



Lexington High School

251 Waltham Street ♦ Lexington, Massachusetts 02421

To: Dr. Paul Ash
Members of Lexington School Committee

From: Eamonn Sheehan
Jennifer Wolfrum

Re: Stress Reduction

Date: April 24, 2012

Addressing Student Stress in the Lexington Public Schools

Over the past 3 – 4 years efforts have been initiated to help reduce students' academic stress, as well as to help them increase their resiliency to all forms of stress.

Lexington High School:

The LHS School Improvement Plan (<http://lhs.lexingtonma.org/sip.shtml>) mentions the following steps to implement the policy goal around reducing stress:

- * Strengthen homeroom and advisory structure to support social and civic expectations; define roles of homeroom teachers, guidance counselors, administration
- * Provide homeroom guidelines/procedural documents for “reflective” exercises on healthy choices/using supports; community service; citizenship; integrity to self; tolerance
- * Establish faculty/student planning committee on stress reduction; assess needs including anti-bullying protocols; conduct review of literature; examine working models of existing programs, data collected by Youth Risk Behavior Survey, K-12 Resiliency Committee, other sources of local information.
- * Enforcement of the policy regarding odd/even days for subject tests during the last two weeks of the quarter
- * Assist students in their return to LHS after an emotional break (Alpha Program)
- * Investigate testing and assessment of students including the assignment of authentic homework
- * Organize summer workshop for teachers to discuss student stress and identify ways to reduce student stress

LHS PE/Wellness Department:

- * Yoga and pilates is offered as a PE class by Anne Carey at the high school. The number of these classes has increased from 2/quarter to 5/quarter.
- * All 9th grade health classes spend 2 - 3 classes discussing stress: what it is, what causes it and healthy ways to reduce it
- * All 11th grade health classes continue to examine how stress impacts students and how they can better manage their stress
- * All 9th and 11th grade health classes have added “focus activities” to the beginning of each class. These 1 – 2 minute activities provide opportunities for students to rest, relax and focus.

Jonas Clarke and William Diamond Middle School

Both Middle School Improvement Plans outline specific steps to implement the system-wide goal to increase pro-social behavior and reduce stress. These steps include:

- * Development and implementation of an anti-bullying program for students
- * Use of common language by teachers, administrators and counselors to communicate with students and parents about pro-social behavior and resiliency.
- * Rachel’s Challenge – Students have chosen to accept Rachel’s 5 challenges:
 - *Treat others the way you would like to be treated*
 - *Dream big and believe in yourself*
 - *Appreciate everyone. Mock no one*
 - *Practice the power of positive gossip*
 - *Forgive and be forgiven*
- * After the Rachel’s Challenge assembly students created the Chain Links club. This club is dedicated to improving the social climate by; creating community service opportunities, endorsing acts of kindness, creating cards for teachers and staff, collecting can tabs for charity, welcoming new students, sponsoring “mix it up days” at lunch, and creating a human chain of all students and staff to show how we are all connected.
 - Urban Improv – assembly about making choices when faced with bullying and cyber bullying situations.
 - The LHS Prevention Specialist, together with the guidance department at Clarke Middle School, have put together a peer leadership program with peer leaders at the High School as well as 7th grade students working together and presenting to sixth graders.
- * In February (2011) Diamond Middle School began a pilot in 6th grade. Once a month, a guidance counselor joins a team teacher (each month in a different subject area class). They offer a session in this classroom setting on topics from cyber-safety to navigating the social world of middle school.
- * A drug and alcohol addiction component has been added to the 8th grade health course. We also hosted a parent evening on ways parents can support children to make healthy choices around drugs and alcohol.

* A survey of students was conducted at Diamond Middle School, to acquire a better understanding of student perceptions of climate. Over 700 students participated. We are in the process of reviewing and analyzing the results.

Elementary Schools

* Open Circle is a social/emotional curriculum that is offered K – 5 at all Lexington elementary schools. Lessons are offered each week that help students identify, understand and articulate their feelings. Discussions about creating and supporting healthy relationships are integral to these lessons.

* The Responsive Classroom is a widely used research-based approach to elementary education that is designed to increase academic achievement, decrease problem behavior, improve a child's social skills and lead to more high-quality instruction.

* Bullying Prevention activities and lessons are being integrated into all elementary schools.

K – 12 Nurses:

* Professional development afternoon with Stephanie Porter from Children's Community Education Program on "Calming and Coping Strategies for Children and Staff"

* Staff meeting with Jeff Bostic, MD on anxiety

* Participation in Wellness Day at LHS for staff

K - 12 Guidance counselors:

* Examining "resiliency" as part of their Professional Learning Community (PLC: a focused group that works together towards common outcomes).

Our Guidance Counselors support our K-12 students with stress management strategies. As part of their professional learning community work, our Guidance Team has been examining various curricula and strategies that help build resiliency in students. Recommendations will be developed, after careful study of these programs, with a focus on supporting all K-12 students.

K - 8 Behavior Intervention Committee:

* The District-wide Behavior Intervention Committee is piloting the BASC-2 (Behavior and Emotional Screening System - titled the "BESS"), which is intended to measure K-12 student behavioral and emotional strengths and needs. Implementation of this screening tool will help us to strategically focus interventions to best support students.

School Health Advisory Council (SHAC):

* A website that addresses issues and resources relating to stress and stress reduction that was originally developed by Needham High School has been adapted by SHAC members for Lexington and is available as a resource for students, parents and educators. The website is available at:

<http://stress.lexingtonma.org/>

* In 2010 - 2011 the School Health Advisory Council and the PTSA co-sponsored a series of speakers who discussed how mindfulness can improve and enhance teaching and learning. Mindfulness is the capacity for intentionally bringing our attention and awareness to the present moment and all that it entails without judgment of the moment or without wishing that it were anything other than what it is. Mindfulness plays a key role in reducing stress.

9/27/10 - Dr. Blaise Aguirre provided an overview of mindfulness

11/3/10 - Myla and Jon Kabat Zinn spoke on mindful parenting

3/3/11 - Dr. Dennis Shirley and Ellen MacDonald spoke about mindful teaching

* A 2010 LEF grant funded a professional development training for K - 12 staff on mindfulness practices. The goal of the grant was to provide an opportunity for teachers to incorporate mindfulness practices into their lives and into their classrooms. Teachers who participated in The Aware Teacher professional development workshop have been incorporating a wide range of mindfulness practices into their classrooms:

At the elementary level:

- * Focusing on relationships
- * Conducting “body scans” with students to help them be quiet
- * Sharing the shell
- * Using “emotions” vocabulary
- * Creating a “peace corner”
- * Permitting eating snack when one is hungry
- * Yoga (kindergarten)
- * “Chime time”
- * Creating calming corners
- * Using relaxation strategies
- * Yoga in PE (Harrington)

At the middle school level:

- * Thinking about mindful activities that do not involve journal writing
- * Turning off overhead florescent lights
- * Incorporating brain gym activities
- * Closing eyes to listen to bell
- * Being silent while looking

At the high school level:

- * Showing respect/authenticity towards students
- * Demonstrating compassion
- * Weighing deadlines and rules with your own time
- * Being proactive
- * Using the term “be present”
- * Welcoming students at the beginning of class
- * Having students free write, “spill it”, “Tell, Let, Go”
- * Being “real” with students
- * Using the first person when speaking

- * Saying, “I feel an inspirational lecture coming on . . .”
- * In health classes:
 - Stress reduction unit (discuss what stress is, causes of stress and how to manage stress; provide practice with breathing and guided visualizations)
 - Classroom set up: chairs are in a U shape with no desks separating students and the room is open for various activities
 - Guided imagery for talking about friends and feelings
 - Checking in at beginning of class: how are you?
 - Getting to know you/get to know each other activities at beginning of course
 - Discussing awareness of body and self

Report prepared by Jennifer Wolfrum with input from all Lexington school principals and teachers from The Aware Teacher training, April 2012.