

JOHN F. KENNEDY HIGH SCHOOL

1901 RANDOLPH ROAD, SILVER SPRING, MD 20902

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OFFICE OF THE PRINCIPAL

March 11, 2018

Dear Parents/Guardians:

The Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) remains committed to sharing information and resources about mental health topics that could potentially impact students. During the 2017-2018 school year MCPS has reviewed programs and activities that support the physical, social, and psychological well-being of students. A variety of initiatives (e.g. mindfulness, individual and group counseling, wellness initiatives, etc.) are available for students to participate in at each school.

We know that the teenage years are marked by a roller-coaster ride of emotions—challenging for teens, their parents/guardians, and educators. It is easy to misread depression as normal adolescent turmoil; however, depression (which is one of the most common of mental illnesses) appears to be occurring at a much earlier age than before. The prevalence of depression in adolescents and young adults increased from 8.7 percent in 2006 to 11.3 percent in 2014 (*Mojtabai, et. al, 2016*). Suicide also is the second leading cause of death among 11–18-year-old youth in the United States (*Centers for Disease Control, 2015*).

To proactively address this issue, MCPS is enhancing its suicide prevention curriculum using the Signs of Suicide® (SOS®) Prevention Program. Currently, MCPS uses the Red Flags suicide prevention curriculum to discuss this topic in Health courses. The SOS® Program is a youth suicide prevention program that has demonstrated an improvement in students' knowledge and adaptive attitudes towards suicide risk and depression, as well as a reduction in actual suicide attempts. Listed on the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices, the SOS® Program showed a reduction in self-reported suicide attempts by 40 to 64 percent in randomized control studies (*Aseltine, et al., 2007; Schilling, et al., 2016*).

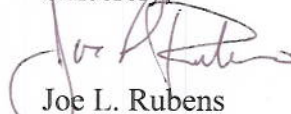
Our goals for participating in this program are straightforward:

- To help students understand that depression is a treatable illness,
- To explain that suicide is a preventable tragedy that often occurs as a result of untreated depression,
- To provide students with the education and skills to recognize the signs of serious depression and potential suicidality in a friend, and
- To impress upon teens that they can help themselves or a friend by taking the simple step of talking to a responsible adult about their concerns.

All students in Grade 9 through 12 will be shown a video entitled *Friends for Life* during his or her Math class periods. The program will be implemented between April 16th and May 18th. Students also will receive handouts that include the *Act to Save a Life* student newsletter and a list of school, local, and national resources that are available on mental health needs.

If you have any questions or concerns about this program, please do not hesitate to contact Ms. Donnie Gamble or Ms. Kim Kochuba in the Kennedy Counseling Office at 240-740-0105 between 8:00 am and 3:00 pm, Monday through Friday.

Sincerely,



Joe L. Rubens
Principal