



Engagement. Balance. Resilience.

Welcome to the first edition of the Challenge Success newsletter for the Dover-Sherborn community! Given the increase in Challenge Success activity over the past year, we are responding with a new way to communicate the various ways in which Challenge Success is being implemented throughout our District (K-12). Our plan is to publish three issues per year (Fall, Winter, Spring) which will contain in-depth stories and profiles, announcements, save-the-dates, and links to resource listings.

We hope that you enjoy this inaugural issue and welcome your input at any time. Happy Reading!

[The Challenge Success Team](#)

Ellen Chagnon - *Director of Guidance 6-12*
Jill Fedor - *School Nurse, Pine Hill*
Pam Kading Webb - *Parent, DSHS*
Scott Kellett - *Headmaster, DSMS*
Heidi Loando - *Adjustment Counselor 6-12*
Andrew Mallett - *Grade 12 Student, DSHS*
Brendan O'Hagan - *History Teacher, DSHS*
Elizabeth Owen - *Grade 11 Student, DSHS*
Cynthia Shapiro - *Guidance Counselor, Chickering*
John Smith - *Headmaster, DSHS*
Adam Wiskofske - *Science Teacher, DSMS*



From the Headmaster

Greetings Dover-Sherborn Parents, Faculty and Students:

It is my pleasure to offer my reflections on our work with Challenge Success and how it can impact our school community.

A couple of years ago when I learned about Challenge Success, it piqued my curiosity. I was often disheartened to see students in my own schools who were academically capable, but under such pressure that they were unable to keep up with both internal and external

expectations. While some stress is naturally part of the human condition, the amount of stress facing some 14-18 year-olds has reached levels that cannot be sustained.

Thinking back to my own education, there were certainly times when the work piled up and study crunch-time became intense, yet I recall having more personal time to complete my work and still have time to just be a kid. Increased educational testing mandates from the state and federal government, more students than ever applying to colleges and universities, enhanced athletic and extracurricular opportunities and the pressure to compete within a global society have created greater pressure for students to be the best. As a result of this intense pressure, some students are unable to meet these unrealistic expectations.

I am a firm believer that all students have something valuable to offer their schools and to our society. It is time that we examine how to allow children to express those talents to make their experiences both meaningful and enjoyable.

Our work with Challenge Success has given our school the opportunity to look at all of our decision making through the lens of maintaining rigor and high standards for learning while providing balance to the educational experience for the students at Dover-Sherborn. Whether it is the development of new engaging courses, creating greater student choice in regard to graduation requirements, offering flexible testing schedules for students, and reducing some of the prerequisites for students to access our courses - all of these decisions have come about as the result of our work with Challenge Success.

Since change can be difficult, major adjustments do not happen overnight - but we are creating a culture now where we constantly ask ourselves some important questions: Is this good for our students? Is this reasonable for our students? Will these changes allow our students to enjoy their educational experience?

Parents, teachers and administrators across our two communities are collaborating and engaging in critical conversations about the health and well-being of our most precious asset, our children. I am proud that the Dover-Sherborn community is taking a strong stance on this issue, and I truly feel we are - and will continue to be - making a difference in the lives of our students.

*Sincerely,
John G. Smith
DSHS Headmaster*

Editor's Note: Each issue of the CS Newsletter will feature a different headmaster from one of our 4 schools.

Upcoming Events at DS

- **Challenge Success Student Advisory Group Meeting, Wednesday, February 24th**
at 2:15pm in the Guidance Conference Room. All interested DSHS students are welcome to attend.
- **Presentation by Jessica Lahey**, Author of New York Times bestseller *The Gift of Failure: How the Best Parents Can Let Go So Their Children Can Succeed*. **Tuesday, March 1st**, Mudge Auditorium. Jessica, a DSHS graduate, is a teacher, parent, author and speaker. She writes "The Parent-Teacher Conference" column for the New York Times, is a contributing writer to

The Atlantic, and is a commentator for Vermont Public Radio.

- **Follow-Up Group Discussion** of Jessica Lahey's Presentation, **Week of March 7th**. Details to follow.
- **Teacher-Parent Forums** for DSHS and DSMS. **Wednesday, March 23rd, 6:30-8:30pm**. On-line registration will be available soon, locations communicated in the Weekly Blasts. See below article for more background information on these forums.
- **Presentation by Denise Pope**, Co-Founder of **Challenge Success**. **Thursday Evening, May 5th** at Chickering School.

Highlights of DS Challenge Success Activity

Faculty Training

"Mindfulness practices have been found to reduce stress in students and help them gain focus, empathy, self-control, and insight."

This past November all faculty, support staff, and administrators participated together in mindfulness training conducted by Resilient Kids, a Providence, RI-based mindfulness training company.



DS faculty learned about the science behind mindfulness and then split into groups by age level taught, with a separate training group for administrators. Each group learned some specific mindfulness and breathing exercises that help to restore focus. Everyone then gathered in the auditorium for a K-12 guided kindness meditation for the last five minutes of the day to conclude the workshop.

Teachers within all of the schools had positive feedback about the training. The high school and middle school teachers felt these exercises could be taught to students to help them improve focus and reduce stress.

The elementary schools are using the techniques in the classroom. Jill Fedor, the Pine Hill nurse and liaison for Challenge Success, said the teachers have already started implementing mindfulness strategies and have written a grant to DSEF on behalf of the school for some specific tools that can be used in classrooms. The training also reinforced some initiatives that are ongoing at Chickering. Last year, Chickering created a separate space where children can go to help them regulate emotions and learn strategies for self-calming. Classroom teachers have begun using mindfulness techniques with the students as whole class activities and have developed "calming corners" where individual students can go. Cynthia Shapiro, a Chickering guidance counselor, explained that "all around the school you will see glitter bottles, balancing birds and other fun and engaging calming focal points that make mindfulness activities accessible and interesting for the children".

Parent-Teacher Forums

This past fall the DSHS and DSMS faculty, supported by members of the Guidance Advisory Council and the Challenge Success Team, hosted another round of Teacher/ Parent Forums. Last spring, this event was met with great enthusiasm among high school parents and teachers so it was expanded to include a middle school session this year as well. These small gatherings in private homes are designed to bring parents and teachers together to open lines of communication and encourage collaboration. Both of the recent forums have focused on the Challenge Success theme of achieving a healthy balance and dealing with stress in our students' lives. The discussions yielded some insights on how parents and teachers can work together to address this issue, with both groups coming away with a clearer understanding of the scope of this challenge. We will be holding another round of forums on March 23rd so stay tuned!

"The middle school parent-teacher forum on November 12th was a "meeting of the minds" between the parents and teachers in our community. The forum, held at a local parent's house, used the slogan, "It's about the journey, not the destination," to give teachers and parents a chance to discuss the culture of DSMS, and the challenges that our students face on a daily basis. Most of the parent-teacher communication in our school is about single student issues, and the school's community and culture are topics that are rarely discussed between parents and teachers. During the forum, we started with small group discussions with about five parents per teacher, and then came back together to share as a group. While each group had the same discussion topics, the discussions were all very different, and added to the richness of the event. Topics discussed included everything from homework and after school activities to cell phone use and high school (and college) placement. The forum was a refreshing reminder that parents and teachers both have the same goal: to make sure that the children in our community grow up to become responsible, capable adults who have the necessary tools to successfully navigate our world, and find fulfillment in life. The teachers at DSMS look forward to the next parent-teacher forum, and the opportunity to discuss how we can make our student's journey more fulfilling."

-Adam Wiskofske, 7th Grade Science Teacher

"I attended the high school Parent/Teacher forum with no real expectations since our oldest is just a freshman this year. We broke into small groups right away and it was insightful to gain the perspectives of other parents. Their views were benchmarked against what they hear from friends in other towns and/or private schools, as well as their own experiences in high school. However, what was even more valuable and reassuring to parents was to sit in a small group discussion and hear a DSHS teacher express concern for the stress levels of the students. The teacher showed great genuine interest in this issue and offered a few of the strategies that she was pursuing in her classroom to counter this culture. I was so encouraged by the sentiment expressed by the teacher and left feeling that the parents and teachers in our district are squarely on the same page. "

-DSHS Parent

Changes to DSHS Athletic Practices/Procedures

The DS Athletic Department instituted some new changes during the Fall season to the way things are done in regards to practice sessions. We did not allow teams to begin practicing until 3pm (Monday-Thursday) in

order to allow student-athletes to see teachers after school for help sessions or to make-up tests. In addition, practice sessions have now been limited to no longer than 2 hours and 15 minutes. With this new initiative, it was our goal to get everyone off campus by 5:30. For example: practice starts at 3:00, gets out at 5 or 5:15, changing time and gathering personal items, and in car no later than 5:30; this ensures that all of our student-athletes are home a reasonable hour. Once the tournaments began, many of our teams also had days off of practice and competition. This allowed for kids to get some added rest and take some time off from sports.



This Winter sport season, we are continuing with the time limits for practices and most teams are either at or under the 2 hour mark. Obviously with all of our indoor teams, the gymnasiums are being used at various times. Some of our teams that practice off-site have varying times as well but they are all keeping to the practice time limits. Additionally, we made sure that there were very limited athletic contests during mid-terms last week.

-Jeff Parcels, DSHS Athletic Director

Open Studio at the Middle School



Open Studio Student Artwork

Open Studio has been implemented this year in support of the Challenge Success initiative of the Dover-Sherborn school system. During the last period of each day, middle school students have the opportunity to use the art studio in a relaxed, informal, less structured setting. They use the space to create in their medium of choice. Options include, but are not limited to, pottery, painting, printmaking, and drawing. All Dover-Sherborn middle school students are invited to attend regardless if they are currently enrolled in art class for the term. On average, attendance for open studio ranges anywhere from 10-20 participants per day.

The goal of the program is for students to be able to use visual art as a tool to help them to unwind and refocus. When asked about the benefits of the H block Art Program, the students have stated that:

"I always feel more calm and less worried about my huge amounts of homework or other things."

"It is something I look forward to because it helps me relax."

"When I get home my brain is refocused and ready to start my homework and be productive."

-Cathy Simino, DSMS Art Teacher

CS Discussion Groups in our Schools

The Challenge Success Book Clubs / Parent Discussion Groups meet several times throughout the year to discuss issues specifically related to achieving balance for our DS students. The purpose of these groups is to stimulate discussion about how we, as parents, can be a vital force in implementing Challenge Success in our community-- both at school and at home. We also keep parents up to date on CS-related initiatives and share relevant resources.

Chickering

This year we are assessing the pressures (time and other) created by sports and other extracurricular activities. Our discussions have centered on what we as parents can do to support our kids and to help the whole family find balance. All Chickering parents are welcome to join - please see the Chickering Weekly News for our next meeting date.



Pine Hill

In our most recent meeting we talked about home-work levels in elementary school. We have discussed ways our families can be more mindful of the stress our kids face and brainstormed ways the school and parents can reduce this stress. A joint meeting with Chickering is planned for the spring to discuss balancing sports and extra-curricular activities with school. All meeting dates are highlighted in the Weekly News, so please feel free to join us.

Middle School / High School

*In this combined group of MS and HS parents, we have used the recommended readings (which are not required for participation!) as a platform for our discussions. This past fall, we explored how elements of the book **Overloaded and Underprepared** by Denise Pope relate to the experience of students here at DS and the changes being implemented by Challenge Success. Each session is focused on different material so participants are not expected to make a long-term commitment to the group. You are welcome to join in the discussions at anytime without feeling any pressure! For the spring, we may offer a follow-up to Jessica Lahey's presentation on **The Gift of Failure** as well as a video screening with discussion. We will post more announcements in the MS/ HS Weekly Updates, and we look forward to your participation.*



DS in the Press

[What We Don't Get About Homework,](#)

The Boston Globe

Did You Know?



From the American Psychological Association (APA):

- Over 1,000 teens were surveyed and they report that their stress level during the school year far exceeds what they believe to be healthy. Even during the summer teens reported their stress during the past months at levels higher than what they believe is healthy. 83% of teens reported that school is a somewhat or is a significant source of stress.
- Teens underestimate the impact stress has on their physical and mental health.
- When people are living with high stress, they are less likely to sleep well, exercise and eat healthy foods, which may lead to additional stress

CS Success Stories

Challenge Success has "conveyed to me the idea of accepting failure. I realize how much failure is feared in our community, and that failure is how we learn. Some failure here and there lets us learn from our mistakes. It lets us grow as people. "

- Andrew Mallett, DSHS Senior

I follow the Challenge Success Facebook page  and read at least 1 article a day if not more - this helps to reinforce things that I am already doing with my kids, gives me suggestions on things that I could/should do and helps me to take a different look or perspective on parenting. One huge takeaway for me is how I greet my kids when they get home from school. Instead of first asking about the test/quiz/paper/project, we talk about more generally how was their day in a low stress way (lunch, friends, funny moment in class, PE etc.) In turn, they now ask me how my day was too and are engaged with my response, since I show them that same respect too. It doesn't go smoothly everyday, but more often than not, the transition from school to home is working much better. My mother (who lives out of town) has also changed the way she talks to the kids on the phone, not first asking about the most recent test, but rather about what is happening in a certain class.

-DS Parent

Good Reads / Info

Recent Articles

[Rethinking College Admissions](#) by Frank Bruni, *New York Times*

[Is the Drive for Success Making our Children Sick?](#) by Vicky Abeles, *New York Times*

[In MA Schools, a Focus on Well-Being](#) *The Boston Globe*

[High-Stress High School](#) *The Atlantic*

[Newton Tackles 'Unrelenting' Stress of College Admissions](#) *The Boston Globe*

Related Videos

[Harvard Report: Turning the Tide on College Admissions](#) *CBS News Segment*

[Student Voices of Monte Vista High School](#) *Challenge Success Newsletter, 12/2015*

Recommended Books

[Overloaded and Underprepared: Strategies for Stronger Schools and Healthy, Successful Kids](#) by Denise Pope, Maureen Brown, and Sarah Miles

The Gift of Failure: How the Best Parents Learn to Let Go So Their Children Can Succeed by Jessica Lahey

How to Raise an Adult: Break Free of the Overparenting Trap and Prepare Your Kid for Success by Julie Lythcott-Haims

Beyond Measure: Rescuing an Overscheduled, Overtested, Underestimated Generation by Vicky Abeles (sequel to Race to Nowhere)

Challenge Success Parent Education Webinars moderated by Denise Pope

- March 3rd **Parents and Homework: What Is Your Role?** (for K-8 parents)
- April 13rd **The Well-Balanced Student** (for high school parents)
- May 11th **The Well-Balanced Student** (for K-8 parents)

*NOTE: Webinar registration information will be available in February.
All webinars are scheduled for 1.00 p.m. ET.*

For more in-depth material, you may wish to "Like" **Challenge Success** , go to the Challenge Success national website , or follow them on Twitter . For updates on Challenge Success at [Dover-Sherborn](#), please refer to the Challenge Success portion of the DS website  or use Twitter to follow John Smith  or Ellen Chagnon .

Mission of Challenge Success

In the fall of 2014, the Dover-Sherborn Regional Schools officially launched the Challenge Success Initiative for grades K-12. This innovative program based out of Stanford University works with schools and families to increase student health, well-being, and engagement. Specifically, Challenge Success aims to reduce unhealthy pressures on youth and to champion a broader definition of "success" in our schools and communities. The program accomplishes this by offering proven strategies for making effective change, drawing from the research data as well as best practices from other schools. Generously funded for the past two years through a grant from the Dover-Sherborn Education Foundation (DSEF) and a private donation, Dover-Sherborn was fortunate to be one of ten new schools joining Challenge Success last year (and the only one on the East Coast) and is now in its second year of implementation with a focus on the following priorities:



1. *To address the root causes of student stress/ anxiety including academic pressures and competing demands on student time.*
2. *To redefine "success" in the school community by shifting the culture away from competition and performance pressure towards collaboration and valuing of individual strengths/gifts.*
3. *To empower students by building resilience and coping skills.*

