EASTCHESTER UNION FREE SCHOOL DISTRICT
SOARING TO EXCELLENCE

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Dr. Noreen Urso, Assistant Superintendent of Pupil Personnel

August 2021

Dear Families,

In planning for our re-entry to full-time in person learning in September, the District has outlined Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) support and resources for students, staff, and families across the District. Our SEL support will provide the foundation for a safe and positive learning environment where all students can be successful and have the best experiences both socially and academically. SEL supports can improve students' attitudes toward school, and reduce stress by providing target support, predictable routines, and structure.

Districtwide:

- **Trauma Awareness for Faculty/Staff:** All faculty and staff will be provided with professional development, prior to the start of school, focusing on trauma awareness. Understanding how trauma impacts performance in the educational setting can change how we interact with our most vulnerable youth.
  Objectives
  - Articulate the definition of trauma
  - Describe the stress response and what it could look like in the classroom
  - Describe "downstairs brain" and provide examples
  - Know the importance of setting up routines in the classroom for regulation, relationships, and self-awareness
  - Understand the 3 R's (Regulate, Relate, Reason) when interacting with youth

- **Self-Care for Faculty:** All faculty and staff will be provided an optional fall workshop (Date and Time TBD) focused on managing their own social-emotional health. Professionals going into careers focused on caring for and helping others are often motivated by the internal satisfaction derived from helping others. Quite often this compassion and satisfaction is what keeps helping professionals going; without recognizing the mental, emotional, and physical drain caring for others can have on their bodies. Charles Figley (1995) refers to this as the "There is a cost to caring" or compassion fatigue. Education and mental health professionals both fall into the category of helping professionals with the potential for high levels of compassion fatigue.

Objectives

- Participants will be able to discuss compassion fatigue, compassion satisfaction, and compassion resilience.
- Participants will be able to develop their own self-care plans as well as be able to assist others to develop self-care plans.
- Participants will identify system features to establish a culture promoting compassion resilience and data for monitoring.

- **Transitioning Back to School: Workshop for Families**
  (September 22, 6:30 pm Secondary, 7:30 pm Elementary)
  Our consultant from Cognitive Behavior Associates of Westchester, Dr. Lauren Bonavitacola, will continue the conversation on anxiety, fear, and worry during a pandemic. Dr. Bonavitacola will help families to work with their children to help manage these feelings by providing strategies and coping skills for both elementary and secondary students during two separate workshops in September.
  Objectives
  - TBD, Will gather information regarding students' social emotional transition during the first two weeks of school.
- **Continuation of our Districtwide SEL Committee, September 2021**.

Waverly School:

- **Kindergarten Orientation:**
  Before the opening of school, incoming kindergarten families will be provided a video including clips from all of the kindergarten classroom, co-teachers and special educators discussing the kindergarten experience. In addition, on the first day of school, incoming kindergarten students will have the opportunity to meet their teachers, new classmates and explore their classrooms for a short duration - just enough to get students excited about their new academic adventure. Special area teachers visit each kindergarten classroom before specials begin. They are introduced and an association made between the child's classroom teacher and the team.
- **Morning Meeting**:
  Depending on social distancing guidelines, Morning Meeting provides the entire Waverly community with the opportunity to join together to both welcome and celebrate the children.
- **Welcome Back Picnic:**
  Students and their families will gather to celebrate the start of a new school year at the Welcome Back Picnic on the Waverly campus.
- **School Psychologist:**
  The psychologist time will be utilized to expand the community building work that psychologists engage in with students in classrooms. Lessons have been crafted to continue to help students

identify and articulate their feelings. This is especially important given that students will return to school in the context of a global pandemic. Many Waverly first graders have never been in school under traditional circumstances.

- **Universal Screeners for Academics AND Social Emotional Learning and Behavior:** All students will be assessed in English Language Arts and Mathematics to identify any academic gaps/needs in these areas. Two additional teaching assistants will support learners both in and out of their classroom under the guidance of our reading teacher. Teachers will continue to observe and identify social emotional needs for our students. Assessment data for all students will be reviewed in RTI/MTSS meetings with each teacher to ensure students are well supported.

Anne Hutchinson School:

- **2nd Grade Orientation:** Before the opening of school, 2nd graders will have the opportunity to meet their principal, teachers, and classmates, and tour the school building with their families.
- **Welcome Back Assemblies**: Depending on social distancing requirements, the principal will lead celebratory assemblies with either the entire school community or grade levels to welcome the students back to school and set a positive tone for the new school year.
- **Welcome Back Picnic:** Students and their families will gather to celebrate the start of a new school year at the Welcome Back Picnic on the Anne Hutchinson School campus.
- **School Counselor:** The new school counselor will launch weekly guidance lessons in each classroom with naming and validating the continuum of feelings students may experience as they return to school in the context of a global pandemic. Students will complete a confidential survey for the counselor to share their feelings and this data will be shared with teacher leaders to ensure all students are well supported.
- **Universal Screeners for Academics AND Social Emotional Learning and Behavior:** All students will be assessed in English Language Arts and Mathematics to identify any academic gaps/needs in these areas.Teachers will also complete a social emotional learning and behavior assessment for each child. Assessment data for all students will be reviewed in RTI/MTSS meetings with each teacher to ensure students are well supported.

Greenvale School:

- **2nd Grade Orientation:**

Before the opening of school, 2nd graders will have the opportunity to meet their principal, teachers, and classmates, and tour the school building with their families.

- **Welcome Back Assemblies**:
  Depending on social distancing requirements, the principal will lead celebratory assemblies with either the entire school community or grade levels to welcome the students back to school and set a positive tone for the new school year.
- **Welcome Back Picnic:**
  Students and their families will gather to celebrate the start of a new school year at the Welcome Back Picnic on the Greenvale campus.
- **School Counselor:**
  The new school counselor will launch weekly guidance lessons in each classroom with naming and validating the continuum of feelings students may experience as they return to school in the context of a global pandemic. Students will complete a confidential survey for the counselor to share their feelings and this data will be shared with teacher leaders to ensure all students are well supported.
- **Universal Screeners for Academics AND Social Emotional Learning and Behavior:**
  All students will be assessed in English Language Arts and Mathematics to identify any academic gaps/needs in these areas.Teachers will also complete a social emotional learning and behavior assessment for each child. Assessment data for all students will be reviewed in RTI/MTSS meetings with each teacher to ensure students are well supported.

Eastchester Middle School:

- **6th Grade Orientation:**
  On August 30, 6th grade students will have the opportunity to meet their principal, assistant principal and classmates, and tour the school building while having access to their class schedules.
- **New Student Orientation:**
  On August 31, new students will have the opportunity to meet their school counselors, meet the principal and assistant principal, and tour the school building.
- **Individual Tours:**
  EMS school counselors have been conducting ongoing building tours throughout the summer for students that were on remote learning during the previous school year to assist with the transition back to in-person learning. This also includes students with disabilities and those exhibiting anxiety. Grade level counselors will continue to meet with students individually throughout the school year.
- **Welcome Back Assemblies**:

The principal and assistant principal will lead informative assemblies with each grade level to welcome students back to school and set a positive tone for the new school year.

- **EMS Counseling Website**:
  Our guidance department website, which can be accessed via the main EMS site, contains helpful links and resources for parents and students that includes links for mindfulness, self care, community resources and contact information for support staff.
- **Social Worker:**
  The new social worker, Ms. Gulenyan, will work closely with our school counselors, psychologist, principal and assistant principal to identify and provide support to students exhibiting social/emotional needs during the transition back to in-person learning. Ms. Gulenyan will be invited to take part in weekly Intervention meetings.
- **Social Emotional Learning (SEL) School Counselor:**
  Mrs. Spillane will continue to prepare and deliver SEL guidance lessons in the classrooms. Each student will have access to a minimum of one monthly lesson along with opportunities to complete follow up activities. The September lesson will focus on moving forward and "Smart Planning". These lessons address Tier I needs, grade level school counselors, school psychologists and social worker will address Tier II & III needs.
- Students will be given a survey and offered the opportunity to have a counselor reach out privately to address any concerns they may have about transitioning into the new school year.

Eastchester High School:

- **Small Group Tours led by School Counseling Department:**
  EHS school counselors will conduct building tours during the professional development days in September for 9th and 10th graders who were on remote instruction last year to facilitate the transition back to in-person learning. This tour will also be geared for new students as well as those with disabilities/anxiety.
- **Welcome Back Assemblies**:
  The principal and two assistant principals will lead engaging and informative assemblies with each grade level to welcome students back to school and establish a positive tone for the new school year. Important information that students need to know from the parent/student handbook will be shared.
- **School Counselors**
  School counselors will continue to meet with students individually throughout the school year and serve as our first lines of defense in gauging our students' social/emotional well-being. School counselors engage in daily interactions and weekly meetings with their respective

building administrators and also participate in weekly Instructional Support Team meetings where students in crisis/need of intervention are discussed.

- **School Psychologists:**
  Our three school psychologists work closely with our school counselors, nursing office, and building administrators to support students individually or in small groups as they cope with the pressures and demands in their lives from a variety of sources: academics, social, familial, etc. School psychologists also participate in weekly Instructional Support Team meetings where students in crisis/need of intervention are discussed.
- **Social Worker:**
  Ms. Gulenyan, our new social worker, will collaborate closely with our counselors, psychologists, and building administrators to identify and provide support to students exhibiting social/emotional issues as they transition back to in-person learning. Ms. Gulenyan will be invited to take part in weekly Instructional Support Team meetings.
- **"Dog Days" at EHS:**
  Ms. Heidi Bonarato of Giving Retriever has established a wonderful program which promotes student and staff wellness by bringing her certified therapy dogs for structured and unstructured visits. These joyful opportunities provide anyone who comes into close proximity of these gentle canine creatures an opportunity to de-stress, relax, and unwind.

These have been challenging times and we are committed to providing our children with the best learning environment possible. Please enjoy these last few weeks with your families and we are looking forward to seeing everyone soon!

Sincerely,

Dr. Noreen Urso

Dr. Noreen Urso
Assistant Superintendent of Pupil Personnel Services