

The District recently hosted a School Safety Information Forum which addressed a host of topics, questions, and concerns from our parents and other District stakeholders. The forum was planned by the District's **Safety Committee**, which is a subcommittee of the District's **Health Advisory Committee** and was created in response to the **Schools Against Violence in Education Act (SAVE)** legislation that was signed into law in July 2000 to promote a safer and more effective learning environment within New York State schools. The Safety subcommittee is charged specifically with addressing the safety of physical buildings and developing the District's safety plans. This subcommittee is comprised of representatives from various backgrounds and experiences, including educators, administrators, law enforcement personnel, safety experts, and parents. The forum generated passionate discussion around a variety of topics and resulted in several follow-up questions being submitted via email. Below are answers to the various questions asked.

Building Access Security

How are visitors identified and cleared for building access?

Buzzer systems equipped with video cameras at the entrances to all of our buildings enable monitors to check the identification of visitors prior to unlocking doors and granting entrance. The IDs of all visitors are checked (unless the monitor knows the individual by both sight and name). Door monitors and office staff are also provided with a physical list of individuals who should not be permitted access or are not allowed to pick up students. The pros and cons of visitor management systems (technology that allows various levels of screening and tracking of visitors to the schools) are also being explored. The possible selection and purchase of such a system in the future would be done in consultation with our safety experts and the Board of Education.

School Bus Safety

What safety devices and discipline supports are available on our buses?

All 65 school buses are equipped with cameras that assist in the prevention of disciplinary issues and can be used for investigating instances of bad behavior. The three school cars and the four Suburbans that are used to transport students do not have cameras, as the vehicle sizes allow the driver to easily monitor behavior. Bus monitors are currently available on buses transporting special needs students, and are temporarily assigned to other routes if requested by a principal to address specific behavior issues. School buses are also equipped with two-way radios and safety features such as seatbelts, shatterproof glass, high-back seats, and a variety of other options.

Surveillance

Can we utilize additional security cameras inside and outside of the school buildings?

Security cameras are recognized as effective deterrents to bad decisions, as well as tools that can help expedite disciplinary

investigations. We currently utilize cameras in select locations and acknowledge that additional placements are worthy of consideration. We have recently entered into a contract with a professional safety firm to complete a comprehensive threat assessment of all the District's facilities. These experts will make recommendations on the use of cameras (and other safety devices), advise on their placement, and identify the type of cameras/devices needed. Funding to implement a comprehensive safety solution is available through our SMART Bond funds.

Vaping

Are vape-detection devices at the Middle School and High School being considered?

These devices are relatively new and sufficient research on their effectiveness is not yet available. We have heard initial reports that the devices have limited range and therefore detection can be easily avoided, so we have decided to wait to get more feedback from schools that are currently trying them. In the meantime, there are cameras placed outside of select restrooms, which have proven useful in helping investigate reports of vaping.

Health and Physical Education classes are also being used to deliver prevention education. The value of peer-to-peer influence on vaping prevention is also clear. Our students are currently producing public service announcements for NPZ and the High School radio station. A student-directed documentary is also in production.

Anonymous Reporting

Are the High School and Middle School considering an anonymous reporting system?

Yes, the District has already selected and purchased a program for anonymous reporting. The work to launch the system is currently under way, and the system should be fully implemented by the end of the school year or the Fall of 2019.



Mental Health

Why are there are no mental health professionals on the subcommittee? Isn't mental health an important part of our approach to creating safe schools?

Yes, mental health is absolutely a part of the District's approach to creating safe schools; however, it is not a part of the Safety subcommittee's charge, which is focused on physical building security. Our Multi-Disciplinary Mental Health Standards Implementation Team, which includes professionals with expertise in the areas of health and mental health, is helping the District create the curriculum and implement the standards for addressing the mental health component in our schools.

What are some of the mental health supports currently available?

The Board of Education and administration have demonstrated a strong commitment to mental health. Ongoing work focuses on ensuring our curriculum not only focuses on academics, but also addresses what it looks like to be healthy in body and mind. Some of the important work that is being done includes:

- Social workers and psychologists are available in each of our four school buildings and guidance counselors are available in Grades 6-12.
- Students have convenient access to mental health supports through the Astor Mental Health Clinic located at our High School.
- Our staff receives professional development training on recognizing the signs of students at risk.
- The District wrote and was awarded a federal Project Serve grant to provide support to students who are transitioning back into the school setting after hospitalization or a traumatic event. Academic supports for the student to catch up on missed work are provided, as well as an opportunity for the student to form a one-on-one relationship with a teacher that can be valuable in the transition.
- An audit of our school counseling program was recently conducted to address the increasing needs of our students and help guide us in revamping services to best meet the new NYS Guidance Standards, which go into effect on July 1, 2019.
- Student Support teams that include our psychologists, social workers, guidance counselors, and coordinators of student support services in each building collaborate on ways to incorporate standards for social-emotional wellbeing. These professionals will be instrumental in implementing the curriculum developed by the Multi-Disciplinary Mental Health Standards Implementation Team.

What role does the Multi-Disciplinary Mental Health Standards Implementation Team play in addressing mental health?

The New York State Education Department recognizes the importance of a healthy mind as well as a healthy body. Health Education Standards, which include mental health, have been developed and schools have been charged with implementing curriculum that focuses on a continuum of wellbeing (emotional, mental, and physical health).

The goal is to enact a shift in thinking that cultivates good mental health before there is a need to be reactive. Removing the stigma related to mental health, providing students with the skills needed to obtain and maintain good health/mental health, and empowering them with an understanding of issues and treatments so they can seek support when needed is key to fostering a positive quality of life.

Our Multi-Disciplinary Mental Health Standards Implementation Team was established to help us use research-based practices and materials to achieve this goal. The team, which is facilitated by Deputy Superintendent Michelle Martoni, includes an adolescent psychiatrist and a physician, along with social workers, psychologists, guidance counselors, and teachers. The team has helped to develop the District's mental health curriculum, as well as create a toolkit/network of community and school resources that can be accessed to address mental health needs. Once fully in place, this toolkit will be made available to parents and the community via the website and will include resources and materials to support good mental health.

Community Involvement

How can I get involved on the District's Health Advisory Committee?

Members of the Health Advisory Committee are appointed to two-year terms by the Board of Education. Seats on the committee are structured to include representatives from specific school community groups, including students. Vacancies are announced publicly, and candidates interested in being appointed should respond to those announcements by submitting their interest to the Board of Education for consideration.