



STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

A Memo from the New Jersey Department of Education

Date: May 26, 2021
To: Chief School Administrators, Charter School and Renaissance School Project Leads, Administrators of Approved Private Schools for Students with Disabilities
Route To: Principals, Administrators, Teachers, School Counselors
From: Kathy Ehling, Acting Assistant Commissioner
Division of Student Services

Celebrating Our School Communities as the 2020-2021 School Year Comes to a Close

In a typical school year, educators recognize the importance of developing strong, supportive school communities by building positive relationships and connectedness among students, staff, and families. In a school year unlike any other, where the COVID-19 pandemic has brought about unprecedented challenges, the end of the school year offers an opportunity to refocus on strengthening our school communities.

Educators may want to consider incorporating time for reflections, end-of-year activities, and celebrations to close the school year on a positive note.

- **Reflections:** Reflection is an essential component of learning that supports self-awareness and provides an opportunity for students to think about how and what they have learned, their thoughts and feelings, and insight into their own strengths and challenges. Creating a class memory book, facilitating small group discussions, creating a slide show or portfolio, or writing a letter to one's future self are a few examples of reflection activities.
- **End-of-Year Activities:** In addition to traditional end-of-year activities such as field day and prom, student events that include staff and families can create meaningful community-building opportunities. Virtual student and staff talent shows, trivia and game nights, musical performances, escape room challenges, and art exhibits can be fun culminating activities for students, educators, and families.
- **Celebrations:** Recognizing the accomplishments of all students and providing opportunities to celebrate successes further foster school connectedness and excitement for the future. In addition to schoolwide celebrations of academic achievements, athletics, citizenship, and character, educators may find it powerful to encourage students to celebrate their growth and accomplishments in and out of the classroom.

In addition to the above approaches, the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) invites educators, instructional leaders, administrators, school counselors, and other relevant staff to join a roundtable discussion where schools from across the State will share creative strategies to positively close the school year.

Roundtable Discussion with Schools

The virtual roundtable will take place on **June 3, 2021 from 3:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.** via Microsoft Teams. Individuals interested in attending the session should complete the registration form on the [NJDOE Calendar of Events](#). Should you have any additional questions, please email SafeSupportiveSchools@doe.nj.gov.

Clearinghouse of Success Stories

This spring, the NJDOE launched a clearinghouse of success stories shared by school leaders during the COVID-19 pandemic on a variety of topics. Please visit the [Clearinghouse](#) to further explore strategies for fostering safe, positive, and supportive learning environments. Information is organized by county, focus area, and size of school district. Additionally, the NJDOE encourages educators to submit success stories related to social and emotional learning and mental health in order to enhance collaboration among school districts on these critical topics.

c: Members, State Board of Education
Angelica Allen-McMillan, Ed.D., Acting Commissioner of Education
NJDOE Staff
Statewide Parent Advocacy Network
Garden State Coalition of Schools
NJ LEE Group