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**Media Advisory:**  
June 13, 2016

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## **Tips for Teachers When Using Social Media in the Classroom**

**AUSTIN, Texas** — Several news outlets have reported an increase in the number of improper relationships between teachers and students over the years. Texting, Facebook and new forums for communication such as SnapChat have increased opportunities for personal, private communication between educators and students. The Association of Texas Professional Educators (ATPE) warns educators that inappropriate communications, including electronic communications, are a violation of the Texas Educator’s Code of Ethics, and violating the Educators’ Code of Ethics can have serious consequences for their teaching certificates.

The Educators’ Code of Ethics requires educators to maintain professional relationships and boundaries with students and prohibits inappropriate communication that includes but is not limited to electronic communications via cell phone, text messaging, instant messaging, blogging and other social network communication. Flirting with a student, even if there is no actual physical contact, will lead to sanctions and loss of the educator’s career.

“Our number one priority is to keep kids safe. It’s never okay for a teacher to prey on a student,” ATPE Media Relations Specialist Stephanie Jacksis said. “Even one incident is one too many. That’s why our association takes every opportunity presented to educate teachers in the classroom and to prepare teachers before they get in the classroom.”

When invited to do so, ATPE representatives travel across Texas to colleges, universities and alternative certification campuses to talk to future teachers about the dangers of engaging in inappropriate communications with or pursuing a relationship with a student.

The state's largest educator group has these tips for educators when using social media to communicate with students:

- **Know your district policy.** Check with your district to see where they stand on social media use. Policies vary from campus to campus. Some schools encourage teachers to be highly active on Facebook and Twitter, while others prohibit any use of social media sites.
- **Create a separate account.** Never add students to your personal accounts. When communication is approved by the local district, ATPE recommends creating a separate account that is used strictly for classroom purposes. Social media is a good tool for posting homework assignments, upcoming test dates and project deadlines.
- **Encourage parental involvement.** Communicate with parents and let them know about your professional social media page. Encourage them to monitor their child's activity on the internet.
- **Communicate during appropriate times.** When private communication becomes the focus of a TEA investigation, investigators look at records that indicate the time messages were sent. SBEC considers it more likely that messages sent in the evening or late at night are inappropriate. It is also assumed that subject matter was more likely inappropriate if there are many messages exchanged between a teacher and student. This increases the likelihood that the communications were personal rather than academic.

Texas laws are clear, and enforcement is strict. For more information on the Educators' Code of Ethics, visit <http://www.atpe.org/en/Protection/Your-Certification/Educators-Code-of-Ethics>.

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The Association of Texas Professional Educators (ATPE) has been a strong voice for Texas educators since 1980. It is the leading educators' association in Texas with more than 100,000 members statewide. With its strong collaborative philosophy, ATPE speaks for classroom teachers, administrators, future, retired and para-educators and works to create better opportunities for 5 million public schoolchildren. ATPE is the ally and the voice of Texas public school educators.