

MS54 Wellness Meeting

December 18, 2020 @ 7:30 AM

Attendance

Laura Adams, PTA Co-President
Elsabeth Cohen, Faculty
Dr. Elana Elster, Principal
Alison Gardy, Wellness Chair
Glenn Levine, Parent
Jodi Mafдали, Special Needs Coordinator
Nildania Perez, Parent

Agenda

1. Check-In

- a. Brief introductions
- b. Share something you do that makes you feel well, relaxed, happy.

2. Dr. Elster's Presentation

3. How can Wellness continue to support SEL for all Booker T. students?

- a. After School Fitness
 - i. Led by physical education teachers
 - ii. Students grouped by neighborhood clusters and tasked with challenges
- b. Connecting Each Grade by Roblox on Private Servers
- c. Student Bake-Off and Neighborhood Distribution
- d. ["Ask The Mask"](#) model of a pandemic advice column for and by middle schoolers

4. Wellness Day Reinvented

- a. Two 60-90-minute Zoom assemblies -- one per day over two days
 - i. Speaker ideas
 - ii. Breakout sessions
- b. Possible In-Person "Yog-In" on the New School Field in May 2021
 - i. Randee Johnson's friend, who is trained to do Yoga-in-the-Schools, would love to donate classes to Booker T. Anne McIntosh Pejovich suggested a "Yog-In," on the new field in Spring, with hundreds of masked, socially distant students filling the field for a yoga class.
 - ii. Awestruck imagining the photo from the top floor of Booker T.....

Summary

The Check-In determined the flow and substance of our meeting.

During the **Check-In**, participants shared something special that happened to them recently that they would want the Wellness Committee to know. Anecdotes included:

- singing with one's mother via Zoom over the holidays and socializing more than in pre-pandemic times via Zoom with West Coast relatives;
- playing a gripping, marathon-length online game with summer camp alumni to identify and locate fellow alumni through each participant's network;
- baking varieties of holiday cookies in consultation, via Zoom, with one's mother and master baker of the family;
- navigating family traditions knowing that some have suffered tremendous loss

The anecdotes shared had special resonance in these pandemic times -- indicating the creative ways we can reach isolated elders and strengthen family and community.

In **Dr. Elster's presentation** about the prioritization of social and emotional learning, she discussed the need to find ways to brighten students' experience of the early, dreary winter months of the year, especially in the pandemic.

- An idea came up for a recipe book to get students involved, perhaps using handwritten family recipes.
- Ms. Mafdali mentioned that faculty member Randee Johnson had already discussed creating a **multicultural cookbook** at an Equity Team Meeting. The Wellness Committee affirmed the greatness of that idea.
- We discussed the possibility of a **recipe "swap,"** with students meeting at the flagpole in the courtyard and swapping the dishes they cooked in a socially distant way. Glenn mentioned that not everyone would feel Covid-19-safe under that arrangement. The swap would be for students and their families who would feel safe. How do we include people who would not feel safe in such an arrangement?
- Ms. Cohen asked **how people who are food insecure could feel included** in a recipe "swap." Might students bake from the cookbook and bring food to the MS54 Food Drive?
- We discussed a **community service** approach to brighten January: Participating families could pledge favorite holiday pantry ingredients, assemble a kit of: the pantry items, a family recipe, a photo of the finished product, and a note "From my family to yours," and deliver the items to the Food Drive for inclusion with the food parcels going home to families.
- Dr. Elster mentioned that there could be two stages to this process, so that people who are extra-cautious about Covid-19 contact could participate:
 - 1) delivering items to the multicultural, socially distanced Food Drive, where people can pick up the items two or three days later;
 - 2) swapping dishes at the flagpole

People who are super-concerned about Covid-19 exposure won't participate.

- Dr. Elster also mentioned that **students' social-emotional experience** was brought to everyone's attention at a **recent faculty meeting**.
 - The overall consensus is that kids are feeling exhausted and burnt out.
 - The faculty feels Zoomed out, too. We're ready for a break -- that normal mid-December feeling -- yet there is a push-pull, because of wanting to cover more academic areas given all of the time lost.
 - Dr. Elster emphasized the importance of giving teachers permission to check in with students to see how they feel.
 - At the faculty meeting, the possibility of changing classes was discussed. In particular, the Zoom classes are too long for the 6th graders.
 - Faculty shared their ideas for breaking up the Zoom classes. One teacher has students turn off their cameras in the middle of class and work for ten minutes off the Zoom call.
 - Dr. Elster reminded teachers that there should be absolutely NO homework over the break, and especially not the tricky kind that is due the next day after school begins again.
 - The snow [on Dec 16-17] was what we needed to get students through the next few days to the break.
 - We see a lot of kids who are struggling, and even those who are new to struggling. We are looking to bring some kids back into school every day, especially for kids who *really* need to be in school.
 - We're thinking about how to mix up the pods so kids can interact more with each other.
 - We're anticipating the Chancellor's announcement to principals today at 9 am. [By mid-morning, after the Wellness Meeting had ended, a press release from the Chancellor announced that there would be no more screened middle schools. Dr. Elster announced later that day that MS54 would continue to offer its academically rigorous program with support, as needed, to students.]

- We discussed ways to connect students with **online games**.
 - Ms. Mafdali expressed concern about any game with an online chat function that might lead to cyber-bullying. Roblox is one such game.
 - We discussed a family game night tournament with a ladder of friendly competition to encourage families to play together and meet each other.
 - We referred back to the 6th Grade Summer Family Meet-ups, in which a 6th grade teacher set up the Zoom with an introduction. We could do something similar around a Pictionary tournament, or Among Us.
 - Ms. Mafdali mentioned the success of a teacher game night, using Kahoot! We could do a grade-wide Kahoot! Meet-up. Nildania and Alison affirmed their children's love of Kahoot! Laura mentioned scribble.io
 - Ms. Mafdali suggested a **Google Survey to students**, enabling them to indicate their favorite online games. Kahoot! could be included, even though it's not a game, but a mechanism for fun competition.

- Dr. Elster wondered if a game such as the one she had played recently with Camp Ramah alumni, “Who Knows One?,” might also help connect each grade. Everyone uses their personal connections to work their cohort until they can answer, “Do you know So-and-So?” The idea is to text people until they come to the screen.
 - We considered having **separate kids’ game night, parents’ game night, and teachers’ game night**. Dr. Elster suggested that Kyle Williams could help us set those up.
 - We are also considering an after school extension of Booker T’s Finishing School, which began in the Spring. Teachers could share you-tube baking skills, for cooking at home, and, if one wishes, donating to the MS54 Food Drive.
- Ms. Cohen and Ms. Mafdali clarified the mental health screen that went out to MS54 students in mid-October. Ms. Cohen, who is working with the MS54 Ambassadors Program, is hoping to get a better sense of what students’ experiences are like right now.

Next Steps:

- Consult with Ms. Johnson to determine the timing of creating the multicultural cookbook.
- Encourage students to bake/cook, swap, and/or donate dishes in the New Year.
- Modify classes to mitigate online exhaustion and burn-out. [Faculty are already sharing techniques for accomplishing this.]
- Avoid homework over the break. [As requested by Dr. Elster.]
- Conduct a Google Survey of students to ask for their favorite online group-oriented games, and include Kahoot! as an option, even though it isn’t a game.
- Set up a separate kids’ game night, parents’ game night, and teachers’ game night to brighten the dreariness of January.