

Reducing Stress, Building Resiliency and Improving Services for Our Youth

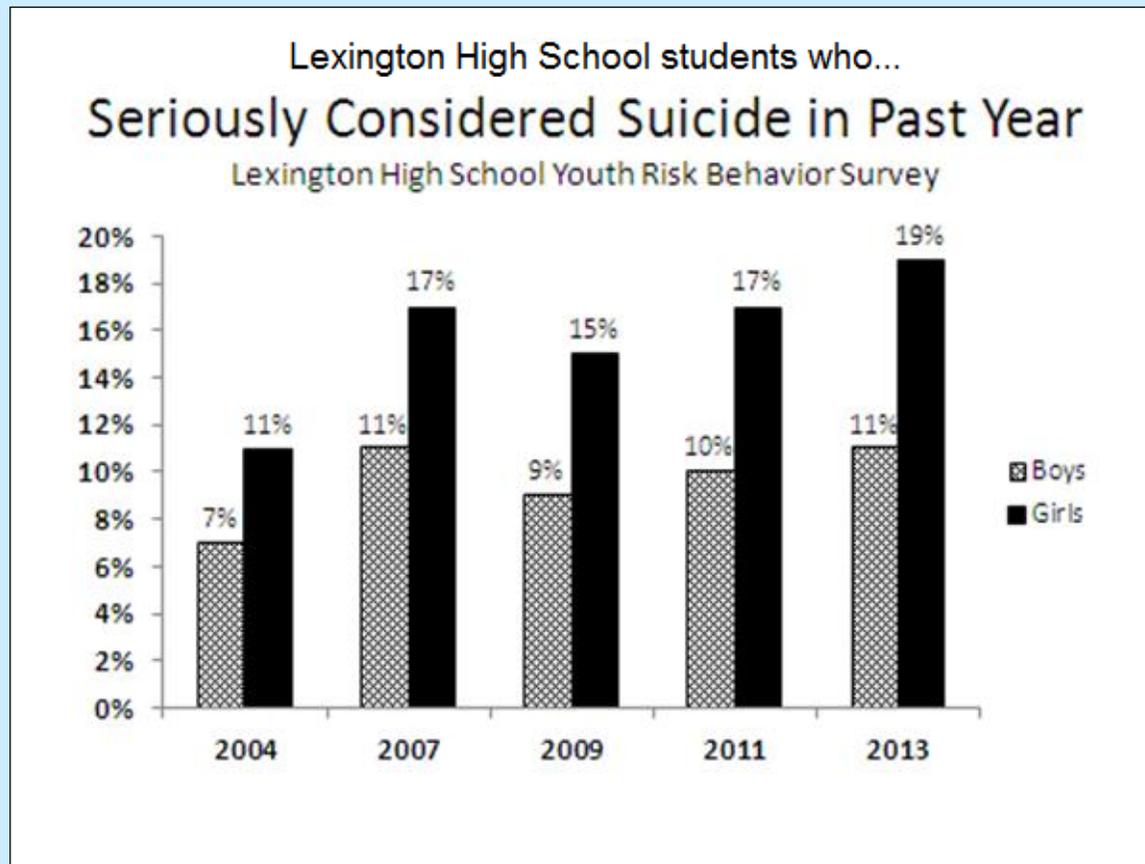
Ad Hoc Committee for Youth At Risk
Presentation to the Lexington School Committee
November 18, 2014

Stress is taking a toll on Lexington youth

According to the 2013 Youth Risk Behavior Survey:

- **55** LHS students tried to commit suicide (at least once) in the past 12 months
- **247** (15% of those surveyed) seriously considered suicide – *the highest level in a decade*
- Harassment at school and through social media was the *strongest predictor* of suicide ideation
- 60% reported “extreme” or “a lot” of stress due to classes

LHS students who considered suicide



From the 2013 Youth Risk Behavior Survey

Prevention / Identification / Support

The recommendations are aimed at one or more of the following:

1. **Prevention** for the *general population*
2. **Identification** of *youth who show signs of risk*
3. **Support services** for *youth at risk*

This is a community issue

- It's not just about the schools
- This is a community problem requiring a joint response by:
 - Schools
 - Town Government
 - Community

Schools / Town Government / Community

Schools	Town Government	Community
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Hire or designate a senior LPS administrator with the organizational authority to mobilize initiatives in the classroom, guidance, social services and professional development in order to lead district-wide efforts to build youth resiliency, reduce youth stress, and provide services for youth at risk ▪ Create a district-wide Stress Reduction and Resiliency Working Group chaired by the senior LPS administrator that includes administrators, principals, guidance, wellness and special education staff and classroom teachers, to develop new initiatives in the schools, share information among schools about their programs and assess the effectiveness of these efforts ▪ Form an on-site working group within each school chaired by the principal or assistant principal to find ways to reduce stress, build resiliency and improve the school climate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Hire or designate a Director of Youth Services within the Department of Human Services responsible for overseeing and coordinating services to youth ▪ Create a Committee for Lexington Youth, co-chaired by the Director of Youth Services and designated LPS lead administrator and comprised of youth, school, town, and community leaders and stakeholders, to promote and develop programs aimed at building resiliency, reducing stress and providing counseling and support services to youth at risk ▪ Hire counseling staff or contract with a community counseling agency to assist the Director in providing counseling and support services, staffing the Youth Center and developing community education programming for youth and parents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Under the auspices of the Committee for Lexington Youth Working Group, recruit leaders from community groups, such as PTA/PTO's, religious and civic organizations, social service and healthcare providers, to form a Community Resources for Youth Working Group with the aim of mobilizing community resources to build resiliency, reduce stress, and provide community-based services for youth at risk ▪ The Community Resources for Youth Working Group would develop and organize community forums, education programs and town-wide events aimed at promoting discussion and educating the community on social and emotional health, reducing stress and supporting youth at risk ▪ The Community Resources for Youth Working Group will act as a liaison in order to coordinate the community education programs and forums for youth and families offered by various community groups

Major Recommendations

1. Designate leadership and establish organizational structure
2. Enhance social-emotional intelligence and build resiliency
3. Reduce sources of *unnecessary and unhealthy* stress
4. Identify and provide support services for youth at risk
5. Work on community education and changing the culture
6. Find networking opportunities and resources

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Recommendation #1

Leadership and Organization

Schools	Town Government	Community
<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Designate Senior Leader in LPS■ Form district-wide Stress Reduction and Resiliency Working Group■ On-site working group at each school	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Hire Director of Youth Services■ Create a Committee for Lexington Youth	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Form a Community Resources for Youth Working Group■ Organizes community forums and education programs

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Recommendation #2

Enhance SEL and Build Resiliency

Schools	Town Government	Community
<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Expand, coordinate and align social-emotional learning programs■ Initiate mindfulness-based stress reduction pilot programs■ Expand wellness programs for staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Create a town Youth Center■ Provide on-line listings of resources for managing stress, health and wellness	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Organize community forums<ul style="list-style-type: none">• SEL, building resiliency• Stress-reduction• Balance achievement & well-being• Role of sleep■ Wellness programs for parents and youth■ Community peer leadership and peer mentor programs

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Recommendation #3

Reduce sources of unnecessary stress

Schools	Town Government	Community
<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Adopt best practices for homework; revise workload policies■ Examine course offerings and levels, e.g. adding honors, more flexible choices■ Clarify recommendation procedures; assist with balanced course choices	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Create town website for youth services■ Partner with schools on community-wide programs on bullying, internet safety, date violence, alcohol and other drugs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Organize community forums<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Peer pressure• Cyberbullying• Over-scheduling• College application process■ Hold Parent-teen discussions

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Recommendation #4

Identify and Support Youth at Risk

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<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Enhance identification/support services▪ Add guidance, social worker in elementary▪ Create additional preventive support programs at LHS, middle schools▪ Identify resources for referral	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Institute community-wide suicide prevention program▪ Give free, accessible counseling, support services and groups for at-risk youth▪ Provide outreach programs for at-risk youth	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Present results of Youth Risk Behavior Survey▪ Train teens & adults on signs of harmful behavior and how to get help▪ Provide parent education and support groups

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Recommendation #5

Community Education & Changing Culture

Schools	Town Government	Community
<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Make reducing stress a priority in schools■ Improve school climate: reduce peer-to-peer competition, pro-social culture, focus on learning■ Increase communication to parents on programs; home-school partnership	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Increase visibility of Town services■ Establish partnerships with local businesses for youth internships and mentoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Organize community forums<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What do we want?• Effect of parental and societal expectations• Balancing high-achievement culture with stress■ Develop Youth Summits■ Initiate parenting workshops

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Recommendation #6

Networking Opportunities

Schools	Town Government	Community
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Learn from comparable school districts▪ Join a network of schools, collaborate with universities and other programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Hire a grant writer to solicit funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Review what other communities have done, e.g. Newton, Needham

Recommendation #7

Create a Follow-up Task Force

- **Create a joint Follow-up Task Force with representatives from the schools, town and community to monitor implementation of these recommendations and to report on progress.**