November 2015

Dear Westbury Middle School Families:

I am writing to ask you for your continued support in an effort to maintain a positive and safe environment for our students in regards to using social media. Recently it has been brought to our attention that some students are sharing and following pages with inappropriate photos on Instagram. Our children are growing up in a world of iPhones, mobile devices, and apps like Facebook, Instagram, and Snap Chat. The current generation of young people in our schools has been titled the "iGeneration."

While this is a world that the students are very familiar with, many adults aren’t as familiar with the technology that is created each and every day. Many of our children are using mobile devices and social media in a perfectly safe, normal, and educational way. However, some of our children are engaging in problematic behavior. For example, did you know that there are more than seven (7) different apps that can be downloaded for the purpose of concealing pictures and video on a mobile device? Some of these apps even allow for password protection. One has an icon that makes it appear as a calculator. All of these apps are designed to conceal images from adults. With the websites mentioned and many others available on most cell phones, tablets and computers, there are more possibilities for children to access and/or post inappropriate material than ever before. Ultimately, this could impact your child’s safety.

At Westbury Middle School, we continue to have discussions with the students about appropriate uses of technology in order to promote a safe learning environment. We will also conduct, as we did last school year, Internet Safety Assemblies. However, we need your assistance since much of the inappropriate behavior occurs outside the school day. It is imperative that our students understand that the use of the Internet, specifically any images shared through email or on social media sites are considered to be public, once uploaded and/or sent. These items can be forwarded by anyone, to anyone, at any time, thus broadening the viewing audience well beyond what the sender may have intended.

In order to continue to ensure the safety of our students, we ask that you:

1. Have a conversation with your child about the appropriate use of any social media, especially in the area of photographs, videos, and other transmissions that can be seen or shared by others.
2. Remind your child that posting, forwarding or being in possession of obscene material can violate the law.
3. Regularly check your child’s cell phone and electronic devices to ensure that there is nothing inappropriate on it.
4. Review with your child the school’s “Cell Phone Protocol” that is contained in the WMS Student Handbook which states: “Cell phones are emergency communication devices that, if brought to school by students, must be turned off and kept out of sight during school hours. Students may not accept cell phone calls, make calls, take pictures, send text messages, e-mail text or pictures, or use any cell phone function (instant messaging, calculator, games, etc.) at any time during school hours without administrative approval. Students violating these rules may be subject to disciplinary action, including suspension from school.

Based on input from our students, by far the number one place where young people tell us that they charge and store their electronic devices is in their bedroom. Some students have shared with us that they sleep with their phone under their pillow. This is dangerous and very problematic. The best advice that I was given a few years ago by the Nassau County District Attorney’s Office was to create a family electronic device charging station. At night before bed, all devices go to the family charging station. Something to consider…

In addition, if a student’s cell phone or electronic device is confiscated, based on visibility or disruption, by any staff member, a parent/guardian may be requested to pick it up.

Collaboratively, we need to work together to continue to instruct and review Internet safety protocols with our students. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me.

We appreciate your attention to this very important matter.

Sincerely,

Mr. David Zimbler
Principal