

## *Remember the Children Are Watching*

(Originally Published to Parents September 2016)

As the Chief School Administrator for the Ramsey Public Schools, I recognize both the benefits and liabilities of social media. It can provide important information quickly, share the great work going on in our classrooms and serve as a tool to promote positive social change. In the past, a family would have to wait for the occasional newsletter or paper update from the district office to know what was happening in their child's school. Today, with the easy access and instantaneous reach of social media, students and families are in a continuous loop of information. However, this same benefit could potentially become a tremendous liability to the work of the district and/or a community, causing unnecessary distractions, and spreading misleading information.

I ask all parents and community members - to please read and think about the following points the next time you decide to post about your child's school on social media.

### **You're setting an example**

The age-old axiom of "children become what they see" is more true today than ever. Every single time you take to social media and comment on anything you're sending your child a message about the kind of person you expect him or she to be. Many of us have seen and unfortunately have been the target of absolutely vicious personal attacks on social media. Please do not forget that the children are watching.

### **The is a fine line between venting and being toxic**

As citizens, our community members absolutely have the right to make public comments about what is going on at the national and local levels. This may include the right to comment upon our school systems. I would never want to suppress that right or prevent the free exchange of ideas. That is not what we teach our students, and it would be truly un-American, yet I would like to remind our community that there is a fine line between appropriately sharing a frustration regarding a situation and using that situation to unload on someone or something. Please do not forget that the children are watching.

### **Don't trade in rumor/half-truths/lies**

Winston Churchill once wrote, "A lie gets halfway around the world before the truth has a chance to get its pants on." We have seen this happen time and time again on social media. A lone person will make an inaccurate statement with no support or truth, other people will pick up on it, spread it via their accounts, and all of a sudden what was untrue has now become part of the public conversation. Before accepting anything as gospel, please take the time to make sure that what you're passing on is true and accurate. If it does not appear accurate, it probably is not. Not only does it damage the individual, but it can also do irreversible harm to the morale of a community and district. Who would want to be part of a community where there is such vile discourse? Please do not forget that the children are watching.

### **Just because it is in print, does not mean it is true**

It is easy to write, print and publish just about anything these days, and sometimes readers fall into the trap of thinking a clean, neat and slickly produced website must be telling the truth. Don't fall into that trap. Instead, take the time to look into the sources and facts that support what you are reading. Don't assume that because something looks professionally produced means that it's accurate. Please do not forget that the children are watching.

### **Don't be mean**

Cruelty is the lowest form of behavior. We do not tolerate meanness from our students, and we wish it were not so prevalent on social media. Our schools and communities are filled with hard-working, well-intentioned and dedicated public servants, and to that point, I would like to request that respect and courtesy guide our interactions. There is no need to use foul language or make threats. This does not mean that disagreements will not occur from time to time. After all, having different viewpoints and working through them respectfully is a hallmark of our democracy, and we need to remember that when you resort to attacking the messenger and not the message, you have already lost. Please do not forget that the children are watching.

### **Stick with traditional communication channels**

Over time school districts have established traditional channels of communication and have also embraced newer ways to reach out to the public. The best source of accurate, authentic and factual information comes from these traditional sources. This does not mean that a curious public should not question and ask for more information. It does mean that official communication channels remain the best way to learn about the goings-on in the school district.

Social media, in so many ways, has been a tremendous benefit to our community and is not going away. The Ramsey Public Schools have recognized this. In my short time here, we have revised our curriculum to include Digital Citizenship and just last year I started Parent Academies to help our parents deal with these very complex issues. I invite you to come to our first Digital Citizenship Parent Academy on October 6 at 7 pm at Smith, and you can register now at this link:

In closing, we must remember that any tool is only as effective as the way it is used. I ask our families and communities to use the megaphone of social media to lift up our schools and not to tear them down. We have an incredible community and school district. Let's keep the positive momentum going.

Very truly yours,  
Matthew Murphy, Ed. D.