



Volume II Newsletter, Spring 2016

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## **From the DSMS Headmaster**

*Greetings Dover-Sherborn Parents, Faculty and Students:*



*Having been an educator for close to thirty years, I have seen the level of pressure and expectations placed on students increase tremendously. Although middle school students do not face a number of stresses that confront high school students, they do face many challenges. The Challenge Success Program has provided the middle school community with a new lens with which to look through, as we work toward our goal of developing the whole child.*

*Our school prides itself on fostering a climate that allows students to develop intellectually, emotionally, physically, and socially. The Challenge Success Program provides a framework in which our school community can maintain academic rigor while focusing on a well-balanced child. When Denise Pope (Co-Founder of Challenge*

Success) visited DS last year, she emphasized the importance of both downtime and family time for our students. To that end, our staff has been given the charge of reflecting on the importance of making homework meaningful and focused. In addition, we synchronized two "homework free" weekends with the high school this year. Our faculty has sacrificed preparation time to provide opportunities that include the following: opening the art room every afternoon during H Block, creating several mindfulness groups, and initiating project-based learning activities.

Working with Guidance Advisory Council (GAC) and the Challenge Success Team, several of our staff members participated in a successful Teacher-Parent Forum in the fall and are planning a second evening for the spring. These forums are intended to share both successes in the schools and potential areas of focus for the school community to consider. One parent group, in the spirit of Challenge Success, asked why the middle school has an A+ in our grading scale while the high school does not. We had discussed this issue several years ago yet decided not to change the procedure. Through the Challenge Success lens, we are currently revisiting this topic with both staff and parents.

One of the major tenants of the Challenge Success Program is to promote resiliency in our students. As a middle school, we are looking to lessen the number of stressors our students face but not eliminate them entirely. As both Denise Pope (February 2015) and Jessica Lahey (March 2016) suggested in their presentations to the DS Community, it is the role of parents, teachers, and administrators to help students develop the strategies to improve and be successful in areas that may not be one of their strengths. I firmly believe that all students, if provided with the appropriate strategies, are capable of making the effort to implement these strategies.

The work that has been done with Challenge Success to date has been beneficial to our students and staff. Our staff understands that this program is not about eliminating academic rigor but rethinking how we do things to develop well-balanced students. Given the high-tech society in which we live, this is a significant task that can only be successful with the collaboration of parents, teachers, and administrators working in unison. The continued support of the Dover-Sherborn Community is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,  
Scott Kellett  
DSMS Headmaster

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

## **Upcoming Event at DS**

**Thursday Evening, May 5th at 7pm at Chickering School.** Denise Pope, Co-

Founder of **Challenge Success** returns to Dover-Sherborn this Thursday to speak on:

## **The Well-Balanced Family: Defining Success and Navigating a Healthy College Admissions Process.**

*This presentation will include a values-clarification exercise, tips on making the path to college less stressful and more authentic, and a structured Q&A.*

Denise has modified her standard presentation for us to address a broader range of student ages. The evening promises to be both reflective and informative, offering perspective on how to align our own family values with how we approach these school-age years and beyond.

## **Highlights of DS Challenge Success Activity**

### **Jessica Lahey Presentation**

On Tuesday, March 1, DSHS hosted high-profile alum Jessica Lahey. Ms. Lahey is an author, teacher, blogger, NYT columnist, and Vermont Public Radio contributor. She spent the day at Dover-Sherborn High School meeting with students, faculty and parents.



DSHS Students, Mr. Potts and Ms. Lahey

In a morning assembly, Ms. Lahey spoke with high school students to encourage developing their own personal goals for achieving "success" while maintaining a healthy life balance. That afternoon, Ms. Lahey addressed the middle and high school faculty, followed by a presentation to parents that evening. She enlightened her audiences on the value of children suffering "setbacks" in their developing lives in order to build resiliency and problem solving skills. Feedback from all three audiences was nothing short of effusive.

A reporter from the *Hometown Weekly* wrote:

*One thing Lahey points out is the amount of pressure put on students by their parents and how many parents overcrowd their children and don't let them do their work independently. She told of how she often saw young middle school girls crying in school outside the locker room about their homework. She suggested to one set of parents, who usually sat with their daughter to do homework, to try going in another room so she can do it herself.*

*She also expressed it's important to get the kids to work hard and to*

*not let things come easy. "The more we tell kids they're gifted the lower their self-esteem goes," Lahey told the students. "By telling kids they're smart they want it easy. Forty percent will lie about their scores."*

[See Full Article](#)

### **Student Advisory Group**

The Challenge Success Student Advisory Group was established in January of 2016. It is comprised of 11 members that span grades 9-12 and meet monthly. The group's mission is to help the student body gain a better understanding of what our Challenge Success program is all about. The group has met three times to date and is currently working on a visual campaign that will be displayed on the television monitors in the high school. Over the next several weeks, new Challenge Success related information will be uploaded to the tv screens for the students to read as they walk through the main hallways. The Student Advisory Group members are also posting the DS WebMD video to each class' Facebook page to further spread the word about Challenge Success. The Challenge Success Student Advisory Group is welcoming new members so students should contact Ellen Chagnon (chagnone@doversherborn.org) if they are interested in joining. Thank you to the students who are supporting this effort!

### **Pine Hill / Chickering Panel Discussion on "Finding Balance in Youth Sports"**

Chickering and Pine Hill parents came together on Tuesday, April 5th for a panel discussion focused on youth sports and the need for balance. The evening, sponsored by DS Challenge Success, started with a screening of the TEDTalk, "The Race to Nowhere In Youth Sports". The video was followed by brief presentations from a group of experts, all of whom were Dover-Sherborn residents. Speakers for the evening included:

- **Grayson Kimball**, DPE, a Dover parent, certified sport psychology consultant, and President of GTK Sports
- **Adrian Hill**, a Dover parent, coach and Co-President of the Dover Sherborn Soccer Club
- **Mininder Kocher**, MD, MPH, a Dover parent and Associate Director, Sports Medicine Division at Boston Children's Hospital and Professor of Orthopedic Surgery at Harvard University



Mr. Hill, Dr. Kocher, Ms. Levine & Andrew Mallett

Two additional panelists brought a parent and student perspective into the dialogue,

sharing their experience of balancing the demands of sports successfully. These panelists included:

- **Gayle Levine**, a member of DSHS Athletic Advisory Committee and parent of a DSHS multi-sport varsity athlete
- **Andrew Mallett**, a DSHS Senior, Student Representative on the DS Challenge Success team and multi-sport varsity athlete/captain

Grayson Kimball opened the presentation by addressing how important it is for athletes to focus on what they can control (i.e. their own performance) and to have fun with their sport. Dr. Kocher presented a slideshow and shared how he and other doctors are seeing an increase in overuse injuries that can result from the many hours of increased playing time and specialization. Two recurring themes throughout the evening were whether to specialize and at what age, along with the pros and cons of these choices.

The speakers also discussed how to create an effective youth sports climate that balances instruction with ensuring the sports remain fun for the children. Adrian Hill highlighted how our youth soccer program at DS has tried to address many of these issues including guidelines in place for how coaches and parents offer feedback to the kids as well as a thoughtful approach to placement on teams. The panelists and various audience members were able to engage in dialogue and offer their experienced perspectives on many of these topics.

### **Summary of Feedback on Changes to Mid-Year Exams**

Students, faculty and parents/guardians were surveyed after mid-year exams, answering questions on the new format of mid-year exams.

In terms of overall opinion of the changes, students in Grades 10-12 responded **overwhelmingly positive** to the new 4-day/90 minute Block format. Many students commented that they preferred to take the exam in their Block, with their teacher in their classroom. These students also commented on their stress levels during mid-years compared to last year:

Grade 10: 60% were Less-Stressed

Grade 11: 64% were Less Stressed

Grade 12: 86% were Less Stressed

**80% of faculty** reported positively on the new format: they observed that their students appeared calmer, they experienced better attendance than in years past, and they had more time for thoughtful grading. Faculty also appreciated being in their classroom with their own students taking the exam.

Parents/guardians also commented that they were grateful for the changes in format, with 63% noting less stress levels in their children during exam week than in years

past, and 82% reporting that the new guidelines for Redline Week were well-enforced by teachers.

### **Teacher / Parent Forum**

On Wednesday, March 23, Guidance Advisory Council & the Challenge Success Team carried out another successful Teacher/Parent Forum for the High School level. On the heels of the Jessica Lahey presentations, teachers and parents came together to discuss allowing our students to experience difficulties without stepping in to solve their problems. Dialogue included how it feels to step back (nerve wracking!), when to step back, and in what areas should we not step back. Sharing experiences, questions and fears about this unlocked a level of comfort for all involved. Having parents in attendance that have older students also offered some healthy perspective from a more advanced point in high school. Special thanks to the Fitzpatrick family for hosting and to teachers Karyn Bishop, Carly Eckles, Brendan O'Hagan, K.C. Potts, and Laura McGovern for giving us their evening time.

### **"CS Moments"**

At the beginning of this semester, students were invited to share Challenge Success "moments" in an open-ended survey. They reflected on a time when a peer, teacher, counselor, coach or parent did something to help create more balance in their lives.

The students were also encouraged to share any changes they may have made personally in the spirit of Challenge Success. Some of the major themes that emerged from this survey were an appreciation for teacher flexibility, parents giving more decision-making authority to their children, coaches being more mindful of practice times/away games, and students being more thoughtful and realistic about balancing their course load and extracurricular activities. Here are some examples of student quotes taken directly from the survey:

*"My junior year, I was taking too many AP classes and was so overwhelmed with work, plus just plain unhappy. I chose to drop one AP class and replace it with an engaging, fun class that I had always wanted to take: Marine Science. The guidance department was extremely helpful and supportive of this decision, which made it a lot easier to take this step that would typically be against the DS norm".*

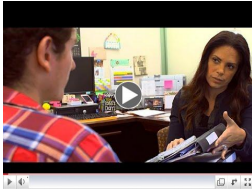
*"The teachers/faculty collectively reduced stress this year with the new midyear schedule. The exams being shorter and spread out over 4 days instead of 3 was, in my opinion, a nice change. This also granted more flexibility to my study schedule."*

*"When the school created a homework-free Thanksgiving, I was able to spend time with my grandparents and cousins without having to stress about*



## DS in the Press

WebMD



### [A Heavy Load: Teens and Homework Stress](#)

*Soledad O'Brien comes to DS to talk to students about homework loads and stress levels in a highly academic environment.*

### [Challenge Success National Spring Newsletter](#)

*This edition highlights DS's efforts to make a difference on our campus. Click on the Challenge Success logo to view the entire newsletter. Below is the piece on DS found under "School Notes":*



Spring Newsletter

*Dover-Sherborn High School (Dover, MA) participated in a mindfulness training for all faculty, support staff, and administrators, recognizing that these practices could help students improve focus and reduce stress. The school also hosted a second round of forums designed to bring parents and teachers together to open lines of communication and encourage collaboration around the themes of achieving a healthy balance and managing stress in students' lives.*

[Bestselling Author Returns to Dover-Sherborn](#) *Hometown Weekly, 3/8/16*

[Author Jessica Lahey Visits Dover-Sherborn Schools](#) *Dover-Sherborn Press, 3/10/16*

[Dover-Sherborn Parents Learn About 'Finding Balance in Youth Sports'](#)  
*Dover-Sherborn Press, 4/15/16*

[Is Homework Good For Your Child's Brain?](#) *NPR, Arun Rath, 4/21/16*

## Stress Buster Tips

- **[Meditation on the Go](#)** Meditation can activate the "rest and digest" part of our nervous system, which deals with stress management. You can meditate just about anywhere and anytime of the day - all you need is ten minutes, a relatively quiet space and a cellphone. Here are 3 examples of mindfulness apps - click to see which one works best for you, or discover your own:



Headspace



Smiling  
Mind



Calm

**Smiling Mind:** Mindfulness-based meditations geared towards specific age groups.

**Calm:** A simple app to bring instant relaxation.

- **No Wi-Fi, No Worries** You can help yourself to relax and relieve stress by simply changing your breathing pattern. Abdominal breathing is an excellent tool for stimulating the relaxation response and helps to promote an overall sense of well-being. Simply follow the steps below:

1. After exhaling through your mouth, take a slow deep breath in through your nose for a **count of 4**. Imagine that you are sucking in all the air in the room and hold it for a **count of 7** (or whatever count feels comfortable to you).
2. Slowly exhale through your mouth for a **count of 8**. As you fully exhale, gently contract your abdominal muscles to expel as much air as possible.
3. Repeat the cycle four more times for a total of 5 deep breaths

- **Go Outside** We are fortunate to live in a beautiful community, so take advantage of it! Getting into nature can help to relieve your stress naturally by reducing the stress hormone cortisol. Spending five to ten minutes outside in nature can help reduce stress, while simultaneously boosting your mood.

## Good Reads

### Recommended Articles with Links

[How to Survive the College Admissions Madness](#) by Frank Bruni, NY Times, March 2015.

*(This is a particularly good read for incoming Juniors and Seniors)*

[Early Specialization and the Science of Success in Sport](#)

by Steve Smith, Ph.D., April 5, 2016

[When Success Leads to Failure](#) by Jessica Lahey, Atlantic.com, August 11, 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](#)



## Parent Ed on Demand: New Online Workshops Available

**Challenge Success National** now offers parent education workshops online for \$19 each. Join Dr. Denise Pope for *The Well-Balanced Student* and *Making Homework Work: The Parent's Role*. Watch from the convenience of your laptop, phone, or tablet - anytime of the day or night - and enjoy the flexibility to pause and resume viewing on your own schedule.

*Click on the links below to view the trailers:*

[\*\*The Well-Balanced Student K-8 Parent Video\*\*](#)

[\*\*The Well-Balanced Student High School Parent Video\*\*](#)

[\*\*Making Homework Work K-8 Parent Video\*\*](#)

### 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.*

#### **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

Challenge Success.... Graciously funded by DSEF and a private donation.