Hello and ‘Welcome’ to the 2021/22 school year! For those of you who may not know me, my name is Elizabeth Ramirez and I am one of the Student Assistant Coordinators (SACs) here in the Franklin Township Public Schools District. As we begin to welcome our students back for this school year, I wanted to share with you that Ms. Valerie Northey has retired and that this year I will continue to serve the students and families of the Hamilton Street Campus as well as provide support and resources to the Sampson G Smith campus and all of our district’s elementary schools while we transition our new SAC hire. I am sincerely and excitedly anticipating an amazing year working with you all to support our students!
This year’s return to school can look similar to pre-covid ways, however many of our students have mixed feelings on this return to in person learning. The need for social distancing has brought many complications into the lives of students and families across our community. Isolation from peers, overexposure to triggers in the home, and severe anxiety surrounding the coronavirus crisis only compounds the existing stress the average student is facing. That being said, it is important that all school personnel working with students recognize a few signs that may indicate that your student is in need of additional help:

- Changes in eating/sleeping habits
- Inability to concentrate
- Drastic mood swings
- Emotional outbursts, excessive anger or crying
- Self-harm (cutting, scratching, burning)
- Suicidal thoughts

If you notice any of these signs or suspect that a student may be struggling with something, please reach out to his or her guidance counselor or directly to the SAC. Support is available for all of our students, whether it be academic, social, emotional, or personal.
Some of you may not be familiar with what a SAC does or what a Student Assistance Program (SAP) entails. The Student Assistance Program is a district wide, school based, comprehensive support program that helps address student needs in a streamlined, timely, and efficient manner through the provision of prevention, intervention, education, support, and with referrals to community resources when applicable. Its purpose is to intervene as early as possible in situations where a student’s personal problems have been recognized as a barrier to learning and success both in school and in their personal lives. These problems can entail mental health, behavioral, substance use, emotional, and/or social problems. Some specific issues that SACs assist in addressing are changes in family dynamics such as death, terminal illness, or divorce. We step in when students are experiencing thoughts of self-harm or suicidal ideation, depression, anxiety, or self-esteem concerns. The SAC provides support services based on the educational premise that students who receive help in dealing with pressing personal concerns will be able to focus their remaining energies more effectively on the important task of developing academically, socially, and emotionally.

Students can be referred to a SAC by any school personnel, another student, or even a parent. All referrals and services are confidential with 2 exceptions: The student indicates that they have a desire to hurt themselves or someone else. OR Someone is hurting the student. **MAKING SURE THAT STUDENTS ARE SAFE IS MY TOP PRIORITY!**

Referrals for K-8 students can be made by completing this [Referral Form](#).
The Student Assistance Professionals in Franklin Township work in conjunction with our community, county, and state to bring a wide range of services to the faculty, staff, students, and families of our district. Programs are offered virtually as well as in person at various locations throughout the school year. This September the Student Assistance Department was able to partner with Empower Somerset to offer three different virtual programs to our middle and elementary school students.

You can register for any of these programs by clicking on the pictures of the fliers in this newsletter.

The Happy, Healthy Me program is an evidence-based program that is designed to enhance children’s self-esteem, communication, and problem-solving skills. This program is open to all of our district’s kindergarten students.
Family Unity Night is a program that offers the exciting opportunity for families to spend quality time together while learning new ways to enhance communication, problem solve and simply engage in some family fun! Upon completion of the 7 week program families will receive a $50 gift card!

And the We’re Not Buying It program is a prevention program that focuses on developing media literacy for 6th grade students.
The purpose of this program is to connect middle schoolers with highly motivated high school students in a mentor and mentee relationship under the supervision of faculty advisors. This program provides mentors and mentees with opportunities to further develop their confidence and ability to be successful both personally and academically. Typically we jumpstart Connections with a week long summer camp that includes team building activities designed to assist our mentors in getting to know the mentees and to provide opportunities for developing a connection. Last year due to the pandemic we were unable to host this camp but this year we were so grateful to have been able to once again give our students this wonderful opportunity! Some of the activities from our camp this year included a visit to Camp Bernie, a special message and meeting with two of Franklin Township Police Officers and a fun self-care day. During the school year students will meet twice a month to engage in fun and stimulating activities that continue to foster both their connections with one another as well as their leadership skills. To the right as well as on the following page you will find some pictures from this summer’s camp events.
Connections
A Leadership and Mentoring Program
Suicide Prevention Awareness Month is a time to share resources and stories in an effort to shed light on this highly taboo and stigmatized topic. September is a time to reach out to those affected by suicide, raise awareness and connect individuals with suicidal ideation to treatment services.

WHY IS NATIONAL SUICIDE PREVENTION MONTH IMPORTANT?

**It promotes awareness**

Suicide prevention organizations aim to decrease suicides by 20 percent over the next seven years. In order to do this, they’re making a conscious effort to talk about suicide — its warning signs, how to prevent it, how to discuss it, etc.— in school, at the workplace, and in politics.

**It starts a dialogue**

There’s a stigma connected to suicide, so too often it’s not talked about — and those who suffer from it feel they can’t discuss it. Suicide Prevention Month helps to destigmatize this mental illness and promote conversation.

**It initiates change**

Thanks to Suicide Prevention Month, approaches to suicide are beginning to change. For example, schools and workplaces are implementing new programs and even pop culture is acknowledging it. For example, the Netflix show “13 Reasons Why” portrays the severity of suicide, the struggles leading to this tragic decision, as well as how it affects those left behind. The Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention is using this platform to its advantage by turning the issues on the show into a national conversation.
Suicide Prevention Awareness Month

There are an average of 123 suicides each day in this country. It’s the tenth leading cause of death in America — the second leading for ages 25-34, and the third leading for ages 15-24. Here are some more statistics for you to ponder -

- 30% - the percentage increase in the rate of death by suicide in the U.S. between 2000 and 2016.
- 50% - the percentage increase in suicides among girls and women between 2000 and 2016.
- 10 - the ranking of suicide as the leading cause of death in the U.S.
- 47,511 - the number of Americans who died by suicide in 2019.
- 1.38 million - the number of suicide attempts in the U.S. in 2019.
- 13.93 - the age-adjusted suicide rate per 100,000 individuals.
- 3.63 - the number of times by which more men committed suicide than women in recent years.
- 69.38% - the percentage of white males who accounted for suicide deaths in 2019.
- 50.39% - the percentage of all suicides by firearms.
- 93% - the percentage of Americans surveyed who think suicide can be prevented.
Suicide Prevention Awareness

- Almost 1 in 5 students have talked about attempting suicide, and 1 in 10 have actually made a plan so *anytime* a child or adult makes a threat about suicide, either directly or indirectly, it needs to be taken seriously.
- People who talk about suicide, threaten suicide or call suicide hotlines are also 30 times more likely than average to kill themselves.
- 4 out of 5 teens who attempt suicide have given clear warning signs

Please take a moment to watch this video created by the Mayo Clinic - in it you will hear teens describing some common signs that indicate when a someone is considering suicide. It also provides encouragement for communicating directly and immediately for the support and safety of our students.
Suicide Prevention Awareness Month

Warning Signs can include...

- Lack of interest in previous extra curricular activities or in school as a whole
- Drug/Alcohol use
- Behavioral problems
- Withdrawal from friends
- Changes in sleeping and/or eating habits
- Neglect of personal hygiene
- Chronic complaints of stress
- Decreased concentration/attention
- Decline in grades
- Writing samples that suggest suicide
- Language that perceives that he/she is a burden
- Indication of a Plan
  - Actual statement of intent
    - Hints: “If something happens...
    - I won’t trouble you anymore
- Giving/Throwing away possessions
- Mood swings
- Expression of “bizarre” or unsettling thoughts

Suicide Warning Signs

These signs may mean someone is at risk for suicide. Risk is greater if a behavior is new or has increased and if it seems related to a painful event, loss, or change.

- Talking about wanting to die or to kill oneself.
- Looking for a way to kill oneself, such as searching online or buying a gun.
- Talking about feeling hopeless or having no reason to live.
- Talking about feeling trapped or in unbearable pain.
- Talking about being a burden to others.
- Increasing the use of alcohol or drugs.
- Acting anxious or agitated; behaving recklessly.
- Sleeping too little or too much.
- Withdrawing or feeling isolated.
- Showing rage or talking about seeking revenge.
- Displaying extreme mood swings.

Suicide Is Preventable.

Call the Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255).

With Help Comes Hope
Suicide Prevention - Dos & Don'ts

5 NO-NONSENSE TIPS TO HELP SOMEONE IN CRISIS

1. **Ask direct questions** - Even though it's hard, ask a person directly if they're thinking about suicide.

2. **Listen to their answers** - People with suicidal thoughts often feel alone, so be sure to let them know that you care deeply about what they have to say.

3. **Do a safety check** - If you're concerned for their well-being, try removing anything they could use to harm themselves, such as alcohol, drugs, medications, weapons, and even access to a car.

4. **Don't keep this a secret** - Let them know you'll help come up with a plan that involves telling a professional who can utilize the many services and resources available to help.

5. **Ensure they seek professional help** - Unless you work in the mental health industry, it's important to suggest they seek additional help from other people, such as a doctor, counselor, psychologist or social worker.
Procedure to refer a student for suspicion of suicidal ideation or self harm

- Send an email with the subject heading ‘URGENT CRISIS’ to the Student Assistance Coordinator and cc’ the appropriate grade level administrator, school counselor, and whenever applicable the CST member as well.

- It is extremely important that you remain with the student until you are able to make live contact with one of these personnel.

- Complete a SAC referral (on our website under the school counseling tab) and the SAC will be able to conduct an assessment as well as contact the child’s parent or guardian.

- If necessary, the student will be referred to our in-house mental health screening services or an appropriate outside agency.

- The SAC will follow up with the student to provide any additional support services that may be needed.
Crisis Resources for Suicide Prevention

If you or someone you know is in an emergency, call 911 immediately.

If you are in crisis or are experiencing difficult or suicidal thoughts, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline offers three ways for you to connect with a live, trained crisis counselor. You can call 1-800-273-8255. If any student is uncomfortable talking on the phone, they can also text NAMI to 741-741 or they can chat online at www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org - All of these are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

The 2nd Floor Youth Helpline serves all youth and young adults in New Jersey. Youth who call are assisted with their daily life challenges by professional staff and trained volunteers. Anonymity and confidentiality are assured except in life-threatening situations. Students can call OR TEXT 1-888-222-2228 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. www.2ndfloor.org
Suicide Prevention

Many adolescents do not know how to manage their extreme feelings and will often look for help! It's important for them to understand that suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem, and that suicidal behavior usually occurs with a mental health disorder that is treatable (like depression).

Incorporating consistent SEL activities that promote self-care & well-being in your classrooms will help students to learn how to regulate their emotions.

Self-Care Strategies For Resilience

While not a substitute for professional care, there are plenty of simple activities you can do to reduce stress, encourage wellness, and restore a sense of well-being during difficult times. You know yourself best. Do what works for you and don’t be afraid to try something new.

Here are a few self-care activities to help you take a step back, breathe, and focus on your well-being.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mind</th>
<th>Body</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Have a daily routine</td>
<td>• Walk, exercise, go outside if you can</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Set goals each day</td>
<td>• Set a sleep routine, giving yourself time to rest and restore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Make a gratitude list</td>
<td>• Practice meditation and yoga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Take breaks</td>
<td>• Take deep, slow breaths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Practice mindfulness</td>
<td>• Take a bath or shower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Read a book</td>
<td>• Eat something healthy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Develop a project, activity or new skill</td>
<td>• Drink a cup of tea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(e.g., painting, knitting, woodworking)</td>
<td>• Limit your caffeine and alcohol intake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Acknowledge something you did</td>
<td>• Put on your favorite song and dance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Schedule worry time</td>
<td>• Express your feelings</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Journal</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soul</th>
<th>Surroundings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Ask for help</td>
<td>• Create a “retreat” space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Donate to a cause</td>
<td>• Make your space comfortable and safe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Tell someone you love them</td>
<td>• Display something you like to look at</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Reach out to someone who may need you</td>
<td>• Watch your favorite movie or show – or something you’ve been meaning to see</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Follow “feel good” social media</td>
<td>• Join a virtual gatherings</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Set boundaries for yourself</td>
<td>• Write a poem or short story</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Share something special</td>
<td>• Connect with whatever inspires you</td>
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<td>• Connect with whatever inspires you</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Simple Actions You Can Take To Help Prevent Suicide

In the era of Covid-19, as we all try to protect our mental health and cope with uncertainty, it's more important than ever that we be there for each other and take steps to prevent suicide. You don’t have to be a mental health professional to make a difference. There are simple things we can all do to safeguard our mental health, and you don’t have to do it alone. Together, we #keepgoing.

Here are some actions you can take to help prevent suicide:

1. Learn how to care for your own mental health.
   Download our self-care guide at afsp.org/KeepGoing.

2. Have a #RealConvo with someone in your life.
   View our #RealConvo guides at afsp.org/RealConvo.

3. Reach out to your public officials to demand smart mental health legislation.
   Learn how to advocate and take action to prevent suicide at afsp.org/ActionCenter.

4. Bring suicide education and support programs to your school, workplace and community.
   Connect with your local chapter representative at afsp.org/Chapters.

5. Share the warning signs, and learn what research tells us about suicide.
   Learn more about the warning signs at afsp.org/Signs.

6. Add crisis resources to your phone, and encourage friends and family to do the same.
   Find a list of suicide prevention resources at afsp.org/Resources.

7. Connect suicide loss survivors to healing resources.
   Explore loss and healing resources at afsp.org/Loss.

Suicide Prevention

Encourage students to record a supportive video to upload to social media or to share in school. This option is easy & doesn’t cost any money, so anyone can do it. Simply ask students to record a 15-30 second video promising their friends to listen to anything they need to say. Be sure to use the hashtags #suicideispreventable #800273TALK #LETITOUT.

Share this video 'How to Help a Friend' with students in order to give them some direction on how to help a friend that they suspect is having a hard time.

Here are some more ways that you can promote awareness and prevent suicide from the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention.
More Resources for Suicide Prevention
If you or someone you know is in an emergency, call 911 immediately.

If you are interested in learning a bit more about how you can help, here are some resources worth checking out -

www.suicideispreventable.org

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

Have a #RealConvo
You don’t need special training to have an open, authentic conversation about mental health. Often, just talking about it can be the first important step in understanding someone and helping them get support or treatment if needed.

QPR Institute
In October

School Violence Awareness Week
(10/18 - 10/22)

UPCOMING EVENTS

WEEK OF RESPECT
WHAT ARE SOME WAYS YOUR SCHOOL IS PREVENTING HARASSMENT, INTIMIDATION AND BULLYING?
TAG @NEWJERSEYDOE TO SHARE YOUR WEEK OF RESPECT PROGRAMS OR ACTIVITIES

NATIONAL HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH
September 15 to October 15

(Celebrated from 9/15 - 10/15)

Students Against Violence Everywhere
SAVE

RED RIBBON WEEK
(10/25 - 10/29)