

Chapter 11

Principal's Letter to Parents: Take Kids off Social Networking Sites

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In recent years Facebook, MySpace, and other social-networking sites have been blamed for the suicides of teenagers in Missouri, Massachusetts, and New York. Parents complained their children were traumatized by nasty comments posted by cyberbullies on social-networking sites. Schools and districts are taking action in response. According to a T H E Journal survey conducted in 2009, 68 percent of respondents replied that their districts banned social networking sites for students and teachers, 19 respondents replied that they banned social networking sites only for students, and another 12 percent said there was no ban in their districts. In the following case study, which is a true story based on a news report in the Spring of 2010, a middle school principal calls for parents to yank their children from all social-networking sites after a so-called "Naughty List" was posted on Facebook. Is his extreme measure justifiable?

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In recent years Facebook, MySpace and other social-networking sites have been blamed for the suicides of teenagers in Missouri, Massachusetts, and New York.

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Retrevo surveyed more than 1,000 adults in the US and found that parents not only want to learn more about their kids through technology, they also have solid opinions on how their kids should use it. According to a new survey by Retrevo, almost half of parents said that they were “friends” with their teenagers on social networks.

Close to 12 percent of surveyed parents ban social networking as a form of punishment, and 18 percent ban all Internet usage. This is creeping very close to the 22 percent who nix TV, showing that parents understand how valuable Internet access is to their teens. Additionally, 29 percent of all parents ban the use of mobile phones and texting while at the dinner table. That number goes up to 36 percent for parents of teenagers. Still, many parents see the value in trying to “friend” their kids on social networks, even though it might be a bit awkward at times.

According to the same survey, most parents who are Facebook friends with their kids have teenagers—only 8 percent of parents said kids under 12 should have Facebook accounts in the first place—and they say that they learn a lot about their teens this way.

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In the following case study, a middle school principal is calling for parents to yank their children from all social-networking sites after a so-called “Naughty List” was posted on Facebook.

THE CASE

The names of dozens of female students at Reagan Middle School community in Pearson District had their names posted on a so-called “Naughty List” on Facebook, officials said. The page, called “The Whimsical Girls of Pearson ISD” claimed the girls were promiscuous. “I haven’t done anything to deserve to be put on that list,” said an 8th-grade victim who did not want to be identified. Parents complained to the district.

A spokeswoman said the district persuaded Facebook to remove the page and the case was turned over to the County Sheriff’s Office. “We felt it was serious enough to get involved and try and help our kids and get to the bottom of it,” said the spoke person of the District. “The ramification of cyber-bulling, in my opinion, is huge

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