



WISCONSIN SCHOOL SAFETY COORDINATORS ASSOCIATION

WSSCA NEWSLETTER OCTOBER 2011

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TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS, AND SCHOOL SAFETY.

This past spring, the state of Missouri passed a law making it illegal for teachers and other school staff members to contact students on social media networks like Facebook, Twitter, etc. Making this action even more unusual was the lengths to which the law went. It not only included contact during the school year, it also included a teacher's off-duty time, to include summer break and winter breaks, etc. Understandably, Missouri teachers were upset and filed a law suit. Thankfully, the Missouri courts stepped in. The law was stopped and teachers' private rights were protected. As of September 23, a new law is being considered in Missouri and this time the governor is asking schools for input. Let's see how this goes.

The genesis of this effort came from the numerous reports from all over the country of teachers and students having inappropriate and/or illegal relationships. I know. As the former Director of Security for the Milwaukee Public Schools and a former police officer I have personally investigated several cases myself. Sadly, I was able to prove some of the allegations. Other allegations, while unproven, I believed were true. I am 100% convinced that there are teachers and other school staff members who will prey on young naive students and therefore, we must take every reasonable precaution to protect them.

That being said, to pass a blanket ban on the interaction of teachers and students on social networks is to suggest that a significant number of teachers might be involved in this disgusting behavior - and that unjustly casts a shadow over everyone on a school staff. The number of staffers involved in these cases that I have investigated, learned about, or have even heard rumors about does not reach even 1% of the teachers that I know. Should we now ban all school staff from having a social drink because some have been arrested for DUI? Of course not.

With more of our youth using social media, the danger to them grows exponentially, but not only from school staffers. California law enforcement officials reported some 30,000 **known** child pornography sites, but insufficient staff to adequately investigate more than 2% of them. A recent Consumer Reports survey shows there are now 7.5 million Facebook users younger than age thirteen and more than five million under age ten. This is a large, growing, and vulnerable audience and we adults must rise to face this challenge to the safety of our youth. But not with the passing of laws like Missouri's. How can we mitigate this problem? Let me offer a few ideas.

Reasonable measures principals can take to prevent staff abuse of students:

- Address this matter during a staff meeting and make it clear that such behavior will not be tolerated and violators will be prosecuted. You will find clear support by the others on staff because no one wants this stain on their school's reputation. (Old Chinese Proverb [that I made up]: In the absence of respect - fear will do nicely. It really does). Also, it is not the severity of punishment that influences behavior - it is the certainty of it. Teachers have been fired and imprisoned and still this behavior continues. Some think they can get away with this and that is why they try. They need to know we are all watching and when caught, they will be prosecuted.

- Do not allow staff to meet students at school in a one-on-one situation during off-hours. If such an emergency meeting is warranted, the teacher must protect himself/herself and inform someone of the meeting and the reason for it. Yes, some kids have emergencies and a teacher may be the only person on earth they trust to talk to. Yes, bad things have happened during these unusual meetings, but I can assure you, some very good things have happened, as well. In my opinion, we must give our teachers this flexibility. To help a troubled kid, there may not be any other option.

- Immediately investigate all allegations or rumors of inappropriate behavior by staff. I am aware of administrators who waited far too long before taking reasonable action. By then, the problem had grown and the damage was done.

- Inform your local law enforcement officials of all allegations. Let them decide what is a legal matter or simply an internal school issue. You may be a great administrator but you are not a cop or a lawyer. The Children's Code is confusing and frequently changing. Do not put yourself in jeopardy of being charged with failing to report a crime. I know of one A/P who was arrested because she conducted her own in depth sexual assault investigation which damaged the ensuing criminal investigation by the police.

In Closing: There may not be a more egregious violation of trust than a student being abused by a school staff person. Every school day the parents of 56 million kids trust us to protect their most valuable treasure - their children. In light of that great responsibility, every violator of this trust should be aggressively prosecuted by law enforcement. In the absence of respect - fear will do nicely. It really does.

HOW TO HAVE A SAFE HALLOWEEN!

- Be sure that costumes are not too long for your child. They have to walk a long way and they have to go up and down a lot of stairs and they could trip and fall.
- Make sure children can see well through facemasks, or if in doubt, use cosmetics for facial emphasis.
- Adults should accompany young children. Older brothers and sisters can only do so much to protect the tag alongs. Remember, they are still children too.
- Go out in daylight, but IF you must go out at night, consider flashlights and use of reflective tape on costumes, especially dark ones.
- Stay within the neighborhood and only visit homes you know.
- Watch for traffic. Children are unusually excited during trick-or-treating and they don't pay much attention to automobile traffic or traffic signs.
- Only give and accept wrapped or packaged candy.
- Examine all candy before allowing children to eat it. Look for open or torn wrappers or items that are obviously old or of questionable quality.
- Dogs don't understand kids dressed as monsters or other animals and may respond aggressively. Even your own pets may not recognize your children in costume so be careful with animals.
- Avoid hard plastic or wood props such as daggers or swords. The kids will "test" these items on each other so be prepared. Most costumes now come with foam weapons so take advantage of that.

One last note for adults: Lighten up! Halloween is fun! When I was kid, my friend and I started begging for candy early and we finished late. We got so much candy we started renting a mule to carry it all. We are now of age to draw social security and neither of us are overweight or have diabetes, and we still have all of our own natural teeth. Let kids be kids. With some over watch by adults, we can all enjoy the day for what it is - a day of imagination, make believe, and fun. Happy Halloween, everyone!!

SPECIAL NOTES: Looking to learn more about school security planning? There is no better value this fall than the **School Crisis Preparedness Conferences** that are being held around the state. Check out the information on the attached flyer or contact Mary Jean Erschen: mjerschen@citizenpreparedness.org.

Also, there is a repeat of an earlier CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION training session OCTOBER 11-13, 2011 in NEENAH, WI. For more information you can go to <https://www.thecjportal.org/CPTC/training/Pages/CSENeenahWI.aspx>

In last month's newsletter I said I would write about the new concealed carry law in this month's newsletter. Due to some interpretations still being unsettled, I am waiting until those matters are resolved before I put anything in writing. Maybe next month?

Start planning now for **WSSCA's 44th Annual School Safety Conference February 27 and 28 at the Kalahari Resort in Wisconsin Dells**. Details will be announced in the near future. Our training will be based on the results of the survey many of you responded to right after this year's Conference. You have spoken and we have listened. We will include Modules 9 and 10 of the School Safety Coordinators Certification Course. In an effort to appeal to more of our members, we will also offer more breakout sessions with training agendas set specifically for safety issues and another set for security issues.

Thought of the month: " In the school safety arena, when someone shares something of value with you - you have a moral obligation to share it with others." WSSCA believes this strongly and we are willing to reward those who share the best ideas. If you have an idea that saves your school money (other than the obvious cutting staff, etc.) send it to me. There are no forms to complete. Just put your thoughts to paper and email them to me at: wssca@wssca.org. No more than a page is necessary. Our staff will review the ideas and recognize the best three with the following rewards: **1st Place** - free Conference registration for two; **2nd Place** - free Conference registration fee and one year WSSCA membership; **3rd Place** - free Conference registration fee for one. We will publish your name and your ideas in future newsletters and send a copy of your congratulatory letter to your Superintendent. The winners will also be introduced at the Conference in February. Offer ends November 30. Please help us help others. Send in your ideas. You have a moral obligation, right?

Peter P. Pochowski
Executive Director and Editor

Education First - Safety Always