

From the Guidance Department at MS 51
(Ms. Bosco, Mr. Phillips & Ms. Zaengle)

We would like to take this opportunity to remind all of our families that we believe in a partnership approach in helping teens to grow and learn. Middle School is the developmental time where students are developing their moral code, learning their boundaries with peers and beginning to work on their own unique identities. Peer approval becomes very important for them at this age; navigating their way around fitting in and being liked, without following the crowd can be very tricky.

We wish to remind /inform parents that there are many social media websites that middle schoolers use in ways which are inappropriate. Currently students are using “Instagram & Snapchat “as the latest forum to bully, harass and hurt other students. In many instances the comments appear as anonymous, in others, the students are able to hack into another students account and impersonate them. As a school it is our responsibility to address incidents of internet bullying and harassment. The difficulty sometimes arises as many of the internet sites allow for anonymity of users which then leaves us supporting the victim and doing little to hold the culprits responsible.

It is the position of the administration that middle school children do not have the emotional maturity to use these sites. If they are using them, it should be with parental guidance and your frequent review of posts. We hope you will have a discussion with your child regarding social media sites. You can begin a discussion with them by asking if they have an Instagram account or whether they have viewed friend’s accounts. Inquire about the kinds of things students post. Ask whether they have witnessed negative posts in which the comments were mean, hurtful, vulgar or in some other way offensive. Sometimes pre-teens need help in identifying what is offensive or hurtful—they think because it may be common vernacular to insult one another or that the peer didn’t say they were offended by the comment, that this implies it is ok. Our students need help in understanding that someone’s silence does not imply that they are “OK” with the taunts, jokes or teasing. When posts are abusive they should be reported to Instagram as such. But it shouldn’t end there. It is also an

excellent opportunity for you to work with your child around acceptable standards of behavior for themselves and their peers or to figure out how they can have a voice against violence.

When we, as a school, are aware that students are involved in negative exchanges using social media, our protocol is to meet with as many of the parties as is possible. Our goal is to support and educate the students involved. We help them to unravel the social dynamics that led to the posts, to understand the personal and social consequences of their actions and to help victims feel empowered to find a voice to say that this type of exchange is not ok. We hope to help students learn, grow and further develop skills to assist them in navigating their social worlds in positive and appropriate ways.

Please familiarize yourself with the Citywide Standards of Intervention and Discipline Measures page 27 which covers the DOE's rules regarding student to student aggressive/injurious behaviors and the consequences of infractions. Additionally pg 6-8 offer explanations regarding our intervention approaches which primarily fall into a restorative approach. Remind your children that although our interventions are designed to help them grow, they may include consequences that are disciplinary in action

Thank you for your efforts in working in partnership with us to help keep the internet /cell phone world safer for our students.