



Warren County Public School Division

From: Bobby Johnston, Principal, Skyline Middle School
Date: October 8, 2019
Re: Open Letter about Bullying and SMS Responses

To Our Skyline Community:

In the last week there has been a great deal of discussion regarding bullying at Skyline Middle School and our response to instances of bullying. We believe that all students have the right to live and be educated in a safe, caring and supportive environment with mutual respect and courtesy. Bullying is anti-social behavior that threatens the values, standards, and peace of our school and community. I would like to take the opportunity to address the Skyline community regarding how we handle bullying from a preventative and responsive point-of-view.

Skyline Middle School has many preventative programs that address the bullying situations your child may face. Our first level of bullying prevention starts with our school-wide behavior expectations. We teach expectations for how students are to treat one another, show kindness to one another, respect one another, and how to own their actions when they are not meeting those expectations.

Sometimes students struggle in meeting behavior expectations. We provide all of our students training using a social-emotional program called *Second Step*. We have used *Second Step* for the last five years, and students regularly participate in this program throughout the year. Students focus on empathy and communication as well as bullying prevention and management of their emotions.

Additionally, we provide a mindfulness program for small groups of students. We provide this additional support to assist these students in proactively regulating their emotions. This support is in place to prevent instances of bullying.

Over the last four years, we have been able to provide our students the opportunity to view a production from the *Same Sky Project*.

“The Same Sky Project features a traveling group of performers who advocate for and promote messages of empathy, love, inclusion, acceptance and inspiration through music and performance. Conceived in 2011 by a client with cerebral palsy, the Same Sky Project showcases a changing group of teens, each with different physical, intellectual and developmental challenges who perform original shows at local school assemblies in an effort to communicate their daily struggles and aspirations to fellow classmates.”

(Taken from the Same Sky Project website. More information located at...<http://www.aplacetobeva.org/the-same-sky-project>)



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Although we have preventative programs, some students continue to engage in behavior that negatively affects others. *Ripple Effects*, a computer based program, is designed to help students reflect on their actions and how they impact others. Peer mediation and social skills groups are other ways we address bullying and student conflicts. We are able to refer students to outside agencies like Family Preservation Services for outpatient counseling through the Therapeutic Day Treatment program. This agency works to provide counseling services to students in need of behavior modification.

We recognize that many students have been exposed to trauma. Project Courage, which is funded through the Warren Coalition, provides students with trauma-informed care, thus working to provide a high level of behavior support for students in need.

We continue to add programs to assist students in becoming more compassionate and empathetic towards one another. Our newest program is called *Do You* in conjunction with the *The Phoenix Project*. This program is designed to facilitate youth resiliency. Students focus on self-esteem, healthy relationships, and communication skills. This past year we partnered with a local non-profit group called *Reaching Out Now*. This group's mission is to provide uplifting experiences to female students through self-esteem building, leadership development activities, and much more.

The goal of Skyline Middle School, as this year's motto states, is One Vision, One Team, One Community. We are here to help support and grow engaged, healthy children into engaged, healthy young adults who are ready for the academic challenges of high school. We welcome a partnership with the parents of our students in order to form a strong community connection. Should you have any questions or if you would like further information, please do not hesitate to contact me at (540) 636-0909 or via email, bjohnston@wcps.k12.va.us. Thank you for your time.

Yours in Partnership,

Robert Johnston
Principal Skyline Middle School

CC: Melody Sheppard
Michael Hirsch