

Keeping young minds healthy

HS guidance team uses digital strategies to support kids during pandemic

Anxiety.
Depression.
Stress.
Grief.
Impaired focus.

National research shows that the pandemic and the necessary changes to the school day have emotionally impacted students. It is, after all, easy for even adults to feel overwhelmed during this time. Students might be concerned about the health of family members or be grappling with the loss of a loved one. They could be stressed from newly unemployed parents or the isolation of quarantine, or have trouble adjusting to remote instruction.

The guidance department at Mount Olive High School has worked hard to establish a support system to help students navigate through their individual struggles.

A focused, department effort

Student needs at the high school level are different from other grades and can be more complex. High-schoolers are dealing with concerns about college applications, the loss of athletics and other social and extracurricular activities, and the uncertainty of traditions and milestones of senior year.

The guidance department has developed creative strategies to reach out and help students. With in-person instruction limited or suspended completely, resources and support are typically provided digitally.

Each grade level has its own class in Google

Classroom which provides applicable guidance info. Typical items include testing information, weblinks for virtual college visits, and links to virtual meet and greets with college admissions representatives which are hosted regularly during the school year.

Through Google Classroom, students can easily schedule time to speak with counselors too, either through video or using the old-fashioned telephone. Every Monday, counselor Zach Heeman also holds an open forum on Google Meet. Here, students can virtually drop in and chat about whatever concerns them, without having to make an appointment.

“We have the best counseling staff,” said Robert Feltmann, vice principal of student services. “They’re always thinking, always trying to find new ways to support kids.”

The department’s most recent initiative is MO Meditation, a website designed to be a clearinghouse of relaxation and self-care resources. Student assistance coordinator Jacqueline Skutka developed the site after receiving input from the entire guidance staff.

“It’s a unique time and we’ve been trying innovative ways to connect with kids,” Skutka said. “Everyone wants to reach out and help students with anything that impacts their



ability to thrive and succeed academically. The website is a way to provide kids easy access to things that they can do for themselves.”

Though intended for students who are reluctant to seek professional help and want to go it alone, the site can be useful for kids and adults alike. You can find mindfulness tips, calming music, and self-care videos. Check it out at www.tiny.cc/MOmeditation.

All guidance events and updates are listed in the department’s electronic newsletter. Published monthly, the newsletter also includes articles about the importance of various character traits as well as academic tips. One newsletter included stories about gratitude and coping skills, for example, and tips for success in AP courses. Another contained suggestions on writing college essays.

Weblinks and phone numbers to outside support organizations are also provided.