Dear Families:

Keeping our children safe requires that families and schools work together as partners, especially on issues that bridge home and school.

Internet safety has recently made media headlines with stories that a video promoting self-harm and suicide slipped through the filters of YouTube Kids and, as a result, children nationwide saw this video while viewing what was otherwise child-friendly content.

While we do not have reason to believe such content was viewed on school devices, we share your concern about the frightening nature of these videos. Although some cyber experts now believe reports about the "Momo Challenge" are a hoax, it is a good reminder of the importance of knowing who your child is communicating with, as well as being vigilant in monitoring your child's online activities, including social media accounts, apps, games, videos, etc.

We encourage you to talk with your children about the content of these videos. Cyber-safety experts warn that bringing up the "MoMo Challenge" specifically may lead children to investigate it themselves. Instead, they suggest families ask their children whether they have encountered anything online that caused them to be worried or upset. If your child is aware of this trend, assure them that Momo is not a real person, cannot directly harm them and cannot tell them to do anything.

Experts also recommend the following tips to protect your child from viral challenges:

- Discuss the online trends among their peers and find out about what games their friends are talking about. It's important you understand what websites, apps, and social media platforms they are on to help them minimize potential risks.
- Have regular conversations with your children about the risks they may be exposed to and how to deal with them, such as cyberbullying, peer pressure and grooming, and ensure they feel able to come and talk to you if they see anything upsetting.
- Check their privacy settings. Make sure they know how to make their profiles 'private' so they are not sharing personal information to strangers. Tighten device settings and parental controls.
- Make sure they know when and how to report and block any malicious or inappropriate messages or posts on the platforms they use.
- Advise them to be careful about over-sharing personal information such as their school, telephone number or anything that identifies where they live and consider not using their full name for their profile.
- Remind children not to accept friend requests from people they don't know, never to contact strangers online -- regardless of the method, and never to give out personal information.
- Supervise your child's online activity, limit video games and YouTube use to shared family spaces and keep an eye out for unknown phone numbers or email addresses.

Attached is some information from the National Online Safety organization about this "challenge." In addition, you may find the following online safety resources helpful:
- www.commonsensemedia.org
- https://internetsafety101.org
- www.netsmartz.org
- www.fbi.gov/resources/parents

- https://ag.ky.gov/protecting-children/cyber-safety
- www.nationalonlinesafety.com

As a school district, we will continue to provide all students with education related to online safety as well as developmentally appropriate lessons about mental health topics. We are also committed to sharing relevant information with the adults who care for them while they're not in school. Working together we will ensure the safety of our children at home, at school and in the community.