



## General Library Item

Name Meeting Highlights - September 25, 2017 (PART 2 - Education Report)

## Content

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### Scarsdale Board of Education Meeting Highlights September 25, 2017 (PART 2 - Education Report)

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At the Board of Education meeting held on Monday, September 25, Lynne Shain, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum, Assessment and Instruction and Co-Director of the Center for Innovation, presented an Education Report on the District's K-12 Student Wellness Initiative, which may be viewed on the District website [here](#).

Ms. Shain began with an overview, noting that Wellness has evolved into one of the most successful initiatives launched by the District, because it is based on shared values, and a shared sense of need. It has also grown organically - not as top-down directives, but as the result of faculty study, funded by grants from the Center for Innovation and pursued in STI courses, and by pilot projects in the schools.

The District was due for a re-accreditation visit from the Tri-State Consortium last spring, and picked Wellness as its area of focus for the visit, not because Wellness was a "finished product," but precisely because it was a work in progress, and District administrators and staff thought that feedback on the progress of these efforts would be helpful.

Ms. Shain and District administrators formulated an Essential Question to guide the Tri-State Visiting Team during its two-day visit:

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**We are strongly committed to Wellness. To what extent is our commitment to support and sustain a strong culture of student wellness reflected in our:**

- Transfer and Application of Research-based Partnerships
  - District-Wide:
    - Scarsdale Teachers Institute: Courses that promote evidenced-based models linked to positive psychology and positive education
    - Mission Statement, Scarsdale Education for Tomorrow 2.0
      - Whole Child
      - Active Learning
  - Elementary: Inner Resilience, Linda Lantieri, founder
  - Middle School: Positive Psychology: Positive Psychology Center (Penn)
  - High School: Challenge Success, Stanford University
- K-12 Approach
- Strategies to help students manage academic expectations
- Efforts to Inform parents, community, and the Board of Education

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To prepare the Visiting Team for its review, the District compiled a Wellness self-study, which may be accessed on the District website under the Curriculum dropdown menu, [here](#).

Ms. Shain observed that there is not just one recognized definition of Wellness. We considered various ways to express our thoughts on Wellness, and sorted our thoughts into the categories of body, mind, and spirit.

- **Body:** Physical Wellness: K-12 Health, Physical Education, Athletics/Intramurals
- **Mind:** Positive thoughts and outlook: Developmental Guidance, Positive Psychology, Mindfulness, Open v. Fixed Mindset, Habits of Mind, Grit
- **Spirit:** Positive, Thriving, Flourishing

Ms. Shain then introduced Jerry Crisci, Director of Instructional Technology and Co-Director of the Center for Innovation, who reported on how the emphasis on the Whole Child approach to teaching embodied in Scarsdale Education for Tomorrow 2.0 encourages teachers to incorporate Wellness concepts in their classrooms, and how Center for Innovation grants supported pilot programs in Wellness.

Following Mr. Crisci's presentation, school administrators described Wellness initiatives in their buildings.

Ken Bonamo, High School Principal, described the organic growth of a number of programs at the High School addressing student stress, and the adoption by the school's Wellness Committee of Challenge Success, based in Stanford University, as a partner in this work because of their familiarity with schools similar to Scarsdale.

A survey administered to students in 2015 revealed that Scarsdale students, when compared to similar peer schools, were experiencing extremely high levels of stress and academic worry, had a higher workload and much less sleep and free time than comparable schools, showed less engagement in school, and reported health-related problems such as headaches, shortness of breath, and exhaustion. As part of the recommendations of Challenge Success, the Wellness Committee began exploring ways to include the voices and concerns of students and parents. A parent committee focusing on Wellness was formed, as was a student committee on Wellness. Working with these groups, the Wellness Committee began to draft solutions, including schedule and curricular changes

Dr. Elliot Cohen, director of Psychology at the Middle School, discussed the application of Positive Psychology at the Middle School. He explained that the goal of Positive Psychology is to promote the sense of well-being that comes from human flourishing, and is comprised of five measurable elements (with the acronym PERMA):

- **Positive Emotion:** Happiness, Joy, and Life Satisfaction are examples.
- **Engagement:** The concept of 'flow' would be a good example of engagement.
- **Relationships:** Relationships and social networks affect our well-being.
- **Meaning and Purpose:** Being connected to something greater than oneself; contributing to a greater good.
- **Accomplishment:** Some achieve goals simply for the satisfaction derived from completing the goal.

Dr. Cohen then described how Positive Education, based on Positive Psychology, is implemented at the Middle School, both in classrooms and in overall school culture.

Dr. Scott Houseknecht, Edgewood School Principal, reported that all five of Scarsdale's elementary schools have initiatives related to Wellness, a topic examined by the Compact Committees in each school. He noted that Scarsdale elementary psychologists conduct a variety of programs and lessons that promote the development of social-emotional skills and character strengths. Each of the schools has also engaged in programs and activities that encourage mindfulness, such as yoga and meditation.

Ms. Shain reported that the District Compact Committee, with representatives of the PTA and Faculty from all seven schools chose Wellness as their area of focus, reflecting the grass roots, organic evolution of this work.

Ms. Shain also noted another ongoing District-wide initiative: the work of the Scarsdale Teachers Institute (STI). Teachers across grade levels have participated in STI course offerings that cover positive psychology, non-cognitive skills, character strengths, mindfulness, and growth mindset.

Ms. Shain also noted that because Scarsdale has taken a leadership role with its Wellness Initiative, she and Dr. Hagerman and Mr. Crisci were invited to share their story with the Tri-State Superintendent's Group.

In closing, Ms. Shain reported a "Capstone" moment for the District in this endeavor: a Superintendent's Conference Day presentation by Dr. Robert Brooks on "The Power of Mindsets - Nurturing Motivation and Resilience in Students," in which he shared his professional wisdom and personal anecdotes. One memorable "take-away" from his talk was the idea that Happiness precedes Success, not the other way around. Dr. Brooks received a standing ovation.