

Miller Place Union Free School District

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September 16, 2014

Re: Social Media and Yik-Yak Application

Dear Parents and Guardians,

A relatively new app named “Yik Yak” is growing in popularity in our nation and our own neighborhood. This app allows a user to write anonymous posts, which can be read by anyone within a defined geographic area as small as a 1.5 mile radius of their location. The anonymity of these posts allows individuals who may have malicious intent to write comments about others that may be hurtful, harassing, and sometimes quite disturbing. Regrettably, this new advent in technology is quickly becoming part of the social media cyberbullying phenomena.

Although the makers of Yik Yak have attempted to address the issue of the misuse and abuse of their product by middle and high school students through the implementation of “geofences,” which restrict access in locations identified as secondary schools, including our secondary schools, this does not address the issue of misuse outside of these predefined geographic boundaries. Sadly, despite our zero tolerance for bullying of any type, even in many cases where the bullying takes place off of school property, due to the anonymity granted by this app we will be unable to identify perpetrators of bullying conducted via this new technology.

We will continue our efforts to educate our students regarding appropriate behavior and the treatment of others both in the traditional sense and in the context of existing and new technologies. Additionally, I urge you to partner with us in addressing this important issue. Toward that end, steps you may take include the following:

- Check your children's phones for this app as well as other similarly misused apps such as Snapchat, Kik, Whisper and Tinder, among others.
- Review the settings on your children's phones and consider blocking apps not rated as age appropriate (restrictions are generally enabled under “settings” on most devices). For instance, Yik Yak is rated for ages 17+ so if you choose to restrict based on your child's age, most will not be able to access this app.
- Have a discussion with your child regarding the respectful treatment of others and to expect respectful treatment in return. Additionally, stress the importance that the mistreatment and disrespect of others, whether in person or through anonymous means, is never acceptable.

Since this issue impacts our students primarily outside of our schools when they are in the community both within the school district and beyond our boundaries engaging in regional social and recreational activities, we are joined by the Rocky Point, Shoreham – Wading River, Mount Sinai and Port Jefferson school districts in sharing this important message. Collectively, we are hopeful that all parents and guardians in our region will be aware and, as a result, better prepared to join with us in addressing this important matter.

I thank you for your cooperation and understanding of the severity of this issue. Please feel free to contact your child's principal if you have any additional questions pertaining to this issue.

Sincerely,

Dr. Marianne F. Higuera
Superintendent of Schools