**Belmont Wellness Coalition (BWC)**

**Meeting Minutes (Virtual)**

**Tuesday, January 25, 2022 at 100 – 2:00 PM**

***BWC Members Present:*** Lisa Gibalerio (Wayside), Sophia Suarez-Friedman (Wayside), Wendy Conroy (Chair, Sexuality Educator), Anne Wang (EDC, outgoing Grant Evaluator), Nadia Foster (EDC, incoming Grant Evaluator), Janice Darias (Assistant Superintendent), Emma Herzog (PhD Student in Ed Leadership and interning with Superintendent), Chris Jablonski (Minister at UU Church, parent), Leah Lesser (parent, Marketing/Communications at Emerson Hospital), Hannah Lee (Youth Adult Services at Belmont Library), Mike Crowley (School Committee, parent, Belmont Media Center), Rachel Bruno (parent, PTO member, psychologist), Melissa O’Connor (School Resource Officer at BHS), Megan Palmer (parent, teacher and education graduate student), Kim Raubenheimer (Nutritionist and trainer, parent), Diana Martinez (parent, Mental Health Counselor), Jonathan Mack (Fitness Director at Waverly Oaks in Waltham, parent), Elizabeth Dionne (parent, on Community Preservation Committee), Haijieding (parent, psychologist), Ellie Lesser (BHS Sophomore)

1. **Welcome [Introductions, Check-Ins]**

Members introduced themselves. Hello and welcome to our new members!

We welcomed Nadia Foster, the BWC’s new grant evaluator from EDC, as Anne Wang is stepping back from her work with the BWC. (Fortunately, Anne will still be available if we need her, particularly for the 2021 YRBS data.)

Thank you to Anne for all of your work over these past four years!

1. **Discuss YRBS Follow Up Report**

Lisa reviewed the impetus for the YRBS Follow Up Report (an attempt to answer the question that parents often raise - *“Based on the data, what do we do next?”*

She noted that a meeting had been held with School Committee members, Mike Crowley and Ralph Jones, as well as with Janice Darius. She requested feedback on which areas BWC members thought were most important to focus on, but first asked that Mike give an update on the recent meeting and the School Committee’s perspective.

* School Committee (SC) update

Mike Crowley, SC member, noted that he as well as the SC finds the mental health data deeply concerning. He added that many of the recommendations in the follow up report will not be possible to do as a result of staffing and funding issues.

The three areas of focus include:

1. Retention of the newly hired social workers, which will require ongoing funding
2. Development of a Youth Mentorship program
   1. Research needs to occur concerning the how this could be developed and what it would cost to do so (Megan volunteered to help out Sophia and Mike)
   2. Wendy shared about the program that exists in Lexington “*Sources of Strength*” around Peer Mental Health support. Peers are trained (from Samaritans). They also had a program for mentorship from high school students to middle school students.
   3. Hannah has an academic mentor match program at the Library - High schoolers (with about 40 students) supporting middle and elementary schoolers with homework and shared interests. The students are providing social support, too. Hannah is interested in having mental health type training for the volunteers, if it is available. Hannah can enroll more middle school students.
   4. Lisa shared how in past focus groups with high school students, the idea of a peer mentorship program emerged.
3. Providing additional staff training around youth mental health - to recognize when kids are in trouble and may need referral to professional

Mike noted that each of these areas has a staffing and budget impact. The full SC has heard that these are the three areas to focus on.

Janice spoke about the partnership with McLean and the contract with McLean around providing professional development to staff and families. Elementary staff received training recently, and on Feb. 3, McLean will offer a training for caregivers. (Megan volunteered to attend to take notes on behalf of the Coalition, and Hannah volunteered as back-up – thank you both!)

Janice added that staff have received training in “*Faces of Mental Illness*” which looks at how mental illnesses may present.

* Other areas to focus on:

Marginalized Identities:

* Rachel pointed out that historically marginalized groups (LGBTQ+ youth, BIPOC youth) struggled more in some areas, and wants to make sure we always pay attention to this in the outreach/events/etc. that the Coalition does. Rachel suggested putting this as a priority, i.e., front and center in the report.
* Janice shared that this has been a focus of the district - such as fostering a sense of belonging. The Equity website will be launching next week. Belmont is undergoing an equity audit and will receive results in a few weeks, with a presentation at the February 15th School Committee Meeting.
* Lisa shared how this is related to work on a State Mass Call grant. She noted the BWC’s partnership with Belmont Against Racism (BAR) and the subgroup LGBTQ+ Alliance. A Spring Parenting Group topic will focus on how to support LGBTQ+ youth.
* Chris shared a suggestion for the wording on the report to be more specific. He shared work with LGBTQ+ Alliance and meeting with 40 queer Middle Schoolers (at a GSA meeting) who shared their experiences at the school (they expressed a lack of support). Chris highlighted the importance of separating out support for both LGBTQ+ youth and BIPOC youth, since their experiences are different.

Therapy Dogs:

* Leah asked if the middle and high schools would ever have a full-time therapy dog (since students are excited to have therapy dogs this week for midterms).
* Rachel shared she is trying to work out logistics with the High School Principal of having a therapy dog join school once a month.
* Wendy shared that some organizations may have volunteers who could come as much as weekly.
* Hannah will ask the Library Director about the possibility of partnership between the library and schools on having a therapy dog.

1. **BWC this Spring**

* Potential Library Program: *Guidance for parents around supporting students with school and other stressors*; Date: TBD
* BHS Senior/Parent Forum: *Social Host, Substance Misuse*, end of April
* Parent Survey re: Youth Mental Health - let us know if you can help us write or edit the survey

1. **BWC Updates:**
2. Monthly Parenting Group

* Next Group Meets: **Wednesday, January 26, 7:00 – 8:00 PM (virtual)**

Topic: *Strategies Around* *Dating, Relationships, Consent*

This group meets monthly, a place for parents to share, and we impart guidance.

1. Student Ambassador Updates

* Focus Group coming up
* Social Norming campaign using YRBS data on substance misuse
* Met with Guidance Counselor Ms. King to support her work around mental health and educating students

1. **Closing Thoughts, New Business, other Updates**

* Links to weekly video segments can be found on BWC website: [www.belmontwellness.org](http://www.belmontwellness.org)
* Next BWC Meeting, first week in March, Lisa will send a doodle.