

Friday, Feb. 17, 2023

Dear Spencerport Families,

As you are aware, Spencerport CSD is a special school system with a great reputation across the State of New York. Our commitment to provide every student with a safe, caring, and excellent education is one that we take very seriously. While many of my weekly newsletters highlight the wonderful awards and recognitions that students, teachers, and staff receive on a regular basis, I unfortunately share a different type of message with you this week.

Recent events on our campus have caused families to ask, "Is my child safe at school?" As someone who has educated children for close to 30 years and a parent of a school-age child myself, I understand the urgency and anxiety that accompanies that question. It is my hope that today's message responds to some of the questions that I have received this week as it pertains to safety, student behavior, discipline, and communication.

To begin, every time we receive information that someone violates our Code of Conduct, we immediately investigate and if necessary, contact the police. Our process involves working with students and families to gather information, obtaining any evidence or footage if applicable, and assessing the impact and severity of harm in the behavior. If it is determined that a violation has occurred, the process then shifts to consequences and systems of support. This would include disciplinary measures and follow-up services and supports based on the specific situation. The district takes issues of safety very seriously and strives to prevent violence in its schools with our positive behavior initiatives and programs. I must be realistic, fighting does occur, and when that happens, students are held accountable.

It is important to note that the majority of students follow our Code of Conduct. However, they are still children, and as such, make poor choices from time to time. For students who have previously violated our Code of Conduct, that prior behavior is taken into consideration with a progressive model of discipline. Coinciding with this, we also strive to have age-appropriate remedies that incorporate prevention, education, intervention, and discipline.

Sometimes parents will ask about disciplinary consequences imposed on other students. Privacy laws for minors are very clear, and we are strictly prohibited from sharing that information. However, the fact that an outcome is not released does not mean that there is no discipline. If a student's conduct is criminal in nature, law enforcement is contacted for their own investigation and/or pursuit of charges. That process is independent from the district.

There is another perception around suspension or even expulsion. Any disciplinary action does not relieve the district's legal requirement to educate a student. Educational services must be provided, even during periods of suspension.

Lastly, we strive to communicate with you, our community, in the most transparent way possible. We alert you to information that may be of concern, knowing that these situations are usually very complicated. Our communications are required to be protective and respectful of the individuals involved, and yet, we release as much information as we can. The incident this week involved two minors and with the video going viral, it has been incredibly upsetting and overwhelming to all of us. It has been especially difficult for those impacted students and their families. Our need to protect the health and safety of individuals involved may leave people looking for more details. Please know that I recognize this and consider your requests for information when determining how to best communicate throughout the district.

As we wrap up this week, I want you to know that my commitment to creating a safe and welcoming environment in our district is absolutely unwavering and I welcome your thoughts and feedback. I also hope you will take this as an opportunity to have a discussion with your child(ren) on the importance of helping maintain a learning environment that is safe, respectful and peaceful. As a community, we will stay strong and be there for each other as we continue our work toward improving our district's climate and culture.

Sincerely,
Kristin