December 5, 2022

Mental Health Update

Dear Members of the Blind Brook Community,

At the November 1st Board of Education meeting, I gave an update on how the school district is addressing the mental health needs of our students. You can watch the presentation by CLICKING HERE. The presentation on mental health starts at the 30:35 mark. You can also view the actual presentation file AT THIS LINK. In this letter I will be highlighting a few of the programs that the District is focusing on this year.

The District has dedicated funds that it received from the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act - American Rescue Plan (IDEA-ARP) to training our staff in Dialectical Behavioral Training (DBT). DBT combines behavior therapy with individual validation to help individuals achieve a more balanced and meaningful lifestyle. DBT targets the issues that cause distress and teaches skills to deal with them. The District has contracted with Cognitive Behavioral Consultants (CBC) of Westchester to provide the training and to help the District in planning the roll out of this program. Already this year we have had a kick off presentation and an intensive four-day training session in DBT for our mental health professionals. Implementation meetings with CBC will be happening in December where the continued training and support in DBT for our mental health professionals will be mapped out for the remainder of the year.

The District is progressing with its adoption of the Yale RULER program. This evidence-based approach to social emotional learning gives the adults in the school the tools to help them build their own skills on recognizing and managing their emotions. These adults can then model these skills for students and help train the students in managing their own emotions. Last year, teams of adults from the Middle School and High School received training from individuals from the Child Study Center at Yale University. These teams are now working to train the rest of the staff with the goal of having everyone in both of these buildings fully trained to help support their students. The principals have also been working some RULER-based activities into the advisory sessions.

The team at the Bruno M. Ponterio Ridge Street School was delayed in their RULER training due to the issues with the construction project last year. It is back on track this year having met with trainers last month and developing training sessions for faculty and staff over the next few months. The group is meeting next week to talk about these training sessions and discuss how and when the training for students will be.

Please know that mental health instruction is happening regularly in the District. At the elementary level, there are mindfulness lessons built into the physical education curricula. And, Health classes in grades 5, 8 and 10 all have mental health units where students are given strategies and resources to help them manage their emotions.

As always, please also know that mental health professionals are available in all three buildings to support students in need. We encourage you or your child to reach out to our counselors, psychologists, and social workers if situations arise.

Ensuring the mental health of our students remains a high priority in the Blind Brook School District. We will continue to look for ways to support our students in all aspects of their lives.

Sincerely,
Dr. Colin M. Byrne
Superintendent of Schools