

Dear Southern Humboldt Unified School District Board of Directors,

After a viral video involving the “desk flipping” incident at the Miranda Junior High circulated, a group of concerned parents formed a group chat on Google Hangouts. There are currently over 25 members on this group including the principal, secretary and mostly concerned parents. We are all committed to getting (or already) live-scanned so we can volunteer at the school. So far there are 4 parents who have followed through on the promise.

After two weeks of volunteering (mostly one day a week for each parent), we are APPALLED at the student behavior. We understand it is directly related to SEVERE UNDERSTAFFING and there are just simply not enough bodies on campus to keep an eye on the students. There seems to be a prevalent and general disregard by a handful of students that’s OUTRIGHT ABUSIVE behavior, language and disrespect. It’s not only abusive to the teachers and staff, but to the students who have to witness it and the impact it has on their classrooms throughout the day.

Most problems seem to stem from lack of consequences (or rewards), lot’s of down time and cell phone privileges. The enrichment period at the beginning of the day is anything but enriching. The students are allowed to use their phones and just goof off. This sets the rambunctious and chaotic behavior pattern for the REST of the day. I use the word “goof” but I’d rather use another four letter word. Goofing off is in good fun, this behavior is NOT good fun. These students are CONSTANLTY throwing things, cursing, shouting racial slurs and making racial or sexual gestures, talking over the teachers (like ALL of the students, not just the “bad” ones), getting physical with each other, leaving class, going to other classrooms they don’t belong, destroying bathrooms, vaping, mobbing the door, mobbing Donna’s office and who knows what else!?. It’s CONSTANT. One of the teachers uses a speaker and MIRCOPHONE as to not get talked over.

I really feel bad for the students who are BORED out of their minds because the teachers can’t actually teach them anything. I have been helping in Ms. Heinz 8th grade Math & Science because I feel comfortable and the most useful actually helping student’s one on one with math problems. She also has a good handle on her classroom and my ability to stay calm and collected is challenged, yet manageable in her class. I’ve had to walk out of the other classrooms multiple times because I need to take a moment to ground myself.

Shanon has been focused on helping in Mr. Looney’s class and it beyond out of control. This man needs something....and I don’t have all the solutions, but the “friend” approach is obviously not working. Maybe it will just take some time as he is a first year teacher to get the skills to take control of his class? But meanwhile the rest of the kids suffer.

When I was in school the kids who could not control their social/emotional behavior were in the Special Education Class. Or if they were expelled they went to continuation at Osprey. I believe these students need to be removed from the classroom until they can prove they can behave with some respect and allow all the students to have a positive learning environment. Do they have special needs? Or are they just assholes? I know there parents, not ALL of them come from

“broken” homes. Regardless – there is a level of social behavior in a classroom that they have learned since KINDERGARDEN. It is systemic and extreme bullying behavior.

CELL PHONES SHOULD NOT BE ALLOWED AT SCHOOL. They should be turned in at the beginning of the day and returned at the end. They students are allowed to use the phones during enrichment and sometimes during class if they “finish early”. They should READ A BOOK if they “finish early” or start the next assignment.

SEARCHED – all students should be searched at the beginning of the day, multiple problems with drugs, alcohol, energy drinks, etc have been reported. The problem items including energy drinks should be taken away.

ENRICHEMNT PERIOD – should have some CURRICULM and actually be ENRICHING – even if it’s games, or watching a documentary, listening to Dave Ramsey, art, music, mindfulness, sex education, drug and vaping education, anti bullying education. ANYTHING but loafing with NO DIRECTION. Maybe some movies like “Shindler’s List” or “Amistad” to teach the kids about what truly happened to the Jews and Blacks. These kids need a wake-up call.

We would love nothing more than to continue to help offer solutions, and try to make this FUN for the students. What is the reward? What is the carrot? How is the PBIS system in place? Are there any field trips, assemblies or school dances?

I would like to see an ASSEMBLY happen with the parents invited where we openly talk about this behavior problem, what the PBIS system is and how the school plans to enforce it and how the parents can help. After the Assembly the “good” students get a day off – maybe get to go hike in the Redwoods, do art, watch movies. The “bad” students get to sit in a classroom and one by one take turns reading out-loud the student handbook, then write an essay on the problem, how they personally have contributed to the problem and what they plan to do to change their behavior. The can also write their teachers and principal and Donna an apology letter. If the day is not over, they can scrape the toilet paper off the bathroom ceilings and clean the campus.

If there is ever a field trip planned – maybe a trip to Juvenile Hall and the County Jail for the problem kids and a Trip to the Beach for the kids who deserve it. Or maybe they get to stay behind and the Sherriff pays them a visit at the school, while the rest of the students get the beach trip. That may sound harsh but to witness the utter lack of disrespect and abuse these students have towards adults is astounding.

I have been involved in the classroom with many of these students since PRESCHOOL. I care about them all, not just my own child, but ALL OF THEM. This is the next generation of OUR COMMUNITY. Who is teaching them how to be GOOD HUMANS, civic responsibility, social decorum, self responsibility, consent, self-esteem?

It’s disappointing to me when parents in our community OFTEN move their students to schools out of district for a better educational experience for their child. Rather than get involved to make a change. I know the biggest difference I can make in my child’s education is to actually

participate, as a room parent, PTSA board member, Site Council member, donating not just money but TIME. I know a few parents of 7th and 8th grade girls who chose independent study because their children were getting harassed and bullied at school. It is an ABUSIVE ENVIRONMENT. The abusive students NEED TO BE REMOVED from the equation not the other way around.

The other issue is that the Student Handbook outlines the levels of discipline but this is not being enforced. No consequences – no reward – no change. The teachers and principal have to enforce consequences and the rewards CONSISTENTLY and COMPLETELY. Being sent to the principal's office has turned into a REWARD, because the students like to “hang out with Donna”. They students deserve a positive learning environment.

IF a student is sent to the principal's office, Donna or Mr. Cord should DIAL the parents phone number and make the student tell the parent WHY they are in the office (AGAIN!). Parents are NOT being notified that their children are behaving this way.

What is the school board currently actively doing to filling the positions needed? At what point is it deemed an unsafe learning environment?

Many of the parents are wondering what we are allowed to do as volunteers on campus. Can we take things away from students? Can we walk them outside and talk one-on-one? Can we physically move them or walk them to the office if needed? If they run can we grab them? Can we take them to the office and make them call their parents? Can we video their behavior? Is there a report form we can file? This is beyond your normal volunteer duties as a parent volunteer, but this is what we are up against.

Beyond Concerned,

Casandra and Shanon Taliaferro
MJH & SFHS Alumni

With support of following parents:
Jesse Cabral and Prairie Morrell

Cc: Stephanie Steffano-Davis, Principal Cord, Donna Bowman