

Municipal and School Board Elections 2018: Social Media Use Q&A

On March 7, 2018, OPSBA shared a template regarding the use of school board resources during the Municipal and School Board campaign. This Q&A document was created as a separate piece for social media use.

The answers below reflect a ***best practices*** approach based on the existing policies and procedures of several member boards. Trustees should consult their board's policies/procedures on election activity or follow up with appropriate board staff for clarification/direction.

Q1. If trustees have a personal Twitter account using their full name, which they currently use for a variety of purposes including the promotion of trustee or board work -- are they prevented from using it as they wish during the campaign period?

A. A trustee's use of a personal social media account that was in existence prior to the election campaign is not in question, even if the account includes their full name. However, during a campaign, the account should no longer be used to promote the work of the trustee or the board.

In addition, a social media account that is connected to a board in some manner (e.g. the account was created by the Board for trustee use) should not be used by a trustee during an election campaign as it would be considered a board resource.

As a best practice, to avoid the appearance of conflict during an election campaign period, it is recommended that trustees should use social media accounts *created specifically* for campaign purposes and not related to their work as a trustee.

Examples:

@janesmith – YES
@trusteejanesmith – NO

Q2. When does a private social media account (e.g. a Twitter handle) become the property of the board?

A private or personal social media account that is not connected to the board would not be considered a board resource or property of the board. Board resources are paid for by the Board.

Q3. Would it be an issue if a trustee's personal social media account identifies them as a current school board trustee (e.g. Twitter handle: @haltonschooltrustee). Would that be an issue?

To avoid the appearance of conflict this would not be recommended. See answer to #1 above.

Q4. Is there an issue if the Board in some way promotes a trustee's social media account (e.g. Twitter/Instagram/Facebook account) as part of the trustee's bio on the Board website?

A school board may remove links to a trustee's personal social media accounts, blogs or external websites from its board public facing website. Please check with your local board regarding its election activity policies/procedures/guidelines for clarification and/or direction.

Q5. If a Trustee has a social media account (e.g. Twitter, Facebook, Instagram) that was previously set up during the last election and has been used continually throughout their Trustee term, can the account continue to be used for Trustee business as well as personal business (e.g., family events, election campaign) during the election period?

To avoid the appearance of conflict during an election campaign period, it is recommended that trustees use social media accounts *created specifically* for campaign purposes. Trustees who choose to create or use social media accounts for campaign-specific communications may want to consider including a statement on the homepage of the account(s), for the duration of the campaign, indicating that it is being used for campaign purposes.

Q6. If a Trustee creates a campaign-specific social media account (e.g. Twitter, Facebook, Instagram), can they use their previous social media accounts to refer followers to their accounts created for the duration of the campaign period?

Yes

Q7. If a trustee has a personal cell phone that is used to access their personal and Trustee email accounts, personal social media accounts and Trustee phone message system, can the trustee still be reimbursed for the allowable internet and phone/communications charges?

A. It is advised that a trustee consult with their local board about its election activity procedures/policies/guidelines regarding direction on the submission of internet/communications plan expenses incurred during an election campaign if the cell phone (or any other personal information technology) for which a trustee is reimbursed is used in any way to support the trustee's election activity. This may vary from board to board.