

School district investigating inappropriate online actions of a student

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While Del Norte School District officials expected some hiccups when students logged into class remotely for the first day back from the long COVID-19 interruption and summer break, they didn't expect shenanigans.

Michael Hawkins, Director of Communications said a student shared inappropriate images from their personal cell phone through their webcam, to an online classroom.

"We take such disruptions seriously and are investigating the situation. We will take all necessary and appropriate disciplinary action," Hawkins said. "We are also in the process of adding an additional layer of security into our Zoom environment."

He said this will limit Zoom use only to those within the district's email domains and eliminate any outside participants, which means that students will have to use their school email addresses to join all Zoom meetings.

"Contrary to what may have been shared on social media, our system was not hacked or hijacked. As of now, we have been told and believe that this was an isolated incident. Our goal is to have virtual school as safe as in-person school."

Superintendent Jeff Harris added that the Smith River Elementary School principal Nichole Cochran is still investigating the incident.

"It appears a student shared a Zoom link with someone from outside the school. Someone then entered the virtual room who shouldn't have been there," Harris said.

He added that the district is still trying to determine who shared the inappropriate image — a student, or the unauthorized visitor.

Harris is confident the new protocols will lock down the classrooms to ensure only students are allowed in to the remote learning environment.

“We’ve kind of changed the process of logging into Zoom,” he explained. “Instead of all the students logging in at one time, we’ve asked teachers to let one student in at a time. They will now also enter their entire name, not just a nickname. They’ll only be let in if they’re in that class. We’re also wanting them on video, so teachers can verify a student is who they say they are.”

Harris said the school district has actually been using Zoom with staff for the past three years and with students since the state first closed down schools at the beginning of the pandemic. He said this was the first incident involving inappropriate behavior by a student.

“We’re hoping it’s the only issue we have,” he said. “As we put in other protections, we hope to meet the needs for education and make learning as safe as coming to school in person.”