



## RiskMATTERS

### Teachers Think Twice: Are Your Photos Facebook Appropriate?



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By [Teresa Haykowsky](#)

Teacher social media postings continue to make headlines.

You may recall the highly publicized case of [Georgia public high school English teacher Ashley Payne](#) who was fired by Barrow County Schools for having posted a picture of herself holding a glass of wine and mug of beer on Facebook. In November 2016 [Canadian media commented on an Ontario school board's teacher-related social media guidelines](#) which apparently warned teachers against posting pictures involving 'scantily clad photos on the beach.'

While somewhat unique, this language highlights an underlying principle that even when a teacher is not teaching, s/he is still a teacher. Teachers hold a position of trust and confidence. They are expected to be positive role models for their students, both in and out of the classroom.

A teacher's inappropriate social media use may create a loss of public confidence in the teacher but also in the school system as a whole, which in turn can disrupt the proper functioning of the education system.

School jurisdictions may [discipline teachers for inappropriate social media use](#). Employer work-related sanctions, including termination, are upheld in the courts. As well professional bodies which regulate teacher conduct do not hesitate to sanction unreasonable teacher expression for off duty conduct, including social media use.

Canadian bodies charged with regulating teacher conduct also regularly educate teachers on social media use. For example Ontario's College of Teachers issued the [Professional Advisory on the Use of Electronic Communication and Social Media](#).

The ATA has issued excellent social media tips and takeaways for Alberta teachers.

- [E-liability: Smart Advice](#)
- [Teachers and Facebook](#)
- [Social Networking in Schools](#)
- [Teachers Must Remain Professional on Social Media](#)
- [Teachers' missteps have dire consequences: Red-faced after Facebook Posting](#)

A risk management perspective school jurisdictions should regularly update, manage, and consistently enforce is their social media use policies, which should:

- set clear expectations as to teacher online conduct;
- clearly state that inappropriate online conduct could be subject to discipline up to and including termination by the school board.

Teachers are always teachers, whether they are on their own time or whether they are in the classroom. When uncertain as to what to post, teachers should consider [erring on the side of caution](#).

As has been said, [teacher professionalism trumps Facebook fun](#).

This update is a general overview of the subject matter and cannot be regarded as legal advice. Please contact [Teresa Haykowsky](#) for advice on this or any other education law topic.

