To: Parents of Students Receiving Counseling Services

From: , Director of Mental Health Services

RE: CONFIDENTIALITY NOTICE regarding telehealth services during the Covid-19 Public Health Emergency

DATE: March 23, 2020

Dear Parent,

We are transitioning to providing counseling services through technology, commonly referred to as “telehealth” during this period. As you we have all experienced, these are unusual times. Your child’s school district feels counseling services are of significant value to students during these times, both for students who previously received counseling as part of their educational program and others who would benefit from emotional supports during this stressful period.

As such, we want you to be aware that we will continue to provide you and/or your child safe, confidential communication, to the extent reasonably possible. While measures are made to protect confidentiality, you should be aware that telehealth communications could be at a greater risk of information accessed by non-authorized persons. For example, computers or cell phones could be stolen and data retrieved without authorization by “hacking”. Likewise, the devices that you or your child use could be hacked, stolen, or lost.

There are some ways that you can help create a confidential experience for your child. I know that during this state-wide stay-home experience, you are limited by the space available, and shared by others, in your home. When possible, provide your child a separate space, such as a room with a closed door, during their counseling session. You or your child can create “white noise” to block outside sounds using a music player, television, or white noise app on a smart phone. Encourage siblings or others to respect this time as “do not disturb.” Your child’s counselor will also help them to make adjustments as needed. As always, it is suggested that you listen to anything your child wishes to share with you about counseling, but not require them to share with you if they do not wish to. Even if your child is young, respecting the confidentiality of counseling encourages your child to feel safe to share information with their counselor and to genuinely engage in the process, so that they can achieve maximum benefit from the experience.

When you or your child participates in counseling, the counselor will not disclose the information you share, without your permission, except if one of the following exceptions occur:

EXCEPTIONS TO CONFIDENTIALITY:

* Your child’s counselor may consult with other members of the counseling staff to provide the best possible care. These consultations are for professional and training purposes. They are particularly likely to be utilized as counselors, and families, adjust to telehealth and while addressing needs that may be complicated by everyone’s experience of this public health emergency. While we make efforts to hide identifying information, such as not using real names, someone else who is familiar with your child might recognize information about them. Be assured, any information disclosed to another school professional during such a consultation is maintained with the same confidentiality, and we do not hold conversations about confidential information without a therapeutic purpose, or outside of such consultations.
* If there is evidence of clear and imminent danger of significant harm to self and/or others, a school district professional is legally required to report this information to the authorities or others’ as necessary for ensuring safety.
* California state law requires that any school staff who learn of, or strongly suspect, physical

or sexual abuse or neglect of any person under 18 years of age must report this information to appropriate authorities. Abuse of any elderly adult or adult incapable of their own care must be similarly reported to the appropriate authorities.

* If your child’s records are requested by a valid subpoena or court order, we must respond.
* During a health or safety emergency such as the current public health emergency, educational agencies may disclose personally identifiable information without prior written consent if knowledge of the information is necessary to protect the health or safety of a student or other individuals. This could, for example, include calling 911 if a student is at imminent risk.

Please speak with the professional who provides your child’s counseling if you have any questions or concerns about how we can implement confidentiality to best support your child.

Wishing you and your family good health and coping through,

Director Mental Health Services