

# The *ProEthica*® Program

## *Case Study: Social Media and Posting Student Responses*

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## Case Study Purpose

The purpose of studying this case is to understand the possible consequences of posting on social media and to explore what local policies and *Model Code of Ethics for Educators* (MCEE) principles might guide an educator's actions. You will analyze the situation in the case, determine what professional principles are related to the case and conjecture possible tensions that educators have to grapple with during the decision-making process.

## Case Summary

This section provides a summary of an actual case. Some of the information, including the teacher name and district, have been modified for this exploration. The information is separated into two parts: Part 1 — Educator's Actions, and Part 2 — Consequences and Judgment, so that the educator's actions can be explored without the knowing what the consequences were.

### Part 1 — Educator's Actions

Steven Smith was employed by the Avon School District as a high school English Language Arts teacher. He posted three photos of his students' writing on Facebook®, highlighting their grammar gaffes and misspellings. He also commented on the mistakes.

Smith's posts weren't shared publicly on the social media site, but a customized group of his Facebook friends could see the photos. Someone who thought his posts were inappropriate for a school teacher did not contact Smith, but did contact the local newspaper about the photos and comments. The school district's central office received an anonymous tip about the teacher, his posts and the forthcoming newspaper article.

### Part 2 — Consequences and Judgment

Steven Smith was suspended with pay pending a complete investigation, which is standard procedure, said an Avon School District spokesperson. She added, "It will take several days to complete the investigation. This is a personnel matter, and we must investigate the incident fully to determine what happened."

Avon Schools does not have a specific social media policy, but the district's Code of Ethics and Standards of Conduct spell out expectations for employees. Avon's employees should demonstrate "limited and restricted, but professional reasons for interaction on cell phones and social websites" like Facebook, Instagram®, Twitter® and others. "Each employee shall exercise professional judgment in the use of social websites to avoid reducing his/her professionalism at all times," according to the policy.

## Activities

### 1. Present the Educator's Actions

Review Part 1 of the case summary to become familiar with the situation and what the educator did.

Discuss the situation and determine the following:

1. Which of the educator's professional principles are at risk
2. What potential consequences does the educator face according to your state's code of conduct
3. What MCEE principles could have guided the educator before he posted the responses
4. What circumstances of the situation (age of students, what the teacher taught, where posted) might have made it either less or more severe
5. What competing tensions might have contributed to the educator's decision and actions

Your reaction to the educator's action might range from "the teacher didn't do anything that should put him at risk because he limited access to his posts to his friends only" to "he should be able to trust his friends" to "the teacher violated professional principles." Some of the MCEE principles that were at risk and could have guided his actions are:

- Principle I: Responsibility to the Profession (specifically, A2, A3, A5)
- Principle III: Responsibility to Students (specifically, A1, B3, C1)
- Principle IV: Responsibility to School Community (specifically A2, C3, D3)
- Principle V: Responsible and Ethical Use of Technology (specifically A1, A5, B1, B2, B3)

### 2. Present the Consequences

Review Part 2 of the case summary. Discuss the consequences and your reactions. Were you surprised or do you agree with the consequence?

Describe other conditions where educators could easily find themselves in a similar position as the educator in the case.

What might you do as the educator's colleague to help the educator make wiser decisions?

Know the policies related to technology and social media in your school districts, and be careful of what you put online. Educators are in a public profession and access to social media sites can be broad and not as secure as one might believe. Sharing a student's work, especially if it could undermine the student, should not be done. Social media sites can be teaching tools, but educators also have to be mindful of unintended consequences of what they post.

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