

Parent discussion, Thursday, 4/3/14
Facilitated by WMS school psychologist, Vicky Anderson
(Attended by 20-25 parents)

Notes of issues discussed:

- Request to have guidance department provide parents information regarding the topics covered in developmental guidance classes so they can continue the discussion with their students, eg: what they are covering on Day Ones with 6th grade and Connections with 8th.
- 7th grade seems to be a “black hole”: lots of changes for kids which affects them socially, emotionally, academically.
 - For example: No assigned seating in cafeteria, Lunchroom bullying, No Day Ones, 6th and 8th grade buddies- not 7th; the jump from 6th to 7th in homework is huge; outside of school – sports are either very competitive level or nothing, so some kids have a lot more time on their hands; also, bar & bat mitzvahs add to the social pressure the 7th graders face.
- Some suggestions for WMS administrators re 7th grade specifically:
 - Suggest gradual shift to open seating in cafeteria - maybe wait a few months. For kids who have some anxiety, open seating can be very difficult.
 - Re homework: there seems to be enormous variation between teachers/clusters. Is homework policy consistent? Wikis are clear for 6th grade but 7th grade inconsistent - all on different pages- much harder as a parent. Could there be a page for the clusters like there is for houses in 6th grade? Giving advanced notice on HW is helpful...not done consistently.
 - Could there be a ‘dress code rule’ about bar mitzvah stuff? Eg, suggesting that students not wear the clothing they receive to school.
- General comment re homework (more than just 7th grade): Not all teachers are following the school policies, eg: homework free days inconsistent. Drop days not really working: some teachers assign extra work to incorporate the drop day.
- Discussion regarding information a parent might find out about another child, and ways to handle it. For example, reading your child’s texts and learning that a friend of your child is engaged in risky behavior: substance use, self-harm, suicidal thoughts. If you don’t know the other parents well, what are some ways to handle it? A question was asked, “Is there an anonymous tip line or way to bring issues without it getting back to your child for reporting it.”
 - Suggestions for parents included calling the guidance department, and to allay concerns that it will get back to your child, GC’s can be discreet with where the information came from. Also, a suggestion to recognize that you would want the information if it were your child. Parent comment: have had great advice and support from the guidance dept
- Discussion regarding recent suicides in Newton. Newton is actively addressing potential areas of stress on students, including looking at homework policies. Newton recently had a speaker who was impactful – a 21 year old- story was in the Globe. How is Wellesley addressing this? Vicky Anderson talked about the approach of WMS, which is to meet students where they are; listen for questions and look for signs, but not initiate discussions because of the students’ differing ages, levels of maturity, etc: not all ready to have a discussion about the recent suicides.