

# Mental Health Initiative Update



Metuchen School District

May 12, 2026

Presented by:

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# Youth Mental Health

Suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death among people ages 10-14

50% of all lifetime mental illness begins by age 14

75% of all lifetime mental illness begins by age 25

1 in 6 youth (ages 6-17) experience a mental health disorder each year

1 in 6 children (ages 2-8) have a diagnosed mental, behavioral or developmental disorder

1 in 10 Young Adults (ages 18-25) experienced a serious mental illness

20% of US High School students had serious thoughts of suicide

40% of High School students reported persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness in the past year

The overall suicide rate increased by 35% since 1999

31% increase in mental health related emergency department visits

<https://nami.org/mhstats>  
<https://www.samhsa.gov/>  
<https://www.cdc.gov/childrensmentalhealth/data.html>



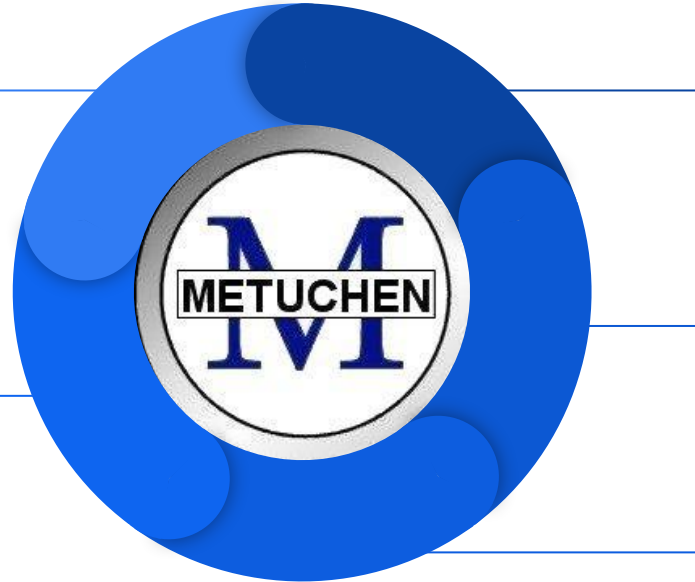
# Mental Health Referendum Components

## School Psychologists

Services expanded at all schools with two additional positions

## Behavioral Support

Increased support from Board Certified Behavior Analysts district wide



## Therapeutic Programs

Clinicians added at Campbell & Edgar and continued at MHS

## Academic Interventions

Reading Specialist  
Math Intervention services  
Increased Intervention services  
Individualized intervention plans  
Summer Institute programs

## Clerical Support

Part time secretary to increase efficiency and availability of support staff for direct services

# Initiative Goals

## Emotional Wellness → Academic Success

### Prevention

- Identify and intervene early
- Assist parents and school personnel in developing and implementing comprehensive strategies for wellness
- Implement best practices across settings
- Foster resiliency, problem solving and coping skills

### Education

- Develop awareness
- Promote acceptance
- Reduce mental health stigma
- Provide community resources
- Professional development
- Parent education
- Student education
- Building capacity of staff, students and parents
- Student skill development

### Support

- Students, families and staff
- Mental health services to students who wouldn't otherwise have access
- Counseling and behavioral services in an accessible, authentic setting
- Academic Interventions
- Facilitating transitions across settings and between service providers
- Addressing targeted student needs

# Elements of the Mental Health Initiative

## Tiered Interventions

## SEL Embedded Curriculum

## Character Education

### Instruction & Application

Explicit Instruction, Practice and Application

### Staff & Leadership

Professional Development, Support, High Quality Resources

### Community & Partners

Engagement, Partnerships, Collaboration

### Student Empowerment

Student Leadership and Peer Mentoring activities focused on building resilience and peer support networks.

### Safety & Awareness

Comprehensive Suicide Awareness Program designed for early identification and crisis intervention.

# Tiered Interventions

## Tier 1- UNIVERSAL SUPPORT

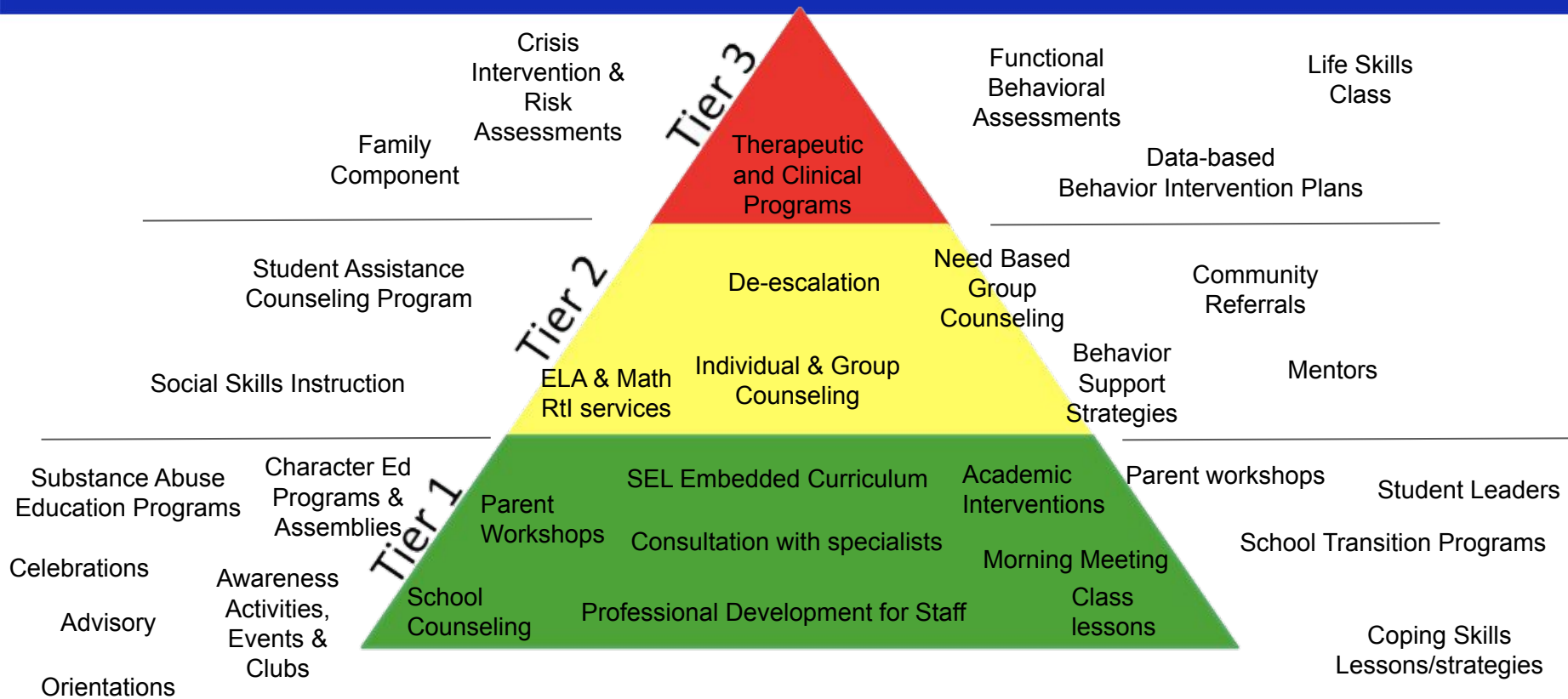
Research based core curriculum, programs and instructional strategies  
Explicit instruction with practice and feedback  
Differentiation and enrichment  
Positive behavioral supports  
Culturally responsive practices  
Student support services

## Tier 2- TARGETED, SMALL GROUP INTERVENTIONS (approx 10-15% of student population)

Research based interventions, supplemental programs and specific strategies

## Tier 3- INTENSIVE INTERVENTIONS (approx 5% of student population)

Increased frequency, duration and intensity of interventions and services  
Highly specialized and targeted  
Individualized and data driven



**District Wide Tiered Interventions and Supports: Beyond Academics**



# SEL Embedded into Curriculum

## Core Integration

Aligned with NJDOE and CASEL definitions, competencies, and sub-competencies. Written directly into Curriculum Guides.

### Instructional Approaches

- Explicit Lessons in target competencies
- Integrate with Academic Content
- Embedded in pedagogical practices and routines

### Problem Solving Framework

#### Common Framework for Inquiry-Based Research:

- Select a Focus
- Gather Information
- Brainstorm and Plan
- Act and Observe
- Reflect

### Sustainability

Supported through comprehensive district-wide touchpoints:

- New Teacher Orientation & Academy
- In-Service Days
- Faculty & Department Meetings
- Professional Development
- District Goal Alignment

## Character Ed Core Skills

- SEL Competencies
  - Responsible Decision making
  - Social Awareness
  - Relationship Skills
  - Self Awareness
  - Self Management
- Monthly Character Traits
- Prevention & Resiliency
- Monthly Wellness Focus
- Schoolwide touchstones: (i.e., PRIDE-Purpose, Respect, Integrity, Diversity, Empathy)

## Explicit Instruction

- Assemblies & guest speakers
- Schoolwide Class Meetings
- Morning Meeting lessons
- Advisory lessons
- Class lessons & presentations
- Daily announcements that educate, inspire & challenge
- Daily Words of Wisdom with calls to action
- Why Try Resiliency lessons
- Lifelines lessons
- Visual representations (i.e. posters, infographics)

## Practice and Application

- Coping skills/strategies
- Morning meeting activities
- Lunchtime activities & events
- Restorative practices
- Bright bulldog certificates
- Paws up certificates
- PRIDE Faculty in Service and Heart (FISH) award
- PRIDE Student of the month
- Observances & celebrations focused on belonging, inclusion, acceptance, culture and joy
- Interactive bulletin boards

## Staff Professional Development

- New Teacher Academy sessions on SEL & Mental Health
- Supporting minds and shaping behavior with heart & compassion presentation for paraprofessionals
- Mental health and suicide prevention training for all staff
- Tiered supports for Behavior by consultant
- Substance abuse and awareness training for certified staff
- Staff
- BCBA staff trainings
- RBT training
- Safety Care de-escalation training
- Supporting students with challenges for transportation staff
- Staff wellness activities at In Service

## High Quality Resources

- Rutgers UBHC
- Anti-Defamation League
- No Place for Hate
- Random Acts of Kindness Foundation
- Why Try: Teaching the Skills of Resiliency
- Lifelines Trilogy
- Special Olympics of NJ
- CASEL
- NJDOE
- Wingman
- Texts, Read-alouds and videos
- Evidence Based

## Leadership Support

- Mental Health Leadership Team (Administrators, Clinical Directors, Community Experts and Parent Reps)
  - Steering
  - Advisory
  - Collaboration
- School and district student support teams
- District Wellness Committee
- District goal alignment
- Whole Child alignment
- Identified district priority

## Family & Community Engagement and Partnership

- Mental health awareness and suicide prevention presentation for parents
- Supports in Metuchen presentation for parents
- SEPAC Student Strategies for Success
- Mental Health awareness and education tips for parents
- Community expert representation on mental health leadership team & memorialization committee

## Multidisciplinary Collaboration

- Hot Topic Forums for Collaborative Problem Solving & Challenging Behaviors
- Rutgers Public School Collaborative Interdistrict Conference on Challenging Behavior
- Partnerships with Mental Health Providers (RU-UBHC, Wellspring)
- SAC, CST, Counselors & Clinicians co-planning lessons
- Staff and student advisory
- Parent partnerships/advisory
- Intervention teams (RtI, 504, I&RS)

## Student Leadership and Peer Mentoring

- Bulldog Buddies
- Mental Health Ambassadors-Wingman
- Peer Leadership
- Unified PE & Club
- Student orientation leaders
- Student Advisories
- Captain's Council for Athletics
- Student outreach fundraising and advocacy
- Coaches and co-curricular club advisors promote kindness, inclusivity and empathy through student led actions

# Comprehensive Suicide Awareness Program

## Lifelines Implementation

### Lifelines Trilogy

Comprehensive approach covering Prevention, Intervention, and Postvention strategies district-wide.

### Prevention Lessons (Grades 6, 9, 11)

Targeted health class sessions focusing on warning signs, trusted adults, and peer support.

### Training & Support

- ALL staff training on warning signs and support strategies
- Parent training on Lifelines, awareness, and support

### Curriculum Focus Areas

- Identifying warning signs
- Identifying trusted adults
- Support for self and friends
- Problem solving skills

### Planning

- Traumatic Event Plan revision
- Memorialization Committee

# Every Moment Matters

## 2025-2026 Highlights

### P-12 Mental Health Support

Realignment planning to ensure district-wide coverage.

### Rutgers UBHC Partnership

Expanded partnership to serve all schools in the district.

### New School Counseling Program at Moss

#### Lunch Bunch (Small Groups)

- Coping Skills
- Social Skills
- Worry & Stress Management
- Friendship Building

#### Classroom Lessons

- Respect
- Identifying Emotions
- Growth Mindset
- Responsibility

#### Ongoing Support

- Monthly Newsletters
- Minute Meetings
- Kindness Week
- Parent Resources
- Targeted Interventions

# Every Moment Matters

## 2025-2026 Highlights

### Student Initiatives & Support

#### Awareness

- Interactive boards: Winter Blues, Social Media, Trusted Adults
- Lunch Table events: “Think Before you Post” & Kindness table
- Mental health awareness events: Recess Chalk, Affirmation Station

#### Specialized Support

- Therapy Dog visits
- Needs based groups: From Classmates to Connections, Family Changes
- Feelings & Friendship, Lunch Bunch, Girl’s Group
- New Zen Dens for emotional regulation

#### Engagement

- Art as self expression painting event with Art NHS
- Strategies for Student Success: Executive functioning workshop (SEPAC)
- Mental Health Ambassadors
- Daily wellness practice calendars

# *Every Moment Matters*

## 2025-2026 Highlights

### Staff & District Initiatives

#### Professional Development

Evidence-based interventions beyond academics, aligned to NJTSS framework by Magnolia Group for:

- P-5 instructional staff
- Child Study Team and Counselors
- Elementary special education teachers

#### Community & Partnerships

- Updated resources for community referrals and partnerships
- Superintendent Hot Topic Forums on challenging behavior and collaborative problem solving

#### Collaborations & Presentations

- Metuchen presentation at Rutgers Public School Interdistrict Collaborative
- Panelists for Middlesex County Behavioral Health Partnership: Social Media & Mental Health

#### Committees

- New Memorialization Committee
- District Wellness Committee

# Every Moment Matters

## Next Steps

### Focus Areas

#### Student Wellbeing

- Fostering kindness and empathy
- Develop coping and problem solving skills
- Emotional regulation strategies

#### Engagement

- Family engagement strategies
- Community partnerships
- Support realignment of student grades

*Sincere thanks and appreciation to all of those contributing to and supporting this important initiative.  
It takes a Boro!*