



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **Amid COVID-19 pandemic, Cicero school district keeps discussion of mental health at forefront of education**

*Cicero District 99, Riveredge Hospital to co-host virtual mental health roundtable for regional support for student and staff mental well-being*

**Cicero — Sept. 4, 2020 —** Like school districts across the county, Cicero District 99 has adapted to the challenges presented by COVID-19 by kicking off the school year in full remote learning. However, while working tirelessly to ensure students, parents and staff are supported while virtually bringing the classroom to the home, District 99 remains dedicated to maintaining something equally as crucial as a quality education — mental health support.

On Tuesday, Sept. 22, District 99 will be partnering with Riveredge Hospital in Forest Park to co-host a virtual School-Based Mental Health Roundtable discussion, inviting local educators and mental health professionals to collaborate on best practices in addressing student and staff mental health, as well as working through developing social and emotional supports during remote learning.

The virtual roundtable marks the second annual collaboration between District 99 and Riveredge Hospital, as the two first partnered last fall for an in-person program which attracted the attention of more than 60 educators and health professionals from public school districts, public health centers and community support agencies across Chicagoland.

District 99's Multi-Tier Systems of Support (MTSS) Department realizes advocating for student mental health should not be confined to the walls of one district, they're actively seeking the partnership of district leaders and community entities across the Chicago area to work together to find meaningful solutions amid the challenges presented by the pandemic — illness, death, fear, isolation and breakdown of normal routines.

“District 99 has a goal of igniting the road to excellence for our students, and maintaining mental wellness is critical to that mission,” said Dr. Jack Rein, District 99's director of MTSS. “Especially during these challenging times, this program is Cicero's way of alerting the greater community of the various mental health needs among children and adults, and sharing best practices for crisis prevention and management.”

This fall's two-hour virtual roundtable will include activities focused on understanding the various griefs and traumas brought on by the pandemic, developing best practices for

educators to identify mental health crises while remote learning and discovering how to best build community in classes while meeting virtually. The program will also feature a special Q&A session with Willow House, a north suburban nonprofit social service agency focused on supporting families, schools and communities coping with grief.

Amanda Norris, school liaison for Riveredge Hospital, says that now more than ever, it's important for educators and communities to overcome the stigmas of discussing mental health and understand that the pandemic adds its own unique set of challenges when it comes to helping others cope with anxieties and traumas.

“Simply talking about mental health can be a challenge,” Norris said, “but bringing to the forefront the knowledge and facts around mental health to the people who are passionate about the topic will really help schools and community members understand that this is a conversation that we can have, and should have.”

There is no cost for educators or mental health professionals to participate in the virtual program, which will be held Sept. 22 from 1-3 p.m.

For insight into last year's inaugural roundtable, view District 99's video [here](#).

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### **About Cicero District 99**

Cicero District 99 is a 16-school public elementary school district in Cicero, Ill., a near-west suburb of Chicago which is home to more than 82,000 residents. A predominantly Hispanic and working-class community, District 99 educates more than 11,000 students in pre-kindergarten through eighth grade, 95 percent of whom come from low-income households and qualify for either free or reduced-price lunch.