



# ROCKAWAY TOWNSHIP PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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Dear Copeland Middle School Parents,

As the 2023-2024 school year begins, I am eager to share news about how the staff of Copeland Middle School will continue to support your children in the areas of mental health and wellness. We pride ourselves on providing services and programs for our students which embody our core H.E.A.R.T values and aim to support the “whole child.”

For the fifth year, Copeland Middle School has partnered with the New Jersey Department of Education to implement the Sandy Hook Promise. This program will help to identify children in crisis that might otherwise remain under the radar, and will teach students, educators, and school administrators how to spot the warning signs of youth suicide, as well as how to intervene before self-harm occurs. Below you will find information on how the program will be implemented.

## Overview of the SOS Signs of Suicide® Program:

SOS Signs of Suicide® is an award-winning, evidence-based educational and screening tool used in middle and high schools across the country with the following program goals:

- Increasing knowledge and adaptive attitudes about depression.
- Encouraging help-seeking behavior in individuals and for their peers.
- Reducing the stigma surrounding mental and physical illness.
- Engaging parents and school staff as partners in protecting students.
- Increasing the link between students and community mental health resources.

SOS Signs of Suicide® is the only universal school-based suicide prevention program that has shown a reduction in suicide attempts (self-reported). The program has also been associated with increasing students favorable attitudes towards getting help for themselves or their friends, and a decrease in suicide planning for “high-risk” participants.

The provided curriculum raises awareness about behavioral health and encourages students to ACT (Acknowledge, Care, Tell) when they are worried about themselves or their peers. It is our hope that following this protocol will ensure safety for every student, as well as alleviate students from feeling as though they are dealing with these complicated situations alone.

Parents will have access to the curriculum and additional resources on the [CMS website](#).

Implementation at Copeland Middle School:

Through video and curriculum provided by the SOS Signs of Suicide® program, students will learn to identify warning signs of suicide and depression in a single P.E./Related Arts period. At the end of the session, students will complete a response card, which gives them the opportunity to speak with a school counselor related to their feelings, concerns, or individual questions related to the curriculum. All response cards are reviewed on the same day by a predetermined team consisting of school social workers, school counselors, school psychologists and the Rutgers Behavioral Health clinician. The goal of this screening is to link at-risk students to community mental health partners and in-school resources.

Post-screen, there may be students that require immediate attention. For students that require immediate attention, the Rockaway Township Risk Assessment Protocol will be initiated before the end of the school day in which the self-report screen was administered. During this protocol, parents are contacted in order to obtain verbal consent to move forward, and are debriefed on the results of the assessment. It is our hope that these students will begin to form connections with the appropriate resources.

#### Dates

- September 13, 2023 and September 14, 2023

#### Opt-Out

The SOS Signs of Suicide® program will take place during P.E. and Related Arts classes. Students who are not participating in the program will remain with their Physical Education or Related Arts teachers in an alternate location. Please know that our goal is to have every student feel included in the school community, however, we understand and respect your choice to not participate. We will do everything in our power to make this process as inclusive and seamless as possible. If you wish to opt your child out of the program, please email Denise Manger at [dmanger@rocktwp.net](mailto:dmanger@rocktwp.net).

Thank you in advance for your support. We are Better Together!

Sincerely,

*Dustin Bayer*

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