

*"The advice I'd give to somebody that's silently struggling is, you don't have to live that way. You don't have to struggle in silence. You can be un-silent. You can live well with a mental health condition, as long as you open up to somebody about it, because it's really important you share your experience with people so that you can get the help that you need." — Demi Lovato, Singer*

*"I found that with depression, one of the most important things you can realize is that you're not alone. You're not the first to go through it, you're not gonna be the last to go through it." — Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson*

*"The experience I have had is that once you start talking about [experiencing a mental health struggle], you realize that actually you're part of quite a big club." — Prince Harry*

December 4, 2020

Dear Parents/Guardians, Students and Staff,

In my November 9th letter, I focused specifically on the topic of mental health and how difficult it has been for all of us to manage through this pandemic. I appreciate the positive feedback that I have received regarding our "no homework" initiative (while we are closed for various upcoming holidays). But I also mentioned that our School Counseling Department offers many age-appropriate services to our families. With the winter months upon us, and mental health struggles becoming its own crisis, I want to make sure that you are aware that our School Counseling Department continues to provide support to our students and families virtually. In fact, the following are the various services that we provide, confidentially and **free of charge**, for specific age groups:

**Elementary-** Outreach Workers & Mental Health Initiative

**Middle School** - School Counselors & Mental Health Initiative

**High School** - School Counselors and The F.O.R.U.M.

- The Mental Health Initiative for Elementary & Middle Schools – This service has resumed providing support to kindergarten through grade 8 students and their families. Telehealth sessions are conducted utilizing Google Meets. Parents can access these services by contacting their child's counselor. **Spanish-speaking counselors are available.**
- Outreach Workers and School Counselors provide individual and group counseling to students regarding academic, personal/peer relationships, social-emotional and post-secondary planning. TPS Support Staff serve as advocates for students and collaborate with teachers, parents and administration to help students. In addition, when appropriate, will provide parents/guardians with referrals to outside agencies.
- The F.O.R.U.M. is for our teenaged students. The F.O.R.U.M. stands for Forging Opportunities for Reasoning, Understanding and Maturity. Through The F.O.R.U.M., we provide a wide array of services to Teaneck residents between the ages of 13 – 19 years old. The F.O.R.U.M. offers school based groups, individual, crisis intervention and family counseling. In addition, F.O.R.U.M. counselors provide referrals to local mental health resources and provide case management services to students and families. Students and their families can access The F.O.R.U.M. via their school counselor or by contacting Mr. Campestre, F.O.R.U.M. Coordinator ([ncampestre@teaneckschools.org](mailto:ncampestre@teaneckschools.org)).

- Counselor Google Classrooms - All School Counselors (grades 5-12) and Elementary Outreach Workers have created Google Classrooms to continue to provide support to their students. Classrooms include grade level content ranging from Mindfulness activities, motivational posts, academic guidance/support and college and career readiness information. Counselors are also hosting Google Meets on a variety of topics such as social emotional learning, peer relationships and academic support.

Please note that all Elementary Outreach Workers, School Counselors, and F.O.R.U.M. staff are available during school hours via Google Meets. High School Counselors and F.O.R.U.M. staff are available during after school hours via appointments. Our parents and students should email their counselor for more information.

For our staff, I encourage you to visit the State website:

<https://www.state.nj.us/treasury/pensions/hb-covid-resources.shtml>. The New Jersey Division of Pensions & Benefits (NJDPB) has created a COVID-specific resources page that compiles all of the various services available for members including behavioral health (e.g. a digital mental health solution available to members at no cost with one-on-one coaching and a personalized eight week program), and other wellness resources.

We all need to take better care of our mental health and I encourage everyone to take advantage of these valuable resources. Other beneficial options include exercising, eating healthy, watching a funny movie, calling an old friend, meditation, and taking a walk outside. Please continue to stay safe, wear a mask, and keep your mental health strong during these next few months.

We will get through this together and I hope to see you all back in our schools very soon.

Sincerely,

Dr. Christopher Irving, Superintendent of Schools