



Woodcrest Elementary School

March 2017



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Shark Sentinel

Dear Woodcrest Family:

I recently read an article in the *New York Times* that drew some very compelling developmental parallels between the optimal legal age to allow kids to drive and the appropriate age to provide children with smartphones. Arguably, the latter is more difficult to determine. Unlike driving, as the article points out, there are no state or federal guidelines when it comes to giving our youngest citizens “unfettered access to the internet and the many benefits and dangers that come with it.”

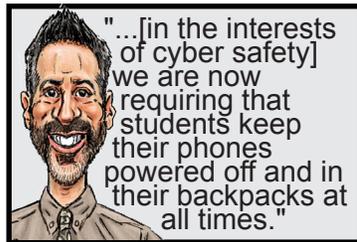
Back in 2012, a Pew Internet and American Life survey concluded that 57% of kids ages 12 and 13 had their own cell phone. Today, that number may not even be high enough to represent our 9-11 year-old student population. Smartphones are ubiquitous in our middle and high schools, and these powerful devices are now unquestionably in the hands of elementary children who may lack the proper judgment to use them safely, appropriately and even in a handful of cases, legally. And the consequences for a momentary lapse in judgment can be severe.

Here at Woodcrest, this has become something of a hot topic. Recently, there has been an uptick in inappropriate online behavior among our fifth grade students. And while these incidents have exclusively occurred during the evening and on weekends, residual issues tend to spill over into the following school day, causing a significant disruption and distraction.

Per the Children’s Internet Protection Act, the district employs filtering software designed to block harmful and inappropriate content; however, we are unable to monitor personal smartphone use in the same manner. That said, it could

just be a matter of time before smartphone misuse occurs *during* the school day. Ultimately, as the staff and I recently concluded, when it comes to the use of smartphones in the elementary setting, the risks outweigh any potential benefits, particularly when the school is well equipped with the tools (e.g., ChromeBooks, iPads, etc.) necessary for effective instructional technology integration.

We recognize that completely banning cell phones from school altogether would be problematic, so instead, *we are now requiring that students keep their phones powered off and in their backpacks at all times.* This way, you will still have the ability to communicate with your child before and after school.



If you have an urgent need to reach your child during school hours, please don’t hesitate to call the main office. Likewise, if a student needs to reach a parent/guardian, s/he will be permitted to use a school phone provided

that there is a pressing need (e.g., forgotten lunch, wet clothing, etc.). However, please understand that in the interests of instilling the life skill of responsibility, forgotten assignments do not qualify as urgent.

To quote Dr. Meloche’s most recent weekly newsletter, “The first ‘online generation’ is coming up through our schools, and it’s one of our greatest responsibilities – and challenges – to help them navigate online media safely.” It is in that spirit that I thank you for continuing to work in partnership with the Woodcrest staff and for your anticipated support of the newly adopted rules and protocols outlined in the updated Woodcrest Family Handbook (as available from “parent information” link from the school website).

Yours in education,

J.C.
Jonathan Cohen

Coming events:



March

- 6 FunPlex Family Night
↳ 6-9 PM
- 6 Family Night
↳ No Homework
- 10 End of 2nd Marking Period
- 14 Sal Vito's/Yo Moma Fundraiser
- 15 Ocean City Ticket Sales
- 21 PTA Meeting - 7:00 PM
- 22 Kindergarten Registration
- 24 Report Cards Issued
- 24 JDRF Assembly - PM
- 30 Spring Picture Day

April

- 3 Family Night
↳ No Homework
- 7 JDRF Walk - PM
- 10-14 Spring Recess
↳ SCHOOLS CLOSED
- 17 Full Day In-Service
↳ SCHOOLS CLOSED
- 19 PTA Plant Sale Begins
- 19-25 5th Gr. PARCC Testing
- 26-27 Mothers' Day Gift Shop
- 28 Interim Progress Reports
↳ issued where concerns exist
- TBA Science Day

Drop-off Reminders...

When dropping your child off during arrival, please be sure it is not earlier than 8:40 AM (with a staff member on duty), and please do not stop at the new APR doors. Instead, please pull up as close to the front doors as possible. This allows for up to 15 cars to safely drop off at once.

Learners Today... Leaders Tomorrow

