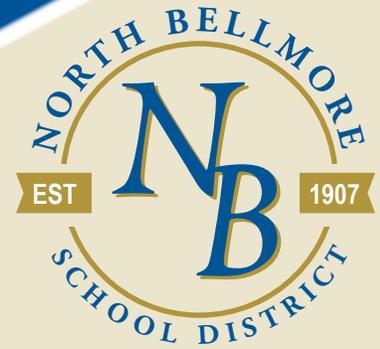


# THE BEACON

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## Mental Health: *A Crucial Part of* STUDENT WELLNESS

The North Bellmore School District recognizes its role in promoting positive mental health in all children. Optimal student learning and development occur in environments that support mental well-being and are free from stigma.

Personal health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and education on the mind-body connection is vital to helping students achieve that objective. Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction Janet Pollitt said that the district strives for a “culture of care” – a school climate where students feel accepted, safe and valued.

“Mental health is a crucial component of your overall health,” Ms. Pollitt said. “It is just as important as your physical and social health.”

New York was among the first states in the nation to implement mental health standards in schools, an area in which North Bellmore has long been a leader. Many initiatives met and exceeded the new requirements. With the release of the new guidelines, district leaders and mental health professionals

met to reassess the curriculum and made enhancements where necessary, including the addition of a school counselor.

The district’s Prevention Department includes a team of professionals, consisting of counselors, nurses, prevention specialists and social workers, who have been implementing a mental health and wellness curriculum through age-appropriate lessons for nearly three decades. They also work to identify students who may have emotional issues to provide proper intervention at an early age.

North Bellmore maintains partnerships with regional organizations such as the Mental Health Association of Nassau County and the Long Island Crisis Center. Teachers and staff have taken part in professional development opportunities so they can provide support to students, and the district has also hosted parent workshops. Ms. Pollitt added that it is important for children to realize they have many trusted adults they can turn to in a time of need, and that asking for help is a sign of strength.

### Mission Statement

Our mission is to inspire all students to be confident, passionate learners with the courage and skills to lead their lives with integrity, while contributing to our global community with creativity and compassion.

### Core Values

Communities and individuals thrive when the talents and abilities of all are valued and fostered.

Each individual is responsible for his or her choices and the impact they create.

There is no limit to human potential.

Honesty, integrity and trust are essential to sustaining meaningful partnerships.

All people want to learn and succeed.

A safe and healthy environment optimizes learning.

Human life is precious.



# PREVENTION DEPARTMENT

North Bellmore's Prevention Department was established nearly 30 years ago as a partnership between the district, the Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services and the Nassau County Department of Mental Health, Chemical Dependency and Developmental Disabilities Services. Prevention staff provide classroom lessons and presentations, facilitate activities and supervise service clubs.

Children who have opportunities for involvement in their school and community are more likely to have enhanced self-esteem and self-confidence, resulting in a decreased likelihood they will exhibit problem behaviors. The philosophy of the district is to start prevention at an early age to give students the skills they need to be mentally and physically well, socially responsible and empowered to solve conflict in creative and nonviolent ways.

Prevention Department programs are offered at each level, kindergarten through sixth grade. Programs include Friendship Matters, Internet Safety, Second Step, Steer Clear of Bullies, Too Good for Drugs, Too Good for Violence and more.

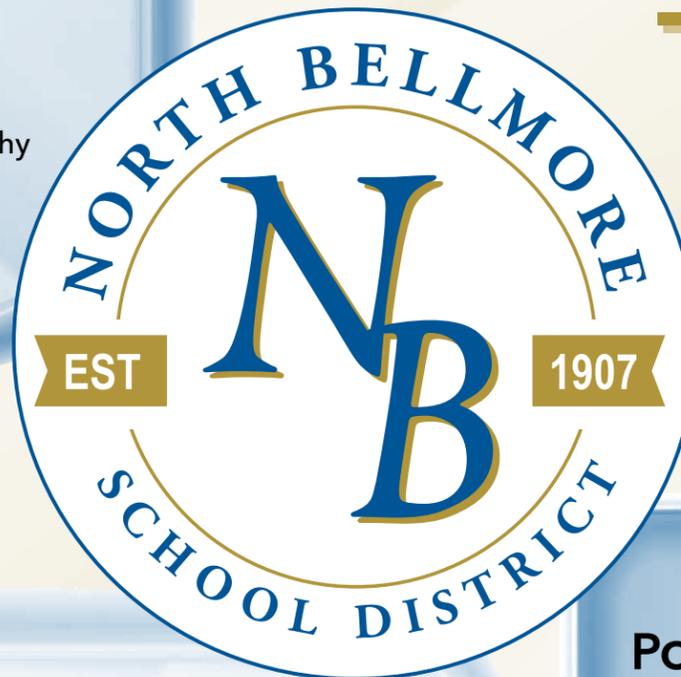
"Positive mental health allows children and young people to develop the resilience to cope and grow into well-rounded, healthy adults," Director of Prevention Jo-Ann Signorelli said. "In North Bellmore, we are proud to say that we have been teaching our children about mental health via our evidence-based social-emotional learning programs. Our Prevention Department utilizes various programs to educate our students on identifying feelings, empathy, coping strategies, social skills, trusted adults and a vast array of other topics that help promote mental wellness."

## SIGNS OF POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH:

- A sense of self-esteem and self-confidence.
- The ability to identify, express and regulate emotions.
- The ability to set and achieve goals.
- Recognition of one's creative skills.
- The ability to expand knowledge and skills.
- The ability to feel and show empathy for others.
- The ability to create and maintain satisfying relationships.

## POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH HELPS US:

- Realize our full potential.
- Cope with everyday stressors in school and life.
- Adapt to changes in our lives.
- Be meaningful members of our communities.
- Be more productive in work, school and our relationships.
- Create and maintain better friendships.



**Mental health is an incredibly important issue that we are tackling head-on. It's important to make sure all of our students have open access to support professionals when they need it.**

*—School Counselor James Duffy*



## MENTAL WELLNESS FACTS:

- According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness, half of all chronic mental illnesses begin by age 14.
- One in 10 young people experience a period of major depression.
- One in 25 Americans live with a serious mental illness.
- When students learn about mental health as an important aspect of overall health, there is an increased likelihood that they will be able to effectively recognize signs and symptoms in themselves and others.

## MAINTAINING POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH:

- Surrounding yourself with real friends.
- Connecting with other people.
- Being physically active.
- Helping other people.
- Getting enough sleep.
- Eating healthy.
- Developing healthy coping skills.
- Asking for help from a trusted adult.
- Getting professional help when you need it.

## Counselor Provides Enhanced Support for Students

An enhancement to the district's mental health and wellness support includes the addition of a school counselor. James Duffy works with fifth and sixth graders in the five elementary schools, facilitating classroom lessons on social, emotional and mental health topics.

In his role, Mr. Duffy is a trusted adult that students can turn to when they need someone to talk to, and this level of comfort is established through the connections he builds in the classrooms. He is trained to work with students individually, in small groups and with an entire class.

"The position of school counselor is unique because I get to support student mental health and wellness through classroom instruction, in addition to other supports," he said.

Mr. Duffy noted that North Bellmore is very proactive in providing students with mental health workshops, as elementary school serves as the foundation for the knowledge, skills and attitudes that are crucial for success in life. He has delivered lessons that involve bullying and conflict, challenging negative thoughts, decision-making, self-esteem, and social media and cyberbullying, among others, all of which give children tools to add to their mental health toolboxes.



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### JOHN G. DINKELMEYER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Sixth graders in the antibullying group focused on creating a school culture of caring through a literature-based approach. After attending an antibullying conference at Hofstra University in the fall, the students were inspired to spread a positive message to their peers. Under the direction of Mary Meyers from the district's Prevention Department, sixth graders visit kindergarten, first and second grade classes to read books about friendship and kindness. They are also planning to create a kindness mural.

### MARTIN AVENUE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

On Mindful Mondays, Principal Leyna Malone leads the school in a

calm classroom mindfulness practice during morning announcements. It sets the tone for the week. Sometimes students ask for extra moments during a hectic week, to which Ms. Malone happily obliges. The practice has been received positively by both students and staff.

### NEWBRIDGE ROAD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Teachers and students practice mindfulness every day and participate in movement and brain breaks. They utilize websites such as GoNoodle and Move To Learn. Books found in many rooms include the following titles: "A Handful of Quiet," "Breathe Like a Bear," "I Am Peace," "I Am Yoga" and "Yummy Yoga." With a health and wellness focus, the staff believes that teaching children how to recognize their own needs for emotional well-being is an important part of learning.

### PARK AVENUE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Project Wisdom, one of the oldest character-building programs in the nation, is being piloted at the school. It features a three-step approach with activities for the entire school community, classrooms and educators. The centerpiece is the "Words of Wisdom" messages delivered daily

that encourage students to do their best. Children keep reflection journals that help build character and social-emotional competencies. Teachers receive professional support and classroom resources.

### SAW MILL ROAD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Compassion was the theme in December as the Students Against Destructive Decisions club hosted a holiday toy drive. SADD Club members encouraged donations to support the Hance Family Foundation and Cohen Children's Medical Center. Students generously filled several boxes with toys to help children across Long Island.

### DISTRICTWIDE

The district hosted a Parent University workshop on youth mental health in October, presented by North Bellmore Prevention Department Director Jo Ann Signorelli and Long Island Crisis Center Director of Education Laura Campbell. Topics included youth mental health statistics, the new mental health state standards and how North Bellmore is implementing these programs, signs and symptoms of anxiety and depression, and self-care strategies and family resources for help.