

East Penn School District

District Administration Office
Phone 610.966.8300

<http://www.eastpennsd.org>

800 Pine Street
Emmaus, PA 18049

Dear EPSD Parents and Staff,

In recent months, Internet safety has received coverage in all the major television media outlets, many radio news and talk shows, newspapers, schools, and parent groups who are concerned about students' use of Internet tools including Blogs (Web logs), email, and other forms of Internet social communities. When used appropriately and with adult involvement, these tools can be educationally and socially useful. The same tools can also pose serious hazards to students who do not understand the potential dangers of inappropriate online behaviors.

Let us share some statistics with you. According to 2003-05 surveys from I-SAFE America, Inc.:

- o Almost 77 million students are on the Internet, at least once per week.
- o Of 55,000 students surveyed, 33% use email, instant messages and chat rooms (or Blogs) as their main contact with friends.
- o Of the same 55,000 students, 35% feel freer to do what they want on the Internet than in the physical world.
- o 11% have met someone face-to-face whom they previously met online.
- o 42% of kids have been bullied while online.

Blogs and Cyberbullying are becoming especially prevalent among school age children. As the classroom use of technology has increased, the district is developing guidelines for Blog use for academic purposes. Educational Blog sites are being evaluated so that one can be chosen as the district supported site for academic use in the classroom.

More Dangers of Blogging:

- o Personal information posted online can also be read by college admissions officers and future employers.
- o Some colleges have expelled teenagers for violating codes of conduct after discovering photos of underage students posing in front of kegs or writing about drinking binges, and employers often look up job candidates on the sites, said Parry Aftab, an Internet lawyer and the executive director of Wiresafety.org.
- o Blogs can also be isolating. "They do less face-to-face talking, less phone talking, less playing outside than any other generation, and because of that, the Internet is real to them, but the risks aren't."

[Excerpted from "Washington Post," January 17, 2006. Article by Tara Bahrapour and Lori Aratani, Staff Writers]

Please note that Internet connections from East Penn School District computers pass through a web filter that blocks web sites identified as inappropriate or unacceptable. Compliance with federal and state laws requiring supervision of Internet use is outlined in the district Acceptable Use Policy (AUP). Teachers and staff are encouraged to participate in workshops and professional development opportunities addressing student use of the Internet. The Curriculum and Instruction Office is currently developing a series of presentations to educate parents, students, and faculty on avoiding Internet hazards, especially those associated with Blogs and Cyberbullying.

In the meantime, what steps can you take?

- o Ask your child if he/she is using Blogs, and if they are, ask to see **all** their Blogs. Get involved.
- o Place the computer in a family area in your home. Your child may be more watchful if you are watching, too.
- o Talk with your child about guarding his/her identifying information while online or in Blog profiles.
- o Teach that chat room or Blog "friends" are not always who they say they are.
- o Make clear that your child never arranges to get together with anyone he/she has met online.
- o Explain that photos are great to give to a friend, but not to post on a Blog or send through email.
- o Advise the child how and to whom he/she should report Cyberbullying.
- o Ensure that your child understands that children are assaulted and abducted as a result of posting personal information online. It can happen to your child, too.
- o **Do not assume** your child is not involved in online socializing. **Do confirm** that your child is being safe.

For more information on Blogs, Chats, and other Internet tools that your child may be using, check out:

<http://www.isafe.org>

<http://www.cyberbully.org>

<http://www.netsmartz.org/netparents.htm>

George A. Ziolkowski, Ph.D.
Substitute Superintendent of Schools