Flemington-Raritan Regional School District
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Dear Flemington-Raritan Regional School District Families,

I want to share some updates with all of you as we continue to work through the pandemic together.   I know all of us are feeling a mixture of emotions: fear, anxiety, and uncertainty about the future-- among others. In the midst of our challenges, we also see an enormous time of learning.

Remote Learning:
By all accounts, the transition to remote learning has been about as well as anyone could possibly expect. For our students, we know this has been an enormous adjustment. We deeply appreciate our parents' understanding as we strive to provide the best possible learning environment using the tools at our disposal. We thank you for your patience, flexibility, and resilience during this extraordinary time.

At this time, I have received zero notifications from our faculty and staff about zoom-bombing during instructional Zoom meetings. Still, my letter arrives to explain the incidents surrounding the Board of Education meeting on April 13, 2020.

Update on the Technology Tool Zoom:

In the April 3, 2020 letter to the community, I provided information about the technology tool, Zoom.   Many of our educators, including myself, are using Zoom to communicate and stay in contact with students, colleagues, friends, and family members.   In my April 3 letter, I explained the phenomenon of zoom-bombing.

As a review, Zoom-bombing is the phenomenon of trolls and hackers intruding on other people's meetings for the sole purpose of harassing attendees. Zoom-bombing is an intrusive behavior that seeks to disrupt and control meetings. Prior to the April 3 letter to the community, Zoom representatives added additional security features that became a required setting of all meetings. The leadership at Zoom upgraded settings for users, such as enabling waiting rooms and requiring the manual unlocking of participants to join a meeting.

The Board of Education meetings also use Zoom to communicate and stay in contact with the public during our virtual board meetings.   During our first virtual board meeting on March 23, the audio and video of participants and Board members were enabled. We experienced no issues with zoom-bombing. However, following our advice and that of the Zoom representatives, adjustments were made for the next board meeting.

The second virtual Board of Education meeting was on April 6, 2020. For this meeting, only audio was activated for attendees, while video and audio were enabled for the Board of Education members.   Participants that joined the meeting virtually used the chat during the *citizens address the board* portion of the board meeting. We experienced no issues with zoom-bombing.

Last night at the April 13, 2020 Board of Education meeting, the public board meeting experienced our first zoom-bombing. The attendee(s) chose to shout out misogynistic statements and racial slurs. As soon as the attendee(s) began to disrupt the meeting, as the host, I muted and removed the intruder(s) as fast as possible; however, the meeting needed to end abruptly because the zoom-bombing continued by multiple attendees. The Board was able to swiftly switch platforms to complete the meeting and until stricter parameters could be put in place for future Zoom meetings.

The zoom-bombing necessitates future Board of Education meetings to be set with stricter settings to avoid behaviors that attempt to inflame, anger, and insult others. Board of Education meetings will continue to be password protected. While this is a deterrent, it does not limit hackers to breach security.   Board meetings are public meetings and, therefore, are required to be advertised to the public. The password and link to the Zoom meeting will continue to be announced and advertised. However, stricter settings will be put in place despite the requirement to be a public meeting.

As the host of the meeting, I will continue to carefully inspect the list of participants waiting to join the meeting while attendees are in the virtual waiting room. For future board meetings, multiple hosts will be put in place, including a trusted member of our technology team, and myself as the Superintendent. Any attendee who exhibits offensive behavior will be removed from the public meeting and not allowed to return.

Other settings that are put in place to secure the Zoom public Board meeting:
1) The waiting room will continue. I, and a member of my technology team, will prevent the admittance of trolls should they slip through the inspection of participants. We will control who enters the meeting and who is allowed to remain in the public meeting;
2) Attendees will continue *not* to be allowed to join the meeting before the host. As Superintendent, I serve as the host. Therefore, no one will enter the meeting before me;
3) All attendees will be muted upon entrance and will stay muted, except for the Board of Education members. Before a member of the public addresses the Board during the "Citizens Address the Board," attendees must list their name and municipality in the chat portion of the meeting;
4) All participants' cameras will be disabled, with the exception of Board of Education members. No attendee will have permission to have their video-enabled;
5) A different session will be created for *every* Board of Education meeting; and
6) There will *not* be private chat available to attendees. This setting is disabled.

Dealing with Inappropriate Behavior:

If it becomes necessary to remove someone from the meeting due to inappropriate, inflammatory, and disruptive behavior, the attendee will be removed from the meeting permanently. The person or persons will not be able to rejoin the meeting. Following the removal of the meeting, the highly-capable technology team will assess the incident and pursue the identification of the individuals who participated in the zoom-bombing. This type of behavior is *not* merely a prank phone call of the 21st century. It will not be tolerated.

As our district upholds policies regarding hate crimes and bias-related acts, the incident was reported to local law enforcement this morning. If future incidents are deemed threatening or in violation of local, state, or federal law, the technology team, along with the Superintendent's Office will work with the local police and the Hunterdon County Prosecutor's Office to further investigate the incident. Disruptive and offensive behavior is not condoned nor tolerated in our schools, during remote learning, or while our school doors are open for traditional education.

Sincerely,
Dr. Kari McGann