

Clayton M. Wilcox, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools

August 14, 2014

SUBJECT: Our Mutual Responsibility Addressing Digital Activity

Dear Parents:

Our students are using social media at home, at school, and at every activity they attend. They are communicating, sharing, discovering new concepts, testing their boundaries, and growing into amazing people who will use social media and the internet at-large when they graduate and beyond. Culturally, the digital conversation has changed how we interact with one another. It has also changed how WCPS needs to operate to better ensure that our students, staff, and visitors remain safe on our campuses. Washington County Public Schools (WCPS) is a supporter of responsible use of social media.

With that in mind, we are writing to inform you that WCPS will be using a service to help us monitor publicly available social media posts for threats of harm, self-harm, and other critical issues deemed to be in the interest of protecting our students, staff, visitors, and our school sites. We want to assure you that we have carefully considered the issue and are acting responsibly and with respect for our students' and staff members' privacy, their right to free speech, and autonomy—all issues and values we support and want to protect.

WCPS is not targeting posts made by our students and staff members. We are, however, implementing a system that will help us filter publicly available social media content made by anyone on various open social networks that indicates potential violence or threats of harm to the people or the buildings in our district.

This decision was made after performing an informal audit of our existing safety procedures. We all have a role to play to ensure online activity doesn't impact school safety and security or the welfare of students. We realize the need to be part of the digital conversation so we can assure our community that we have the information needed to fulfill our responsibility to protect our community. We have the means to physically monitor our schools, and now we will also be able to monitor publicly available social media posts.

WCPS recognizes that our students and parents may have concerns about this type of service and so do we. Therefore, we want to make sure that community members have the facts, have a venue to ask questions, and can participate in the implementation of this service. With that in mind, we request the following:

- Please read the FAQ enclosed. It is designed to help you understand how the service will and will not be used.

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- Consider joining our student advocacy group. Beginning early this fall, a committee of students, representing the Washington County Student Government Association, will meet to identify and work through gray areas. WCPS will be limiting use of the service to key personnel to monitor for issues that impact school safety and security, but we recognize that vague areas will exist and we want students to be involved in working through those situations as stewards of their own safety. The balance between what we say and do online and what others can do with that information will be a topic that follows our students into their adulthood, and we want them to think through those issues sooner rather than later.
 - If you haven't already done so, please use this as an opportunity to engage in conversations with your children about how to practice good online citizenship and protect their privacy. While the many opportunities for socializing online have become part of day-to-day life, each comes with certain risks. You may want to visit www.onguardonline.gov, a federal government website that includes a number of resources to help you talk with your children about how to be safe and make the most of their online time.

Respectfully yours,



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Enclosure