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June 1, 2021

Dear Parents,

As our nation continues to emerge from an extremely challenging year, I am writing to provide you with an update on the resources we have available for students with regards to mental health.

Over the last decade, experts have seen a nationwide increase in student and adult family anxiety. Experts point to a number of potential causes and solutions, including an over-reliance on social media.

While our primary function remains academic education, we know it's critically important that we focus on the *whole child*, even when funding and time don't adequately provide for it. As a school district, we are not mental health providers, but we believe we must do all we can to bolster the mental health and well-being of our students. We also know that mental health services nationwide - in our communities and in private networks - are simply not able to keep up with the need for services.

First, if your child or anyone you know is having thoughts about self-harm and needs immediate help, please contact [Valley Creek Crisis](#) at (24 hours a day/7 days a week) at 610-280-3270.

In our schools, we are providing the following mental health supports:

- **Mental Health Specialists** - We first began to employ mental health specialists at our high schools seven years ago. Four years ago, we expanded to middle schools, and the past two years we included these services at the elementary schools. **For the 2021-22 school year, we are adding three additional mental health specialists for a total of 12 to work with students and families, K-12, who are struggling.** These are highly trained counselors, who meet with students on an individual basis to provide targeted counseling services.
- **Intervention Specialists** - An intervention specialist at each of our high schools works closely with our families to provide supports for students who are struggling with mental health and substance abuse issues. They've been working in our high schools for about the last 20 years.
- **School Counselors** - Counselors cultivate relationships with students and are an on-going resource. While our counselors do not provide therapy, they do meet with students individually and in small groups to discuss concerns. They also provide screening for students who may need more in-depth help and in many instances are able to work with parents to help facilitate those supports.

We use a variety of mental health monitoring tools to help identify when students may be struggling:

- Every member of our faculty has participated in trauma-informed training, and uses our protocol to notify counselors/family members if they see signs of sadness, depression or a significant change in student personality or behavior.

- In our middle and high schools, we use a mental health screening tool for students who are exhibiting mental health concerns. During the past two years we have conducted more than 360 suicide risk assessments and 110 violence risk assessments, and have been able to provide help to each of these students.
- We use a computer monitoring system used by schools nationwide that helps us to identify mental health concerns.
- Our Safe 2 Say Something line is our anonymous reporting system that allows individuals to report concerns to the District. The school counselor or intervention specialist meet with the student.

Across the school district, we have set up a **counseling resource library** with crisis hotline information, wellness activities, and videos to help students and families cope with stress and anxiety. Please visit that page [here](#).

Our **Second Step Social Skills Program in grades K - 8** is an evidence-based program used by schools nationwide that addresses topics and skills such as resiliency, self-advocacy and peer conflict. We are in our fifth year of offering this program in class.

Also, for the 2021-22 school year, each school will be completing a needs assessment and developing goals (along with support from mental health specialists from the Chester County Intermediate Unit) for their school's **Social Emotional Learning Plan**. Goals might include an increased focus on teaching resiliency skills, self-advocacy skills, or implementing executive functioning skills instruction.

We will continue to offer a variety of **parent workshops** throughout the school year covering topics such as anxiety, social emotional learning, and drug use. We will also continue to participate in the PA Youth Survey in grades 6, 8, 10 and 12. The results are used to help us know how best to develop and implement supports for students.

Finally, click [here](#) for a list of services available in Chester County and speak with your child's doctor if you have concerns. We also strongly encourage you to reach out to your child's school principal, counselors and teachers with any concerns. We must work together to provide the best possible supports for our students.

Sincerely,

Dr. Jim Scanlon

Superintendent