



To: Mr. Watts, Superintendent  
Ms. Malone, Chairperson of the Board  
Members of Newport Board of Education

September 19, 2024

## **1. Installation of Communication Boards at Newport Primary School**

In our commitment to fostering an inclusive and supportive environment for all students, Newport Independent Schools recently installed a communication board at Newport Primary School's playground. This project is a vital step in ensuring equitable learning opportunities and accessible spaces for students with communication challenges.

Key Features of the Communication Board:

- **Visual Support for Non-Verbal Communication:** The board includes symbols, pictures, and words that provide students, particularly those with limited verbal abilities, a way to communicate effectively. This benefits students with autism, speech and language impairments, and other disabilities that affect verbal communication.
- **Facilitating Inclusion and Interaction:** By providing an alternative method for communication, these boards encourage interactions between students, fostering friendships and reducing feelings of isolation during recreational activities. All students are empowered to participate fully, enhancing their sense of belonging.

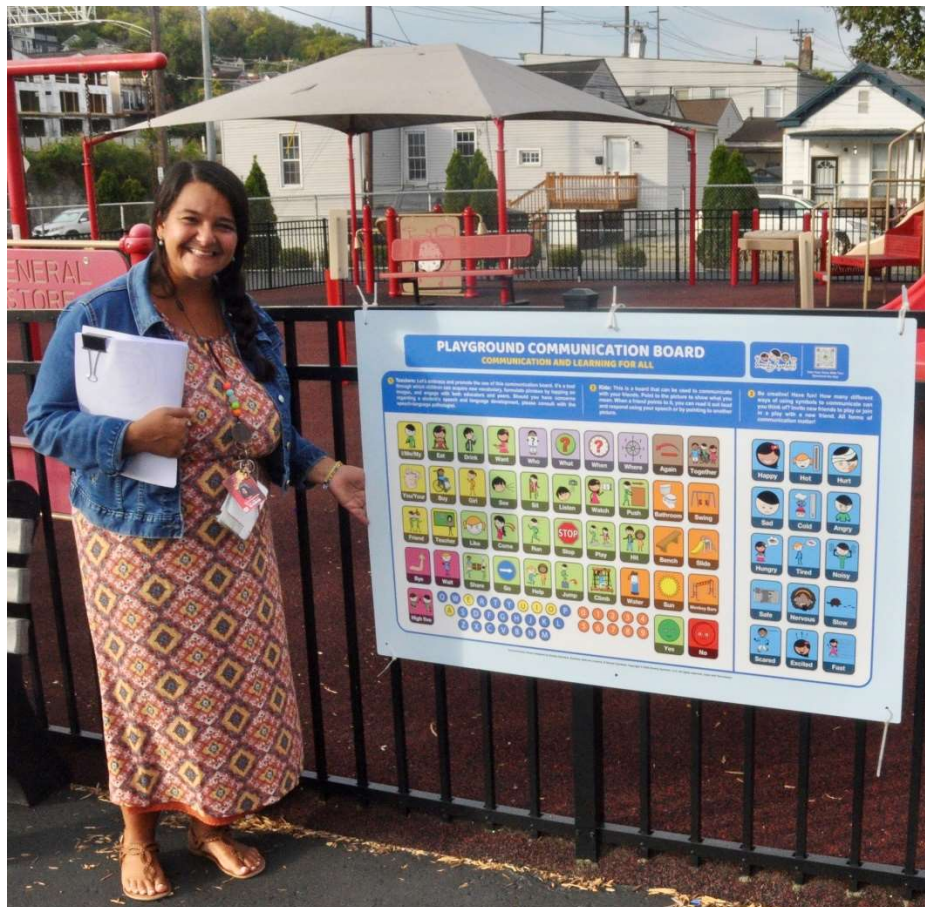
Impact of Communication Boards:

1. **Enhanced Communication Access:** Non-verbal or speech-limited students now have the means to express themselves, ensuring that every student has a voice and can be active in social situations.
  2. **Promotion of Social Interaction:** These boards enable better peer engagement during play, promoting collaboration and friendship development.
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3. Support for Language Development: Students with speech and language delays can use the boards to reinforce vocabulary acquisition and sentence structure learning in a visual, hands-on way.
4. Fostering Independence: Students can independently use the communication board to express their needs and preferences, reducing reliance on teachers or aides.
5. Encouraging Peer Understanding: The visibility and use of communication boards promote greater awareness and acceptance of different communication methods, encouraging a more patient, inclusive peer environment.

By incorporating communication boards into everyday school activities, Newport Independent Schools is aligning with Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles, ensuring equitable participation and learning opportunities for every student.

Future Plans and Monitoring: The installation of this communication board is only the beginning. The district will actively monitor its use, gather feedback from teachers, students, and families, and explore expanding the initiative to other common areas. This project underscores our district's dedication to accessibility and the success of all students.



## 2. Newport Independent Schools Suicide Prevention Month Awareness

During September, our District Mental Health Clinicians, Hannah Lunde and Jacquelyn Scruggs, took a proactive role in supporting Suicide Prevention Month initiatives, helping to foster a culture of mental wellness and support across our wildcat sch community. Their efforts focused on equipping students, staff, and families with crucial tools and resources to recognize early warning signs of mental health challenges, encouraging timely intervention, and promoting a network of support for those in need.

Key Initiatives for the Month:

1. Awareness Campaigns: A month-long effort to promote mental health awareness through educational materials such as posters, brochures, social media posts, and school-wide announcements. These resources educated students on the importance of seeking help and provided guidance on how to support peers in distress. See attachment for Social Media Post by Douglas Clark
2. Student Mental Health Education: Our clinicians conducted vital sessions to help students identify the warning signs of suicide, such as feelings of hopelessness, withdrawal, or behavioral changes. These sessions also connected students with essential community resources, such as Northkey Community Care, HealthPoint Family Care, and St. Elizabeth Healthcare.
3. Promoting Lifelines and Support Resources: To ensure students knew where to turn in times of crisis, we prominently promoted the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. Reminding students that help is available around the clock, both in and out of school.
4. Support Programs: Students were invited to participate in check-ins, fostering a culture of understanding, kindness, and proactive outreach. These programs empowered students to not only support each other but also to reach out to trusted adults when needed, reinforcing the strength of our connected school community.
5. Community Outreach: To further engage the broader school community, our team distributed Suicide Prevention Swag at the Football Tailgate Party on September 13, 2024, encouraging open dialogue about mental health in a fun, supportive setting.

Examples of NHS Daily Announcements:

- Monday: Highlighted statistics and raised awareness of how suicide impacts individuals and communities, reminding everyone that early detection saves lives.
    - *“If you or anyone you know is struggling with suicidal thoughts, there is help. The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is available 24/7 via call or text at 988. In school, you can talk to our counselors, administrators, teachers, or any trusted adult.”*
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- Tuesday: Shared an inspiring quote from Demi Lovato, emphasizing the importance of reaching out for help and finding inner resilience.
  - *“Every single person on this planet is worth life. If you or anyone you know is struggling, don’t hold it inside—reach out for help.”*
- Wednesday: Debunked the myth that suicides happen without warning, teaching students to recognize the subtle signs of distress in their peers.
  - *“If you or anyone you know is struggling, know that help is always available. Talk to a trusted adult, or reach out to the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline.”*
- Thursday: A motivational message reminded students that seeking help is a sign of strength.
  - *“It isn’t weak to ask for help. It’s like using a flashlight when you’re lost in the dark.”*

Through these efforts, Newport Independent Schools underscored the importance of mental health and suicide prevention, fostering an environment where students feel supported, heard, and empowered to seek help. Our focus remains on ensuring that every member of our community knows that they are not alone, and that help is always available. If you or anyone you know is in need of support, don’t hesitate to reach out to our school counselors or use the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (988). Together, we can continue to build a safer and more supportive wildcat community.

### 3. Special Education Service Programming Rates:

- Special Education Population  
203 Students
- Related Service Enrollments:  
Speech & Language- 103  
Occupational Therapy – 31  
Physical Therapy – 6  
Orientation & Mobility- 1  
Mental Health Therapy- 40

#### Alternate Service Locations:

- Restore Program – 7
- Home/Private School Students – 1
- Newport School of Innovation- 4

#### 504 Programming Rates – 13 Students

- NPS- 1
- NIS – 2
- NHS – 11
- NSOI- 1

Respectfully Submitted,

Lisa Swanson

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