

The MIHS Athletics and Activities Code: Unraveling the Mystery

The beginning of a new school year or season is always a good time to remind people about important issues that are often misunderstood. The MIHS Athletics and Activities Code is one of those issues. I did not feel the need to increase awareness about this school policy last year but I have done so in previous years. A lack of understanding about the intent and the implementation of this policy have been a challenge throughout and prior to my tenure.

The Athletics and Activities Code is document that describes our high school's expectations of those students who represent the school in athletics, student leadership, drill and cheer. It also provides the consequences when it is determined by the school that an infraction of the Code has occurred and describes the appeal process. The Code is posted on our school website and students and parents sign their acknowledgement prior to participation in school athletics and activities where students represent the school.

The Code is based on the premise that students who represent the school are held to a higher standard of behavior because they represent the school. The Code is in effect 24/7 all year long, including summer and winter vacation from the first time a student represents the school until the student graduates. The Code lists certain infractions as examples of behaviors that the Code prohibits, but the list is not exhaustive. The most common infraction where the Code is applied is alcohol use and/or possession.

Typically, Code infractions come to the attention of the administration one of two ways, either from the athlete/participant themselves or through a third party, which could include law enforcement, representatives of the courts, parents, students and community members. Obviously each source of information must be handled a little differently. For example, a police report is clearer than an anonymous letter. When students self-refer, we typically handle the incident as a learning opportunity and there usually is not a suspension from the activity. It is important to note that each and every time school staff receives information about a potential violation of the Code, the incident is investigated. If it is determined that an infraction has occurred, the Code is applied, each and every time. When information comes to the attention of the school and the potential violation was committed by an athlete, the incident is investigated by the Athletic Director. Any other potential violations are investigated by the Associate Principal by alphabet assigned to the student(s) in question. The Principal is not involved unless a family appeals the application of the Code.

I believe that any misconceptions or misunderstandings about the implementation of the Code are a result of the confidentiality that must be exercised by school staff by law, and/or the insidious nature of gossip. When MIHS students make poor choices, and there is an Athletics and Activities Code sanction, unless the sanction is suspension from the activity, the community does not know that the Code has been applied because it is a confidential matter between the school and the family. Because there was no suspension, does not mean that there was no sanction. Sanctions that don't result in suspension may include community service, restitution or a referral to community agency. Again, I can guarantee that

when it has been determined that there has been a violation, there has been a sanction but it will not be made public.

It saddens me that in some cases, gossip in the community creates a situation where MIHS students are convicted by conversation of an offense that they may not have committed. Occasionally the school is criticized for not following through when we may not be aware of the incident that precipitated the conversations. We can only follow through when we have information that is credible. When I was a first year principal, too many years ago, I was dealing with some gossip in the community that was very damaging and a parent shared this poem with me:

Nobody's Friend

My name is Gossip. I have no respect for justice.

I maim without killing. I break hearts and ruin lives.

I am cunning and malicious and gather strength with age.

The more I am quoted, the more I am believed.

*My victims are helpless. They cannot protect themselves against me
because I have no name and no face.*

To track me down is impossible. The harder you try, the more elusive I become.

I am nobody's friend.

Once I tarnish the reputation, it is never the same.

I topple governments and wreck marriages.

I ruin careers and cause sleepless nights, heartaches, and indigestion.

I make innocent people cry in their pillows.

Even my name hisses. I am called Gossip.

I make headlines and headaches.

Before you repeat a story, ask yourself:

Is it true? Is it harmless? Is it necessary?

If it isn't, don't repeat it.

Author Unknown

“Nobody’s Friend” is a great reminder that it is important to determine accuracy of information. If parents have questions about the Code, the MIHS administration is happy to answer them. If parents have information about specific incidents we encourage you to come forward in confidence. We have a

great school. We serve a great community with incredibly supportive parents and wonderful students. This community cares about schools and cares about kids. This is a very well intentioned community that wants the best for its students. The community values student activities and I know that the community supports the expectations we have of our students. I can assure you that the MIHS administration takes our commitment to parents and students very seriously and the Athletics and Activities Code is a policy where it is important that our actions are demonstrable. I can assure you that they are and will continue to be.

Sincerely,

John Harrison

Principal