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Year of Inquiry into Student Mental Health

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Year of Inquiry into Student Mental Health

Dr. Jose Torres, President & CEO
Dr. Amber Stitziel Pareja & Katie Berger, Year of Inquiry Co-Chairs
Monika Narain & Ray Shang, Student Representatives
• 650 residential students
• Grades 10-12
• 17% low income students

Student Support
• 2 School Counselors (LCPCs)
• 4 College & Academic Counselors and 2 Learning Strategies Team Members

Student Population of Academy, 2018-2019
Percentage of students identifying as:
41.7 Asian
35.4 White
8.9 Hispanic or Latino
8.1 Black
5.9 Two of More Races, Non-Hispanic or -Latino

Male = 50%  Female = 50%
Why Pursue a Year of Inquiry?
Year of Inquiry Objectives

• To engage in an in-depth examination of a current challenge that significantly influences IMSA’s work and mission
• To identify both the scope of and potential solutions to the challenge
• Topic: Student mental health and well-being
Year of Inquiry Kick Off

• Introduced at Community Day, June 2018

• Town hall style meetings, September 2018
  • Year of Inquiry model overview
  • Introduce student mental health focus
  • Review Challenge Success data

• Listening interviews, September & October 2018
Listening Interviews

• Hosted 6 listening interviews:
  • General sessions and targeted groups
  • Identified themes to develop research question(s)
  • Recruited Year of Inquiry team members

• Questions:
  • How would you describe student mental health at IMSA?
  • What factors influence student mental health?
  • What does IMSA do best regarding student mental health?
  • What can IMSA do better to support student mental health?
Year of Inquiry Process

- Mid/Late October 2018
  - Selected research question(s)
  - Developed sub-committees to collect/analyze data

- November 2018-March 2019
  - Collected and analyzed data

- April 2019
  - Presented findings to Year of Inquiry team
  - Identified potential pilot projects

- May 2019
  - Year of Inquiry Town Hall meeting
Year of Inquiry Research
Question & Sub-Questions

• What are the primary factors that influence students’ stress and anxiety levels at IMSA?
  • Which factors lead to increased stress and anxiety levels?
  • Which factors help to decrease stress and anxiety levels?
Year of Inquiry Team Working Groups

1. Literature Review – Identified findings from previous research related to student stress and anxiety

2. Data Analysis – Analyzed data from the Stanford Survey of Adolescent School Experiences (a.k.a. the Challenge Success Survey)

3. Focus Groups - Conducted focus groups of current IMSA students related to student stress and anxiety
Literature Review
Teens experience high levels of stress, especially related to academics

- Students experience high levels of chronic stress, particularly in relation to academic performance and the college admissions process (Leonard et al., 2015).

- Teens report unhealthy stress levels; 83% indicate that school is a somewhat or significant source of stress (American Psychological Association, 2009).

- Students report feeling the most stressed by school, money, relationships, and parents (Hermann, 2008).
  - “Appreciating what teens reported regarding the stress in their lives leads to numerous measures that can be taken to aid them in dealing with those stressors.”
Many teens are not getting enough sleep, which can lead to a variety of problems

- Adolescents should sleep a minimum of nine hours; many are not getting enough sleep (Kelley et al., 2015).
- Not getting enough sleep is an important health risk among adolescents (Godsell & White, 2019).
  - Insufficient sleep is related to a variety of problems (i.e., headaches, depression, and behavioral and emotional problems).
- Adolescents who do not get sufficient restorative sleep have “the highest levels of internalizing symptoms and aggressive and rule-breaking behavior” (El-Sheikh et al., 2018).
- Peers can have both a negative and a positive effect on sleep behavior (Godsell & White, 2019).
Data Analysis
Challenge Success Survey

• Survey of High School Experience developed by Stanford in 2009
  • Academic engagement, homework, extracurricular activities, academic integrity, student support, student physical and mental well-being, parental expectations
• Administered at 10 Check in February of 2018 and March of 2019
• Response rate better in 2018 than in 2019
  • 2018: 550 of 637 Students – 86.3%
  • 2019: 495 of 639 Students – 77.5%
IMSA students average 5.9 hours of sleep per night; varies by grade and gender

• Sophomores get significantly more hours of sleep than juniors and seniors (p < .001).

• Females get significantly more hours of sleep than males (p < .05).
IMSA students report high levels of academic worry (3.9/5); varies by grade and gender

- Juniors report significantly higher levels of academic worry than sophomores ($p < .01$) and seniors ($p \leq .001$).
- Females ($p < .001$) and other/trans students ($p < 0.5$) report significantly higher levels of academic worry than males.
IMSA students report 3.8 stress-related health symptoms/past month; varies by grade and gender

- Sophomores experienced significantly fewer numbers of symptoms than juniors ($p < .05$).
- Females and other/trans students experienced significantly higher numbers of symptoms than males ($p < .05$).
IMSA students identify workload, grades, and lack of sleep as top three sources of stress
Focus Groups
Focus Group Research Process

• Five focus groups conducted in February
  • 50 students – 26 female/24 male
  • Participation voluntary

• Focus group questions
  • What causes IMSA students stress?
  • What are the primary ways IMSA student deal with stress?
    • Positive
    • Negative
  • What do you think IMSA can do to decrease stress levels?
Focus Group Prevalent Theme: Lack of Sleep

• Student feedback suggests a toxic environment for managing sleep
  • “Badge of honor to pull an all-nighter”
  • “Sleep is temporary, GPA is forever.”
Focus Group Prevalent Theme: Workload Imbalance

• Overlapping of assessments and major assignments
  • Everything due on the same day
• Lack of communication among teachers
• Homework over extended weekends negatively impacts time with family/friends, ability to “recharge”
Focus Group Prevalent Theme: Time Management

• Over commitment to extra-curricular activities (i.e. sports, clubs, co-curriculars, cultural shows)
  • “What are you in?”
    • Need large number of activities for college applications (peer pressure)
• Students have difficulty planning long-term projects (or don’t know how to)
• Age appropriate social life can be difficult to balance with intense academic curriculum
Year of Inquiry
Recommendations
Year of Inquiry Recommendations

1. Implement an Academy Major Assessments Master Calendar

2. No homework assigned over Extended Weekends and no major assessments on the first day of class following Extended Weekends

3. Increase focus on sleep education and incentivize positive sleep behaviors
Year of Inquiry Team

• 2018-2019: Year of Inquiry
  • 10 students
  • 5 staff members
  • 2 faculty members
  • IMSA President

• 2019-2020: Pilot Phase
  • Increased involvement from the Principal’s Office
  • More parent and faculty involvement
  • Fewer students
Year 2: The Pilot Phase

NO HOMEWORK DURING EXTENDED BREAK & SPRING BREAK POLICY

- No assignments due over an Extended Break or Spring Break
- No assignments due or assessments given on the day classes convene from an Extended Break or Spring Break

MAJOR ASSESSMENTS CALENDAR PILOT FOR SELECTED JUNIOR CLASSES

- Major assessments for selected junior classes
- Students who have 3+ major in-class assessments on the same day may rearrange one of the assessments
- After 9 weeks, the Curriculum and Assessment Leaders (CALs) to solicit feedback on pilot and make changes as appropriate
Year 2: The Pilot Phase

SLEEP EDUCATION & INCENTIVES PILOTS

- Building Capacity & Buy In

- Sub-Committees:
  - Educational Programs
  - Incentives
  - Policy & Protocols
  - Communication & Marketing
What if you could...

FEEL HAPPIER
- lower your risk of heart attacks, strokes and diabetes
- be less depressed
- stay slim and lower food cravings

LIVE LONGER
- be protected from cancer and dementia
- ward off colds and the flu

LOOK MORE ATTRACTIVE

BE MORE CREATIVE

BE LESS ANXIOUS
- enhance your memory
This amazing breakthrough is called SLEEP!

Evidence supporting the proven benefits of a full night of sleep have been documented in more than 17,000 well-scrutinized and scientific reports to date. Emerging from this research is an unequivocal message: sleep is the single most effective thing we can do to reset our brain and body health each day. According to UC Berkeley professor and author of “Why We Sleep” Matthew Walker:

Based on epidemiological studies of average sleep time, millions of individuals unwittingly spend years of their life in a sub-optimal state of psychological and physiological functioning, never maximizing their potential of mind or body due to their blind persistence in sleeping to little.

Please make sure to talk to your student about their sleeping habits!

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Lessons Learned

• Focus on engaging topic
• Communication is key
• Identify “champions” of the work
• Keep the work moving

• Challenges: Scheduling & Prioritization
Questions

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