



Beth Jones is the Assistant Superintendent for Student Services for Barrington 220.

PHOTO: JIM PRISCHING

## Support Resources for Barrington 220 Students and Their Families

**A**T THIS TIME LAST YEAR, none of us had any idea how a once-in-a-lifetime pandemic would soon hit the United States and drastically change our lives. From school closings, to social distancing, it has now been nearly a year of ups, downs, and crazy twists and turns. Quintessential Barrington talked with Beth Jones, Barrington 220's Assistant Superintendent of Student Services and Support, about how the district is working to support the social and emotional well-being of students during this tumultuous time.

**QB:** *Tell us about your background in education and your current role in Barrington 220?*

**BJ:** I have a bachelor's degree in special education from Northern Illinois University. In addition, I have two master's degrees from NIU in special education and leadership and I recently completed the first year of my doctoral program in educational leadership at Concordia University Chicago.

I began my career as a special education teacher at the elementary and secondary levels and went on to work as a district administrator in several

area school districts. I proudly joined Barrington 220 in 2017 as the Assistant Superintendent of Student Services and Support. My department oversees all district special education programs, multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS), nurses, psychologists and social workers, and outside therapeutic placements. In addition, I oversee the Barrington Transition Program, which serves students 18-22 years old who have met high school graduation requirements, but who continue to require transitional services to meet post-secondary outcomes outlined in the individual student's IEP.

**QB:** *Why do you enjoy working in Barrington 220?*

**BJ:** Our district has a strong commitment to building community relationships. I really enjoy connecting with families and helping them realize that they are not alone if they're struggling to raise children who need support. Our strong community relationships make it possible for Barrington 220 to work alongside families and outside therapists, so we can provide comprehensive services for our students that will support them in all aspects of their lives.

**QB:** *Now more than ever it is critical that students have the support they need. What is the district doing to provide that support?*

**BJ:** The pandemic has drastically changed our world. Although you often hear people say that children are resilient, living through all these changes and challenges at once takes an advanced degree of resiliency that even adults have to dig deep to find.

As a school district and as a community, we are working to support our students in many areas. We are extending support to our families who have lost loved ones to COVID-19 and to those who have been caring for a family member who is sick. Families have also been dealing with many other issues such as losing jobs, losing homes, and feeling isolated.

Although the school setting has been far from normal due to the pandemic, our caring and compassionate staff have been doing their best to safely bring students into our school buildings in small groups or individually, to touch base with school social workers, counselors, and psychologists. We

are also providing services to students over Zoom and through the META mobile app, if they are not able to attend in person or choose to access these services through these methods.

In addition to our talented staff, we are fortunate to have strong partnerships with organizations such as BStrong Together and Barrington Youth & Family Services. We've had outside therapists run small group sessions for students at school to help them process all of the challenges they're facing and to work with some of our families who require ongoing support.

**QB:** *What are some things students can do on their own to keep a positive mental attitude?*


**BJ:** I once worked with a student who told me that she was never really allowed to sit with her bad feelings. That statement was eye opening to me because we need to let our children know that it is okay to feel badly sometimes. It is important for children to experience life, the good and the bad, and seek help from a friend, family member, or a trusted adult. I want our students to have the skills to deal with tough situations.

I encourage young people to try to stay positive by doing the healthy things that make them happy. Students have shared that they like to take a break in the day and go for a walk, paint, talk with a friend, hang out with their pets, practice yoga, meditate, or watch a favorite show. They should find something outside of the daily tasks that brings them joy and do that! I also encourage students to take care of themselves physically by drinking plenty of water, getting a good night's sleep, and eating enough each day.

Doing something kind for someone else is another way to feel better. During these winter months, the rush of the holidays is over, and people tend to feel lonely. January and February are good months to reach out to others and check in on them. Drop off a meal or send a card to someone who could use a boost. Our students are creative in finding ways to help others and I have faith that they will continue this kindness.

**QB:** *What can students and parents do if they have a concern or need help?*

**BJ:** It is important for parents to know that if their child is in imminent danger of being a risk to themselves, call 911. If a parent has concerns about their student or the student has self-reported concerns that do not appear to be an immediate concern, I encourage them to reach out to a teacher, social worker, psychologist, counselor, dean, or any other staff member to get assistance. Our district has policies and procedures in place to ensure that research-based supports and interventions are provided.

We all need help at some point in life. Please have grace for yourselves when thinking about your responsibilities. Know that there is always someone who is there to help you find a solution to any problem or struggle. Also, please have grace with one another. You never know what a person may be going through behind closed doors. 

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