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Mental Health Policy

Support Services/Community Services

Rationale

Mental health encompasses all aspects of our well-being. Along with social-emotional skills, it affects how a student thinks, feels and acts. It also is key component in the development of our executive functioning skills, determining how we handle stress, relate to others and make positive choices. It is an important topic in the district’s Health Curriculum Framework that supports classroom instruction. Mental health is essential to a student’s growth and development into a productive community member both in the school and into adulthood. With this in mind, *Lincoln Public Schools will establish and maintain a learning environment that fosters the mental, behavioral, social and emotional well being of students and staff.*

Definition

For the purposes of this policy, “mental health” is intended to encompass the functional, social and emotional well being of elementary school children as well as the mental and behavioral health of middle and high school youth and staff, including social and emotional well being, mental illness, substance abuse and addiction.

Policy Introduction

The Lincoln Public School District recognizes that mental health is a key component of a young person’s ability to succeed in school and in life. Students today are often confronted with a myriad of issues that can impede their social, emotional and academic development including, but not limited to, stress, trauma, neglect, homelessness, poverty, domestic violence, anxiety, depression, anger, substance abuse/use, partner violence, bullying, alienation, socialization/social skills, academic or functional disability, human sexuality, and gender expression. All of these can significantly impact students as they seek to define their roles in society. It is the commitment of the Lincoln Public School District that individuals who struggle with mental health issues, or who are at risk of developing issues, be afforded every opportunity for success.

This mental health policy is designed to ensure that the District is actively working to identify and address mental health issues confronting students, and to equip youth and families with the skills and support they need to be successful while continuing to develop an atmosphere that promotes mental health for all students. The District recognizes the risks associated with failing to address the mental health needs of students, and is committed to ensuring the health and safety of every student as well as our entire school community. This mental health policy is to be incorporated into the District's overall health and wellness policy to provide for a comprehensive approach to the health, safety and well being of our students.

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This policy also recognizes that district staff may experience mental and behavioral health concerns. As such, this policy also seeks to address mental and behavioral health in district staff.

District Goals and Objectives

In order to establish a learning environment that supports mental health, the District shall initiate and maintain a series of dynamic and proactive measures that will provide for effective implementation of the District's mental health policy and facilitate collaboration among various stakeholders.

Education and Outreach

- The District shall disseminate information regarding mental health issues affecting today's youth, and shall support age-appropriate curriculum-based initiatives to promote youth development in the areas of social emotional learning, critical thinking, coping strategies, and life skills, as well as to raise awareness while decreasing stigma among youth regarding mental health issues.
- The District shall promote a sense of community in its schools by ensuring that students are afforded the opportunity to participate in extracurricular activities, including sports, after school clubs, music and art programs, drama, and community service initiatives. The District shall also periodically review and evaluate the adequacy of these offerings.
- The District shall view youth, parents, and families as partners in ensuring the mental health of all students. As such, the District shall disseminate information regarding the mental health support services available to parents and youth, and encourage youth, parents and staff to seek support as appropriate.
- The District shall seek to work collaboratively with relevant boards and committees whose purpose is to promote mental health.
- The District shall periodically review and provide education and training to district administrators and staff on mental health issues affecting youth.

System Supports for Students

- The District shall support school-based implementation of early intervention protocols for addressing mental health issues among individual students so that those students and families can gain access to support services as expeditiously as possible.
- The District shall foster school-based implementation of supports, as appropriate, to students returning to school after a mental health-related absence.
- The District shall collaborate with local and statewide supports, including but not limited to, local mental and behavioral health clinicians and/or counselors, mentoring programs and services, community-based mental and behavioral health services, Truancy Court, resource officers and the Lincoln Police Department.

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- The District shall provide support staff to address the mental, behavioral, social and emotional needs of students, including school nurse-teachers, social workers, guidance counselors, and school psychologists, and will evaluate on an annual basis the adequacy of current staffing levels.
- Conduct regular building level meetings, involving the mental health professionals assigned to the building, administration and staff, to assess and respond to mental health needs of the building.
- Confidentiality shall be maintained at all times in addressing the mental health concerns of individual students.

System Supports for Staff

- In an effort to support district staff regarding mental and behavioral health concerns, the district will explore opportunities to facilitate access to mental and behavioral health services for district staff.

Ongoing Evaluation and Continuous Improvement

The Lincoln Public School's District Health and Wellness Committee shall be responsible for the ongoing evaluation and continuous improvement of the mental health policy and efforts in the district. In the course of its work, the subcommittee shall:

- Engage district administrators and staff, community-based mental health professionals, local agencies, youth and parents;
- Identify key mental health indicators in our school community;
- Assess the status of relevant district-wide and school-based initiatives;
- Compile findings on an annual basis;
- Make recommendations to the Lincoln School Committee regarding ways to improve the District's goals, strategies, and policies for addressing mental health issues facing our youth;
- Convene on a regular basis throughout the academic year in the performance of its duties.

Summary

By recognizing that mental health is an essential component of a young person's overall growth, development, and well-being, the Lincoln School District is in a key position to enhance the mental health of its students. Many factors play a role in determining the mental health of a young person. While schools cannot be the sole entity in addressing mental health issues, they can play a vital role through advocacy and support. In addition, schools can create a climate where all children feel safe and respected. It is the intent of this policy to establish a framework for addressing the myriad of mental, social and emotional needs of students so that they can grow and develop into productive members of society.

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The implementation of this policy shall in no way effect, waive, limit, or expand the privacy rights of any student, faculty, staff, administrator or their respective family members as afforded under the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996, as amended, 42 U.S. C. §300gg, 29 U.S.C. §1181 et seq., 42 U.S.C. 1320d et seq., and the Rhode Island Confidentiality of Health Care Communications and Information Act, R.I. Gen. Laws §5-37.1-1, et seq. U.S. C.

References:

Basic Education Plan (BEP) G- 14- 3.2 Psychological and Mental Health Services

Mental and emotional health issues directly impede students’ abilities to learn. Such issues include bullying, alcohol and drug abuse, depression, anxiety, and domestic violence, as well as psychiatric disorders. Therefore, each LEA shall:

- Ensure that students have access to a coordinated program of culturally and linguistically responsive psychological and mental health services, on site or through effective referral systems;
- Ensure that school psychological and mental health services will be provided by appropriately credentialed, high quality staff. Services must provide for identification of risks and assessment of service needs; primary prevention; individual, family, and group counseling; consultative services; and resource and service coordination; and
- To the extent practicable, ensure that schools coordinate with community youth development, prevention, and treatment efforts

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TOWN OF LINCOLN SCHOOL COMMITTEE, Lincoln, Rhode Island