

Lab Schools Parents' Committee on Health and Wellness

Concerned by the recent health and wellness survey result, the Parents' Committee on Health and Wellness is calling for the Middle and High Schools to make substantive, systemic changes to the workload of students in order to address issues of stress, sleep loss, anxiety, depression, drug use, persistent negative self-image, and other risk-taking behaviors. We are parents who understand that academic achievement and wellness are not in opposition, but go hand in hand.

We call for study and reform based on the following evidence:

- Excessive academic workloads affect almost all aspects of health and wellness including, anxiety, depression, sleep loss, risk taking behaviors, persistent negative self-image and participation in family and community life.¹
- The reported average number of homework hours (2.5 for Middle School and 3.5 for High School) is far above averages recommended by the National Education Association,² almost all academic researchers in this area,³ and is high even as compared to other comparable, high performing schools, nationally⁴ and internationally.⁵ Combining school hours and homework, the Middle and High Schools at Lab occupy 11.5 of the 14-16 hours that our children are supposed to be awake. The ability to make more time available to children lies largely in the hands of the schools and teachers.
- The Laboratory Schools appear to lag behind other schools that have made wellness reforms part of their progressive education of students, emphasizing both quality over quantity of work, and the physical, social and emotional needs of students.⁶
- Robust research indicates that, after a certain point, excessive homework no longer increases academic outcomes but has the opposite effect—that is, academic outcomes begin to decline.⁷ At the same time, students lose out on opportunities to engage in activities that might increase their health, social connections, life skills, future workplace skills, well-roundedness, or increase their attractiveness in future college applications.
- Lab schools have a wealth of resources, both from their highly skilled teachers, counselors and administrators, and from the University and academic institutions across the country to come up with a thoughtful and sensible approach to workloads that simultaneously maximize academic achievement as well as health and wellness. Many high-performing independent and public schools have altered their approach and engaged experts who execute exactly this type of reform in their schools.⁸ It is time for Lab to engage in meaningful systemic reform.
- We also acknowledge the important role of parents, families, and other adults to the health and wellness of children and consequently, we offer our commitment to work in concert with the Schools in these pursuits.

¹ M. Galloway, J. Conner, & D. Pope, *Nonacademic Effects of Homework in Privileged, High-Performing High Schools*, THE JOURNAL OF EXPERIMENTAL EDUCATION, 81:4, 490-510 (July 15, 2013); National Association of Health Education Center, *Kids and stress, how do they handle it?* KidsHealth KidsPoll, October 12, 2005; Denise Pope, et. al., OVERLOADED AND UNDERPREPARED: STRATEGIES FOR STRONGER SCHOOLS AND HEALTHY, SUCCESSFUL KIDS (2015), p.1-2 with further references to academic evidence.

² <http://www.nea.org/tools/16938.htm>.

³ See, e.g., H. Cooper, *Does Homework Improve Academic Achievement? A Synthesis of Research, 1987-2003*, REVIEW OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH, 76:1 (Spring 2006); Denise Pope, et. al., OVERLOADED AND UNDERPREPARED: STRATEGIES FOR STRONGER SCHOOLS AND HEALTHY, SUCCESSFUL KIDS (2015); Vatterott, Cathy, RETHINKING HOMEWORK: BEST PRACTICES THAT SUPPORT DIVERSE NEEDS (2009).

⁴ See, e.g., M. Galloway, et. al, supra note 1, at 498 (In a sample of 4,317 high school students from 10 high-performing high schools the mean number of homework hours ranged from a low end of 2.38 hours per night to a high of 3.59 per night.).

⁵ Julia Stockdale-Otárola, “Does Homework Work” The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (Dec. 17, 2016). Based on data from The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), a worldwide study by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), which evaluates educational systems by measuring 15-year-old school pupils’ scholastic performance on mathematics, science, and reading, the homework load in the Middle and High schools at Lab is about two hours above the weekly average for 15-year olds in the country with the most homework—Shanghai/China—and 50% above the next two highest countries—Russia and Singapore. In Finland, one of the top 3 countries in science, students spend an average of 3 hours per week on homework. See Sonali Kohli and Quartz, *Where Teens Have the Most Homework: An international ranking, from 14 hours a week in China to three in Finland*, THE ATLANTIC (Dec. 13, 2014).

⁶ The following is just a very small sample of health and wellness reforms at elite schools:

- Cullota, Karen Ann et. al., *Later Start Times, Less Homework: Here’s What Elite Schools Are Doing To Help Students Cope With Stress*; CHICAGO TRIBUNE, Nov. 14, 2017.
- Kyle Spencer, *It Takes a Suburb: A Town Struggles to Ease Student Stress*, N.Y. TIMES, April 5, 2017.
- Jenny Anderson, *At Elite Schools, Easing Up a Bit on Homework*, N.Y. TIMES, Nov. 11, 2011.
- *Challenge Success By the Numbers*, <http://www.challengesuccess.org/about/impact/by-the-numbers/> (Over 450 schools have engaged Challenge Success, a program that provides schools and families with the information and strategies they need to create a more balanced and academically fulfilling life for their kids through conferences and action plans to implement best practices in areas such as curriculum, assessment, homework, school schedule, and a healthy school climate.)

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- Boston Latin School, Presentation for parents on Challenge Success: https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1ebX1S9m1AhiIDG3Lb38gxjMInwJJ1HfuK6poVodtJ8M/edit#slide=id.g1f440a7c95_0_38.
 - *Balance & Well Being: Challenge Success Student Club Kicks Off in Upper School in 2017–2018*, HEAD-ROYCE NEWS, May 15, 2018, <https://www.headroyce.org/about-us/story/~board/main-news-stories/post/balance-well-being-challenge-success-student-club-kicks-off-in-upper-school-in-20172018>.
 - *Balance & Well-Being: No New Homework Mondays Back for Third Year in Middle School*, HEAD ROYCE NEWS, Oct. 10, 2017, <https://www.headroyce.org/about-us/story/~board/main-news-stories/post/balance-well-being-no-new-homework-mondays-back-for-third-year-in-middle-school>.
 - Eileen Marshall, *Dr. Denise Pope of Challenge Success to Speak [at Bronxville School] about the Well-Balanced Student Monday, January 22*, MY HOMETOWN, Jan. 18, 2018. http://myhometownbronxville.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=11134:dr-denise-pope-of-challenge-success-to-speak-about-the-well-balanced-student-monday-january-22&catid=19:schools-and-camps&Itemid=17
 - *The Bush School is Challenging Success*, <https://www.bush.edu/page/news-detail?pk=1125141>.
 - *Mindfulness Initiative and Challenge Success*, Brownwell-Talbot School, <https://www.brownell.edu/campus-life/mindfulness>
 - *Byram Hills Takes Next Step to Improve Students' Emotional Well-Being*, EXAMINER NEWS, Sept. 24, 2018;
 - "Medfield Goes to School," *Wicked Local Medfield* Aug. 31, 2018.
 - Joanne Wallenstein, *Wellness in the Scarsdale Schools*, SCARSDALE10583.COM, Sept. 27, 2017.
 - Sharon Noguchi, *Private Schools Seek to Dump A-to-F grading*, The MERCURY NEWS, Sept. 20, 2017.

⁷ H. Cooper, *supra* note 3; M. Galloway, et. al., *supra* note 1. The OECD provided an overview of its results on students' wellbeing, which states that "PISA 2015 shows that anxiety about schoolwork, homework and tests is negatively related to performance in science, mathematics and reading." <https://www.oecd.org/pisa/PISA-2015-Results-Students-Well-being-Volume-III-Overview.pdf>

⁸ See *supra* note 6.