

MS54 Wellness Meeting

November 20, 2020 @ 7:30 AM

Attendance

Laura Adams, PTA Co-President
Shehriyar Antia, 7th Grade Parent
Dr. Elana Elster, Principal
Alison Gardy, Wellness Chair
Lawrence Lee, PTA Co-President
Jodi Mafdali, Special Needs Coordinator
Hudson Roditi, SLT Member

Agenda

How can MS54 fulfill the SLT's CEP Goal for Social and Emotional Learning?
Dr Elster and Ms. Mafdali present to the School Wellness Council for brainstorming.

Summary

Dr. Elster's Presentation on the SLT's CEP Goal for Social and Emotional Learning (SEL):

- As part of the SLT's CEP goals, we added a goal to address SEL and set an expectation that every student would participate in two SEL-related programs throughout the year.
- The SEL goal is intentionally broad. We can create programming for it, and it may also fit into things we have planned.
- The SEL goal is intended to keep SEL on everyone's radar.
- We need to define what an SEL-related program could mean.
 - Wellness speaker?
 - Invite past Wellness Day speakers interested in talking with students.
 - Afterschool fitness?
 - Establishing an affinity group/support group?
 - Virtual Wellness Day?
 - An extended period, not just once but twice.

Ms. Mafdali's Presentation on the SEL Survey

- The SEL survey was sent to the entire MS54 community in mid-October, two weeks after the start of in-person, hybrid learning.
- 160 students responded
- The survey enabled the school to better understand and respond to students' varying needs around depression, anxiety, Covid-19-specific anxiety, and thoughts regarding self-harm or ending one's life. The survey also assessed students' ability to cope with their feelings.
- Graduate students from Teachers College, Columbia University helped formulate questions as well as sort and interpret data.

- Ms. Mafdali and colleagues responded to students' needs with appropriate resources.
- Observation: While there are elevated levels of anxiety, much of it is not related to Covid-19. High-level anxiety can be normal, and some students are high strung to begin with.

Ideas for Achieving the SEL Goal

We know that the more connected students feel to teachers, the better the students do. It's always been about connecting, and even more than it was before. It's hard.

- **5-Minute Check-In:** Remind teachers to do a five-minute check-in during the school day or at least once per week. A check-in would consist of asking students to share something about their lives that does not have to do with school, or tell a joke, or answer a fun question. In this way, the community connects and that connected feeling affects the rest of the class. Some teachers do a good morning check-in already. Others are academic-focused. Though there is a time crunch in remote school, the five-minute check-in can go a long way.
 - We could include a weekly Wellness Tip for teachers -- a check-in tip.
 - Ms. Mafdali suggests an either-or question: Would you rather have this or that? Chocolate or vanilla?
 - Student responses can be recorded and classmates can see what percentage responded one way or another.
 - Encourage teachers to try different check-ins so that students are not doing the same check-ins every period!
 - Hudson's classes with teachers always begin with a "transitional period" in the first five or ten minutes. Otherwise, there may be emotional baggage brought to the meeting. The transition paves the way to people's feeling connected.
 - Sometimes the transition consists of people's responses to picture metaphors or quotations in the chat space in Zoom. Participants can browse images, pick one, and explain what it means to them at that moment in time.
 - There are so many structured ways to check in and move forward.
 - Offer choice.
 - Hudson will share these resources.
- **Opportunity for Teachers to Share Best Check-In Practices**
 - Perhaps a December Zoom lunch where teachers can share openers that have worked well for them so that they can become turnkey solutions for others.
- **Wellness Will Create a Write-Up for Dr. Elster to Share with Teachers**
 - A memo regarding connection and the five-minute openers.
 - Structure for each class might be:
 - 5-minute welcome opener
 - Tips during the class about keeping a healthy mind/body
 - Reminder on the way out of class with "Have a great next period!"

- **Open Drop-In Hours for Students:** Students can drop in if they have an issue and then be directed to counselors, if need be.

- **An Assembly:** An assembly can connect students to their community in a different way. Topics: healthy mind/body practices; remembering to get up and stretch; 20-20-20 (every 20 minutes, look 20 feet away for 20 seconds); quick physical movements; remembering to take care of one's needs.

- **Wellness Walks:** Shehriyar commented on the importance of having a standing invitation, a structure people can count on, without anything formal like a sign-up, just people showing up when they can at 10 am on a Sunday to walk. The walks are a bit more awkward for children. What can be done for the students?
 - Maybe the PE teachers can help students meet each other in their neighborhoods for a walk.
 - Students could be surveyed according to interest, ability, geography to meet in outdoor affinity groups, bringing together, for instance, those who like to play baseball in any weather.