

West Buffalo Charter School

Integrating Mental Health Education and Well-Being within an Entire School Environment

Purpose

Effective July 1, 2018, New York State Education Law § 804 requires health education in schools to include instruction in mental health. Mental health is defined as a state of well-being in which every individual realizes their own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to their community. As part of overall health and wellness, mental health includes: a sense of self-esteem and self-confidence; the ability to identify, express and regulate emotions; the ability to set and achieve goals; recognition of one's creative skills; the ability to expand knowledge and skills; the ability to feel and show empathy for others; and the ability to create and maintain satisfying relationships. To comply with the amendments to Education Law § 804, Commissioner's Regulation §135.3 was amended to require that health instruction include mental health and the relation of physical and mental health; be designed to enhance student understanding, attitudes and behaviors that promote health, well-being and human dignity. Integration of this instruction within existing health education curriculum and other key areas such as wellness and student support will create positive, safe and supportive environments, and provide opportunities to build and practice relationship skills, resilience and social and emotional competencies.

While it is understood that the regulatory requirements only speak to integration of mental health instruction into the health curriculum, this comprehensive guide encourages schools to promote a whole school, whole child, multi-tiered approach to mental health which recognizes the significant positive impact on students when there is a holistic approach.

Policy

West Buffalo Charter School recognizes that mental health is a state of well-being in which every individual realizes one's potential, can cope with normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to contribute to one's community. It is a dimension of overall health. As part of overall health and wellness, mental health includes: a sense of self-esteem and self-confidence; the ability to identify, express and regulate emotions; the ability to set and achieve goals; recognition of one's creative skills; the ability to expand knowledge and skills; the ability to feel and show empathy for others; and the ability to create and maintain satisfying relationships. Schools play a key role in promoting mental health in all children and young people, recognizing that student's learning and development is supported by environments that promote mental health. The impact is the greatest when all staff is involved in mental health promotion as it relates to every area of the school – the culture, policies, curriculum and activities. This policy is intended as guidance to all staff, including non-teaching staff and volunteers. It should be read in conjunction with the medical policy in cases where a student's mental health overlaps with or is linked to a medical issue, school confidentiality

policies, policies for students with identified special education needs, and other related mental health policies (e.g., wellness, student support and discipline, including alternatives).

The policy affirms our commitment to providing safe, welcoming and supportive environments that promotes a culture of respect and equity; embeds social and emotional learning into the curriculum, including mental health instruction in Health Education programs; ensures families, students and staff are key partners in mental health and wellbeing initiatives; and works collaboratively with local health professionals and the community.

The goals of West Buffalo Charter School to accomplish these are to:

- Promote positive mental health for all staff and students;
- Educate and support the school community on a variety of approaches that are culturally sensitive to support mental health;
- Increase the skills of students, staff, parents and school community to recognize signs of mental health conditions;
- Decrease stigma related to talking about mental health;
- Provide support to staff through trainings including ways to recognize when students are experiencing mental health challenges;
- Link students and families to a range of available supports;
- Provide guidance and resources to parents/guardians on how to talk to their children about mental health; and
- Provide support to students living with mental health challenges, their peers, parents and caregivers.

Teaching and Supporting Mental Health

The mental health component of the health education curriculum will be developed by the appropriate school instructional staff and mental health support staff to ensure that school staff has appropriate knowledge and support to address mental health challenges both preventively and responsively. When appropriate, staff will be encouraged to collaborate with qualified community mental health professionals. This policy and related supports and curriculum will be consistent with the principles of the whole child and whole school approaches, including multi-tiered support frameworks, and will be offered within a safe and culturally-sensitive environment. The school's approaches will reflect an understanding that mental health literacy includes four key components:

- How to obtain and maintain positive mental health;
- Ways to prevent mental health challenges and disorders, identify symptoms of disorders, and the range of available supports and treatments;
- Decrease stigma and promote appropriate help-seeking behavior; and
- Increase understanding of the challenges of mental health conditions in everyday life.

Elements of positive mental health include: An understanding of the elements of positive mental health, reducing stigma and promoting recovery including strengthening social determinants of health, and personal resources such as engaging with learning at school; connecting with family, peers and community; believing in one's ability to learn and engage with others; ensuring equitable access to opportunities to learn and engage; and strengthening capacity to advocate for a healthier environment.

Staff will receive regular training about supporting mental health, recognizing, and responding to mental health needs in a developmentally (to include students with special needs) appropriate and culturally sensitive way. The school will support school-wide professional development on integrating mental health education into the curriculum, and in accessing resources, tools and professional learning to enhance their knowledge and capacity to integrate mental health and well-being content across the curriculum. The Integrating Mental Health Policy will be distributed to all staff within the school, be kept in the school's policy binder, and be made available to others at any time.

Implementing and Evaluating the Policy on Mental Health

The school will establish an implementation and evaluation plan for this policy to monitor its effectiveness and the possible need for modification over time. Towards this end, the school designates the following staff to have operational responsibility for ensuring that the school meets the goals and mandates of this policy: the Administrative team and School Nurse. These designated staff, including school mental health support staff, will also serve as liaisons with community agencies that may help with providing resources. The school will annually report on the progress toward meeting the goals of the policy to the Board of Trustees.

The school recognizes that every member of West Buffalo Charter School has an impact on student health and contributes to creating an environment that promotes positive mental health and well-being. All members of our school community - including students, teachers, support staff, school related professionals, administrators, Board of Trustees, families and volunteers, will be supported in their efforts to provide an environment that promotes mental health.

The West Buffalo Charter School curriculum will integrate 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 throughout K-8.

The Board of Trustees (BoT) shall promote necessary district-wide staff awareness and understanding of the Mental Health Education policy by:

- Having it reviewed by the Policy Committee and then adopted in Public Session by the BoT;
- Distributing the policy and making it available to others; and

- Supporting school-wide professional development on integrating mental Health Education into the curriculum.

The BoT shall promote necessary community awareness of the Mental Health Education Policy by the following:

- Discussing the change and supports available at a meeting(s) of the BoT; and
- Highlighting the curriculum change in the school newsletter.

The School will:

- Provide a curriculum that actively engages and builds students' self-awareness, social awareness, responsible decision-making, self-management and relationship skills, and social and emotional learning;
- Support staff in accessing resources, tools and professional learning to enhance their knowledge and capacity to integrate mental health and well-being content across the curriculum;
- Establish a whole school, whole child approach to mental health that is consistent with this policy by providing positive, safe and supportive environments and opportunities to build and practice relationship skills, resilience and social and emotional competencies;
- Engage an advisory committee such as a Wellness or similar committee in supporting efforts; and
- Engage students, families and the community in supporting mental health and wellbeing in a culturally-sensitive approach.

Monitoring and Review of Policy

The Mental Health Education Policy and related curriculum will be monitored and reviewed annually by (the Administrative team, School Nurse, Board of Trustees and qualified mental health professional(s)).

Last Updated: July/2018