

Wakefield PTSA Meeting
January 22, 2022
Minutes

The meeting was called to order at 8:33 a.m. The meeting was held virtually via Zoom with 56 attendees; meeting was recorded and will be posted.

1. Welcome and introductions: President, Judith Davis

Welcomed everyone and thanked social media managers for their great work keeping the community up to date on the PTSA's activities.

2. Principal's Report: Dr. Willmore

- Governor's order regarding masks: In follow-up to his executive order, the Governor released a statement yesterday asking parents and students to comply with directions given by their school division. APS has emphasized that everyone will continue to mask on Monday. School officials have met to talk about how to handle anyone who doesn't want to mask on Monday. With students, they are focusing on Relationships and Responsibilities and the importance of looking out for each other; we must think beyond ourselves and do what is best for our community. Any debates need to happen outside the school setting.
- Inclement weather: APS has used all 6 inclement weather days. From here on out, any "snow days" will move to virtual learning and follow the normal bell schedule (with minor tweaks). There will be a 35 minute lunch. Block periods will remain 90 minutes long (45-50 minutes of synchronous instructions; 40-45 minutes of asynchronous work) During asynchronous work, the teacher will remain available. 3rd period will be 60 minutes (30-40 synch/asynch).
- This week is the last week of the 2nd semester. Encourage your students to reach out to teachers to turn in any late work. Saturday academy homework help is available in the library (quiet place to study or get assistance).
- January 31 is a teacher work day and there is no school for students.
- Wakefield students won first and second place in APS visual arts contest!
 - 1st place McCarley Keish (12th grade)
 - 2nd place Munachismo Nkemakolam (9th grade)

Questions:

- Even though it is past the deadline, can you still submit a senior picture for the yearbook? Yes, email Dr. Willmore and he will send it to the yearbook sponsor.
- What will Wakefield do to ensure that all students are aware of and pick up the new KN95 masks being distributed by the school? Right now students can go by the tables in A hallway first floor to pick up a mask. They are tracking everyone who gets a mask and will deliver any not picked up to the student.
- Can students donate their mask if they don't need it? Yes, just go by A hallway to let them know.

3. Wakefield School Board Liaison: Mary Kadera

The PTSA welcomed and introduced the newest School Board Member who will also be our school liaison.

- She is happy to meet with people any time.
- You can contact her regarding issues and complaints via email (mary.kadera@apsva.us, easiest for her), text messages, and WhatsApp (other contact info to follow via the googlegroup). She is tracking any concerns she receives to make sure she doesn't lose anything and will relay all concerns to the Board.
- APS calendar discussion at the school board meeting: VA mandates a certain number of instructional hours. Due to snow days, at the elementary level, we currently have less than a full day of hours left before we hit that threat threshold; at the secondary level, we have only 5-6 hours left. So we can't take any more snow days without making them up somehow. Plan B is to revert to virtual learning in future bad weather. At the last School Board meeting, the board reviewed a proposed Plan C. If virtual learning can't happen on a bad weather day (for example due to power outage), APS would need to add a day back into the school calendar to make that time up. There are 5 proposed days. Mary is advocating that those dates be prioritized on which will be used first and a commitment that APS will give "x" number of days advance notice to families.

4. Wakefield librarian and staff liaison, Christine Lively

- The library is very popular and in full swing; they are checking out loads of books to students. Many students enjoy working on puzzles and the library would appreciate any donations of puzzles families no longer need. Will take any size.
- They offer coffee on Fridays in the library for staff. Donations of disposable cups, creamers, and sugar would be appreciated as well as napkins and utensils. Reusable mugs for staff to keep are also welcome. Baked goods are always appreciated!
- They also often have Chess games going. Let us know if your student would like particular games.
- Christine is also the staff liaison so can relay concerns you may have to the staff.

5. Chief Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Officer at APS: Dr. Jason Ottley

APS is putting together a task force on mental health issues. For those interested in learning more about the Task Force please email: jason.ottley@apsva.us

6. Mental Health Panel:

Paul Patterson – MD, PhD, Developmental Behavioral Pediatrics, Wakefield parent

Michelle Best – National Alliance Mental Health

Lynette McCracken – Wakefield Counseling Department, lynette.mccracken@apsva.us

Amy Cannava – Wakefield School Psychologist

Mental Health Resource List: apps, websites, books, local contacts and crisis hotlines
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1oG7BCkuU4W1fvtjGNI3dNmxaqBD2CE63/view>

Mental and Behavioral Health Wellness Presentation: Paul Patterson

See full presentation [here](#):

What you can do now to help your child (non-medical).

Talking in broad terms about self-care. Get ahead of some of the problems; put things in place before a real crisis arises. Build skills. Take care of yourSELF. Getting **Sleep, Self-regulation, Exercise, Love and Food**.

1. SLEEP

S: Sleep directly impacts wellbeing and mental health. 8-10 hours needed. Avoid caffeine, screens before bed. Sleep only in your bed (don't do homework in bed)

L: leave electronics out of the bedroom

E: exercise

E: early rising: don't sleep late every day.

P: plan for bed. Plan backwards to get to bed in time. Predictability is very important in routine.

2. Self-Regulation techniques: easy to feel overwhelmed in the moment. These practices can help you recenter yourself. Many free apps available. Meditation, nature, breathing techniques (see slide on page 4 on box breathing – Navy seals use it). Breathing will calm you quickly and easily.

3. Exercise –No particular amount or intensity is required for mental health. What is important is that it is regular. Serotonin affects mood and increases with exercise. It can also improve appetite and sleep. Aim for 1 hour a day, but even 10 minutes will help.

4. Love – what you do, who you spend time with, yourself. Have focus outside yourself: social connections, pursue creative outlets and activities, build on resilience (7 Cs).

5. Food – Nutrition impacts your mood. Eat well-balanced diet to get the needed nutrients. Processed foods often lack key nutrients.

Safety: physical, environmental, emotional. Want adolescents to feel comfortable to talk about what is concerning them. Listening to them is the most important thing to do. Normalize talking about mental health. Talk about it at the dinner table. Share your own past difficulties.

See full presentation for information on signs and symptoms of Depressions, Anxiety, Suicide and helpful Communication skills

Michelle Best

She created a document that goes through steps to take if you see alarming behaviors. Try to get involved early when you start to see signs before things get very scary.

Lynette McCracken

Wakefield did a survey earlier in the year. About 60% of students report they have a trusted adult at the school. They will redo the survey later this year. They work hard to help build these relationships. They use many of the techniques like box breathing at school, guided visualizations, talking them through calming processes. Resilience is huge and they try to help students build resilience: if they can overcome small problems, they can build on that to solve

larger problems. Parents shouldn't solve students' problems for them; help them learn to do that for themselves.

We have 10 counselors on staff, 2 psychologists, 2 social workers, and 1 substance abuse counselor to support students in crisis and on day to day as needed.

Amy Cannava

- Anyone can benefit from mental health support but there are times in everyone's life that they really need it. She would like to see people accessing outpatient services more regularly, not waiting until it's bad enough to need inpatient assistance.
- Student counselors present SOS (signs of suicide) to the students. The teach ACT: Acknowledge Care Tell – students can help someone but they can't do it all by themselves; need to help their friend get help.

How do we prevent it from getting to a crisis?

Amy

We look for change – is the young person no longer hanging out with friends, changes in eating or sleeping, irrational behavior, substance abuse, are existing mental health issues increasing.

At Wakefield, counselors have a case load of 200-230 students (which is below the National Assoc of Student Counseling standard of under 250). As they are aware of students having issues, they set up regular check-ins with them or pull in other student support services. It is important that parents keep counselors in the loop to support the student. Their primary role is to help students succeed at school. They need to connect students with outside resources for ongoing care.

Schools have become de facto mental health centers, but they are not intended to be so. We are the first line of defense in many cases for mental health supports, which are necessary but not sufficient. Part of our role is helping to destigmatize mental illness and encourage students and families to seek ongoing therapy within the community. The shortage of mental health providers makes this difficult and the American Psychological Association is working to expand the availability of providers by looking into credentialing Masters' level clinicians.

Michelle

We are in a different world today with Covid. We are short of people available to help our kids. Hard to find private providers; particularly who will take insurance. As a result, if you see anything in your child, get to work right away finding care (get on a waitlist). Put forward a plan ahead of time before you hit your first crisis. You can manage crises at home but you need support and guidance from professionals and peers. There are listservs/groups in Arlington that can offer support and information (provided in the resource list linked above).

We serve a community where sometimes mental health issues are treated as behavioral issues instead. Also in marginalized communities, mental health is stigmatized so students may not ask for help and parents won't recognize it.

Paul

We have to talk about mental health to normalize it (in home and school). From a cultural standpoint, acknowledge your own lived experiences (like anxiety and depression) and share those feelings with your kids so they will feel comfortable. Anxiety and depression in adolescents have increased greatly in the past year.

Lack of resources: we can't create support out of thin air. Need to address at community level.

Other avenues are moderated peer discussion groups and trusted adults.

How are these issues different in minority communities?

Amy

The need for culturally responsive therapeutic providers is high and most mental health providers only receive one class on the subject. In schools, we do a lot of proactive education to teach students about mental health, anxiety, stress and how to manage them. All students also have access to the Cigna Support Line (info in the resource packet) which is shared with students frequently.

Lynette

School to prison pipeline. Want to be very careful that students of color or disabilities aren't sent down a behavioral path rather than a mental health path.

Michelle

We have a tendency to not give these kids the opportunities that need to be provided to them. Need to meet these needs early. There are groups/outlets out there such as church groups, YMCA, etc. that can help support them.

How does APS check in with students who are quarantining "as needed"?

Amy: As needed is not defined. Students the psychologist sees regularly, she reaches out to them and provides services through Microsoft teams. Counselors are doing the same. Teachers are also reaching out to students who have been out for a while.

They don't get notices on who is quarantining, so the family or kid needs to let them know!

What would the parents, staff like to see?

Weekly resources? Mental health weekly check-ins?

- Create mental health tik toks!
- Amy: she now refers to "coping" skills as "dealing" skills as kids respond to this better. Talks with students about how to deal with stress. You need an entire toolbox of skills, not just one. <https://care.uci.edu/services/Coping%20Skills%20Worksheet.pdf>
- Chris: more programs like this for parents and focus on stigma. Many kids seem to be more open to it than adults are. But their parents still have a stigma. Need to get through the stigma first, before resources are helpful.
- Christine Lively: as a Youth Resilience Coach (life coach), every student needs an adult outside of their parent who believes in them. They need fans to support them and cheer them on.
- Chris: To increase the amount of adults with training in mental health, Wakefield has a 2-day course (Mental Health First Aid) for other Wakefield staff to attend. It has been popular. (parents can sometimes access this class as well through the Parent Resource

Center). They have done professional development on how to respond to behavior in a way that is productive and leading towards positive resolution. Starting restorative practices training.

Final Comments:

Paul: Keep mental health front and center. Mental health repercussions from covid will continue for a long time. Have frequent discussions about it. Primary care providers are plugged into what help is available so they are a good resource to involve. Employee benefit programs also often have family counseling services available.

Amy: Contact your insurance company if you can't find an in-network provider. They may approve an out of network provider at in network cost or help you find one. They teach about mental health twice a week during Warriors period. The lesson plans each week align with the CASEL Standards of Social-Emotional Learning. Students need to learn to manage stress (not just have it taken away).

Judith: Need to recognize that students are on different levels in their ability to deal with stress and mental health and adults should be aware of that and respond accordingly.

If your student is in crisis at home, try contacting CR2 (Children's Regional Crisis Response: 571-364-7390)

Judith: If you want to help create, share ways to get info out, support parents, let the PTSA know. If you are bilingual, you can be very helpful too.

7. Financial Report, Treasurer Beth Hicks

The financial report can be viewed [here](#). If you have any questions, please contact Beth at: wakefieldwarriortreasurer@gmail.com

8. Minutes: The November 15, 2021 PTSA Meeting Minutes APPROVED as written.

9. Upcoming dates and announcements:

- Plant Sale pickup April 30th. Pre-orders will be taken. This money supports teacher grants.
- National Honor Society – parents, encourage students to apply and make sure they know about the tutoring sessions offered by members.
- Next PTSA Meeting: Saturday, February 19 at 8:30am
- Curriculum info night – January 25

Meeting adjourned at 10:26am.

Respectfully submitted,
Molly DeMaret-Tahu
Wakefield PTSA Secretary