



McDowell County Board of Education

BOARD OF EDUCATION

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Dear Families,

I am writing to you today regarding a deeply concerning situation involving a staff member in our district. While this matter is currently in the hands of law enforcement, I want to speak directly to you about what we know, the actions we have taken, and how we are strengthening protections for every student in our care.

First and foremost, the safety and well-being of our students is our highest priority. The individual involved was immediately removed from all school-related duties as soon as allegations of inappropriate behavior were reported to us. We are fully cooperating with law enforcement as they conclude their investigation, and we are also conducting a comprehensive internal review to ensure all appropriate actions have been taken. To maintain the highest level of objectivity, we have retained a third-party external team to audit our district processes and procedures.

We recognize the seriousness of this situation and the impact it may have on our students, families, and staff. In response, we are implementing the following safeguards to prevent future incidents:

- **Secure Digital Communication:** Enhanced monitoring of staff-to-student interactions, requiring all digital communication to occur exclusively through district-approved platforms.
- **Strengthened Supervision:** Stricter guidelines regarding one-on-one interactions and increased staff visibility in all student spaces.
- **Advanced Safety Technology:** Upgraded security cameras with AI-assisted monitoring and additional camera placement in identified priority areas.
- **Comprehensive Staff Training:** Mandatory training focused on recognizing, preventing, and reporting boundary violations and inappropriate behavior.
- **Improved Reporting Systems:** Clear, confidential, and accessible channels for students and families to report concerns directly to leadership.
- **Student Empowerment:** Age-appropriate boundary and personal safety training offered to students by our school counseling teams.
- **Expert Policy Review:** Ongoing consultation with external safety experts to ensure our practices reflect the highest national standards for student protection.

In addition, we are making counseling and support services available for any student who may need them. If you believe your child would benefit from speaking with a professional, please contact your school's main office directly, and we will ensure support is provided promptly.

We also encourage you to speak with your children about personal safety, boundaries, and the importance of reporting anything that makes them uncomfortable. Open communication between families and schools is essential, and we are here to support you in those conversations.

This is a difficult moment for our community, but please know that we are committed to transparency, accountability, and continuous improvement. We take our responsibility to protect your children very seriously, and we will continue working diligently to ensure our schools remain safe, supportive environments for all.

Thank you for your trust and partnership.

Dr. Ingrida Barker, Superintendent

Doing What is Best for Students. No Matter What.