

COUNTY OF MORRIS
COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR
OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS & DIGITAL MEDIA

P.O. Box 900
Morristown, New Jersey 07963-0900

Board of Chosen Freeholders

Director

Douglas R. Cabana

Deputy Director

John Cesaro

Kathryn A. DeFillippo

Hank Lyon

Thomas J. Mastrangelo

Christine Myers

Deborah Smith



County Administrator

John Bonanni

Communications Director

Larry Ragonese

973-285-6015

lragonese@co.morris.nj.us

www.MorrisCountyNJ.gov

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Official News Release

For Immediate Release

**MONTVILLE SCHOOL DISTRICT IS FIRST K-12 DISTRICT TO JOIN MORRIS COUNTY'S
"STIGMA FREE" MOVEMENT**

*EIGHTEEN MORRIS COUNTY TOWNS ALSO ENROLLED IN EFFORT TO END STIGMA RELATED TO
MENTAL ILLNESS AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE DISORDERS*

The Montville Township Board of Education has voted unanimously to pass a Stigma-Free resolution, becoming the first K-12 district in the county to do so, and joining 18 Morris County towns that have enrolled in the countywide effort to help eradicate the stigma associated with mental illness and substance abuse disorders.



The Montville School District joins recently announced participants, Mendham Borough, Mountain Lakes, Roxbury, and Washington Township, which enrolled as Stigma Free communities in Morris County.

Other participants are the town of Boonton, Boonton Township, Denville, Dover, East

Hanover, Hanover, Jefferson, Long Hill, Madison, Morris Plains, Morris Township, Parsippany, Rockaway Borough and Rockaway Township

Sparta in Sussex County has joined the initiative as the first Sussex County town to do so.

"We became interested in supporting a Stigma Free environment based on information gleaned from the School Climate and Culture Survey conducted during the 2015-2016 school year through the YEA initiative with the United Way," said **Montville School Superintendent Rene Rovtar**.

"Our results showed that stress and anxiety are a concern among students at all grade levels. We feel it is important that students feel that if they are struggling with any mental health issues that they know that it is okay not to be okay, and that many resources are available to help them. We want all of our students and staff to know that the district stands ready to support them with no stigma attached."

“We are pleased that the Montville School District is supporting this Stigma-Free initiative, taking an important and first step to get the young people of our county involved in this effort,” said **Morris County Freeholder Director Doug Cabana**. “We look forward to the energy and support that students in Montville can bring to this initiative in helping affected people seek recovery, without fear of stigma or reprisal.”

The **Morris County Board of Freeholders** in 2016 passed a [resolution](#) designating Morris County as a Stigma-Free County and asked the county’s 39 towns to consider enrolling. County College of Morris and the Morris County School of Technology have supported the effort, with Montville becoming the first school district to pass a resolution of support.

The Stigma-Free initiative encourages participating towns, communities, school districts and organizations to participate in an active way through educational programs, events and/or active discussion.

Morris County has created a Stigma Free website www.morriscountystigmfree.org to call attention to the initiative, provide information and resources, and a calendar of upcoming events related to mental illness and substance abuse. A Stigma Free Toolkit also is available for towns and communities.



Morris County’s goal in creating a Stigma Free initiative is to disseminate information and foster a stigma-free environment where people are free from judgment and can get the help they need to recover.

As part of the countywide initiative, residents are urged to take the Stigma Free Pledge:

- As a supporter to those who have a mental illness or substance use disorder, I understand the importance of recognizing the high prevalence of mental illness and substance

use disorders.

- I also know that when recognition is coupled with reeducation and understanding, health-seeking action can be taken. These actions lead to recovery, which is possible for everyone.
- The Three R’s (recognize, reeducate and reduce) depend on each other to effectively Stamp Out Stigma surrounding mental illness and substance use disorders.
- This is what I, as an individual, charge myself to do—to fully Stamp Out Stigma and clear the path to health-seeking behavior. It begins with me.

For more information on the disease of mental illness, visit www.nami.org and for more information on NAMI’s national Stigma Free effort, visit: <https://www.nami.org/stigmfree>

Stigma is defined as a mark of disgrace which results from the judgment by others. When an individual is labeled by their illness they experience judgment and prejudice. Stigma brings experiences and feelings of shame, embarrassment, distress, hopelessness and reluctance to seek or accept help.

Montville Township Public Schools Stigma Free Resolution

WHEREAS, the Morris County Board of Chosen Freeholders, along with the Morris County Department of Human Services, supports the designation of Stigma-Free Communities in every municipality, and;

WHEREAS, at their April 27, 2016 meeting the Morris County Board of Chosen Freeholders unanimously passed a resolution supporting the designation of Morris County as a Stigma-Free

Community, and;

WHEREAS, Morris County recognizes that one in four Americans has experienced mental illness, including substance use disorders, in a given year according to the National Institute of Mental Health, and;

WHEREAS, mental health problems are more common than cancer and heart disease combined, affecting children and adults, including more than half of our Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans treated at Veteran's Administration hospitals, and;

WHEREAS, given the serious nature of this public health problem, we must continue to reach the millions who need help;

WHEREAS, the stigma associated with the disease of mental illness is identified as the primary reason individuals fail to seek the help they need to recover from the disease, and;

WHEREAS, Stigma-Free Communities aim to inspire public interest and open dialogues about stigma, raise awareness of the disease of mental illness and create a culture wherein residents who have the disease of mental illness feel supported by their community and neighbors and feel free to seek treatment for the disease without fear of stigma and;

WHEREAS, promoting awareness that there can be no “health” without mental health will break down barriers and encourage residents of all ages to be mindful of their mental health and ask for help when needed, and;

WHEREAS, local resources are available to treat the disease of mental illness so no one resident needs to suffer alone or feel hopeless, and;

WHEREAS, establishing Stigma-Free Communities will raise awareness of resources and encourage residents to engage in care as soon as the need is identified so recovery can begin, hope is inspired and tragedies are avoided, and;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Montville Township School District recognizes the community needs and supports the efforts of the County of Morris and the Township of Montville in designating the Montville Township Public Schools as a Stigma-Free School District.

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