

Press Clippings 09/23/2021

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Latest TikTok challenge causes headaches for schools

By Madhu Krishnamurthy



A restroom at Lawrence High School in Lawrence, Kan., was closed after damage by vandals. Students across the country are videoing themselves stealing or damaging school property and posting their activity on TikTok. *Courtesy of Cuyler Dunn via Associated Press*

A viral social media challenge that has spurred a string of vandalism by students is causing headaches for some suburban school leaders.

The latest trend is the "devious licks" challenge that began earlier this month on TikTok. It encourages kids to steal or damage school property and then anonymously share a video or photo of it with the hashtag #deviouslicks.

Nationwide, some students are facing criminal charges for their high-jinks, which include stealing items, such as soap dispensers, fire extinguishers, computers or film projectors, and vandalizing bathrooms.

Though TikTok has removed video content related to the challenge, users have started posting with alternative hashtags and keywords.

In the past two weeks, **Elgin Area School District U-46** has had to replace about 80 soap dispensers at mostly middle and high schools at \$15 a pop.

"Some of the vandals have been caught, and we've applied consequences, per our Student Code of Conduct," spokeswoman Mary Fergus said.

Soap dispensers and mirrors in bathrooms have been the primary targets in Palatine-Schaumburg Township High School District 211 schools.

"We have seen some damage and theft relating to this trend," district spokeswoman Erin Holmes said. "We have increased supervision in these areas and worked collaboratively with law enforcement. We already have identified and disciplined some students."

Holmes said students themselves have come forward to report such behavior.

"We are encouraging parents to speak to their student about this topic and make positive decisions," she added. "Any student caught willfully damaging, stealing or vandalizing school property is subject to suspension and could be arrested on charges of criminal damage to property or theft. The cost to replace damaged or stolen property, as well as the cost of the repair, will be the responsibility of the student."

At Libertyville-Vernon Hills High School District 128 schools, students have removed batteries from automatic soap dispensers, pulled loose paper towel dispensers from walls, stolen soap dispensers and vandalized toilets.

The district is in the process of assessing the cost of damages and repairs.

Campus safety teams are making more frequent checks of restrooms while administrators are investigating leads, security camera footage, and anonymous tips online, district spokeswoman Mary Todoric said.

"This situation is a reminder that many of our students are facing challenges as they now adapt and transition back to full-time in-person learning," Todoric said.

Des Plaines Elementary District 62 Superintendent Paul Hertel sent a letter to parents last week asking them to talk to their children about the consequences.

Bathroom signs and soap dispensers have been stolen from district middle schools, and evidence of the vandalism was posted on social media.

"This behavior is unacceptable and simply will not be tolerated," Hertel wrote.

Students attempting the challenge at school and found to be in violation of the district's student behavior policy could face disciplinary actions, including an out-of-school suspension, expulsion and police involvement. Moreover, the district might require restitution for any damage to school property, he warned.

Such instances of students acting out also are raising alarms about their mental health stemming from 18 months of pandemic-related social anxiety.

Confusion, stress, frustration, failure and panic are just some of the states students are experiencing, said Ellen Swanson, District 62 assistant superintendent for student services.

"What we are seeing is a spectrum of behaviors for students in preschool through eighth grade, who on a daily basis have more pervasive, more frequent, more intense behaviors than in previous years," Swanson told the school board Monday.

It's just the tip of the iceberg, said Huntley High School Principal Marcus Belin.

A lack of social-emotional support during the pandemic has affected students' level of engagement with peers and understanding of how to interact with each other.

"We've been completely disrupted for 18 months," Belin said. "Now, being in an actual school building, the interactions that students are having, some appropriate some inappropriate, you're starting to see a lot more social media uptick. This is just going to continue to snowball ... unless we figure out a solution and be able to help and support young people."

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Michael Amadei is Des Plaines District 62's next superintendent

By Russell Lissau



Des Plaines School District 62's next superintendent is no stranger to the community.

Michael Amadei, who until this week has been the district's assistant superintendent for human resources, will bump up to the big chair in July 2022, after current Superintendent Paul Hertel retires.

Between now and then, Amadei will serve as associate superintendent in what officials called a transitional move.

"I'm deeply honored," Amadei said Wednesday.

The District 62 board approved the changes Monday night. Board President Ronald Burton said officials are excited to welcome Amadei as the district's next leader.

"Dr. Amadei is a very driven and dedicated professional who will continue the dynamic work that began under Dr. Hertel's leadership," Burton said in a news release.

Amadei, of Wayne, has been the district's assistant superintendent for human resources for four years. He previously served as principal at District 62's Iroquois Community School, and in teaching and administrative roles in [Elgin Area School District U-46](#).

Amadei said his experience in District 62 has given him a really good understanding of the district's needs and of the community it serves.

With the promotion, Amadei will collect a \$190,000 base salary this school year, effective Monday, [documents](#) indicate. His base pay will jump to \$205,000 for the 2022-23 school year.

Hertel is collecting a [\\$251,789 salary](#) this school year.

Hertel has been District 62's superintendent since 2018. Before taking that post, he had served in other administrative roles in the district since 2006.

Like Amadei, Hertel came to District 62 from Elgin Area School District U-46.

Hertel said he was open about intending to retire when his contract ends next year. The stress of the COVID-19 pandemic cemented that decision.

"The last 18 months have felt like 10 years," said Hertel, of Geneva. "We've never worked harder. And it just really takes its toll."

Hertel said he's looking forward to traveling with his wife, Kathy, and doing some volunteer work. Although open to new professional opportunities, he said he has no plans.

"We'll see what comes," Hertel said.

In the district's news release, Burton thanked Hertel for his guidance and leadership, especially during the pandemic.

"Dr. Hertel has devoted time and dedicated his focus on supporting staff and students during such a challenging year for so many," Burton said. "He has made a lasting impact that will be felt for years to come."