

Sample Discretionary Policy*

**Sample discretionary policies compiled and distributed by NJSBA are not required for compliance with state and federal law. The practices described may be amended to reflect your district's/school's practices. Discretionary policies should not be adopted without district revisions and consultation with your board attorney.*

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

The Board of Education believes a school climate that is safe and secure and that promotes positive mental health and wellbeing for students and staff supports student achievement. Social and emotional learning (SEL) and character education is a process through which children and adults develop the fundamental skills for life effectiveness. Teaching these skills will enhance the mental health and wellbeing of the students by enabling them to manage their behavior, develop positive relationships, and work effectively and ethically. The board believes that social and emotional learning (SEL) and character education strengthens social competencies that will empower students to connect across race, class, culture, language, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, learning needs and age.

The Board directs the chief school administrator to integrate into all aspects of the educational program, social and emotional learning (SEL) and character education for the purpose of:

- A. Promoting positive mental health and wellbeing in all staff and students;
- B. Enabling students, staff and the school community to understand, care about and act on core ethical values such as respect, justice, civic virtue and citizenship, and responsibility for self and others;
- C. Increasing understanding and awareness of common mental health issues;
- D. Alerting staff to early warning signs of poor mental health and wellbeing;
- E. Providing support to staff working with young people with mental health and wellbeing issues;
- F. Providing support to students suffering with mental health issues including but not limited to anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation, trauma, long-term physical illness, loss and mental illness;
- G. Providing support to the peers and parents/guardians of students suffering with mental health issues.

Social and Emotional Competencies

The program shall be aligned with the the national standards from the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL). The Social and Emotional Competencies are as follows:

- A. Self-awareness
 - 1. Recognize one's feelings and thoughts;
 - 2. Recognize the impact of one's feelings and thoughts on one's own behavior;
 - 3. Recognize one's personal traits, strengths and limitations;
 - 4. Recognize the importance of self-confidence in handling daily tasks and challenges;
- B. Self Management
 - 1. Understand and practice strategies for managing one's own emotions, thoughts and behaviors;

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2. Recognize the skills needed to establish and achieve personal and educational goals;
3. Identify and apply ways to persevere or overcome barriers through alternative methods to achieve one's goals;

C. Social awareness

1. Recognize and identify the thoughts, feelings and perspectives of others;
2. Demonstrate an awareness of the differences among individuals, groups and others' cultural backgrounds;
3. Demonstrate an understanding of the need for mutual respect when viewpoints differ;
4. Demonstrate an awareness of the expectations for social interactions in a variety of settings;

D. Responsible decision-making

1. Develop, implement and model effective problem solving and critical thinking skills;
2. Identify the consequences associated with one's actions in order to make constructive choices;
3. Evaluate personal, ethical, safety and civic impact of decisions;

E. Relationship skills

1. Establish and maintain healthy relationships;
2. Utilize positive communication and social skills to interact effectively with others;
3. Identify ways to resist inappropriate social pressure;
4. Demonstrate the ability to prevent and resolve interpersonal conflicts in constructive ways;
5. Identify who, when, where, or how to seek help for oneself or others when needed.

Curriculum

In accordance with law (P.L. 2019, c. 222 and N.J.S.A. 18A:35-4.39), the district health education program for students in grades kindergarten through 12 shall cover the multiple dimensions of health by including mental health and the relation of physical and mental health so as to enhance student understanding, attitudes, and behaviors that promote health, well-being, and human dignity. The instruction in mental health shall be adapted to the age and understanding of the students and shall be incorporated as part of the district's implementation of the New Jersey Student Learning Standards in Comprehensive Health and Physical Education (see: 6142.4 Health and Physical Education). The instruction shall include, as appropriate, information on substance abuse (see: 5131.6 Substance Abuse).

Working with Parents/Guardians

The board recognizes the important role parents/guardians and caregivers have in promoting and supporting the mental health and wellbeing of their children, and in particular supporting children who do have mental health needs. Teaching staff members shall emphasize as part of parent/teacher conferences the importance of positive mental health for learning.

It is critical that parents/guardians and caregivers share information regarding their concerns about their child's mental health with the school so that measures to support their child may be developed and implemented as early as possible. Parents/guardians shall be encouraged to inform staff of any mental health needs their child has and any issues that they think might have an impact on their child's mental health and wellbeing. All information will be treated in confidence.

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To support parents/guardians and caregivers:

- A. Activities, such as workshops and information sessions, may be offered to inform parents/guardians and caregivers on recognizing and responding to mental health issues, ways to promote positive mental health, social and emotional learning (SEL) and character education, the Social and Emotional Competencies and other related topics;
- B. Information shall be available on the school and district websites on mental health issues, community programs on wellbeing, internet resources for information and services;
- C. Procedures for reporting issues and the contact information of the staff member that parents/guardians and staff members may talk to if they have concerns about a student shall be posted on the district and school website.

Staff Development and Training

All staff will receive regular training on recognizing and responding to mental health issues as part of the district safety training. School staff shall be alert for warning signs which indicate a student is experiencing mental health or emotional wellbeing issues. These warning signs should always be taken seriously and staff observing any of these warning signs shall communicate their concerns to the school counselor and the school nurse. Possible warning signs that a staff member may notice include but are not limited to:

- A. Changes in eating/sleeping habits;
- B. A student becoming socially withdrawn;
- C. Changes in a student's activity and mood;
- D. A student talking or joking about self-harm or suicide;
- E. A student expressing feelings of failure, uselessness or loss of hope;
- F. A student reporting repeated physical pain or nausea with no evident cause;
- G. Falling grades;
- H. Substance abuse;
- I. Physical signs of harm that are repeated or appear non-accidental;
- J. An increase in lateness or absenteeism.

Teaching staff members shall be given opportunities for professional development on how to integrate the Social and Emotional Competencies into their classroom practices. Teaching staff members may view the learning modules, "Social and Emotional Competencies for School, Work, and Life," provided through a collaborative effort by the New Jersey Department of Education, the Mid-Atlantic Comprehensive Center at WestEd, and the Center on Great Teachers and Leaders at the American Institutes for Research.

In addition to the NJDOE SEL Modules for Educators, other learning opportunities may be provided and approved. Professional development opportunities on mental health and wellbeing, social and emotional learning (SEL) and character education, and the Social and Emotional Competencies for School, Work, and Life shall be incorporated into the district and school-level professional development plans (see: 4131/4131.1 Staff Development, Inservice Education).

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING (continued)School Response

- A. Parents/guardians, caregivers and staff who observe warning signs or have a concern that the student is having mental health issues shall communicate their concerns to the school counselor and the school nurse;
- B. When a concern has been raised, the school counselor will:
 - 1. Contact parents/guardians and caregivers and meet with them;
 - 2. Involve parents/guardians and caregivers in their children's interventions (unless doing so would threaten the child's health, wellbeing or safety);
 - 3. Offer information to take away and places to seek further information;
 - 4. Be available for follow up calls;
 - 5. Make a record of the meeting;
 - 6. With the involvement of parents/guardians and/or caregivers, develop, as deemed necessary and appropriate by the school counselor, a mental health individual care plan that details any support measures that will be implemented;
 - 7. Discuss how the parents/guardians and caregivers can support their child;
 - 8. Keep parents/guardians and caregivers up to date and fully informed of decisions about the support and interventions provided;
- C. Parents/guardians and caregivers shall be informed by the school counselor if their child is at risk of danger to self or others;
- D. Parents/guardians and caregivers shall be provided with referrals to access mental health and other services for their child, where appropriate;
- E. Parents/guardians and caregivers shall be provided with referrals to access mental health and other services for their own mental health needs, where appropriate.

In the event that the parent/guardian and/or caregiver does not cooperate and refuses to access services for the student, the principal shall notify the Department of Child Protection and Permanency (DCP&P) when the failure to cooperate constitutes child abuse or neglect.

Community Awareness

The chief school administrator his or her designees shall ensure that students, parents/guardians and the community are informed regarding the district's social and emotional learning (SEL) and character education programs and other activities that promote mental health and wellbeing and shall be encouraged to become involved. The district shall provide the coordination, technical assistance, and other support necessary to assist and build the capacity of all participating schools within district in planning and implementing effective parent, family and community involvement in mental health and wellbeing activities and social and emotional learning (SEL) and character education to improve school climate. In providing coordination, technical assistance, and other support, the chief school administrator or his or her designee may obtain meaningful consultation with mental health professionals, employers, business leaders, and philanthropic organizations, or individuals with expertise in social and emotional learning (SEL) and character education and/or effectively engaging students, parents/guardians and the community in education.

Resources

School-community collaboration is critical in order to provide the full continuum of mental health services. Meeting the full continuum of student needs is also dependent on collaboration between the district schools and community mental health providers. The chief school administrator and/or his or her designee shall seek to

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develop positive working relationships with community agencies, including but not limited to, police authorities, fire departments, New Jersey Division of Child Protection and Permanency (DCP&P), emergency room and/or squad, other school districts, and all other agencies providing services to district pupils (see board policy 1410 Local Units).

The school-employed mental health professionals (e.g. school counselor, social worker, school nurse) shall develop a list of community providers that offer supplementary or intensive services that go beyond school capacities including but not limited to counseling agencies, mental health facilities, drug and alcohol treatment programs, crisis intervention services and medical services. Services provided in school shall be appropriate to the learning context and services that are provided after school hours shall be appropriately linked to and supported in the school setting. Partnerships shall be coordinated by a school-employed mental health professionals. When possible partnerships shall be defined by a clear memorandum of understanding.

Adopted: March 23, 2021

Key Words

Mental Health, Social and Emotional Learning, SEL, Character Education,

Legal References: N.J.S.A. 18A:11-1 General mandatory powers and duties
N.J.S.A. 18A:35-4.39 Health curriculum to include instruction on mental health
N.J.S.A. 18A:54-20 Powers of board (county vocational schools)
N.J.A.C. 6A:16-1.1 et seq. Programs to support student development

Possible

Cross References: *1000/1010 Concepts and roles in community relations; goals and objectives
1210 Community organizations
*1410 Local units
*4131/4131.1 Staff Development, Inservice Education
*5131.1 Harassment, intimidation and bullying
*5131.6 Drugs, alcohol, tobacco (substance abuse)
*5141 Health
*5141.4 Missing, abused and neglected children
5141.6 Crisis intervention/suicide
*5145.7 Gender identity and expression
*6142.4 Health and Physical Education
*6162.4 Community resources
*6164.1 Intervention and referral
*6164.2 Guidance Services
*6164.4 Child study team

*Indicates policy is included in the Critical Policy Reference Manual.

Resources:

(New Jersey Department of Education at:

<https://www.state.nj.us/education/students/safety/sandp/sel/SELCompetencies.pdf>, August 2017)

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) at: <https://casel.org/sel-framework/>

NJDOE SEL Modules for Educators, "Social and Emotional Competencies for School, Work, and Life," at:

<https://www.nj.gov/education/students/safety/sandp/sel/>

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National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) School-Based Mental Health Services: *Improving Student Learning and Well-Being*, at:

<https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/mental-health/school-psychology-and-mental-health/school-based-mental-health-services>