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Curriculum and Instruction

SUBJECT: REQUEST THAT THE SCHOOL BOARD OF MIAMI-DADE COUNTY, FLORIDA, ENDORSE AND ADOPT THE DISTRICT'S PLAN OF ACTION TO COMBAT TEENAGE SEXTING

COMMITTEE: INSTRUCTIONAL EXCELLENCE AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

LINK TO DISTRICT

STRATEGIC PLAN: IMPROVE SAFETY AND THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

In an effort to proactively address a troubling nationwide proliferation in the transmission, by minors, of sexually explicit text and/or photographs through the use of cellular telephones and other electronic media, Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS) proposes to develop and establish a District-wide Plan of Action to combat teenage sexting.

A research study led by The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy reveals that 20% of teenagers have electronically sent or posted nude or seminude pictures or video of themselves and approximately 44% of teenage girls and boys report that sexually suggestive messages are frequently shared with individuals other than the intended recipient. Although the study documents the nature and prevalence of sexting, the adverse consequences faced by minors that engage in sexting has been more broadly reported through a spate of recent well publicized cases involving:

1. Prosecution of minors for violations of existing state and federal laws barring the transmission and/or possession of child pornography. The Wall Street Journal recently reported that approximately 20 children ranging in age from 11-17 in Tunkhannock, Pennsylvania, faced the prospect of felony child pornography charges after officials confiscated cellular telephones that contained semi-nude or scantily clad images of the minors. "A Lawyer, Some Teens and a Fight Over Sexting" *The Wall Street Journal*, April 21, 2009
2. Threat that minors may be branded as sex offenders under current laws that were intended to prevent child abuse perpetrated by adults. "Losing children could be imprisoned or made pariahs for life. Mark Rasch, a former cybercrime prosecutor for the Justice Department, and now an information security and privacy consultant, says that a 16-year-old with a standard story—she took a bunch of pictures of herself and sent them to a boy electronically in the hopes of seducing him—could get life in federal prison under current sentencing guidelines.

If she does manage to get out, she may have to register as a sex offender.”
“Sexting May Place Teens at Legal Risk” *The New York Times*, March 26, 2009

3. Bullying and harassment prompted by the unintended distribution of sexually suggestive messages or images. 18 year old Jessica Logan from Cincinnati, Ohio, committed suicide on July 3, 2008, after she was subjected to relentless ridicule and taunt over the course of several months following her transmission of nude photographs that she had taken for her boyfriend. “Sexting Lands Teen on Sex Offender List” www.cnn.com, April 8, 2009.

Sexting may also subject minors to an increased risk of infection from sexually transmitted diseases and/or unplanned pregnancies as the propensity to convey sexually explicit communications may lower inhibitions and thereby promote reckless behaviors. Similarly, by impulsively transmitting lurid messages or photographs through electronic media, teenagers that engage in sexting fail to consider the lasting impact such images may wreak on an individual’s reputation, jeopardizing a minor’s future ability to secure college admission, obtain employment and/or establish interpersonal relationships.

Although media attention has portrayed sexting as a primarily legal issue, M-DCPS recognizes the district’s unique ability to promote awareness and engage parental and community support in combating this trend. The plan of action will be developed in collaboration with appropriate stakeholders to offer a comprehensive approach that focuses on awareness, insures student safety, emphasizes prevention/intervention support and trains parents/families to regulate cyber activities. The plan will incorporate curriculum and professional development and feature an unprecedented partnership between M-DCPS and local and state law enforcement agencies to promote legislation targeting the inequitable application of existing child sexual abuse laws to minors that engage in sexting.

RECOMMENDED: That The School Board of Miami-Dade County, Florida, endorse and adopt the District’s plan of action to combat teenage sexting.

MRF:jw

M-DCPS Comprehensive Policy to Combat Sexting

Action Plan

