

**Belmont Wellness Coalition (BWC)**  
**Meeting Minutes (Virtual)**  
**Monday, March 13, 2023 from noon – 1:00 PM**

Lisa Gibalerio (Wayside), Maeve Kennelly (Wayside), Wendy Conroy (BWC Chair, Sexuality Educator), Nadia Foster (EDC evaluator), Mike Crowley (School Committee Member), Jim Propp (parent), Chris Jablonski (Minister at UU Church), Samantha Resnick (BHS Social Worker), Portia Thompson (parent), Danielle ? (parent)

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

Members present introduced themselves.

**2. Student Ambassador Updates:**

- Student Survey - Maeve noted that she and the SAs will create a student survey to understand peer pressure, peer attitudes toward academic pressure and stress; this data will help focus the student initiatives for next school year  
SA Rebranding -The current SAs would like to engage in a process to provide an updated focus, maybe change name, and ultimately - publicize the group more widely to increase youth membership
- One Caring Adult* Sticker Project Update - identify caring/trusted adults in building - teachers responded to survey and put themselves forward to identify as a trusted adult, Maeve ordered stickers to put on nameplates

Nadia asked if pins could be made as another way to identify the “caring adults”. Maeve will look into that.

**3. BWC recent workshop (Suicide Prevention) experience**

**Question – *How can we better advertise our events to increase attendance?***

Only four community members attended. This was disappointing given the upfront work that was done.

Review what we did for publicity, e.g., sent flyer to schools, to Media Center, to Library, to Youth Commission, to Health Dept, to CMS and BHS PTSO, to all BWC members, posted on Facebook parents page and BWC page several times, posted on our website, etc.

**Question: How can we reach more families?**

Lisa: Past YRBS data showed that there are concerning numbers of students experiencing suicidal ideation, making a suicide plan, etc. There is a need in the community to further educate parents and caregivers about the signs of suicidal ideation, how to talk to kids about suicide etc. BWC partnered with NAN Project for this event.

Lisa asked if the group had any feedback on how to gain more attendance or where else can we share advertisements for events. Should we be virtual or in person for these topics?

Mike: people may feel challenged with their time, and virtual may get more attendance. He asked if it was recorded for those that may have missed it.

Lisa explained that she reached out to the Media Center, but they did not respond. Lisa also mentioned that even with a virtual event such as our *Understanding Youth Mental Health* workshop event in the fall, attendance there was also low (8 parents attended).

Mike suggested that one reason for low attendance may be that most parents have a hard time understanding the mental health challenges their children are facing and may not know they need this education.

Chris mentioned that it's hard to "break through the noise" and the craziness of everyday life right now. And parents who are stressed about their kids - will be the most challenged in showing up.

Portia added that it may be helpful to work with the schools to make similar events mandatory - especially events where mental health is part of the education process. More people may come if events are mandatory.

Lisa discussed that we will have more YRBS data by July, and those numbers will help drive some initiatives for the next school year.

Wendy mentioned looking at what the BHS PTSO (Jon Mattleman) event numbers looked like and if people chose to go to that event, which was similar to ours. She also offered other ways to get this information out, such as social media, Youtube, and possibly get student ambassadors involved to create media. Also discussed trying to tie multiple topics into one presentation, like doing broad mental health information and sneaking in some suicide prevention.

Chris highlighted the idea of using more "media focused" ways to disseminate information, and mentioned sharing "Hope Stories" about people who have experienced mental health struggles, and how they "made it through". This could then be shared to families who are in crisis, or shared weekly/regularly.

Lisa discussed the BWC staff capacity issue.

#### 4. **2023 YRBS**

- Surveys are complete.
- Will be administered in grades 7 – 12 during the last week of April.
- Caregiver notification was explored.

Lisa summarized that she, Janice, and others were able to edit the core middle and high school survey and additional modules that expanded on mental health, safety, vaping, etc.

The YRBS will be administered the last week in April for grades 7, 8, and 9 - 12.

Mike asked when the data will become available.

Raw data will be available in July and then sent to Nadia and her team to unpack it and create visual charts and graphs. Expect the BWC to roll our data highlight presentations in late October.

Portia mentioned that there is not an option for selecting: "*I have never....(had sex, done drugs, etc.)*" and this leads to parents opting their child out of the survey.

Lisa mentioned that parent correspondence will be sent along with examples of surveys, basic info about YRBS, a tip sheet, etc. which hopefully will help parents better understand the purpose of the YRBS.

Lisa stressed that the YRBS is 100% anonymous.

### **5. Belmont Board of Health Marijuana Regulations**

The Health Board has approved a change in the minimum age (from 25 reduced to 21) and in delivery of products - which will now be allowed.

Lisa summarized that following the legalization of recreational marijuana in Mass., the 2018 Health Board put together some regulations that were widely supported by Town Meeting concerning placing the age limit for people purchasing marijuana at 25, the requirement to be age 25 to work at these establishments, and there would be no delivery of products. This past January, the Health Board met and voted unanimously to change the 2018 regulations. The minimum age was lowered to 21 for purchasing as well as to be an employee, and products can now be delivered.

Lisa shared that those involved expressed that they wanted Belmont to align with the State's regulations (which are age 21 for both purchasing and to be an employee). She also stressed to the Health Director and many others (Senator Brownsberger, Rep Rogers, for example) that as a Public Health Prevention Specialist – the 2018 Health Board got it right, given that teen brains keep developing until mid to late twenties, given that 25 year olds fraternize *less* with teens, and that 25 year olds have more driving experience.

Jim asked if Belmont would be at risk for litigation if they decided not to follow state regulations.

Lisa stated that yes - that was the Health Board's concern as well as Senator Brownberger's concern.

Portia shared that at the Health Board meeting she attended in January, one of the people advocating for and supporting these changes were the marijuana business owners. Portia said she shared her concern about this business and the new regulations at this meeting. Apparently a suggestion was put forth to use some of the marijuana revenue for educational purposes. She also shared frustration with the lack of transparency and the lack of communitywide deliberation on this topic.

Lisa noted that Wes, et al, have been supportive of the BWC and acknowledged the BWC's concerns about the regulation changes, and, because of the concern of potential lawsuits and the desire to align with the state and neighboring communities – the regulations were ultimately changed and unanimously adopted.

Mike noted that having someone from the Health Dept be a more active participant in the Coalition, would be very helpful.

Lisa agreed and added that she did request that the Health Director keep in touch with her/BWC and share relevant information going forward.

Jim asked if part of the deal with the marijuana dispensaries is that they give the town money for specific drug education – is it a percentage of the overall profit or tax revenue income?

Lisa will find out, but thought it was tax revenue.

Nadia shared that in other towns, the public health department controls this money.

Jim also asked that given there are surrounding towns that have experienced selling marijuana at age 21 - we might want to reach out and learn what is happening there. The upcoming YRBS could possibly show us if the age of 21 in other communities correlates with higher usage in high school.

Wendy shared that the data on marijuana is limited because it was a controlled substance and the few studies that existed – were funded by the Marijuana industry. The newer studies we're seeing stress that there are far more health concerns and health risks than originally thought.

Portia asked (on behalf of Kim E.) if there was a way to see who drafted the initiative to change the regulations (e.g., changing the minimum age, etc.).

Lisa said she requested the public records and would attempt to find this out.

Jim shared an underlying issue in Belmont is accountability and transparency. We need to give feedback concerning the process - even if that feedback is not positive.

Lisa also shared that the School Department may have a hard time taking on additional prevention education activities as their capacity is low (there is not a Health Curriculum Director at this time).

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Agenda item 6 and 7 were skipped due to time constraints:

6. **Vaping**

- BWC will submit helpful information (parent strategies and refusal skills) to Karla Koza for transitioning packet that will be sent to families
- BWC will host a community forum in early October
- Hope to form a BWC sub-group to generate prevention education for youth and families

7. **Programming Updates:**

- **CANCELED: “Get Real” Talk with BHS Juniors and Seniors**
- **BHS Seniors and Parents** (Social Host, Substance Misuse strategies, etc. – April 25)

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8. **Other Updates and Upcoming Coalition meetings:**

**Opioid Money Update:**

Belmont will receive \$50,000 a year for 15 years from the class action Opioid lawsuit.

Lisa is wondering where this money will be allocated (likely the Belmont Health Dept) and how the money will be spent. She noted that the Health Dept. has been asked (by the Town Administrator) to provide input on how to spend this funding and that they noted that some funding should be used for Narcan distribution. She agreed that Narcan is important and emphasized that it's extremely imperative to add primary prevention strategies for youth.

It was noted (with concern) that Narcan is not currently available at the schools.

**Parenting Group** – Next meeting: Wed., March 29, 7 – 8 PM, virtual – Please invite!

**Mark your calendars for upcoming BWC meetings and note new start time**

- Mon., April 10, **12:30 - 1:30 (Note start time is 12:30)**
- Mon., May 8, **12:30 - 1:30**