Social Media Platforms' Drain on Educational Time and Resources

By Sarah Loughlin

District leaders and school business officials can help advocate for social media verification and reporting.

To say that the impacts social media can have on a school district—for better or worse—are wide-ranging is an understatement.

The education community has found many positives to social media use, including opportunities for professional development and family engagement in their schools. The COVID-19 pandemic also drove more teachers, parents, and students to social media than ever before, making districts' presence there a vital communication strategy over the last few years, according to a 2022 Brookings report.

At the same time, schools are experiencing disruptions in the classroom triggered by online conflicts outside of school, lawsuits against schools related to bullying on social media, and increasing strain on staff and students' social, emotional and mental health, leading to Seattle Public Schools' lawsuit against major social media platforms earlier this year.

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In this complex environment, the lack of dedicated verification and reporting processes for federally recognized K-12 education institutions from social media platforms is causing a drain on educational time and resources in schools across the country, according to a recent report from the National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA) and the Consortium for School Networking (CoSN).

This should be a concern for school business officials, as fiscal stewards of their educational systems. When tallying up the costs to operate your schools, consider how much district time and resources are lost to combating social media misinformation and harassment. Then take action to help reduce those costs by joining NSPRA and CoSN in advocating for dedicated verification and reporting processes for public schools.

The Critical Need

The third largest urban district in the state of Pennsylvania serves about 17,000 students in a community of nearly 118,000 people. The district, as well as its more than 20 individual school buildings, maintains a social media presence on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. To date, its requests for verified district social media accounts on these platforms have been unsuccessful or outright denied.

Meanwhile, administrators are spending countless hours each year reporting malicious accounts—some that impersonate school leaders and spread false information, some that show embarrassing photos of students, some that use footage of other districts' students to mischaracterize local schools—and training staff on how help report accounts, in the hope that more reports will lead to faster response times from the social media platforms.

Challenges like these have long been reported anecdotally during conferences, in online communities, and at meetings by members of NSPRA, which represents more than 2,500 school communication

professionals, and CoSN, which represents technology leaders in over 1,100 school districts with 13 million students.

In late 2022, NSPRA and CoSN released *Schools and Social Media: The Critical Need for Verification and Dedicated Reporting Processes* (nspra.org/k12verify), a report highlighting a series of findings confirming the extent of the significant challenges faced by school districts on social media related to verification and reporting processes.

Striking findings of the report include:

- Overall, a quarter of respondents indicated that within the last two years their educational organizations have applied to be verified on social media and have been rejected (25%).
- Respondents indicated that among their educational organizations, 59% have dealt with accounts that harass, intimidate, or bully students; 45% have dealt with social media platforms not removing reported accounts/posts that harass, intimidate, or bully their students.

Responses from survey participants included in the report also demonstrate the strain that verification and reporting barriers cause to both institutions and students. Notable responses include:

- "We have spent countless hours reporting accounts that are causing real harm to students only for it to take days to get a response, if any at all, and many times that post remains up."
- "Kids often create accounts that are harmful to other students and or the school image. These accounts (can) create disruption and fear in the classroom environment and cost hours of time from teachers and administrators to research, calm, and connect with parents."
- "The time (that dealing with fake impersonation accounts or

bullying accounts) takes away from education, instruction, and leadership…is significant. When an account like this pops up, administrators and communications professionals spend countless hours investigating and reporting and interviewing students, usually to no avail. Reporting the issue as if we were 'regular' account holders is not working. We need better and more effective alternatives as an educational institution to protect our students, and in some cases, our brand."

With support from national education association partners, NSPRA and CoSN reached out during summer 2022 to several social media platforms, including Meta (Facebook, Instagram), Snapchat, TikTok, Twitter, YouTube, and LinkedIn, to assess their awareness of these challenges and to collaboratively identify current and potential solutions.

While many of the platforms had general consumer verification processes at that time, none had a process dedicated to school districts' social media accounts. However, LinkedIn, Meta (Facebook, Instagram), TikTok, Twitter, and YouTube indicated a willingness to explore solutions to this problem.

Similarly, none of the platforms had a dedicated process for school districts to report fraudulent social media accounts or to report posts and accounts that harass, intimidate, bully or otherwise negatively target students.

Continuing the Conversation

As conversations with social media platforms continued after release of the report, Twitter expressed willingness to work directly with NSPRA and CoSN to help K–12 education institutions' official Twitter accounts become verified—a massive step in

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the right direction in combatting the misinformation that can be caused by fake-official and district impersonation accounts on social media.

The ever-changing landscape of the platform, however, has delayed execution to date, though representatives have continued to express their commitment to assist with verification as processes continue to be finalized in light of the recent leadership change at the company.

NSPRA and CoSN also remain committed to furthering dedicated verification and reporting efforts with Meta (Facebook and Instagram), TikTok, YouTube and LinkedIn.

Get Involved

School business officials and leaders can join the call for platforms to solve these social media challenges by advocating on their own social media pages using the #k12verify and by sharing and discussing the *Schools and Social Media: The Critical Need for Verification and Dedicated Reporting Processes* report with district leadership teams, teachers, families, and locally elected representatives.

Visit nspra.org/k12verify-toolkit to access materials and templates to help.

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