

# MAINE SCHOOL ADMINISTRATIVE DISTRICT NO. 35

Serving the communities of ELIOT & SOUTH BERWICK

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October 19, 2017

To: Marshwood Community  
From: Mary Nash, Ph.D., Superintendent of Schools  
Date: October 19, 2017  
Re: *An Alert Regarding the Potential for Creating Hostile or Threatening Environments Through the Use of Social Media Sites*

Dear Marshwood Community,

The Board's policy regarding the *District-Wide Student Code of Conduct* [JICDA] defines the district's expectations for student behavior and provides the framework for a safe, orderly and respectful learning environment. The policy is intended to support and encourage students to meet the following statewide standards for ethical and responsible behavior:

- Respect
- Honesty
- Compassion
- Fairness
- Responsibility
- Courage

I would like to underscore the Board's mission for the district:

*Our mission is to challenge and support all our students so that they may acquire the knowledge and skills required to become curious, responsible, productive citizens, well prepared to meet the demands of our changing world. We want our students to develop compassion for others and the courage to act on their own beliefs.*

Over the past several years, months and weeks there have been numerous examples on both the national and local level of how some folks treat others with derogatory language and/or actions. Sadly, southern Maine has not been spared from these ugly incidents.

The purpose of my letter to you today is to emphasize that with the emergence of social media sites such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter to name a few, there appears considerable confusion around students creating a hostile, threatening or unwelcoming environment for others on our school campuses even when posts or memes on these social media sites are unsolicited.

Let me be clear. The social media sites have developed the capacity to establish incredible networks where a person can "see" everything on each of their network's social media sites and vice versa. What is astounding is that each member of a person's network has their own network that, in turn, can "see" everyone else's posts on the

network as well. This is called a multiplier effect and the result of these layered networks is that it is very difficult to control content being sent to a person through these layered networks.

In addition to the multiplier effect of social media networks, the social media sites can push out “memes” which can convey racist, biased or violent content to the layered networks without any member of the network actually subscribing to these sites much as unsolicited advertisements are pushed out while reading regular content on the internet.

Instagram defines its “Search and Explore” function this way:

*“Search & Explore to better tailor it to you. Posts are selected automatically based on things like the people you follow or the posts you like. You may also see video channels, which can include posts from a mixture of handpicked and automatically sourced accounts based on topics we think you'll enjoy.”*

The bottom line is this: our Board’s policy around the *Harassment and Sexual Harassment of Students* [ACAA and ACAA-R] strictly prohibits harassment including but not limited to verbal abuse based on race, color, sex, sexual orientation, religion, ancestry, national origin, or disability.

### **What We Can Do**

Our students need to become immediately aware that they are responsible not only for their own behavior in terms of creating an unsafe, hostile or threatening environment for others, but they will also be held responsible for their actions if they open one of their social media sites on school grounds (including on school buses) and inappropriate content pops up or is broadcast via an audio transmission (even if this happens inadvertently).

We will be working with our schools to help our students understand in developmentally appropriate ways how best to navigate these challenging waters. For example, we need to explicitly teach our students that racism and bias are not OK under any circumstances. We need to make our staff and our students’ families aware of both intentional and unintentional ways in which our assumptions, language or actions may make people feel unsafe or unwelcome due to their racial, ethnic, religious, disability or sexual orientation identities. And we need to affirm that Marshwood welcomes students of all identities.

Over the next several weeks and months, the Board and the district will turn to its strategic plan to review and enrich one of the Board’s five strategic goals i.e. *Developing a Positive Climate for All*. This goal states:

*MSAD 35 will support all our students to become responsible, productive citizens who are well prepared to meet the demands of a changing world and who develop compassion for others with the courage to act on their own beliefs.*

I invite you to actively participate in this work with us. Your voice and thoughtful input is important because this is both a community issue and a school issue ~ it is not one where the schools can or should craft the next steps forward in this work alone. You will be hearing about ways in which you can participate in this important work as we move forward over the coming weeks and months. I hope you consider joining us.

Thank you for your continued support and perseverance in helping Marshwood truly go from being a “good district” to becoming a “great district” by mindfully constructing a culture of civility for all of our students!

Sincerely,

Mary Nash, Ph.D.  
Superintendent of Schools  
MSAD 35