



SCHOOL DISTRICT OF THE CHATHAMS

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Dear Parent,

I am writing to you regarding a Board of Education policy that has been the subject of an unusual degree of attention this week. On Monday, our Board slightly modified a policy ([5535](#)) that has been in place in Chatham for more than seven years and that mirrors a policy enacted by numerous other New Jersey school districts. The policy states that the school district may use a passive breath alcohol sensor device at school-sponsored events to deter students from coming to such events under the influence of alcohol. Although the policy has authorized the use of these devices for years, and although other high schools have used these devices for some time at events like proms or dances, we have not ever used a passive breath screening device at a school event.

The reason our administration has focused more closely on the use of these devices is that foremost of our responsibilities as educators is the safety and well-being of students. In an effort to be ever more proactive in this regard, our high school administration has held meetings with students, sent letters to students and parents in advance of large school events, worked with police at certain events, and taken other steps to educate students about the dangers and consequences of coming to a school-sponsored event under the influence of alcohol. I have also hosted a series of parent workshops with our student assistance counselors over the past two years in an effort to raise awareness about critical student issues like these.

Despite our efforts, we have not been immune to unfortunate incidents. I have been superintendent for four years now. In each of those years, I have had to work with our high school administrative team to deal with incidents involving the consumption of alcohol prior to or during school-sponsored events. These incidents are often frightening as they unfold and are always extremely trying on students and families directly involved in them. They sometimes result in emergency room visits and they always result in suspension from school. I would never want any student or family to endure such an experience.

Our students are fabulous. They work hard, they exude school spirit, and they treat one another and our faculty with respect. They also make mistakes sometimes, and part of our job is to help them make positive choices. Their worlds involve social media platforms that can capture and memorialize a mistake indefinitely. Their college admissions processes are more complex and stressful than ever before. Finally, their expectations for achievement are probably greater than they were for those of us who grew up a generation or two ago. Any tool that we can draw upon to guide students in a better direction, and help them avoid a negative or potentially tragic event, is worth pursuing.

Given that this policy is fairly common in New Jersey, I have been surprised by the attention it has received. However, that surprise has been eclipsed by the overwhelmingly positive response I have had from district parents expressing their support and appreciation for taking additional steps to protect the well-being of students. I am hopeful that the use of these devices at some point in the future will serve only to improve the student experience at our events and also contribute to Chatham's reputation as a school district dedicated to fostering the development of the whole child.

Sincerely,

Mike LaSusa