



The River Vale E-Review November 3, 2017



A Message from the Superintendent

Dear Parents and/or Guardians:

It is not uncommon around Halloween that we remind our children of the importance of safety, whether it is trick-or-treating, mischief night, or stranger-danger. As partners in this educational community, I wanted to write you about another safety issue we need to remain focused on: students' use of their personal devices.

We know the vast majority of our students use social media positively, and are becoming the "compassionate citizens" and "global communicators" we want them to be from our *Portrait of a Graduate*. In fact, social media and technology can be powerful tools that help students learn the value of developing into kind, compassionate young adults.

Unfortunately, over the past several years, including this school-year, we have seen an alarming increase in the number of incidents where some students have used social media or text messaging inappropriately on their personal devices, with negative consequences. Although this is more prevalent with our older students, we have also seen it to a lesser degree in the upper-elementary grades. This usually occurs outside of school hours and off school grounds, and through text messaging or social media sites such as *Snapchat* and *Instagram*. Common themes include:

- *Text messages or postings that use extremely offensive language or images to make cruel and demeaning comments or threats towards other students, and in some cases, teachers and administrators*
- *Sharing pictures with each other that show partial nudity*

I'm sure we all agree this is extremely dangerous for our children and harmful to all involved.

The school district, in concert with the River Vale Police Department and other local partners is committed to reinforcing the importance of digital citizenship with students. However, there are limitations to our ability to intervene in off-campus behavior, and as

partners in this process, we are asking for your help in closely monitoring your children's use of personal devices. I have included a link to commonsensemedia.org you might find helpful in navigating this challenging issue - the **Parent Concerns** tab includes several short, user-friendly articles on *privacy and internet safety, cyberbullying, social media, and cell phone parenting*.

Additionally, please consider attending the Hills Valley Coalition free parent screening of the documentary, [Screenagers: Growing up in the Digital Age](#), on December 7th at 7:00 P.M. at Pascack Valley High School. This short film looks at how the overuse of screen time, particularly with hand-held devices and gaming systems, can negatively impact children.

*Holdrum School will also be showing students a modified version of the documentary sometime in December.

We understand there is no "blueprint" or easy answer for working with children on this challenging issue - many of us have children ourselves and are grappling with these same concerns. But, if we see this as an opportunity to come together as a community, we can work together to help support our children navigate this complex digital society.

As partners in the process, we are here to help in any way we can, so please feel free to reach out to your building principal if you need more support.

Sincerely,
Rory McCourt