October 6, 2017

Dear Families:

I am writing to let you know about a serious social media safety concern that several students at the middle-school level brought to our attention on Thursday. Our students referenced a social media event they referred to as "Exposure Day," which could include the posting or sharing of photos or video intended to shame, embarrass, humiliate, intimidate or otherwise "expose" other students. On Friday, the City School District of Albany discovered one report of an "exposure" posting on Facebook.

We brought in the families of the involved students and contacted the Albany Police Department, which is investigating the incident along with members of the district's security team. In addition, our staff – including our social workers, behavior specialists and school psychologists – was and is prepared to identify any students who appear to be having a difficult time emotionally as a consequence.

Shaming or embarrassing another student online or in any context is considered a form of bullying and harassment under the Dignity for All Students Act, and a violation of our Student Code of Conduct. We urge you to talk with your children at home about the importance of avoiding inappropriate behavior in any form, including social media. We also are providing resources from the National Association of School Psychologists to help you talk with your children if you believe they may be having a difficult time. Please see the back of this document for more information.

- **Common Sense Media.** *Social media, social life: How teens view their digital lives.*
https://www.commonsensemedia.org/research/social-media-social-life-how-teens-view-their-digital-lives
- **Preventing Youth Suicide: Tips for Parents and Educators**
https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources/school-safety-and-crisis/preventing-youth-suicide/preventing-youth-suicide-tips-for-parents-and-educators
- **Save a Friend: Tips for Teens to Prevent Suicide**
https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources/school-safety-and-crisis/preventing-youth-suicide/save-a-friend-tips-for-teens-to-prevent-suicide

We commend our students for bringing this information to our attention immediately. Please talk with your children about the importance of letting you, a school official or another adult know whenever they encounter a situation or information that concerns or confuses them. Thank you for your continued partnership in our efforts to ensure the safety and security of all of our students.

Sincerely,

Kaweeda G. Adams
Superintendent of Schools

Social Media and School Crises: Brief Facts and Tips

- ***Social media defined.*** The U.S. Department of Education (2012) defines social media as "Forms of communication either Internet or text-based that support social interactions of individuals" (p. 5).

- ***Nearly all youth and a majority of adults use social media.*** In 2012, 90% of 13- to 17-year-olds reported using some form of social media. About 70% of adults use social media regularly, and about half use two or more social media platforms. It is expected this usage will increase.

- ***Social media increases communication speed.*** Historically, it was sometimes possible for educators, parents, and other caregivers to assess a crisis threat or situation patiently over time. However, the speed of information exchanged via social media, both accurate and inaccurate, requires quick thinking and quick responding.

- ***There are potential risks associated with social media use.*** Social media can contribute to psychological trauma and other challenges. Potential risks include the following.

  - Cyberbullying or other online conflicts (e.g., a student or staff member may experience widespread and direct public ridicule; schools with social media accounts may experience negative postings about the school).

  - Quick and widespread communication of crisis-related rumors or other false information (e.g., inaccurate information about what happened or who was involved in a crisis situation).

  - Quick and widespread communication of embarrassing or inappropriate information (e.g., personal photos or shameful information posted).

  - Potential for triggering crises, increasing perceptions of threat and fear, or creating crisis contagion (e.g., 1–5% of suicides are believed to be due to a contagion effect where learning about crisis details leads to another crisis).

  - Affects privacy (e.g., individuals may not be aware of the risks associated with sharing too much).

  - Potential for overuse or as a consistent substitute for face-to-face socializing (e.g., may lead to social media depression).

  - Time consuming for educators, parents, and other caregivers to learn and monitor.

References:

National Association of School Psychologists. (2016). Social Media and School Crises: Brief Facts and Tips [handout]. Bethesda, MD: Author.