



Milwaukee Public Schools

January 17, 2007

MPS gets tough on cell phones, outside troublemakers *District Attorney promises criminal reviews for acts of violence in schools*

MPS Superintendent William Andrekopoulos announced new get-tough measures on student use of cell phones in schools – including an effort to expel students who use the phones to summon outsiders when there is a fight.

On January 8, a fight involving a small group of students at Bradley Tech High School grew more dangerous when outsiders arrived at the school and joined in. They had been called to the school by a student with a cell phone. Three adults were arrested. Up to nine students were cited by police and also are recommended for discipline under MPS policy. Similar incidents involving students using cell phones to invite others to be part of a brawl have occurred at other schools.

“This is intolerable,” said Superintendent Andrekopoulos. “The disrespect a small number of students show for the safety of all of our youngsters and staff should be an outrage for the entire community. Parents, families, students, we have to have your cooperation. No cell phones in the schools.”

Some principals already have cell phone confiscation routines in place; the school leaders who do not, have been asked by Administration to establish a protocol by January 29, when second semester starts. Cell phones and other two-way communication equipment have been banned in the district for some time; events of recent months have heightened the need to strictly enforce the rules.

“If we see cell phones in school, we will take them away and students will be disciplined,” said Bradley Tech Principal Ed Kovoichich. “If we find that a student has used a communication device to endanger safety, such as calling relatives to ask them to come and be part of a fight, that student will be recommended for expulsion.” Kovoichich

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stated that the district needed this type of rigid policy in order to maintain a safe learning environment that permits school leaders to focus on educational reforms.

As MPS pursues the enforcement of the cell phone ban, the Milwaukee County District Attorney's Office has pledged to review criminal charges against outsiders and others who commit violent acts against school staff.

To address the continued difficulty of angry adults fighting and committing other violent acts in MPS schools, Milwaukee County District Attorney John Chisholm announced that no longer will the adults simply receive a disorderly conduct charge carrying a municipal fine. Chisholm will call for a review of these cases in the D-A's office for criminal charges, where the alleged offender could face a Class I felony charge with penalties that include jail time. "We must protect the safety of school staff – and that includes principals, teachers, safety aides, kitchen staff, maintenance workers – anyone who by nature of their employment is exposed to risk," said Chisholm. "I want to remind everyone that school employees are a protected class."

District Attorney Chisholm informed MPS Administration on penalty enhancers for those who commit criminal acts of violence at a school site, similar to the extra penalties currently faced by someone who carries a gun within 1000 feet of a school site.

The move by MPS to get tough on cell phone violations is not unique in Wisconsin. Other state public school districts ban the use of cell phones by students, and empower their staffs to confiscate the devices, including Greendale and Waukesha public schools.

Posters will soon be displayed at the entrances to each MPS school site carrying the message in English and Spanish that cell phones are not allowed in school. The first set of posters has been presented today to Principal Kovoichich.

For additional information, please contact MPS Communications Director Roseann St. Aubin at (414) 475-8237.

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