

Philip Michael Pennington School

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Amanda McCulla, Principal
David Anderson, Assistant Principal

January 5, 2022

Dear Blue Jay Families:

I am saddened to share the news that Coach McNeill, our first grade and middle school Health and Physical Education (HPE) teacher, has passed away following a brief illness. (His death is not COVID-19 related). Coach McNeill has been with Pennington for close to 15 years, teaching almost every Blue Jay who passed through our doors. Although Coach could be tough about holding every student to the highest expectations, he had a soft heart and would often share with his wife just how much joy each member of our school community brought him. He frequently shared with her the times our students made him smile and laugh, and he would join in celebrating their accomplishments. In addition to being our HPE teacher, Coach McNeill also ran our after-school intramural program and taught at various colleges and universities in the Northern Virginia area.

Resources will be available for both staff members and students who need support in coping with their sadness. Please pay attention to your student's emotional needs during the next few weeks, especially if he/she knew Coach McNeill. The following suggestions may be helpful to your student:

1. Encourage your child to talk with you about the feelings he/she may be experiencing concerning life and death. Sharing similar experiences that you have had may be very useful. Let your student know you are available to talk about this loss and to answer questions.
2. Be aware that your child may not feel like himself/herself for a while. Talk about ways to feel better.
3. Watch for ongoing signs of difficulty, which could indicate that your child may need additional help. Some of the signs to watch for include: prolonged sadness, withdrawal from social contacts, a change in eating or sleeping habits, or other behaviors unusual for your student.
4. Initiate a discussion of life and death with your child. Research has shown that this helps the healing process.

If you need assistance, please feel free to contact our school counselors at 703-369-6644. Our counselors can provide additional information on school and community resources. School counselors and our school mental health team will be available and will be providing support to our students and staff as soon as we return. Please do not hesitate to reach out to them or to school administration.

This is a difficult time for our school community, but Pennington students and staff will support each other as we deal with this loss. Thank you for your continued support and understanding.

Sincerely,

Amanda Johnson

Principal