

# NEWTON YOUTH STRESS AND MENTAL HEALTH SURVEY

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PRESENTED BY THE NEWTON YOUTH COMMISSION



# WHAT WE'LL DISCUSS

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- What is the Newton Youth Commission?
- Newton Youth Stress and Mental Health Survey – Results
- Newton Youth Stress and Mental Health Survey – Key Takeaways
- Recommendations for Next Steps

# THE NEWTON YOUTH COMMISSION

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Who are we?

# THE NEWTON YOUTH COMMISSION

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- Volunteer leadership body of students and adults from the Newton community – the City’s only commission led by students!
- Nine student commissioners appointed by Mayor Fuller
- 30-member advisory board (15 students and 15 community members) – students from South, North, and private schools
- Students and adults meet once a month at Newton City Hall to work on issues important to young people (mental health, youth connection, substance use, etc.)
- In the 2018 – 2019 school year students created and distributed the Newton Youth Stress and Mental Health Survey to learn more about what causes stress and what students do when they feel stressed.
- The 2019 – 2020 school year will be used to see ensure our recommendations made as a result of the survey are implemented in the schools.

# SURVEY DATA

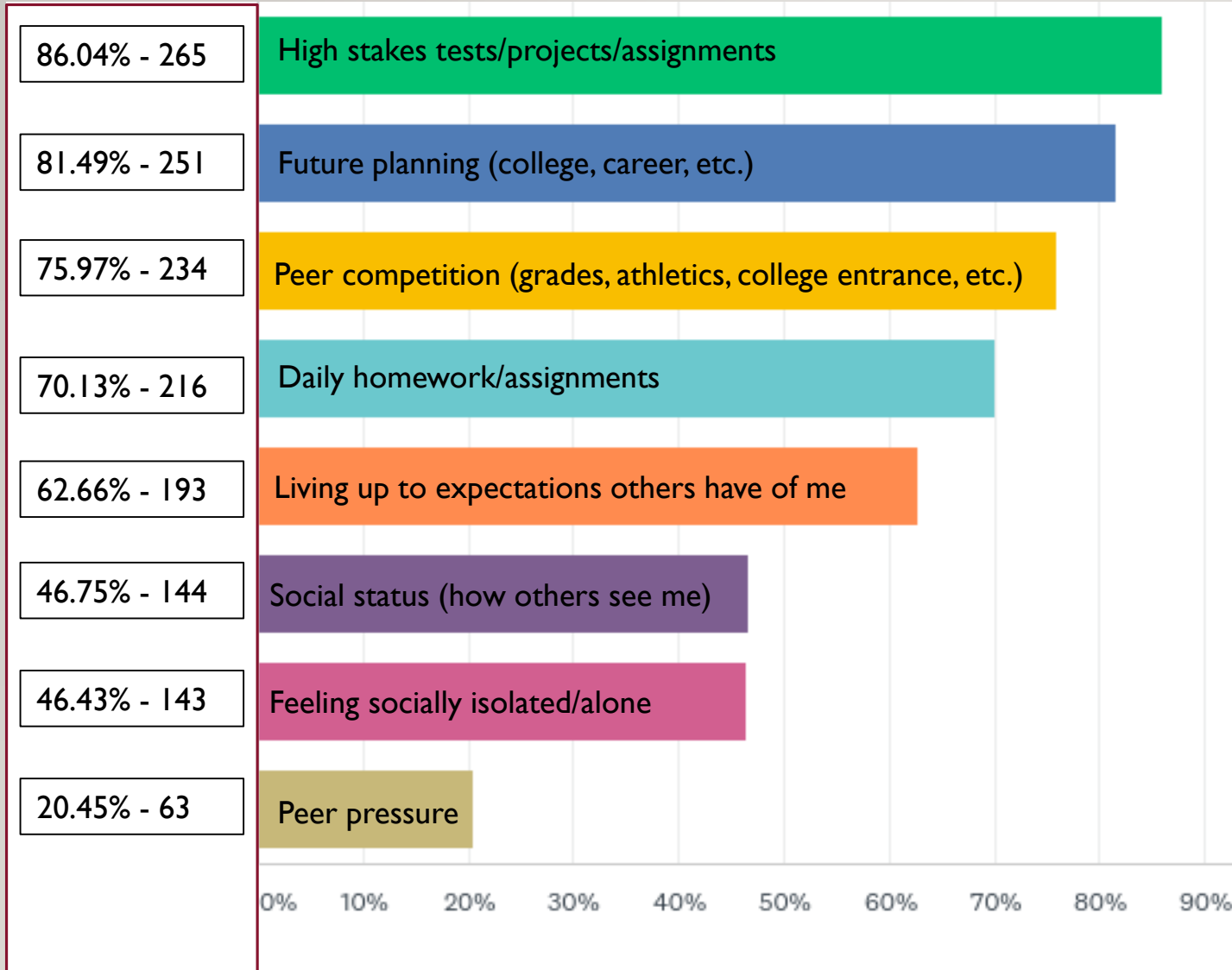
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## NEWTON YOUTH STRESS AND MENTAL HEALTH SURVEY

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- Students collaboratively wrote all survey questions during Youth Commission meetings with feedback from NPS Guidance Staff, Youth Commission Adult Advisors, School Nurses, and Health and Human Services Staff
- Survey was distributed by students via social media (Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat)
- Survey was open for a two-week period (3/8 – 3/22) and was closely monitored by Youth Services dept.
- Any students who asked for adult connections were put in touch with school counselors



Q1: THE THINGS THAT STRESS ME OUT AT SCHOOL ARE... (YOU MAY CHOOSE MORE THAN ONE ANSWER)

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Answered: 308 Skipped: 1

# STUDENTS WHO COMMENTED “OTHER”

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- Social interaction (X2)
- Afterschool activities/sports
- GPA
- Debate
- Medical treatment conflicting w/school schedule
- Climate change, social situation in US and abroad, politics
- Gender dysphoria
- Deadlines
- Literally everything about school stresses me out
- Subjective grading



Q2: WHEN I'M  
FEELING  
STRESSED OUT  
AT SCHOOL  
I...(YOU MAY  
CHOOSE MORE  
THAN ONE  
ANSWER)

| ANSWER CHOICES  | RESPONSES |     |
|---|-----------|-----|
| Find a friend to talk to  | 74.14%    | 215 |
| Have a snack  | 54.83%    | 159 |
| Use social media  | 49.31%    | 143 |
| Take a break from class   | 39.31%    | 114 |
| Visit my guidance counselor or other trusted adult                | 24.14%    | 70  |
| Leave campus  | 23.45%    | 68  |
| Skip class  | 22.41%    | 65  |
| Juul/vape/use other substances/drink alcohol                      | 10.00%    | 29  |
| consider hurting myself/hurting someone else/acting destructively | 9.66%     | 28  |
| Visit the nurse/therapy dog                                       | 2.76%     | 8   |
| Use other substances  | 2.41%     | 7   |
| Total Respondents: 290  |           |     |

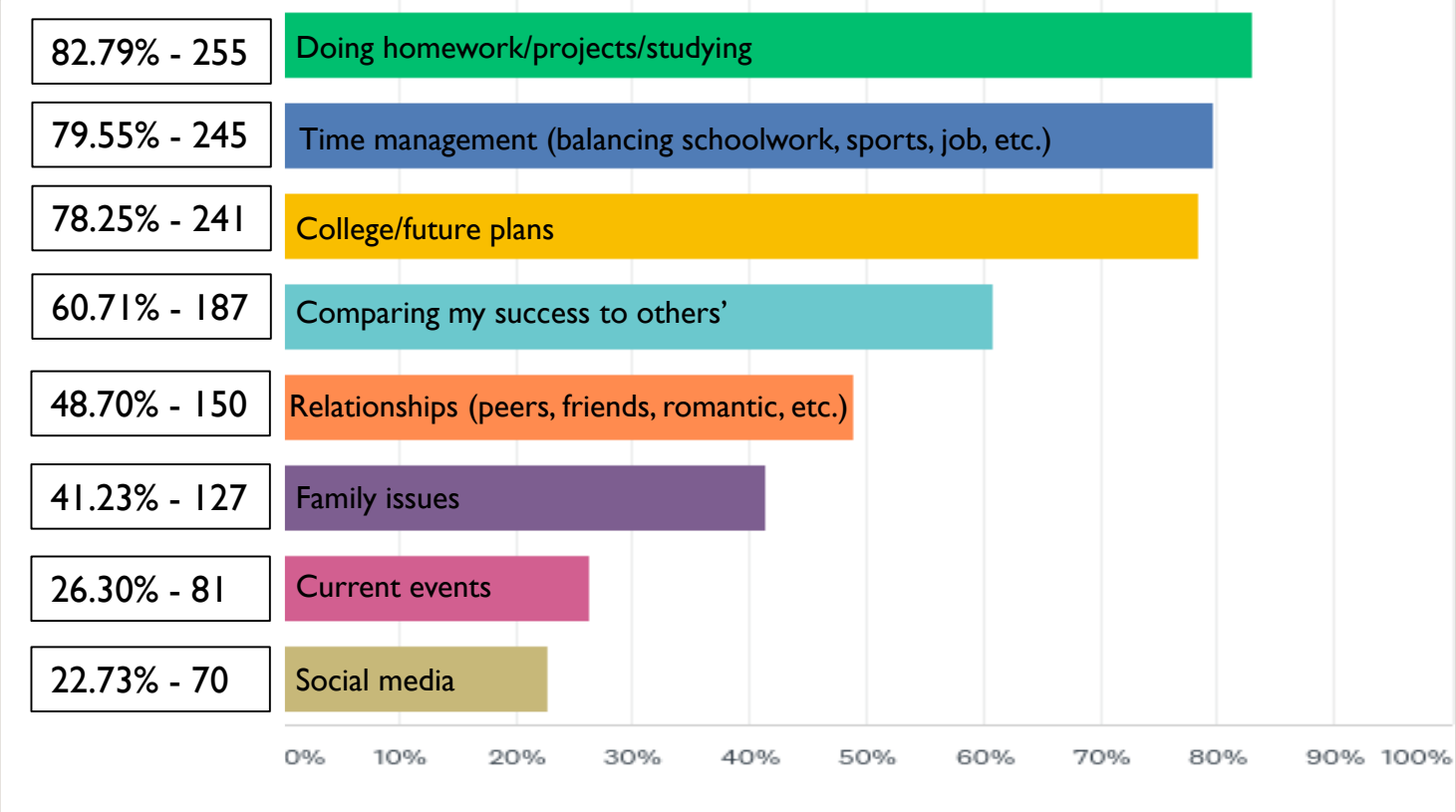
# STUDENTS WHO COMMENTED “OTHER”

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- Sing to myself
- Look at memes
- Sleep (X3)
- Hiding/stay alone/do nothing/suffer/ignore the pain (x10)
- Message a friend (not talk)
- Have a snack
- Music/TV/read
- Deep breaths, center, workout
- Essential oils
- Cry (X2)
- Stay home/skip school
- Text my mom
- Do a hobby I enjoy/hang w/friends
- Take a nap or close my eyes
- Do work
- I don't get stressed
- Meditate
- Go home and talk to my parents/siblings

# Q3: THE THINGS THAT STRESS ME OUT AT HOME/OUTSIDE OF SCHOOL ARE...(YOU MAY CHOOSE MORE THAN ONE ANSWER)

Answered: 307 Skipped: 2



# STUDENTS WHO COMMENTED “OTHER”

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- Extracurriculars (x5)
- Nothing
- Body image
- External forces that affect my performance
- Worrying about my friends hurting themselves or attempting suicide
- Working (x3)
- Parents talking about college

# Q4: WHEN I'M FEELING STRESSED OUT AT HOME I...(YOU MAY CHOOSE MORE THAN ONE ANSWER)

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| ANSWER CHOICES  | RESPONSES |     |
|---|-----------|-----|
| Watch tv/movies/Netflix                                     | 77.96%    | 237 |
| Sleep   | 71.71%    | 218 |
| Eat something   | 69.74%    | 212 |
| Listen to music/make art/write                              | 66.45%    | 202 |
| Browse social media   | 58.22%    | 177 |
| Take a shower or bath                                       | 55.92%    | 170 |
| Exercise/play a sport                                       | 43.75%    | 133 |
| Talk with a friend/family member/counselor                  | 35.53%    | 108 |
| Vape/Juul/use other drugs or alcohol                        | 14.47%    | 44  |
| Post to social media  | 10.86%    | 33  |
| consider hurting myself/hurting others/acting destructively | 10.20%    | 31  |
| Total Respondents: 304                                      |           |     |

# STUDENTS WHO COMMENTED “OTHER”

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- Play piano/dance/play music (x3)
- Cry or go outside
- Stress eat
- I don't get stressed at home
- Try to just do what I need to do
- Try to be productive with my work
- Relax
- Smoke weed to de-stress/sleep
- Watch YouTube (x2)
- Play video games (x3)
- Drink something warm/coffee
- Talk to my mom
- Meditate
- Remember HS is only 4 years

# OTHER DATA

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What school do you attend?

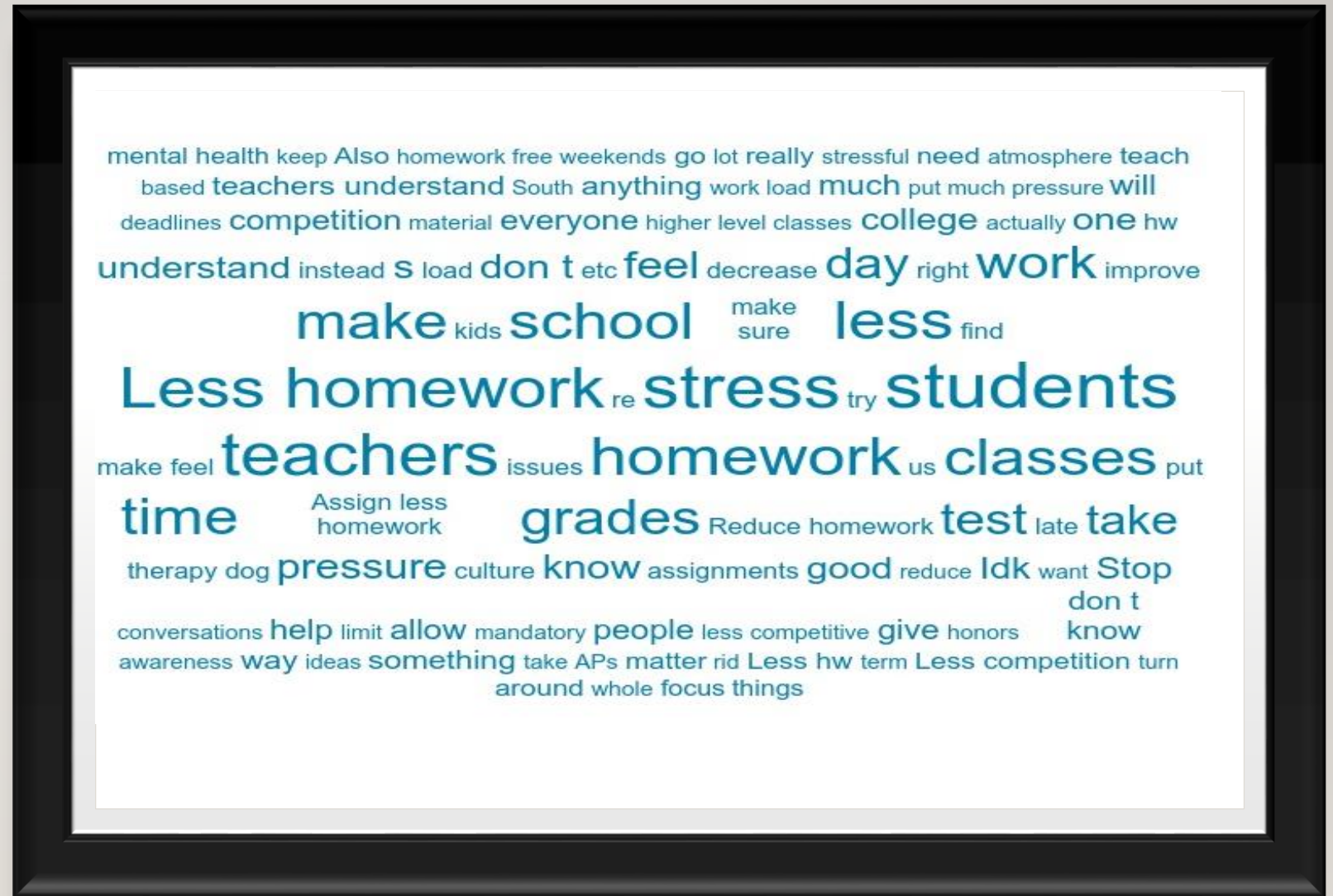
| ANSWER CHOICES              | RESPONSES |     |
|-----------------------------|-----------|-----|
| Newton North                | 36.04%    | 111 |
| Newton South                | 62.99%    | 194 |
| Other Newton School Program | 0.97%     | 3   |
| TOTAL                       |           | 308 |

What grade are you in?

| ANSWER CHOICES | RESPONSES |     |
|----------------|-----------|-----|
| 9              | 2.92%     | 9   |
| 10             | 26.30%    | 81  |
| 11             | 35.06%    | 108 |
| 12             | 35.71%    | 110 |
| TOTAL          |           | 308 |

Q5: MY SUGGESTIONS  
FOR IMPROVING MY  
SCHOOL'S CULTURE  
AROUND STRESS ARE:

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# IMPORTANT TAKEAWAYS FROM Q5

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- Most students wrote specifically about reducing the amount of homework days per week, amount of homework assigned, and their desire to have more communication between departments/teachers/students about tests, assignment due dates, and hours of homework assigned
- Some students suggested tangible supports like more therapy dogs in school, designated spaces to de-stress (i.e. not the library), time built into the day/class for meditation/mindfulness, more time with guidance counselors, more guidance counselors in general, and more training for teachers around supporting students struggling with mental health
- Students openly acknowledged feeling peer pressure/cultural pressure to take higher level classes as well as pressure from school/community/parents around high achievement
- Many comments expressed desire to remove or change stressors like posted honor roll lists, APs, weighted GPAs, extreme late penalties, etc.

# SURVEY DATA AND YRBS – HOW DO WE COMPARE?

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- The 2018 YRBS found that 53.7% all HS students describe their lives as “somewhat” stressful and 26.8% of HS students describe their lives as “very” stressful (81% of HS students are “somewhat or very stressed”)
- 46.3% of HS students report that they worry about School Issues (grades, homework, tests, etc.) “almost every day”, while 30% report they worry about school issues “often” (combined, 76.3% of students report they worry about school issues “often or almost every day”)
- When broken down by gender, female students report higher stress levels than males, and higher rates of substance use.
- In overall MA data, trends of students reporting thoughts of suicide or suicide attempts are higher. In Newton, our numbers have remained the same or consistent, but the rate of reported depression has increased slightly but consistently since 2014 and is currently at 20%.

# STUDENT QUOTES

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**On Guidance:** *“Have mandatory guidance counselor 1-on-1 meetings monthly. Talk about anything.”*

**On Homework:** *“Less homework; more emphasis on collaboration, less on competition.”*

**On Mindfulness Space:** *“Have special place to go if you’re stressed and or overwhelmed”*

**On Student Voice and Choice:** *“For teachers to be more open minded on student input.”*

**On Changing Culture:** *“I think many people overschedule because their friends are doing so, and easier, required classes like basic finance and economics, as well as a mandatory stress management class freshman year would help with this.”*



# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NEXT STEPS

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# RECOMMENDATION # 1

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We ask that NPS require high school guidance counselors to schedule a short check-in meeting with each student on their caseload once per semester.

## RECOMMENDATION # 2

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We request that holiday weekends, religious holidays, and school breaks be designated as homework free for ALL NPS students and that there are no high-stakes assignments due or tests given until the Wednesday after the break or long weekend.

# RECOMMENDATION # 3

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We request designated space in each school for mindfulness/meditation/de-stressing during the day, **and** that all teachers (K-12) incorporate mindfulness practice into the classroom (i.e. gratitude journals, breathing practices, word of the day, etc.)

This effort should be led by each building's administration. If this becomes the norm, this changes the culture.



# RECOMMENDATION # 4

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Students believe that incorporating student voice and student choice are both crucial components of relieving stress within the classroom. We recommend that teachers set classroom norms at the beginning of the school year that incorporate student voice.

We recommend that, when possible, students be given the opportunity to vote/choose when tests/assignments are due based on other work coming up, as well as that students be given choice in assignments (choosing projects, etc.).

When this happens, students report lower levels of stress and feeling like they are more in control of their schedules and learning, even if the vote doesn't always land in their favor.





QUESTIONS?

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