

MS54 Wellness Meeting Summary

April 23, 2021 @ 7:30 AM

Attendance

Laura Adams, PTA Co-President
Dr. Elana Elster, Principal
Alison Gardy, Wellness Chair
Lawrence Lee, PTA Co-President
Jodi Mafdali, Special Needs Coordinator
Anne McIntosh, Parent Coordinator
Maggie Weinreb, Math Faculty

Agenda

- I. Discuss and Define Wellness Priorities through June 2021 and Beyond
- II. Discuss, Define, and Commit Funds to Wellness Activities through June 2021
- III. Additional Thoughts and Ideas
- IV. Next Steps

Summary

Check-in

During our check-in, we each shared an experience that made us feel well, relaxed, and happy over the past month. Shares included: savoring an unmasked visit among fully vaccinated family members and getting a manicure in a salon for the first time in over a year.

- I. Discuss and Define Wellness Priorities through June 2021 and Beyond
 - A. We agreed that having a Wellness presenter talk with students would be helpful. Since May is Mental Health Awareness month, the opportunity is before us.
 1. One thought was to have a speaker who would help students focus on ways to counter negativity and show kindness toward others.
 2. Ms. Weinreb, however, suggested that, given what she learned about her students' mental health concerns during a spontaneous 70-minute class discussion and confidential chat share, a presenter who could help students learn self-relaxation and self-centering techniques -- such as Five Finger Breathing, looking outside the window for 20 seconds (away from the screen), and journaling, all techniques she has mentioned to students -- could be extremely valuable. Many students feel a little sad or a little isolated but don't feel they need to talk with someone. They also assume that guidance counselors and other school authorities are busy helping students who are experiencing greater distress.

3. “At this point,” Ms. Weinreb said, “we need to focus on taking care of ourselves.” We agreed that this priority on self-care was not selfish, but a necessary putting on one’s own oxygen mask first.

B. Anne McIntosh Pejovich will check in with Dr. Vijayeta Sinh on her availability to do a Fireside Chat on Mental Health for parents. This year, on Wellness Day (3/16/21), she led two workshops with students on “Mindfulness for Worry—Quick & Easy Strategies to let go of Anxiety, Worry & Stress.”

C. Ms. Mafdali said more teachers are talking about the importance of these kinds of mindfulness exercises. Is there an advantage to students’ receiving this guidance from teachers they’ve gotten to know?

D. Dr. Elster mentioned that we could have a speaker lead an assembly, demonstrate mindfulness tools, then have students go into breakout rooms where a teacher would supervise but not be intruding on student discussions. The students could also discuss SEL needs in the coming year.

E. Dr. Elster added that she would reinforce the Five-Minute Check-In as an exercise for faculty to do with students. The Wellness Committee articulated the Five-Minute Check-In on page 2 of the [November 20, 2020 Wellness Meeting Summary](#).

F. We agreed that parent Social-Emotional Learning groups could be helpful as well, facilitated by a therapist parent. We could have a Fireside Chat on Mental Health

II. Discuss, Define, and Commit Funds to Wellness Activities through June 2021

A. Dr. Elster said she was inspired by the nonprofit [OneTable](#), which her son and his friends participate in, to do a similar activity customized for Booker T. Groups of eight students each would have a half-hour socially distanced picnic in the courtyard every day when school dismisses at 1:00 pm.

B. FOOD/DRINK: The school would provide a pizza pie and perhaps ice cream to each group of eight students. There would be a gluten-free pizza option and for students who do not eat pizza, they could bring their own lunches or eat the grab-and-go school lunches (e.g. peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and cheese sandwiches). Students would bring their own water bottles.

C. SOCIALIZING: Each group would be given icebreakers on slips of paper to help them get to know each other. The Wellness Committee and students could help think of icebreakers, such as:

1. This-Or-That questions: Ketchup or mustard? Chocolate or vanilla? Dog or cat?
2. Puzzlers such as “Is water wet?” and “Is a tomato a fruit or a vegetable?”

D. PROPS: The following was suggested:

1. Anne McIntosh Pejovich said she could bring in cloth table coverings for students to sit on. And sprinkle them with candies.
2. We could also have a large poster board in the courtyard for students to sign their names and write words of encouragement to each other.
3. We could have a “selfie corner” where students can take photos of each other with props.

E. SIGN-UP: Sign-up would prioritize 6th graders, then 7th and 8th graders.

Students would be expected to sign up to participate in at least one picnic lunch, with an option to repeat. On any given day of the week, approximately half of the students in the building would be able to participate. The school would use the same online sign-up mechanism for Booker T. Day and Wellness Day.

F. OPT-OUT EXEMPTION: Students who have commitments after school and cannot participate in the lunch will need to request exemption from this activity.

G. IN CASE OF RAIN: Students would move into the gym for lunch from 1:00 pm to 1:30 pm for a socially distanced picnic.

H. REMOTE PICNIC: Remote students could enjoy Zoom picnics in breakout rooms.

I. FUNDING: Wellness Grant of \$2500, Wellness PA budget of \$900+, hospitality funds and principal’s discretionary fund. We can start with 6th graders, and see how it goes.

III. Additional Thoughts and Ideas

- A. How can we help families feel comfortable about returning in the Fall? Lawrence (Larry) Lee suggested that a parent might make a video of this past pandemic year the way Jerome Kramer did last year, pre-pandemic. The video could document photos of teachers and staff at the school with a small video montage. Anne suggested that we ask Jerome to do it again. Dr. Elster added that we could also post a call for parent video-makers in the MS54 PTA Facebook group

IV. Next Steps

- A. Dr. Elster launches the sign-up for 6th Grade Lunch.

- B. The Wellness Committee thinks of icebreaker activities for 6th Grade Lunch.
- C. Dr. Elster selects a teacher or parent facilitator to lead an assembly on Mental Health in May.
- D. Laura and Larry approach a parent therapist to lead a Fireside Chat on Mental Health for parents.
- E. Larry posts a call for parent video-makers in the MS54 PTA Facebook group and asks Jerome if he is interested in making the video.