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February 12, 2026

**SUBJECT:** Prioritizing the Mental Health and Well-being of Our Students

Dear Families,

Our school community has recently navigated a period of profound heartbreak and loss. The passing of two students—one to a tragic accident and another to self-harm—has left a void in our hearts and a weight on our collective spirit. In times like these, words often feel inadequate, yet it is essential that we come together to support one another and, most importantly, our children.

Beyond these specific tragedies, we are seeing a concerning trend that we must address openly. We have observed a significant rise in mental health challenges among our high school students. This includes an extensive increase in self-harm attempts, mental health hospitalizations, and pervasive rates of anxiety and depression. Our students are navigating a complex world of academic pressure, social media-induced stress, and the painful impact of bullying.

I want to reassure you that the safety and emotional well-being of your children are our highest priorities. We are committed to taking proactive, substantial steps to meet this crisis head-on.

### **Our Investment in Support**

The district has made significant investments to ensure that no student feels they have to struggle alone. We are currently:

- **Our Mental Health Team:** We retain school counselors, social workers, and psychologists throughout the district. Additionally, our social work and school counselor intern program works with our students from Kindergarten through 12th grade seeing hundreds of students each week. Our goal is to meet and sustain recommended staff-to-student ratios, ensuring that professional support is accessible when a student needs it most. Last budget cycle we also added a new Child Study Team. We also partner with Effective School Solutions to facilitate therapeutic programs, we run The Hub at MMS and The



Loft at CHS. We continue to maintain robust mental health supports throughout the district.

- **Enhancing Curriculum:** We have implemented a comprehensive social-emotional learning (SEL) curriculum. Mental health curriculum is also included as part of our health and physical education program. These programs are designed to help students identify their emotions, build resilience, and know exactly where to turn for help.
- **"Wellness Wednesdays":** To combat burnout and academic pressure, we have introduced "Wellness Wednesdays" at the high school. These sessions provide students with dedicated time to develop coping skills, practice mindfulness, and engage in activities that foster mental clarity and stress reduction.

### **The Power of Partnership**

While our schools provide a vital safety net, we cannot do this work in isolation. We need your partnership. We encourage you to remain vigilant and watch for signs of distress in your children, such as changes in sleep patterns, withdrawal from friends, or a sudden drop in academic interest.

We ask that you make it a daily practice to check in with your children. Ask them not just about the highlights of their day, but specifically about the "bad moments" they may have encountered. Normalizing the discussion of struggles helps remove the stigma surrounding mental health and reminds our students that it is okay to not be okay.

Our children's social circles now extend far beyond the school. To help keep them secure, try to stay curious about their online world. Ask them to show you their favorite game or who they're chatting with. Being involved is the most effective filter we have.

### **Resources and Next Steps**

We will be hosting a series of community forums and workshops for parents to learn more about our resources and how to navigate these difficult conversations at home. Please keep an eye on your email for upcoming dates.



**Mr. Jason Bing**

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If you believe your child is in immediate distress, please reach out to your school's counseling office or utilize the 24/7 crisis resources provided on our district website.

If any child or family member is experiencing thoughts of self-harm at home, they should immediately contact 988. If your child is experiencing thoughts of self-harm at school, please tell them to go to the nearest teacher and they will guide your child to a mental health professional.

We are a community built on care and resilience. By working together—schools, families, and students—we can create an environment where every child feels seen, heard, and supported.

Sincerely,

Jason Bing

The district has launched the STOPit Safety and Wellness App to build a culture of "speaking up". The APP provides fully anonymous reporting, two way chat with incident response specialists, a library of resources, and live crisis counselors.

<https://www.somsdk12.org/district/safety/stopit>

[Mental Health & Counseling Resources – Explore the South Orange & Maplewood School District](#)