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August 8, 2023

Dear Rock Hill Schools Families,

Greetings, and welcome to the 2023-2024 School Year. It is my hope this communication finds you doing well and enjoying the final days of summer vacation. Our primary goal remains to provide each student with the optimal opportunities to develop academically, socially, and emotionally in a school environment that is both safe and limited in as many distractions as practicable.

In the past few years, we have seen a dramatic increase in the use of cell phone devices throughout the school day, and upon conversations with staff, students, parents, and law enforcement, it has been determined that this increase in phone activity has become a hindrance to the educational process throughout the school day making it increasingly more difficult to keep students engaged and focused during classroom instruction. Additionally, we have experienced a dramatic increase in the number of instances of cyber-bullying and student misbehavior or disciplinary infractions associated with cell phones.

With the start of school, **we will begin the 2023-2024 academic year with a new board-approved policy and set of expectations on cell phone use in our schools.** For our total school community to partner with us in this vision, we need your support.

Beginning August 21st, the following will be in place on our school campuses as directed by **Board Policy JICJ: POSSESSION/USE OF PERSONAL ELECTRONIC DEVICES**

- Cell phones must be turned off at the beginning of and throughout the school day and put away during the school day** in lockers, bookbags, or personal storage space (handbag, satchel, etc.). Cell phones must not be visible.
- Students may only access their cell phones before the start of the school day and then again after the school day ends. Students will be able to use their phones during after-school activities.
- Students may not access and use their cell phone at any point during the school day (which includes commons time, transitions between classes, in hallways, in restrooms, and lunch/cafeteria).**

- Students will be expected to engage with these expectations in positive ways and follow the guidelines outlined.** We will make it a practice to provide reasonable warnings and consequences to students in violation of these rules. Students who continually choose to access or use their phones during the school day may have the cell phone confiscated as well as be held accountable to the District's Code of Conduct. Cell phones will be returned to the student at the end of the school day and may require a parent/guardian to be present at the administration's direction.

- A student who refuses to surrender their cell phone to any member of the faculty and/or staff **will be considered insubordinate which may result in a Level 2 or 3 offense.** Rules governing **insubordination** will apply as outlined in the Code of Conduct.

- Unauthorized use of a cell phone, which may include, but is not limited to, taking pictures or recording an incident without permission, cheating, harassment, or bullying is prohibited. Offenders may face up to three days out of school suspension.

The school office is always available as a resource to our students and families. In the event you have an urgent matter, our office staff members will relay an emergency message to your child. If a student **must contact a parent due to an urgent situation, he/she should go to a designated location upon receiving permission from a staff member in the school to place a call through the school's business line.**

I hope you understand our stance on technology, in particular, cell phones. **We highly encourage you to talk with your student about these new expectations before the start of the school year.** We will address this change with students on the first day of school, and this will also be reflected in our updated student handbooks.

Thank you in advance for your partnership with our schools and for your continued support to provide safe and productive learning environments limiting distractions for all our students. We look forward to a great school year ahead for our total school programs, students, and families.

Sincerely,


Dr. Tommy Schmolze
Superintendent