



Serving With Pride The
Township of Manalapan
and the
Borough of Englishtown

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Dear Parent(s)/Guardian(s):

Yesterday, five young girls were interviewed by Manalapan Township detectives regarding conversations they had in a chat room on the app "House Party". Yesterday, numerous fourth and fifth grade students were crying at lunch after hearing a rumor that someone was going to "shoot up" their school. Yesterday, the principal and assistant principal had to speak to every fourth and fifth grade class to assure the children that they are safe in their school. Yesterday, because parents allowed their ten year old children to be on a website that requires a waiver for anyone under thirteen, an entire district went on alert.

My question to the Manalapan-Englishtown community is: what are we going to do today? Remember when we would teach children not to talk to strangers. Now we look the other way while our 10 year olds download the latest app which allows them to interact with anyone. Clearly the teenagers who made those disgusting comments and threats are responsible for what they said but isn't every parent who either allows or is unaware that their child is on a social media site also responsible in some way too. There would have been no threat if those students were not in the chat room. None of the fourth or fifth grade students at Clark Mills would have been crying at lunch or worrying about their safety. This is not the first incident that the district has had to address because children too young for social media sites were allowed access by their parents. My question to the community today is simple: are we going to make the commitment to make this the last incident?

Tomorrow is the beginning of spring break. It is a time to spend with family and friends. It is also a time of new beginnings. Let's take advantage of this opportunity to take back control of our children's social media. I implore you to remove any app that requires you to waive the 13 year old requirement because elementary school children are not developmentally or emotionally ready for that type of social environment. If your child is playing an online video game, please review the age requirement. Do you really want your elementary school child playing with teenagers?

I recognize that this letter will be met with push back and a lot of comments on Facebook that it is none of my business. I understand that it is a parent's choice to allow underage children to go on apps, but this is now impacting all the children in our district. This fact, I believe, requires a reevaluation of what a superintendent should be concerned with in the 21st century. I will ask you the question: do you think I should be involved in something that has contributed to an entire fourth and fifth grade being scared about coming to school? Do you think I should do something about a situation that has contributed to numerous children crying at lunch? I believe we need to work together to address this.

Sincerely,

John J. Marciante, Jr., Ph.D.
Superintendent of Schools