

Good evening, parents. This is Superintendent Gaylord of the Martin County School District calling with an important message about internet safety.

As you may be aware, a number of stories have appeared in local and national news lately about something called “The Momo Challenge.” “Momo” is essentially a form of cyberbullying that is appearing frequently on social media platforms used by children – Instagram, WhatsApp and even YouTube Kids. Parents have reported that a scary, bird-like female figure is appearing out of nowhere while children are watching videos on these platforms and encouraging them to harm themselves or others. Law enforcement experts believe that the hackers responsible for placing these videos on children’s social media platforms are targeting young children in the hopes that they will share personal information with them out of fear.

As the parent of two children myself, I am beyond alarmed by this latest internet scheme that specifically targets our youngest population. The safety of our students will always be our top priority here in the Martin County School District, so I want to share a few important tips with you that will help you talk with your child about internet safety.

- 1) Remind your child about the importance of “see something, say something.” Encourage them to come to you, a trusted adult at their school, or their school resource officer if they see a video or photo on the internet that encourages them to harm themselves or others.
- 2) Remind them that their personal information is just that – personal. They should never give out their name, address, phone number or any confidential information to anyone outside of their family, law enforcement or an employee of their school. Let them know that they should alert you immediately if they are ever asked to give out this type of information while surfing the internet or using apps on a phone or tablet.
- 3) Set privacy restrictions on the devices your child has access to in your home. There are numerous apps available in the Google Play and App Stores that will let you limit what sites and apps your child is able to access, as well as set time limits for device usage.
- 4) Monitor what your child is doing online. YouTube Kids is a popular platform that is viewed by many of our youngest children, which presents a prime opportunity for hackers, criminals and other unsavory characters to try and interact with kids. Make sure that you know what your child is watching – the Momo Challenge has been known to “pop up” in cartoon shows, such as *Peppa Pig*, as well as in the popular *Fortnite* videos.
- 5) Keep the conversation going. Trends and viral challenges can be tempting for children to take part in, no matter how dangerous or scary they may seem. Please speak with your child about peer pressure, and how they should never do anything they are uncomfortable with whether online or offline. If they are unsure about what they are hearing or being asked to do, encourage them to talk to you or another trusted adult.

As I shared with you earlier, the safety of our children will always be the top priority of the Martin County School District. We appreciate your commitment to your child's education, as well as to school and internet safety. If you have any additional questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact a member of the leadership team at your child's school. Thank you.