

Philip Michael Pennington School

9305 Stonewall Road • Manassas, VA 20110
703.369.6644 • FAX 703.369.4206 • pennington.pwcs.edu

Amanda McCulla, Principal
David Anderson, Assistant Principal

January 13, 2022

Dear Blue Jay Families:

I am saddened to share the news that Mr. Lena, our retired middle school math teacher, has passed away following a lengthy illness. (His death is not COVID-19 related). Mr. Lena was with Pennington for more than 10 years, teaching almost every Blue Jay who passed through our doors during that time. Although Mr. Lena was on medial leave and retired last year, he was well-known to so many of our families for his sense of humor (hats and 'friendly' competitions!), his kindness to others, and his absolute refusal to let students struggle with math (and his absolute refusal to wear shoes in the classroom!). When speaking with Mr. Lena's wife, she shared that Pennington students and staff were always the bright spot to him, and he never regretted switching careers, leaving the world of engineering behind, and becoming a middle school math teacher here at Pennington.

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 Mr. Lena. 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 to provide support to our students and staff. Please do not hesitate to reach out to them or to school administration.

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

Sincerely,

Amanda Johnson
Principal