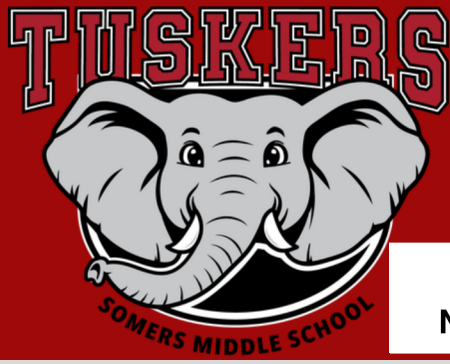




SEPTEMBER 2026

SMS COUNSELING CORNER

We are here for you!
Need to reach an SMS school counselor?

By Phone: 914-276-2588

6th Grade: Mrs. Bieber: ebieber@somersschools.org Ext. 3306

7th Grade: Mrs. Kurchack: skurchack@somersschools.org Ext. 3308

8th Grade: Mr. Fleck: jfleck@somersschools.org Ext. 3307

Grades 6-8: Social Emotional Learning Interventionist (SELI): Mrs. Cespedes: wcespedes@somersschools.org Ext. 3305

Mrs. Coogan, Department Secretary: 914- 276-2588

Mr. Phil Kavanagh, Director of Counseling: pkavanagh@somersschools.org 914-248-8585, Ext. 4303

Welcome to a great new school year!

Our goal is to ensure that every student at SMS knows that their counselor is a trusted adult who is here to support them through their middle school years. We value parent involvement and hope you will reach out with questions or concerns. During the first two weeks of school, each grade level school counselor and the SMS SELI (social-emotional interventionist) have been helping students with finding classes, opening lockers, and navigating their new schedules. Being visible to students is important, so the team has been visiting classrooms and the cafeteria, in addition to being a presence in the hallways to welcome new students and to say, "hello" to our returning students. To help make for a smooth transition from SIS to MS, Mrs. Bieber (this year's grade 6 counselor) and Mrs. Cespedes worked with the SIS student support team and met with students twice in 5th grade, as well as in August during Orientation. Mrs. Cespedes has been contacting parents of students who have building level and 504 counseling support. Those connections will be established within the next week.

Counseling WIN groups and lunch groups have begun! Topics range throughout the year with a variety of offerings including meeting new peers, friendship skills, organizational support, and transitional support. If your child is interested in joining a lunch group, they should let their counselor know. Some WIN groups are pre-selected and some are open for students to self-schedule.

We hope to see you on **September 17th at Back to School Night!** We will be in the hallways to assist parents navigate their children's schedules and will also be on the schedule as an option for you to come learn more about the counseling program at SMS and developmental milestones you can expect for your child this year.



Mrs. Bieber, Mrs. Kurchack, Mr. Fleck, and Mrs. Cespedes

S.T.A.R. Program

Back by popular demand.... Students who are caught doing random acts of kindness can be nominated by staff members as STARS (students that are role models). At the end of each month, STARS are acknowledged and celebrated through the morning announcements.

Supporting Your Child's Social Growth

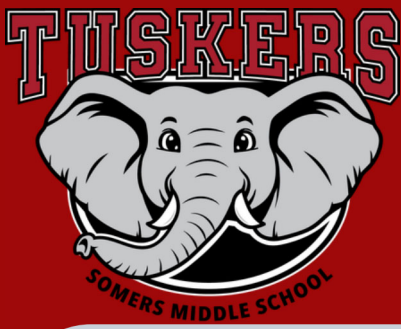
Socializing is an important part of middle school. Spending time with friends helps students feel connected, enjoy school more, and stay engaged in their learning. Positive social interactions can also reduce boredom and feelings of isolation.

Encourage your child to take breaks from screens and make time for activities they enjoy. Playing games with family or friends, riding a bike, gardening, or simply sharing stories and laughter are great ways to create joy and relieve stress. Laughter and physical activity are powerful tools for managing stress.

As your child begins to seek more independence, such as walking to get a snack after school or shopping with friends, be sure to discuss safety expectations ahead of time. Open communication can help your child make responsible decisions while enjoying new opportunities for independence.



Tech Tip: "Remember, your child's safety is more important than their privacy. As a parent, you aren't being nosy by checking their cell phone on a regular basis; you are being responsible."



SMS COUNSELING CORNER

What to Expect

School counselors support life-readiness and academic skills for all students. Our department focuses its skills, time, and energy on providing direct student support (individual academic and personal counseling, crisis management, group counseling, classroom lessons, 504 annual reviews, etc.) and indirect services (parent communications, academic program planning, student data teams, grade level team meetings, etc.). Our counseling curriculum focuses on three key areas: academic development, personal-social growth, and college and career readiness. These areas align with the New York State Learning Standards and are guided by the framework established by the American School Counselor Association (ASCA). We routinely partner with our school psychologists, Student Assistance Counselor, teachers and administration to best support students.

Outreach:

SMS Counselors send four newsletters per year and frequently include information in the SMS Friday Flyer. Please also visit our school's website for resources about academic planning and emotional support. Additionally, if your child works with a private therapist, we welcome the opportunity to collaborate with them to align support for your child. If you'd like to grant permission for these confidential conversations to take place, [CLICK HERE](#) to access the confidential release form.

In Sixth Grade -

- Each student will be seen individually by their counselor throughout the school year for an "About Me" meeting. This is the foundation of building a relationship and the introduction to an individual progress and goals conversation.
- Your counselor will push into Health Class for three co-taught lessons that are part of the Human Growth and Healthy relationship unit. These include strategies of self-regulation (DBT Steps A curriculum), stress management, and social-emotional aspects related to puberty.
- Counselors will work with their students in Science class (using a platform called Xello) to help students better understand their learning and work styles, as well as time management skills. Counselors help students to begin exploration of potential careers.
- All sixth graders will participate in the SMS Peer Mentoring Program, which is run by Mrs. Cespedes. Trained eighth graders work with sixth graders to establish connections, be positive role models, and foster a positive school community.

In Seventh Grade -

- Each student will again have a formal check-in with their counselor. These "About Me" meetings continue the conversation and relationship established in grade 6. Students review their progress and goals with their counselor, and build upon the trusted adult relationship between counselor and student.
- In Health Class your counselor will push in for two co-taught lessons that are part of the Human Growth and Healthy relationship unit. These include effective strategies for decision-making and communication.
- Through Family and Consumer Science (FACS) class your counselor will continue the prior year's work related to identifying potential career interests. Students will again use the Xello platform, this time to take the Matchmaker Assessment. This is designed to help students think critically about their interests and to learn more about careers that might match those interests.
- In the spring all students have the opportunity to learn about and apply to become a Peer Mentor in 8th grade. Training begins in the spring.

In Eighth Grade -

- Your counselor will again push into FACS class for two co-taught lessons that are part of the DBT Steps A curriculum. The focus of this work is to help students learn to be present and self-regulate their emotions so they can be more effective in their academic and social experiences.
- Our work in FACS class on the Xello platform continues, as students will use a "Personality Style" quiz to help discover more about themselves and continue to delve deeper into what would make for a satisfying career path.
- In the early winter we begin formal classroom conversations about the transition to HS, NY State graduation requirements, and preparation for a trip to SHS.
- Following the trip to SHS, an evening orientation program to HS, and academic recommendations from grade 8 teachers, students will meet individually with their counselor from January through March to plan their HS program. Course selections will be shared with parents to allow for questions and discussion so that students can best be prepared for the transition to SHS.