



SMITHTOWN CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

# DIGEST

## Learning and Adapting DURING REOPENING

**Approximately 10% of the students in the district are fully remote. For those parents and students who chose the fully remote option at the start of the school year, here's a look at how that program breaks down:**

### Elementary Fully Remote\*

- A dedicated classroom teacher conducts daily synchronous lessons via Google Meet.
- Weekly asynchronous lessons are provided for the special areas (art, library, music, physical education/health).

*\*This program is not currently accepting new students.*

### Secondary Fully Remote

- Students livestream their classes daily following their regular bell schedule.

When the district reopened its doors in September, the classrooms, hallways and buildings looked very different. Masks, social distancing and hybrid learning have all changed the way students learn and teachers teach. But as the weeks have passed and students and staff settled into their routines, there has been a return to some sense of normalcy.

In the elementary schools, students started the year on a hybrid learning schedule and alternated their in-person days in school. In October, the elementary students began to return to school full time. While social distancing and health department requirements are still in place, students and staff are excited to be back in their buildings and connecting with their teachers and peers in person.

"Teachers are beyond thrilled to have their full classroom of students back in school," said Paul Strader, assistant superintendent of curriculum and assessment. "They are able to build those relationships with their students now face to face. There's a lot of excitement from both teachers and students to return to a more typical class flow."

Having the elementary students back in the schools full time has also given the classrooms more of a feeling of a typical learning experience. Additionally, the learning and the pace of the curriculum can move at a more regular speed since students

are getting that face-to-face interaction with their teachers on a daily basis.

"The Chromebooks have provided more regular access to technology," Mr. Strader said. "All students now have a Chromebook so they can regularly access some of the resources that we have always had for our students without having to compete for devices."

At the secondary level, the 1:1 technology initiative has allowed for synchronous learning to take place when students cannot be in the classroom. Teachers are livestreaming lessons and students are following their regular bell schedule during the school day. When they are not in the buildings, students are logging on to their computers, joining their Google Meets and/or streaming their lessons from classroom Smart Boards.

"This model more closely resembles what a typical classroom experience is like while the secondary students are learning remotely," Mr. Strader said. "Teachers have started to resume a natural flow of their classwork, meaning every day can now be an extension of the work they had done in a previous lesson." More content is being learned and new learning is happening every day with this synchronous model of instruction. Secondary students can now engage with their teachers every day whether it's in person or virtually.

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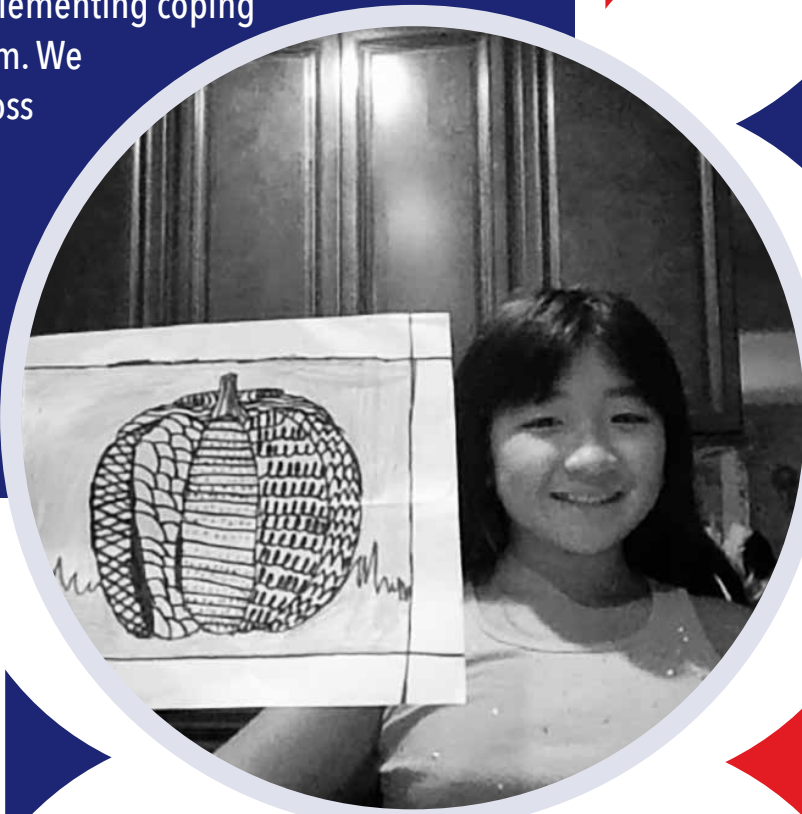
## Partnering With Parents

Parents and staff, as well as students, have access to counselors and mental health staff. "We spend time working with all individuals and how best to assist them with a personal issue or a family issue," said Dan Helmes, assistant superintendent for pupil personnel services. "We provide parent support and parent consultation daily. A focus when working with parents has been supporting their child's emotional needs, personal parenting skill questions and strategies with setting routines at home."

The Instructional Support Team meetings are a powerful tool to assist staff when identifying students who may be in need. School staff may refer students that they feel may need additional support in this forum to ensure they are meeting student needs and to provide additional supports and/or interventions as necessary.

There is ongoing communication with the teachers in all current learning models to evaluate and monitor student engagement and attendance. The mental health staff has ongoing and regular contact with the classroom teachers when looking at a student's functioning as a whole. This year, there is additional collaboration between families and the school district due to the nature of the various learning models. There has been and will continue to be frequent parent and teacher contact in an effort to continually assess students' mental and social well-being.

"Our building staff and mental health professionals make themselves available through a variety of ways," Mr. Helmes said. "Our mental health professionals reach students through back-to-school orientations, meet the teacher night, parent-teacher conferences, going into classrooms to introduce themselves and setting up Google Classrooms to provide social-emotional support and materials. We provide ongoing professional development training with teachers on implementing coping strategies within the classroom. We are working with families across the models of in-person, fully remote and hybrid learning settings. We are checking in with high-needs students on their remote days via email, remind texts and phone calls home."



## Social-Emotional Learning: Support on the Rise as Needs Grow

When students returned to school this year, their social-emotional needs were a top priority. SEL has always been woven into the district's instruction but administrators and teachers realized the need now more than ever.

According to the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, SEL is the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply



the knowledge, skills and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions.

"We've always prioritized student and staff mental health and wellness, so we're doing what we did in years past, just a lot more of it, including ongoing contact among school counselors, social workers, psychologists, administrators, teachers and other staff members to evaluate student and family needs for food, technology, mental health, counseling and academic support," said Jennifer Bradshaw, assistant superintendent for instruction and administration.

Multiple strategies are employed to make certain students' needs are being met. "We spend time working with our students on developing coping strategies and talking through issues," Dan Helmes, assistant superintendent for pupil personnel services, said. "We employ active listening, speaking to students about controlling what they can control, being in the moment, dealing with emotions, making friendships, conflict

resolution, developing their personal support network, clarifying expectations, using mindfulness techniques and providing proactive strategies to alleviate stressors before they are realized. We spend time with our students on the current learning models and review their personal instructional plan to reduce confusion and stress and to hone learning expectations."

SEL support for teachers and staff has also increased. The district provides ongoing support for the many changes to the teachers' everyday routines, including providing daily technology integration tips and support. They work to support teachers in their implementation of morning meetings, emotional check-ins and discussion circles. Staff have an open-door policy of meeting with counselors to speak about students as well as if they have a concern that needs to be discussed.

The district also assembled a wellness team which includes staff, students and community members. They are integrating responses to COVID-19 into all of their committee work, including the development of a Community University virtual event focused on wellness.

## Staff Training

The district began the school year with training for all staff members in social and emotional learning, trauma-sensitive schools, self-care and the importance of focusing on connections first before focusing on academics.

"We have a dedicated team of social and emotional learning specialists who develop training for faculty members and develop and spread SEL content to teachers that they can use in their classrooms with students both in person and virtually," Jennifer Bradshaw, assistant superintendent for instruction and administration.

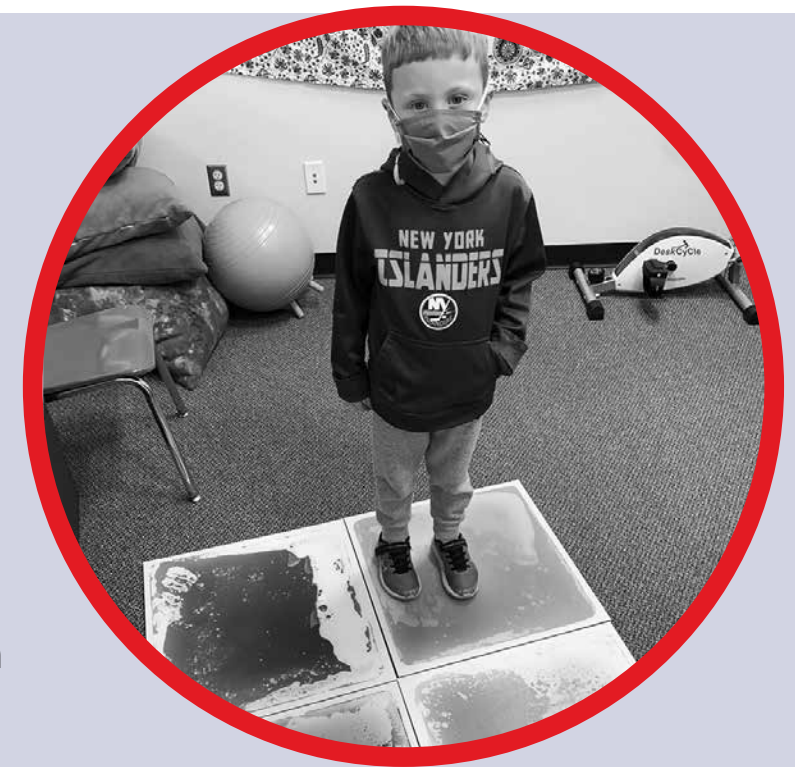
The district is offering both introductory and advanced faculty training in integrated mental health and social and emotional learning to:

- Support healthy emotion regulation and social relationships.
- Improve immune system functioning and support overall health and wellness.

- Reduce stress for students.
- Safeguard against teacher burnout, compassion fatigue and stress-related conditions.
- Increase self and social awareness.
- Improve healthy and responsible decision-making.

This is all in addition to increased counseling, home visits, student referrals, classroom push-ins by mental health specialists, and ongoing contact with students learning remotely, English language learners and other families who may need additional support in the new learning environment.

"Our support staff is available to all students," Helmes said. "SEL supports students, staff and families on a variety of levels. We make it a priority to embed SEL into the classroom for all students. We are aware that learning is different this year, and we have made it a point to focus



on students that are in the various learning models, knowing they may need additional supports. We have made it a priority to reach our students through various methods and access points to ensure they have continued access and support to our mental health staff."

# Outside and Ready to Learn

Social distancing, space constraints and some mild late summer/early fall weather have all led teachers to think outside the box when it comes to learning. Many have gone way outside the box, and even outside the buildings as they take learning outdoors. Here are some examples of Smithtown students and teachers using their outside space.



The fourth graders at St. James Elementary School have broadened the walls of their classrooms. The comfy, cozy nooks of the classroom have been replaced in creative ways. On this warm day, the students snuggled up with a good book and found a cozy nook on the playground equipment.



During science class with Mrs. Olander, students at Accomsett Middle School asked questions and described the phenomena they observed.



*"While technology has been a necessary part of learning this year, it is no substitute for hands-on learning and outdoor experiences. Our teachers and administrators have gone above and beyond to make sure students have access to safe, fun, experiential learning and recreation this fall."*

Jennifer Bradshaw,  
assistant superintendent for instruction and administration

Students in Mrs. Trovato's first grade class at Mt. Pleasant Elementary School went outdoors to learn about the five senses. They read "My Fall Five Senses," sang their five senses song, experienced and wrote about what they saw, heard, touched, and could taste and smell during the fall season.



Great Hollow band student-musicians have been able to keep practicing while keeping their distance outdoors.

## District Hosts Countywide EdCamp for Arts

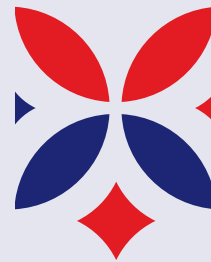
With the current health crisis and the effect the pandemic has had on traditional instruction, there exists a heightened need for teachers to learn from one another. The district hosted a virtual countywide day of professional development, Suffolk County EdCamp for the Arts, on Nov. 14.

The EdCamp model allowed educators to collaboratively determine session topics for the day of the event and was free for participants across Suffolk County. EdCamps are an opportunity to network with other educators, pitch ideas, facilitate a session, and share contact information with those

they've connected with to bolster their professional network.

Seventy-five art and music teachers registered to participate. Some of the art topics included: best practice and programs to use in art while teaching remotely; remote lesson plans; STEAM and online learning; and teaching elementary art on a cart.

Music teachers collaborated on topics such as: virtual ensemble rehearsals, performances and musicals; teaching general music remotely; safe performance and scheduling; recommended literature to use with special education students; and recording music.



### SCHOOL & COMMUNITY DIGEST

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