



# Petoskey High School

Every Opportunity

1500 Hill Street, Petoskey, MI 49770 ▪ (231) 348-2160

February 24, 2022

Dear PHS Parents, Staff, and Students,

Student education and safety is job one for the Public Schools of Petoskey. When a student reports an incident that makes them feel unsafe, we investigate.

In April 2021 staff found four girls in the bathroom, who left class without permission, and it was suspected they were passing an item between them that was suspected contraband. Petoskey High School Assistant Principal Robert Szukala carried out a search with another female staff member present. Following the search, some of the females reported to Principal Gamble that they were uncomfortable with the way the search was conducted. Mrs. Gamble and Mr. Hewitt promptly investigated and determined the search was done according to legal and district requirements and had follow up communication with the parents of those students involved. The same students came forward again in December, 2021 stating that they didn't feel the district had handled their complaints appropriately. Following those complaints, the district conducted another investigation into the allegations and confirmed the results of the spring 2021 investigation. The district then contracted with an outside investigator, Rehmann Corporate Investigative Services, to review the allegations. This investigation resulted in the same conclusion that the search was done according to legal requirements and school district policy.

Conducting reasonable suspicion searches is a necessary piece of ensuring safety in our schools. While in many cases, the item in question may not cause a significant problem, the reality is that we have a responsibility to keep all of our students safe and knowing what is in our schools is part of that puzzle.

As a result of the investigation, Assistant Principal Szukala will be returning to Petoskey High School beginning on February 28, 2022. While it was determined that legal and district procedures were followed, there will be changes made to our practices to match the current environment. These changes include:

1. A minimum of two staff members will be present for any review of a student or his/her personal belongings, including one staff member that is of the same gender as the student whenever possible.
2. Any search of a student will be performed on-camera.

3. A log will be kept of all student searches conducted to include:
  - a. Name of student
  - b. Date and time
  - c. Witness
  - d. Gender of student
  - e. Time parents / guardians were contacted subsequent to the search

While student searches are seldom conducted, when they do happen, my goal is for them to be as transparent and understandable as possible. We can work together to limit the need for searches by preventing your student from bringing items that are a violation of the Student/Parent Handbook.

In addition to the allegations about inappropriate behavior during a student search, there were concerns brought forward regarding Mr. Szukala's social media use. Although not endorsed by the Board or administration, Mr. Szukala's use of social media did not violate Board Policy 4217 and he has been counseled regarding his use of social media.

I would like to thank the families and students for their continued support and understanding of the changing situations we have experienced this school year. As always, please contact me with any questions or concerns you may have.

Respectfully,

Deidra Gamble  
Principal, Petoskey High School