

Tuesday, February 9, 2016

**WMS PTO Meeting, “Metro West Adolescent Health Survey Results and WMS Panel Discussion”**

PANEL

Mark Ito, Principal  
Cathi Gordon, Assistant Principal  
Joanne Grant, Director, WPS Fitness & Health  
Kate Mahoney, WMS Department Head, Guidance  
Colleen Clopek, RN, WMS Nursing Services  
Officer Evan Rosenberg, School Resource Officer  
Anna Kobayashi-Lomes, PTO President  
Andra Jensen, PTO President

JOANNE GRANT:

Good morning, I'm Joanne Grant, Director of Wellesley Public School Fitness and Health for K-12. This morning we will review the Metro West Adolescent Health Survey results, look at the implications, and how Wellesley Middle School will address what we see. We have Panel Members here to address the survey for you (introductions):

Mark Ito, Principal  
Cathi Gordon, Assistant Principal  
Joanne Grant, Director, WPS Fitness & Health  
Kate Mahoney, WMS Department Head, Guidance  
Colleen Clopek, RN, WMS Nursing Services  
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MARK ITO:

Before we begin, as many of you know, the budget is being talked about a lot right now. We went through many discussions with the School Committee what it will look like, and are fighting very hard to make sure the teachers stayed in place, with much effort, and [PTO Co-Presidents] Anna and Andra working on our behalf. I personally can't lobby, but I'm sure everyone knows what my thoughts are. I really do appreciate the work of Anna and Andra and all of you, and wanted to let you know the School Committee voted on Thursday night not to cut the ½ cluster. (Applause).

JOANNE GRANT:

Happy day after two snow days. I've spent the last 6 years in Wellesley and am on my 25<sup>th</sup> year of teaching. The Health Survey is such a big effort and a lot of work for a lot of people, and I appreciate that parents want to hear the results. I gave this exact presentation to the Wellesley School Committee a few weeks ago. In that presentation

I showed over 120 slides, with great detail. I have put together the most salient pieces for you, detailing areas we improved on and areas that needed improvement.

(Presentation will be posted on the [WPS Website](#)).

The Metro West Adolescent Survey has been administered 5 times, representing a decade of data. In 2012, we had 100% participation in the region. This data has been compiled to show you the most salient information. Please contact me to see ALL of the data.

(Commenting on presentation slides)

Substances: Cigarettes, alcohol & marijuana are the most prevalent substances in Middle School. The biggest increase is from 7<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> grades, especially in alcohol use.

Our analysis is more in depth on alcohol, the most prevalent substance in Middle School. 14% of 8<sup>th</sup> graders have participated in lifetime drinking (defined as any drinking other than past 30 days).

AUDIENCE QUESTION: What is the jump from 8<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup>? It would be great to be prepared for what's coming down the road.

JOANNE: I can get that information for you.

The most common ways middle-schoolers get alcohol are – 1. At home 2. At a party...

Also, the percentage of students reporting self injury is on the rise.

Suicide numbers are also unsettling. Looking at these trends through the decade... "Very stressful" and depressive symptoms are on the rise from 2006.

"Being sick", "Too tired" and "Behind on school work" are the most common reasons given for absences from school. Females are reporting absences at a higher rate than males.

Middle school 8<sup>th</sup> graders are reporting over three hours each night on school work and studying, and are getting the least amount of sleep.

Males are getting more sleep than females.

Next we looked at Safety Related Behaviors. Again this not comprehensive data, but I am highlighting [the most concerning] unsafe behaviors.

The incidence of bullying [at WMS] is lower than Metro West Data... this is good

news... this is something we have been working at and we have made improvements... it was previously higher [than the Metro West Data].

Bullying and cyberbullying have gone down since 2006 - also good news.

Girls are reporting to be victims at a higher rate than males.

The top three locations where bullying occurs are: 1. In the hallway 2. In the cafeteria 3. Outside on school property.

School Attachments and Adult Support – Wellesley is doing very well. At Middle School, a very high percentage of students feel attached to the school, they feel that they are a part of the school, they are happy to be here and feel safe.

Wellesley's trend on attachment has been stable. The highest was reported in 2014, at 87%.

That is our overview of the 2014 Stress and Mental Health survey. The School Wellness Advisory Committee (SWAC) is in its 4<sup>th</sup> year... using this data to offer recommendations to the district.

(Panel Discussion Begins)

MARK ITO: I can answer the previous question from the audience: alcohol use at 10% in the Wellesley Middle School in 8th grade jumps to about 50% in 9th grade.

QUESTION: Is that data broken down by gender? Male v. female alcohol consumption?

JOANNE: Yes, I can get that info.

MARK ITO, WMS PRESIDENT

Overall, there is always room for improvement in whether children feel safe, however the trend shows that we are absolutely moving in the right direction. When address these issues from all three [contingents]: parents (PTO), students (SEED program) and faculty (faculty development: how we can better serve students) then we are on the right track.

[The survey shows] Mental health and stress is the new area that we need to be addressing... To address this issue we will use the resources we have in place.

KATE MAHONEY, WMS HEAD OF GUIDANCE

Much of stress is short term. We find out about stress: 1. From parents, 2. From teachers and 3. From students.

Academic challenge

Homework

Too busy schedules

Transitions – entering Middle School or High School, can cause temporary stress

Socially – friendship challenges

...These are reasons stress can happen.

We work individually, case by case. As an example, being out for illness and getting caught up can cause stress. Guidance works with the teacher to manage work load, and make that transition easier for the student.

We are also doing lessons in the classroom, on the iPad, “Brain Pop”, is an interactive quiz and learning about coping with stress. In 6th, 7th and 8th grade [we do] SEED sessions, and new this year, we are asking students if they would like to participate in lunchroom "Stress Sessions". About thirty 8th graders volunteered to participate in these lunchroom sessions. Outreach worker Dr. Arrigg will run a few sessions throughout the year.

Some advice for parents: Call the counselor if your child is having trouble navigating academics, homework. Hearing from you is so important – that is how we can get involved.

CATHI GORDON, WMS ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL

I would like to address the bullying piece.

In 2006 bullying was on the rise... [The current] decrease can be attributed to parents and the school. At Wellesley Middle School we have a Zero Tolerance policy, Officer Rosenberg is involved. Kids are starting to learn that what you put out there doesn't just go away. Teachers are in the hallways more, in the cafeteria, listening to what's going on... an overall onslaught to stamp out those areas of bullying. I am also in charge of tardies and kids who come late, and will outreach to parents. Often, they are trying to do homework in the morning, or having some other issue... this initiates the conversation to try to help the child.

We are all working together: school, home, kids, the police department. That is the most important thing.

COLLEEN KLOVAK – School Nurse

Good morning, I am Colleen Klovak, a nurse here at WMS. I'm stepping in for Linda Corridan, who is absent today.

The Nursing Department see sick children but address the "whole child".... We take into consideration issues having to do with anxiety and growth.

Stress and girls: girls are maturing a little bit earlier. Development and mood swings could be a part of the reason we are seeing that stress earlier than with the boys.

I can't stress enough how important SLEEP is for children. We are working with guidance and teachers... please let someone know if the work load is too much.

Kids are more aware of stress and anxiety. We are teaching resilience... helping them to go and take that test, work through nerves... they feel so much better learning that. In our office we are using relaxation tapes for kids coming in with nerves. Both Mrs. Beaton and myself like to look at the whole child – we ask – What did you have for breakfast? How much did you sleep? What time is your test today? The children are very honest... there are a lot of kids who don't get enough sleep. We are seeing that more students are staying home when they don't feel well. I think its a good thing. We used to see a lot more – 20 or more – kids a day than we do now. That's a good thing.

OFFICER ROSENBERG

I'm a cop that tries to be good (laughter). I am the liason between the school and the Wellesley Police Department.

I can't stress enough that our collective approach to these issues is the key. I work to let the school know about things happing in the community that will affect the Middle School community... less than 2% of my job is getting kids in trouble. I am a resource for awareness. If you ever interact with me... we want to try to prevent your child being in trouble, taking a proactive role.

JOANNE GRANT

We do a good job of looking at this data hard and long and have a lot of conversations about it and what can we do to tackle it. From our department, we have Professional Learning Communities (PLC) to look at topics. We are very lucky to [be able to offer] health in all three grades... We don't have that at the High School. I am proud to say that we [offer Health] separate from PE. We offer WOW sessions (Working on Wellness) ... Maura Renzella and Officer Rosenberg come in and discuss topics with the kids. The Intramural program plays a part ... giving the kids stress relief from exercise.

[Regarding the survey] we are very proactive with the information. The day after we got these results, Mark Ito was making meetings to discuss them.

Thank you! Let's take some questions.

(Questions)

QUESTION: As a coach, I have seen a lot of students. At the Elementary level - BOKS - to get kids going in the morning. I believe it was a great stress reliever. As a High School coach, there are great athletic programs available, there are kids that opt out of gym and programs. There's a lot of stress... right before midterm. Getting into college. Ongoing athleticism is very important - where do you tie into those kids that need to do something active but don't feel like they fit into the available programs?

JOANNE: First, as the Director of Fitness and Health... its a state law that children take PE, so the only time they can legally opt out is in the case of physical injury. So I want you to know that kids are not opting out. We have the highest percentage of students in our area, over 90%, on an athletic team. Steve Wroblewski, in the Performing Arts Department, offers an enrichment program for the kids. We offer barre classes, yoga, pilates - run by students and teachers. At the High School this year, in our department, we started mindful yoga to tackle stress. It has been very popular.

MARK: Sometimes in the winter its gets harder. If they aren't on a team, there are intramurals available after school. Joe Roberts is here with us from Community Investors, who fill that gap with kids who want to be physically active ... he provides a great outlet.

QUESTION: Do you capture information by race?

JOANNE: On this survey - yes.

QUESTION: I would be interested to see the bullying information ... are we seeing differences that should be addressed.

JOANNE: When I put this together... if I didn't see a large difference in reporting, I didn't include in my presentation.

QUESTION: Are the survey results online?

JOANNE: Not yet. I'm sure Dr. Lussier would [allow that]. It has to go to the School Committee first. I will discuss that with David.

MARK: Sometimes when you just put the data out there, people rush to judgment. It's important for us to have discussion alongside the data and analyze the big picture.

JOANNE: It's hard to absorb just from looking at a slide.

QUESTION: Do other schools put it up?

JOANNE: Some do, some don't.

QUESTION: What stress are you seeing more, social or schoolwork?

JOANNE: What I hear from the health teachers, its both, it's all those things... To Mark's point, we just don't know unless the student reveals the information to us.

KATE: I'll jump in from the Guidance Department. My department is taking a new initiative. We are keeping data as to why kids are visiting us. The categories are: Stress, Homework, Family, and Social. One of my goals this year is to take a look at the data monthly and analyze it, and collaborate with other departments... to figure out what we need to be addressing.

COLLEEN: [The Nursing Department] keep a record of visits also and look a trends every month. If we need to involve Guidance we do that. A lot of visits that students have with us can have more to do than just being sick.

QUESTION: Regarding substance abuse - marijuana use jumps significantly at the high school level. How are you [addressing that]?

JOANNE: We have marijuana education in both the Middle School and High School. The drug of choice is still alcohol. Prescription drug sharing is still low.

QUESTION: And, do we have a picture into the "Why"? Can you capture that info?

JOANNE: We talk about that in health to discuss some of the reasons that the kids are making choices.

OFFICER ROSENBERG: Kids get more access as they get into 9<sup>th</sup> grade... I talk about the law... we try to teach the kids to make an informed decision. When we respond to incidents, we have a specific Youth Alcohol Response program – you can look at it on our website – that was worked on with the Chief. We are not looking to give kids criminal records, but let them understand that 21 is the law. And there are going to be times when kids say, "Someone else asked me to," and we try to make that connection here when its lower stakes... good decision making.

QUESTION: What are you doing in the cafeteria in regard to bullying? And second, on the bus?

JOANNE: There are cameras on the bus. Any behavior we expect at school we expect on the bus. In the cafeteria, in 7<sup>th</sup> grade, every table is filled. It's about 400 kids.

There are 10 adults. [Lunch is] a time for them to have unstructured time, taking a break. Teachers walk up and down the aisles. We are working with Guidance... how can we make kids feel more comfortable. We know this is a place where things happen... we are continuing to evaluate. The most important thing is that kids tell us when things are happening.

MARK: Every summer when we come back the cafeteria is a different color. We are looking at ways to create a more comfortable feel... I agree that the red maybe isn't the best color.

QUESTION: Do 7th graders have assigned tables?

JOANNE: With every issue that we address, the steps have have pros and cons. You can be sitting at an assigned table and have a fight with those boys and girls the next day and be miserable.

QUESTION: What about the 6<sup>th</sup> graders? And what work are you doing with social media [issues]?

KATE: We work on transitions before the 6th grade... kids come for visits, take a tour, we offer parent workshops. Kids are placed in homerooms where they follow the same students throughout the day, to create a sense of community. They have assigned seating in the cafeteria so kids feel like they have a seat. Guidance speaks to kids to let them know we are a resource. It can be a challenge for kids... we don't group with friends... there is a good chance they will be without their close friends. We talk about resilience, giving things time. If a child is having trouble, please reach out to us. We ask the student, "Who seems nice? Who might you like to spend time with?". Behind the scenes we can work with teachers to try to put the child together with someone, pair them together on a project, for example.

MARK: The MARCs center does some work with cyber bullying and digital citizenship. Its a good resource.

QUESTION: Cliques, friends, if there is a problem within a group, how do you step in, or what kind of support is offered with "unfriending". I've heard that the school has a policy, or do you stay out of it?

KATE: Its not unusual that kids will sometimes feel excluded and that can be a really hard thing. Because I'm a counselor, we try to figure out, is this a relationship that the student wants to stay connected to? We try to coach the student on how to make those decisions. Sometimes it makes sense to have kids sits down in a group to work it out. We would never do that in a bullying situation, that is different. It's not natural, we don't have to be friends with everyone, even adults aren't friends with everyone. Our goal is trying to create a culture where kids can have time with their friends, be with who they want to be with, but be inclusive.

ANNA: This Thursday there is a discussion with Dr Anderson, school psychologist... one-on-one conversations, that's a good place to go if your child is having issues.

ANDRA: Thank you to all. As a follow up to the Survey results showing a rise in stress for kids, our next PTO meeting "FAMILY MATTERS: HELPING ADOLESCENTS MANAGE STRESS" will be held 3/15, 7-8:30pm. Dr. Rob Evans will be our guest speaker and will help us explore ways to reduce adolescents' stress and help them be more resilient and cope better.