

WYOMING AREA FOOTBALL PARENTS ASSOCIATION

Donnie Minnick
President, Wyoming Area Football Parents Association

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Dr. Estelle Campenni
Wyoming Area Board of Education
20 Memorial Street
Exeter, PA 18643

Dr. Campenni,

I am writing this letter to recommend that you and the school board revisit social media policy for booster clubs that operate within the school district. As you may know, I've been dealing with an issue related to the Wyoming Area Football Parents News Group for some time now. Simply put, a parent chose to use the Facebook News Group as a public forum to air an issue, attempt to embarrass me, and call my character into question. I don't think its necessary for me to go through the specifics of that issue in this letter. I am available to meet if the school board would like to discuss that. Instead, I'd like to share some insights I've gained as a result of the experience.

For those who may not be aware, WAFPA uses a Facebook News Group to communicate with our membership. We have approximately 250 people that use the News Group to varying degrees. This group includes current and former students, their parents, as well as other individuals who support and follow the Wyoming Area Football program. While I don't have user data, I'd estimate that there are less than 50 people who use the group regularly based on the volume of posts, comments, and likes. As you might expect, current players and their families tend to be the most frequent users of the News Group.

We use the News Group as one of many communication tools, and it works much like a Facebook user's news feed. Members of the group can post updates. They can also like or comment on the updates of others in the group. The group is a closed group, meaning that Facebook users must submit a request to the administrator of the group, and the administrator must grant permission before the user can access it. I have been acting as administrator of the group since taking over as WAFPA President in 2014. My board and I have been using the News Group to send information updates to the membership, as well as reminders of activities and events. We use the group to celebrate team and individual player successes as well.

So what insights have I gained? Here are the main points:

- Social media tools, in general, and Facebook, in particular, make it difficult to keep sufficient separation between personal use and organizational use of these tools. As I worked through various ways to solve the issue I noted above, I could not find a solution that would meet both my desire for privacy of my personal account and a completely

open News Group. Facebook is not designed to accommodate this kind of separation. Keep in mind that, in a effort to resolve the issue and move WAFPA forward, I have, in effect, removed myself from direct participation in the News Group. I don't think that's a reasonable outcome to this issue.

- When using a tool like Facebook, control is ceded to the individual user. As administrator, I have the ability to delete posts that would be offensive or questionable to the membership, but this is reactive at best. We all know that users with mobile devices can otherwise capture and share data even after an offensive post is deleted. Even if I were to monitor the News Group on a full-time basis, I could not guarantee full control. I should point out that the Warrior Nation is predominantly a positive group and our News Group reflects that. I've been involved in the program as a parent since 2009 and this situation is the first social media issue we've faced as an organization.
- I would be disingenuous if I stated that this situation does not affect me on personal level. It was, to say the least, upsetting to be attacked in a public forum. And I found myself thinking, "What could I have done differently? Why should I be attacked like this? What are people going to think of me now?" Perhaps I could have handled this situation differently, and I take responsibility for that. But at no point did I act with any malicious intent. I did my best to put my personal feelings aside and deal with the situation objectively. At some point, it occurred to me, "What if this happened to a parent? Or a student?" I imagined my sons or their teammates being attacked via the News Group and having to suffer the same anxieties. I think I'm safe in stating that no parent would want their child to suffer that kind of anxiety and humiliation.
- From what I can tell, other booster clubs in district do not make use of social media, and when they do, it is incidental use. I would highlight the basketball program as an example of a group that almost exclusively uses the program website as a primary means of communication with their membership.

Why is this relevant for you and the school board? While there is a good set of district policies that help to govern booster clubs, there is no policy that addresses booster club use of social media. For reasons that I think are obvious, there should be, at minimum, some guidelines outlining appropriate and inappropriate use of social media. If there is a policy and somehow I've missed it, then it needs to be made more readily available. And I think policy needs to be reconsidered in light of recent events.

My personal opinion is that booster clubs don't need to use social media, and I've recommended to the WAFPA board that we shut down our Facebook News Group. While I don't want to disappoint people who like the News Group as a resource, it's only a matter of time before we encounter another issue. I don't want a student to become the target of a personal attack on WAFPA's News Group. I don't think we have the necessary control to manage it. In my mind, the risks substantially outweigh the benefit we gain by continued use. I see this as a step forward and a way to protect our children. Of course, the decision is not entirely mine. The WAFPA board needs to decide as a group what is appropriate going forward and conduct a formal vote. I've had the pleasure of working with an outstanding group of officers and I know they will make a thoughtful decision.

My hope is that my experience can serve as the catalyst for a positive change. That's why I've written this letter. I'm happy to meet as needed to discuss the matter. Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Donnie Minnick
President, Wyoming Area Football Parents Association

CC: Janet Serino, Superintendent, Wyoming Area School District
Vito Quaglia, Principal, Wyoming Area Secondary Center