

Ghostwriter in Brief

January 2013



Stress levels rise at Westford Academy

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While stress is a natural part of nearly every person's life, the amount of stress that is bearing down on some students at WA has become too much, and has begun to affect many aspects of students' lives.

This is a fairly recent development, according to head guidance counselor Wendy Pechacek, who reports that she has seen an increase in severe levels of stress among students over her twelve years at WA.

Pechacek attributes this rise to a number of differing factors. These include the

high performance standards that are held at WA; pressure to succeed from parents, friends, and teachers;

desire to balance work, school, sports, and other extra-curricular activities; and even the economic state of the country.

"Families [worry] about their children getting in a

good college, and getting a good job, and scholarships, being able to support themselves. I think that if they

see at



Photo by Jocelyn Cote

A student struggles with an overwhelming amount of schoolwork.

home that

things aren't going well due to the economy...that that does add to the mix of

stress...I think it's one of many [factors] but I think it's one of the ones that I hear about more now than I used to," said Pechacek.

Westford Academy is not alone with regard to the rise in stress among its students. Other schools in the DCL also hold their students to high academic standards and due to these expectations are subject to more stress among their students, who are striving to succeed in their school, according to Pechacek.

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How to cope with stress and anxiety

VICTORIA WALKER
STAFF WRITER

Stress has always been commonplace in the working world, at school and at home, but as we have been reporting, it seems to be an escalating problem at WA. Everyone either knows someone who always seems to be stressed out, or else experiences the feeling themselves. It is not uncommon to hear "this is so stressful" in reference to a number of things.

Stress is a defensive reaction your body has to danger. It puts you on edge and heightens your response time to enable you to respond faster in an emergency. Stress can be helpful during a test or in the last minutes of a soccer match, when you need to be alert.

"It can motivate us," said WA Health teacher Melanie Jozokos. "Help you concentrate for a game or a play..."

AP Psychology teacher

Sandy Whittemore had similar views.

"Stress isn't always bad... We all need a little

stress to keep us motivated and active," Whittemore said.

While stress has its benefits, when it becomes excessive or a common occurrence it can wear a

person out and sometimes lead to anxiety or depression. Excessive amounts of stress can be caused by major changes in life, such as moving or a death in the



Photo by Victoria Walker

A student talking with their guidance counselor.

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ily, but also by everyday things like school work and relationships. For a student, schoolwork is also a major stressor, especially when balancing it with a rigorous course schedule, a varsity

sport and various clubs. In addition to this, financial stress can effect the whole family, especially around the holiday season when money can pose a limitation to people's expectations.

"I think parents have children who have expectations of what they would like," said Jozokos, "I think parents have expectations on children too sometimes that causes students to get stressed out."

The good thing about the stress problem is that a lot of the time it can be avoided. Once a problem is recognized, there are easy ways of dealing with stress and its causes.

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WA to introduce new security measures

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In light of the recent mass shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary school in Newtown, Connecticut this past Friday, Westford Academy has decided to implement a number of new procedures regarding security.

WA Principal Jim Antonelli met with Superintendent Bill Olsen, Westford Chief of Police Thomas McEnaney, all principals of Westford Public Schools, and school committee members on December 17 to discuss current school safety measures, and possible security reforms to prevent another event similar to what Sandy Hook experienced.

"We reviewed all crisis response protocols," said Antonelli.

Significant changes taking place within the Westford Academy community are as follows:

- There will be an armed resource officer on school grounds. In February, West-

nile delinquency, providing guidance on ethical issues, and mentoring students on a personal level. Although resource officers have a large obligation to maintain a safe school environment, their

This is to ensure that school personnel can quickly and easily be identified.

- All doors to classrooms will be locked during school hours. Doors will be locked but can remain open so that students and staff can easily walk through. However, in the event of a lockdown, a teacher will not need to exit the room in order to lock the door from the outside.

- Administrative assistants will be more vigilant with regards to allowing visitors into the building. There are already a number of things that the administrative assistants consider when "buzzing" visitors into the building and this is to continue. However, Antonelli spoke of potentially having a set of questions be implemented before any visitor is allowed into WA.

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Photo by Ethan Walsh

Westford Academy will soon feature heightened security measures.

ford Academy will be staffed with an armed resource officer. The role of a resource officer includes patrolling school grounds, preventing juve-

members will wear identification badges from the school on their person at all times. While this is not currently a mandate, it is being strongly suggested by Antonelli.

Hanly reveals how depression feels

KATHLEEN MCALEESE
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Depression and anxiety are conditions countless students at Westford Academy deal with on a daily basis. They are not as palpable, and not as tangible as other illnesses can be. Depression and anxiety are conditions that their victims struggle with for most of their lives sometimes but are usually misunderstood.

WA Graduate of the class of 2007, Caroline Hanly, knows about depression and anxiety all too well, having been diagnosed in her freshman year of high school. Hanly is still in treatment as a grad student at twenty-three years of age.

"Depression is not a feeling, a bad day, or a ploy for attention," said Hanly.

Many people suffering from mental illnesses worry

about being judged and this proved to be a daily challenge for Hanly, as she worried about others seeing her as being "over-dramatic."

Therapy has been something that proved to be helpful for Hanly; simply having someone to sit down and talk to is beneficial. Still going to therapy once a week allows Hanly a place for her to vent her feelings in a safe, confidential

environment. Seeing a therapist weekly and on medication, Hanly expects she will need treatment for the rest of her life, but she is

now in a place where she is able to cope with her illness.

With treatment, she is able to manage her symptoms and is able to get back to a happy place

that she has experienced before.

"Even when it seems like things will never get better, they can," said Hanly.

Hanly, through her experiences with depression and anxiety, has been changed.

Gaining empathy and true friends, she has been forever altered by her experiences.

"I definitely value happiness more than I

would if I didn't go through those overwhelming low points," said Hanly.

Having gone through so much, she has learned how to cope with her emotions in a positive way, and has gained valuable skills and tools to manage all symptoms of both her anxiety and depression.

Stressing the value of a strong support system, Hanly has gotten by with much help from her parents and friends.

"Friendship isn't always about laughing and having a good time, it's also about sticking by people and supporting them when they are having a hard time," said Hanly.

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WA grad Caroline Hanly as a high-school senior

Provided by Westford Academy Yearbook