

**Lexington School Department
School Committee Meeting – Clarke Middle School
April 12, 2005**

Members present were Tom Griffiths, Tom Diaz, Helen Cohen, Scott Burson, Interim Superintendent William Hurley and Student Representative Janette Ekanem.

Tom Griffiths called the meeting to order at 7:40 p.m.

No public comment or statements from the audience will be allowed. The purpose of tonight's meeting is to discuss the results of the Youth Risk Behavior Survey. After the report, they will entertain questions and comments. Mr. Griffiths introduced Jack McDevitt and Dr. Amy Farrell.

See the attached report and presentation on the Youth Risk Behavior Survey conducted at Lexington High School dated March 7, 2005.

Bill Hurley questioned the stress level percentage. Ms. Farrell clarified that the 80% figure were those who considered themselves under "extreme stress". There was discussion regarding the stress survey question. Ms. Wolfrum said there is sometimes overlap from children who report they are under stress or under extreme stress. Students sometimes overestimate what is going on thinking that "everyone drinks" or everyone does "this" or everyone does "that". The survey helps to show kids that only a certain percentage of their peers are drinking, engaging in sexual acts, etc.

Ms. Wolfrum said the results from this survey are discussed in health education class. The statistics from the survey are used when that particular topic is reached in class. A lot of feedback received from students in class has helped in future surveys. Results are used to plan future curriculum and sometimes students are asked to provide peer leadership to other students.

It was noted that there are other community groups that are interested in these problems. One is the Selectmen's Youth Services Council. Bill Kennedy spoke on their behalf and said their organization also deals with behavioral and mental problems among youth.

A parent in the audience stated the only place that we as a whole community can intervene would be in respect to alcohol use. He said part of the problem is that alcohol is so readily available in homes and many parents turn the other way. He's never heard that parents monitor their alcohol content or hide it or monitor parties. It is his opinion that each parent can make a huge difference just getting rid of alcohol or hiding it in their homes.

A representative from City Year commented that low self-esteem has a lot to do with kids engaging in sexual activity, drinking and/or smoking for acceptance. There should be programs that focus on raising students' self-esteem. In 2005-06, City Year hopes that we create a mixture of high school students who can mentor our schools in Lexington but we need parent interest for this program to succeed.

Mr. Hurley feels it is critically important that the younger the child we collect data from, the more we can address issues and intervene. Children should hear a consistent message whether it is in their health class, parents or social groups.

A question was raised whether it was possible to also have health education in Grade 10. Ms. Wolfrum said the School Committee needed to address this. She feels health education at that grade level should be available but unfortunately budget constraints do not allow for such.

Scott Burson said he is pleased to see the downward trend in the suicidal rate and asked if there are any broader trends to show that this is happening across the state. Ms. Farrell said this is part of a trend that they are seeing in Massachusetts but thinks Lexington has done more than a lot of other communities in Massachusetts in regard to teen suicide.

Bill Hurley said the most efficient way to prevent this type of behavior is to engage in these conversations with your children. Parents need to open the door and be non-judgmental. Parents need to have as much dialog with their children as possible.

Tom Griffiths thanked Jack McDevitt, Amy Farrell and Jennifer Wolfrum. Special thanks were extended to Elaine Sterzin who worked closely with Mr. Griffiths keeping him apprised of what was going on as a lot of people are concerned about the development of our youth.

A motion was made to adjourn at 9:15 p.m. (Burson – Diaz; 4-0)

Submitted by,

Lisa McGuire

cc: William Hurley
Tom Griffiths
Helen Cohen
Scott Burson
Olga Gutttag
Tom Diaz