



# CABRILLO UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

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## An Open Letter to Parents of Cabrillo Unified School District Students:

Even in this very uncertain and challenging period of time, good things are continuing to happen in Cabrillo Unified School District classrooms each and every day. You have seen this for yourself when you have visited your child's classroom... attended the exceptional Half Moon Bay High School production of *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*... participated as a volunteer in any of the recent elementary school dinner/auction fundraising events... driven by those amazing new buildings on the Cunha Intermediate Campus... or engaged in one way or another in the myriad of other school-community activities that take place throughout the year. Thank you for partnering so well with us to make your Coastside public school system so special. Now I ask you to join with us in responding to two fast-emerging and very different issues that could negatively impact the quality of education and life that we enjoy so much in our seaside communities: cyberbullying and decreased state funding for schools.

Bullies and bullying behavior have been around for a long time. But yesterday's verbal threats, unsigned notes, and "slam books" have taken a much more serious turn thanks to today's computer technology. Students now have access to each other "24-7," and damaging comments or embarrassing pictures can be shared with countless others in seconds. As a result, today's altercation on a school campus or at a bus stop after school is often triggered by last night's email exchange. A recent survey estimates that 42% of school-aged children have been bullied while on-line... and nearly one in five has experienced such behavior more than once. While so-called "cyberbullying" is a relatively new phenomenon, the Cabrillo Unified School District Board of Education has already approved and implemented four policies to address this kind of misbehavior. Here are some things that you should be aware of as a parent:

- 1) Any kind of bullying, including cyberbullying, is considered a serious act of misconduct that will result in disciplinary action that may include out-of-school suspension or expulsion;
- 2) Students may be held accountable for actions that occur on the way to or from school... or for any off-campus conduct during non-school hours which poses a threat or danger to the safety of students, staff, or district property or disrupts the orderly delivery of the educational program;

- 3) Courts have held that school officials have the right to confiscate and examine cell phones, personal computers and other types of “personal digital assistant” devices for evidence of misconduct; and
- 4) Student use of cell phones or other kinds of mobile communications devices is a privilege and not a right. Students who fail to heed a staff directive to turn off such a device... or who use the device for any illegal or unethical activity will have that device confiscated.

Because cyberbullying so often occurs outside of school hours and off school grounds, it is imperative that parents like you join with your coastside schools to actively combat this fast-growing threat. Here are some specific ways you can help:

- 1) Maintain open lines of communication with your child. If you see a dramatic change in behavior, push for a cause;
- 2) Become knowledgeable about what your student is doing “on line.” Acquire a working knowledge of social networks like *Facebook*, *MySpace*, and *YouTube*. Know something about new “virtual world” simulations like *Second Life*. Talk to your child. Be prepared to make the “tough” decision as a parent if you believe your child is using technology in an unsafe or inappropriate manner. Remember, the cyber world is a bit like life in the old western frontier... exciting, expansive, and largely lawless and ungoverned. Your child is probably meandering through this frontier on a regular basis... alone and unguarded;
- 3) If your child informs you that he or she is being harassed or threatened on-line, ask to see copies of the messages or postings and immediately share this information with a school administrator;
- 4) Despite the fact that your son or daughter tells you that everyone has a cell phone or some other mobile communication device and that it is his or her “right” to have such a device, remember that you are the parent. If you have reason to believe that your child is misusing computer technology or mobile devices, it is your right and responsibility as a parent to limit or curtail such use at any point in time; and
- 5) If your child is found to have engaged in cyberbullying or other misuse of computer technology, allow your child to accept full responsibility for his or her actions. Children make mistakes in judgment. Learning that there are consequences associated with decisions is an important part of the growing process.

I highly encourage you to learn more about this issue. Visit the Cabrillo Unified School District website at [www.cabrillo.k12.ca.us](http://www.cabrillo.k12.ca.us), click on the “Technology Department” link, and then click on “Are You CyberSafe” and “CyberbullyingNOT” links. Other good sources of information can be found at [www.cybersafety.ca.gov/default.asp](http://www.cybersafety.ca.gov/default.asp), [www.safeteens.com](http://www.safeteens.com), and [www.thewilliamsschool.org/page.cfm?p=109](http://www.thewilliamsschool.org/page.cfm?p=109). You are also invited to attend a special bilingual presentation *Digital Kids Safe Smart and Responsible* at 6:00 p.m. on Tuesday, May 12 in the Cunha Intermediate School Library. A flier describing this event is included at the end of this letter.

A more global issue threatening the well-being of your child is being posed by reduced state funding for schools. Are you aware that California ranks 47<sup>th</sup> out of 50 states in per-student funding for public education? Did you know that the state has reduced on-going spending for schools by \$11 billion this year? This action has placed virtually every California school district in a state of fiscal crisis. The Cabrillo Unified School District must now find strategies for addressing an on-going

(structural) deficit of \$1.6 million. The Cabrillo Board of Education has determined to make some \$440,000 in program reductions for the upcoming (2009-2010) school year while continuing to spend down precious one-time reserves that could have been used to purchase textbooks and other

instructional materials. But next spring, these same board members will need to consider an additional \$1.2 million in program reductions and these cuts may include reducing or eliminating class size reduction, counseling and library services, and music and/or other elective offerings. Today's world demands a more sophisticated level of education than the one you and I experienced. The current level of state funding makes this goal a virtual impossibility. Your child deserves better.

The clock is ticking for us here on the Coastsides. Help isn't coming from the State any time soon and the federal stimulus dollars you have probably been reading about are one-time payments tied to specific federal programs. Thanks to recent Board actions, we have a limited amount of time to work together to explore alternative ways of maintaining first rate schools here on the Coast. I am very pleased that the Cabrillo Education Foundation has stepped up to the plate and agreed to plan a series of community meetings focusing on this very issue. I highly encourage you to attend any and all of these sessions... or at the very least remain posted on the strategies that are surfaced during the course of this very important process.

Also, please visit the Cabrillo Unified School District website at [www.cabrillo.k12.ca.us](http://www.cabrillo.k12.ca.us) and click on the "Budget Bulletin" link. You will find a number of important resources presented in English and Spanish. We will continue to update this section of the website on a regular basis, including information about the Foundation community meetings noted above. Click on the "What you can do: Federal and state contact information" link and consider contacting one or more of your elected officials to demand adequate funding for public schools in California. Your opinion and vote really do count.

Together, we can make a difference for our children here on the Coastsides... even in this very challenging period of time.

Sincerely,

Robert B. Gaskill, Superintendent  
Cabrillo Unified School District