

PACA Connect Meeting Minutes
December 13, 2023
8:00 AM Fireside Dining Room

- I. Welcome: Gaby May, PACA President
- II. CA Counselors: Student Wellness and Mental Health
 - A. Dr. Suzanne Ritter, Co-Director of Student Services and US Psychologist
 - 1. Creation of the Student Services Co-Directors position is allowing CA to be more proactive instead of reactive in terms of student needs
 - 2. Many student wellness initiatives are occurring at CA
 - 3. Counselors are tackling student wellness, relationships, drug/alcohol awareness, etc.
 - 4. All counselors attend the Student Support Team meetings
 - 5. Counselors are working to improve student belonging, wellness, and students' overall experience at CA
 - B. Danielle Gibbs, Lower School Counselor
 - 1. Childhood is a multi-faceted approach to building the “steel structures” of children
 - 2. Fly Five: K-5 program to promote social-emotional strength
 - 3. Wellness visits in all classes Explorers-5th grade in addition to Fly Five
 - 4. Small groups for various needs are utilized
 - 5. Executive functioning skills are paramount to teach in LS: organization, cognitive flexibility, self-regulation, task initiation, attention, working memory, and emotional control
 - 6. “Talk less, smile more”--ask kids what ideas they have as opposed to talking *at* them all of the time
 - 7. What we say to younger kids should “fit on a postage stamp”--keep it brief and simple
 - 8. Make visual lists with your child, such as with morning routines
 - 9. Work through challenges with a laddering approach (start small and work toward bigger goals)
 - C. Amy Brooks, Middle School Counselor
 - 1. Programs in MS: ROX (small group of 6th grade girls), Family Matters (for students dealing with death, divorce, or a sibling leaving home or any other family transition), REACH (for students with a seriously ill family member), Minute Meetings (new this year--Mrs. Brooks is talking to every middle school student to make sure that every student is paired with a trusted adult at CA), PEEC Class in 6th grade (teaching positive education and positive psychology with Dr. Ritter and Mr. Rhee)
 - 2. Dealing with stress: Stress with recovery time is normal and healthy and fosters growth

- a) Help students to develop their own stress toolboxes: Deep breathing, taking a walk outside, making art, journaling, exercising, putting down the screens
 - b) Get creative to keep the lines of communication open—have a purpose to your check-in (do an activity, have a snack, etc.)
 - c) Cope out loud and model taking care of your own needs
 - d) Help your student customize their own coping toolbox
 - e) Let go of preconceived ideas about where kids “should” be
 - f) Help them set attainable goals and shed perfectionist tendencies
 - g) Help them achieve balance—including time to “do nothing”—boredom is ok!
- 3. Students need our support even more now
 - 4. ROCK-PEBBLE-SAND metaphor
 - a) Rock: “must do” —sleep, go to school, etc.
 - b) Pebble: “should do”—basketball practice, save money, etc.
 - c) Sand: “want to do”—playing video games, etc.
- D. Taylor Dillon, Upper School Counselor
- 1. Addressing mental health in the US
 - a) Going into classrooms
 - (1) Talking about test anxiety, depression, strong mental health, etc.
 - b) Visiting advisories
 - c) Working in affinity groups
 - (1) Working with students with all kinds of different family backgrounds or family situations
 - d) One-on-one meetings
 - 2. Helping to build a positive foundation in wellness to set them up for college and adulthood by building coping strategies to help manage and tolerate stress
 - a) Teaching students that they can do hard things
 - (1) Make peace with discomfort
 - (2) Work with positive and negative emotions
 - b) Developing independence
 - c) Knowing their limits
 - (1) Setting boundaries
 - (2) Managing expectations
 - 3. Midterms are next week
 - a) Many students are stressed and anxious
 - b) Midterms are important, but they are not final grades
 - c) What can you do as a parent?
 - (1) Be there as a support
 - (2) Help them make a study plan and talk about what studying actually looks like

- (3) Remind them of self-care, such as getting enough sleep, eating well, exercising, etc.
 - (4) Go over active study habits, such as rewriting notes, highlighting, teaching others the information, etc. instead of just “going over” notes
 - (5) Manage expectations
 - 4. Building your relationship with your teen
 - a) Active listening–let them talk and see what they say
 - b) Reflecting back to them what you hear so they feel heard
 - c) Letting go–fingers crossed
 - (1) Let them make mistakes
 - d) Validating and normalizing their emotions
 - (1) Reflect what you heard, acknowledge their emotions, say “of course” you feel that way to validate them
- III. Meet Nelson, CA's Community Dog
- A. Came from Paws with a Cause: Trained as a “facility dog”--CA decided to call him a “community dog”
 - B. Some things Nelson does: Goes on tour in the morning, goes backstage at Junior Speeches to calm students, visits to morning meetings, comforts students in stressful situations, nurses sometimes call him to come help calm students, among many other things
 - C. Named for the road (Nelson Road) where the first CA campus was located
 - D. Nelson's Instagram: @nelsonthecommunitydog
- IV. Announcements
- A. Follow Lynn Lyons's podcast–full of great information
 - B. Sweet Celebration is this Friday–we still need volunteers and donated cookies; we are purchasing about 1000 cookies from Cookies for a Cure and Cheryl's
 - C. Please consider joining Kroger Rewards with code XW755 to benefit Teacher Appreciation at CA
 - D. Have a wonderful holiday season!