Social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Google+, Flickr, LinkedIn, and the like can provide valuable tools for conversation and communication between state boards of education and their constituents. In particular, social media offers these benefits:

- instant communication with constituents at little to no cost and at lightning speed;
- an easy way to share board priorities with the public;
- more visibility for the board and the ability to keep the public informed about work they are doing for students; and
- the opportunity for board members to have conversations with constituents they might not have had otherwise.

Because social media is a powerful force, state board members need to be cognizant of how effectively they use it and avoid common pitfalls:

- Once it is posted, a social media message is forever available; even deleted posts can be retrieved.
- Not everything on social media is accurate or truthful.
- Board members cannot control the responses they receive to their posts.
- Remember, “you have the right to remain silent; anything you say can be used against you in a court of law”—or, for that matter, in any other proceeding—to discredit you.
- Your comments can affect your role as a board member.

More than one official has become an unflattering example of social media use gone bad. On February 6, 2017, parents and other members of the community called for the resignation of Joseph J. Barragan, an Alvord Unified School District board officer, based on posts he made to a personal social media page. The now-deleted posts include support for “a wall like the one in Israel to keep Muslims out” and comments about sterilization of prisoners. The California school district “officially condemns the inflammatory and offensive individual personal comments” yet also recognized Barragan’s right to free speech as a private citizen. The district stressed he does not speak for it on these issues. Barragan has since denied writing the posts and says his account was hacked. He has declined to resign.

In *Pickering v. Board of Education*, 391 U.S. 563 (1968), the U.S. Supreme Court held that a teacher may not be compelled to shed the First Amendment right they would otherwise enjoy as a citizen to comment on matters of public interest in connection with the operation of their school. The court sought to balance the interests of the teacher as a citizen to comment publicly and the interest of the state as an employer in efficiency of services performed.

Likewise, state board members do not shed their First Amendment right. They may still speak as private citizens on matters of public concern if they identify that they are doing so in a private capacity and not as a board member. However, this private speech may disrupt or derail the work of the board.

Thus one must tread lightly. There are five things state board members should keep in mind as they use social media:

1) Stop and think before you post.
2) Choose your words carefully.
3) Keep it neat and keep it clean.
4) Stick to posts about board priorities and do not get pulled into politics.
5) Keep it positive. Remember the Thumper rule (Bambi 1942): “If you can’t say something nice, don’t say nothing at all.”