

Whole Child Panel

Social Emotional Learning/Wellness

grades 6-12, 8/4/20

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TOP PRIORITIES

1. **!!Reinstate the position of Wellness Coordinator!!**
 - a. Provide additional support for the coordinator, including a stress resiliency/mindfulness or “mental fitness” initiative leader
 - b. *This is the only school department without a designated coordinator (and that's nutty)*
2. Include a focused resiliency/Social Emotional Wellness*(SEW)/‘mind fitness’ (Amanda will describe this program)/mindfulness or other curriculum during the (pre)opening of school for all grades and **maintain** it
3. Opportunities made available across the board from support staff to kids, teachers, admin, building and maintenance, parents guardians and families. **EVERYONE** is given the opportunity to participate
4. Implement wellness/emotional fitness training early and often. SEW/SEL has been put at the **top** of the priority list, let’s treat it that way. Indoors or out, these tools apply
5. Be conscious of language/stigma/bias and how programs are presented to increase and retain interest
6. Emphasis has been placed on SEW/SEL interventions by Supt. Marini and Anthony Meyer (among others), and it’s *important that there’s follow-through*

**I’m using the acronym “SEW” along with “SEL” because “wellness” may feel more accessible - and less of a chore - than “learning.”*

TIME

There needs to be an agreement to allocate time for teaching skills to staff and students that will positively impact and enhance SEW/SEL and individual/group health. Once skills are embedded, the time requirement decreases. These are critical needs that are improved by developing SEW/SEL:

- Caring for ourselves
- Caring for each other
- Recognizing needs in our small and large communities
- Community building
- Promoting connectivity intentionally
- Reducing the experience of isolation
- Realistic expectations
- Flexibility with sites and facilities - indoor/outdoor/lack of familiarity
- Engage PTO/BPO to reach out to parents across the board
 - IDEAS FROM MARIA (branding ideas for ongoing activities): Mindfulness Wednesday, Yoga Thursday, Trivia Game night. If particular staff, students or community members have a skill or talent, they could host a session, i.e. baking, yoga, tai chi, juggling, Rubik's cube, outdoor activities. (The BTC is already piloting a version with kid-to-kid programs)

SEW/SEL at BHS

Anthony Meyer and Hal Mason have emphasized the importance of addressing the Whole Child by:

- “Fusing SEL with the curriculum.”
- Securing “time and opportunities... to prioritize community building.”
- “...build in prevention and education work so that we are fostering an inclusive, safe environment.”
- “Foster collaboration as a central goal to... guard against the isolation many students experienced last spring.”
- “...time and structures to facilitate monitoring and intervening to assist struggling students... We need better to better support timely, effective communication, collaboration, and student support.”

ALL OF THESE ELEMENTS APPLY TO 6-8 AS WELL AS 9-12

Learning/Practicing/Teaching

“Children are the living messages we send to a time we will not see.” - John F. Kennedy

Teachers need to learn , enhance, and practice resiliency/relaxation/mental health/mental fitness/mindfulness promoting tools (or whatever one chooses to call them) - *before and in order - to teach those tools to students and other community members. The power is in the practice, and the knowledge that even at their most simple (as simple as shifting the way we breath), they work. Students need to be taught by trusted adults, who need to learn and practice. And the need is going to be even greater this year than what is usual.*

Again, this requires TIME and commitment to their importance . There’s no guarantee that these skills will be adopted by everyone, but we need to make the offer and provide ongoing support, no matter what curricula/um are selected. Schools are a constellation of people; we need to acknowledge and support them all.

A relaxed child is more prepared to learn. A present educator is more prepared to teach. A calm administrator is better able to supervise. Every nurse, para, cafeteria worker, custodian, parent, guardian, who is at ease, is more able to reach any goal he/she/they are seeking to achieve, even if that goal is to simply to stay upright and steady during these challenging times and turbulent times.

These tools require very little time to practice once they're learned. Standard breath focus, physical content such basic yoga poses, movement games, 'reframing,' visualizations, gratitude exercises, community building, are all possible with little time front-loaded, with the potential for enormous benefits.

Providing the experience of relaxation/mind-fitness/mindfulness during the day is critical, and has to be experienced for buy-in, but some underpinning is valuable, especially for older students and adults: to understand the stress response, basic physiology, rationale and de-escalation, identification of stressors and cognitive distortions, introduce gratitude/positive psychology/optimism as a component of health, and recognize the continuum of small to big problems.

- There need to be dedicated units in all grades/schools however big or small.
- *At the high school there was a well received Mindfulness & Stress Resilience Initiative that did not continue last year after an Innovation Fund grant ended, but there are a number of trained staff who would be ready to take a leadership role. At the HS, Wellness classes and Advisory (ideally both), are where these tools would most naturally be taught/learned.*
- Wellness teachers at all grades are likely to have more familiarity; content teachers need to be brought into the loop.
- *Teachers, OT's, PT's, and others across the district/grades have received grants for a variety of programs ie: resiliency, yoga, mindfulness. Finding out who's done what would be helpful.*
- These tools can be integrated with the restorative circles currently being used at the HS, morning meeting or other on-going activities in lower grades.
- There are tools in this arsenal that are doable for everyone: reluctant kids, reluctant adults, individuals with trauma histories, special needs, behavior issues, auditory or visual impairments, everyone, though physical distancing makes it harder.
- Cultural sensitivity, language barriers, physical limitations can all be addressed in the presentation of this content.

A-B-C-D

SEW/SEL skills are: **Achievable, Believable, Concrete and Desirable.**

We all breathe; that's step 1. Brookline may care supremely about the academic achievement of its students, but if a student isn't ready to learn or a teacher isn't ready to teach, because of any sort of escalated state, all bets are off. We're all stressed now, experiencing anxiety, and deeply concerned about the future. If we can't help our school staff and students feel better in a moment-to-moment manner, we can't help them over hours, days and years. Let's start with the smallest moments, help them find the quieter places inside themselves, and move forward together with resolve in each school, the larger school community, as a town, and as global citizens.



RESILIENCE – SEL GOAL



The process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or significant stress.

PHYSIOLOGICAL : managing stress by balancing our nervous system

NEUROLOGICAL: managing our emotions and mindset to take advantage of our neuroplasticity

SOCIAL/ RELATIONAL: cultivating empathy and compassion through the power of connection.

SEL / Mental Health / Mindfulness / — Self Care / Resilience

ALL OF THE ABOVE have to do with OUR (students, staff, parents) ability to manage, regulate and care for oneself to be successful, happy + productive.

- ❑ Manage their emotions + thoughts through stressful + uncertain times.
- ❑ Manage all the changes in this new (teaching) environment
- ❑ Create & maintain positive relationships
- ❑ Learn how to be more happy & productive in these times

What do they all have in common?

STIGMA + PRECONCEPTIONS

Problem Based / Diagnostic - Oh you have mental health (issues) !

MENTAL FITNESS

A new term that takes away the stigma of mental health.

“Getting Stronger with your Mental Health”

MINDSET - Changing how we think about changing + building our mental health.

PROCESS - we can make goals, routines, just like Physical Fitness

STRATEGIES - Understanding there are things WE CAN DO to impact our wellbeing



4 Elements of Mental Fitness

1. STRENGTH: Ability to handle a difficult or heavy stress. How much can you handle?
2. ENDURANCE: Ability to withstand prolonged stress for long periods of time.
3. FLEXIBILITY: Ability to use the right tools and switch techniques depending on situation.
4. TEAM: Ability to get support when needed, like using coaches for offense, defense, team trainer, etc.

TOOL KIT

Things we do Anyways - but we can optimize them to improve mental fitness?

- Movement
- Nutrition
- Sleep
- Connection
- Mindset

Workouts - Extra things we can do to strengthen our mental fitness

- Optimism
- Mindfulness
- Gratitude
- Reframing
- Perspective



Mental Fitness needs to be part of school.

Made a priority for teachers - Care about their wellbeing and make decisions that are purposefully targeted at this aim.

Made a priority for students - time in their day, EVERYDAY to do mental fitness check ins and workouts, not just taught in a unit once a year - not retained.

Offerings + Events to promote mental wellness for staff + Students

Common Focus on Emotional Wellness can BRING US ALL TOGETHER.

TEACHER Community + Connection

Offering options + TIME for teachers to build community + promote mental fitness:

- ❑ Clubs (Knitting, Yoga, Running, Cooking, Book)
- ❑ Events (Staff Mud Run, Pot Luck Dinners, First Fridays, Karaoke)
- ❑ Offerings (yoga, mindfulness, gratitude wall, workouts)
- ❑ Community Action Events (Park clean up, Making Food for Senior Homes)
- ❑ Staff room make-overs (ping pong table, fitness room, stress reducing activities)

TIME is of most importance! BUILT into the schedule/ Day / Calendar -
Before school? After school? Zoom or Live?

Staff Community Building Days = Similar to how corporations do team building activities

TEACHER WELLNESS

We become what we teach. - Making wellness a piece of regular check ins in school and talking about age appropriate mental fitness strategies. Not another thing to teach but maybe a new norm of this “return to school”

Yoga + Mindfulness - morning zoom yoga sessions for teachers. A good way to start your day. Wellness teachers could lead on zoom (Myself, Billy Graham, Liz?)

Connections - Have teachers to run weekly gatherings, - cocktail making, painting, knitting, karaoke, cooking, baking, etc.

SEL + Wellness Workshops for Educators - Breath For Change workshops, District wide PD, Weekly Offerings

HOW can PTO HELP?

- Organize meetings for parents - bridge the gap between school + home.
 - Grade specific regular meetings for parents to share concerns + problem solve.
 - Connect parents with SEL strategies being taught in the schools.
- Fund Mental Fitness Offerings for Staff + Students
 - Yoga / Mindfulness sessions (Staff + Students)
 - Events for Staff + Students
- Coordinate with other schools' PTO and provide list of COMMUNITY RESOURCES for children could get involved in.
 - Virtual Classes (Baking, Art, Karate, Ballet, etc.)
- Assemble grade level ideas for zoom playdates to promote social / peer engagement (numbers bingo, kahoot, scavenger hunt, battleship game, craft, etc.). Maybe set up weekly playdates for grades levels with a parent host.

K-8 Guidance + Mental Health Website

Comments + Feedback

<https://sites.google.com/psbma.org/psb-school-counseling/social-emotional-learning/create-a-schedule?authuser=0>

Articles/Info (there is a great deal available)

<http://neatoday.org/2020/04/15/social-emotional-learning-during-covid/>

<https://www.edutopia.org/social-emotional-learning>

<https://www.nytimes.com/guides/well/mindfulness-for-children>

<http://www.doe.mass.edu/sfs/sel/>

<https://register.gotowebinar.com/register/5431901208029474574?source=prereg1>