

# ARTHUR P. SCHALICK HIGH SCHOOL

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*Home of the Cougars*

October 27, 2017

Dear Parents/Guardians:

On Thursday, October 19, we had the misfortune of dealing with an alleged verbal threat of school violence. The reports were received during the second half of the school day, and continued into the evening. New Jersey State Police (NJSP) was notified of the situation and additional measures were taken to ensure the safety of all our students as the reports were investigated.

Following an extensive investigation, it was determined that our school was and is safe. The investigation is ongoing. School and law enforcement officials work together in making determinations after information is obtained. We are collaborative partners and welcome your information; however, please allow school officials and law enforcement officers to make these determinations, and communicate them to you when appropriate.

Since the initial threat was reported, a lot of reactions are being fueled by rumor, speculation and the use of social media. During the investigation, it came to light that hearsay and rumors were taken as truth. It appears those reporting information were not doing so to be malicious, but instead believed the information of possible threat to student safety was true. During this time, the text messages by students and parents alike, as well as the social media posts by students, parents and community members only served to enflame an already tense situation. Unfortunately, this is an example of what can occur when our students and community do not appreciate the magnitude of social media and how quickly misuse can result in hysteria.

On Friday, October 20, we opened our school doors because school was safe; we will never put our students at risk. Safety is our first priority. Our students completed their Homecoming Weekend with the presence of the NJSP as additional assurance that they were safe.

We want to take this opportunity to thank the New Jersey State Police for their diligence in handling this situation. I also want to thank many of our students and parents who provided relevant information to assist during the investigation.

This coming week, the entire Schalick High School student body will be addressed by the NJSP regarding this issue. Below is a summary of the points that will be emphasized with our students:

1. Threats - false or substantiated - can be considered criminal activity. Any threat, and/or comments that may be perceived as a potential threat by an objective person, will heighten the awareness of school officials, law enforcement and more.
2. When to Tell. Report suspicious activity. Anytime you see suspicious activity or potentially threatening comments, please report them immediately to School Administration.

3. Bystander Behaviors. If an act of bullying, harassment or intimidation is observed, how should students react? Do not ignore the situation. Know when and how to help, and when to report.
4. It's all public. Even when you think you are part of a "closed group," consider what may happen if someone copies a post and forwards it to others. Conversations are never private on social media.
5. No such thing as anonymity. We can identify any individual on social media. With cooperation from law enforcement, it's only a matter of time before we identify the anonymous individual.
6. Social media is permanent. Even though individuals may delete comments/posts, posts are often copied, photographed, forwarded and sent to hundreds of people in a very short period of time. Consider a social media post permanent.
7. Be responsible and respectful when using social media. Too many of our students, parents and community members use social media inappropriately. Most of the posts we see are not elevated to a threat-level but many may be considered to be mean, insensitive or harassing in nature. Remember to be respectful when interacting with others.

I am asking that our parents reiterate these important points with their children, and to reflect upon one's own actions. Unfortunately, we have had far too many uncomfortable meetings where students have gotten themselves in a lot of trouble as a result of social media misuse, or the spreading of rumor and hearsay.

#### **What can parents do?**

When it comes to social media and internet use, our parents are the first line of defense. Many of the issues we deal with are a result of activity that occurs outside of school hours. Inappropriate comments, pictures and/or threats are usually brought to our attention by an alleged victim or observer of the behavior. As parents, there are a few things we can begin doing immediately that will help teach our children responsible and respectful social media use.

1. Monitor social media use. If you don't do this now, please begin to monitor your child's social media activity and address inappropriate behavior immediately. It only takes one regrettable post for your child to lose a lot of privileges here at school, or to be prosecuted by law.
2. Think before you post. As parents, we model the behavior our children replicate. Unfortunately, too many adults engage in inappropriate behavior when using social media themselves. Keep in mind that our children see this behavior and often act similarly while on social media. Parents who model appropriate social media behavior help to teach our children how to conduct themselves respectfully.
3. Social media is not a reliable source of information. If you have questions or need clarification, call us. Messages will be returned, or a public statement issued, as soon as possible. Please be patient as we deal first, with the matter at-hand. Your child's safety is our first priority. Too often we see comments on social media attempting to address or clarify a school-related issue that are often inaccurate, misleading and/or irresponsible.
4. Privacy. Not all information can or will be shared. Not all information will be made public. Privacy must be respected in our society. Please be patient as school and law enforcement officials gather the information needed to make informed decisions and to prepare statements to our public. The rate at which messages are spread is much quicker than the rate at which a thorough investigation may be completed.

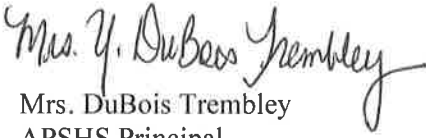
## Planning Ahead

As an administrative team, we continue to evaluate our safety and security measures at Schalick. We work closely with law enforcement and conduct drills on a regular basis. In light of this recent incident, we will convene as a team and investigate how we can improve upon these measures. I can also tell you that we take threats and potential threats seriously and will not tolerate any behavior that harms the safety and welfare of our students.

Looking ahead, the NJSP will be present at the November 2<sup>nd</sup> Board of Education meeting to speak to the matter and to address our Board and the public regarding their involvement in critical incidents. All are invited and encouraged to attend.

In closing, I thank you for your patience and cooperation. Should you have any additional questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me at your convenience.

Sincerely,



Mrs. DuBois Trembley  
APSHS Principal

- C: *H. Bermann, Superintendent of Schools*  
*New Jersey State Police*  
*D. Harris, Business Administrator/Board Secretary*  
*Pittsgrove Township Board of Education*  
*D. Garrison, Chief Academic Officer*  
*P. Ocasio-Jiménez, PTMS Principal*  
*T. Monti, Olivet Elementary School Principal*  
*D. Bruce, Norma/Elmer Elementary School Principal*  
*A. Chiaradonna, Special Education Supervisor*