

Jody Monroe
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Bethlehem Central School District

<http://bethlehemschools.org>



Dear BCHS Parent/Guardian:

I am writing to you about an important new initiative at the high school related to online student safety and digital citizenship.

As technology use continues to grow, our students are faced with what are new and often untested rules of appropriate and responsible behavior when using the Internet. Though our faculty and staff work diligently K-12 to make character education an integral part of our school curriculum, we want to ensure our students are equipped with the knowledge and tools they need to make good choices and be good citizens, online and elsewhere. To do so, we are stepping up efforts to educate students about digital citizenship. We are beginning at the high school where we feel a special responsibility to help those students inching closer to adulthood make the best decisions possible.

On April 24, the BCHS chapter of No Place for Hate will help us address **online safety** as they welcome the Siena College Cyberbullying Ambassadors to begin a **peer-to-peer training program** at the school. It is designed to establish a group of peer advisors who can help promote age-appropriate dialogue about online behavior and underscore the importance of being upstanding digital citizens. A group of about two dozen BCHS students, grades 9-12, who were recommended by teachers and fellow students, will be trained by the college group to serve as ambassadors at the high school. The college students will spend the day at the school, first in a training workshop and then to assist our new school ambassadors as they host an assembly for all ninth and tenth graders.

The goal of the assembly and for our ambassadors is to demonstrate what being an “upstander” looks like and how to educate others to be one. The peer ambassador program is one that will be ongoing, continuing in 2017-18, and whose education efforts will be extended to other grades.

In a study conducted last fall by the Siena College Research Institute, Capital Region teens cited the following as reasons they believe cyberbullies target others on social media: physical appearance (42 percent), social awkwardness (34 percent), being thought of as gay (36 percent), the clothes they wear (29 percent), being un-athletic (24 percent), having a disability (20 percent) or being sexually active (21 percent).

As much as we remind our students they should always seek out a trusted adult when feeling confused or threatened online or anywhere, it is understandable that peer-to-peer messaging can help bridge gaps where students may shy away from confronting some of the same issues revealed in the Siena poll. Our goal with this new program is to let our students know that they are never alone.

Thank you to the students and advisors of No Place for Hate, and our high school administrators, for their efforts in bringing the Siena partnership to BCHS and for their exemplary work creating a more positive, inclusive and accepting high school environment.

If you have any questions about the high school’s efforts to address online safety and digital citizenship, please contact High School Assistant Principal Heather Culnan at hculnan@bczd.neric.org or No Place for Hate faculty advisor Megan McGinnis at mmcginnis@bczd.neric.org.

Sincerely,



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Superintendent of Schools

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