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Reading School District Hosts Second Annual Aavidum Mental Health Conference

READING, PA — On March 22, the Reading School District hosted its second annual [Aavidum](#) Mental Health Conference at the Doubletree Hotel in Reading. Aimed at breaking down stigma and fostering mental health awareness, the event welcomed middle and high school students from across Berks County.

Building on the success of last year's inaugural event led by RSD social workers and school counselors, this year's conference saw a significant expansion, drawing 200 attendees representing six different school districts, including all RSD middle and high schools. Schools were invited to bring at least six students, along with chaperones.

Thanks to funding from the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency, the conference featured a variety of resources and activities designed to support attendees. Community members, students, and educators had opportunities to engage with various organizations and agencies offering mental health support, crisis intervention, and LGBTQ resources. Among the participants were representatives from the [National Alliance on Mental Illness](#), [Reading Area Community College](#), and local mental health providers.

"Cabinet-level and school board members love being a part of this event," said Anne Fisher, RSD Director of Student Services. "In Reading, the support for everyone navigating mental health challenges is evident throughout our leadership, from the top down."

The keynote speaker of the conference, Roy Juarez, Jr., shared his personal journey dealing with housing instability as a child. His moving address resonated with attendees, providing a powerful reminder of the importance of mental health awareness and support.

"I walked in feeling hopeless and walked out feeling hopeful," shared one student.

Reading High School's Aavidum club has been actively involved in organizing initiatives such as Suicide Prevention Month, Mental Health Awareness Month, and World Kindness Day. Additionally, Aavidum clubs have expanded to all RSD elementary schools this school year, ensuring that mental health resources are accessible to students of all ages.

Aavidum, a nonprofit organization, originated in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, within the Cocalico School District. Founded by students after a student suicide, the word 'Aavidum' was created by these students, meaning 'I've got your back.' Since its inception, Aavidum has played a crucial role in promoting mental health advocacy statewide and beyond.

"In Berks County, Avidum clubs are growing, with at least a half dozen districts now having their own clubs," said Emily Snisky, RSD Social Worker. "Events such as 'The Talk,' organized by other public school districts, offer students valuable chances to connect across districts. They can openly discuss important topics in a safe and impactful setting. These initiatives not only encourage collaboration, but also keep conversations flowing among students throughout the year. It creates a network where they can exchange experiences and ideas, helping them address mental health concerns within their own schools more effectively."

The Reading School District remains committed to promoting mental health awareness and providing resources to support the well-being of its students and the broader community.

To learn more about the Reading School District and its mental health initiatives, please visit their Health Services webpage: <https://www.readingsd.org/domain/1393>.

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