



# Student Support Services Newsletter

Columbus  
Academy

• October 2020 •



## Welcome to our newsletter!

**Page 2** Mental Health & Suicide Prevention Program

**Page 3-4** Health & Wellness Podcast & Book Suggestions

**Page 4** @Vikes\_Support Tweets Helpful Articles from Our Staff

**Page 5** Nurses' Office Update

**Page 6** Struggling in the Age of COVID-19

**Page 7** Lower School Counseling Update

### School Counselors

Lower School  
Shaun Ditty, M.A., LPC  
dittys@columbusacademy.org

Middle School  
Shekyra DeCree, M.A., LPCC-S  
decrees@columbusacademy.org

Upper School  
Suzanne Ritter, Ph.D.  
ritters@columbusacademy.org

School Counseling Intern  
Amy Brooks

### Health & Wellness Support

Nurses  
Beckie Hoagland, L.S.N.  
Janet Fireman, L.S.N.  
nurse@columbusacademy.org

Health & Wellness  
Ann McCabe, M.S./M.A.T  
mccabea@columbusacademy.org

### Academic Support Specialists

Lower School  
Director of Early Childhood Programming  
Brelle Farrenkopf  
farrenkopfb@columbusacademy.org

Reading Specialists  
Cyndi Yakscoe  
yakscoecy@columbusacademy.org

Learning Styles Specialists  
Alyssa Thiele (PreK-Grade 4)  
thielea@columbusacademy.org

Speech-Language Pathologists  
Adrienne Moser (PreK-Grade 4)  
mosera@columbusacademy.org

Alexis Marin (Grades 4-5)  
marina@columbusacademy.org

Middle School  
Reading Specialist  
Tamarah Davis  
davist@columbusacademy.org

Learning Styles Specialist  
Carolyn O'Brien  
obrienc@columbusacademy.org

Speech-Language Pathologist  
Alexis Marin  
marina@columbusacademy.org

Upper School  
Reading Specialists  
Jeff Arndt  
arndtj@columbusacademy.org  
Katy Frickel  
frickelk@columbusacademy.org

Visit our Student Support Services website at: [columbusacademy.org/studentsupportservices](https://www.columbusacademy.org/studentsupportservices)

# Mental Health & Suicide Prevention Program

Ann McCabe, Dr. Suzanne Ritter & Shekyra DeCree

Throughout the year our Middle and Upper School health teacher [Ann McCabe](#), Upper School Psychologist [Dr. Suzanne Ritter](#), and Middle School Counselor [Shekyra DeCree](#) are going to be teaching our students about mental health and wellness.

Our overall goals are to:

1. Raise awareness about the continuum of mental health.
2. Reduce stigma associated with mental illness and mental health problems.
3. Promote emotional well-being practices and help seeking behaviors.

One of our tools, the Signs of Suicide (SOS) program will be used to specifically address depression and suicide prevention. Our goals in participating in this program are:

- To impress upon students that they can help themselves or a friend by taking the simple step of talking to a responsible adult about their concerns.
- To provide students training in how to identify serious depression or potential suicidality in a friend.
- To explain that suicide is a preventable tragedy that often occurs as a result of untreated depression.
- To help our students understand that depression is a treatable illness, and help them assess whether or not they may have symptoms consistent with depression.

## **SOS Parent Information Portal**

One of our favorite features about this program is the Signs of Suicide parent portal. In order to access the link, go to <http://sossignsofsuicide.org>. Columbus Academy's parent username is **ca-par**, and the password is **vikings**.

This portal provides you with a depression screening form, informational videos about depression, and supporting a child is showing symptoms of depression, as well as clips of videos we show our students, and guidance about how to talk to your children about mental health.

If you have any questions or concerns about this program or have difficulty accessing the portal, please contact Shekyra DeCree, the Middle School Counselor at [decrees@columbusacademy.org](mailto:decrees@columbusacademy.org) or Dr. Suzanne Ritter, the Upper School Psychologist, at [ritters@columbusacademy.org](mailto:ritters@columbusacademy.org).

# Health & Wellness

Ann McCabe

MS/US Health & Wellness Teacher

Looking for some health and wellness books to add to your list? Here are two great reads that also support learning goals related to physical and emotional health from Academy's health and wellness grades 6-9 curriculum.

The first book is [\*The Joy of Movement: How Exercise Helps Us Find Happiness, Hope, Connection, and Courage\*](#), by Kelly McGonigal, Ph.D., a Stanford University health psychologist and award-winning science writer. The book reminds us that exercise - which our society often views as a punishment, obligation, or activity undertaken to make our bodies fit an unrealistic ideal- can be used to create social connection, happiness, and meaning in our lives and communities. It also examines the research that health education has used to rethink how we educate students on subjects like nutrition, body size, physical activity, and health.

When learning about fitness and nutrition in health class, we focus on rejecting diet culture and promote eating in a flexible, balanced manner, with an emphasis on pleasure/hunger cues and maximizing nutrients. When it comes to exercise, lessons cover the importance of finding enjoyable and accessible ways to move, which often look different for each person. The goal is for students to develop a positive relationship with food and exercise, and to recognize that health is not "eating clean" and "getting fit" - but instead, a complex interdependence of social, environmental, spiritual, physical, mental, and emotional wellness.

Speaking of emotional health, the second book I recommend is [\*Permission to Feel: Unlocking the Power of Emotions to Help Our Kids, Ourselves, and Our Society Thrive\*](#) by Marc Brackett, Ph.D. He is the Founder and Director of the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence and a Professor in the Child Study Center of Yale University. *Permission to Feel* describes why and how teaching children to understand and use their emotions supports their well-being. I sought out this book to help my 7th grade students.



Marc Brackett, Ph.D.

Although we cover emotional health throughout the health curriculum, in 7th grade we begin class with a deeper analysis of the role of emotional health in our lives: how having emotions is part of being human, how emotions provide us with information, why we feel emotions so strongly during adolescence, and why everyone - no matter their gender - is allowed to feel all emotions without shame. We also discuss the misconception that happiness is the only “healthy” or “good” emotion. After reading this book, I added information to my lessons on naming and taming emotions and collected new strategies to help teach students how to manage their emotions.

Check out these books and let me know what you think!

[Ann McCabe](#)

## Tweets to Note

### [Election Anxiety: How to Not Scar Your Kids](#)

Podcast by: Lynn Lyons, LICSW

“We’re going to talk about ways to protect your children from the very big and scary things, namely your unchecked reactions and feelings.”

### [How to Talk to Your Kids About Politics](#)

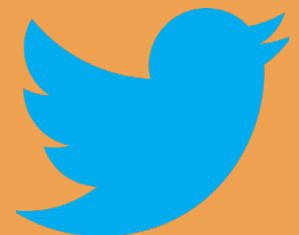
Article by: [OnOurSleeves.com](#)

*Improving Children’s Mental Health*

“No matter your personal political views, most of us want the same outcome: to raise the next generation to be responsible and engaged citizens.”

Follow us on Twitter  
[@Vikes\\_Support](#)  
[twitter.com/Vikes\\_Support](https://twitter.com/Vikes_Support)

We will provide links to helpful articles, publications and organizations related to school-age children’s mental, emotional and physical health.



# Update from our Nurses' Office

Beckie Hoagland & Janet Fireman

From the Nurses' Office at Columbus Academy, we hope this update finds you well! There is so much going on around us and sometimes we forget the little things in life that help sustain us through our day, so here are a couple of reminders to keep your child(ren) healthy this fall season.

- **Hydration Matters** - Did you know that dehydration may lead to headaches, fatigue, muscle cramps, dizziness, constipation, and heart palpitations. Please help us keep your student hydrated by sending in a water bottle daily! 50-65 oz (6-8 glasses) of water a day is recommended for those weighing 100-150lbs.
- **Healthy Snacks** -It doesn't need to be fancy, just a little something to get them through the day, especially if they have sports after school.
- **Flu Shots** - More important than ever, it is recommended to get a flu shot! Flu vaccines will reduce the risk of getting the flu, being hospitalized from the flu or even worse, dying from the flu. Getting the vaccine may also save health care resources for those patients diagnosed with COVID-19. Lastly, preventing the spread of Influenza will help to protect our vulnerable students and staff members.
- **Daily Wellness Checks** - We are asking for your cooperation every day to check your students for fever or any signs of illness prior to sending them to school. This helps keep our community safe from illness and protects those most vulnerable from getting sick.
- **Holiday Celebrations** - Please be especially careful as you find ways to celebrate over the upcoming Thanksgiving break. Whether you travel to visit friends and family, invite people into your homes, or enjoy the week with immediate family, we urge you to take precautions to protect yourselves and others from exposure to COVID-19. [This article](#) from *The Washington Post* gives helpful tips on do's and don't's for the upcoming holiday travel season.

We are happy to answer any questions or concerns ([nurses@columbusacademy.org](mailto:nurses@columbusacademy.org)) you may have and wish you a restful and safe autumn!

[Beckie Hoagland](#), L.S.N.

[Janet Fireman](#), L.S.N.

# Struggling in the Age of COVID-19

Dr. Suzanne Ritter

I have been noticing that so many of our Upper School students, who usually are able to easily get back to school and jump into their classwork and extracurricular activities, are struggling with motivation. They are more tired, more lethargic, and are not enjoying the classes and activities they usually participate in with enthusiasm and joy. They are worried that this pandemic will affect them “forever” because there is no easily definable end to it. To add to that, our Black students, LGBTQ students and young women are worried about their personal safety, and this country’s ability to protect their health and civil rights. All of this, while facing new, but normal challenges, from senior applications, to our freshman adjusting to the Upper School pace or adjusting to a whole new school altogether. Lastly, all of our students are trying to figure out their identity and develop meaningful relationships, the essential tasks of adolescents.

Two articles have caught my attention that address what I’ve been observing. First, the American Psychological Association has published the results of the “[Stress in America 2020 Survey](#).” Not surprising at all, is the finding that current events disproportionately have an effect on our Gen Z kids, (ages 13-17) and Gen Z young adults (ages 17-24). The loneliness, uncertainty, and lack of hope are taking its toll. This undoubtedly affects intrinsic motivation for our students, as they seek to find meaning and purpose in their everyday lives, devoid of the usual ways to cope, connect with others, and energize themselves.

*The New York Times* article, “[How To Do School When Motivation is Missing](#),” written by Lisa Damour, a widely published Clinical Psychologist and expert in adolescent psychology, addresses the lack of motivation we are seeing in our students. In this article, she describes this time as being “all vegetables and no dessert”, an apt and accurate description! She describes the difference between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. She describes the conditions that need to be in place to support and foster intrinsic motivation. She believes that during these times, our children will need more extrinsic motivation purposefully and regularly built into their daily routines, as a means of helping them to get moving, when these conditions aren’t working, or aren’t available. She references Carol Dweck’s growth mindset work, when she reports that the effectiveness of praise depends on how it is done, referencing the effort rather than the talent (you worked hard vs. you are so smart). Finally, she describes when and how to use extrinsic motivation.

I hope you all can all find and create times of peace, joy, fun, laughter, awe, curiosity, love, and togetherness during this difficult time. Positive emotions are necessary for keeping us moving forward, growing, and connecting to one another, and ultimately the key to fostering physical and emotional health. They do not just provide feel good moments. Their effect can last throughout the day, the weeks, and the months to come. Please feel free to contact me or other members of our counseling staff, [Shekyra DeCree](#) and [Amy Brooks](#), with concerns or questions about your child’s emotional well-being.

[Dr. Suzanne Ritter](#)

# Lower School Counseling Update

Dr. Suzanne Ritter

The Student Support Services faculty and staff are missing one of our own, [Shaun Ditty](#), our Lower School Counselor. At the beginning of October, he took a medical leave to focus on treatment for cancer and is expected to return in early 2021. Needless to say, our school is not the same without Shaun.

We are hearing from him on a regular basis and he seems to be in good spirits. This morning, Mr. Ditty sent us a picture of himself celebrating Halloween dressed as “Mr. Clean” for his chemo appointment. We are so glad to see he is keeping his sense of fun and play as he manages this taxing time in his life.

We know that the Lower School is working hard to find a counselor to fill in until Mr. Ditty comes back. While he is out, please feel free to contact the [Lower School administrators](#) and [teachers](#), as well as school counselors [Shekyra DeCree](#) and [Dr. Suzanne Ritter](#) with any questions or concerns about your child’s mental health.

Please join us in sending thoughts and lots of prayers for a speedy recovery for Mr. Ditty!

[Dr. Suzanne Ritter](#)