



FALL 2021 | ISSUE 4

THE ALLIANCE

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF FREEHOLD MUNICIPAL ALLIANCE

MISSION STATEMENT

The Freehold Municipal Alliance exists to meet the need for comprehensive, coordinated substance abuse awareness planning and programming for the residents of Freehold Township and Freehold Borough. The Alliance conducts needs assessments, produces an annual prevention plan, and advocates for enhanced prevention services based on community needs and priorities.

FUNDING

Alliance sponsored programs and activities are primarily funded by the Governor's Council on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse (GCADA) through the Drug Enforcement Demand Reduction Fund. Additional funding is supplied by private donations and our annual golf outing fundraiser.

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A BITTERSWEET GOODBYE & EXCITING NEW CHAPTER

Sharon Shutzer

Freehold Borough Councilwoman

During the last eight years, the Alliance to Prevent Substance Abuse enjoyed a partnership with the Freehold Borough K-8 School District under the direction of Superintendent Dr. Rocco Tomazic who brought a wealth of knowledge and experience to us. His cooperation, support and expertise enhanced our programs and benefited all of the students in our school community. As of August 31, Dr. Tomazic retired after a long and successful career in education. We will certainly miss him, and we all wish him and his family well.

On September 1, Dr. Joe Howe took over the leadership of the Freehold Schools when he was appointed as the new superintendent. He has already attended an Alliance meeting and has assured us that our partnership will continue. Dr. Howe comes to us highly qualified and contagiously enthusiastic.

An undergraduate of Kean University with a degree in political science, Dr. Howe went on to earn his Doctorate in Education at Seton Hall University. Before coming to Freehold, he worked in Piscataway. For the last seven years, he has served as the Assistant Superintendent of Business for the Freehold Borough Schools. He became active in the community and worked tirelessly with Dr. Tomazic in the fight to receive full funding for our schools. Additionally, he helped oversee the building program and many other positive projects. About his membership in the Alliance, he said, "It is great to be a community partner with an organization that does such wonderful and important work." As a professional educator and as the father of a young son, he realizes the importance of doing everything we can to educate and protect our young people in the battle against substance abuse.

We all warmly welcome Dr. Joe Howe, and we look forward to a long and productive partnership.

Sharon Shutzer

FROM THE SCHOOL COUNSELORS

Mental Health and the new school year; Focusing on Social Emotional Learning (SEL)



Ms. Courtney Colford, M.A., SAC
School Counselor

Heading back to school is stressful. Heading back to school during an ongoing pandemic can leave our kids more anxious than usual. Counselors at Freehold Township middle schools and Freehold Intermediate are mindful of the challenges and have developed strategies using social emotional learning to help students ease back into in-person school.

At Barkalow, we introduced "Wellness Wednesday", a program where students have 30 minutes of social emotional learning (SEL) with homeroom every week to focus on connection. A social emotional learning coordinator provides weekly lessons for teachers to present; we hope this time will allow for students to build connections with peers and staff. The program gets the students talking. When asked how she feels about being back at school, 8th grader Bella said, "Well, it's a big thing...it's exciting because my 6th grade year was somewhat ruined by COVID, and I'm very happy now to be back in our building!"

At Eisenhower, both students and parents have expressed feeling happy with the return to full days of school. Students have been eager to socialize with peers as well as staff during the first three weeks of school. Teachers have been working to provide students with outside opportunities when appropriate to get some fresh air, take a mask break, socialize with each other, and work on assignments outdoors. One student, who was remote learning all of last year, said, "I'm so glad to be back in school. It's really great to be in a classroom, see all of my friends, and I have even met some new friends." One of our parents said, "My kids are thrilled to be back in school for a full day. They learn better in a classroom environment, and they can be with their friends."

"Well, it's a big thing...it's exciting because my 6th grade year was somewhat ruined by COVID, and I'm very happy now to be back in our building!"



Mrs. Heather Elkin, SAC
School Counselor

Freehold Borough Intermediate School's focus is on Social Emotional Learning (SEL) as well. "The students are happy to be back. Some were anxious, which is to be expected after 1.5 years of being in and out of school and not having a full, normal day," said Heather Elkin, Freehold Intermediate Guidance Counselor. Elkin added, "After talking with many students, their perceptions of what school would be like and what it actually is, are very different. Many reported school starting much better than they could have imagined and expected." The goal of the staff is to help students learn and apply the SEL skills necessary to be successful in their academics as well as their emotions. Working with the SEL model, staff are trained to help students with their feelings and how they relate to others, guiding them towards solutions. The staff and administration are working together to accomplish this, and so far, things are going well.

For additional information on easing your child back into the school year during a pandemic, check out these sites:

<https://childmind.org/article/back-to-school-anxiety-during-covid/>

<https://www.samhsa.gov/coronavirus/back-to-school>

SUPPORTING STUDENTS AT HOME



The start of a new school year can be an exciting yet uncertain time for the whole family. Due to the circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic, many kids are facing mental health challenges right now. In fact, 82% of 11-17-year-olds who took a mental health test at mhascreening.org from March 2020-July 2021 were showing signs of a mental health condition.

If you are concerned about your child or teen's ability to readjust to in-person school and have a good year, there are things you can do at home to set them up for success and support them during this transition. Not only is the home environment the most significant factor affecting academic achievement, family member interactions help provide social and intellectual development and improve child confidence.

TAKE CARE OF YOUR OWN MENTAL HEALTH

Children and teens pick up on anxiety and tension in adults around them. Be open about your own feelings and lead by example in how you deal with them by modeling healthy behaviors and coping skills.

REEVALUATE YOUR EXPECTATIONS AND ANTICIPATE CHALLENGES

Children and teens may act differently in school than they have before because of the adjustments they had to make last year to adapt to virtual learning. Anticipate some disorganization, forgetfulness, and anxiety. They may also have higher levels of irritability and frustration than you're used to. Patience and compassion are key.

Even if your child or teen seems to be doing well, they were impacted in some way by the events of the last year and a half. All school age youth experienced some degree of:

- Uncertainty
- Fear
- Loss of normalcy or disruption of routine
- Reduced peer interaction or loneliness
- Lack of structure
- Grief or loss

WORK AS A TEAM WITH THE SCHOOL

Teachers and parents/caregivers should work together for the best outcomes, especially since students may act differently at home and in the classroom. Be familiar with options for support available through your child's school to help accommodate them if they are struggling emotionally or academically. You are your child's best advocate!

ENCOURAGE COMMUNICATION AND EMOTIONAL VULNERABILITY

Trust is important. Your child needs to know they can come to you and that you'll really listen when they do. Be curious and ask questions about your child's day, what they learned, how they felt, etc. – especially since adolescents usually aren't the most forthcoming. For those who are dealing with lots of fear and anxiety, they may require frequent comforting and reassurance to feel safe.

KNOW WHEN YOUR CHILD'S STRUGGLES MAY BE A SIGN OF SOMETHING BIGGER

Common signs of mental health conditions in youth include problems with concentration and memory, changes in appetite, feeling sad or hopeless, loss of interest in things they used to enjoy, excessive worry, irritability, changes in sleep patterns, and/or angry outbursts. Check out our fact sheet, *Know the Signs: Recognizing Mental Health Concerns in Kids and Teens*, for more information.

A Parent Screen is available at MHAScreening.org to help you determine if your child or teen may be having emotional, attentional, or behavioral difficulties. These results can be used to start a conversation with your family doctor or a school mental health professional.

SAFETY AT SCHOOL: PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL

Going back to school may come with some extra nerves this year, especially since the last two school years haven't been normal. You'll likely be back to full-time, in-person school again, and it may feel a little weird or scary. To have a successful school year, it's important that you feel safe in your school and classroom.

SAFETY STRESSORS

After being home and doing school virtually for so long, here are some common things that you may be concerned about when physically returning to school:

COVID-19: The rules about when and where you need to wear a mask are different depending on where you live, and it can be confusing. Your school may or may not require masks to be worn, and with not everyone being able to get a vaccine, you might have concerns about getting sick, bringing sickness home from school, or going virtual again.

BULLYING: One of the benefits of learning virtually was that you didn't have to see bullies in person, so you may be worried about getting picked on again now that you're back in a classroom.

GETTING INTO TROUBLE: Being back in school probably means being on a stricter schedule than you got used to while doing virtual school, so it might be hard to sit still for hours at a time or to keep your behavior under control. Your teachers may also get stressed as everyone gets used to being back in school, and they may seem less patient or meaner than you remember. You may feel like only certain people get disciplined for misbehaving, or some get punished worse than others. If you are one of the people who seems to be in trouble more often or faces harsher discipline than others who do the same thing, it can be scary.

SCHOOL VIOLENCE: When no one was at school, there was no fighting in the halls and you stopped hearing about shootings or other acts of violence. Now that school is back in session, the possibility of violence has returned. Even though it seemed like you heard a lot about acts of violence at school before COVID, they aren't as common as you think despite the amount of media attention they get. Talk to your teachers about procedures if you need to be reminded about what to do to stay safe.

If you still feel overwhelmed, unsafe, and as though your fear affects how you function every day, you may be experiencing the first signs of a mental health condition, like depression or anxiety.

Take the Youth Screen at MHAScreening.org to see if you may be at risk. Once you get the results, MHA will provide you with more information and help you to figure out the next steps.



2021 ONGOING FUNDRAISING EVENTS – GOLF OUTING

Our Annual Golf Outing is our major source of funds. With these funds, the Alliance is able to afford all the programs we put forth to our community (students, parents, etc.). The Golf Outing is a complete day of events that are enjoyed by all. A SPECIAL thank you goes out to all the volunteers. Without the dedication and hard work of the volunteers, this day would not be the grand success that it is. Therefore, once again, THANK YOU all.

- Antoinette Ceciarelli, Coordinator



(L-R) Borough Councilwoman Sharon Shutzer and Freehold Township resident Linda Altini

SPONSORED ALLIANCE EVENTS & PROGRAMS



Dr. Michael Fowlin presented his *You Don't Know Me Until You Know Me* presentation to **Freehold High School Students on 10/27/21** and to **Freehold Intermediate School students on 12/03/21**.

Doug Collier, M.A. DEA, presented to the **Freehold Township High School Staff on 10/11/21**. Doug's Program is to update staff in regards to substance abuse and its impact on students and student achievements.



Botvin LifeSkills Training (LST) is a research-validated substance abuse program proven to reduce the risks of alcohol, tobacco, drug abuse, and violence by targeting the major social and psychological factors that promote the initiation of substance use and other risky behaviors. This comprehensive and exciting program provides adolescents and young teens with the confidence and skills necessary to successfully handle challenging situations.

Instructors from the **Freehold Area Health Department** and **CentraState Healthcare System** are happy to be back in person to deliver this training to **6th, 7th and 8th graders at the Freehold Intermediate School (FIS)**.

WORKING TOGETHER WITH OUR COMMUNITY PARTNERS



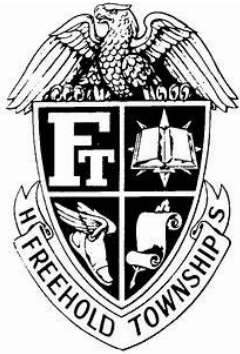
www.freeholdboro.k12.nj.us/
Heather Elkin School Counselor/SAC



Working to Prevent Substance Abuse
Antoinette Ceciarelli at 732-294-5103
Aceciarelli@Twp.Freehold.nj.us



www.centrastate.com



www.frhsd.com/freeholdtwp
Kristin Clyne SAC



www.freeholdracewaymall.com



www.gcada.nj.gov/home/



<http://highfocuscenters.pyramidhealthcarepa.com/locations/freehold/>



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www.freeholdtwp.k12.nj.us/
Courtney Colford School Counselor/SAC



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www.facebook.com/Freeholdpolice
department/?tn-str=k*F



<https://downtownfreehold.com/>

Additional Community Partners
Freehold Township School PTO



www.facebook.com/Freehold-Clergy-Association-148997381810652/

2022 UPCOMING MEETING



Note: Meetings are conducted in accordance with NJAC 17-40-1 et. seq. –
“Sunshine Open Meetings”.

Alliance Key Members

Antoinette Ceciarelli, Freehold Municipal Alliance Coordinator
Jeff Friedman, Co-Chairperson, Downtown Freehold.com Director
Jay Robinson, Co-Chairperson, CentraState Community Development Director
Lester Preston, Freehold Township Committeeman
Sharon Shutzer, Freehold Borough Councilwoman

Newsletter Editor

Angelica Espinal-Garcia, Health Educator with Freehold Area Health Department
AEspinalGarcia@twp.freehold.nj.us

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For more info contact Antoinette at 732-294-5103
Aceciarelli@Twp.Freehold.NJ.us