



Levittown LEADER

SAYING YES TO COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

When it comes to caring for students' mental health and well-being, Levittown Public Schools are not alone. By taking advantage of powerful resources in our very own community, Levittown Schools are able to provide the best in social-emotional education. The district's partnership with YES Community Counseling Center has flourished and strengthened over many years to generate an array of activities, experiences and resources utilized by countless students, teachers and families.

YES Community Counseling Center is a nonprofit, community-based organization that has been serving

residents of Nassau County for more than 45 years. The YES staff includes licensed clinical social workers, licensed mental health counselors, credentialed addiction counselors, credentialed prevention professionals, and family therapists that can assist families with mental health counseling, social work and more. They have two locations in Levittown and Massapequa.

Through its partnership with Levittown Schools, opportunities for Levittown residents have expanded substantially, and the close relationship only continues to blossom. Two federal grants provide the funds for several services that

help keep students' mental health at the forefront and reduce the use of harmful substances.

"Being open to working with a community organization helps us to provide services to the entire Levittown community – and we can't do that alone," said Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction Todd Winch.

"The goal is to have everyone strive," said YES Director Adrienne LoPresti. "We're progressive – we're always willing to evolve and open to change."

Here's a closer look at the relationship between YES and Levittown Schools.

Levittown Community Action Coalition

The Levittown Community Action Coalition was founded in 2015 to increase awareness, provide education and engage the community in developing initiatives to reduce underage drinking and substance abuse. By collaborating with the Levittown School District, it has been a vital resource

in enhancing the skills of community leaders, parents, educators and students through trainings in evidence-based practices and programs proven to be effective in reducing early onset of substance abuse.

Levittown Schools and LCAC have worked together to establish the Levittown Youth Coalition, where students are

trained in leadership skills to create a positive change in the Levittown community. Students collaborate to raise awareness about the risks and consequences of drug and alcohol abuse among youth and help to reduce access to these substances.

The Levittown Youth Coalition participated in the Community Anti-Drug

Coalitions of America's National Leadership Forum, where the team won CADCA's Got Outcomes! Awards, which recognize coalitions that achieve measurable success in community-level, substance abuse-related outcomes. They were recognized for implementing a comprehensive and feasible

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Members of the Levittown Youth Coalition attended CADCA's National Leadership Conference.



At CADCA's National Leadership Conference, members of the Levittown Youth Coalition won in CADCA's Got Outcomes! Awards.

plan guided by local data, and they completed a rigorous two-phase application process presenting their story and contribution to community-level outcomes.

LCAC has also worked to implement programs and activities within the community, including Sticker Shock Campaigns, Drug Take-Back events, environmental scans, Red Watch Band Training, parent/youth educational forums, media campaigns and town hall meetings and presentations.

The coalition is funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Drug Free Communities Support Grant. For more information on LCAC, visit www.lcacoalition.org; for more information on the Youth Coalition, visit www.levittownyouth.org.

Partnering in Action and Change for Tomorrow

YES's Partnering in Action and Change for Tomorrow, or PACT, provides vital resources to limit substance abuse and strengthen prevention priorities among 9- to 20-year-olds in the community, including underage drinking, marijuana and opioid use. Through funding from the Substance Abuse and Mental

Health Services Administration and the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention, PACT seeks to understand patterns of youth and young adult underage drinking and substance abuse and offer targeted education and outreach.

This YES initiative is a collaboration among the Levittown Community Action Coalition and several other school districts and community organizations, including the Nassau County Police Department and the Long Island Prevention Resource Center.

YES staff have worked hand-in-hand with Levittown school social workers and teachers to deliver evidence-based program trainings which have in turn benefited students in supporting prevention measures.

PACT has also coordinated with Levittown Schools to recommend parents ask their child's pediatrician for an SBIRT Screening during their child's annual pediatric visit. An SBIRT Screening can assist with early identification and intervention of alcohol and/or drug use in adolescent children.

In a collaboration with Levittown Superintendent Dr. Tonie McDonald and the

Nassau County Council of School Superintendents, local policymakers were educated on the value of opting out of New York's Adult Cannabis Retail Dispensaries and On-site Consumption sites.

And in a partnership with Levittown Schools, PACT's social media marketing campaign, "Alcohol and Teens Don't Mix! Be Their Guide, Don't Provide," was promoted to students, staff and the community.

More information on PACT can be found at www.pactyes.org.

PAX Good Behavior Game

Teachers throughout Levittown Schools have adopted the PAX Good Behavior Game, a classroom-defining initiative that helps boost inclusivity. Students help define the rules of the classroom to create a more nurturing environment. During the year, students learn to support one another and are rewarded for doing so in class. This also helps reduce inattention and disruptions, which, in turn, enhances learning.

YES provides support directly to classroom teachers for this classroom strategy,

used every day during regular instruction.

Commerce Plaza

YES is also home to Commerce Plaza, a children's business center where students can partake in an immersive business experience to prepare them for the real-world workforce. It features a simulated business community in which every student gets to experience true-to-life transactions, business operations and management that ultimately give them a sense of success after their full-day trip.

In December, fifth grade students from Abbey Lane Elementary School visited Commerce Plaza and worked in various businesses throughout the day, including the Capital One Bank, Hofstra University and the Ikea Snack Shop. A highlight of the trip was the students being able to write their own checks or use their debit cards to purchase items from other businesses. Students got a firsthand look at what it is like to be a member of the workforce, budget money and have real-world responsibilities.

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MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING • SELF-CARE

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted our lives in ways that no one could have predicted. Though every situation is unique, one thing is clear: what we're experiencing is unfamiliar and uncomfortable, and we are all dealing with various kinds of stress. Stress looks different for us all and can manifest itself in many ways, including:

Fear and worry about
your own health and
the health of your
loved ones

Changes in
sleep or eating
patterns

Difficulty
sleeping or
concentrating

Worsening of
chronic health
problems

Increased use of
alcohol, tobacco
or other drugs

It's important for both your mental and physical wellness to take care of YOU so you can take care of your students and family. Here are some ways to help manage your stress and practice self-care.

- **Acknowledge your feelings:** Avoidance may only be an effective solution in the short term. Long term, however, it becomes a bigger problem than whatever was being avoided in the first place.
- **Take care of your body:** Deep breathing, stretching, meditating, exercising, getting plenty of sleep and avoiding alcohol and drugs go a long way to maximize your health.
- **Stay in the moment:** Our thoughts can become overwhelming, so focus on the present and what you can control.

- **Avoid too much exposure from the media:** Take breaks from watching, reading or listening to news stories, including social media. Hearing about the pandemic repeatedly can be upsetting and increase your stress, blood pressure, heart rate, etc.
- **Seek out positive supports in your life** and connect with others. Talk with people you trust about your concerns and how you are feeling. Consider outside therapy and support if life becomes too overwhelming or unmanageable.
- **Know your limitations and set clear boundaries:** It's easy to get consumed with work and being "on" at all times. Set limits to end burn-out and commit to be available and present in the other areas of life.

- **Make time for laughter and joy:** Laughter can actually improve your mood, relieve stress and help your body relax, so make time for laughter every day.
- **Practice positive self-talk:** Be gentle and encouraging with yourself. Think about things you're thankful for in your life.
- **Avoid alcohol and substances:** Alcohol and other substances take a psychological and physiological toll on the body and may actually make things worse.

Resources
YES Community Counseling Center
152 Center Lane, Levittown, NY 11756
516-799-3203

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