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MONMOUTH BEACH SCHOOL

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Dear Middle School Families,

Since joining the district, I have personally chaperoned many dances for our middle school students. Over the past few years, I have observed most of the students that attend the dances spend a great deal of time on their cell phones instead of socializing with their peers and actually dancing! As a parent of three former middle school students, I realize and accept the fact that having a cell phone has become part of the reality of being a twenty-first century teenager. However, as the principal of our school, I have a responsibility to promote and maintain a positive social setting for all students here at school.

Although we have not had any serious issues with cell phone use at our dances so far, I truly believe it is only a matter of time before that changes. During every dance, students take pictures and video footage of one another and it is virtually impossible to know if this is happening with consent or even awareness among the students. Living in this age of social media, I have no doubt that our students are posting pictures and video footage on various sites such as Snapchat and Instagram.

As with any decision, I consider the issue from all perspectives, including being a parent. I understand that having a cell phone makes it easier for students to contact their parents when they need to be picked up and for parents to contact their child at the end of a dance. I also anticipate parents wanting their child to have a phone in case of an emergency. However, not only does every chaperone have a cell phone, but every room in the school has a phone, including the gym, so there will always be multiple ways to make an emergency call if needed.

For all of the reasons stated above, students that bring a cell phone to a school dance will be expected to place the phone in a basket when they check in. When they are ready to leave, or at the end of the event, students will be able to retrieve their phones.

I have given this issue a great deal of thought and I have come to the conclusion that we can either continue to allow students to use their cell phones freely at our dances or we can take this preventative step and avoid a potentially serious situation. Equally important is the need to encourage and promote actual conversation and personal interactions among our students. If you think about it, it is ironic to call it "social media" because activity on all of these sites has caused our students to become much less social.

Respectfully,

Michael E. Ettore
Principal/Superintendent