

Belmont Wellness Coalition (BWC)
Meeting Minutes (Virtual)
Tuesday, June 7, 2022 - 2:30-3:30 PM

BWC Members Present: Lisa Gibalerio (Wayside), Sophia Suarez-Friedman (Wayside), Wendy Conroy (BWC Chair, Sexuality Educator), Samantha Resnick (BHS Social Worker, started the BHS Bridge Program), Diana Martinez (parent, Mental Health Counselor), Jonathan Mack (Fitness Director at Waverly Oaks in Waltham, parent), Chris Jablonski (UU Minister, LGBTQIA+ Alliance), Elizabeth Dionne (Community Preservation Committee, Parent), Ellie Lesser (Rising Junior at BHS)

1. Welcome [Introductions, Check-Ins]

Members did brief introductions.

2. Summer Sub-groups

Lisa noted that an SEL subgroup has already been formed. Lisa, Janice, and Megan P. will meet to update the SEL documents that the BWC created in the summer of 2020.

The BWC is looking to add a subgroup to help establish the goals of the 2022/2023 Peer Mentorship program at BHS and also one to address improving BWC's outreach and visibility efforts.

Summer Commitment: 2-5 hours over the summer (or more if you feel like it). A few meetings and/or offline work.

Please let Lisa and/or Sophia know if there is anything in particular you'd like to work on or support during the summer!

3. Peer Mentorship – Update

Lisa noted that Wayside is in the process of hiring a part-time *Youth Engagement Specialist*. Part of this position will include setting up a Peer Mentorship program at BHS. This person will work with someone at BHS to enroll students, provide some training of peer leaders, plan a student-focused agenda, etc.

Lisa will be updating the School Committee on this topic at their meeting tonight, at around 7:30 pm.

4. Youth Perspective – Thank You, Ellie!

BWC member, Ellie Lesser, provided the following feedback concerning the youth perspective:

- Feels like drug and alcohol use has increased now that more has opened up than during the pandemic lockdown period. She would be interested to learn if there will be a question relating to this on the next YRBS (Spring 2023). Wendy wondered about what the numbers look like for communities who took the YRBS this Spring. Leah Lesser updated (via Ellie) that Concord took the YRBS this Spring and the data will be out in September.
- Elizabeth wondered if different High School classes (e.g., freshman, sophomore, etc.) have their own profile (i.e., more trouble, more calm, etc.) Ellie agreed that this is probably true. Samantha added that the pandemic impacted this and there are more pronounced

personalities of each High School class. For example, the Freshman seem to have a lower maturity level because the pandemic impacted their social/emotional development.

- Ellie would like the Coalition/School/Town to react more to the hate speech and at-school violence that has been happening recently (and to include student voices in the response).
- Ellie would like the community to meet the BHS Social Workers, and to have an event between the Guidance Department and the Social Work Department to explain to everyone the difference between the two departments and how/when to access each.
- Ellie was surprised that the school workload was so intense. She would like to advocate for additional Homework Free Weekends, possibly once per month, that are put on the calendar at the beginning of the year (not just holiday weekends!).
 - Samantha spoke towards the immense pressure to succeed that students feel. Ellie would like to redefine what it means to “succeed” and to normalize failing.
 - Course selection can impact this, such as someone guiding students to the *best class for them* versus feeling pressure to take all AP. Samantha made a suggestion to limit how many AP classes a student could take.
- Wendy brought up the issue of students feeling like they need to go to the “best possible” college. She would like to normalize conversation about there being the best school for everyone and finding the “best match” for you as opposed to striving for the “best school.” She suggested an event with a college counselor to discuss this point.
- Chris added that this (i.e., youth pressure, overwhelming stress, and academic excellence expectations, etc.) is a *life saving* conversation for our youth (with regard to what we know to be true about youth mental health ...)
- Wendy noted that this conversation about the *culture of stress* and super high academic expectations will be met with pushback from a cohort of Belmont parents.
- Wendy raised the “quiet room, break room” topic - is it happening at BHS? Ellie said not that she is aware of, and agreed that this would be very helpful. (Perhaps this could be a priority for the next academic year.) Sam’s office is currently a space students come to for this, but she couldn’t have something permanent. Sam and Ellie spoke to how beneficial it would be. Wendy suggested that this could be part of the Peer Mentor work.
- Lisa spoke to the “*Culture of Stress*” and how difficult it is to penetrate this topic in Belmont. She agreed that the pressure kids feel to excel in all areas of their lives, e.g., academically, athletically, with music, theater, etc. definitely can adversely impact their mental health. It will need to be approached from many different areas across town, e.g., School, home, Library, Rec Dept, etc.

5. **BWC Year in Review**

The BWC has been engaged in many initiatives throughout the past year. Highlights include the following:

The creation of 9 educational Tip Sheets:

1. Teen Alcohol and Other Drug Use
2. The ABC's of Sex Gender and Gender Identity
3. Guidance for Parents of Transgender and Nonbinary Kids
4. Supporting a Teen in a Mental Health Crisis
5. Mental Health 101- Typical Versus Concerning Teen Behavior
6. What to Know about the Social host Liability Law

7. Suicide Prevention in Teens
8. Safe Holiday Tips for Middle and High School Parents
9. Sleep Tip Sheet

The creation of 20 Educational Video Segments with the Belmont Media Center:

1. Navigating the World of Teen Dating
2. COVID Updates
3. Families Transition from Summer to Back-To-School
4. Easing the Mental Load of Parenting
5. Marijuana use Among Teens
6. Offering Support for Domestic Violence
7. COVID and Flu Shots
8. Youth Risk Behavior Survey
9. Fire Prevention
10. Older Teens and Substances
11. COVID-19 Omicron Variant Information and Prevention
12. Identifying, Treating, and Preventing Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)
13. Suicidal Ideation and Identification
14. How to talk with your kids about the Ukraine crisis
15. Gender Pronouns
16. Resiliency
17. How to talk with your children about keeping safe and avoiding danger
18. Creating Autonomy and setting limits for your children
19. Teens and Privacy
20. Data from the Parent Survey

Provided 4 Educational Workshops:

1. Belmont Library Event - Navigating Difficult News Events: 30 participants
2. Belmont Young Adult Library Mentor Match Event: 4 participants (60 will watch recording)
3. Presentation to BHS Seniors and Parents - *Social Host Liability, Youth Substance Misuse Prevention Strategies and Healthy Relationships*: 237 participants
4. Belmont PTSO Event - *Understanding Youth Mental Health*: 37 participants

Hosted 8 Parenting Groups:

1. Trust and Autonomy
2. ADHD and other challenges with executive functioning
3. Substance Misuse
4. Freedom and Limits with Tweens/Teens
5. Dating, Relationships, and Sex, Part 1
6. Dating, Relationships, and Sex, Part 2
7. Supporting LGBTQ+ Youth
8. Exploring the Culture of Stress

Provided 9 Parent One-on-One Phone Conversations

- Support around ADHD, mental health, finding therapist, substance misuse prevention strategies, teen safety, tic disorder

YRBS Data Presentations / Community Forums:

1. School Dept.

2. Select Board
3. Middle School
4. High School
5. Health Dept.
6. A BMC Video segment on the data and two written articles (Belmontonian and BCH)
7. YRBS Follow Up Report
8. Peer Mentorship Proposal

Also -

- Creation and Dissemination of Parent Survey
- Social Media Posting of Numerous Educational Links on BWC Facebook Page
- Delivery of Seven *Thank You* Cakes throughout the community - yum!

6. BWC Updates:

Parent Survey

Sophia noted that more survey data will be posted soon.

LGBTQ+ Alliance

Chris informed us that this **Sat. June 11 at 1:00** there will be a **Belmont Pride Event**, including speakers and a march - on the Town Green.

7. Closing Thoughts:

Lisa thanked Ellie for being a huge part of this meeting and for providing her perspective and voice! She also thanked the BWC members for all their support and energy throughout this past year!

Please contact Lisa if you want to be a part of the summer work, e.g., peer group development, updating SEL content, BWC visibility, etc.

Next BWC Meeting: Sept. 2022