



Happy Monday!

Over the long weekend, we received notification of 0 new covid cases in the district (woohoo!). This is 2 weekends in a row!! Instead of case counts, this email includes some information about some recent concerns we have seen with our students..

Student Social, Emotional and Behavior Concerns

As we slowly emerge from the pandemic, we have been focusing on helping our students with learning loss due to the pandemic. We continue to work on the academic growth of all of our students. But, as we emerge from this pandemic, we are seeing some social, emotional and behavioral issues in our students. The problems we are seeing are not unlike those that are occurring across the state and the nation. In a future email, I'll share information about the steps we are taking to address learning gaps, as well as ways that we are trying to address the social, emotional and mental health concerns that some of our students are facing. For now, I'd like to share some information about what we are experiencing, so that perhaps we can partner with parents to address some of the student concerns together.

First, we know that this pandemic has taken a toll on our children, and we also know that everyone makes poor decisions as a youngster. I made many poor decisions, and my sister probably made more (lol). But, that was many years ago, back in the 1900's and our previous poor decisions don't seem to be as serious as the issues students face today, by comparison. Our students are faced with social, emotional and behavioral decisions today that can be life altering. I'd like to share a few of the incidents we have seen in our schools recently.

Socially, our students, particularly our older students (and students everywhere), are tied to their cell phones. I think cell phones were very helpful for some of our students to bridge the distances between friends during the pandemic. Cell phones are a social tool for our students. But, recently, we have seen an uptick in inappropriate use of cell phones within our schools, and cyberbullying seems to be on the rise. The situations are sometimes very difficult for school personnel to monitor because they occur on or on personal cell phones and/or outside of school. Unlike the notes we used to pass to our friends in school back in the 1900's, cell phone texts, social media posts, apps, pictures, etc. can have very serious consequences when poor decisions are made.

As another example, at one point, there were challenges on the TikTok app that encouraged students to hurt others or to cause damage to school property. While the challenges may have subsided a bit, the damages in our middle school and high school bathrooms has continued. Over the past few months, sinks and partitions nearly have been ripped from the walls in one of the high school bathrooms. Perhaps this was a challenge that was completed or maybe it was an angry student (we also see elevated emotions in students now) or maybe it was kids just “messaging around.” But, the consequences for the destruction of school property can be severe.

The final example of behavioral concerns is one that can be life threatening. Compared to pre-pandemic, we have seen an increase in vaping in our middle school and high school students, similar to other districts across the state and nation. Last week, Vance Varner, the Mifflin County School District Superintendent sent a letter to all families in the Mifflin County district regarding the increase in vaping in that district. But more importantly, the Superintendent shared information about actual vaping devices that were confiscated from Mifflin County High School students. There, three vaping devices were laced with fentanyl or heroin, two potentially dangerous or even life threatening drugs. Here is a link to the Mifflin County SD letter, if you would like to read more:

https://www.mcscdk12.org/news_posts/mcsd-parent-letter-02252022/

We checked with our School Resource Officers about the potential availability of vaping devices laced with drugs in our schools. While we haven’t seen any of this yet, we never want our students to be in harm's way. A poor decision to use a vaping device even once can be life threatening.

By no means am I trying to tell parents how to parent or to raise major alarms or an over reaction. These incidents are not an indicator of a great prevalence of issues in our schools. I just wanted to share a few of the recent local incidents and information, so that parents can talk with their children, if they want. We encourage parents to talk with their children and to reach out to our principals or school counselors if they are looking for some help for their students. We truly have the most awesome students, but as I mentioned, we all make poor decisions at some point in our lives. I know working together we can make our students even more awesome than they already are!

As a reminder, there is no school for students on Thursday or Friday this week. Barring any breaking news, I’ll send my next update letter or a brief email on Thursday. If the case counts continue to plummet, I may return to regular weekly reports and emails beginning next week. As always, thank you so very much for your continued support, patience and understanding through these very challenging times. I hope you have a marvelous Monday and a great week ahead!

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