

JANUARY 2013

the
PRINCIPAL'S NEWSLETTER

*How do you want your
child to spend their
free time at school?*

✧ THE EARNEST ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVE ✧

Dear Parents,

Reflection on the past and hope for the future goes hand-in-hand and is always most poignant for me at the beginning of the school year in August and the New Year in January.

As you remember, in August I sent an e-mail asking you to tell me in a million words or less how I could make this the best school year your child has ever had. More than 250 parents responded and I listened to each and every one of you. I met face-to-face with dozens of you, and the results of our combined efforts have been overwhelmingly positive. Based on your suggestions, we forged a path that lead to the master schedule being adjusted to include a defined path for student enrichment and support.

Now I have a new assignment for you. With five months of school remaining, I am asking for your help once again to work as a team to help our children be better "engaged." Let's be clear. I'm not talking about classroom engagement as this aspect of our combined efforts has been quite successful. I am in the classroom

daily and see hands-on activities where your children are collaborating, creating, and discovering in a learning environment that is free of worksheets and photo-copied handouts. I see student-centered activities where all are academically engaged.

Rather, I need your help identifying, understanding and implementing strategies/activities that affect our kid's success before, after, and between the school bells, when less constructive pursuits compete for their time, attention, and energy.



Like this?



Or this?



Continued...

The recent events in Connecticut have surfaced many disturbing questions about how our children spend their free time between classes, at recess, and in the lunch room in activities where they appear engaged, but are not.

Every child has a selective window of engagement. Some are open to opportunities to join their classmates in pursuing whatever the school day presents. Many others, however, are sealed tight; far too comfortable with virtual pursuits that encourage and reward digital engagement over human interaction. Simply put, a hand-held device is a poor substitute for friends, classmates, collaborative activities, and human engagement.

Here is the question. How do we meet the needs of all students to ensure that their engagement during school hours is earnest, valuable, rewarding and, most importantly, people-centered? School is an interactive community that draws on the strength of its individual citizens (students, teachers, parents) to develop an atmosphere that our children can trust to provide friendship, knowledge, and a safe haven from the shallow and sometimes negative stimulus they receive via video games.

During the school's combined lunch/recess period, students read, play, eat, talk, listen to music, and play video games. The earnest engagement initiative is designed to replace shallow free-time pursuits that offer little to no value, with opportunities for students to become earnestly engaged in activities that will enrich them not only as students, but as members of a family with a shared purpose- learning and growing not only on an academic, but also on a social level.

As of this week, video games during school hours will be prohibited as there is no advantage to the student or the school in this type of shallow engagement. Overwhelming research on video games suggests students who play them in preference to social

interaction become more isolated, aggressive, and the impact on their grades trends toward the negative.

Just as we have differentiation of instruction in the classroom, we have differentiation of socialization during lunch and after school. I need your help to identify and foster activities that will support your child's ability to engage earnestly so that they can realize positive returns for themselves as well as the student body and school family.

Here is our baseline. Many after-school activities at Wiesbaden Middle School are not only academic, but also fun and earnestly engaging. Monday through Thursday, the school offers academic clubs and help with homework and tutoring, as well as the art club, crafts club, cooking club, Young Astronauts' Club, and the Dodge Ball Club. On Thursdays, the Outdoor Club takes students places such as ice-skating, rock-climbing, to various markets, and to visit the tomb of the Red Baron. During lunch there are members of our teaching staff who volunteer their duty-free lunch period to mentor, tutor, and provide a safe, learning environment for kids to work in small groups who don't want the noise and excitement of the playground or cafeteria.

I need your help identifying and establishing additional pursuits that will socially prepare your child for high school, college and adulthood. Let's work together to ensure our students are earnestly engaged in positive activities that will pay the highest dividends for their future.

Happy New Year! Just like you, I want the best for your child and all children.

As always, I am just a phone call or e-mail away.

Susan P. Hargis, Ph.D

Principal

