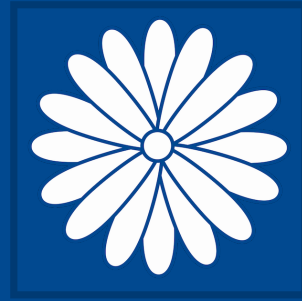


NEA Rhode Island Statement of Values on Mental Health in Public Schools



President's Statement



We hear with greater frequency in the news and directly from our members that more and more students are coming to school with burdens that weigh heavy on their minds and hinder classroom learning.

In November 2018, NEARI held a Mental Health Summit attended by classroom educators and education support professionals who came together to train with mental health professionals and learn how to create a safe, inclusive learning environment for our students.

Summit workshops centered on building communication with students, suicide prevention and intervention, self-care strategies, and understanding how our students are impacted by trauma.

With these increasing conversations, NEARI is sounding the alarm. More must be done to address the mental health of our students with an integrated approach in order to serve the whole child in a compassionate school setting.

We are committed to advocating for more mental health resources and equipping our members with the tools and knowledge to support all students.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Lawrence E. Purtill".

LAWRENCE E. PURTILL

President, NEA Rhode Island

Introduction

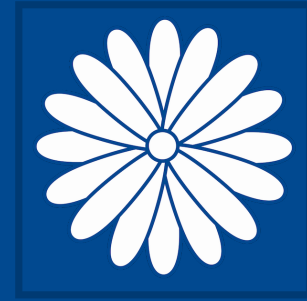
NEARI believes that we are in the midst of a mental health crisis. Our students need us to respond, and to respond quickly and effectively. While our public schools are incorporating many successful strategies to meet children's social and emotional needs, more resources, support, and consistency is desperately needed.

In November of 2018, NEARI hosted a Mental Health Summit with hundreds of educators and members. At that event, we collectively identified the areas of need to support mental health for Rhode Island students. A smaller committee then met and put together this final document. It is our hope that with community partners we can use these recommendations to guide mental health advocacy for our students on the state and local level. They are counting on us.



“*As a school-based social worker, I have noticed an increased presence of anxiety, behavioral health issues and depression in students at younger ages.*”

Whole School Whole Child



- Schools should embrace an open-door policy. There should be trained adults and space available anytime, not just by appointment, to ensure that students have access to support when they need it. A school-based mental health professional should be available at all times.
- At the beginning of each school year, every school building should gather educators with the school-based mental health professional and other support staff to communicate and prioritize students' mental health needs. Everyone in the building should understand the Crisis Response Plan and threat assessments.
- School districts should support more student-led and peer support groups. Districts should also create support groups for school staff and administration in order to provide space for self care.
- Every district should have a social and emotional learning coordinator on staff for the district.
- Additional staff are needed for guidance and counseling to build strong relationships with students.
- We must continue to develop and support preventive activities that engage students and help them build connections, such as clubs, sports, team activities.

Services

More mental health support for educators and students.

- Our public schools need more mental health support personnel including social workers, psychologists, counselors. They are necessary to meet the student need in our schools.
- We must advocate for increased available beds for emergency health care and hospitals. Anytime a student receives mental health care, re-entry collaboration communications with the school is critical.
- Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) should be made available to all school district employees.
- Students need access to outpatient and inpatient services regardless of their insurance coverage or ability to pay.



“Today’s children and teens are under tremendous pressure and as a result the number of students experiencing mental health problems is rapidly increasing.”

Services

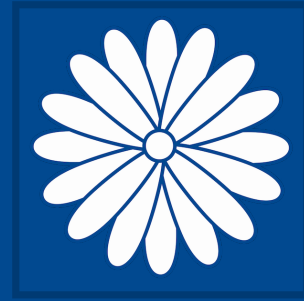
More mental health support for educators, school staff, and students.

- Local unions are encouraged to model good practices and ensure that sick leave in Collective Bargaining Agreements cover leave to care for mental health.
- Coordination and additional mental health services at schools including referrals and advisory counseling are critical.
- Many of our districts have limited funds and more funding is needed to increase mental health support staff in schools, such as psychologists, guidance counselors, and social workers.
- Uplift the school employees and ensure best-practice models are inclusive of adults.



Having more mental health support would allow for us to possibly do more prevention.

Curriculum & Policy



- Physical education should be required every quarter or semester for students.
- Educators must be given the flexibility to incorporate mental health topics into other subject areas.
- Mental health curriculum should be implemented earlier for students, preferably in middle school.
- Health education should be required every year.
- Educators should have access to a variety of research-based, Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) curriculum and best practices.
- SEL should be prioritized and more time spent on SEL opportunities. SEL should be embedded in the culture of every public schools.
- School Committee strategic plans should include mental health and how to address this need for students.
- Every School District should embrace Restorative Practices and appropriately train staff.

Training

More training for school staff, families, caregivers and community members.

- Training around proactive relationship building for adults in education - every student should have access to a trusted adult, primary prevention. Systems such as the Connections Survey should be utilized to support this goal.
- Additional funding is needed for training and increased mental health support staff in our schools.
- Align training with the goal of trauma-informed, compassionate schools.



The mental health and wellbeing of educators is essential to their teaching and students' learning.

Training

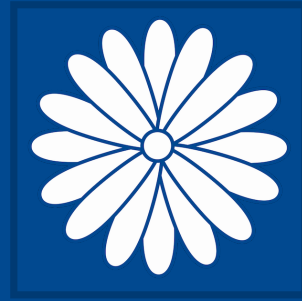
More training for school personnel, parents and community members.

- Professional development should be offered regularly by RIDE to educators on topics such as Mental Health First Aid, Supporting Transgender Students, Trauma-Informed Schools, Risk Assessment and Social and Emotional Learning.
- Districts should approve educators to attend these professional development opportunities. Pre-certification programs should include these topics. RIDE should collaboratively work with state and community agencies to provide educators on a variety of topics.



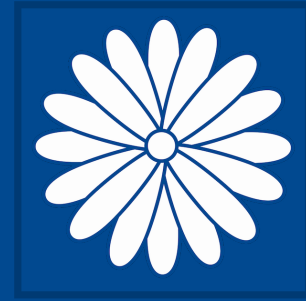
I am assessing for suicidality almost on a weekly basis, making multiple DCYF calls, seeing 30 to 35 kids a week for individual or group counseling.

Things You Can Do



- Join the Mental Health Summit planning committee so it is more likely to become an annual event.
- Share with your school committee.
- Host a community conversation on the importance of mental health.
- Share this document with someone who has not yet read it.
- Investigate the policies at your school. Are they aligned with a compassionate school program?
- Meet with your legislators to keep them updated on the importance of mental health in our schools. Find your legislators at this website: vote.sos.ri.gov/.
- Become familiar with the newly-passed law requiring school districts to establish threat assessment teams in the interest of school safety. Teams would implement policy to identify safety concerns for both prevention and intervention and include procedures for referrals to community services or health care providers for evaluation or treatment when appropriate. You can learn more here: bit.ly/RIGA5538.

About NEARI



The National Education Association Rhode Island (NEARI) is a union and professional organization with a proud history of serving Rhode Island. Since its inception in 1845, our members have been at the center of every struggle to advance the finest of American dreams: the promise of a quality public education for every child. One in every 100 Rhode Islanders is a member - chances are, you know us already!

Our organization is 12,000 members strong; we are classroom teachers, education support professionals, higher education faculty, graduate students, and staff, municipal and state workers, and retirees. We are affiliated with the three million members of the National Education Association (NEA), America's oldest and largest organization, and RI AFL-CIO.

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*Great Public Schools
for Every Student*





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