



Newsletter • JANUARY & FEBRUARY 2021



A DAY OF SERVICE AND LOVE

On Sunday, February 14, 2021, Broward County Public Schools (BCPS), along with communities across Broward County, will host A Day of Service and Love in observance of the three-year commemoration of the 17 lives lost and those injured as a result of the tragedy at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School (MSD) on February 14, 2018.

This event will provide an opportunity for students, employees, and volunteers to come together to support each other through a variety of activities at our schools and across the county. On this day, our students will reflect and spend time making a positive impact on the lives of others. We want them to know they have the power to positively shape their world and to feel pride in their importance as contributors to our community as they are surrounded by the positive acts of others. Developing character in our youth is as important as the academic education they receive. We remind ourselves that, as adults, we must exemplify what we want to see in our children.

To provide the chance for all to serve during the COVID-19 pandemic, we have developed a range of volunteer opportunities that support local efforts which can be accomplished while wearing masks and practicing physical distancing during the week of February 8-12, 2021.

Districtwide

During the week of February 8-12 (which will be regular school days), schools across the District will engage students in A Day of Service and Love activities leading up to Sunday, February 14. Students will have the opportunity to participate in projects which are intended to encourage the spirit of service while raising awareness about important and meaningful causes. On Friday, February 12 at 10:17 a.m., our entire District will observe a moment of reflection in honor of those lost and injured in the MSD tragedy. In accordance with normal school operations, Safe School Officers, security specialists, campus monitors, mental health professional staff, and counselors will continue to be accessible at all schools. Students who may experience emotional stress during this time can access the Tell Another Listening is Key (T.A.L.K.) App. This app is a new mental health services resource for K-12 students. It appears on the Clever dashboard for all students.

Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School

MSD will participate in the A Day of Service and Love on campus on February 12, but will have an early release day at 11:00 a.m. At 10:17 a.m., MSD will join the entire District in the observation of a moment of reflection.

If you have questions, please contact Dr. Philip Harris, Program Manager, Recovery, at 754-321-1783 or via Outlook philip.harris@browardschools.com or Ken King, Cadre Director at 754-321-3820 or via Outlook at ken.king@browardschools.com.



#2getherInServiceandLove





SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING AND MINDFULNESS

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) and the practice of mindfulness can provide an opportunity for young people and adults to develop focus, coping skills, and resiliency. Employing these techniques in daily life can help nurture the awareness needed for growing, healing, and learning.

There are many suggested SEL activities and strategies that support students coping with challenging situations and complex histories. The District already integrates SEL core competencies outlined by the **Collaborative for Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL)** to build the foundations of self-awareness, self-management, social skills and awareness, and responsible decision-making.

You can work on developing social-emotional skills by implementing some of the following strategies in your family:

- Create predictable routines, while offering limited choices to build a sense of control
- Build strong and supportive relationships by providing a safe place to talk and process
- Empower students' independence and self-confidence while setting appropriate limits

- Support the development of self-regulation skills with an understanding of roots of misbehavior
- Provide opportunities to explore individual and community identities
- Promote awareness activities such as observing nature and sounds
- Express emotions creatively through art, music, or dance
- Practice self-care to stay fit physically and mentally

Practicing and building inner resources grows our capacity to live and communicate in ways that support ourselves and others. **ReThink Ed** has partnered with Broward County Public Schools (BCPS) to offer research-based SEL and mindfulness resources (including modules that feature trauma-informed content) for free to families and students via a Canvas course entitled: "**SEL and Mindfulness Toolkits for Families and Students**". There is also a useful **toolkit** for educators.

For further resources and references, please contact carolyn.santangelo@browardschools.com.

MIDDLE SCHOOL COUNSELORS COLLABORATE FOR STUDENTS' WELL-BEING

After the tragedy at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School (MSD), Broward County Public Schools (BCPS) allocated funding to expand school-based mental health care within the MSD Zone, including the hiring of a team of school counselors for each school.

In August 2018, Maria Burke and Tonia Grant were assigned to Westglades and Coral Springs Middle Schools, respectively, to provide trauma-informed counseling and supplement school counseling activities already being provided.

This school year, they are teaming up to provide evidence-based social-emotional learning (SEL) and mindfulness initiatives to students, staff, and the school community. Ms. Burke and Ms. Grant are also starting a Center for Mind-Body Medicine (CMBM) small group, comprised of students from Westglades, where they will

facilitate trauma-sensitive activities for the participants. Students will learn how to help themselves and those around them, and how to use scientifically based skills to reduce stress and promote positive mental health.

Students will have the opportunity to participate in a variety of mind-body practices, including breathing, drawing, imagery, biofeedback, and movement.

Ms. Burke and Ms. Grant meet on a regular basis to plan outstanding activities for both schools, bringing additional support and resources to the MSD Zone. They have also developed an excellent Canvas page where students from both middle schools are invited to access a variety of SEL and mindfulness resources designed to reduce stress, build resiliency, and enhance well-being.



AMERICORPS AWARD TO HELP AND HEAL



The District has been awarded an AmeriCorps grant through Volunteer Florida from the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS). This multi-year AmeriCorps grant was awarded to Broward County Public Schools (BCPS) based upon a proposal to hire AmeriCorps members in evidence-based prevention, intervention, and assistance programs that strengthen communities. Through the grant, the District is currently recruiting 21 AmeriCorps Recovery Ambassadors who will help enhance academic success while reducing disciplinary infractions and absenteeism rates across our schools.

The District will utilize the evidence-based Whole School, Whole Child, Whole Community model to intervene with select students on an individual basis. AmeriCorps members will plan and deliver direct services to select students one-on-one during non-instructional time, personalization periods, and afterschool in the areas of academic tutoring, emotional

recovery services, wellness and mindfulness, equity, and family and community engagement. The goal is to identify and help local students who are at-risk of not completing grade level coursework. By the end of the first program year, the AmeriCorps members will have provided targeted tutoring to at least 350 students to improve behaviors, attendance, and course passing rates in English Language Arts and Mathematics courses.

During the 2021 school year, these services will be delivered either in person or electronically in compliance with the District's eLearning guidelines at seven selected public schools: Olsen MS, Westglades MS, Boyd Anderson HS, Deerfield Beach HS, Miramar HS, Northeast HS, and South Plantation HS.


The AmeriCorps members will receive a living allowance while serving at least 1,200 hours per year. Upon successful completion of their service, members earn a Segal AmeriCorps Education Award from the National Service

Trust which they can use to pay for higher education expenses or apply to qualified student loans.

"We are grateful for the investment that CNCS puts in Florida's communities through AmeriCorps, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic," said Volunteer Florida CEO Clay Ingram. "AmeriCorps members 'get things done' in the Sunshine State and we look forward to supporting the meaningful change that they will bring to Florida's communities and schools this year."

Director of AmeriCorps Chester Spellman said, "We are so pleased to be supporting more AmeriCorps members in Florida, where their service will help to create a brighter tomorrow for the communities they serve."

The AmeriCorps program will be housed under Student Support Initiatives & Recovery (SSI&R) and managed by Dr. Philip Harris, Program Manager, Recovery and AmeriCorps Recovery Ambassadors Program Director.



**WHY IMAGINATION—
NOT RESILIENCE—
MIGHT BE THE ANSWER TO
SURVIVING
ADVERSITY**

There are some losses we cannot just bounce back from. Instead, grief experts advise we simply try to move from Life One to Life Two. Getting there is going to take some imagination...

Even before the Covid-19 pandemic, the word 'resilience' was becoming increasingly popular, showing up in every story about children who were facing the sudden challenges of distance learning, isolation, and lost rites of passage like graduation and prom. We hear a lot about the need for community strength and how we should all be putting more effort into being positive in the face of adversity. By definition, resilience means the ability to adjust or rebound from tragedy or bad experiences. Resilience is also associated with a kind of elasticity or adaptability to life's ups and downs. This implies that, to survive crisis, we should quickly and easily adopt qualities that would require levels of stability and health that are hard to attain during the best of times!

Cultivating resilience during times of adversity can feel exhausting. Trauma and crisis leave most people feeling worn out, with little strength to be suddenly tough, mentally or physically. How can we expect this of ourselves when we may feel least capable of being capable? Why are we suddenly demanding ourselves to be resilient and sunny? In some cases, the world seems to expect us to miraculously develop resilience which seems like a task we may not be up to, a new assignment in addition to dealing with the grief or pain. This often feels out-of-sync with our feelings or the circumstances. Resilience, despite its current catchphrase status and positive intent, does not necessarily facilitate effective coping.

A big challenge of the resilience model is that bounce-back implies an attempt to get back to where we were before the crisis struck, that our pre-crisis life can be re-attained. But, as most victims of tragedy will tell you, things will never be

the same again. We cannot hold onto the hope that things will return to how they were. This idea of bouncing back using resilience keeps us looking backwards, believing that the past is, inevitably, better than the future. This tells us that we somehow need some imaginary past self if we are going to make it through, which is not true.

Who we were before cannot be resurrected. Grief and trauma aren't about stretching and then regaining our original shape. They are about being reformed into what some grief experts call the dynamic shift from Life One to Life Two – Meredith Parfet

Instead of focusing on resilience to get through pain and suffering, could we choose to focus instead on imagination? Imagination is an incredibly positive tool. It involves creativity, curiosity, openness, and adaptability. It encourages us to perceive reality, including the very darkest moments, as mutable, not fixed and inflexible, or forever. Imagination asks us to consider the question:

What if...?

Researchers from the University of Colorado and the Icahn School of Medicine at Mt. Sinai studied people's brains after asking them to imagine ways to adapt to various types of threats. They found that employing imagination stimulates the pre-frontal cortex, "reducing [our] neural and physiological conditioned threat responses." They concluded that imagination stimulated activity in the region of the brain that oversees decision making, logic, and executive function. In other words, somewhat counterintuitively, imagination helps us think more clearly and not get stuck in the primitive fight, flight, or freeze response triggered by intense trauma. Imagination is not just useful for working with past trauma. It's a form of cognitive flexibility that we can practice in non-crisis situations as well, especially when we face life's most challenging moments.

So, how do you harness the power of imagination in tough times? First, you need to identify what's most important to you. You need to ask yourself:

What matters to me most in this moment?


What must I hold on to or protect?

Once you've established these priorities, you can break down your next steps into reasonable, manageably sized tasks.


Ask: What is possible for me to do in this moment? This empowers our brains by giving us back some choices. It's not about outcomes but rather possibilities. What might be possible -- not necessarily good or desirable but just possible? Possibilities are not tied to outcomes; they are just a variety of options. Possibilities imply one's inner ability to choose.



What choices do I have right now?

How do my choices tie to what matters to me most? It may sound easy, but when you're in the depths of suffering, even the smallest choices can feel overwhelming. Start with small choices and build from there. If you've been bed-ridden with grief, ask if you could get up for a few minutes to shower. You could choose to make that positive decision. Imagine that it would feel great to return to bed feeling clean and  refreshed.

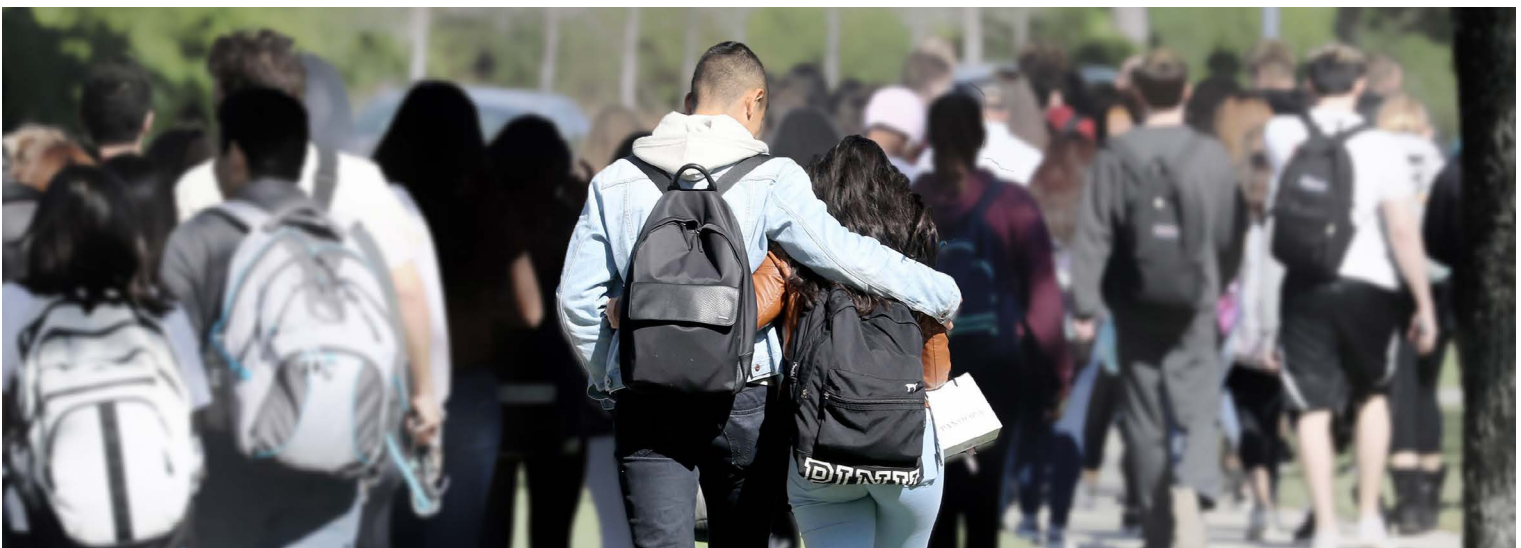
During even the darkest times there are surprising glimmers of light that one can use to ignite imagination and ease the overwhelming grief. The momentary glimmers are proof points for imagination, reminders that there is something other than the pain. - Meredith Parfet

While we cannot simply wish suffering away, we can imagine small spaces within our pain where we might experience moments of laughter, connection, or compassion. Many bereaved people describe unexpectedly meaningful conversations with perfect strangers, or feelings of gratitude for the support of a friend, or the momentary appreciation of a small marvel of nature. These glimmers of positivity can be used to ignite our imagination and ease the overwhelming grief. They are reminders that there is something other than pain because pain can be a trap, a dark hole that feels inescapable. Pain limits our ability to see other possibilities. Imagining choices is different than positive thinking. Positivity assumes outcomes  often relies on a belief that "everything will work out for the best." Life does not offer us that certainty, however - as bereaved people know all too well. Imagination simply suggests that even in hopeless situations, we have the choice to show kindness, to accept help, to experience more than just one way of existing.

Many people try to survive trauma and suffering by hardening themselves. This is a self-preservation response, a desire to not ever be vulnerable to the same pain again. But life is more than hardened survival. You can find small spaces amidst the pain to soften and be curious, to accept uncertainty, to open up—even a little bit—to the prospect that you still have choices. Eventually, you can choose to imagine that good things might be possible again.

“ During even the darkest times there are surprising glimmers of light that one can use to ignite imagination and ease the overwhelming grief. The momentary glimmers are proof points for imagination, reminders that there is something other than the pain. ”

- *Meredith Parfet*





A MINDFULNESS PRACTICE TO HELP FACE CRISIS AND TRAUMA

Try this imagination exercise as a structured process for facing crisis and trauma.

- 1 Using a breath or a mantra, acknowledge: “~~Who I was before this time of suffering cannot be resurrected.~~”
- 2 Choose an aspirational word, something you would like to experience amid this hardship -- peace, growth, connection, surprise, reconciliation.
- 3 Using your aspirational word as an anchor, imagine what it would feel like, for example, to be at peace. Do not look far into the future but consider where you might choose peace in this moment.
- 4 Sometimes, when you’re in acute crisis, imagination feels impossible, but it is a pragmatic skill that you can develop with practice. The simple act of imagining moves us from the bleak, ‘stuck’ feeling of suffering into the unwritten potential of the future.

Based on an article by Meredith Parfet, published online on December 3, 2020.

