

MINUTES OF THE LINCOLN SCHOOL COMMITTEE
LINCOLN SUDBURY REGIONAL DISTRICT SCHOOL COMMITTEE
SUDBURY SCHOOL COMMITTEE
TRI-DISTRICT PUBLIC FORUM
COMMUNITY FORUM ON ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION

Monday, March 11, 2019

Lincoln-Sudbury Library, Lincoln Sudbury Regional High School, 390 Lincoln Road,
Sudbury, MA
OPEN SESSION

Lincoln School Committee Present: Tim Christenfeld (Chairperson), Peter Borden (Vice Chairperson), Tara Mitchell. Also present: Becky McFall (Superintendent), Jessica Rose (Assistant Superintendent), Mary Emmons (Administrator for Student Services), Erich Ledebuhr (Hanscom Middle School Principal).

Absent: Trintje Gnazzo, Adam Hogue, Laurel Wironen (Hanscom Educational Liaison), Simone Johnson (METCO Representative), Buckner Creel (Administrator for Business and Finance), Robert Ford (Director of Technology).

Lincoln-Sudbury Regional District School Committee Present: Radha Gargeya (Chair), Patricia Mostue (Vice Chair), Ellen Joachim, Carole Kasper, Kevin Matthews, Candace Miller. Also present: Bella Wong (Superintendent and Principal).

Absent: None.

Sudbury School Committee Present: Lisa Kouchakdjian (Chair), Margaret Helon (Vice Chair), Christine Hogan, Silvia Nersessian, Richard Tinsley. Also present: Brad Crozier (Superintendent).

Absent: None.

I. Meet and Greet at 7:00 pm.

II. Call to Order

Mr. Christenfeld, Lincoln Chairperson, Mr. Gargeya, L-S Chair, and Ms. Kouchakdjian, Sudbury Chair, called the open session to order at 7:34 pm. Mr. Gargeya thanked Mr. Christenfeld, Ms. Kouchakdjian, and all those attending. The forum was taped and will be available for viewing on Sudbury TV and on the Lincoln School Committee's website, www.lincnet.org.

III. Opening Remarks by Radha Gargeya, Chair, LS School Committee

Mr. Gargeya thanked Superintendent McFall, Superintendent Wong, and Superintendent Crozier, the committees, and the Directors of Student Services, Mary Emmons (LPS), Stephanie Juriansz (SPS), and Aida Ramos (LS) and speaker Dr. Mona

Potter. He noted that the collaboration between the schools and the staffs is great. He thanked the custodians and grounds staff for their help. Mr. Gargeya said the forum is the fourth that the districts have held, and the discussions have been an incubator for topics.

Ms. Joachim gave a report on the School Start Time Subcommittee. She said they are working on creating a later start time for the Lincoln-Sudbury [LS] Regional High School with the potential implementation of the later start time in the fall of 2020. Later start times give students a chance to get more sleep, and students then have improved performance. Because LS and Sudbury schools share buses, they will work with the bus vendor and mapper to plan bus routes. She noted that it is ongoing work, and the Start Time Subcommittee welcomes input from the community.

IV. Introduction and State of Affairs at Lincoln (LPS), Sudbury (SPS), and Lincoln-Sudbury (LS)

Document: PowerPoint presentation on Anxiety and Depression

The Directors of Student Services, Mary Emmons (LPS), Stephanie Juriansz (SPS), and Aida Ramos (LS) worked together on their part of this evening's presentation. The presentation said that anxiety and depression are medical diagnoses. Students can be anxious and depressed at the same time. Some of the symptoms of depression are lack of sleep, or sleep disturbance, trouble concentrating, and anxiety. Students need to have symptoms for a specific amount of time before anxiety and or depression can be diagnosed. Ms. Emmons said the determining factors that are used is whether the symptoms and diagnoses impact the academic and social-emotional functioning performance of students. She noted that the data from the three districts shows an upward trend among students with anxiety and/or depression. Anxiety and depression can be a primary disability or a secondary disability. The William James referral service on the schools' websites can support families to identify resources for all residents, including those from Hanscom.

Ms. Ramos said there are three tiers of intervention. In Tier I, there are different techniques that are used, such as the curriculum, space in classroom, and consultants. Tier II, the middle tier, is when they start intensive support. There is counseling, student support teams, and therapeutic help. In Tier III, there is intensive help. There are also case workers to help. In high school, there is more flexibility in scheduling and more resources to be creative with solutions. 10th graders have to take a mandatory depression workshop. "Depression exists – ask for relief" is the phrase used to make students aware of it and of the support that is available for students. 11th and 12th graders take a well-being course. There are specialized programs, such as the Beacon Program for high school students when students are absent from school for mental or physical reasons. Excel is a special education program, and ACE is for students with or without IEPs. Ms. Emmons said that it is best for parents and schools to partner together and the partnership is essential for students. She said that all stakeholders need to keep the student in the center of the conversation.

V. Presentation on Anxiety versus Depression: How does it impact schools and families and how can we work in collaboration to support students?

Document: PowerPoint presentation by Dr. Potter with handout

Ms. Kouchakdjian introduced and welcomed the speaker, Dr. Mona Potter, Medical Director of McLean's Child and Adolescent Outpatient Services including the McLean Anxiety Mastery Program, School Consultation Service, and Adolescent DBT Outpatient Service; and Instructor in Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School. Ms. Abby Stark, Dr. Potter's assistant and a 5th year student who has been working with McLean the last two years, also presented.

Dr. Potter said that the topic of anxiety and depression is huge, and she will only be able to touch on a small percentage for this evening's presentation. She used a PowerPoint presentation and provided a handout to participants. She said that anxiety and depression are costly to students, parents, and schools. When students who suffer from these disorders avoid or withdraw from life, they miss out, and the withdrawal can lead to depression and family stress. She said that recently, she sees students avoiding school, and that is bad for students, and her programs try to help.

Dr. Potter said that anxiety disorders are common in childhood, and there seems to be a rise in the number of students who have them. She said that she is seeing it in younger students, and anxiety presents in more extreme ways with them. Depression can present itself in physical ways. Teens could lack interest and have difficulty sleeping or sleep more than usual. 70% of teens say that anxiety and depression are a major problem, but students are not getting the help they need. For example, 40% of students have the externalizing disorder of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder [ADHD], These students are diagnosed and being treated but 60% of students have depression, and 80% have anxiety, and each are internalizing disorders which are harder to diagnose. Is it stress or something more? Anxiety happens on a continuum. A little stress and anxiety can be good, it can help students get things done but if students are in a constant state of anxiety, that is not good.

Nature and nurture can affect anxiety and depression. Students who are thinkers are more challenging as it is more difficult to share what is happening than those that are more talkative. Social media can affect students. Studies show that students who have vulnerable brains look different from the brains of students who do not have vulnerable brains. The fear circuitry is different. Anxious people can have larger amygdalas. Students who suffer with moderate to severe anxiety and depression can be helped with cognitive behavior therapy [CBT]. Students are malleable, and pruning of experiences needs to happen, and it is important to recognize that their experiences matter. How to interact with the students' vulnerabilities is part of the work. Students need practice approaching and taking risks instead of avoiding situations. Families, clinicians, and schools need to collaborate with each other to support students.

Ms. Stark said that students need two foundational skill sets. CBT helps with thinking, feeling, and doing. Students need help to understand their emotions. Students can learn mindfulness to increase the ability to pay attention to the present moment. Students need to notice their emotions and to learn and to apply coping skills. Validation of students' emotions is important. Emotions make sense in the moment, and validation helps to regulate emotions and helps with problem solving. Ms. Stark said that invalidating emotions makes them bigger and worse.

Ms. Stark said that addressing behaviors of students is also important. There is protecting versus pushing. With anxiety, students want to avoid things, but the thing gets bigger if it is avoided. Students need the skills to face their stressors and need to be pushed. Ms. Stark said the opposite is true in depression, where students can withdraw or isolate. She suggested that students should exercise and socialize. Their thoughts and emotions should be connected, and the thoughts should be reflected upon to see if the thoughts are helpful and true thoughts? If not, she suggests trying to help students identify a more helpful version of the thoughts. Students should learn how to address emotions associated with anxiety and depression. Students should learn how to self-soothe using their six senses, and Ms. Stark suggested that students build a self-soothing kit to help in that endeavor.

The Committees' members shared their concerns. Ms. Hogan asked if social media and the amount of time spent on screens was a reason for the increase. Dr. Potter said there are many reasons, but the most attention is spent on social media. She suggested that adults model different behavior with their own smartphones and said that a technology free dinner time could help. Students' brains do not have fully developed frontal lobes until they reach age 25. Ms. Stark suggested that students need to gain awareness of how to react to social media.

Ms. Hogan said their work on changing school start times so that students get the right amount of sleep has a synergy to this topic. Ms. Stark said that adolescent sleep patterns shift, and students should practice good sleep hygiene. Dr. Potter said that later start times were better. Eating, sleeping, and moving are three basics to getting well. She said it was important to identify proactive ways to prevent anxiety and depression. Ms. Kouchakdjian asked if there were telltale signs when students were younger. Ms. Stark said that early on, students internalize many things. Interventions are good for all students, and students need to learn about their emotions and not be scared of them. Dr. Potter said that signs of mental health issues are not always obvious ones, but there could be physical symptoms. There needs to be communication between homes and schools. Parents and schools can provide interventions, and both groups need to teach and model behaviors because students learn by observing.

Mr. Tinsley noted that there has been a commitment to social-emotional learning, but the rates are still increasing. He said the understanding and science about the brain is more sophisticated, and asked if they could measure the impacts. He asked where they were in terms of prevention and asked what changes might be seen in the next ten years. Dr. Potter said that the concern on the social-emotional well-being of students has skyrocketed, and there are many companies looking at how to solve the issue.

Ms. Miller said that academic stress is one of the biggest issues and suggested that parents work with the schools to look at tests, assignments, and other things. She added that they are asking students to do too much. Dr. Potter said it was a great point because the stressors are overwhelming. Ms. Stark said they have to allow individuals to advocate for themselves in the environment. Dr. Potter noted that colleges are discussing this issue too.

VI. Question and Answer Session with public comment and participation

One parent commented that the workload, homework, and extracurricular activities, kept his student up until 1:00 am and then has to get on the bus early. He noted

that he did not have this workload when he was in school. Ms. Stark said it was about balancing, and Dr. Potter responded that there is literature about homework that shows there is no benefit to homework in early and middle school grades, but there is a benefit to homework in the later grades. She said it was harder for students who suffer from anxiety and depression to do homework, and it takes them longer. She said the question is how to be more efficient with it. She said they are starting to have the conversations with school districts. Dr. Potter added that perfectionism is a problem. This is values based work. Students need to think what are the goals? What does the student need to work on to reach the goal? Students need to know when they have reached their goal. Ms. Kouchakdjian said there is a balance between removing the stressor and developing the mechanism for dealing with the stressor. Dr. Potter said that they have to prepare students to be independent in the world.

Dr. Potter said that Board Certified Behavior Analysts [BCBA] are helpful and they add structure, predictability, and accountability. Students need coaching and skills training sometimes. Ms. Stark said they are helpful with high school students. Ms. Kouchakdjian suggested that they look at the causes of anxiety, and Dr. Potter agreed. She said that sometimes there is a bigger vulnerability, and the behavior of the student communicates something. Ms. Stark said the therapies used are more present focused and are not psychotherapy. One parent suggested that parents be trained. Ms. Stark agreed and said that parent training is vital. Parents have to manage their own stress. Parents need to help students share their emotions. Ms. Stark suggested they could have parent training nights, and Dr. Potter suggested they think about how they could reach parents. They could use videos, and get the curriculum at school out to the parents. A common language on mindfulness is also helpful.

Ms. Helon asked Dr. Potter where should the schools focus, and on which grades? Dr. Potter said that she sees more of students in kindergarten and 1st grade who are emotionally dysregulated. The students may be ok in earlier grades, but middle school demands more of them than they can tolerate. She said that the continuity between middle and high schools is also an issue. She said schools need to ask what social-emotional skills are needed for each developmental stage of a child.

Ms. Helon asked if there were benchmarks that could be worked on for these issues. Ms. Stark said that brain imaging is terrible at predicting who will develop these issues, but there are universal transitions for all students. She said that all students will be sad and feel emotions and need the skills to cope with them. Ms. Nerssessian said that with the spikes in middle school, are there factors that would trigger parents to say that their childrens' experiences are not typical and asked for advice. Ms. Stark responded that parents should keep an eye out for feelings of intensity, interference with daily life, repeated patterns, and the duration. Ms. Nerssessian noted that things are invisible with students until they get to a certain point. Ms. Stark suggested that parents give their children validation when they tell parents about difficult things and model how to deal with emotions. She said that sharing is also helpful. Dr. Potter said that having family meals at least five to seven times per week can help.

VIII. [sic] Action Items

Mr. Gargeya said the Committees need to identify action items or set up a process for action items. He suggested a working group to look at these items. Ms.

Kouchakdjian liked the idea of working groups. Dr. McFall said the directors of student services are collaborating on these issues and a lot is happening. She is worried that having many parallel conversations can miss the mark. She said that Lincoln has a Social-Emotional Task Force that is looking at the curriculum. She added that Hanscom has unique needs. Mr. Borden said that the districts should explore if there are synergies or at least a continuity of language as Lincoln students move up to Lincoln-Sudbury. Mr. Tinsley said it has to be a multi-modal approach that keeps communication open.

Ms. Emmons said they want students to have competencies to be healthy, and it needs to be differentiated for students. Mr. Matthews worried that the Committees were getting in the mode of telling the school administrations what to do and said that the Committee members are not experts in this subject. He would welcome more data on the subject. Ms. Wong said they are adding programs and asking how to engage families. She said social media and academic stress make families more stressed. Ms. Kouchakdjian thanked Dr. Potter and Ms. Stark and the school administrations. She would like to see a group put forward some parent workshops on the topic. The directors of student services have written a grant on social-emotional learning and are waiting to hear if they have won it. The directors have a good partnership and do professional development for staff and for parents. Ms. Emmons said that the schools have social workers, psychologists, BCBAs, nurses, and others who work with students on these issues every day.

Ms. Kasper and Mr. Crozier said they like the work on the Vision of a Graduate and the districts are collaborating. There will be a presentation on the work, and he said they have a great team and will report back on the work. Ms. Joachim asked that they look at the communication with families piece. Ms. Mostue said that parents should also reach out to other parents, including those whose children have graduated; there is a vast army of parents who have a lot to offer.

IX. [sic] Adjourn

Mr. Christenfeld moved, and Mr. Borden seconded, the motion to adjourn the meeting at 9:38 pm. Mr. Gargeya moved, and Ms. Mostue seconded, the motion to adjourn the meeting at 9:38 pm. Ms. Hogan moved, and Mr. Tinsley seconded, the motion to adjourn the meeting at 9:38 pm.

The Committees voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting.

The next Lincoln School Committee meeting is scheduled for Thursday, March 14, 2019 at 7:00 pm in the Hartwell Multipurpose Room, Ballfield Road, Lincoln.

Respectfully submitted,
 Sarah G. Marcotte
 Recording Secretary
 Lincoln School Committee