



Pearl River School District

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Marco F. Pochintesta
Superintendent of Schools

February 28, 2019

Dear Pearl River School Community,

The news has recently included coverage of a disturbing and potentially dangerous video called the “Momo Challenge” that children may be accessing through social media sources such as WhatsApp, YouTube, FortNight, Peppa Pig.

According to what is being reported, as the video content begins it may appear to be age-appropriate, but as it progresses a character appears on the screen and provides directions to the viewer to engage in self-injurious behavior. According to various media reports, the “Momo Challenge” is a form of cyberbullying through which children receive anonymous threatening messages tied to pictures of “Momo”. Momo is a grinning figure with dark hair and bulging eyes created by a Japanese special effects company. The “Momo” messages allegedly compel the viewer to engage in harmful behaviors such as taking pills and even committing suicide. It is not entirely clear how this content is embedded into software applications like YouTube or YouTubeKids or how to predetermine which videos contain this content ahead of time. YouTube and other companies have indicated they are taking steps to ensure that videos of this type are removed.

Whether the Momo Challenge videos are real or a hoax as some are reporting, it is nevertheless disturbing. In recent years, social media users have encountered news of various viral challenges of this type that prey on the vulnerabilities of our youth. We are encouraging our parents and guardians to speak to their children about internet safety, and the kinds of choices children wish to make regarding videos and virtual games. This issue reminds us that monitoring internet activity, and limiting screen time are part of the challenging parenting landscape in the digital age. Keeping children safe is the highest priority, and one that we share with you. Thank you for your efforts in supporting the safety of all children.

I am including links to two news reports and a link from Common Sense Media on this and other Internet challenges with tips for parents on how to talk to your children about online challenges and Internet safety.

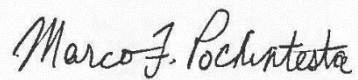
Feel free to contact your child's counselor or building administrator should you have any concerns about your child.

<https://www.common sense media.org/blog/viral-youtube-challenges-internet-stunts-popular-with-kids>

<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/momo-challenge-resurfaces-police-issue-warning-to-parents/>

<https://www.today.com/video/-momo-challenge-how-to-protect-kids-from-disturbing-internet-game-1449768003504>

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light gray background. The signature reads "Marco J. Pochintesta" in a cursive script.