

Dear School Board,

Over the last few decades HAZING has become a large issue at the forefront of ALL school activities. Students feel it is acceptable to haze new members of their organization. Most of them feel that hazing creates a bonding experience that makes the new members more connected and dedicated to the organization. There are far too many instances around the country in which hazing has been taken so far as to cause bodily injury or death. This does not account for all of the psychological harm hazing can also do. Hazing can be defined as anything that causes discomfort, demeans, disgraces, and degrades students, especially when new members are being isolated. We, as a school board, NEED to create a zero-tolerance hazing policy at our schools to protect our students.

Our school has a zero-hazing policy for ALL organizations including sports, academic clubs, and other student organizations. ALL incidents of hazing will result in disciplinary action.

Hazing is any act on or off school property that is intended to cause physical or mentally harm, cause discomfort, or demean. There does not have to be direct proof that a person's membership in organization is hinged on hazing. Even if a person consents to activities, hazing is still happening.

Hazing can be, but is not limited to the following:

- Verbal abuse or embarrassment*
- Physical abuse or assault*
- Sexual abuse or assault*
- Deprivation of daily needs such as food or water*
- Forced consumption of food or alcohol*
- Forced activities that aim to embarrass or ridicule, including head shaving or other branding*

The definition of "forced" in this case is a mere act of peer pressure towards individuals. Thus any event that suggests any members to participate in an activity that causes discomfort, demeans, disgraces, or degrades them can and will be considered hazing.

Being a Zero-Tolerance School means that we would accept NO form of hazing. Any activities that are not positive activities or can be viewed as a hazing will be punished. All parts of the organization can be punished including students and coaches or teachers. Punishment will be decided on a case by case basis. Punishment can include but is not limited to the following:

- Individual(s) being benched from a set number of practices and/or games or meetings.*
- Individual(s) being banned from organization for a season, year, or indefinitely.*
- Individual(s) being suspended or expelled (or fired) from school.*
- Entire organization being on probation for a set number of seasons or years.*
- Entire organization disband for a year.*

*-Entire organization no longer allowed to be affiliated with school.
All instances of hazing will ALSO be reported to the local police who will follow their own protocol.
Failure to report hazing will also be punishable.*

Positive Team Building Options:

- Challenge Course or Team Building Field Trip*
- Discussions on why older member are proud to be a part of their organization/team and what it means to them.*
- Picnic or gathering with friendly games or activities such as bowling, mini golf, volleyball, etc.*

Who to report hazing to:

- Head of Organization*
- Teacher*
- Parent or Adult*
- Principal or Assistant Principal or Athletic Director*
- Police*

In order to protect our students and children we need to educate them and make them aware of these expectations. All advisors and coaches will be expected to present this policy to their students at the first meeting on an organization each year. They will also be required to have all students sign a form stating that they WILL NOT initiate or participate in ANY type of hazing or initiation. Coaches and advisors should meet with captains and leaders and reinforce the importance of this policy. This policy will also be printed in the student handbook and on our website, as well as posted around the school. At the beginning of each school year and the beginning of each sports season, a short student led video should be played over the announcements. This video should include examples of harmful hazing, the Zero-Tolerance Policy, who to report hazing to, and suggestions of positive team building. Coaches and advisors will also be expected to participate in a Zero-Tolerance Hazing Training, including signs of hazing, before taking a leadership role in their organization. This training will emphasize that any signs of hazing MUST be up channeled and should not be “dealt” with and ignored. Also, because not all hazing will take place on school grounds, we also need to send a letter home to all parents making them aware of our Zero-Tolerance Policy and signs of hazing.

As a stand against ANY hazing, we as a community and members of the school board, will have to stand firm in our ZERO-TOLERANCE Policy. This means following through with the policy with no exceptions and making examples out of those, coaches/leaders and students, that are not following the policy. I believe this is important to the safety and well-being of our students as well as the integrity of our school and its organizations.

Sincerely,

Megan Sparks