



EAB

Tackling the Student Stress Dilemma

15 Practices for Improving Student Mental Health and Well-Being

Independent School
Executive Forum





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Independent School Executive Forum

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The Independent School Executive Forum is EAB's first research program for Pre-K to 12 schools, focusing on the best strategies and practices to address the most critical challenges facing heads of school, including: ensuring financial sustainability, enhancing fundraising and alumni engagement, balancing academic rigor with attention to student wellness, and optimizing faculty recruitment and professional development.

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Supporting Members in Best Practice Implementation

Resources Available Within Your Membership

This publication is only the beginning of our work assisting members improve the mental health and well-being of students. Recognizing that ideas seldom speak for themselves, our ambition is to work with members of the Independent School Executive Forum to decide which practices are most relevant, to accelerate consensus-building among key constituencies, and to support timely and effective implementation.

For additional information about any of the services below—or for an electronic version of this publication—please visit our website (eab.com), email your organization’s dedicated advisor, or email research@eab.com with “Independent School Executive Forum ‘Tackling the Student Stress Dilemma’ Request” in the subject line.

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Executive Summary

Putting Student Wellness at the Center

A Growing Challenge for Independent Schools...

Independent school leaders are increasingly confronted with unprecedented levels of student stress on campus. In addition to the steady rise in the number of students struggling with clinical mental health issues, this stress manifests in maladaptive behaviors, academic misconduct, substance abuse, and poor physical health.

...and an Opportunity for Meaningful Change

While many of the factors contributing to student stress are beyond a school's control, independent schools still have tremendous opportunity to improve the mental health and well-being of their students. The aim of this study is to provide best practice strategies to address this growing challenge. We identified four major areas of opportunity, laid out below, where schools should focus their energy to have the most significant impact.

Key Lessons of the Study

1 Expand the Support Network

- Use entire school community as eyes and ears
- Normalize mental health issues, help-seeking behaviors
- Create a reintegration blueprint with clear roles, ownership to support all student needs

2 Deploy Time in Student-Centric Way

- Ensure assessments are designed using evidence-based principles
- Make time for both academic and non-academic priorities in schedule
- Create a schedule that contributes positively to student well-being

3 Reframe College Admissions

- Focus student energy beyond just "getting in"
- Equip students with long-term skills, not just college resume-builders
- Adjust college admissions timeline to reduce stress, involve insider experts

4 Equip Students with Life Skills

- Select evidence-based strategies to support future student success
- Demonstrate importance, value of strategies by incorporating them into academic curriculum
- Recognize that culture change is difficult, requires consistency, new norms and behaviors from all



Tackling the Student Stress Dilemma

INTRODUCTION

Mental Health Needs of College Students Growing

College students today are struggling with mental health issues more than their peers in the past. Demand for counseling services is outpacing the enrollment increases of recent years. Counseling centers are having to hire more staff to keep up with this increased demand, but even with greater capacity, many have waitlists throughout the year. At some schools, waitlists begin in the first few weeks of the school year.

Many observers, including the director of counseling quoted on this page, point to a decline in resilience among students today as an explanation for this increased demand. According to that perspective, young people today are protected and coddled, shielded from adversity, and consequently cannot handle tough or challenging situations. College is the first real experience with challenge for many of these students, and as a result, many of them wilt under the pressure.

This explanation is compelling. It fits into a broader narrative about an entitled millennial generation and the growing backlash against the “participation trophies for all” approach to sports, school, and interpersonal relationships. However, that explanation plays into stereotypes, ignored compelling data, and glosses over important nuances.

Colleges Feeling the Impact, Struggle to Meet Increasing Need

Increased Use of Counseling Services on College Campuses

5x

The factor by which demand for counseling services outpaced enrollment in 2014

33%

Of college counseling offices have a waitlist for services at some point in the academic year

51%

Of counseling center directors reported hiring new clinical staff in 2015, up from 30% in 2013

42%

Of college students reported experiencing greater than average stress in the last 12 months



Students Enter College Unable to Cope

“A lot [of students] are coming to school who don’t have the resilience of previous generations. **They can’t tolerate discomfort or having to struggle.** A primary symptom is worrying, and they don’t have the ability to soothe themselves.”

*Dan Jones, Director of Counseling and Psychological Services,
Appalachian State University*

Source: Penn State Center for Collegiate Mental Health, “CCMH 2015 Annual Report,” 2015, https://sites.psu.edu/ccmh/files/2016/01/2015_CCMH_Report_1-18-2015.pdf; Reetz, D. et al, “The Association for University and College Counseling Center Directors Annual Survey,” AUCCCD (2015); Hoffman, J., “Anxious Students Strain College Mental Health Centers,” *The New York Times*, May 27, 2015; Isabella, K., “The Most Popular Office on Campus,” *The Atlantic*, October 19, 2016; EAB interviews and analysis.

Data on Teen Mental Health Tell Similar Story

When we looked to the data on teen mental health, we found similarly troubling statistics. The chart on this page shows increases in major depressive episodes among teenagers, with a more significant increase among girls. The statistics at the bottom of the page reveal a dramatic increase in suicides among young teen girls and a sharp rise in hospitalizations for eating disorders. Coupled with statistics about the number of teens who struggle with anxiety or self-harm, these change-over-time statistics present a troubling picture of teen mental health today.

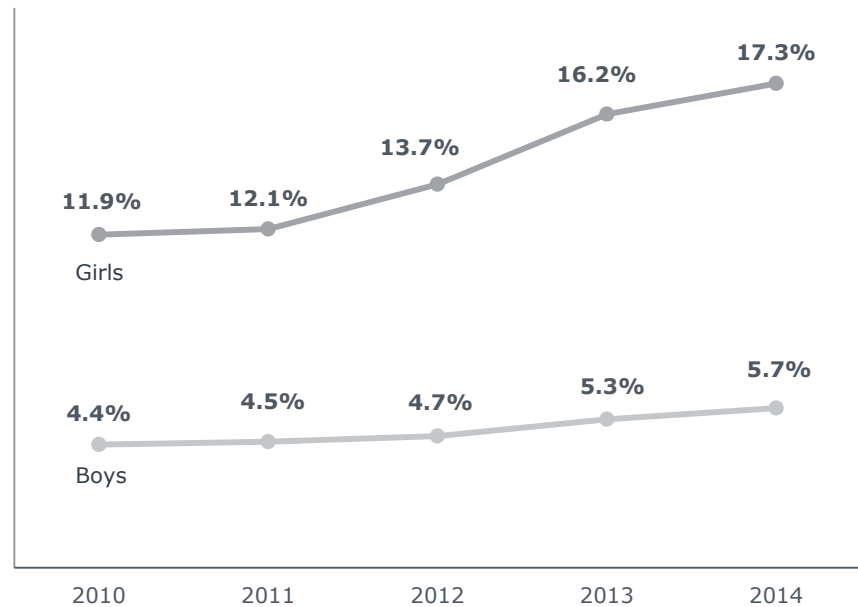
A common response to these statistics is to argue that improved diagnostic methods and decreased stigma are actually driving these increases, rather than greater incidence of mental health issues. In reality, the changes we see are likely the result of a combination of factors. Regardless, these data do suggest that students today are struggling and need help.

Most schools reported that they have not seen a large increase in the number of students dealing with clinical mental health issues. What they have seen, however, is a significant increase in students struggling at the sub-clinical level.

Major Increase in Suicide Rates, Major Depression among Teenage Girls

Past Year Major Depressive Episode¹ Among Adolescents Aged 12-17

By Gender (2010-2014)



200%

Increase in suicide rate among girls ages 10-14 between 1999 and 2014

25%

Of teens meet criteria for an anxiety disorder

172%

Increase in minors requiring hospitalization for an eating disorder between 2003 and 2014

8%

Of children ages 7-16 have attempted self-injury

¹) A major depressive episode is characterized as suffering from a depressed mood for two weeks or more, and a loss of interest or pleasure in everyday activities, accompanied by other symptoms such as feelings of emptiness, hopelessness, anxiety, worthlessness

Source: Curtin, S et al, "Increase in Suicide in the United States, 1999-2014," Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2016, <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/products/databriefs/db241.htm>; Merikangas, K. et al., "Lifetime prevalence of mental disorders in US adolescents: results from the National Comorbidity Survey Replication-Adolescent Supplement (NCS-A)," *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, June 31, 2010, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2946114/>; Olfson, M. "Trends in Mental Health Care among Children and Adolescents," *The New England Journal of Medicine*, May 21, 2015; "State of Mental Health in America," Mental Health America (2016); Bichell, R., "Suicide Rates Climb in U.S., Especially Among Adolescent Girls," April 22, 2016, <http://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2016/04/22/474888854/suicide-rates-climb-in-u-s-especially-among-adolescent-girls>; Barrocas, A. et al, "Rates of Nonsuicidal Self-Injury in Youth: Age, Sex, and Behavioral Methods in a Community Sample," *Pediatrics*, peds. 2011-2094, June, 2012; "Prevalence," <http://youth.gov/youth-topics/youth-mental-health/prevalence-mental-health-disorders-among-youth>: EAB interviews and analysis.

Students in Crisis Merely the Tip of the Iceberg

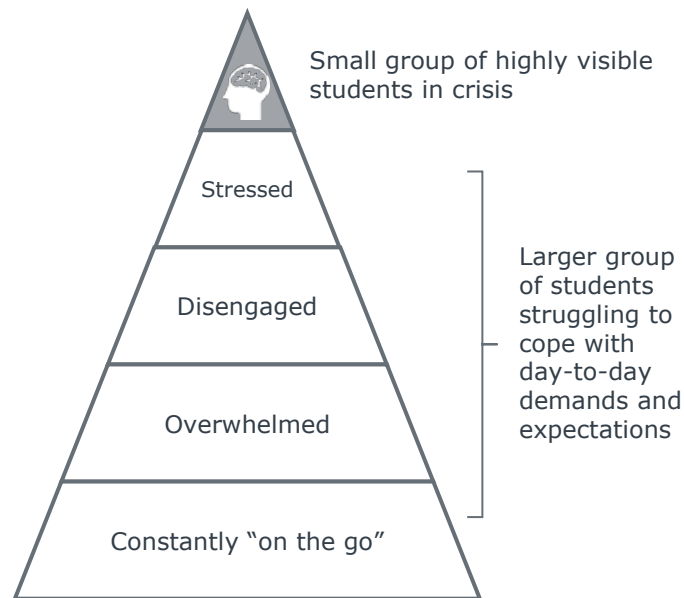
Students today are stressed out, anxious, disengaged from learning, always on the go, and rarely have time to process the events and happenings in their lives.

For many independent schools, the pervasiveness and severity of stress-related conditions and unhealthy coping mechanisms appears to be at an all-time high among students.

Given this new reality, it is not surprising that heads of school identify student mental health and well-being as top concerns.

Sub-clinical Concerns Pervasive, Troubling for Independent Schools

Below the Surface, Many More Students Struggling...



...And It's Keeping Heads of School Up at Night



88%

Proportion of independent school heads citing anxiety as common student wellness issue



49%

Proportion of independent school heads citing depression as major student health challenge

Evidence of Poor Student Well-Being at Every Turn

Beyond concerns about stress, anxiety, and disengagement, heads of school are also worried by the other negative ways stress and anxiety manifest on their campuses: poor physical health, fatigue, substance abuse, risk-aversion, among many others outlined on this page.

One of the most concerning manifestation of this stress and anxiety relates to academics, outlined in the bottom half of the circle. Students, in a relentless pursuit of perfection, concerned about getting the highest grades in the toughest possible classes to get admitted to the most selective colleges, have little interest in learning or their own growth beyond building the perfect college resume. This is very much the opposite attitude towards learning independent schools hope to foster in their students.

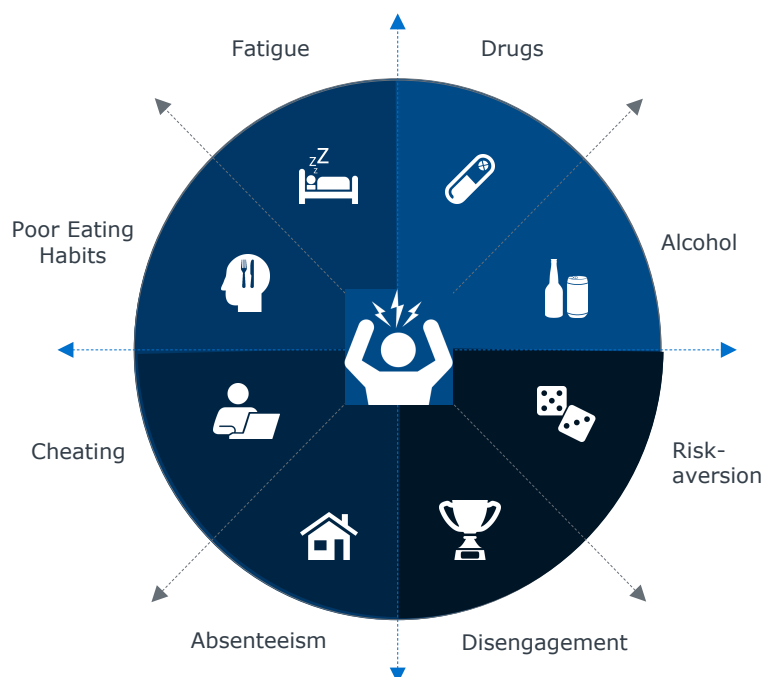
High Levels of Stress Manifest in a Variety of Ways on Campus

Poor Physical Health

Seventy-three percent of students who reported feeling unhappy, sad, or depressed also reported not getting enough sleep

Substance Misuse

Students look to drugs and alcohol to relax; use prescription drugs to focus, work late into the night



Academic Misconduct

Overwhelmed students copy homework, plagiarize online sources; take "mental health days" off from school

Maladaptive Behaviors

Fear of failure keeps students from new challenges; singular focus on grades creates disengagement

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

External Factors Contribute to Student Stress

In our analysis, three factors beyond a school's control stood out as playing a major role in creating and sustaining this new reality: a new parenting style, college admissions, and social media and technology. Let's consider each in turn.

Outside of Your Control, but Having a Huge Impact



New Parenting Style

Performance-driven parenting creates busy, failure-adverse, overscheduled students; high level of parental intervention leaves students unable to cope on their own

“You’ve heard of the helicopter parent. What about the snowplow parent, who **plows the path ahead to make it as smooth as possible**? This approach isn’t helping kids any more than a helicopter parent does.”

Head of School



College Admissions Stress

Increased selectivity of elite colleges creates academic, extra-curricular pressure among high school students

“Parents say: ‘I got into Yale; you’ll get into Yale too.’ Well, you got into Yale 25 years ago. Maybe your kid will get into Yale, and maybe they won’t. **But the pressure you’re putting on them is just so high.**”

Jennifer Jones, Director of Counseling and Wellness, John Burroughs School



Social Media and Technology

Increased connectedness eliminates time away from social pressure, exacerbates regular aspects of adolescence

“For kids who are anxious, technology amplifies that. When I was in high school, I went home and watched Miami Vice on Friday night, I may have been vaguely aware people were doing cooler things, but **I didn’t have to watch the pictures unfold in real time.**”

*Liz Perry, Head of Upper School
St. Luke’s School*

New Parenting Style Having Negative Impact

From helicopter parents and opt-out moms, academics have devoted considerable attention to the impact parenting has on children. More recent research has identified yet another approach to parenting: the snowplow parent, who paves the way for their child's success by removing all obstacles in the child's path.

These types of intensive parenting have led to children being hyper-scheduled, overly focused on grades, and unaccustomed to failure.

Academics have expressed concerns about the consequences of intensive parenting. When they are sheltered in this way, children are seldom exposed to struggle, they do not have to learn coping skills, and they never need to problem solve on their own. In short, all the work that parents are putting in to protecting their children and promoting their success is actually having the opposite effect.

Over-involvement, Pressure Contributes Negatively to Student Wellness

New Parenting Style Leaves Students...



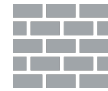
Overscheduled

41% of 9-13 year olds report feeling stressed always or most of the time because they have too much to do



Grade-oriented

90% of high school students report getting good grades is important, but only 6% say they value learning



Unaccustomed to Failure

"10 or 20 years ago kids were allowed to make more mistakes. Sign up for that course that interests you and if you don't get a good grade that's ok! It's 7th grade. It's not like that anymore."

Helping or Hovering?

"Parents need to understand they're not giving their children a chance to develop competency, a feeling of pride and well-being. Children are not developing the skills they need to become fully functioning adults."

*Holly Schiffrin, Associate Professor of Psychology
The University of Mary Washington*

Source: "Student Life in America: Teens' and Parents' Perspectives on the High School Experience," *The Princeton Review*, 2015, <https://www.princetonreview.com/high-school/student-life-american-teens>; Advocate Health Care, "Dangers of Overscheduling Your Child," 2013, <http://www.ahchealthenews.com/2013/03/25/overscheduling-your-child-leads-to-burnout-and-less-creativity/>; Schiffrin, H. et al, "Helping or Hovering? The Effects of Helicopter Parenting on College Students' Well-Being," *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, no. 23, Feb. 9, 2014; English, B., "Snowplow Parents' Overly Involved in College Students' Lives," *Boston Globe*, Nov. 9, 2013; EAB interviews and analysis.

More Applications Increases Competition

No study of student mental health and well-being would be complete without acknowledging that the college admissions process is a major source of stress for students. However, it is important to appreciate the dynamics at play to fully understand what's driving student stress.

First, while it is true that colleges are getting more applications than they did in the past, this is not only because more students are applying to college. Instead, more students are applying to more schools: while only nine percent of students applied to seven of more schools in 1990, by 2016, that number had risen to 29%.

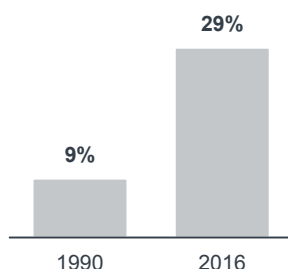
More often than not, those additional applications are not going to so-called "safety schools;" instead, students are applying to a greater number of selective schools, to increase their chances of getting in somewhere selective.

The effect of this new student approach to college admissions, well-articulated by the former Dean of Admissions from Pomona College, is that the most selective schools become even more selective, as the number of applications they receive increases. In 2015, nine of the top ten most selective colleges had acceptance rates under 10%.

More Students Apply to More Schools, Selectivity at Top Schools Increases

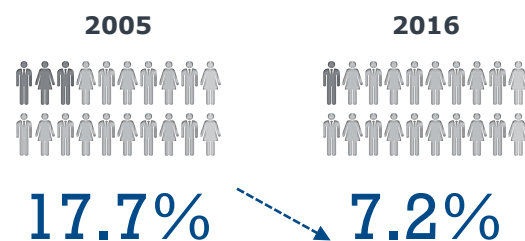
Students Expand College Lists to Secure a Spot...

Students applying to 7+ schools



...Making their Targeted Schools Even More Selective

Average admissions rate of top 10 selective colleges



The Catch-22 of College Admissions

"Kids see that the **admit rates are brutal and dropping**, and it looks more like a crapshoot. So, they send more apps, which forces the colleges to lower their admit rates, which spurs the kids next year to send even more apps."

*Bruch Poch, Former Dean of Admissions,
Pomona College*

Source: National Association for College Admission Counseling, "2015 State of College Admission," 2015; Perez-Pena, R., "Best, Brightest, and Rejected: Elite Colleges Turn Away Up to 95%," *The New York Times*, April 9, 2014, https://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/09/us/led-by-stanford-5-top-colleges-acceptance-rates-hit-new-lows.html?_r=0; Snider, S., "10 Universities Where the Fewest Applicants Get In," *U.S. News & World Report*, Sept. 29, 2015; EAB interviews and analysis.

Too Much of a Good Thing?

In the recent past, teenagers had few options for staying in touch with their friends once they left school for the day. This lack of connectivity created a mental break from both school and social life, in the evenings and on weekends.

With the advent of cell phones, however, students are constantly connected to friends through various social media platforms and technologies. That mental break enjoyed by previous generations of teenagers is long gone.

A great deal of good can come with this constant connection, but it also has a dark side. Cyberbullying, eating disorders, depression, anxiety—all of these can be exacerbated by social media use. The more time spent online, the greater the risk.

Psychologists and sociologists tend to agree that all of these factors do indeed play a role in student mental health problems. But independent schools are contributing to student well-being as well, and unfortunately, that contribution isn't always positive.

Constant Connection Has Negative Impact on Kids

In the Past, Students Had Few Options for Staying Connected



78%

Of high-income teens owned a smartphone in 2014

Today, Students Have Virtually Limitless Options



Increased Technology Use Correlated with Negative Outcomes

25%

Of adolescents report being bullied repeatedly through the internet or cell phone

2.7x

The likelihood of depression among heavy users of social media versus non-heavy users

2.6x

The risk of reporting eating or body image concerns among frequent social media users, compared to less frequent users

Source: Rideout, V. et al., "Generation M2: Media in the Lives of 8-18 Year-Olds," Kaiser Family Foundation, Jan. 20, 2010, <http://kff.org/other/event/generation-m2-media-in-the-lives-of/>; Common Sense, "The Common Sense Census: Media Use By Tweens and Teens," Nov. 3 2015, <https://www.commonsensemedia.org/research/the-common-sense-census-media-use-by-tweens-and-teens>; Shensa, A. et al., "Greater Social Media Use Tied to Higher Risk of Eating and Body Image Concerns in Young Adults," University of Pittsburgh Schools of the Health Sciences, Media Relations, May 11, 2016; EAB interviews and analysis.

But You Are Also Part of the Problem

Many independent school leaders have acknowledged that they could be doing more to identify students with the greatest need. They have also indicated that they struggle to reintegrate those students into the school community, meaning that some students ultimately do not come back to campus.

Academics are a strong driver for the student stress dilemma: homework, assessments, start times, class schedule: in other words, all the things that shape how students spend their time contribute negatively to student stress.

With an eye to admission to a top college or university, a significant amount of pressure comes from parents and students themselves. How schools support this process, however, isn't always helping to reduce this pressure.

Making their pre-college experience less stressful does not necessarily mean students will be well-prepared for future challenges. Independent school leaders are likely to see equipping students to thrive in their post-high school lives as part of their mission, and this presents a fourth opportunity for improvement.

Focusing attention on the four areas outlined on this page has the potential to impact the mental health and well-being of students in a positive way.

Internal Processes, Programs Having Equally Negative Impact on Students

Current Practice Contributes to Poor Student Outcomes in Four Areas



Limited Ability to Identify, Reintegrate Students in Crisis

- Current approach fails to connect all students in crisis to necessary support
- Reintegration poses logistical, academic, and social challenges



College Admissions Programming Exacerbating Stress

- High school experience heavily focused on "getting in" to the right college
- Classes and activities geared at college resume-building



Schedule Organization Undermining Student Health

- Traditional school schedule keeps students constantly "on-the-go"
- Organization and timing of work often designed with adults, not students, in mind



Inadequately Preparing Students for Future

- Schools struggle to find sufficient time to develop coping skills, adaptability necessary for future success

Tackling the Student Stress Dilemma

This page outlines 15 tactics that will help schools have a positive influence on the health and well-being of independent school students, organized around the four areas outlined on the previous page. We believe focusing efforts in these four areas will yield significant improvements in the day-to-day lives of students.

These 15 tactics will help schools to:

1. Expand the support network for students in crisis
2. Deploy time in a student-centric way
3. Reframe the traditional approach to college admissions
4. Equip students with the skills necessary for life beyond high school

A Road Map for the Study



Expand the Support Network

1. Faculty-Led Crisis Identification
2. Stigma-Mitigation Strategies
3. Student-Led Peer Support
4. Coordinated Reentry Process



Deploy Time in Student-Centric Way

5. Student-Faculty Homework Load Calibration
6. Homework-Free School Days
7. Optimized Final Exam Schedule
8. Mission-Aligned School Schedule



Reframe College Admissions

9. Goal Setting for Personal Growth
10. Community-Based Career Exploration
11. College-Facilitated Application Prep
12. Admissions Officer for a Night



Equip Students with Life Skills

13. Lifelong Fitness-Oriented P.E. Curriculum
14. Self-Regulation Through Mindfulness
15. Growth Mindset School Culture



Expand the Support Network

SECTION

1

- Practice 1: Faculty-Led Crisis Identification
- Practice 2: Stigma-Mitigation Strategies
- Practice 3: Student-Led Peer Support
- Practice 4: Coordinated Reentry Processes

The Silent Epidemic on Your Campus

While small in numbers, independent schools leaders are understandably concerned about students struggling with clinical mental health issues. Failing to offer the right support for students with mental health problems can have tragic consequences, so offering robust support in this area has been a priority for heads of school for many years now.

Mental Health Challenges All Too Common...



8%

Of teens suffer from anxiety disorders with severe impairment



2nd

Suicide is the second leading cause of death in youth, ages 10-24



80%

Of children and adolescents with mental health needs receive insufficient or no treatment

The New Normal

"I hired a new head of upper school three years ago. Her first year she spent a third or more of her time working with parents and students on issues related to emotional well-being, really serious issues including medical leaves. I kept promising her, **'This is an anomaly. It hasn't been this bad; it will get better next year.'** Well it didn't. It just continued."

Head of School, K-12 Independent School

Source: Merikangas, K. et al., "Lifetime Prevalence of Mental Disorders in US Adolescents: Results from the National Comorbidity Survey Replication – Adolescent Supplement," *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, 49 (10), 2010; Costello, J. et al., "Services for adolescents with psychiatric disorders: 12-month data from the National Comorbidity Survey–Adolescent," *Psychiatric Services*, 1;65, Mar., 2014; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *Child Health 2014* (2014); VanOrman, A. et al., "Suicide Replaces Homicide as Second-Leading Cause of Death Among U.S. Teenagers," Population Reference Bureau, June, 2016; EAB interviews and analysis.

Adding Staff Common Response to More Demand

Most schools have addressed this growing concern by adding staff: while more counselors was most common, many schools have tried various other health professionals to meet student needs.

But this additive approach isn't getting schools to where they want to be for three primary reasons.

First, adding staff does not increase what students know about mental health. They do not gain a better sense of the signs and symptoms of mental health issues, so they are not better equipped to recognize concerning behavior in themselves or others.

Second, adding more staff does nothing to tackle stigma around mental health issues, leaving many students hesitant to come forward with a problem.

Third, decreasing the student-to-counselor ratio does not necessarily mean students will develop the trusting relationships that facilitate help-seeking behaviors.

As a result, schools still do not believe they are meeting the needs of their students. Schools continue to feel like they are not identifying all students who need support, and those who are identified may be identified late, and therefore require higher levels of intervention.

External Focus Unsustainable, Doesn't Completely Address Challenge

Why Adding Staff Isn't Moving the Dial on Mental Health

Personnel Growth Doesn't Remove Barriers to Student Support



Student Knowledge Unaltered

Students still unable to recognize signs, symptoms, need for support



Stigma Persists Despite Additional Staff

Perceptions, myths around mental health remain intact



Time, Access to Counselors Remains Limited

Even with smaller counselor-to-student ratio, developing trusting relationship difficult, limited by lack of time

Leaving Schools with Two Persistent Problems:

- Students falling through the cracks, not receiving needed support
- Students identified late, when more intensive interventions are necessary

Significant Opportunity Within School Community

Our research suggests that schools should look internally for opportunities and mechanisms to better support their most vulnerable and at-risk students.

First, schools should look to better educate faculty and students about mental health so they are better able to identify potential mental health concerns. Increasing awareness and understanding also has the potential to reduce stigma, making it more likely that students will seek help when necessary.

Second, schools should refine already-existing processes for identifying and supporting students in crisis, to both be more proactive and more thorough in these efforts.

Educate Community, Improve Process Around Mental Health Issues

Equip Faculty, Students with Knowledge to Identify At-Risk Students, Reduce Stigma



Educate faculty with mental health-specific training

to recognize the signs, symptoms of distress, mental health concerns



Deploy peer-to-peer education strategies

to help students recognize signs, symptoms of distress, mental health concerns in themselves and others



Raise awareness among entire school community

to better understand realities, facts about mental health, as a means of reducing stigma

Improve Existing Processes to Proactively Identify, Support Students



Regular faculty meetings with counseling staff

to communicate concerns about possible students in distress



Meet predictable needs proactively

by developing support for times when students often encounter challenges



Ensure roles and responsibilities are well-known

in advance of crisis to protect against further challenges, known risks

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Faculty Enlisted to Identify At-Risk Students

At Harpeth Hall, an all-girls schools for grades 5-12 in Nashville, Tennessee, faculty education and a dedicated meeting enable faculty to play a meaningful role in supporting students in crisis.

All faculty are trained to identify and articulate behaviors commonly associated with mental health issues. Key to this training is a focus on *behaviors*, not labeling. This training creates a foundation for faculty to come together and discuss students who are exhibiting concerning behavior, which might indicate that they are struggling, at the Students of Concern meeting.

The Students of Concern meeting, which happens monthly for upper school faculty and weekly for middle school faculty, provides an opportunity to identify patterns in behavior across the student's current school experience that might suggest a mental health issue.

If faculty and counseling staff believe the behaviors they're seeing should be addressed, faculty are the first to connect with the student. As faculty have more regular contact with students than counseling staff, and their relationships are often deeper, they are well-placed to act as a "first line of defense" for supporting a student. When it becomes clear that a student does need more support, counseling staff step in and take over.

Harpeth Hall Mobilizes Faculty to Recognize, Aid Struggling Students



Harpeth Hall

Faculty Key to Identifying At-Risk Students

1 Faculty Trained to Recognize Behavior

Faculty trained to recognize, articulate academic, behavioral, emotional issues, including warning signs of depressions, anxiety, social isolation

2 All Faculty Involved in Formal Discussion

Faculty, academic advisors, and counseling staff meet to discuss students of concern

- Monthly upper school meeting
- Weekly middle school meeting

3 Faculty Serve as First Line of Defense

Faculty provide support to students, referring on to counselors, involving parents when necessary



Students-of-Concern Meeting

- Focus of meeting is to identify **troubling changes in student behaviors**, brainstorm solutions, interventions
- Faculty submit "**Student of Concern**" form in advance of meeting, outlining changes in student's behavior
- Group discussion **surfaces larger pattern of behavior**; brainstorm solutions, interventions

Normalize Mental Health with Education, Visibility

But schools shouldn't feel limited to enlisting faculty in their efforts to support students in crisis. Students offer an important opportunity to increase awareness and reduce stigma in your school community. Westminster Schools, a K-12 co-ed school in Atlanta, Georgia, took steps to increase awareness around mental health issues by actively engaging students in these efforts.

School-supported peer-to-peer education aimed at reducing stigma around mental health issues is one such step. The school has a chapter of Active Minds, a national nonprofit that supports mental health education on school campuses. Westminster's chapter raises awareness through posters and flyers throughout the school, information sessions throughout the year, and other educational activities. They also provide input to grade-level deans on what mental health and well-being programming should be offered, given what's currently happening on campus.

Westminster Schools Mitigates Stigma, Reduces Barriers to Support



The Westminster Schools

Reduce Stigma with Peer-to-Peer Education



Student Presentations

Students in Active Minds group research, lead informational sessions for other students on topics related to mental health



Schoolwide Events

Active Minds student-led schoolwide events raise awareness, educate students about mental health topics



Resources on Display

Students in Active Minds group create resources, information; displayed throughout school

Organization in Brief: Active Minds



- National nonprofit supporting peer-to-peer mental health education
- Equips students with the skills to speak openly about mental health, educate other students, encourage seeking help

Normalize Mental Health with Education (cont.)

Beyond awareness-raising, Westminster Schools has made efforts to reduce barriers to mental health support. First, by renaming their counseling center the Wellness Center, or the Well, Westminster shifted the focus of the center's activities from sickness to wellness. While this might seem like a small change, it can have a significant impact on how students perceive the Center and why they might access the services offered.

Second, they hold counseling hours in a well-trafficked, more student-friendly space. The director of counseling has a private office connected to the gym, where students come and go frequently, particularly after schools hours. By meeting students where they are, Westminster is able to make help more accessible to struggling students.

Both of these changes were intended to normalize counseling and accessing support for mental health-related concerns.

In order for practices like this to be successful, schools must do the work of creating an accepting culture around mental health. Westminster was able to do much of this through their awareness-raising efforts outlined on the previous page.

Westminster Schools Meets Students Where They Are



The Westminster Schools

Integrate Mental Health Support into School Life



Make Support About Wellness

Renaming counseling center The Wellness Center (aka The Well) shifts emphasis from illness to wellness



Offer Satellite Counseling

Hold office hours in student-friendly space (ex. the gym)



Have an "Ear to the Ground"

Involve students in grade-level programming development around mental health

Create Peer-to-Peer Mental Health Support

Building on the power of students to support other students and help expand the reach of the counseling staff, Windward School, a co-ed, grades 7-12 school in Los Angeles, California, built a robust peer counseling program for their middle school.

This is how the program works:

First, peer counselors are selected through a competitive process that includes an application and interview with the Director of Counseling. Once selected, peer counselors participate in a semester-long training program covering basic counseling skills.

Next, the peer counselors are paired with a middle school student for the year, with each counselor having more than one middle schooler. This provides the middle schooler with a consistent resource to discuss challenges and solutions. Peer counselors also use the middle school advisory program to discuss relevant mental health issues in small groups.

Finally, much like Harpeth Hall's Students of Concern meeting, all peer counselors meet with the Director of Counseling to discuss students of concern or issues that are affecting the broader school community.

Windward Proactively Addresses Mental Health with Peer Counselors



Windward School

Peer Counselors Preempt Crisis, Provide Support to All Middle Schoolers



- ✓ Every middle school student is paired with upper school peer counselor
- ✓ Pair meets regularly to discuss struggles, challenges; counselor provides support, coping strategies, someone to listen
- ✓ Peer Counselors selected through competitive application process; receive extensive training in active listening, empathy, confidentiality, mental health issues

Peer Counselors Increase Awareness, Help Identify Students in Distress



Advisory Program Used for Small Group Discussion

Peer counselors facilitate discussions in middle school Advisory about mental health issues



Weekly Meeting with Director of Counseling

Peer counselors meet as a group with Director of Counseling to discuss middle school students of concern

Reentry a Major Challenge for Students, Schools

For independent schools, the number of students who will require a prolonged absence from school to recover from a mental health setback is very small in any given year. Challenges to their successful reintegration range from catching up on missed course work to answering questions about their absence from their peers.

Having a standard process in place, one that can be adapted to the particular needs of the student, will do much to ensure that all aspects of a student's recovery are accounted for, increasing the likelihood that the student's reintegration will be successful.

After Leave of Absence, Students with Unmet Needs Struggle to Succeed

Adolescent Mental Health Treatment

5%-9%

Of teens require hospitalization or prolonged absence from school (>11 days) as a result of mental health issues

5-7 days

Average length of time teens stay in the hospital for mental health reasons

”

Reintegration Fraught with Challenges

“Teens return to the community at high risk of relapse and are expected to take on the task of recovery while managing all the social and academic pressures.”

*Henry White, Clinical Director
Brookline Community Mental
Health Center*

Primary Barriers to Successful Reintegration



Schoolwork

Homework, tests, projects pile up, becoming unmanageable



Social Isolation

Students face unwanted attention, questions from peers



Care Coordination

Lack of coordination between external providers, school

Source: Brookline Community Mental Health Center, “Bridge for Resilient Youth in Transition,” <http://www.brooklinecenter.org/bryt>, 2014; “A School-Based Transition Program for Adolescents Returning to High School After a Mental Health Emergency,” *Psychiatric Services*, 65, Is. 11, Nov. 1, 2014: pp. e6-e8; Singh, S., “Transitioning from Psychiatric Hospitalization to Schools,” UCLA Center for Mental Health in Schools, 2015, <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/>; Clemens, E. et al, “Elements of successful school reentry after psychiatric hospitalization,” *Preventing School Failure: Alternative Education for Children and Youth*, Aug. 3, 2011: pp. 202-213; EAB interviews and analysis.

Structured Reentry Eases Transition

Brookline High School's Bridge for Resilient Youth in Transition (BRYT) Program stands out for its comprehensive nature and the demonstrable results achieved through the program.

Across the top of the page are the three key elements of the BRYT program, with the three types of support it provides along the bottom of the page.

First and foremost, reentry planning must begin with a reentry meeting. These meetings serve to bring together all the relevant people to chart a reentry plan. After the meeting, participants should be clear on next steps, who owns those next steps, and the milestones and check-ins that will occur.

All BRYT programs have a dedicated two-person team: a Program Coordinator, who oversees the student's clinical needs, and the Academic Coordinator, who provides academic support and liaises between the student and their teachers. This team is able to provide coordinated care during the student's transition.

Devoting a two-person team to a relatively small number of students might not be appropriate for all schools. Schools can optimize existing resources by designating members of the counseling and academic support teams for these roles.

Bridge for Resilient Youth in Transition (BRYT) Provides In-School Support



Reentry Meeting

- Student, guidance counselor, adjustment counselor, school leaders, teachers, parents, transition program staff, school nurse meet to plan student's reentry
- Delineate staff responsibilities and set dates for monitoring student progress, follow up



Dedicated Team

- Clinician/Program Coordinator: licensed professional customizes clinical support to the need of the student
- Academic Coordinator: responsible for liaising with faculty to ensure academic progress



Dedicated Space

- Staffed by clinician, academic coordinator at all times
- Transition space inside the school
- Primarily used to reintegrate student into school community

BRYT Provides Essential Support Through Integrated Framework



Care Coordination

Clinical care available on-site; program team monitors, communicates student progress to parents, school staff, outside clinicians; provides holistic transition planning



Academic Support

Helps organize and complete assignments; discusses workloads with teachers; schedules tutoring sessions



Family Support

Arranges meetings with family, school personnel; communicates progress with family

Dedicated Space Integral to Student Transition

The final element of a BRYT program is a dedicated space. Each BRYT program has its own space within the school, which is used to help get the student back on campus and support their reintegration.

This space is key because it serves as an initial space for students to come as they begin to take on all aspects of their campus life. Getting students back on campus and reconnected to the community after a mental health-related absence is a significant hurdle for students. The BRYT room offers a supportive space where students can begin to readjust, without having to confront all the challenges of reentry at once.

At the beginning of the transition, students generally spend the majority of their time in the Transition Room. They may begin going to one class per day, completing the rest of the work in the BRYT space, before gradually ramping up their re-engagement. Eventually, students may only use the room to meet with program staff or to complete homework, but it remains available to them throughout their transition as a space they can use if they are feeling overwhelmed.

Transition Room Designed to Ease Students' Reintegration

Typical BRYT Transition Room



BROOKLINE COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH CENTER

Key Elements of a BRYT Transition Room:

- 1 Space dedicated solely for BRYT use
- 2 Open and staffed all day by clinician/program coordinator, academic coordinator
- 3 Includes workspace, informal seating, computers
- 4 Room connected to an office available for family, student meetings
- 5 Near an exit, enabling students to enter, leave discretely

Transition Support Leads to Successful Students

Since 2004, 47 other schools have developed programs following the BRYT model. The central BRYT team has conducted studies on the impact of these programs, finding significantly decreased re-hospitalization, drop-out, and late finish rates for students who participate in the BRYT, earning praise from the American Psychological Association.

While devoting the resources required to fully replicate the BRYT model may be impractical for some schools, there are some aspects that all schools should have as part of their reintegration strategy:

1. The reentry meeting: Bring the student support network together in the beginning to decide on a plan, and on who is responsible for each part of that plan.
2. The dedicated team: Even if a school chooses not to hire permanent staff for these roles, it is important to clearly designate who will play the clinical and academic support role.
3. The space: Allow students to get back into the rhythm slowly once they are back on campus, and provide a space for them to go when they are feeling overwhelmed and in need of extra help.

Bridge for Resilient Youth in Transition Yields Results, Expands Rapidly



47

BRYT programs started since 2004



<10%

Of students require re-hospitalization



82%

Of program participants graduate on schedule; nationally about 50% students with serious mental health issues drop out



"Once I heard what they are doing in Brookline, and now in many other places in Massachusetts, I couldn't help but wonder why this program hasn't always existed and why every school system in the country isn't using it. Not to be too dramatic, but it really saves lives, and at a very small cost."

*Nancy Reed
American Psychiatric Association*



"Because the program is fully integrated into the school environment, access is easy, acceptance of services by students and families is enhanced, and staff members are available immediately to respond to crises and emergencies."

*Henry White, Clinical Director
Brookline Community Mental Health Center*

Source: Brookline Community Mental Health Center, "Bridge for Resilient Youth in Transition," <http://www.brooklinecenter.org/bryt>, 2014; "A School-Based Transition Program for Adolescents Returning to High School After a Mental Health Emergency," *Psychiatric Services*, 65, Is. 11, Nov. 1, 2014: pp. e6-e8; Association for Children's Mental Health, "Problems at School," <http://www.acmh-mi.org/get-help/navigating/problems-at-school/>; EAB interviews and analysis.

Key Lessons for Supporting Students in Distress

This section of the study has focused on equipping schools to better identify and reintegrate students in distress.

Schools should find ways to expand the reach of counseling staff by equipping others in the school community to identify students in distress; schools should expand what both faculty and students know about mental health, so both groups are able to be additional “eyes and ears.”

Second, schools should reduce barriers to accessing support. A key element of this effort is mental health education and awareness-raising. Students often listen to their peers more readily than to authority figures, so enlisting students in the education effort can be crucial for success.

Finally, schools should have a process in place for reintegrating students who have had to leave the school community for a period of time for mental health-related reasons. This process should be standardized, but adaptable. Standardization will ensure that no piece of the student’s reentry process is missed, increasing the chances of their successful reintegration.



1

Use entire school community as eyes and ears.

Expand the reach of your counseling staff by equipping broader school community (especially faculty, peers) to recognize, describe signs of students in distress, to connect more students with needed care; provide forums for discussing students of concern

2

Normalize mental health issues, help-seeking behaviors.

Reduce barriers for students seeking support by increasing awareness and reducing stigma around mental health concerns, empowering students to access support when necessary

3

Create a reintegration blueprint with clear roles, ownership to support all student needs.

Design processes, delineate clear roles, ensure accountability to ensure students reintegrating into campus life are supported academically, socially, and psychologically



Deploy Time in a Student-Centric Way

SECTION

2

Practice 5: Student-Faculty Homework Load Calibration

Practice 6: Homework-Free School Days

Practice 7: Optimized Final Exam Schedule

Practice 8: Mission-Aligned School Schedule

Yesterday's Schedule, Today's Demands

Early morning start times, short blocks to allow every class to meet every day, and homework from every class every night: all of these factors combine to create a school schedule that is having an adverse effect on student well-being.

Current research on sleep has demonstrated that teenager circadian rhythms make it difficult for them to fall asleep before 11 pm. Consequently, early morning starts cut into teen sleep time, leaving many upper school students sleep-deprived and exhausted.

Schedules with short classes that meet every day also have a negative impact. Students require about 13 minutes to mentally transition from one subject to another, meaning that teachers are potentially losing a third of every 45-minute block to switching costs. In fact, research on switching costs for adults finds that frequent switching can result in productivity losses up to 40%.

The problem posed by too much homework is also related to classes meeting every day. With many students taking on a rigorous course load, with every class assigning homework every night, the organization of time across a student's day is clearly having a significant impact on their well-being. In too many cases, that impact is negative.

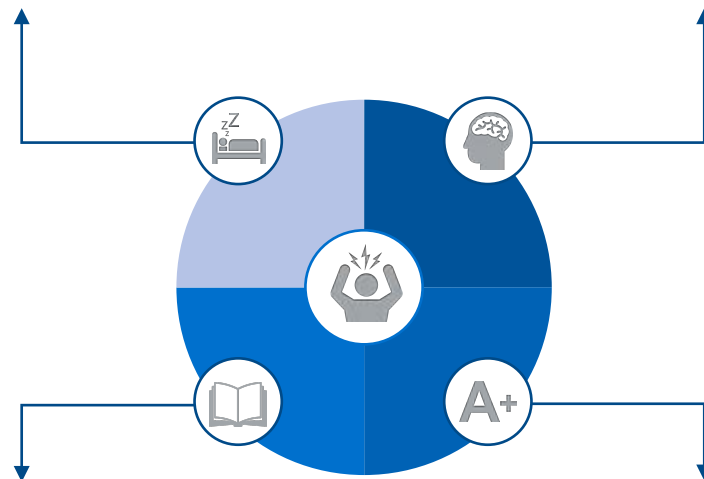
Latest Research Suggests School Day Adding to Student Stress

Early Start Times

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends high schools start after 8:30 am; average high school start time is 8:03 am

Class Transitions

Students need on average 13 minutes to transition mentally from one class to another, limiting instructional time, content that can be covered in a typical 55-minute class



Homework

Average 1st grader has 28 minutes of homework per night, exceeding the 10 minute per night per grade level recommendation

Rigorous Curriculum

Percentage of students who completed higher level math, science courses rose from 5% in 1990 to 13% in 2009, resulting in more time spent on homework, studying

Source: Flocco, D., "Deeper Learning, Reduced Stress," NAIS, June 1, 2012, <https://www.nais.org/magazine/independent-school/summer-2012/deeper-learning,-reduced-stress/>; National Center for Education Statistics, "The Nation's Report Card," U.S. Department of Education, 2011; Wheaton, A. et al., "School Start Times for Middle School and High School Students - United States, 2011-12 School Year," Center for Disease Control and Prevention Weekly, 64(30), Aug 7, 2015: pp. 809-813; Rettig, M., "The Effects of Block Scheduling," The School Superintendents Association (n.d.); EAB interviews and analysis.

Exceeding the 10-Minute-per-Grade Guideline

Ten minutes per night, per grade level is widely accepted as best practice for homework from 1st through 12th grade. Research suggests that a point of diminishing returns occurs at 120 minutes of homework, after which no real benefit is derived.

Harris Cooper, Professor of Psychology and Neuroscience at Duke University's Trinity College of Arts and Sciences, has been studying the effects of homework since the 1980s. Cooper's research led him to articulate important qualitative homework guidance that is often overlooked:

First, a student should be able to complete the assigned work on their own. This means that it should challenge them, but should not require the help of a parent to complete.

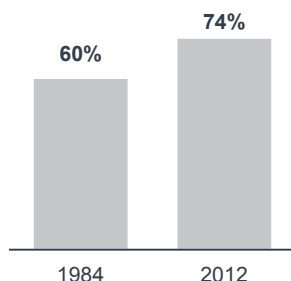
Second, homework should involve some choice: students should be able to select from several options that achieve a particular learning goal.

Third, homework should be graded or assessed in some way by the teacher. Giving students work without feedback means they might not be learning the content properly, can be demoralizing, and can encourage cheating.

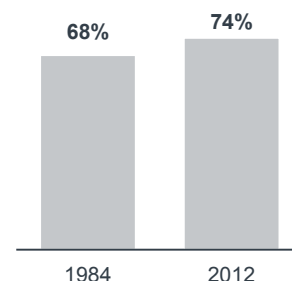
Current research suggests that students are spending more time on homework than they did in the past, and that this increase is having a negative effect on their health.

Increased Homework Having Unintended Negative Impact on Students

9-Year-Olds with 1+ Hours of Homework



13-Year-Olds with 1-2+ Hours of Homework



Homework and Stress in Elite High Schools¹

68%

Of students report homework often or always prevents them from getting enough sleep

72%

Of students report being often or always stressed over schoolwork

Exceeding the 10-Minute Guideline

"The data shows that homework over this level [the 10 minute rule] is not only not beneficial to children's grades or GPA, but there's really a plethora of evidence that **it's detrimental to their attitudes about school, their grades, their self-confidence, their social skills and their quality of life.**"

Stephanie Donaldson-Pressman, Clinical Director
New England Center for Pediatric Psychology

Source: Galloway, M. et al., "Nonacademic Effects of Homework in Privileged, High-Performing High Schools," *The Journal of Experimental Education*, July 15, 2013: pp. 490-510; Loveless, T., "Homework in America," The Brookings Institution, Mar. 18, 2014, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/homework-in-america/>; Donaldson-Pressman, Stephanie, interview with Kelly Wallace, "Kids have three times too much homework, study finds; what's the cost?," CNN, Aug. 12 2015, <http://www.cnn.com/2015/08/12/health/homework-elementary-school-study/>; EAB interviews and analysis.

1) The study sampled students from 10 college preparatory schools (4 public, 6 private) in "advantaged, upper middle class communities."

How Did We End Up with All This Homework?

With this best practice guidance available, how has it come to be that students today have so much homework? Through our research, we identified four major drivers of students' homework load.

The curriculum problem is straightforward: over the last decade, students have increased the number of advanced courses they are taking, and this has increased their homework load.

The "more is more" mentality affects faculty and parents, who believe that if a course assigns a lot of homework, that course is rigorous. One head of school described this attitude as the "lazy man's definition of rigor."

In addition to external factors, student distraction is certainly part of the homework challenge. Students are multitasking more and more, frequently splitting attention between homework and multiple digital devices and interactions. This often means they are likely not completing their work efficiently.

The fourth driver is misalignment between faculty and students expectations around how long a particular assignment will take to complete. This misalignment leads to students struggling through harder, more time-consuming homework than the teacher might have intended.

Multiple Factors Contribute to Increased Homework Load



Curriculum

- Students load up on advance/honors/AP classes, creating workload challenge
- Number of AP exams more than doubled since 2004
- Independent school students take over 50% more per student than public peers



"More Is More" Mentality

- Faculty, administration, parents see homework as a measure of rigor: more homework, more rigor
- Faculty see homework-achievement link, despite no correlation with grades



Student Distractions

- Social media, multitasking, etc. mean homework takes hours to complete
- Unsupervised students frequently spend 35% of dedicated homework time on digital distractions



Misalignment Between Faculty, Students

- Faculty assess difficulty, duration of assignment one way, students experience it in another
- Teachers underestimate homework completion time by as much as 50%

Sources: Dolin, Ann K., cited in "Homework overload gets an 'F' from Experts," Today, Jul. 27, 2012; Maltese, Adam V., Robert H. Tai and Xitao Fan, "When is Homework Worth the Time?: Evaluating the Association Between Homework and Achievement in High School Science and Math," *The High School Journal*, 96, no. 1, 2012; CollegeBoard, "2004 and 2014 Program Summary Reports," 2014, <https://research.collegeboard.org/programs/ap/data/archived/ap-2014>; Council for American Private Education, "CAPE Outlook 2015," 2015; Rosen, Larry D., L. Mark Carrier and Nancy A. Cheever (2013), "Facebook and texting made me do it: Media-induced task-switching while studying," *Computers in Human Behavior*, 29(3), May 2013: pp. 948-958; EAB interviews and analysis

Addressing the Homework Load Challenge

As is the case at many schools, students at University Prep, a co-ed school for grades 6-12 in Seattle, Washington, pointed to homework as a major source of stress. Both students and parents shared this concern that the workload was overwhelming, particularly in junior year.

Juniors at UP took their concerns about homework to their student government, who raised those concerns to the Assistant Director of Upper School. Rather than dismissing their claims, the Dean told students that data documenting the homework load would be helpful to developing a solution.

In response, four 11th Grade students used their statistics class as an opportunity to create survey instruments to measure homework: one for faculty, one for students, and one for parents. Once gathered and analyzed, the data were shared with faculty. The data revealed a wide gap between teacher and student expectations of homework completion times. Misaligned expectations were at the heart of UP's homework problem.

Misalignment of this type is often rooted in the fact that, as faculty become further removed from the novice experience with their subject matter, they underestimate how long tasks take to complete. As a result, they inadvertently assign more homework.

University Prep Students Drive Conversation, Solution to Homework Stress



University Prep

Collaboration Between Students, Faculty Creates Dialogue



Homework Concerns Raised

- Students brought concerns to student government, Assistant Head of School
- Students encouraged to collect data to describe problem



Homework Problem Quantified

- Four 11th grade students create survey instrument in math class to quantify problem
- All 11th grade students, faculty, and parents surveyed about homework completion times in science, math, history, English, foreign language, fine arts, and electives



Misalignment Between Faculty and Students

- Data shared with faculty, reveals homework frequently took students longer to complete than faculty anticipated



Homework Rubric Created

- PAWS rating system created by committee of students, faculty, grade-level advisors; shared with faculty, students
- Faculty rate each assignment in advance, feedback collected from students



Homework Rating System Aligns Expectations

University Prep wanted to create a mechanism to better align faculty expectations with the student experience. That mechanism became a homework rubric called the PAWS system.

Developed by a committee of faculty, students, and grade-level advisors, the rubric is an agreed-upon scale that all faculty use and all students understand. Homework and assignments are rated on a five-point—or five PAW—scale, with level one corresponding to simple homework and level five being a major assignment like a term paper.

When teachers create an assignment, they include the PAWS rating at the top. This communicates to students what the teacher expects, but equally important, it requires the teacher to reflect on her expectations for this particular assignment.

On the day teachers collect the assignment, they make time for in-class discussion of the homework's difficulty, using the PAWS rating as a common starting point.

The PAWS system got its name from their mascot, a puma. This "hook" creates a light-hearted way of discussing homework, which can be a contentious conversation.

University Prep Uses Rubric to Monitor Homework, Make Adjustments



University Prep

Jointly Created Rubric Clarifies Expectations for Faculty, Students

Time Expectations

Establishes baseline for appropriate amount of nightly homework

Frequency of Assignments

Defines the number of times per semester each type of homework should be assigned

	★	★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★★
Time on task:	Baseline: task takes less than 30 minutes to complete and can be completed in a single night.	May raise workload slightly above baseline for one day or or Would not raise workload above baseline if student worked steadily, but student has several days to complete task.	May raise workload above baseline significantly for one day or slightly for several days.	May raise workload above baseline significantly for several days.	May raise workload above baseline significantly for several days.
How frequently are these tasks occurring?	Daily	Several times a unit / weekly	Once or twice a unit / weekly to monthly	Once a unit / every 3-4 weeks or less frequently.	Once a semester
Will it be assessed in a summative way?	No, not directly.	Perhaps, but as a stand alone assignment it won't influence the grade too much, if at all.	Yes, and as a stand alone assignment it can influence your grade.	Yes, and as a stand alone assignment it will influence your grade.	Yes, and has the potential to significantly change your grade (20% of semester grade or more).
Does it require collaboration?	No	No	Perhaps, but it is minor, optional or can be completed during class time.	Perhaps	Perhaps
Will there be a public component?	No	No	Perhaps	Perhaps	Perhaps
Is revision, rehearsal, or repeated practice an important and integral part of the assignment?	No	Perhaps	Perhaps	Yes	Yes
Examples:	★ Reading ★ Short problem sets ★ Music practice	★ Vocabulary or reading quizzes ★ Lengthy or graded problem sets ★ Formative quizzes	★ Socratic seminars ★ Convincing arguments ★ Graded quizzes ★ Short papers / responses (1 to 2 pages double-spaced)	★ Unit tests ★ Projects ★ Shorter Research papers (3 to 5 pages double-spaced)	★ Final exams ★ Culminating projects ★ Longer research papers (more than 5 pages double-spaced)

Assignment's Weight

Explains assignment grading in relation to final grade

Common Assignments

Provides representative examples for each rating

A full version of this rubric is included in the *Student Mental Health Toolkit*, now accessible at EAB.com.

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

'No Homework Days' Address Student Stress

St. Luke's School, a co-ed school for grades 5-12 in New Canaan, Connecticut, had an experience with homework that was in some ways similar to that of University Prep. Students voiced concern about the homework load, saying it was too heavy, and in response, St. Luke's academic council surveyed the students to get a better understanding of the problem.

St. Luke's took a different approach to addressing their homework problem. They felt that the problem wasn't so much a question of misalignment, but instead they suffered from a "more is more" mentality. In response, St. Luke's piloted "No Homework Days," during their fourth quarter, eliminating homework assignments on Tuesday nights for the entire quarter.

St. Luke's informed parents of both the survey results and the upcoming pilot project. Faculty were told these "No Homework Days" meant a 20 percent reduction in homework across the week and not a redistribution of homework across the other days of the week.

St. Luke's Lays Groundwork with Pilot Study



St. Luke's School

Timeline of "No Homework Days" Pilot



Students Surveyed to Understand Student Life

Academic Council surveys students about high school experience



Council Proposes "No Homework Days"

Tuesday night chosen to align with late starts on Wednesdays, giving students a break midweek



Pilot Rolled Out After Major Exams

Administration decides to pilot "No Homework Days" during 4th quarter, after cumulative exams



Data, Pilot Project Shared with Parents

Parents informed of survey results, upcoming pilot project: no homework due on Wednesdays during 4th quarter



Parents Support "No Homework" Pilot

"I appreciate St. Luke's School's willingness to buck conventional wisdom, take a step back, and think about the big picture rather than how to accelerate the hamster wheel."

*Parent
St. Luke's School*

Finding the Sweet Spot

Following the pilot, St. Luke's again collected data, this time from faculty as well. Most students reported feeling less stressed as a result of the mid-week break, despite the fact that 60% of them still reported doing homework on Tuesday night. While many used the time for leisure, many also used at least part of it to get ahead on assignments. Knowing that the break was coming also relieved some pressure from earlier in the week.

Remarkably, 88% of faculty felt that reducing 20% of weekly homework had not compromised rigor over the course of the quarter. Nonetheless, almost half the faculty did not want these homework-free nights continued into the next year.

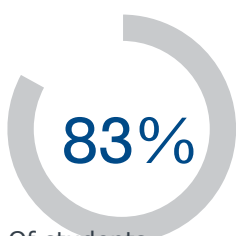
As a middle ground, St. Luke's instituted 12 no homework days across the 2016-2017 academic year. These 12 days were selected to fall after major holidays or events, rather than a weekly night of no homework. While not having homework or assignments due or tests scheduled on those days did not eliminate the need to do homework on a break or long weekend, it did provide space for a small, genuine reprieve for students.

St. Luke's Balances Faculty Concern About Rigor with Benefits to Students



St. Luke's School

Pilot Demonstrates It's Possible to Balance Rigor with Stress Reduction...



Of students reported reduction in homework related stress



Of teachers reported feeling they maintained the same level of rigor

...Yet Faculty Wary of Year-Long Adoption



48%

Of teachers did not believe a similar homework policy should be adopted during regular academic year

St. Luke's Modifies "No Homework Days" for Full Implementation

- In place of weekly no homework day, St. Luke's designates 12 "no homework days" throughout academic calendar
- Days strategically scheduled around vacations, school holidays, school and national events
- Days include:
 - Sept. 27 (day after presidential debate)
 - Oct. 13 (day after Yom Kippur)
 - Nov. 28 (day after Thanksgiving break)
 - Monday, March 27 (day after spring break)

Pre-holiday Exams Allow for Truly Restful Break

Final exams are another source of stress for students. While it is not possible, or necessarily desirable, to remove stress entirely from final exams, it is possible to organize them in a way that minimizes stress and maximizes the potential for student learning. Berkeley Prep, a co-ed PK-12 day school in Tampa, FL, provides an excellent example of one possible configuration.

First, each academic subject has a designated test day. The goal here is to eliminate two exams in one day. Subjects that tend to take longer to grade have their day earlier in the schedule, allowing faculty the necessary time for grading.

Second, the schedule itself has "off" days built in, allowing for further review and stress reduction. The makeup days at the end of the exam period are for students who are taking two subject area classes, such as American History and European History. With this schedule, one of those two subject area assessments is moved to the makeup day.

All exams occur in the morning, leaving the remainder of the day for studying, including attending review sessions or meeting with faculty after exams are held.

Finally, by having fall semester exams in December, Berkeley Prep provides a true break for students over winter break.

Students and Teachers Benefit from Extended Fall Exam Schedule



Berkeley Preparatory School

Berkeley Prep's Pre-holiday Exam Schedule

December						
Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
		1	2	3	4	5
6	Review	Exam	Exam	Off	Exam	12
13	Exam	Exam	Makeup	Makeup	Grades Due	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		

1 One Subject Area per Exam Day

- Subjects with longer exams scheduled early in exam period to give faculty sufficient grading time

3 Work-Free Break for Faculty, Students

- Grading due on last day of exam period
- All student assignments completed before winter break

2 Built-In Breaks

- Gap in exam schedule allows for make up exams, review sessions

“Let's have about 18 weeks of uninterrupted instruction, then take two weeks off. Then let's take a major test that covers everything we've learned, and have it count for a major portion of your final grade. Better yet, let's take like five of them all in a row. Whose idea was this?”

Dave Powell, Associate Professor of Education
Gettysburg College

Source: Powell, D., "It's Time to Give the Final Final Exam," *Education Week*, Jan. 19, 2016, http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/K-12_Contrarian/2016/01/is_this_going_to_be_on_the_test.html; EAB interviews and analysis.

Schedule Innovation Fosters Engagement

In recent years, many schools have undertaken major schedule overhauls. This is no small task, nor is it a short-term project that can be started in June and rolled out in August. For schools who haven't redesigned their schedules recently, their current schedule tends to be the product of cumulative decisions, made over a long period of time. Their design is not necessarily intentional, nor does it reflect current research on teaching and learning. It also does not always prioritize what is best for students versus what is best for adults in the school community.

Of the best examples of a non-traditional, student-centric schedule is Colorado College, a selective liberal arts college in Colorado Springs, Colorado. It offers a very literal block schedule, with students taking a single, 3.5-week course at a time. This structure allows for more lab and direct research time, as well as greater immersion in the material. Your school doesn't need to move to this schedule to benefit from longer blocks: introducing a schedule with 75-90 minutes blocks allows teachers to use different pedagogies and assessment methods in classes, many of which will include more course work being done in class, rather than as homework. This has the potential to increase student learning and decrease student stress.

Schools Able to Maintain Rigor, Increase Engagement with New Schedules



Immersive Learning

- 1 class per block, immersing students in subjects
- Each semester students complete 4 blocks
- Blocks last 3.5 weeks
- Block breaks give students 4.5 days off between classes

Impact

- Professors cover more material and enhance classes with fieldtrips
- Students take blocks off for independent projects

Source: Flocco, D., "Deeper Learning, Reduced Stress," NAIS, Jun. 1, 2012, <https://www.nais.org/magazine/independent-school/summer-2012/deeper-learning,-reduced-stress/>; Colorado College, "The Block Plan," (n.d.), <https://www.coloradocollege.edu/basics/blockplan/>; EAB interviews and analysis.

Schedule Innovation Fosters Engagement (cont.)

A second schedule innovation that is becoming increasingly common is inclusion of a late start. Some schools, like Westminster Schools, have a later start of 8:30 every day of the week, while other schools start later one or two days a week.

Finally, many schools, like Montclair Kimberley Academy, a K-12 co-ed school in Montclair, New Jersey, are making time in the school day for non-academic activities, ranging from extra help or office hours to club or activity meeting time.

Many of the schools that have made these changes have experienced significant positive effects on student engagement, diversity of teaching strategies and activities, and the range of curriculum-enriching activities possible without disrupting other classes.

Schools Able to Maintain Rigor, Increase Engagement with New Schedules



The Westminster Schools

Longer Block, Late Starts

- Four 70-minute classes per day
- Each semester students complete 5-6 classes
- Schedule has seven blocks, leaving most students with a free block most days
- School starts at 8:30 am

Impact

- No decrease in standardized test scores or college admissions profile
- Allows teachers to be more creative, flexible with pedagogy
- More conducive to field trips, internships, independent study courses

MKA Montclair Kimberley Academy

Integrated Extracurriculars

- 8-day rotating schedule
- Four 75-minute classes and 2 common periods: 30-minute extra help period and 30-minute meeting period for advisor groups or club and class meetings

Impact

- 17% more 'A' grades; 45% fewer 'B-' grades
- Student athletes miss less class time because classes end earlier
- New schedule balances out contact minutes lost with gains in instructional time by reducing time students spend transitioning to a new class

Source: Flocco, D., "Deeper Learning, Reduced Stress", NAIS, Jun. 1, 2012, <https://www.nais.org/magazine/independent-school/summer-2012/deeper-learning-reduced-stress/>; Colorado College, "The Block Plan," (n.d.), <https://www.coloradocollege.edu/basics/blockplan/>; EAB interviews and analysis.

Make Time for All the Things That Matter

The schedule used by Pacific Ridge School, a co-ed day school for grades 7-12 in Carlsbad, California, provides a good example of a student-centric schedule that incorporates the priorities and values of the school right into the schedule.

Having opened in 2007, Pacific Ridge was able to design its schedule from scratch, giving the team tremendous freedom in how they configured the day.

The logistical details of their schedule can be found in the grey box. Block 5 is where Pacific Ridge incorporated the activities and experiences that often occur outside the school day into their schedule. Given their rotation, it occurs two to three times a week.

The first instance of Block 5 is reserved for extra-curricular activities. The second instance is for service learning, a requirement for grades 7-10. The third instance of Block 5 is reserved for grade-level projects. These occur on "Magic Mondays," when Block 5 occurs a third time in a week. These vary in content, but are interdisciplinary and provide different-in-kind educational experiences.

The unique value of this schedule is that it integrates enrichment opportunities into the core school experience, rather than relegating these important experiences to after school hours.

Pacific Ridge Builds Extracurriculars, Service Learning into Schedule



Pacific Ridge School

Pacific Ridge Schedule Basics

- ✓ Eight-block rotation; four 90-minute blocks per day
- ✓ Students take five academic classes, arts, and P.E. annually
- ✓ Lunch period built into each day
- ✓ Block 5 is a non-academic block used in same way for entire grade-level: extra-curricular activities, service learning projects, grade-level projects

Using Block 5 to Support Non-academic Experiences



Extracurricular Activities

- Extracurricular activities scheduled during first Block 5 in rotation
- Provides longer block for activities requiring greater time investment; can also meet after school



Service Learning Projects

- Second Block 5 used for service learning projects
- Required participation of grades 7-10
- Greater variety of projects due to in-school block of time



Grade-level Projects

- Third Block 5 occurs once every other week; used for grade-level project
- Examples include: Building, launching high altitude balloons; writing grant proposals to address local issues

Source: Pacific Ridge School, "Course Map," 2016; EAB interviews and analysis.

Key Lessons for Optimizing School Time

This section has focused on time, specifically on how it is organized for and by students. This page lays out the key lessons for the section.

First, make use of evidence-based research on homework to support your faculty in designing assignments that are aligned with this body of research. In the same vein, it is important to ensure that students develop robust study skills that allow them to focus on their work, but also to take into account the reality of the digital world.

Second, independent school leaders should consider whether their school's mission and values are clearly embodied in the school's academics and programming. If this is not the case, leaders have a great opportunity to improve and have a positive impact on students.

Finally, independent school leaders should think beyond the limitations of a traditional schedule, and should consider how their ideal schedule would look if they could create it from scratch. While actually doing so may not be possible, envisioning that ideal will help to identify steps that could bring the present schedule closer to it.



1

Maximize assessment-related time in evidence-based ways.

Ensure timing, amount, structure of assessments creates optimal learning environment for students, where content mastery and deep understanding replace rote memorization

2

Make time for academic/non-academic priorities in schedule.

Design a schedule that allows for more meaningful, substantive interactions between faculty and students; consider including time for non-academic activities during school day to alleviate after school time pressures

3

Think beyond traditional scheduling confines.

Assess the needs of your students, the goals of your curriculum, and the mission of your school when designing a schedule; do not be limited by previous iterations and priorities



Reframe College Admissions

SECTION

3

Practice 9: Goal Setting for Personal Growth
Practice 10: Community-Based Career Exploration
Practice 11: College-Facilitated Application Prep
Practice 12: Admissions Officer for a Night

Relentless Pressure to Be the ‘Perfect’ Applicant

College admissions is one of the factors we identified as being largely beyond the control of independent schools. But that doesn’t mean independent schools shouldn’t look to improve their college admissions programming to lessen the stress students experience throughout their high school years.

Colleges and universities today are looking for the same kind of student: one who takes a rigorous course load full of AP courses, a full array of extracurriculars, and with significant community involvement.

The college admissions process has effectively created an arms race, for which students are paying the price.

High School Arms Race Disengaging, Contributes to Student Stress

Building the Perfect Resume

Classes

✓ AP Calculus

✓ AP US History

✓ AP English

✓ AP Physics

✓ AP French V

✓ AP Psychology

Activities

✓ French Club

✓ Trombone

✓ Robotics

✓ Varsity golf

✓ Model UN

Volunteer work

✓ French tutor

✓ Guatemala mission trip

”

Homogenizing Effect of Competition

“The college process has homogenized the student experience, particularly at independent schools. **We’re all so competitive; it’s almost like an arms race.** Everyone hears what everyone else does so they all start doing everything, and then all students start looking the same.”

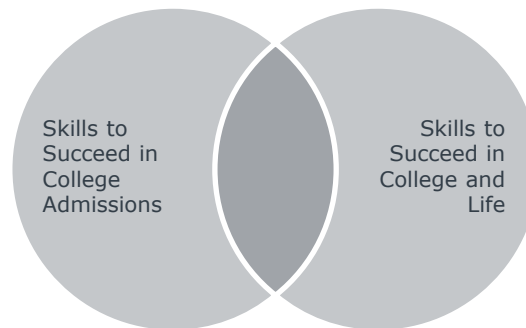
Rodney De Jarnett, Head of School, Dwight-Englewood School

Preparing Students for College and Beyond

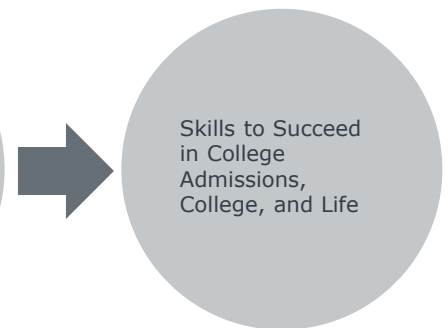
The result of this arms race is that students spend much of their high school years building the skills necessary to get *into* college, but not necessarily the skills that will allow them to succeed *in* college and beyond. This is one of the reasons so many students struggle when they arrive on college campuses: they simply aren't prepared with the right skills.

One of the goals of this study is to help schools move from the leftmost graphic on this page to the rightmost, where the overlap between college admissions preparation and broader life skill and resource-building will be more complete.

Where We Are Today...



Where We Need to Be...



“

We're feeding colleges students who have the skills for admission but not necessarily the skills to be able to perform in the long run. I think about a Venn diagram, where one circle is what you need to be successful in the college admissions process and the other circle is what you need to be successful in college and beyond. And the overlap should be complete, in a perfect world, but it's not. They're not completely disparate, but the overlap should be bigger than it is currently.

Head of School, K-12 Independent School

”

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Put the Focus on Growth, Not Building a Resume

The college counseling process at Montgomery Bell Academy, an all-boys 7-12 school in Nashville, Tennessee, is an example of a process that helps students develop the skills necessary for success in life beyond high school, while also setting students up with compelling college resumes.

As part of new student orientation, MBA freshmen begin working with the college counseling staff. But the focus isn't on creating the right list or learning everything they can about a particular set of schools. Instead, the college counselors work with freshmen to set a series of six goals for them to work towards during their freshman year.

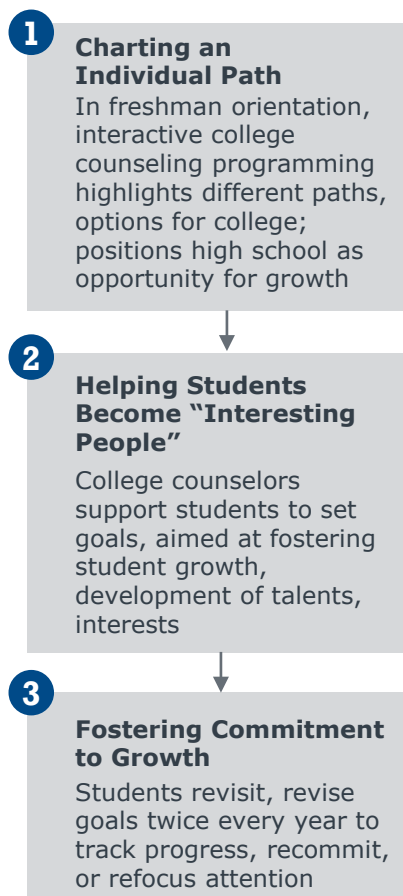
Counselors hold on to their goal sheets, and have check-in meetings to assess progress once per semester. This exercise encourages students to try new things, to build on past successes or failures, and to grow as people. Introduced in freshmen year, students complete this goal setting exercise every year of high school.

Through this process, students are also building dynamic college resumes. But rather than focusing on college as the end goal, college counseling centered around goals emphasizes growth and the development of interests, talents, and passions. This shift in focus can do much to reduce the stress associated with college admissions.

MBA's College Counseling Process Emphasizes Personal Growth



Montgomery Bell Academy



Name

1 Academic Goals

Earn an A in AP Biology by the end of freshman year

2 Athletic Goals

Practice tennis twice a week and make the varsity team by sophomore year

3 Extracurricular Goals

Become treasurer of robotics club by junior year

4 Family Goals

Eat dinner with family 2 times per week

5 Service Goals

Raise \$2,000 for Guatemala trip by end of June

6 Social Goals

Practice guitar with friends for garage band

Real World Issues, Hands-On Learning Opportunity

The Policy Institute, an intensive summer program offered at Georgetown Day School, a co-ed PK-12 school in Washington, D.C., is an example of the type of program that brings together college resume material with the skills and passion for future success.

The Institute is a four-week summer program open to rising juniors and seniors. In the course of the program students gain in-depth knowledge about a particular social issue, participate in community service opportunities related to that issue, and design and implement a strategy to address the social problem in question.

Along the way, students have the opportunity to develop skills that regular classes might not develop as fully. From small things like sending “thank you” emails following a meeting with an expert and confidently introducing oneself in a group setting to bigger skills such as working with various stakeholders with multiple commitments and priorities, students gain practical skills.

Finally, students are exposed to a social issue in their community, and to the considerations involved in addressing that issue. This exposure provides new insight into possible careers and college majors, expanding how students think about college.

GDS’s Policy Institute Provides Different-in-Kind Educational Experience



4-Week Summer Institute Immerses Student in Local Problem

- Students learn from, collaborate with local leaders, community organizations, and school staff to solve community problems



Intense Professional Skills Development

- Students work in teams to solve problems, present solutions to parents, staff, students
- Hone communication, teamwork, time management skills



Expand Knowledge of Local Issues, Broaden Career Interests

- Students are introduced to local issues, identify different career options
- When applying to college, students more likely to consider a wider range of schools, majors

Passion, Not Grades

“I took from it the passion and knowledge I could enjoy doing something related to work and school. There were nights where I’d be working for a while on a summer project that I had no grade for. I think that was really important for me because sometimes for me, in school, my main objective was getting good grades.”

*Student
Georgetown Day School*

Sample Project: Refugee Resettlement

To provide additional color to the Institute's work, we've outlined one of the Summer 2016 tracks on refugee resettlement.

Students met with Lutheran Social Services and the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants to learn about refugee resettlement in Washington, D.C. After this initial phase, they met with a senator and the Deputy Secretary of Homeland Security to present ideas on improving the resettlement process.

Throughout the program, students gained deep knowledge on the topic, engaged in advocacy and volunteering, and developed a website to connect refugee families with other families in similar situations to help create community and share knowledge.

Programs of this type have great potential to develop skills that students will need in college and in their careers, but they can also do a great deal to engage students in learning for learning's sake. This not only fosters an attitude towards learning that is at the core of many an independent school's mission, but it also a value that will serve students well in college and beyond.

Students Gain Deep Understanding, Create Platform to Ease Resettlement

1 Develop Deep Terrain Knowledge

- Learned key issues, challenges, statistics about global refugee crisis
- Met with experts in the field to learn about national policy and local resettlement efforts



"We visited with staffers from Senator Mark Warner's office on Capitol Hill, and had a meeting with the Deputy Secretary of Homeland Security. Our group had the chance to present our ideas on the refugee resettlement process to a man who actually makes the policy as his job."

*GDS Refugee Project
YouTube Channel*

2 Engage in Advocacy and Volunteer

Participated in several volunteer events:

- Furnished an apartment for a refugee family from the Democratic Republic of the Congo
- Accompanied elementary-aged refugee children on field trip to local farm



"This summer the Life Resettled pod worked alongside Lutheran Social Services, a group that has devoted almost a century to helping those in need in the DC area. During our visit we met with a case manager to learn about how the LSS directly helps with the refugee resettlement process."

*GDS Refugee Project
Facebook Page*

3 Collaborate to Develop Final Project

- Created website to provide support, connect new refugees with others in similar situations
- Educated general public about refugee issues



"We envision a platform that connects soon-to-be resettled or recently-resettled refugees with former refugees...Through our YouTube channel and website, refugees can share their experiences or advice for refugees."

*GDS Refugee Project
YouTube Channel*

Source: Georgetown Day School Life Resettled, "Life Resettled GDS Refugee Project," <https://www.facebook.com/gdsliferesettled/>; Georgetown Day School Life Resettled, "By Refugees, For Refugees," <https://www.facebook.com/gdsliferesettled/>; EAB interviews and analysis.

Where Can We Improve College Counseling?

Two major issues emerge when considering how to improve on delivering college counseling: timing the start of the process and supporting parents.

The timing question is difficult, and independent schools have taken a wide variety of approaches to address it. Some, like MBA, begin with programming for freshmen. Some hold information sessions with 7th and 8th grade parents, to explain the college counseling programming offered in the upper school and answer questions. The central idea is to minimize uncertainty, thereby reducing stress.

Research from Royall & Co. provides compelling support for starting the college counseling process early. Nearly 80% of high school student names are available to colleges by students' junior year, with many available prior to that. As a result, colleges start recruitment efforts early, meaning that students and parents will benefit from early preparation that allows them to better understand the solicitations they receiving.

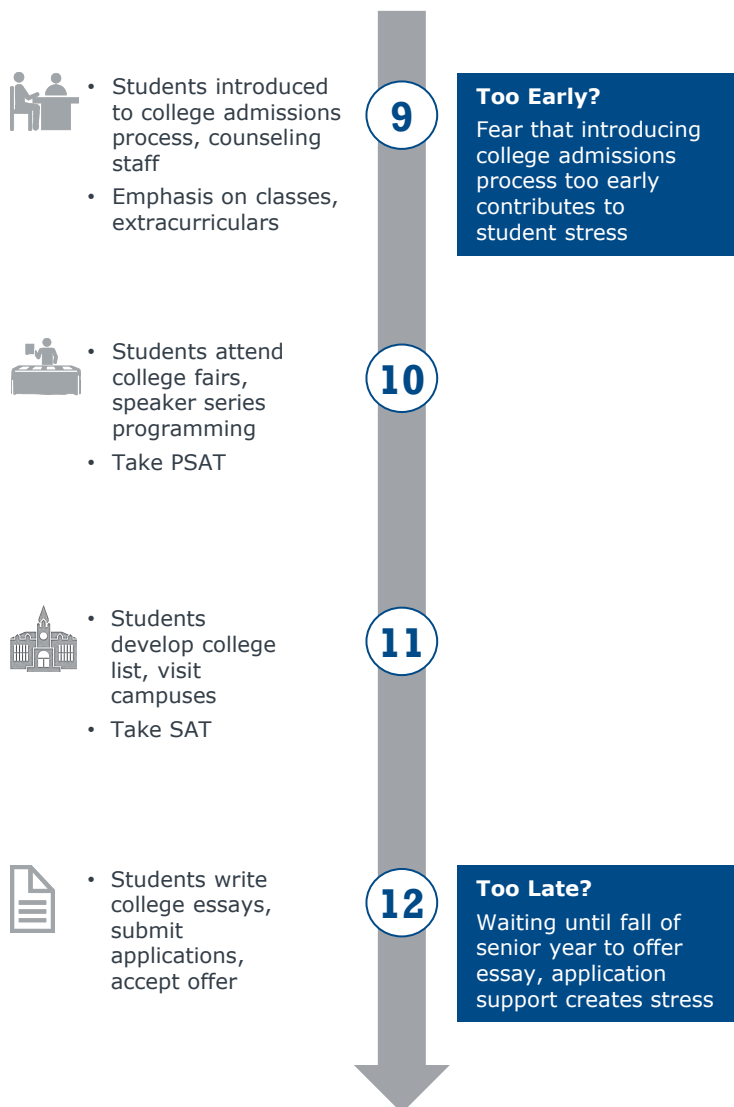
How early is too early depends largely on parent culture at a given school, but research indicates that 9th grade is the optimal year.

Debates About Timeline, Best Approach Present Improvement Opportunities

Common Debates in Grade-Level Counseling Process

What Programming Best Serves Parents?

- Parents often have incomplete knowledge, understanding of college admissions process
- Admissions seen as "referendum" on effective parenting, leading parents to put pressure on children



Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Summer Boot Camp Reduces Stress in Senior Year

Windward School, a co-ed 7-12 school in Los Angeles, California, provides a promising model for mitigating some of the stress associated with college admissions.

First, Windward hosts a week-long application boot camp in the summer between junior and senior year. In the course of that week, students complete significant portions of the Common App and the supporting essays. This frees up time in the fall of senior year for students to focus on classes and activities.

Schools not already offering this kind of support are strongly encouraged to do so. Beginning senior year with applications already prepared can relieve a significant amount of student stress, while forcing procrastinators to address college admissions earlier than they would otherwise.

The second aspect of Windward's approach involves inviting around 35 college representatives to campus each year to participate in their boot camp. Representatives interact directly with students, giving them feedback on their essays and answering questions. Each student speaks with three different representatives during the process, allowing them to get three different perspectives on what makes a good college essay.

Windward Invites College Reps to Summer Application Boot Camp



Windward School

Timing of Summer Programming Allows for Less Rushed, More Varied Support

1 Major Tasks Completed During Summer Boot Camp



Students finish most time-consuming tasks in the summer, allowing them to focus on senior year classes and activities

2 College Representatives Facilitate Boot Camp Sessions



College representatives are able to participate over the summer to provide direct feedback, tips to students; sometimes seen as more authoritative than college counsellors

3 Students Get Different Perspectives on Admissions Preferences



Students meet with representatives from three colleges to workshop college admissions essays, learn first-hand colleges have varied preferences when making admissions decisions

Admit, Reject, Wait List?

A second practice from Windward aims to expand how both parents and students think about college counseling, by involving them in the decision-making process.

As part of their college counseling program, Windward organizes an evening session for juniors and their parents, again bringing college representatives to campus. Each representative partners with a small group of parents and students, and each group is given the same four fully-completed college applications, along with descriptions of a fictitious college and instructions to reject one student, admit one, and waitlist two.

Each group shares their list on a leaderboard, which inevitably reveals no one candidate was accepted by all groups.

College representatives then facilitate a larger discussion on why admissions decisions vary from school to school, especially after students meet a minimum of grade and test score expectations.

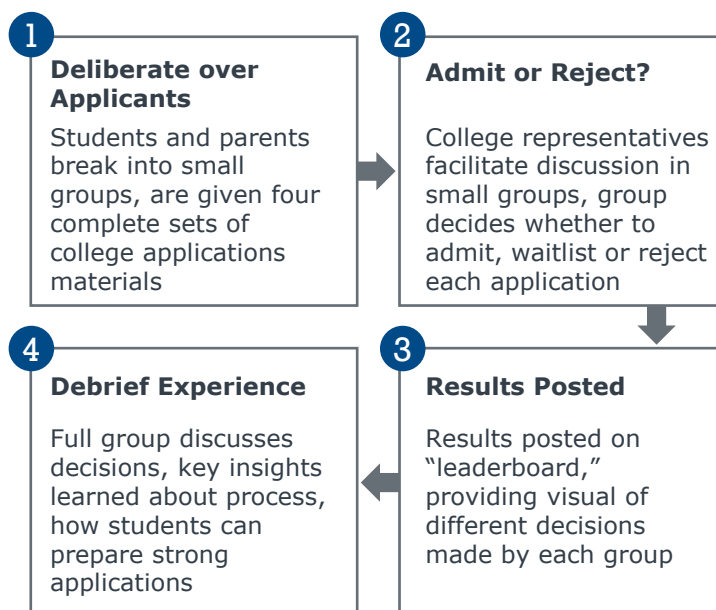
It is crucial that any event like this be supported with the right messaging. Students must be encouraged to pursue interests and passions, and to cultivate a high school experience that they can be proud of. Without that messaging, this kind of eye-opening experience can be devastating.

Windward Offers Students, Parents Opportunity to Play Admissions Officer



Windward School

Students, Parents Learn Firsthand Admissions Decisions Not Clear-Cut



Not a Straightforward Process

"They get a sense of **how subjective it can be**...They begin to see that you can be a 4.30 [GPA] with a 2,300 [SAT score] and not get into a place because there are a lot of great kids in this world."

*Kevin Newman, Assistant Head of School for Strategic Partnerships
Windward School*

Key Lessons for College Admissions Support

The central focus of this section has been on reducing the stress associated with college admissions.

First, schools should work to reorient their college admissions programming to focus on more than just gaining entry to a particular college.

Second, schools need to help students think long-term. Create programming that supports the development of skills that will help students succeed in college and beyond, while connecting those skills to the admissions process.

Third, changing the timing of college admissions support offers opportunities to reduce the number of tasks in senior year and provide more direct interaction with college representatives. Both results can decrease the overall stress felt by both students and their parents.



1

Focus student energy beyond just “getting in.”

Orient college counseling process towards personal growth, fostering talents and interests; this diminished focus on “getting in” will reduce stress of college admissions process

2

Equip students with long-term skills, not just college resume-builders.

Create engaging learning experiences to bridge gap between preparing students for college admissions and preparing students for post-admissions success

3

Adjust college admissions timeline to reduce stress, involve insider experts.

Provide pre-senior year application support, pulling major tasks into summer; connect students, parents with college representatives in an interactive manner



Equip Students with Life Skills

SECTION

4

Practice 13: Lifelong Fitness-Oriented P.E. Curriculum

Practice 14: Self-Regulation Through Mindfulness

Practice 15: Growth Mindset School Culture

Improving High School Experience Not Enough

The content of this final section focuses on equipping students for life beyond their time at school. While making school cultures less stressful is a priority, it is also important for schools to prepare students to lead happy and productive lives by helping them build the skills and resources to handle challenging or difficult situations.

Many schools already include this goal of preparedness in their mission. The question, then, is how well schools manage to execute on that mission.

Ambition Must Be to Provide Students Skills to Cope with Life's Stresses

Focus on Reducing Stress at Your School Insufficient for Students' Success Beyond High School



High School

- Graduation requirements
- College admissions
- Interpersonal relationships
- Family life



College

- Graduation requirements
- Internship, first job, graduate school admissions
- Interpersonal relationships
- Family life



Career

- Navigating career path
- Work/family fit
- Personal and professional interpersonal relationships
- Life events: marriage, children, home ownership

Everyday Life Skills

"I'm more interested in finding ways to equip kids to live their day-to-day lives in a moral, responsible, and healthy manner. We have to be certain that popular culture and the achievement-oriented nature of our schools **do not diminish our efforts to teach democratic values, to nurture morality, and to enable students to find a sense of balance in their lives.**"

Bryan Garman, Head of School, Sidwell Friends School

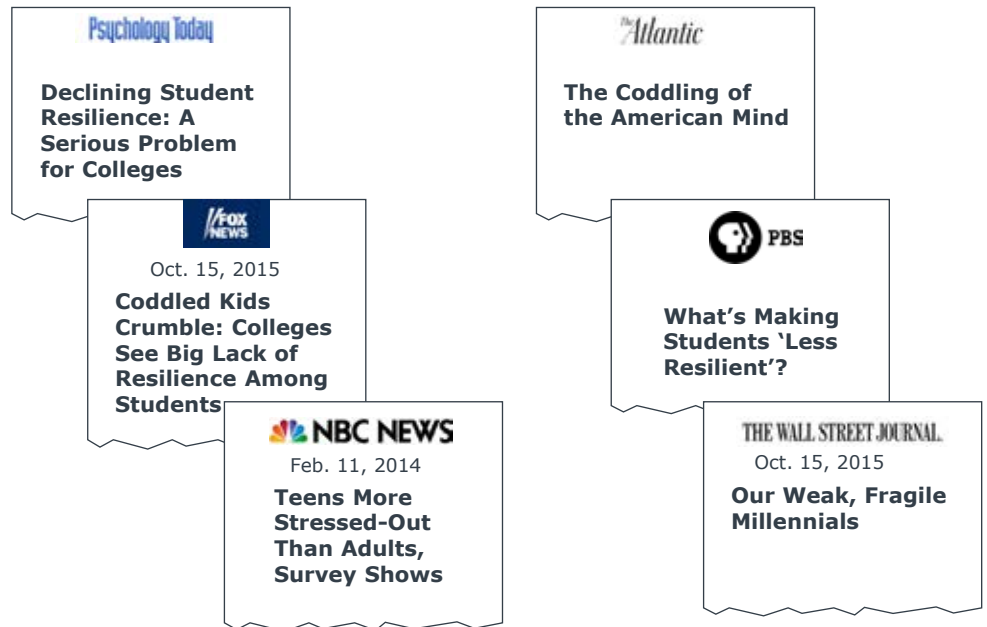
Not Delivering on This Ambition

The headlines on this page clearly suggest that there is room for improvement when it comes to preparing students to thrive and succeed in a stressful world.

Media attention focused on coddled, fragile children has inspired a surge of ideas about how to address this problem. Much has been written about resilience, grit, meditation, yoga, and many other methods.

How, then, should schools distinguish between what works and what does not?

Data, Headlines Suggest Students Are Ill-Prepared for Post-High School Life



Source: Gray, P., "Declining Student Resilience: A Serious Problem for Colleges," *Psychology Today* Blog, Sep. 22, 2015, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/freedom-learn/201509/declining-student-resilience-serious-problem-colleges>; Reilly, D., "Coddled Kids Crumble: Colleges see big lack of resilience among students," Fox News, Oct. 15, 2015, <http://www.foxnews.com/us/2015/10/15/coddled-kids-crumble-colleges-see-big-lack-resilience-among-students.html>; Aleccia, J., "Teens More Stressed-Out Than Adults, Survey Shows," NBC News, Feb. 11, 2014, <http://www.nbcnews.com/health/kids-health/teens-more-stressed-out-adults-survey-shows-n26921>; Kukianoff, G. et al., "The Coddling of the American Mind," *The Atlantic*, Sep., 2015; Haidt, J., "Our Weak, Fragile Millennials," *The Wall Street Journal*, Feb. 22, 2016, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/our-weak-fragile-millennials-1456185268>; Cummins, D., "What's Making Students 'Less Resilient'?" PBS, Aug. 29, 2016, <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/making-sense/student-resilience-time-low/>; EAB interviews and analysis.

The Protective Effects of Fitness

Exercise has various well-known benefits, ranging from improved cardiovascular health to better sleep. More recent research has focused on the impact of fitness on both the prevention and treatment of mental health issues.

Studies have shown that regular exercise can reduce an individual's odds of depression and anxiety, the two most common mental health conditions.

The research shows that the most positive effects of exercise on mental health come from cardiovascular exercise, including activities like running or swimming. Exercise should also be at least moderate in intensity to bring benefits. Previous guidance suggested that regular exercise should involve three to five moderate to high intensity sessions of 30-60 minutes per week, but more recent research indicates that a total of 150 minutes of exercise per week is what matters.

Physical Fitness Effective in Boosting Mental Health, Mitigating Stress

Population-Based Research Shows...

30%

Lower odds of depression among active people, compared to non-active peers

28%

Lower odds of an anxiety disorder with regular physical activity

What type of exercise is best?



Most effective exercise for improving mental health is aerobic: jogging, swimming, cycling, brisk walking



Intensity matters: exercise should be moderate in intensity

150

Number of minutes per week needed to see mental health benefits

The Mind-Body Connection

“Regular physical activity can help keep your thinking, learning, and judgment skills sharp as you age. **It can also reduce your risk of depression and may help you sleep better.** Research has shown that doing aerobic or a mix of aerobic and muscle-strengthening activities 3 to 5 times a week for 30 to 60 minutes can give you these mental health benefits.”

Center for Disease Control and Prevention

Source: Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, “Physical Activity Guidelines Advisory Committee Report,” 2008, <https://health.gov/paguidelines/report/>; Center for Disease Control and Prevention, “Physical Activity Facts,” 2015, <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/physicalactivity/facts.htm>; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Physical Activity and Health,” 2015, <https://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/basics/pa-health/>; Weir, K., “The Exercise Effect,” *American Psychological Association*, Dec. 2011, 42(11), <http://www.apa.org/monitor/2011/12/exercise.aspx>; EAB interviews and analysis.

More Than Just Dodgeball and Lacrosse

When the Ensworth School, a co-ed, PreK-12 school in Nashville, Tennessee, expanded to include an upper school in 2004, they wanted to offer a different-in-kind P.E. curriculum. Rather than offer a more traditional curriculum of sports, games, and fitness, or a sports team requirement, Ensworth designed a P.E. program that would provide students with a solid foundation in fitness and physical well-being, which would be useful to them in college and beyond.

Each semester, students follow a personal fitness program designed for them by their P.E. teacher. The program includes both individual components, such as weight training, along with group fitness, such as yoga, which are done as a class.

In their senior year, the expectation is that students will design their own fitness program, with the support of the P.E. teacher, building on what they've learned over the last three years.

While this is a labor-intensive approach to P.E., feedback from alumni has been very positive. Alumni appreciate having the knowledge and confidence to continue healthy fitness practices once they arrive on a college campus, where opportunities to be less-than-healthy surround them.

Ensworth Redesigns Phys. Ed. Curriculum to Build Lasting Habits



Ensworth School

P.E. Curriculum Develops Transferrable Fitness Habits



Integral Part of Upper School Curriculum

Occupies same space in class schedule as academic classes



Building Blocks of Lifetime Fitness

Introduces students to speed, strength, flexibility, and cardio components of fitness



Individualized Training Program

Includes student-specific fitness program and group fitness activities



Culminates with Self-Designed Fitness Program

Required each semester of upper school; students design their own fitness program in senior year



Innovating on the Past

"This is much better than the P.E. class I took when I was a kid, and it's much better than being forced to be on the JV field hockey team, or whatever, for students who couldn't care less about playing the sport. **People now are aware of the value of fitness**, so they think: 'oh, this is a much better way to approach P.E.'"

*David Braemer, Head of School
Ensworth School*

Mindfulness and the Brain

The physiological impact of mindfulness on the body has captured the attention of academic researchers at some of the country's most prestigious academic medical centers. Recent research from centers like Johns Hopkins and Harvard has revealed a number of ways in which mindfulness can reduce the physiological symptoms of emotional stress:

1. A meta-analysis of clinical mindfulness trials led Johns Hopkins researchers to conclude that mindfulness meditation can have a small but significant effect in reducing symptoms of emotional stress
2. A UC Davis study of mindfulness retreat participants found a strong correlation between improved mindfulness and reduced levels of cortisol
3. Yale researchers examined brain activity in both experienced and inexperienced meditators. Their findings suggest that cultivating mindfulness can help maintain a more focused mental state
4. A Harvard study observed a clear difference in the brain structure of study subjects following an introduction to mindfulness and eight weeks of mindfulness practice

Research Supports Effect, Benefit of Mindfulness Meditation on Brain

Academic Research Reflects Wide-Ranging Effects



Reduction in Depression, Anxiety Symptoms

- Meta-analysis at Johns Hopkins found that the effectiveness of mindfulness meditation similar to antidepressants for reducing symptoms of depression, anxiety



Reduction in Cortisol

- UC Davis researchers measured mindfulness and cortisol levels of volunteers before and after 3-month mindfulness retreat
- Participants whose mindfulness score increased showed a decrease in cortisol, the stress hormone



Decreased Mind Wandering

- Yale researchers conducted brain scans of experienced meditators
- Scans showed that the main nodes of the default-mode network, associated with mind-wandering, were deactivated during meditation
- Mind-wandering is associated with being less happy and increased worrying



Changes in Gray Matter

- Participants in Harvard study took part in 8-week mindfulness program
- Magnetic resonance (MR) images showed increased gray matter density in the hippocampus, key for learning, memory
- MR images also showed a reduction of gray matter in the amygdala, responsible for anxiety and stress

Source: Brewer, J. et al., "Meditation Experience is Associated with Differences in Default Mode Network Activity and Connectivity," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, Oct. 4, 2011; Goyal, M. et al., "Meditating Programs for Psychological Stress and Well-being," *JAMA Internal Medicine*, Mar. 2014, <http://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamainternalmedicine/fullarticle/1809754>; Fell, A., "Mindfulness from Meditation Associated with Lower Stress Hormone," UC Davis, Mar. 27, 2013; McGreevey, S., "Eight Weeks to a Better Brain," *Harvard Gazette*, Jan. 21, 2011, <http://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2011/01/eight-weeks-to-a-better-brain/>; EAB interviews and analysis.

Mindfulness in the Classroom

Some of the most compelling research on mindfulness in recent years has been done on the impact of mindfulness in the classroom. Early findings from mindfulness initiatives in public schools suggest that mindfulness can be used to help students focus better in class, it can help them self-regulate, and it can improve student engagement by creating closer relationships between students and teachers.

Many schools have already begun to incorporate mindfulness into teaching. Some require a semester-long class, others use the Advisory program to teach about mindfulness, while still others have incorporated it into P.E. curricula.

Early Interventions Support Wider Adoption of Mindfulness Programs

Public School Programs Demonstrate Promising Results



Of educators implementing mindfulness in the classroom observe **improved focus** in students



Of educators implementing mindfulness in the classroom observe **improved emotional regulation** in students



Of educators implementing mindfulness in the classroom observe **improved engagement** in students



Study in Brief: Learning to BREATHE: A Pilot Trial of a Mindfulness Curriculum for Adolescents

- 120 private high school seniors participated in 7-week mindfulness program tailored to the developmental needs of adolescents
- Compared to control group, students demonstrated a significant reduction in negative affect and tiredness
- Students showed a significant increase in feelings of calmness, relaxation, self-acceptance
- Emotional regulation also increased, as students reported a greater awareness of emotions
- 66% of students continued to practice mindfulness outside of the classroom

Center for Disease Control and Prevention

Source: Broderick, P. et al., "Learning to BREATHE: A Pilot Trial of a Mindfulness Curriculum for Adolescents," *Advances in School Mental Health Promotion*, 2(1), 2009: pp. 35-46; Mindful Schools, "What Educators See in Their Students," <http://www.mindfulschools.org/>; EAB interviews and analysis.

Embed Mindfulness as a Community Norm

Middlesex School, a co-ed 9-12 school in Concord, Massachusetts, provides an excellent example of bringing mindfulness into the school. The foundation of their mindfulness program is their full-time Director of Mindfulness, who is charged with making mindfulness a resource and opportunity for the whole school community, including alumni.

The program begins in freshman year, when all new students are required to take a semester-long intro to mindfulness class. The class covers three areas: stabilizing attention in the mind; developing heightened awareness of the body and its relationship to emotions; and thoughts and how individuals relate to their own thoughts. Throughout the class, students learn how to integrate mindfulness into everyday life.

Beyond the introductory class, Middlesex offers more advanced classes where students learn to deepen their practice, and eventually how to lead others in mindfulness practice.

Similar courses are offered to faculty as well, with an emphasis on how to bring mindfulness into their classroom.

To ensure students have regular opportunities to practice mindfulness beyond when they are taking the required class, 5-10 minutes of weekly chapel time is devoted to school-wide mindfulness practice.

Internal Expertise Supports Community-Wide Mindfulness Practice



Middlesex School

At Middlesex, Entire School Community Taught Mindfulness



Parents and Alumni

- 8-week mindfulness course designed for parents
- Annual mindfulness retreat designed for alumni



Faculty

- 70% of faculty elect to take introductory mindfulness class
- Faculty encouraged, supported to integrate mindfulness into classroom practices



Students

- All new students required to participate in semester-long mindfulness meditation class, practice
- Advanced classes offered to deepen practice, equip students to lead mindfulness practice



Director of Mindfulness

- Teaches required mindfulness classes to all new students
- Leads whole school in weekly mindfulness practice during chapel
- Trains teachers, coaches, parents, alumni in mindfulness, how to incorporate mindfulness into school culture

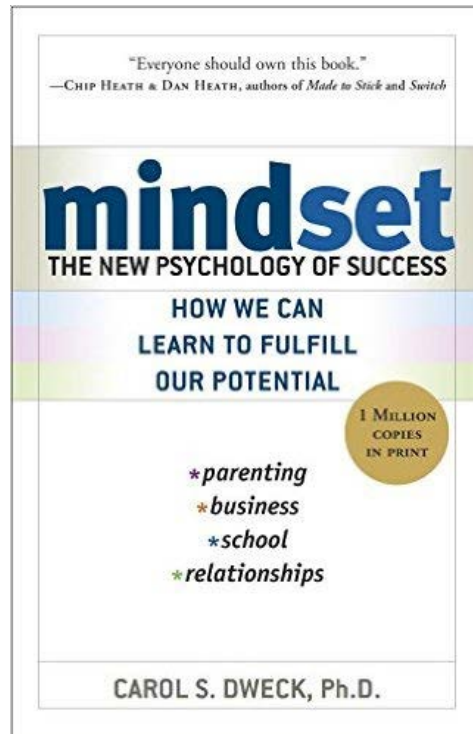
An Introduction to Growth Mindset

Carol Dweck's work on growth mindset has become tremendously popular among educators in recent years. At the core of this work is the distinction between a growth mindset and a fixed mindset.

Dweck's research finds that most people have a fixed mindset. This mindset supports the idea that intelligence and abilities are fixed and cannot be changed in any significant way. According to that view, intelligent people should not have to work hard to succeed. Problems arise when a fixed mindset person encounters a challenging task. They interpret the challenge itself, and their inability to succeed quickly, as evidence of an inherent inadequacy on their part. Without quick success, those with fixed mindsets quickly become paralyzed in the face of challenge.

Growth mindset, on the other hand, starts from the view that improvement is possible through effort and training. People with this mindset see challenge as an opportunity to improve, and believe that they can improve their skill in any subject through hard work and practice. They value the process as much as the result, and when confronted with failure, they look for indications of what went wrong to identify what they can learn from the experience.

Defining Our Terms



Growth Mindset

The belief that intelligence and other abilities can be shaped through effort and training



Fixed Mindset

The belief that intelligence and other personality traits are innate and cannot be changed

“Mindset change is not about picking up a few pointers here and there. It's about seeing things in a new way. When people change to a growth mindset, **they change from a judge-and-be-judged framework to a learn-and-help-learn framework.** Their commitment is to growth, and growth takes plenty of time, effort, and mutual support.”

Carol Dweck, Professor
Stanford University

Growth Mindset Promotes Mental Toughness

Two of the many studies that have compared growth and fixed mindset students are detailed on this page. As is the case with the growing body of research on this topic, these two studies illustrate in a compelling manner that a growth mindset is something that can be taught.

Dweck and others often seek to demonstrate this conclusion by comparing groups of students in control group studies. One group is told that intelligence is not fixed and can be improved with effort, while the other group is not. These groups are then presented with a series of challenges. Simply telling one group about growth mindset is often enough to provoke a more productive response in that group.

Given that college is generally more difficult than high school, that graduate school is more difficult than college, and that working life includes a combination of tasks that both play to and test one's aptitudes and abilities, it is clear that equipping students with the mindset to be able to thrive in the face of challenges will be essential to their future success.

Research Demonstrates the Impact of Students Adopting a Growth Mindset



Study in Brief: Implicit Theories of Intelligence Predict Achievement Across an Adolescent Transition

- 373 seventh grade students assessed for mindsets, grades monitored for two years
- Average grade of students with a growth mindset increased by 5 percentage points, whereas those with a fixed mindset decreased by 1
- Analysis shows divergence in grades due to:
 - Students with growth mindset focus more on learning than earning high grades
 - Students with growth mindset believe effort leads to success, do not view current ability as limitation
 - Students with growth mindset adopt new study habits to improve learning in face of setback



Study in Brief: The Role of Expectation and Attributions in the Alleviation of Learned Helplessness

- 750 students assessed for mindsets; 12 selected for having a fixed mindset
- Dweck tracked accuracy of math problems, effects of failure on students' performance
- During pretests, 75% of fixed mindset students chose to repeat successful tasks, rather than tasks they had previously failed; all fixed mindset students showed a deterioration in performance after failure
- All students taught that failure on math problems is due to insufficient effort
- When taught to equate failure with lack of effort, 83% of students improved performance after getting a math problem wrong

Source: Dweck, C., "The Role of Expectation and Attributions in the Alleviation of Learned Helplessness," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 31(4), 1975: pp. 674-685; Blackwell, L., "Implicit Theories of Intelligence Predict Achievement Across an Adolescent Transition," *Child Development*, 78(1), 2007: pp. 246-263; EAB interviews and analysis.

How Can We Move Beyond a Fixed Mindset?

Unfortunately, there is a great deal in modern American culture, and in the culture of independent schools in particular, that supports a fixed mindset. Achievement is often praised, without acknowledgement of the processes that lead to achievement. School culture labels some children as smart and other children as not, and people of all ages are too often allowed or even encouraged to discontinue activities in which they do not immediately excel.

All of these factors add up to send a message that failure suggests a deficiency on the part of the individual, rather than a temporary and retrievable setback. As a result, many steer clear of activities and subjects that test them, favoring ones that bring immediate success.

For today's student in the middle of the college admissions process, there is little room to "get better at something."

Elements of Independent School Culture Reinforce Fixed Mindset

Parents



Emphasis on results discourages children from trying new things

As a Result:

Children avoid assignments, problems that are difficult for fear of failure

Protecting children from failure teaches them to devalue activities at which they do not immediately excel

As a Result:

Children quit activities that are difficult

Teachers



Reassuring students about their intelligence, talent undermines effort required for success, growth

As a Result:

Students equate doing well with intelligence, not effort

Outcome-oriented messages meant to motivate and encourage students instead reinforce focus on innate ability

As a Result:

Students believe skills, intelligence cannot evolve, shy away from subjects, activities that do not come naturally

Students



Communicating with peers, students downplay effort, time spent to complete task

As a Result:

Students fear failure, social ridicule; reduce risk-taking, attempting more difficult work, greater challenges

Students tease others for mistakes in class, not achieving perfect grades

As a Result:

Peer comparisons undermine students' self-esteem, creating increased stress around school work

Source: Dweck, C., *Mindset: the New Psychology of Success*, New York: Random House Publishing Group, 2006; EAB interviews and analysis.

Growth Mindset at Laurel School

In order to effectively teach growth mindset, and instill this approach in students, schools will need to infuse this mentality into their culture. A good example of this practice comes from the Laurel School, a K-12 all-girls school in Shaker Heights, Ohio.

In the top part of this page, we detail some of the small, but powerful, actions involved in fostering a growth mindset at Laurel. Each of these elements reinforces the message that students can, and should, work to improve their performance, that mistakes along the way are acceptable and part of the learning process, and that by working at something, students can improve.

The bottom part of the page describes two more significant events that Laurel uses to foster a growth mindset culture. As part of their professional development, faculty participate in workshops designed to help develop a growth mindset approach to teaching. Through role-playing and scenario debrief discussions, faculty learn how to provide growth-oriented feedback and how to encourage growth mindset in their classrooms.

Shifting a school's culture towards growth mindset cannot be accomplished overnight, but making these small changes can have a positive impact on how students respond to setbacks and challenges.

Daily Interactions Cultivate, Reinforce Growth Mindset Culture



Small Actions Foster a Growth Mindset Culture



"We" Voice

Faculty encouraged to use "we" voice to foster empathy, emphasize that everyone makes mistakes



Process-Related Feedback

Faculty respond to students with feedback that addresses students' problem-solving strategies, approach



Power of "Yet"

Faculty reinforce "power of 'yet'" with 'Yet' pins on lanyards



Brain as a Muscle

"Brain as a Muscle" posters displayed in classrooms to emphasize intellectual growth



Brain Bowl

- Annual trivia event for fifth graders
- Questions focused on brain anatomy and learning development
- Emphasizes the ability to change the brain



Faculty Workshops

- Workshops use role play to teach growth mindset-oriented feedback; how to incorporate growth mindset into classroom practices

Demonstrate Growth Mindset as a Lifelong Skill

The Laurel School is also home to the Center for Research on Girls. The work the Center does to translate academic research into actionable and practical ideas for students and parents is important, but what we found particularly interesting is how school uses the Center's research process as a dynamic example of growth mindset in action.

Research is by nature a messy endeavor. By exposing students to the trial and error of the research process, the Center gives them a useful model of persistence through failure, demonstrating that this mindset is key to success.

Laurel School's Center for Research on Girls



Case in Brief: Laurel's Center for Research on Girls

- Conducts research on topics such as stress and well being in girls' lives, how creativity builds emotional resilience, factors that drive self esteem in middle school girls, etc.
- Translates academic research into usable format for teachers and parents
- Exposes girls to growth mindset through interaction with the academic research process



Faculty Engage in Research

Faculty have the opportunity to participate, contribute to research on stress, well being, etc.



Research Informs Teaching Practices

Research is transformed into lessons, content, teaching practices for use in the classroom



Researchers Demonstrate Growth Mindset

Through exposure to research, students learn that growth is constant, adults must identify and continuously work to build knowledge

A Million Tiny Contributions

When introducing mindfulness and/or a growth mindset into your school, demonstrating and reinforcing the importance and utility of both of these approaches to dealing with difficult situation can only happen with small, consistent changes to actions, behaviors, and modes of interaction.

Everything in your school's culture needs to support the adopted approach. Students need to see evidence that schools leaders and faculty value and believe in the approach. Without this type of concerted effort, instilling these skills and resources that come along with these approaches will inevitably fail.

Preparing Students for Success Requires Integrated Approach, Consistency

1 Adapt Curriculum



Incorporate philosophy into pedagogy in all classes, consistently reinforcing messaging

2 Train and Equip Faculty, Staff



Enable faculty to employ philosophy in their day-to-day teaching



Recognize behaviors aligned with philosophy in public forums, such as assemblies, newsletters

3 Reinforce Philosophy Throughout School



Promote philosophy through posters, message boards



Employ philosophy-aligned language in communication with students, parents



Ensure all staff are equally able to reinforce philosophy in their interactions with students

Key Lessons for Equipping Students to Succeed

This section has focused on research-based approaches to equipping students with skills to succeed in life beyond high school.

First, adopt a research-based approach to equipping students. We've outlined three compelling options in this section.

Second, raise this type of life-skills learning to the same priority level as other academic subjects. These skills are just as important to the future success of students as the academic content that is currently in school curricula.

Finally, whatever wellness philosophy or approach schools adopt, it is necessary to reinforce it with everything you do. Creating a supportive culture is critical to making the practices outlined in this study meaningful and sustainable.



1

Select evidence-based strategies to support future success of students.

Adopt research-based approach to instilling healthy coping skills to help students thrive in stressful situations, recognizing that some stress can be positive

2

Demonstrate importance, value of strategies by making room in academic curriculum.

Weave this type of skill-based learning into your curriculum, approaching this content with the same rigor, intentionality used to teach academic subjects

3

Recognize that culture change is difficult, requires consistency, new norms and behaviors from all.

Change your community's culture to reflect, support the selected approach; ensure the behaviors and norms of all community members reflect this culture

The best
practices are
the ones that
work for **you.**SM

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