

February 5, 2018

Dear Parents and Community Members:

I am writing regarding the incident that led to the decision to hold two boys' basketball games between Haldane and Putnam Valley at a neutral site, the cancellation of junior varsity basketball games, and today's change of the girls' basketball schedule.

I understand that the public might not be fully informed about this matter due to the responsibility of school districts to maintain confidentiality about discipline and student issues. However, given the attention this matter is receiving, I feel obligated to disclose the following information from our perspective.

During the 2015-16 basketball season, an incident occurred on the Putnam Valley campus following a boys' basketball game with Haldane which resulted in the significant injury of one of our PV students by a fan of the opposing school. Based on increasing tensions between the two schools at that time, along with that incident, the Districts thought that the teams could take steps to build a better relationship. The decision was made to hold a blue and white dinner and practice which Haldane graciously offered to host at their site.

After the boys' team was directed by Haldane to change in the girls' locker room, two separate and distinct incidents occurred. The two incidents involved a female student's iPod that was left on top of a bag.

One incident involved a lewd photo taken by a PV student who received swift consequences by the school to the extent allowable and immediate removal from the basketball team. The second incident involved two students who took one selfie. The selfie included only two faces without expression.

These students received school consequences in addition to a team consequence. They also received Letters of No Trespass from Haldane that they and our school honored. None of the students involved traveled to Haldane last year. They were not permitted to attend or participate in any athletic event held on the Haldane campus.

We certainly do not condone any of these activities. Decency and privacy were breached. We are deeply sorry for the embarrassment and any other adverse effects this caused the young lady who owned the device. Through a thorough investigation with interviews that included our SRO, it was determined that these

were different acts, and as such needed to be addressed according to the level of culpability. Putnam Valley reached out to Haldane ahead of this season's game to ensure that this season would be a positive one for both schools.

At that time, we were told that the no-trespassing penalty was still in effect. In order to move forward with the scheduled games, we accepted terms that included a neutral site for the boys' games and would also prohibit the students who took the selfie from attending the girls' basketball games on either campus.

The two games were played without incident. Putnam Valley and Haldane are engaged in a variety of other athletic, educational and professional partnerships that are mutually beneficial. Currently, students from Haldane and Putnam Valley participate on merged teams for Varsity wrestling and Varsity indoor track and field and engage in co-practices in Varsity football.

We know that as educators we are responsible to help students learn from mistakes, even egregious ones. Adolescence is a time when we use every opportunity to turn errors into learning opportunities when students learn about consequences, remorse, forgiveness and making amends. We are seeking the most balanced approach, holding students accountable, but allowing them to move forward without permanent exclusion from positive community experiences.

I also want to emphasize that our Athletic Director has worked hard to encourage, expect and advocate for good sportsmanship and positive spectator behavior. We are confident that our community will set an example of Putnam Valley Pride that will set a tone of cooperation and mutual respect as we move ahead.

Sincerely,

Fran Wills
Superintendent of Schools
Putnam Valley Central School District