

Press Clippings 08/29/20 to 08/31/20

---Press Clippings---08/31/2020
There are no U-46 related news stories.

---Press Clippings---08/30/2020
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---Chicago Sun Times--- 08/29/2020 **‘Zoom-bombers’ hijack online classes at suburban middle school, spew racist rants**

The first day of online learning provided an important lesson for a group of suburban middle school students, but it wasn't the one their teachers intended.

By: Madeline Kenney



Emerson Middle School, 8101 N. Cumberland Ave., Niles.

The first day of online learning provided an important lesson for a group of northwest suburban middle school students earlier this week, but it wasn't the one their teachers intended.

Instead, some students at Emerson Middle School in Niles got a lesson in digital security and racism.

During the first day of e-learning Thursday, classes were hijacked by an unknown hacker who used "inappropriate, racist, religious, hateful and homophobic language," according to an email Emerson principal Samantha Alaimo sent to families Thursday. The hacker used the n-word and talked about resuming slavery.

Similar disturbing incidents happened again Friday, according to a second email sent to families.

Peter Gill, a spokesman for School District 64 in Park Ridge, which includes Emerson, said there were five separate hacking incidents on Thursday, and an additional four on Friday. It's unclear if the same hacker was behind all of them.

Alaimo condemned the hateful speech used by the so-called intruder.

"We stand in solidarity with our Black students, our students of color, and their families as they are repeatedly targets of racism in our society," Alaimo wrote.

The school is investigating the incidents and working to identify the offenders. It's also offering support services to students whose classes were impacted by the hack, the email said.

The school said it will continue to use Zoom for its online learning amid the pandemic. Alaimo stressed the importance of not sharing students' usernames or passwords with anyone, including family members other than parents.

"We've got eight schools, and this happened at one of the schools, and I'm not trying to minimize it because it's certainly not good," Gill told the Sun-Times in a phone interview. "[But] we're pretty confident we'll be able to move forward with this and do something to ensure a safe environment for the kids."

"Zoom-bombing" — or the unwanted, disruptive interruption by hackers during online video conference calls — has become an increasing problem since March, when millions of people began using such apps to connect with family, friends, colleagues and others while practicing social distancing during the pandemic.

Emerson isn't the only school that has had issues with unwelcome intruders hijacking online classes this school year.

Tony Sanders, superintendent of School District U-46 in Elgin, said there have been at least two instances last week when unauthorized people disrupted online classes. Sanders didn't provide details but said the district was aware that students had shared the Zoom link to their class with other students, and the links "were then used inappropriately."

A similar occurrence also happened in Glenview School District 34 last week, said Cathy Kedjidjian, the school district's director of communications and strategic planning.

She didn't provide details but said the district believes a student or a few students shared a Zoom link to their classrooms and teachers mistook the visitor as a new student. The district has since changed its security measures, which includes adding password protection for all classes that is shared in a secured student portal, Kedjidjian said.

In April, administrators at New Trier High School and Winnetka School District 36 reported at least two such incidents to police for criminal investigation, [Patch reported at the time.](#)