**School Health Advisory Council**

Meeting Minutes: 12/8/14

Introductions

Claire Sheth, Kathleen Lenihan, Laurie Buchta, Mona Potter, Tim Dugan, Lisa Gualtieri, Jill Gasperini, Sharon Kendall, Martha Kurland, Ann Redmond, Connie Counts, Eileen Jay, Julie Fenn Mare Ellen Dunn, Sion Harris, Eamonn Sheehan, Jennifer Wolfrum (notes) and student members of the SADD Board: Jonathan Cooper, Rob Zedros, Alyssa Mazur, Grace Vogelzang, Matt Lieberman, Corrie Fenn

Announcements

\* Food services are testing compostible trays at Bridge. They had one problem: they stick together so kids are taking more then one. This is a project that’s “in the works”. The plan is to reduce the use of styrofoam.

\* Lisa G. reported that she is running social media challenges with her Tufts’ students; there is one on emergency preparedness, one on happiness and one on sexual assault. Having the students crafting the messages is helpful. They are doing a lot with social media and graphics and she wondered if students at LHS might be interested. Someone mentioned that there’s an honors marketing class at LHS that does something like this; one project focused on transportation and biking to school. Some students from LHS have won awards for their work.

\* One member announced that the town has done two things that are not good for teens: Emily Levine’s position is being scaled back and the committee to plan for teen activities at the new center has been disbanded.

NOTE: Both Mary Ellen Dunn and I followed up with Carl Valente, Town Manager, and Charlotte Rodgers, Director of Human Services, and found out that this information is not accurate. There are a number of changes occuring both within the Human Services Department and within the town’s structure (a new department is being created: Department of Recreation and Community Programs). Emily’s full time position will stay within the Human Services Department although it will be renamed. Another position that was in the Human Services Department will move to this new department and will focus on programs for youth.

Student Input

\* Students from the Board of the SADD club came to talk about student issues and challenges.

Q: how was the Halloween party that SADD sponsored? Students said that it was good with a good turn out but some SADD members left early. There is a lot of pressure on students to go out to parties and drink alcohol. It’s hard to find friend groups that don’t feel like they have to drink. This was the first year that SADD had a haunted house; 70 students turned out. SADD members learned a lot about what they need to focus on and how they need to interact with other students.

Halloween pointed out how hard it is to address pressures to drink and all of the pressures of stress. Its’ hard to change the school culture. What can we do to impact student thinking? At the last SADD Board meeting they talked about social media and how that impacts students and their plans, eg. when you see all of your friends on Snapchat, it makes students feel left out. SADD is launching their own social media initiative over Facebook and Twitter about drug and alcohol abuse. They also want to release statements over LexMedia, eg what SADD is doing/trying to do.

Also SADD is talking about parent education. There are parents who hold parties and parents who are having a night out and are oblivious to what their children are doing. One student talked about interviewing his mother about the Social Host Liability Law and she didn’t know anything about it.

Q: do peers watch LexMedia? A: made a proposal for a new TV show. Number of viewers has increased each week. Also promoting the show over Facebook and Twitter and will also release online. Q: what is the programming? A: providing examples of resources that students can use and also programming to help people understand the effects of alcohol and to understand the options. S: LHS is very stressful and a lot of students turn to alcohol and drugs so they need to have alternatives. Students can’t wait to go to parties because they work so hard and are looking to alcohol and marijuana for stress relief.

Discussion: one of the problems is that people have tried to get the word out and reach students and parents who need the info. There are some students who will never go to parties and then there are a group of students who will always go to parties and then there are those in the middle. Positive reinforcement works better with students. What are some of the more positive ways to address stress? Perhaps having students making videos for other students would help. Also, places like LYFS (Lexington Youth and Family Services) can offer an outlet for students.

Suggestion: have students in SADD read the Ad Hoc Committee’s report on Youth at Risk and comment on what they think will help students the most.

Q: what do you feel are the strongest sources of stress? Just being at LHS; what we achieve and what is expected of us; it is really hard just trying to meet those expectations; that is really stressful. Sometimes it’s hard for teachers to understand all of the homework that students have. Teachers of seniors could acknowledge all of the extra stress that’s added on from college applications. As an LHS student you are expected to be stressed.

Comment: part of this is a societal issue. It’s also important to work on resiliency and healthy coping. Q: are some students starting to think about positive ways to cope? A: not really; students ask each other “how much sleep did you get?”, “how much work do you have?”, and they make jokes about it and laugh it off. Students shove it down: taking all of the APs and honors classes. A B range here is like getting an F at another school. During frees students spend time socializing and that is positive. Losing X block was a big loss as that was time for students to come in and get extra help.

Q: As SADD group have you partnered with/reached out to athletes and coaches? S: Teams/athletes might want support and help from SADD. Yes, good idea. Students know that some students are drinking when on teams and outreach makes sense. If someone is providing a substance free event, then we could ask coaches to make the event mandatory for the team members. We can let coaches know that SADD events are options. S: you would never know that there is an MIAA rule about not drinking when on a sports team because so many students do it and get away with it. SADD could be a resource for coaches.

Q: curious about pressure to take extra AP’s; what degree of that comes from home and what comes from friends? A: Big pressure from parents. Discussion: Needham HS instituted a plan to mandate no more then 2 AP classes/student but there was a huge outcry by parents. Another place that the pressure comes from is from colleges. Guidance will be introducing a new approach for advising students about courses and the work loads involved to help them understand what they will be facing. There will be discussion about redirecting students if they are overscheduling themselves.

How do we change this and maintain a balance? Why are there so many students in honors math who need a tutor? LHS standards seem unreasonable. No reason to make classes so hard. The number of AP classes has been increasing recently.

Wrap up comments from students:

Should try to implement: regular, honors and AP classes. S: “Taking AP physics was the biggest mistake of my school career. If I could have taken an honors version, that would have been better.” THE LHS competitive spirit drives us to want to be better then anyone else. LHS needs to send a message out about detering students from taking so many APs.

It’s about individually assessing your situation. Comparison to other students is the biggest issue; students need to recognize that you have different strengths. Having the guidance counselor sitting down with students to focus on what is best for the student and not how they can fit in with other students is important.

Too much of a gap between regular ed classes and honors/AP classes. Makes students feel like they’re not as good as their classmates if they are taking regular ed classes. Because of the competitiveness there is so much jealousy.

Messages from colleges are confusing and stressful. Colleges say that students do need to take AP classes. Need to take the emphasis from colleges out of the high school process. Should be taking high school classes not college level classes. S: I don’t feel like I’m feeling any impact from what school/community is trying to do

Summary: It would be great to partner with other groups.

Parent Symposium/Academy Report

Q: Is there a “getting to know the high school” for parents? A: Parents from the high school come as a panel to talk to parents of 8th graders. Clarke had the panel in the morning and then Diamond offered it at night. It might help to have the PTA presentations coordinated. What are the opportunities for parents of 8th graders to learn about issues at the high school? There are three sessions: 2 sponsored by middle school PTA’s and one sponsored by the high school PTSA. Then there’s the school-provided orientation for parents.

Discussion returned to the Parent Symposium/Academy: Some people made suggestions for topics: ideas for parents of 8th graders. A suggestion was made to consider partnering with LCE. The PTA Presidents have agreed to co-sponsor the event. Someone suggested that a good speaker is Dr. Josephine Kim; she speaks on parent/child relations including Asian stereotypes.

Discussion: Ad Hoc Committee Report & Excecutive Summary

Summary of the report from Eileen Jay (one of the committee members): The Ad Hoc Committee for Youth at Risk was called for by the School Committee (SC) over a year ago. The SC decided it was important enough to assign a committee to examine the issues for one year. The SC went to the Board of Selectmen to join in but they voted not to participate. The membership of the committee was a mix of representatives from the schools, parents, and community. Their main guiding principle was that this is not just a school’s issue; people look to the schools too much. This is very much a community issue. The community includes religious groups and everyone in the community together. The follow up to the report will be the creation of a task force and the hope is to get the town involved. The town’s services, if anything, are getting cut back (see NOTE earlier in the minutes). There is a desire for more of a community-wide effort. Members of the Committee talked with people in Needham, Winchester, Bedford, and Newton to see what is going on in those communities. They seem to have so much more then in Lexington.

The Committee came up with 7 broad recommendations and within each one were specific recommendations for the schools, the town and the community. Eileen then reviewed the 7 categories.

Discussion: How to best coordinate and coplan with people from the community, town and schools? People feel that one problem is that support from town for youth services does not exist. What are the Selectmen doing? What is the Human Services Dept. doing for teens? There is concern about cutting services for teens. What needs to be done? LYFS is going to meet with the Human Services Committee (they advise the Town Manager) in January to talk about youth services.

The Lexington Parent Advocacy Group is a new group that has been formed to address issues relating to youth. This group can use the report to advocate. Initially the group came together over school enrollment concerns; they can expand to address other issues. Comment: it is important to focus on youth and family stress. The Ad Hoc Committee can post documents on their website.

General discussion/comments: The interviews for the new Superintendent have been focusing on enrollment and stress. We are expecting so much of students; this issue is a “tough nut to crack”. If we (schools) need anything, we need to hire more people for the trenches. The problem is the gap in services within the town. People who are concerned that services for youth and families are not being addressed by the town should contact the Selectmen and the town manager.