



MEDIA RELEASE

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Charting the Course for Mental Health: Rumson's Journey through Collaborative Training Initiatives



Rumson, NJ- The Rumson School District has given significant attention to fostering students' mental health. Following an insightful community conversation featuring Ajita Shah, Founder and Program Director at Innerspace Counseling, the district organized a training session in collaboration with Ira Hayes, Director of Programs, Development, and Outreach from the Center of Wellness. Ajita Shah's expertise laid the groundwork, addressing school avoidance and anxiety prevalence among students with parents, while the subsequent training, facilitated by Ira Hayes, delved into school phobia distinctions with the district SEL team. Dr. Michael Snyder, Director of Student Services, emphasized transparent and collaborative endeavors, promoting early intervention and equipping children with tools for mental well-being. The Rumson School District Department of Student Services continues to provide resources, fostering a supportive community that prioritizes the comprehensive well-being of every student.

Ajita Shah's extensive knowledge and experience in student well-being set the stage for the district's commitment to this important area. The valuable insights she shared during the parent academy paved the way for subsequent training sessions. Working closely with Ira Hayes, the Rumson district SEL team played a crucial role in organizing and actively participating in the training, demonstrating a collaborative spirit and fostering a culture of collective learning and shared expertise. Under the skillful facilitation of Ira Hayes, the training session delved deeply into the nuances of school phobia, highlighting the distinctions between school refusal, school avoidance, and school phobia. The engaged and insightful discussions during the session promoted a deeper understanding of these issues and their impact on students. Dr. Michael Snyder championed the central theme of the training—encouraging open dialogue—a focus on fostering empathy and understanding to promote an atmosphere where every student is acknowledged and valued. The collaborative efforts of educators, administrators, and mental health professionals resulted in the development of specific strategies and the creation of a toolkit of resources and interventions. These tools are meticulously tailored to meet the unique needs of students exhibiting signs of school phobia, showcasing the commitment of the Rumson School District to address mental health challenges proactively.

Ira Hayes, drawing on his profound understanding and expertise, engaged the audience in the training session, challenging conventional perspectives and leading the path towards a more precise identification and targeted intervention for addressing critical issues. His insights have enriched the collective understanding of student mental health, equipping the district SEL team with valuable tools to foster a healthier and more supportive learning environment. It is evident that the Rumson School District maintains an unwavering commitment to the well-being of their students. The success of both the parent academy and the recent training session serves as a testament to the district's dedicated approach to mental health awareness and support. Providing educators, counselors, and support staff with the necessary knowledge and tools to identify and address school phobia effectively is a key focus. According to Dr. Snyder, "the ultimate goal is clear: to proactively cultivate a positive school environment for every student. This involves creating a space where every student feels supported, understood, and heard." Dr. Snyder emphasizes, "Together, we persist in prioritizing and enhancing the mental health of our students, reinforcing our collective commitment to their comprehensive well-being. In Rumson, we're not just addressing challenges; we're actively shaping an environment that nurtures the mental health of every student, laying the foundation for a brighter future together."