

New Bedford's Pulaski, Congdon School students to participate in 10-day sleep challenge

"As part of Student Sleep Health Week (September 17-23), two elementary schools – Pulaski and Congdon – will participate in a 10-day sleep challenge developed by Dr. Kathleen Mackenzie, Supervisor of Clinical and Behavioral Services in collaboration with New Bedford Cable Access. "With the return to school in its third week and as schedules become routine, this is a great time for students and families to focus their attention on getting quality sleep. It is critical for overall well-being, and is linked to positive outcomes in learning, development and physical/mental health," notes Dr. Mackenzie.

Andrew O'Leary, Interim Superintendent, notes the importance of balancing screen time and sleep. "The way our students consume media is very similar to those habits, good or bad, in their nutrition and exercise. If a rested mind learns best we must all do more to encourage healthy screen-time habits and ensure our children get sufficient sleep for their age and activity level."

Students start the challenge by taking an anonymous survey about their sleep habits and watch a brief introductory video produced by New Bedford Cable Access with Dr. Mackenzie. Each day, they look at a slide to discuss a Question of the Day and watch a short video response, which provides a suggestion they can try to improve their sleep. They record their sleep in a daily log. At the end of 10 days, they take a post-challenge survey (also anonymous). This process of discussing and self-monitoring sleep health with peers and counselors creates greater awareness and understanding of sleep as a big part of

being the best one can be.

Developed two years ago, the sleep challenge seeks to educate staff, students, and families about the importance of sleep, and as a way to support student mental health. Students at the middle and high school level have participated in the sleep challenge in the past and students reported positive changes in their level of happiness, stress, and overall well-being.

This year the RISE Academy program at Pulaski School is incorporating the 10-day sleep challenge into their social-emotional learning blocks taught daily in the classroom by school adjustment counselors. RISE (Reaching Independence through Supportive Education) facilitates intensive social-emotional/behavioral and academic interventions.

Jarred Varao, Supervisor for the RISE program states, "We put social-emotional learning at the forefront of everything we do. RISE teaches skills to promote self-regulation and builds a love for learning that helps foster academic growth and success. Healthy sleep habits are a critical component."

In preparation for the sleep challenge, RISE lead behaviorist Kevin Gifford said, "We are excited to embark on this journey and partner with Dr. Mackenzie to support our students, families and staff. Our dedicated behavioral staff will also be participating, looking at their own sleep patterns. With this knowledge we can work together to create an environment that prioritizes healthy sleep habits and ultimately enhances our learning community."

Since not all schools are able to participate in the challenge at this time, Dr. Mackenzie will offer an informational session via Zoom on Tuesday, September 26, 6:00 to 7:30 p.m. To register: <https://bit.ly/NBPSSleepHealth>. The session is for parents, guardians and caregivers who would like to learn about several science-based strategies to get their children and family members sleeping better now."