

## APRIL 2011, ISSUE 6

### THE PUBLIC INTEREST

THANK YOU FOR YOUR INTEREST IN NEWS FROM THE  
ONTARIO COLLEGE OF TEACHERS.

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### ONTARIO COLLEGE OF TEACHERS ISSUES ADVISORY ON THE USE OF ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION AND SOCIAL MEDIA

It happens to many teachers across the province. They open their  
Facebook page and see that they received a friend request.

Nothing too special so far.

Except, in many cases, the request is from one of their students.

How should the teacher deal with this request?

Students are spending an enormous amount of time using social media. So, too are  
College members. For many students, social media represent the single most  
commonly used avenue for communication and community. This is something we  
simply cannot ignore in the classroom.

That's why the regulatory body for the teaching profession is issuing a **professional  
advisory** on the use of social media to its 230, 000 members.

This advisory offers advice to teachers on how best to use electronic communication  
and social media with students.

"In the current education milieu, e-communication and social media do and will  
continue to offer engaging and exciting teaching and learning experiences for  
students and teachers. Their use should be encouraged," says College Registrar  
Michael Salvatori, OCT. "We want to alert members to its potential risks and provide  
guidance for its responsible, professional use."



"The simple message for Ontario certified teachers is this: Represent yourself in social media the same way you would in person."

### **Predicated on Teachers' Professional Standards**

The teaching profession's ethical standards and standards of practice provide the foundation for the College's advice.

"Our advice to teachers is to keep ethical standards — care, trust, respect and integrity — in line of sight," says College Chair Liz Papadopoulos, OCT. "As teachers and educators, we model professionalism and responsibility for our students in both the real world and the virtual world."

### **Private versus Professional**

The professional advisory on the use of electronic communication and social media stresses that the onus of responsibility is on members — even when students are the ones who initiate online interaction.

The advisory also reinforces a point made by Canada's Supreme Court that teachers' off-duty conduct matters and is relevant to their suitability to teach.

It's the College's role as a professional regulator to provide advice to its members from time to time on emerging issues or in response to member questions on aspects of teaching that will continue to advance the profession and the public's confidence in it.

### **Criminal, Civil and Disciplinary Proceedings**

The inappropriate use of electronic communication and social media can be used as evidence in criminal and civil proceedings. Also, the findings and orders of a criminal or civil proceeding can be and are used as evidence in College disciplinary hearings.

### **Why an advisory now?**

Because the use of e-communication is a fact in Ontario schools. And it can only increase.

Many teachers in Ontario understand that social media is more than a passing trend.

That's why they are finding innovative ways to integrate social media into the school day, from the use of YouTube as a reference to the development of blogs for information sharing and class projects.

With new media come not only new opportunities, but also new responsibilities. By paying close attention to professional boundaries and understanding potential ramifications, we can make social media appropriate, useful and powerful.

You can [view the advisory](#) on the College's web site.

**Watch the video**

Get quick access to guidance for teachers in using social media.

In this 6-minute video — a complementary tool for the professional advisory — teachers and social media experts tell us how the teaching profession can use electronic communication and social media responsibly and professionally.

You can [watch the video](#) on the College's YouTube channel.

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**PUBLIC INTEREST E-NEWS**