



NEW PROVIDENCE SCHOOL DISTRICT

DAVID M. MICELI, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools
908-464-9050 (ext. 4225)

JAMES E. TESTA
School Business Administrator/
Board Secretary
908-464-9050 (ext. 4223)

SCOTT D. HOUGH
Assistant Superintendent of
Educational Services
908-464-9050 (ext. 4222)

JOHN M. RICHTER, JR.
Director of Curriculum,
Instruction, and Supervision
908-464-9050 (ext. 4221)

356 ELKWOOD AVENUE • NEW PROVIDENCE, NJ 07974 • FAX (908) 464-4813 • www.npsd.k12.nj.us

August 3, 2020

Dear Parents and Guardians,

We hope that this letter finds you all well. As the New Providence School District continues to refine its plans to reopen for hybrid instruction in the fall, we have obviously worked hard to take into account the academic and physical health and safety needs of our students. However, we have also worked to provide special attention to the mental health needs of our community (inclusive of students, families, and staff). It is crucial that students feel safe and comfortable coming into the new school year, and that they be encouraged to develop the necessary skills to manage through the uncertainty and challenges that exist during this difficult time. To this end, the New Providence School District has developed a plan to ensure that students, staff, and families have the support necessary to sustain mental health beginning in the short-term, and to build social and emotional learning skills for long-term benefit.

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)

Social and emotional learning is the process by which adults and children develop and implement the knowledge, skills and abilities to set and achieve goals, develop and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. While related concepts, the terms “SEL” and “Mental Health” cannot be used interchangeably. As defined by the World Health Organization (WHO), “Mental health is a state of well-being in which an individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community.” SEL is one process that seeks to inform, develop, and sustain one’s positive mental health.

When we as *educators* talk about improving student self-discipline, decision making, and understanding the consequences and impact of actions so that they may become more productive adults, we are talking about improving SEL. When we as *adults* discuss improving our own ability to set schedules, build stronger relationships, and learn from past mistakes, we are also talking about improving SEL. The more that we (and our students) are able to practice these skills, the better prepared we (and our students) will be to face the challenges of our ever-changing world.

The development of SEL in our students is an ongoing process that must occur in a supportive environment over the course of a child’s education. Through the duration of the educational process, this includes formal instruction, modeling, and practice opportunities. Teachers, administrators and support staff at elementary, middle, and high school levels can support this process by being educated about these skills, providing classroom environments that support and promote SEL, and helping to sustain a school culture that nurtures SEL for all.

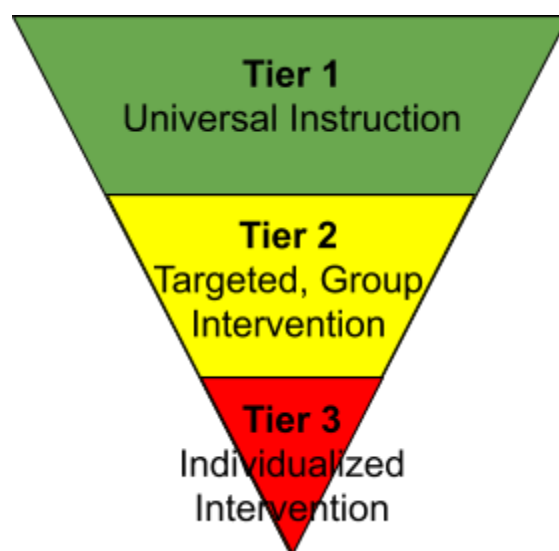
As such, a Mental Health/SEL Subcommittee, composed of teachers, administrators, and mental health professionals from all of our schools, met throughout the fall of 2019 as part of the district's Strategic Planning. The committee's discussion, research, and collaboration resulted in an "SEL Resource Guide" for teachers that will be shared with all teachers and staff during the Professional Development days prior to the start of the school year. In addition, it is well understood that New Providence teachers and staff have long engaged in activities that have promoted SEL at all levels. It is the hope of the committee that this guide will encourage greater integration of those efforts into a consistent and sustained process while also enabling staff to engage in new efforts to expand on this important work.

Addressing Student Needs

Student needs will be addressed through a tiered plan designed to match the intensity of the intervention to the specific needs of the student. The first tier represents a general focus that is appropriate and relevant for all students and staff. Most of the interventions utilized here are provided by the classroom teachers, and are embedded in quality teaching strategies. This level of intervention focuses on building strengths and preventative strategies, as well as identifying students and staff who are at risk and in need of further intervention.

Those identified as needing further support are provided with Tier 2 interventions, which may include group counseling, follow-up parent contact, and additional support provided by school counselors, child study team members, or other members of our district's mental health team.

Students who require additional mental health services will receive tier 3 interventions, which are the most intensive and may include individual sessions, and consultation with parents and/or outside mental health services.



Family Support

Preparing for our children to return to school this September is unlike any other "back to school" scenario we have ever experienced. As such, we are pleased to be **collaborating with George Scott EdS, LMFT**, who is a state-wide Coordinator with the NJ Traumatic Loss Coalition (part of Rutgers University Behavioral Health Care), a Family and Adolescent Therapist, and is certified in Post Traumatic Stress Management. Following his 30-year career in public education, George continues his relationships with New Jersey school districts, offering Professional Development and Parent Academy training.

George believes that "all adults have the power within them to improve the lives of children" and will not only provide professional development for our staff at the beginning of the school year, but also impart his thoughts and wisdom to the New Providence parent community during a **Zoom presentation on Wednesday, August 12 at 7:00 pm** that will focus on preparing our students on returning to school. Up to 300 participants can be accommodated for this presentation using [this link](#). The following week, we will send follow up information to all parents. We hope you will be able to join us.

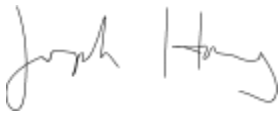
We are also in the process of curating a number of articles, videos, and other resources that we hope will prove helpful to you as you assist your child(ren) with the return to school. The resource website, which will also

contain pertinent return-to-school information outside of the realm of SEL/mental health, is expected to debut mid-month. The district will be in communication with families as soon as it is available.

Naturally, within the district, we will continue to support any and all individual families throughout the remainder of the summer and into the new school year. Should you have any questions or concerns regarding SEL, mental health, or our plan to support students, please don't hesitate to reach out to either of us. We will provide you with 2020-2021 contact information for all of our district mental health staff as the start of the school year nears.

Take care and be safe.

Sincerely,



Dr. Joseph Harvey
Director of Special Services
jharvey@npsdnj.org
908-464-9050 ext. 4239



Mrs. Jillian Shadis
Director of School Counseling
jshadis@npsdnj.org
908-464-4716