WHS students in Cathy Luis' AP Psychology class created a floor-to-ceiling mural to raise awareness and reduce the stigma surrounding mental health issues.

Message from Superintendent Dr. Margaret Dolan

Each month, in every classroom across the Westfield Public School District, our educators are re-thinking and re-crafting lessons with not just the academic content in mind but the social and emotional aspects of learning as well.

The mental health and physical wellness of our students is front and center when teachers create lesson plans, choose literature, facilitate classroom discussions, and plan group activities that incorporate the five competencies of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL): Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Social Awareness, Responsible Decision-Making, and Relationship Skills. These five tenets of SEL may seem obvious but, just as we can't expect a child to tackle a difficult math problem on the first or even second try, nor should we ask him or her to manage these important social and emotional learning behaviors without instruction. They are skills that must be practiced every day.

We continue to work at every level to address the climate and culture in our schools. Research shows a direct correlation between healthy
behaviors and academic achievement (i.e. grades, attendance, and graduation rates). Providing an educational environment where students feel safe and supported is an important part of that process.

This edition of *The NEWS Letter* outlines the many initiatives and programs in place to support our students and staff in the Westfield Public Schools. Our school administrators and counseling teams stand ready to assist any student or staff member who may be struggling. Contact information for each counselor can be found under "Counseling" on the "Departments" tab of each school webpage.

The concept of wellness is impacted not only by the school day, but by family and peer interactions as well. Our role in the Westfield Public Schools is to help students build the necessary skills to deal with stress in positive and healthy ways. We know that parents are doing this same work at home and we welcome that partnership.

**MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS IN WESTFIELD PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

Some of the many ways the district addresses the social and emotional needs of students and staff include:

- **Districtwide Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) initiative** is in its 2nd year, with teachers weaving the language of SEL into everyday classroom lessons.
- **Westfield High School (WHS) Transition Program** teams 11th & 12th grade peer leaders with 9th graders for monthly mentoring sessions.
- **Courses on the Holocaust, Global Perspectives, Women Studies, Forging Identity through Language and Literature, racial and gender equity, and other curricular offerings** bring important discussions into the classroom.
- Robust health and physical

Ninth graders meet with members of WHS Transition Team for monthly mentoring sessions.
education curriculum addresses substance abuse, suicide, risky behavior, sex education and other challenging subjects in age-appropriate ways.

- **Counselors, teachers and paraprofessionals receive regular training to recognize signs of a person at risk of suicide and other crises.**
- **Superintendent and K-12 Director of Counseling serve on town-wide Mental Health Council.**
- **School-based alternative programs, including the Bridge Program and Project '79, provide personalized learning based on individualized needs.**
- **WHS and intermediate schools are participating in the Anti-Defamation League's "No Place for Hate" program to combat bias and bullying.**
- **Roosevelt Intermediate School (RIS) guidance team organizes February 20, 2020 parent presentation on Suicide Awareness and Intervention.**
- **Additional "Parent Academy" presentations are offered through the Edison Speaker Series on mental health and wellness by the Counseling Team and School Resource Officer.**
- **Intermediate "Advisory" program engages all students and staff in once-a-month sessions with SEL scenarios.**
- **RIS parents are invited to "Coffee with the Counselors."**
- **Good character and acts of kindness are recognized and celebrated at all schools.**

Character Education is provided in Morning meetings introduce elementary students to the day's schedule, foster a sense of community, and set a positive tone for the day.

- **Character education is provided in age-appropriate lessons.**
- **Harassment, Intimidation and
Counselors provide parent presentations.

Mix It Up Days at our intermediate schools has students sitting at lunch with others they may not know.

WHS PTSO provides students a chance to rest their minds during mid-terms with basketball, coloring, aromatherapy, and therapy dogs.

Bullying (HIB) Specialists and School Safety Teams are in place at each school.

- District invests in professional development and other training to help staff understand the power of language and how it can deepen a growth mindset in students.
- All staff reviews HIB and other child wellness policies annually.
- District administrators and teachers attend special training in December by Dr. Maurice Elias, Professor of Psychology at Rutgers University and Director of Rutgers Social–Emotional and Character Development Lab.
- Counseling is provided for students in grades K–12, with special programs focusing on mental health and wellness in place.
- Peer–supported programs (i.e., The Guy & Girl Thing, Mix It Up Day) reinforce important character development.
- Student clubs focus on healthy behaviors and inclusiveness. Examples include the Dream Team, LGBTQ and Straight Alliance, Lunch Ambassadors Club, and Kindness Club.
- Employee Assistance Program offers information about topics ranging from dealing with aging parents to coping with job–related stress. EAP program also puts staff in touch with behavioral health resources.
- PTO initiatives include "Parent Academy" presentations and opportunities for students. Recent outreach included a screening of the documentary, Angst, and stress–relieving activities for students during mid–term and final exams.
"Stress management has been in our health curriculum since 1990. In this last decade, we have seen a nationwide increase in anxiety and depression in children and adolescents. It is more important than ever that we continually build our children's social and emotional skills and competencies -- a learning process that begins at home and continues each day in our classrooms."

Maureen Mazzarese
Director of K-12 Counseling

Social and Emotional Learning

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) and its five competencies - Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Social Awareness, Responsible Decision-Making, and Relationship Skills - are incorporated into classroom lessons across the district.

The district has produced videos and TED-style talks to help our school community better understand what SEL is and what it looks like in the classroom. Click on the images to view the videos and learn more.

SEL in the Classroom

TED-Style Talks on SEL

Students Weigh In on SEL

For important resources on coping with loss, suicide prevention, speaking up against hate, digital safety, SEL, and more, visit www.westfieldnjk12.org, click on the "Family Resources" tab, and select "Mental Health and Wellness."

In my Opening Day remarks to staff on September 3, I stressed the importance of reaching out to a supervisor or myself with any concerns about a person in their lives.
I again make the same appeal to you, as parents. If a student or family member is going through a difficult time, please do not hesitate to notify a counselor, a teacher, or any one of the many caring adults who work in our district so that we can help to provide support. Thank you for working together with us to ensure the physical safety and emotional security of your children.

The "Global Citizen" course at WHS helps students understand the greater community around them.

RIS Hosts Presentation on Suicide Awareness and Intervention

EIS Speaker Series on Mental Health and Wellness

DISTRICT NEWS

Please visit the district website at www.westfieldnjk12.org for news and helpful resources.

Click on the images to read recent news about important initiatives in the district.

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