
"A place where learning has no limits and together we work for the success of all."

October 18, 2013

Dear Parents/Guardians:

Recently in the news there was a tragic story of the death of a 12-year-old Florida girl who authorities say committed suicide after being bullied online by several other young girls. Sad incidents such as this provide an opportunity for adults to reflect on the actions we are taking to ensure that young people are safe. Every day we try very hard to make sure the children in our schools are being taught in a safe environment, free from disruption and intimidation by others. It is a very challenging task but a responsibility we accept as educators when serving *in loco parentis* (in role of the parent).

Some of the behavioral issues we address on an almost daily basis are due to incidents that occur outside the school setting. (However, I recognize that you, as parents and guardians, may also be dealing with issues and/or behaviors that start in the school environment.) One major challenge for us, in the technological world in which we live, is the use of social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter that provide a forum for some children to be mean and malicious to others. It appears that some children find it easy to make a disparaging and often hurtful remark about a peer and post it on a social media forum from the comfort of their home, on their cell phone, or in other public arenas outside the school division.

I am respectfully asking you as parents/guardians to closely monitor what your children are posting on social media, as well as what other children might be stating or sharing with your child. Honestly, as both a parent and superintendent of schools, I believe that no child should have an expectation of privacy. You as parent or guardian have every right and, I believe, an *obligation* to be aware of the communication exchanges your child might be participating in online.

Rightfully so, parents get upset at the school system when they believe their child is being bothered or harmed in a school setting. The issue of bullying or children just being mean to others is an ongoing challenge that every community and school system faces. The communities that are making a positive impact in reducing the number of bullying or harassment incidents are those in which the school system and parents are taking their responsibilities seriously and working together.

On behalf of the Harrisonburg City School system, I accept the responsibility of working every day to take the proper measures to keep all 5,300 students safe. I am hoping you as parents/guardians will also do whatever is necessary to make sure the internet and other environments outside the school setting are not arenas for children to be cruel to others. I would encourage you to make clear your expectations of your child's online conduct and remind them that having access to social media and the internet is a privilege, not a right. I would suspect in most cases your child is not paying for their cell phone and internet provider. We often remind our students that the natural consequence of violating a privilege is to lose that privilege.

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Finally, if at any time you are aware of or have concerns about your child's safety, especially as it relates to the school environment, I hope you will bring it to your child's principal's attention immediately. Furthermore, if your child is being threatened or feeling unsafe either online or in person, you have every right to notify the school resource officer or police department. I am confident that by working together we can avoid a terrible situation such as that which occurred in Florida.

I thank you very much for your cooperation and our continued partnership in ensuring that Harrisonburg City Schools is a great place for children to learn.

Sincerely,



Scott R. Kizner, Ph.D.
Superintendent of Schools

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