

**MINUTES APPROVED JUNE 1, 2016**  
**Howard County School Health Council**  
**April 6, 2016**  
**(7:00pm-9:00pm)**

**NOTE CHANGE IN LOCATION**

Savage Branch, Howard County Library System  
Da Vinci Meeting Room  
9525 Durness Lane  
Laurel, MD 20723

Attendees: Caroline Rothfield, Craig Selbrede, Craig Selbrede II, Varsha Pudi, Praveena Ghanta, Mya Tsang, Jeanne Serafin, Joan Ford, Cynthia Schulmeyer, Elieen Singleton, Janet Munro, Sadie Whong, Alvaro Ortiz, Eleanor Dixon-Terry, Linda Rangos, Morgan Risley, Sharon Hobson, Deb Jung, Paul Whong, Miriam Ofonedu, Jackie Dougé, Joan Webb-Scornaienchi, Bess Altwerger, Debi Lattimer, Andrea LeWinter, Nana Ama, Anne Markus, Jacob Lampf, Se Rin Lee.

- I. Opened meeting at 7:15pm
- II. Caroline Rothfield volunteered to take minutes
- III. Skipped Review of Ground Rules
- IV. Agenda & February Meeting Minutes approved unanimously
- V. **“But now we’re stressed out” – Student and Parent Panel Discussions**
  - a. Markus made some introductory remarks
    - i. Niche.com, which was founded in 2002 by Carnegie Mellon University students and rates school systems based on teaching statistics and ratings from parents and students (n=2,876 reviews for Howard County), ranked HCPSS 1<sup>st</sup> in the state of Maryland with A+ for academics and A+ for educational outcomes, although the system received a B for food.
    - ii. HCPSS has also become quite competitive – competition that students and parents are starting to feel earlier and earlier – one could even argue in preschool years. While academic excellence and competition are not intrinsically a bad thing, in excess they can come at a price.
    - iii. The question is: What is the price we have to pay for this?
    - iv. Undue or unnecessary stress is one reaction students and parents might feel. Unnecessary stress can in turn lead to a variety of responses – some healthy, some less so. Responses include: high levels of anxiety, inability to sleep/insomnia, depression, substance use/misuse, and a variety of others.
    - v. Surprise, surprise, we don’t have much data at the county level but we know the following:
      1. In 2012, anxiety was 1 of the top 10 conditions reported by high schoolers and their parents after conditions, such as asthma, allergies, and ADHD (HCPSS student health data).
      2. In 2014, 11.3% of Howard County adults reported having an anxiety disorder (BRFSS data).
      3. That same year, 6% of Howard County adults with children reported taking medications or receiving treatment from a mental health professional (2014 HCHAS Survey).
      4. In a national sample of over 2 million privately-insured individuals over the 2001-2010 period, rates of mental health medication use were up for

- men, women, boys and girls. For boys, rates increased from 6% to 7%, and for girls, rates increased from 4% to 5% during the study period. Rates were slightly higher for boys than girls in 2010: 7% vs. 5%.
5. NHIS data from 2007-2012 show that use of melatonin, a OTC sleeping aid, has more than doubled among adults (3.1 million were users in 2012) and significantly increased for children, with 419,000 children using melatonin in 2012.
  6. All of these statistics are just the tip of the iceberg.
- b. Markus described the purpose of the panels, which was to hear directly from students and parents about their experiences within HCPSS, their views on the issues of academic stress, anxiety and depression, success, and what solutions might be proposed.
  - c. Markus introduced the panelists
    - i. Student Panel: 6 high schools were represented (so half of all high schools in the county), including Marriotts Ridge, Mount Hebron, River Hill, Hammond, Glenelg, and Atholton. Panelists included 1 freshman, 2 sophomores, 3 juniors.
    - ii. Parent Panel: Eleanor Dixon-Terry, Jeanne Serafin, Praveena Ghanta.
  - d. Student panelists were asked the following questions (shared ahead of the meeting):
    - i. Tell us a little bit about yourself and your experience trying to be a successful student in our current school system. How would you define success? Is the school system promoting it in a way you think is useful for the next steps in your academic and/or professional life?
    - ii. What do you make of the response of one high school counselor to a student seeking guidance that "a certain amount of anxiety is good" for one's academic performance?
    - iii. How about your parents/caretakers and your friends' parents/caretakers? What do they think a successful student is? What impact, if any, does this have on you?
    - iv. Do you think the current environment leads to unnecessary stress? Why?
    - v. Are you feeling stressed and if so why? How are you coping with it? How are your friends coping with it? How are your parents coping with it?
    - vi. How can we fix this? Are there any concrete and doable solutions?
      1. Some solutions included: a) implementing "Hawk" (River Hill) time(s) in all high schools; b) coordinating exam and test schedules; c) introducing yoga techniques.
  - e. Parent panelists were asked to react to the student panel and answer the following questions (provided before the meeting):
    - i. Do you feel that the HCPSS is a very competitive school system? If yes, how do you and your child respond to the competitive school climate?
    - ii. Are there factors that are outside your control that maybe contributing to the increase demand from home for high academic performance? (e.g., asking students to take more AP and college-level courses, be engaged in community services and extracurricular activities, peer pressure)
    - iii. What would you recommend as ways that the school system could help to increase staff and parents capacities to serve as resources for our students? (e.g., type of training)
  - f. Students' experiences and views fell on a continuum, from those who welcome and need anxiety to perform at high levels to those who suffered the consequences to the point of having to be hospitalized and remain out of school until able to return. Most of

the information shared echoed the documentary “The Race to Nowhere” from 2009. Students expressed a variety of views on how to address stress in our schools.

- g. The student panel generated a lot of discussion and questions from those in attendance, including: a) Are you learning anything? b) What do you mean by acceptance in a “good” college?

VI. Next Steps

- a. Stress and Anxiety
  - i. Postponed item to June meeting
- b. Later School Start Time (see attachment)
  - i. Deb Jung provided an update of recent developments regarding the Orange Ribbon Bill, which passed the House 134-1 and at the time was stalled in the Senate (it has since been enacted).
  - ii. Deb Jung provided a summary handout with recommended action steps regarding the Orange Ribbon Bill, the HCPSS Board of Education (BoE) race, and the April 28 BoE meeting.
- c. Wellness Policy 9090
  - i. Postponed item to June meeting

VII. No Public Input

VIII. Adjourned meeting at 9:05pm

ATTACHMENTS

- Start School Later Action Items for Howard County School Health Council Meeting, April 6