



PUBLIC SCHOOL 229 QUEENS

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January 27, 2011

Dear Parents and Guardians,

Computer and internet safety are important issues in the nation, our schools and at P.S. 229. Before your students use computers in school our teachers review important measures regarding privacy and being aware of safe computer practices. Another major issue we face today in school is bullying and there are many programs at P.S. 229 to educate our students in hopes of eliminating this harmful practice.

The purpose of this letter is to increase the awareness of parents about the problems of computer/internet safety and a form of bullying called *cyber-bullying*. We ask for your help with these issues in school and at home. This is quite a long letter, but it addresses important issues. This letter will be posted on our website and we will send out and post the translations when they are available.

It has come to our attention that several students have been sending/receiving inappropriate messages outside of school and it is affecting the learning and social environment at school. As a school community we must work together to provide all our students with a safe environment in which they do not feel violated in any way. You should be checking your child's e-mails and text messages regularly for inappropriate content. If you do not know how to access your child's cell phone texts/messages, and/or e-mail accounts please contact the cell phone/internet provider.

Cyber-bullying has been defined as:

- *when the Internet, cell phones or other devices are used to send or post text or images intended to hurt or embarrass another person*
- *When an electronic device is used to attack or defame the character of a real person. Often embarrassing or false information about the victim is posted in an online forum where the victim and those who know the victim can see it publicly.*

Cyber-bullying can be as simple as continuing to send e-mail to someone who has said they want no further contact with the sender, but it may also include [threats](#), sexual remarks, pejorative labels (i.e., [hate speech](#)), ganging up on victims by making them the subject of ridicule in forums, and posting false statements as fact aimed at humiliation.

Cyber-bullies may disclose victims' personal data (e.g. real name, address, or workplace/schools) at websites or forums or **may pose as the identity of a victim** for the purpose of publishing material in their name that defames or ridicules them. Some cyber-bullies may also send threatening and harassing emails and instant messages to the victims, while other post rumors or gossip and instigate others to dislike and gang up on the target.

Did you know kids report being mean to each other online beginning as young as second grade? According to research, boys initiate mean online activity earlier than girls do. However, by middle school, **girls** are more likely to engage in cyber-bullying than boys do. Whether the bully is male or female, their purpose is to intentionally embarrass others, harass, intimidate, or make threats online to one another. This bullying occurs via email, text messaging, posts to blogs, and Web sites. **Many times the bully will be sending messages through others accounts/passwords.**

Cyber bullying has become a serious problem in our country, and the consequences of engaging in such behaviors are serious. Any parent can go to the police with proof of cell phone texts and/or e-mails. I'm sure you would agree that the inconvenience of checking your child's communications outweighs a visit from the police because of accusations towards your child.

As your child's primary care-giver/guardian it is your responsibility to foster an internet safe environment. In today's world electronic communication is so easily accessed that it is imperative that you teach your child what is appropriate language and behavior and what is inappropriate. It is recommended that you monitor your child's use of electronic communication devices (e-mails, cell phone-texting and calls) for inappropriate behavior in the form of e-mails and texts that are either: harassing in nature, use inappropriate language, and are threatening.

As a school we are doing everything in our power to halt these behaviors. We need your cooperation in this matter immediately and please do not hesitate to reach out to us for further information. The following link is a parent's guide to internet safety: <http://www.connectsafely.org/Safety-Advice-Articles/facebook-for-parents.html>

Sincerely,

Sibylle Ajwani, Ed. D.

Principal

