

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Mental Health and Well-Being Resources Available for Pennsylvania School Communities

Harrisburg, PA – The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) wants to remind individuals and school communities that there are mental health and well-being resources available to help navigate the uncertainty of COVID-19.

People may be experiencing anxiety, depression, loneliness, isolation, and other stressors during the pandemic. These emotions may be confusing and overwhelming for children and adults. It is important that you take care of yourself and cope with emotions in a healthy way.

“Science has shown us that high levels of stress can impact the way we learn, think, feel, and act,” said Mental Health/AOD Specialist for the Office for Safe Schools Dr. Dana Milakovic. “During a time when so much is out of our control, finding ways to buffer the stress brought about by the pandemic and focusing on mental health and mental wellbeing can seem impossible.

“As we focus on mental wellbeing, the most important thing we can do is focus on relationships – with ourselves, our families, our school systems, our communities, and our students. As we continue to focus on social distancing and navigating this pandemic, the relationships we have and the feelings of mental wellbeing we bring to ourselves and those in our lives may very well be what provides a much-needed buffer and allows our brains to heal.”

Mental health is just as important as one’s physical health and must be a priority. PDE reminds school communities that a carefully curated [collection of resources and tools](#) is available to help individuals combat stress, create positive learning climates, talk to children about the pandemic, and much more. In addition, the website provides contact information for various support services that can provide help 24/7.

Executive Deputy Secretary of Education Pam Smith reiterated that schools are doing a commendable job during the pandemic and encouraged school communities to utilize PDE’s mental health resources.

“During my time as a social worker, I have seen firsthand how stress, trauma, and grief can affect the human body and mind,” said Smith. “This has been a tough time for many of us—we have lost our sense of ‘normal’. We are missing in-person connections with our friends and loved ones, and many school and work environments have changed dramatically. But we can get through it together with support from each other and the

tools that are here to help us. The Pennsylvania Department of Education has put together a mental health and well-being webpage to help educators, students, and families connect to needed supports and tools.”

Early on in the pandemic, PDE created a [Mental Health and Well-Being Resource page](#) which provides tools for social and emotional well-being, grief and loss, promoting positive learning climates, and more. As part of a [larger roadmap for school communities](#), PDE developed a [Staff and Student Wellness Guide](#) that serves as a toolkit that offers resources to consider when determining methods of communication with stakeholders, universal practices to address social and emotional needs and to create safe, welcoming and equitable learning environments, and conditions for monitoring and supporting identified staff and students demonstrating needs related to social-emotional and psychological supports. For youth, families, and educators seeking [Self-Care Resources](#), PDE also has information available.

For more information about Pennsylvania’s education policies and programs please visit the [Department of Education’s website](#) or follow PDE on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), or [Pinterest](#).

Note: [Video clips featuring two PDE staff members speaking about the information in this release are available for download/broadcast via PAcast.](#)