

TEACHER

COACH

# Live Well. Teach Well.

*A Mental Wellness & SEL Newsletter*

Issue 1: Suicide Prevention

**September 2020**

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## Message from the CEO...



Welcome to our first TC newsletter. With limited time and resources, we know that every moment you spend away from your endless well of tasks, requires the reward of meaningful content. Our team intends to provide practical support for all the determined district leaders and educators leading our country through these immeasurable challenges. Our focus on mental health, SEL, and social justice will dominate the next six to twelve months, with unique articles, workshops, webinars, and other resources for virtual, traditional, and hybrid education. Through your feedback we will continue to iterate best practices, bringing you the most poignant psychological and educational tools for high quality leadership and instruction. Educators are the most important professionals on the planet and your mental health and well-being is paramount to our national success. While you are sacrificing, we will be at your side, supporting you through this unparalleled challenge. Thank you for all you do and please do not hesitate to reach out to us with ideas and comments. Have a safe and healthy school year.

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## Sponsor Spotlight...



My name is Erik NeVille and I'm the CEO of Teacher's Pension Consulting. It's our sincere honor to partner with TeacherCoach supporting school districts nationwide. Through our shared belief around integrating personal and professional training, we provide financial education and consulting to districts across the country. Educators work too hard to have their retirement jeopardized by inadequate planning, deserved of the very best plans and products to honor their years of service. We also recognize that districts require financial support during this turbulent time, which is why we have fully funded the TC mental health and SEL package, available to any district regardless of size or location. We serve as a role model to all companies, emulating the perfect ecosystem between district, community, and business partnerships. My team and I look forward to easing your burden and removing the barriers for successful financial wellness.

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## Stand Out District ...



Springfield Township School District is located in Burlington County, NJ and boasts a student population of approximately 225 students grades K-7<sup>th</sup>; the district feeds into the Northern Burlington County School District for high school. Despite being a smaller sized district, Superintendent, Craig Vaughn has big ideas for the students, teachers and community at large, especially when it comes to the whole health and wellness of everyone. He explains, “The longer I’m in this profession the more perspective I gain on how big of an impact educators have on students, beyond just academics. In the years since becoming an administrator, I’ve dealt with a lot of student concerns that I wasn’t exposed to as a classroom teacher - not because they weren’t present in my classroom but because I may not have recognized them because I was so focused on instruction. Having worked side-by-side to deal with student concerns that aren’t necessarily academic with so many amazing educators - from CST members and school nurses to exceptional classroom teachers and fellow administrators - I’ve learned how important it is to recognize that there is a greater role we play in serving our students. If they don’t feel safe, if they don’t have the skills to cope with adversity, if they haven’t been taught to accept and value feedback, if they don’t feel empathy to and from others, well, then it doesn’t matter how strong your curriculum is because there are too many barriers in the way of learning.”

Certainly, administrators, educators, students and parents have never faced a bigger challenge in education than the current pandemic situation that has gripped our nation, and the world, for the past six months. Old education models have been tossed aside as each individual district tries to navigate the safest and most effective way to educate the youth of this nation. It looks different for each district depending on geographical location, size, rate of infection and technological and staff capabilities. Springfield School District has taken painstaking and well thought out steps to ensure a safe and effective solution that is best for their community. “I’ve been beyond fortunate to work with such an amazing community of learners at Springfield; they’ve made it much easier to address all of the challenges we’ve faced. I think of all the challenges, however, the one that we struggled the most to address was keeping all of our students engaged during virtual learning. We had a small number of students who became disassociated with their learning...these were great kids who were always connected and energized while in school, but when we were fully remote they struggled. They struggled to complete assignments, interact with their teachers and classmates, and stay connected to our school community. We tried lots of different strategies to pull them in, but we struggled to hit the right buttons for a few of these students. This was what drove us so hard to put our school in a position to safely reopen...we needed to get these kids back in the building where they could connect,” says Vaughn.

Vaughn continues to explain how they addressed specific issues related to reopening to ensure the greatest possible success and outcome. “We did so much planning throughout the summer, with a lot of community and staff input, that we were really confident in our reopening plan. The biggest thing I've tried to do since reopening has been to listen and remain flexible. We had things in our plan that we found didn't work, so we made changes and pushed forward. Everyone has a voice in this and we've stressed that we're stronger together, so I think our school community recognizes that everyone has a role to play in keeping our school safely reopened. Beyond that, we spent significant time before students returned focusing our staff training efforts on how to respond to the mental trauma of COVID-19 (facilitated by Dr. Scherz), and we've implemented daily social-emotional lessons through the HeyKiddo Huddle program.”

Never has there been a time when recognizing and addressing the mental wellness of educators been more important. Teachers now have to worry about maintaining engagement and effective teaching methods with virtual learning, health and safety concerns regarding themselves and the students, and dealing with their own families working and learning from home. Vaughn expresses awareness of this issue with insight and a sense of humor. “I see that there's definitely an increased level of anxiety among educators. I think most educators are worriers to begin with, and the pandemic has just added to their already fairly full plate of concerns. Some of it is tied to health concerns, but a lot of the anxiety comes from a fear of the unknown. We're trying to make sure they feel supported and valued, and we're also making sure to provide opportunities for them to talk about their concerns with mental health professionals like Dr. Scherz. We addressed some of this before students returned to school in early September, and we're revisiting this in October so we can continue to help them work through the anxiety and stress. We'll also look to provide some chocolate at some point...that usually helps educators out when they're feeling overwhelmed!”