

B.S. from your C.S.
(Big Shouts from your Counselor at School)

September, 2019

Hello Everyone!

Welcome Back! As most of you know, I use this newsletter as a way of keeping in touch with you on a regular basis, providing resources, and updating you on the Mental Health Team. For the newcomers, hopefully this newsletter will help get you up to speed on what it is that the Mental Health Team does here at Alcott. Having said all of that, here are my thoughts for the month...

Who is the Mental Health Team?

The Mental Health Team (MHT) consists of Naomi Krakow (Principal), Brigette Sayles (School Psychologist) and myself (School Counselor). Brigette and I have very similar roles with the major distinction being that she handles initial referrals for Special Education and I handle the 504 Accommodation Plans. Make a note - my office has changed! I am in Alex Poirier's old office right across from the conference room in the Main Office Area.

What exactly does the MHT do?

As I mentioned, Brigette and I have many of the same responsibilities. Our positions will include the following roles/responsibilities:

- Teacher/staff and parent consultation (i.e., observations, classroom management strategies, skill development, Open Circle questions, etc.)
- individual/group counseling
- designing & implementing behavioral interventions and plans
- direct classroom support
- crisis intervention
- staff and parent training/development
- classroom-wide interventions
- doing whatever we can to make your lives a little bit easier!

I have a classroom full of kids for you to work with...What should I do?

In previous years, Brigette and I attended Grade Level Meetings so teachers/staff would bring social, emotional, or behavioral concerns to these meetings to determine how to support these students. Given the changes to our Grade Level Meeting structure, we will be considering what makes the most sense

in terms of how the MHT Team should be notified of your concerns. We will keep you posted on what has been decided!

What if I have an emergency with a student?

Please call the office right away (*not our direct phones lines or email*) if you have an issue with a student that involves safety or a significant disruption to learning. NormaJean/Kristin then will contact us via our walkie talkies.

What are friendship groups and Peace Tables?

As many of you know, we offer "friendship groups" at each grade level in an attempt to access more students, to instill skill development, and to provide a forum for model peers to demonstrate and teach skills. We also hope that having continuously running groups at each grade level will make it easier to provide social support more immediately as the need arises. Additionally, we offer the "Peace Table" where students can make an appointment with one of us to resolve a conflict with a peer(s) with adult mediation (this is not a discipline approach, rather it is a chance for students to advocate for themselves and problem solve together!). **You can suggest the Peace Table to a student simply by saying that they can go to my/Brigette's office at an appropriate time to schedule an appointment.**

What should we do if we come to see you and your door is closed?

It is very important to remember the sensitive nature of our jobs and the impact on testing measures. If one of us has our door closed, please *do not* interrupt, unless it is an absolute emergency. You can always leave a note in our mailboxes, leave a voicemail message, or find another Mental Health Team member. Thank you in advance for respecting this request!!

Can I borrow...?

Please feel free to use us as resources! We have lots of "things" that we are happy to lend out, including references, children's books, ideas for games, information, etc. And if we don't have the info, we'll find it!

Tips and Tricks

As part of this newsletter, I will provide resources and tips from your colleagues. Here are a few:

1. At the end of last year, Brigette, Mike Murray (Behavior Specialist for the new SEL classroom), and I started a list of ideas to consider as you open the new school year. These are basic tenets that will not be "rocket science" to anyone; however, they are reminders of some important aspects of classroom behavior management to keep in the forefront of your minds given that perspectives are fresher at this time of the year. ☺ You'll find this list attached to the end of this newsletter. We called it "Back to Basics."
2. Camp Cody, an outdoor education center on Ossipee Lake in New Hampshire, is offering a Teacher retreat the first weekend in October. They're offering professional development, a chance to network with other professionals, and outdoor time as well. See link below:
<https://info.campcody.com/coc-october-2019-retreat-rsvp>
3. This link is from Barbara Gordon. It's an article about developing a positive staff culture. Take a look! Thanks for sharing, Barbara!
<https://www.edutopia.org/article/building-positive-staff-culture-takes-work>

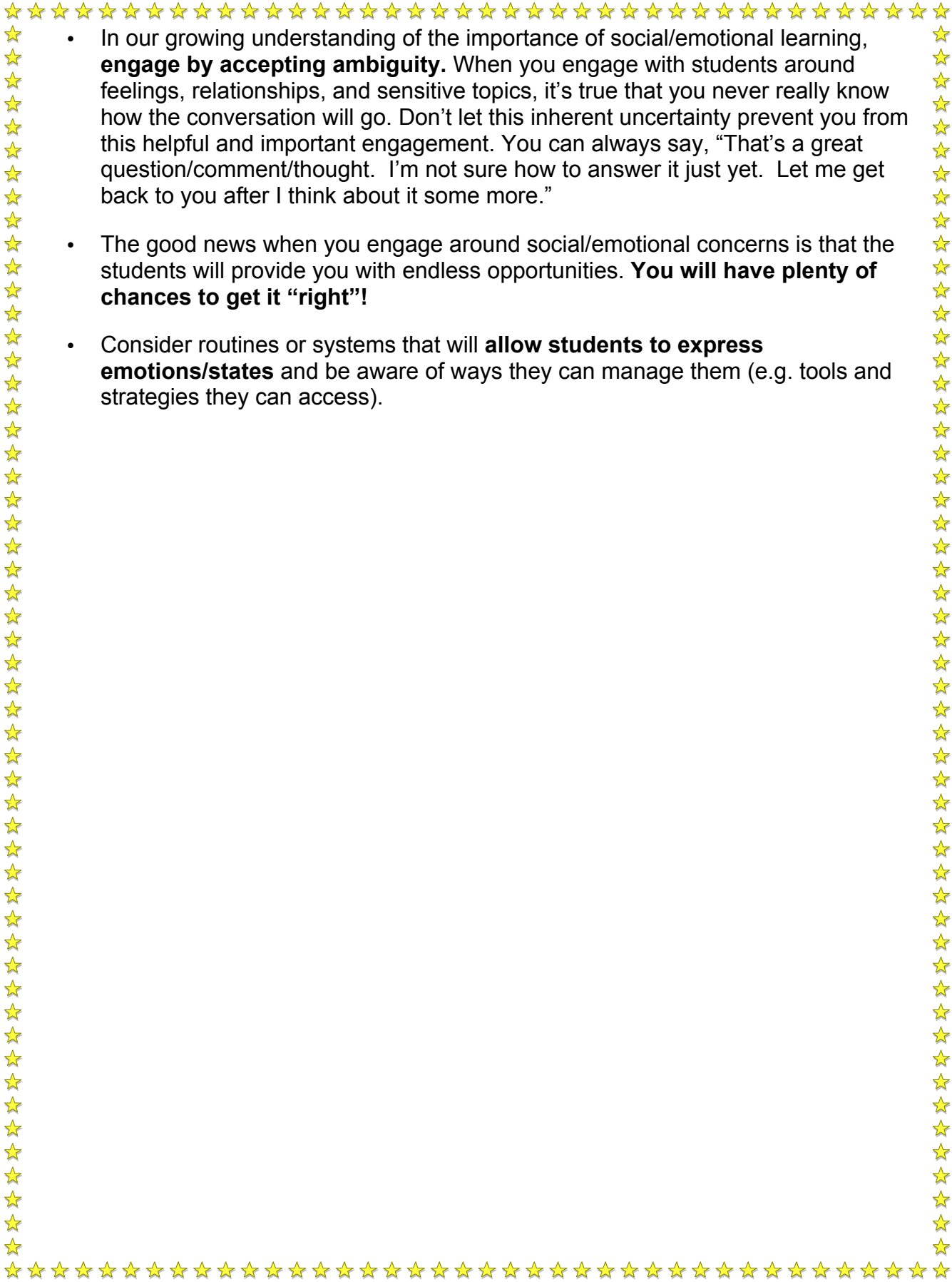
Best of luck this school year!!

Sherree Foye, School Counselor



BACK TO BASICS

- **Establish clear expectations, rules, and routines** from the very beginning. Being firm and consistent about these helps students feel secure, and affords you space to be a flexible teacher.
 - **Think ahead and plan for what your response will be** when established rules and routines are not followed (e.g. What language will you use to communicate this to a student, what will the follow up actions/consequences be).
 - **Think of a simple 3-step approach** you might take or **have 3 “go-to” strategies that you rely on consistently**. Consider the following example:
 - A student is not putting materials away after free time.*
 - Step 1. Provide choices by saying, “Would you like to clean up the legos or the magna tiles?”
Student responds with “I’m not going to clean up either one!”
 - Step 2. Use humor + positive discipline by saying the following in a lighthearted voice: “I must have heard that wrong because I thought I heard you refuse to clean up...”
Student responds by saying, “You heard me right. I’m not cleaning up either one.”
 - Step 3: Consider setting an expectation or referring to your classroom consequence plan in a neutral voice: “You can choose to clean up legos or magnatiles. Or we can practice cleaning the classroom during the first 5 minutes of free time tomorrow. Which would you prefer?”
- **Use Open Circle to address issues and conflicts that are *already present* in the classroom group.** Again, we don’t know exactly how the conversation might go, and it won’t be helpful every time. But, most of the time, the group benefits from teacher help in interpersonal issues they are already trying to manage. OC should be another go-to strategy.
- **Consider your biggest pet peeve. Now make that your focus for the 1st few weeks of school.** Consider how you want to address it, tell students how you plan to address it, notice each occurrence, and follow through by addressing each occurrence consistently using the strategy/approach you said you would use.
- **Preview.** The unexpected *will* occur. Diminish the anxiety-provoking impact of surprises on children by previewing as much as possible, so that they experience fewer surprises.
 - Use role-playing: preview new experiences or expectations and pre-established consequences through role-plays during Open Circle!

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- In our growing understanding of the importance of social/emotional learning, **engage by accepting ambiguity**. When you engage with students around feelings, relationships, and sensitive topics, it's true that you never really know how the conversation will go. Don't let this inherent uncertainty prevent you from this helpful and important engagement. You can always say, "That's a great question/comment/thought. I'm not sure how to answer it just yet. Let me get back to you after I think about it some more."
 - The good news when you engage around social/emotional concerns is that the students will provide you with endless opportunities. **You will have plenty of chances to get it "right"!**
 - Consider routines or systems that will **allow students to express emotions/states** and be aware of ways they can manage them (e.g. tools and strategies they can access).