



Dear Colleague:

Many New York City teens face multiple life stressors, engage in high risk behaviors, and experience emotional distress. The 2011 NYC Youth Risk Behavior Survey showed that 27% of public high school students reported feeling sad or hopeless almost every day for two weeks or more, more than 8% reported having attempted suicide, and 18% reported doing something to purposely harm themselves.

Schools are key settings for identifying students with emotional and behavioral problems and linking them to appropriate services. When students' mental health needs are effectively addressed at school, they are more likely to feel engaged, perform better academically, have fewer disciplinary actions, and have higher graduation rates.

To assist your staff in responding to the mental health needs of their students, the New York City Department of Education and the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene are offering a free online training program: *At Risk for High School Educators*.

This one hour web-based training helps school personnel:

- (1) *identify* students exhibiting signs of psychological distress, including anxiety, depression, and suicide;
- (2) *approach* students to discuss their concern;
- (3) use motivational interviewing techniques to help *connect* students to mental health supports in school.

More than two hundred high schools have already participated, and we strongly encourage every high school to dedicate a staff meeting or a professional development session for all teachers to complete this training. You can access the course by visiting highschool.kognito.com/newyork, where you will also find communications resources that can be used to promote the training in your school.

We also want to call your attention to the Health Department's new Teen Talk Kit, a resource to help you raise awareness about emotional health, reduce stigma, and assist teens in identifying their own pathways to getting help. The Department of Education has distributed the kit to all middle and high schools and encourages its use as part of health class, parent workshops, guidance sessions, advisories, and other school support programs. To order additional kits, call 311; or visit nyc.gov/teen to download resources. Please contact Scott Bloom or Denise Arieli-Barufka at CYFSchoolprogram@health.nyc.gov with any questions about the kit or online training program.

Thank you for your ongoing efforts to improve the lives of young people in New York City.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Dennis M. Walcott'.

Dennis M. Walcott
Chancellor
Department of Education

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Thomas Farley'.

Thomas Farley, MD MPH
Commissioner
Department of Health
and Mental Hygiene