



Niskayuna Central School District

Hillside Elementary School

Van Antwerp Middle School

November 2, 2009

Dear Parents:

We are writing on behalf of our Hillside Elementary School students and families to ask for your assistance.

Hillside School is fortunate to have installed a beautiful playground structure on the playground. The kids love to use it during the school day, after school hours, and on weekends. We are encountering a couple of problems, however.

First, unfortunately, a small number of middle school (and high school) students have behaved inappropriately, causing elementary aged children and parents to feel uncomfortable in a place that should be a haven for them. Their behavior has included marking the structure with graffiti and defacing the equipment, using bad language and talking back to parents and other adults. Second, older students congregate on the play structure *en masse*. Sometimes, older students drive over, bringing dogs and groups of older teens in cars. The mere presence of all these students is intimidating to young children, causing them to feel as though they cannot use the equipment. This has come to be a significant problem, with students and parents complaining that they have had to go home because of the presence of all these older kids.

Steps taken by district and building administrators include meeting with groups of students to develop positive solutions to the problems outlined above, ordering signs and a video camera to be posted on the property, improving lighting, calling some parents, following through with consequences for some students, and working closely with the police department.

Our goal is not to exclude older students from using the playground. We hope that we will not have to do that. We expect that visitors to the playground will use the equipment appropriately, will treat others with respect, and that older children will defer to younger children as having first priority use of the equipment. We ask that you speak to your older

children with regard to respectful use of the equipment and interaction with others. *When younger children arrive to play, older children should remove themselves from the equipment.*

Our school Codes of Conduct cover misbehavior on the playground, including misuse of the equipment and/or mistreatment of others. Such behavior could lead to exclusion of the playground, disciplinary consequences, and/or referral to the police department. We recommend that children, especially younger ones, be supervised while on the playground. Dogs are not allowed. Skateboarding, snowboarding, etc. is prohibited. If you observe any misuse of the playground, alert the elementary or middle school principal if during school hours. Otherwise, especially if it is an immediate problem, please call the police department.

We appreciate your help in this very important matter. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Shireen Fasciglione
Hillside Elementary School Principal

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Luke Rakoczy".

Luke Rakoczy
Van Antwerp Middle School Principal