



February 2014 Monthly Memo

Safety First

Dear Parents and Friends,

I have spent the last several weeks thinking about safety. If we want our students to grow as learners, we must provide them with a safe and secure learning environment. This involves many things. Their physical safety needs must be met, their mental and emotional safety must be protected, and they should be free of distractions that keep them from learning.

Growing up is a fun adventure, but children need safety nets and lots of support along the way to help them make good decisions. In education, we use the term “scaffolding” to describe the healthy learning process. You build in lots of support at the beginning of the learning process, and slowly, as children gain the requisite skills and understanding, you start to pull that support away until they can stand on their own two feet. This can be applied to both academic skills and life skills.

In an international setting, this scaffolding process can be even more important. I was just talking with another mother the other day about how it takes a community to raise a child. And while I in no way mean that anyone is more influential in a child’s life than his parents, I do mean that the school community, fellow parents, and extended family members play a big part in supporting children throughout the adventure of growing up.

As a school community, we are committed to supporting your children – not just in their academic affairs, but in keeping them safe while they are here at school, helping them make smart decisions, and helping them to embrace the adventure of growing up in a healthy, positive way.

This Monthly Memo is dedicated to detailing some of the ways in which we are doing that, some of the plans we have for the future, and some of the things we want you to be aware of as parents so that we can partner together for the benefit of your children.



Campus Security



One of the things that we are working to improve is our campus security at entry and exit points. Knowing who is physically present on our campus is a key criteria for being able to monitor students’ safety during school hours or school events. When entering the campus, all visitors are asked to sign in and to wear a visitor ID card. As we try to improve the systematic implementation of this procedure, we ask that you as parents join us in adhering to entry and exit procedures. This helps show others in the community that we are serious about keeping our campus safe. If you are not stopped at the gate, we ask that you let a principal know so that we can continue to monitor our progress in this area.



Personal Health & Safety

Shisha / E-cigarettes



Recently there has been information circling about our upper school students bringing Shisha/E-cigarettes onto campus. Parents should be aware that not only is this unacceptable for students, this could be potentially harmful for their health. These devices are being marketed to teenagers and often times, students are simply unaware of the dangers associated with these unregulated devices. I have attached information from a non-profit association, Freedom from Chemical Dependency (FCD), about the potential health risks associated with smoking e-cigarettes.

I want to let you know how the school is addressing this situation. One of the most important steps in helping students make smart decisions is educating them on the risks involved with engaging in this behavior. To that end, we have invited FCD Prevention Specialist (<http://www.fcd.org>) to our campus to speak with students, teachers, and parents about this and other substances that can be harmful to students' (and adults') health. I have worked with this group in three other schools and found them to be highly effective in their approach to educating students in a non-threatening way. This visit will take place from March 11-13. Principals will be informing students and parents of the scheduled events in the upcoming weeks.

We are also working as a leadership team to increase teachers' awareness of these issues and how to recognize questionable behavior or items.

Providing education around the health dangers of alcohol / drug / tobacco use is one part of our approach. The other part is providing education around the consequences of illegal / unacceptable behavior. Holding students accountable is a very real part of the scaffolding process, and a part that ultimately can help to curb dangerous behavior. The school's policy handbook, found on the website, details the school consequences for student use of drugs, alcohol and tobacco, and states:

“Drug and alcohol use by students on school grounds and at any time that they are under the care of an SCIS-HIS representative is prohibited. SCIS-HIS has a ‘zero tolerance’ philosophy when it comes to illegal drugs such as marijuana, ecstasy, or other controlled substances, other than prescribed medications. Any student enrolled is subject to random or targeted drug analysis testing. In the event that your child is chosen for random and targeted drug testing, you will be notified on the day that the hair sample is taken, and when the laboratory results have been returned.”

The policy is written and enforced in order to protect all of our students. As a community, let's work together to educate our children on both the health hazards and social consequences of poor decision making so that they are safe and supported here at SCIS.

Air Quality

As we have been experiencing several poor air quality days over the last few weeks, I want to remind everyone that we work hard to maintain optimal indoor air quality throughout our campus. Keeping doors that lead to the outside shut will help us regulate this. Additionally, when the AQI goes above 200, students on campus will be kept indoors for recess and PE.



Students' Emotional Safety

Bullying has become one of the most talked about topics in education today. I am proud to say that as a community, we have a reputation of having a supportive environment where students feel accepted and that they belong. But maintaining this takes purposeful effort, and it takes a commitment to being observant. The most important thing we can do to support our children is to let them know that we care about them as individuals, not just as learners. When students feel safe, they are much more likely to open up about their cares and concerns.

I Care

One of the things we are doing as a school to encourage students to advocate for themselves and their friends, is we are setting up an anonymous system for students to report actions or behaviors that could potentially hurt themselves or others. We want students to understand that reporting unhealthy behavior is not something that makes them a 'whistle blower' or 'snitch.' It is the mature way to show they care about their friends. It takes all of us working together to safeguard our students. By providing a safe way for students to join in that endeavor, we begin the scaffolding process of helping students make right decisions. We give them a way to say, "I care."

In closing, I want to point out that we have a GREAT school. The topics discussed in this memo can be uncomfortable to deal with. But it is important that we tackle the hard topics, the topics that, if they go unaddressed, or swept under the rug, will only lead to greater difficulty down the road. And when we address them together, as a community that cares about our children, we can set an example for all of our students on how to deal with difficult situations and let our students know that we care about them. If you have concerns about our students' health and safety, please talk to a principal or myself.

Sincerely,

Katherine Brewer
Head of School



Introduction – What are e-cigarettes, hookah pens, etc.?

- Electronic cigarettes, e-cigarettes, e-cigs, e-vaps, hookah pens, e-hookahs, vape pipes, etc.) are battery-operated electronic nicotine delivery systems (ENDs) and commercial products designed to replicate tobacco smoking behavior.
- Core components of an e-cigarette generally include a battery, heating element, and a cartridge solution of propylene glycol, nicotine and assorted flavorings.
- E-cigarettes, both disposable and reusable, generally include both metal and plastic pieces and may be styled to look like tobacco cigarettes, cigars, pipes, hookahs, etc.
- Functionally speaking, these devices and systems, no matter their name, are virtually indistinguishable. Different products may be branded differently to appeal to a target market or to remove the stigma of being seen as a “cigarette,” but **all ENDSs contain unregulated chemicals and virtually all contain the addictive substance nicotine.**

Examples of cigarettes, e-cigarettes, hookah pens and vape pipes.



Hookah pens, E-cigs, and Nicotine Addiction among Youth

- Virtually all hookah pens, e-cigarettes and like devices contain nicotine – the highly-addictive chemical in traditional tobacco cigarettes – and deliver this chemical to the body and brain systems of teen users.
- In a study published in the journal *Addiction*, results show that the slower metabolism of nicotine may increase susceptibility to dependence by increasing nicotine exposure and nicotine effects on the developing brain in teens.
- A study in the Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine found that some youths experience tobacco dependence within a day of first inhaling.
- For adolescents, it only takes this one day for the brain to remodel itself in response to one dose of nicotine. About one-quarter of young people experience a sensation of relaxation the first time they inhale from a cigarette, and this sensation predicts continued smoking.
- The brains of adolescents can become tolerant to nicotine after smoking very few times – fewer than one cigarettes per day. It is this age-based vulnerability to nicotine that drives teens to smoke more often and become rapidly addicted.
- Youth who change the neural pathways in their brains with an addiction to nicotine may be more susceptible to facing other addictions to alcohol, marijuana and any other substance in the future.
- The physiological effects of use of the stimulant drug nicotine are elevated heart rate, blood pressure, and breathing; agitation of muscles; and impairment of the brain’s reward pathways. It is relatively easy to overdose on nicotine, with the outcomes of overdose being seizures and death.



How are these devices used?

- Electronic cigarettes and hookah pens are powered through batteries. Prompted by an initial inhalation on the mouthpiece of the e-cigarette, an e-cigarette's batteries electronically heat a solution of chemicals within a small cartridge, turning that solution into an aerosol which is then inhaled through the mouthpiece.

How prevalent is its use?

- Most young people do not use hookah pens, but use is tied to cigarette use. A study by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that among middle school students who have ever used e-cigarettes, approximately 80% of these students have also smoked tobacco cigarettes.

Other than addiction, what are the additional risks and effects of use?

- These are new devices, so there is a lot that remains unknown about their health effects. They are unregulated, largely un-researched profit-driven devices delivering addictive chemicals to the human body and brain.
- Both known and suspected carcinogens have been found at higher levels within the bloodstreams of e-cigarette users than within study participants not using the product.
- The World Health Organization recommends caution until e-cigarettes' harms are evaluated. This should especially be true in the case of adolescent use.

Where can I learn more?

Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids

- <http://www.tobaccofreekids.org/research/factsheets/pdf/0127.pdf>

British Medical Association

- <http://bma.org.uk/working-for-change/improving-and-protecting-health/tobacco/e-cigarettes>

U.S. Food and Drug Administration

- <http://www.fda.gov/forconsumers/consumerupdates/ucm225210.htm>

National Institute on Drug Abuse

- <http://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/electronic-cigarettes-e-cigarettes>
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Iz67IqkLwYs&feature=youtu.be>