

Farouk Rajab, Board Chairman called the regular virtual meeting to order at 6:30p.m. Members present were Heidi Simmons, Secretary, Craig Esposito, Daniel Kelley, Kevin Agnello, Christopher Donahue, and Sara Baker. Also present were Ana de Oliveira, Recording Secretary, Dr. Van Riley, Superintendent of Schools, Student Government Representative Kyle Lowry and members of the administration staff and interested citizens.

Communications & Recognitions

Dr. Riley recognized the nurses who have done an amazing job for the past two years managing the COVID-19 issues. He noted the number of positive cases are posted on the district website. He gave a shout out to the parents for doing their part. Heidi Simmons spoke in regards to the superintendent search and focus groups. She applauded Dr. Osga for doing a commendable job with the search. Ms. Simmons noted we are moving in a positive direction. Dan Kelley recognized the passing of Jerry Desmond and spoke of his contributions to the town. Sara Baker thanked all who worked in putting forth the start of the 2021-22 school year. Chris Donahue recognized the nurses and parents that have been very patient during these times. He also recognized the administration for making things happen when shorthanded with staff. He spoke of Jerry Desmond as a true loss for Stonington and the community. Kyle Lowry, Student Government Representative recognized Mr. Freeman for agreeing to get pied for a fundraiser which raised \$700. Farouk Rajab, Chair noted he was touched by every Stonington staff member. He added he appreciates everyone and is proud to be in this community and thanked all for everything they do. Chair Rajab recognized Jerry Desmond who touched him deeply and was a friend.

Comments from Citizens Relative to Items on the Agenda

Mr. Dane Lewis commented on the Jerry Desmond memorial proposal. He added he is grateful for the efforts that were made to get this item on agenda, and thanked Dr. Riley, Mary Anne Butler, Mark Friese, Alicia Dawe and Bryan Morrone for putting this forward for consideration. He also recognized Mr. Desmond's wife Jackie for her support, Peter Anderson, and Scott Howard for their efforts.

Greg Howard commented he supports the memorial proposal "Desmond Way" noting it is perfect. He was a great asset for this community and a terrible loss. He also spoke on the outstanding job that Dr. Osga is doing with the superintendent search, it will help our community move forward after Dr. Riley's departure. Mr. Howard commented on school transmissions of COVID-19 and willingness to share data that he has been following.

Adam Linicus commented on the positive experience he had during the focus group for the superintendent's search, adding it was fantastic and very transparent. He also shared a statement from the parent advisory committee on diversity, equity and inclusion. (see attached)

Ashley Tewell spoke on the focus group with Dr. Osga and thanked her for the opportunity. She added we should have a new superintendent by April 1st and voiced the new superintendent should be involved in hiring of the new high school principal since they will be the one working with this principal and maybe include them in the search.

Board Presentations

Kevin Agnello and Allison Van Etten – Social Media and Mental Health - Kevin Agnello and Allison Van Etten shared a presentation which focused around social media and how it affects mental health in students. Mr. Agnello shared in depth information regarding data surrounding this topic. See attached presentation document. Allison Van Etten spoke the district is looking at opportunities for presentations specific to on line safety and shared upcoming initiatives for parents and students to attend. She spoke of future potential partnerships with Child and Family agency which will be located at the district office. Mrs. Van Etten noted the district would like to potentially do more surveys with students, targeting middle school students with regards to social media. Kevin Agnello noted that he feels something about mental health should be included in the Board Goals. He added we should be present, aware and involved in the community. Sara Baker commented the district should look at the roll of narcissism and how it could possibly play a role with what we are seeing. Chris Donahue spoke on empathy and caring for other classmates and what can we do to enhance these programs and continue to move forward. Heidi Simmons spoke she is hopeful that within the next month we will be able to confirm the goals and voiced that the children's mental health is primary. Dan Kelley asked what can the district do to bring that trend down and instead of upwards. He voiced he thinks we need to have a stricter policy during the day in the schools from classroom to classroom regarding use of cell phones. It is up to the administration to crack down on the cell phone issues in the schools, the policy needs to be enforced. He would like the district to step it up.

Kyle Lowry, Student Government Representative spoke on the three levels of interventions at the high school. He voiced that by denying social media you have more of a chance of students coming forward with a problem. Farouk Rajab, Chair noted this is a starting point, it is relevant and important that of the mental health of our children and community. He added he wants to move this forward and hold the administration accountable on what we are doing about the mental health, this is important. He commented he does not want to deny we are all on it, but what can we do more and do better and how can we educate what the effect of social media is on students. He added that this presentation is a starting point. Chair Rajab thanked Mr. Agnello and Mrs. Van Etten for their great work, he really appreciated it.

Consent Agenda

- A. Minutes – December 9, 2021
December 14, 2021
- B. Checks and Bills – December
- C. Personnel Report

The following motion was made by Craig Esposito and seconded by Chris Donahue:

Motion 1: To accept the consent agenda as presented.

All: Aye - Motion Passes

Report of the Superintendent of Schools

Process for High School Principal Vacancy - Dr. Riley noted it is the superintendent's job to do the hiring for the principal and it important to include parents, staff and students in the process. He reviewed the process and the timeline.

COVID-19 Update - He reported with the support of the Board we have been able to open our schools and have been able to keep things going. He shared the number of para and teacher absences and spoke about incentives in order to get people to apply for para positions. Heidi Simmons commented that the Governor gave the ok to bring back the retirees. Dr. Riley explained that we do hire retired teachers, but have not seen an increase in applications with that move. Kevin Agnello commented on the hiring of the high school principal, and would like to give the new superintendent a say in the process. The Board and Dr. Riley shared their views and concerns regarding the process of hiring the new high school principal. Heidi Simmons asked could the new superintendent cooperate with you Dr. Riley but not make the final decision but could be a part of the process. Dan Kelley voiced he feels the new superintendent will have a certain philosophy and vision for the school system. The high school is the flagship school of the school system. The new superintendent should have a major role in the hiring process. Craig Esposito noted the problems with pushing the hiring until the new superintendent and the new superintendent is doing their job somewhere else still. He stated he sees a down side to putting off the hiring and in a normal situation they would have a say, but I am in favor of having the principal search run as soon as possible. Chris Donahue agreed with Mr. Agnello, Ms. Simmons and Mr. Kelley, we should find a way to have the new superintendent involved in the process. Mr. Agnello voiced we should go ahead and look for the candidate and at the end the new superintendent can be part of the hiring. Farouk Rajab, Chair said the ask of Dr. Riley is not to stop the search, the ask is we start the search now, if we have a selected candidate for the new superintendent, use them as a consultant as part of your cabinetry and discuss and review the final two candidates. The ask is to use the new superintendent as a consultant to Dr. Riley in that process. Chair Rajab spoke the final control is in your hands Dr. Riley and we ask that new superintendent if we find that person help in that decision process. Dr. Riley agreed to work with the new superintendent to make the selection. Chris Donahue recognized administration and staff for their efforts in keeping school open, but would like to see the district get some sort of refund from the First Student for services. Dr. Riley noted we are paying per route so there will be less cost and some kind of savings in the transportation costs this year. Dr. Riley will bring that information to the next Finance Committee meeting. Dan Kelley had questions regarding people on the substitute list whether they are subbing in other towns. He voiced he feels we have not done enough if we can't find subs. He noted other options for recruiting substitutes, such as increasing the daily rate to \$150 per day or giving other incentives. Craig Esposito noted other districts are having the same issues.

Jerry Desmond Memorial Proposal

Dr. Riley voiced it is a wonderful opportunity to recognize a special person and fully supports the proposal. He asked the Board to move forward with the proposal.

The following motion was made by Dan Kelley and seconded by Chris Donahue:

Motion 2: To approve the Jerry Desmond Memorial.

All: Aye - Motion Passes

2022-2023 Budget Preview - Dr. Riley shared the proposed budget for 2022-23 and noted the new increase is 2.385%. Gary Shettle, Director of Finance gave an overview of each line item of the proposed budget, while explaining each increase and line items with no change. Dr. Riley explained the budget process and noted staffing additions and changes in the new budget. Chris Donahue had questions regarding the elimination of five teaching positions. Dr. Riley noted this is partly due to declining enrollment and explained the reason for the elimination of these positions. He added we are not cutting opportunities there are just less students in classes. Chris Donahue voiced he is concerned that the education gap is growing and figured staff is the last thing we want to cut at this point. Kevin Agnello asked if Dr. Riley can share a spreadsheet version and not a scanned version of the budget. Dr. Riley noted if we can share, we will. Dan Kelley thanked Dr. Riley for the historical information of the budget. Dr. Riley asked that the Board forward all their budget questions to him.

Monthly Reports

The Board had no questions on the monthly reports.

Items for Future Agendas

The Board had a discussion regarding the Board of Ed Goals. Farouk Rajab, Chair explained his vision for the goals. He would like Heidi Simmons and Craig Esposito to revisit the goals from 2021 with him and use those for the next six months. He suggested that the new Board together with new superintendent and administration develop new goals in the future. He added the 2021 Goals will be presented and added to the February agenda.

Board Comments/Concerns a

Chris Donahue thanked the Governor's office for what they did for the flexibility for retirees coming back to sub. He added he hopes they hear our concerns, with more testing kits, more masks, if we needed to have a day with remote learning have that be credited to the year. He voiced that the National Guard could be used for subs and we need to do more to head on this problem.

Dan Kelley noted he has had significant communication from parents with concerns of pick up and drop off at the schools. He respectfully disagreed with the communication from Dr. Riley with where we are with transportation. He noted issues on Deans Mill Road at the school and suggested having a traffic control operator to help with the traffic flow at the schools. He would like Dr. Riley to revisit this issue.

Farouk Rajab, Chair voiced both are valid concerns. He commented it might make sense to hire more building subs. He asked Dr. Riley to take a look at using more building subs. He also asked that he bring back in the next two weeks some ideas and proposals of something different than we are doing today on this issue. Chair Rajab asked administration do a drive in the morning to the schools, so that we have a safe environment for our staff. Dr. Riley noted that the police is helping in the afternoon with traffic control and will report back to the Board on this issue. Dan Kelley suggested to the Board members to see for themselves and go by the schools at dismissal and witness what is going on. Craig Esposito noted he does go by the middle school and it does get hectic. Farouk Rajab, Chair commented on First Student's responsibility as a contractor and feels they need to do more. Dr. Riley noted he will check and make sure there is a police presence at the schools. Mr. Kelley spoke of the staggered pick up, which worked well and can we ask First Student and maybe do more staggered times if necessary.

Farouk Rajab, Chair commented that Kevin Agnello will be the chair for the Teaching and Learning Committee and Chris Donahue will be the chair for the Finance Committee and thanked them for their service

Adjournment

The following motion was made by Chris Donahue and seconded by Sara Baker:

Motion 3: To adjourn at 9:09p.m.

All: Aye – Motion Passes

Heidi Simmons, Board Secretary



Social Media and Adolescent Mental Health

Disclaimer

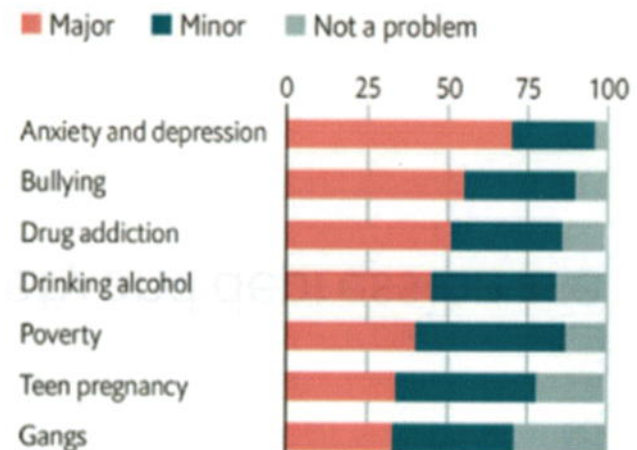


- **What this is...**
 - An overview of the body of literature surrounding adolescent mental health over time
 - A presentation of the working theory among some prominent psychologists that social media is to blame for an alarming increase in negative adolescent mental health outcomes
 - Goal is to provide the parents and the community as a whole with quality information that pertains to our students
- **What this is not...**
 - My opinion
 - A political agenda
 - A policy initiative

What do adolescents think?



- Survey by Pew Research Center (2019)
- 13-17 year old American students
- “70% of respondents thought anxiety and depression were a major issue among their peers”

“How much, if at all, do you think each of the following is a problem among people your age in your community?”



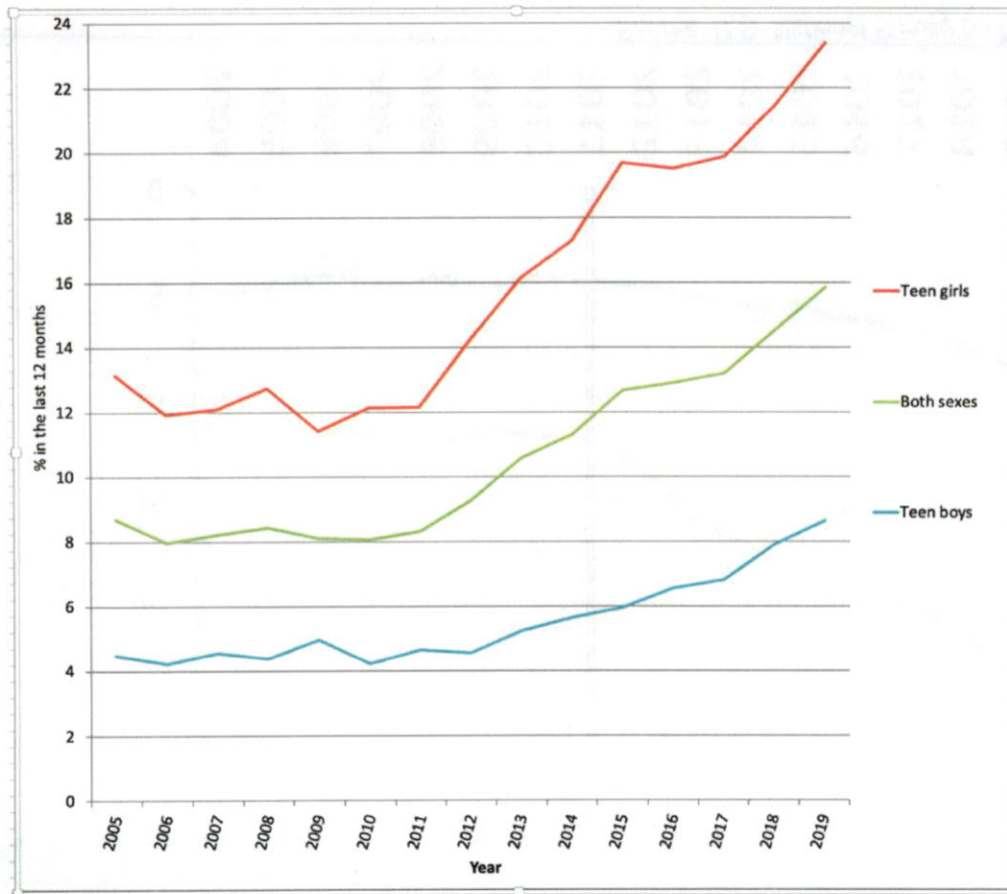
Source: Pew Research Centre

The Economist

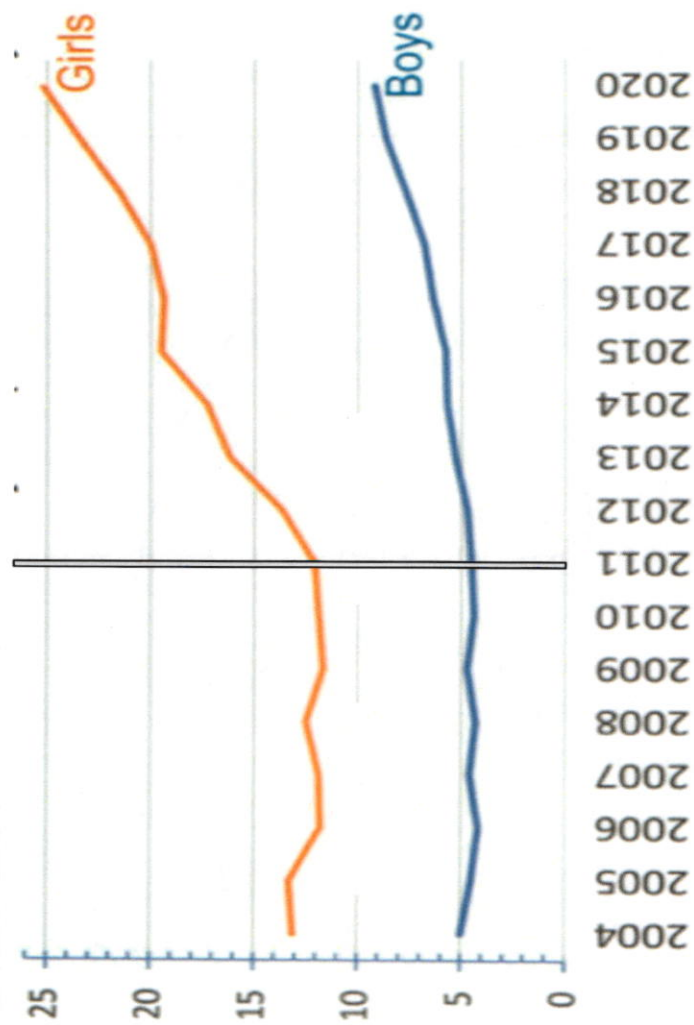



School-aged children think that anxiety and depression are major issues among those their age.

How big of an issue is it?



- 2005 - 2019
- Dramatic shift beginning 2011 or so...
- Increase is larger for girls than boys



Source: U.S. National Survey on Drug Use and Health

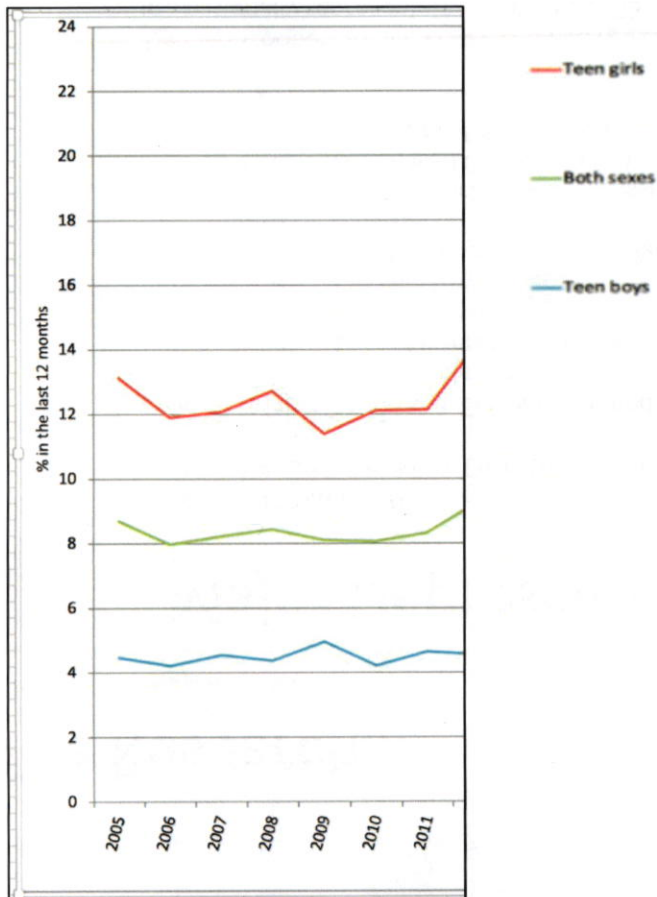
- Same dataset, plus 2020 data
- As of 2020, over 25% of teen girls reported a MDE

The Research...

“Major Depressive Episodes”

- 2019 study (Twenge, et. al)
- National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH; N = 611,880)
- “Major Depressive Episode” defined as a respondent having experienced 5 or more symptoms in a two week period (DSM-5)
 - Depressed mood
 - Loss of interest/pleasure
 - Weight loss/gain
 - Insomnia/hypersomnia
 - Psychomotor agitation (fidgeting, restlessness, etc)
 - Fatigue
 - Feeling worthless or excessive/inappropriate guilt
 - Decreased Concentration
 - Thoughts of death/suicide

Twenge, Cooper, Joiner, Duffy, & Binau (2019). Age, period, and cohort trends in mood disorder indicators and suicide-related outcomes in a nationally representative dataset, 2005-2017. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*.



- % of U.S. teens (12-17 years) experiencing a major depressive episode in the last 12 months.
- 2005 - 2011
- Steady trend among teens girls and boys



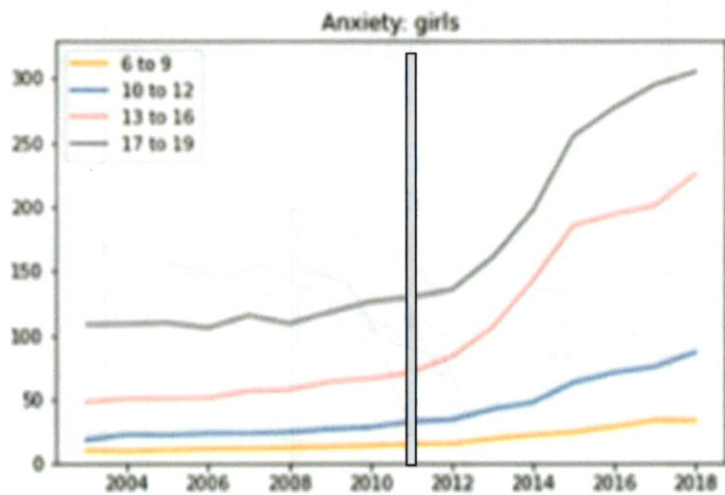
Summary

- 97% of teens rate anxiety/depression as a problem among their peers
 - 70% “Major problem”, 27% “Minor problem”
- Rates of teens experiencing MDE sharply increased beginning in 2010-2012
 - Particularly for girls, but noticeably for boys as well
 - 108% increase for girls from 2008 - 2020
 - 80% increase for boys from 2008 - 2020

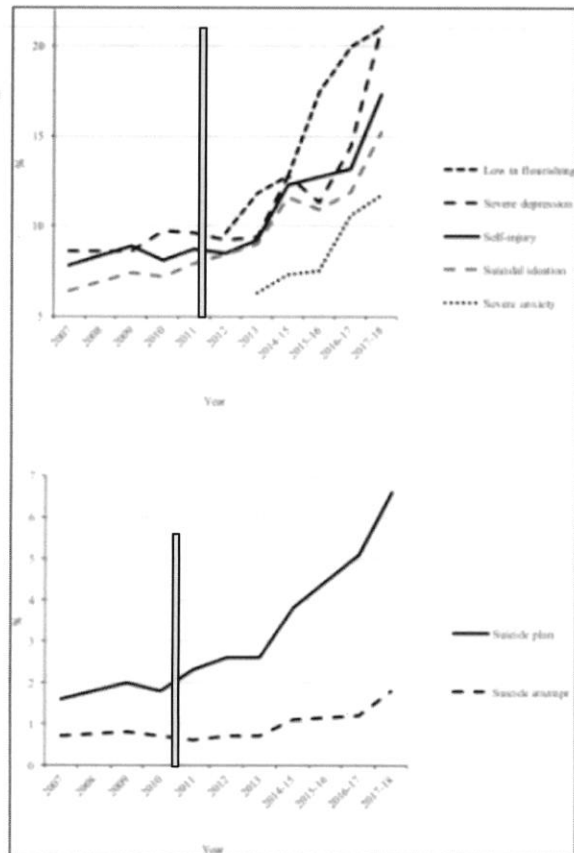
“Well, that’s just one study. Are there others???”



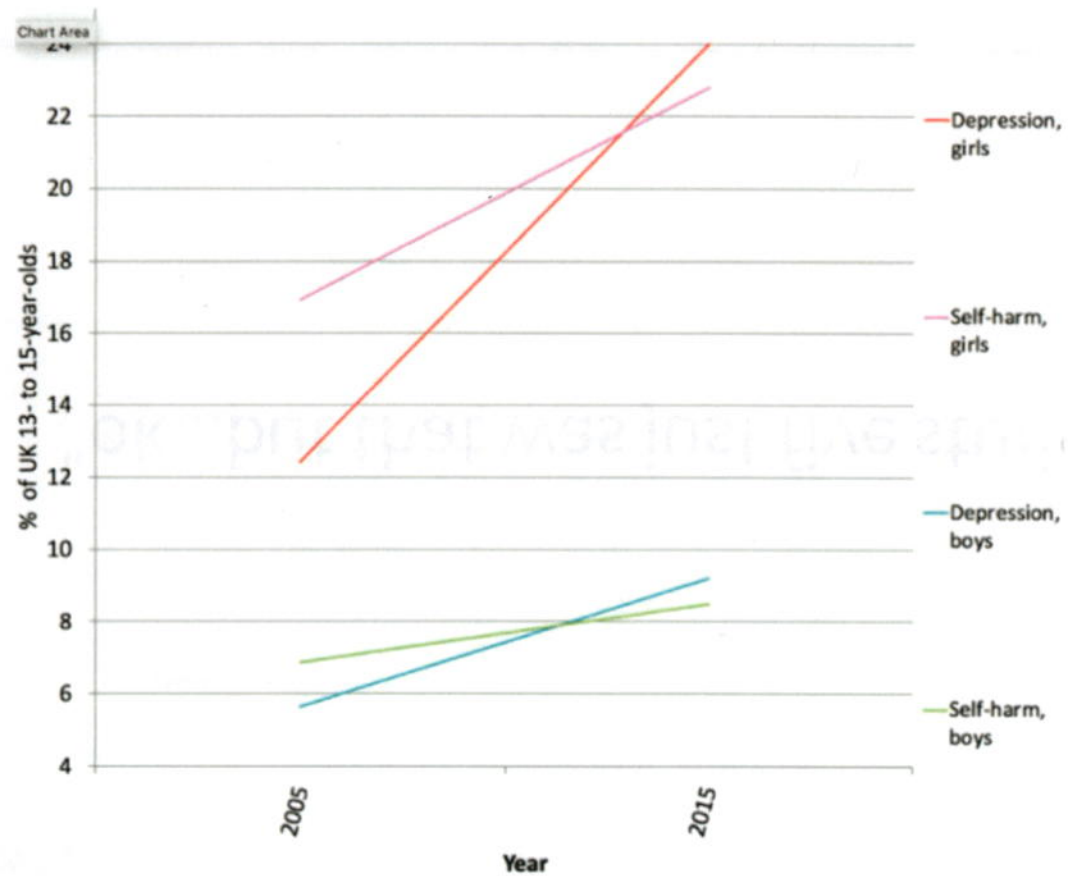
- Twenge, Joiner, Rogers, & Martin (2018)
- “Depressive symptoms”
- NOTE - Similar sharp increase beginning 2010-2012
 - More drastic for girls, but noticeable for boys as well



- Cybulski, Ashcroft, Carr, Garg, Chew-Graham, Kapur, & Webb (2021)
- Mood disorders of adolescents in the UK
- NOTE - Similar sharp increase beginning 2010-2012
 - Chart shows just girls



- Duffy, Twenge, & Joiner (2019)
- Rates of self-harm and rates of depression/anxiety displayed on same chart
 - Similar trends over time
- Dramatic increase in rates of respondents reporting plans for suicide beginning in early 2010s



- Patalay & Gage (2019)
- 13-15 year olds
- Depression and self-harm rates
- 2005 vs. 2015



“ok...but that was just five studies. What about others?”



Others...

- Daly, M. (2021). Prevalence of depression among adolescents in the US from 2009 to 2019: analysis of trends by sex, race/ethnicity, and income. *Journal of Adolescent Health*.
- Fink, E., Patalay, P., Sharpe, H., Holley, S., Deighton, J., & Wolpert, M. (2015). Mental health difficulties in early adolescence: a comparison of two cross-sectional studies in England from 2009 to 2014. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 56(5), 502-507.
- Keyes, K.M., Gary, D., O'Malley, P.M. et al. Recent increases in depressive symptoms among US adolescents: trends from 1991 to 2018. *Soc Psychiatry Psychiatr Epidemiol* 54, 987–996 (2019).
- Mojtabai, R., Olfson, M., & Han, B. (2016). National trends in the prevalence and treatment of depression in adolescents and young adults. *Pediatrics*, 138(6).
- Patalay, P., & Gage, S. H. (2019). Changes in millennial adolescent mental health and health-related behaviours over 10 years: a population cohort comparison study. *International journal of epidemiology*, 48(5), 1650-1664.
- Sadler, K., Vizard, T., Ford, T., Marcheselli, F., Pearce, N., Mandalia, D., ... & McManus, S. (2018). Mental health of children and young people in England, 2017.
- Twenge, J. M., Cooper, A. B., Joiner, T. E., Duffy, M. E., & Binau, S. G. (2019). Age, period, and cohort trends in mood disorder indicators and suicide-related outcomes in a nationally representative dataset, 2005–2017. *Journal of abnormal psychology*, 128(3), 185.



And some more...

Cybulski, L., Ashcroft, D. M., Carr, M. J., Garg, S., Chew-Graham, C. A., Kapur, N., & Webb, R. T.

(2021). Temporal trends in annual incidence rates for psychiatric disorders and self-harm among children and adolescents in the UK, 2003–2018. *BMC psychiatry*, 21(1), 1–12.

Spiller, H. A., Ackerman, J. P., Spiller, N. E., & Casavant, M. J. (2019). Sex-and age-specific

increases in suicide attempts by self-poisoning in the United States among youth and young adults from 2000 to 2018. *The Journal of pediatrics*, 210, 201–208.

Twenge, J. M., Cooper, A. B., Joiner, T. E., Duffy, M. E., & Binau, S. G. (2019). Age, period, and

cohort trends in mood disorder indicators and suicide-related outcomes in a nationally representative dataset, 2005–2017. *Journal of abnormal psychology*, 128(3), 185.

Twenge, J. M., Joiner, T. E., Rogers, M. L., & Martin, G. N. (2018). Increases in depressive

symptoms, suicide-related outcomes, and suicide rates among US adolescents after 2010 and links to increased new media screen time. *Clinical Psychological Science*, 6(1), 3–17.

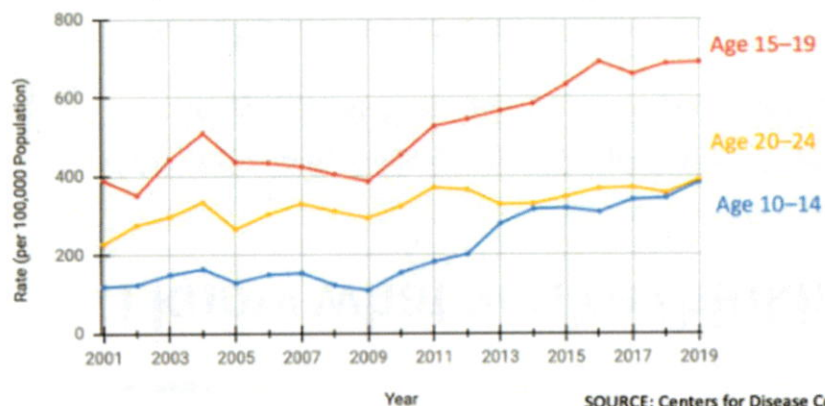


I know what you're thinking...

“All of these metrics so far are self-report. Perhaps, it has become much easier and acceptable for people to openly discuss their mental state and want to seek help.”


- This article mentions this idea
 - <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2019/jun/03/mental-illness-is-there-really-a-global-epidemic>
- BUT, this idea is much less relevant for behaviors like self-harm and suicide, particularly when those actions lead to hospital admission

Hospital Admissions for non-fatal self-harm: Girls



SOURCE: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control

- Mercado, Holland, Leemis, Stone, & Wang (2017)
- Hospital admissions (not self-report)
- Girls 10-24 yrs.
- NOTE: Noticeable increase beginning 2010-2012
 - 75% increase from 2009 - 2019 for 15-19 year old girls
 - 150% increase from 2009 - 2019 for 10-14 year old girls
 - Not displayed - no noticeable increase for boys

- 
- Increases in anxiety/depression and self-harm/suicide among adolescents are well documented
 - Increases seem to begin somewhere around 2010-2012 and continue to grow

What happened around 2010-2012?

Social Media - Humble Beginnings

Active Users - 2005

Social Media Timeline



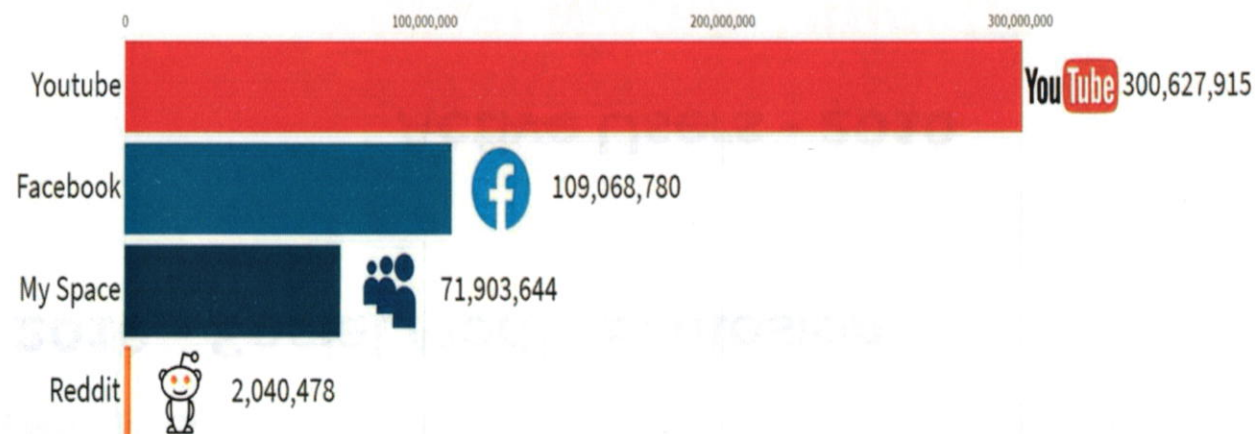
- Facebook still in its infancy
 - Only available to organizations/colleges
- MySpace usage among teens was very low (<50%)
- YouTube had limited features

2008 - Welcome Facebook



Active Users -

Social Media Timeline

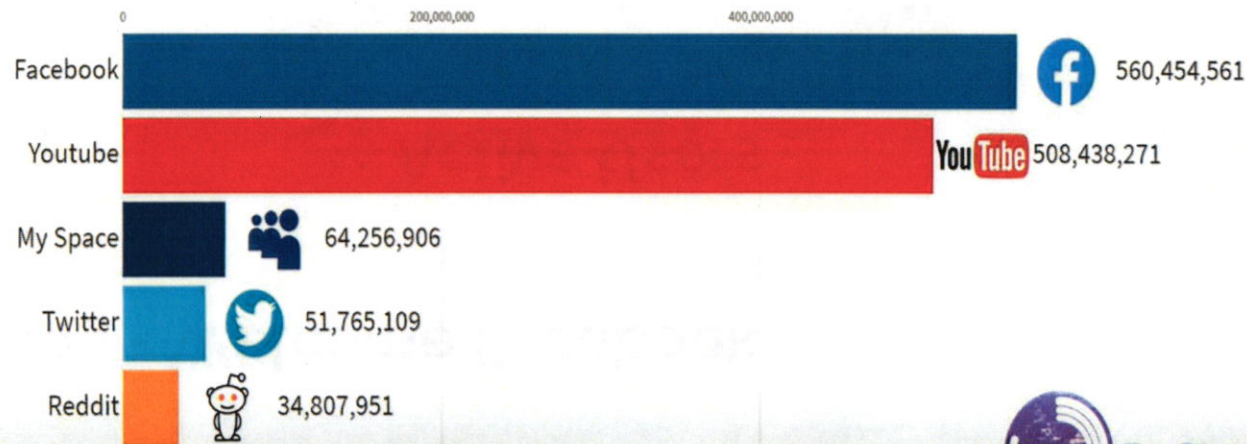


- 2006 - Facebook becomes available to the public
 - Grows in popularity among teens
- 2008 - "Like" button introduced

2010 - Social Media Explosion

Active Users - 2010

Social Media Timeline

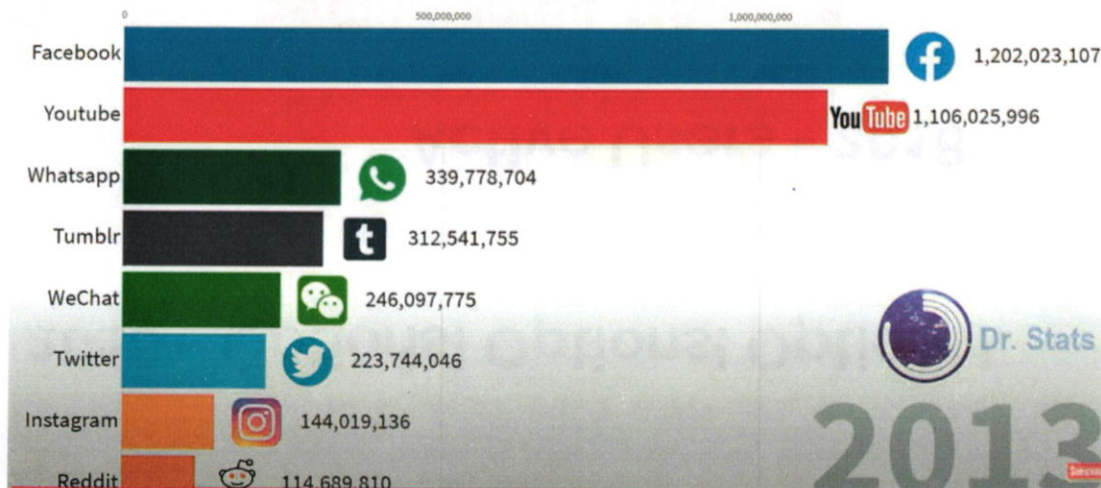


- 2010 - Facebook active users increases 500% in 2 years
 - Upwards of 70% teens on Facebook
- Twitter becomes mainstream

2013 - Options!

Active Users - 2013

Social Media Timeline

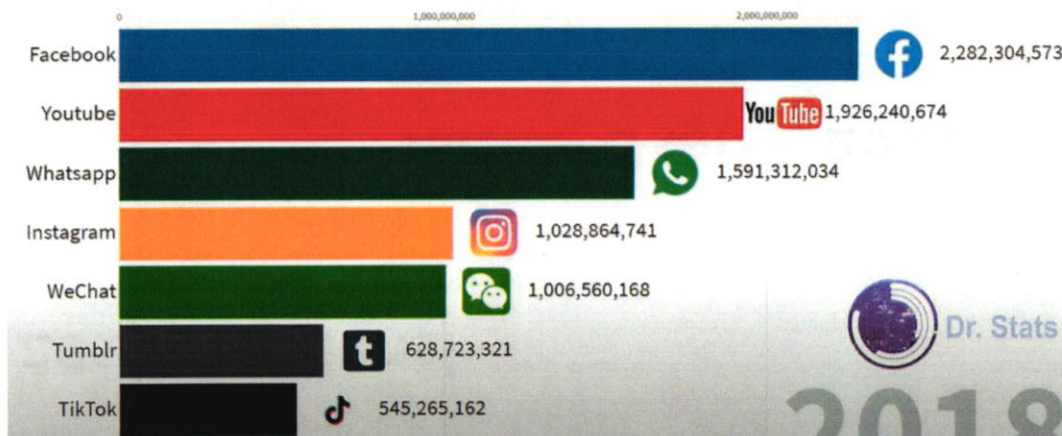


- 2012 - Facebook acquire Instagram
- Instagram becomes mainstream

2018 - Options! Options! Options!

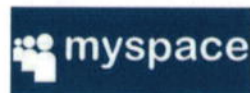
Active Users - 2018

Social Media Timeline



- 2018 - Tik Tok becomes mainstream
- Teens interact with Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, Instagram, Tik Tok, plus others.
- NOTE: Not pictured - Snapchat



In a little over decade, social media usage among teens grew from less than 50% usage on one major platform to over 90% usage on multiple platforms



Instagram



YouTube

- 
- 
- Self-reported mental health episodes and self-harm have increased
 - Hospital admissions for self-harm have increased
 - Social media usage has increased

Where's the connection?



Some research...

- Twenge & Farley (2020)
 - Adolescents between the ages of 13-15 (n = 11k)
 - Correlations between hours spent on social media and mental health outcomes
 - “Hours spent on social media and internet use were more strongly associated with self-harm behavior, depressive symptoms, low life satisfaction, and low self-esteem” than video games and TV
 - Correlation was stronger in girls than boys
- Boers, Afzali, & Newton (2019)
 - Adolescents between the ages of 12-17 (n = 4k)
 - Statistically significant relationship between screen time on social media and depressive symptoms
 - Suggests “upward social comparison” is tenable explanation



Bullying

- Physical bullying declines with age. Verbal, social, and cyber bullying tend to increase in early teen years (Archer & Cote (2005), Espelage et al. (2004))
 - Bullying peaks around 9th grade (Peskin et al. (2006), Brown et al. (2005))
- Girls tend to use social forms of bullying at earlier ages than boys (Crick et al. (2001))
- Verbal victimization (reputation destruction, name calling, teasing) continues at high rates throughout the high school years and are more common with girls than boys (Smith et al. (1999))
- Social media exponentially increases opportunity for bullying, particularly via reputation destruction, name calling, teasing, upward social comparison (Craig et al. (2020), Amedie (2015), Parris et al (2020), Canty et al. (2016))

Other Research on Social Media -> Mental Health

Kelly, Y., Zilanawala, A., Booker, C., & Sacker, A. (2018). Social media use and adolescent mental health: Findings from the UK Millennium Cohort Study. *EClinicalMedicine*, 6, 59-68.

Przybylski AK, Weinstein N. A Large-Scale Test of the Goldilocks Hypothesis: Quantifying the Relations Between Digital-Screen Use and the Mental Well-Being of Adolescents. *Psychological Science*. 2017;28(2):204-215.

Rosen, L. D., Lim, A. F., Felt, J., Carrier, L. M., Cheever, N. A., Lara-Ruiz, J. M., Mendoza, J. S., & Rokkum, J. (2014). Media and technology use predicts ill-being among children, preteens and teenagers independent of the negative health impacts of exercise and eating habits. *Computers in human behavior*, 35, 364–375.

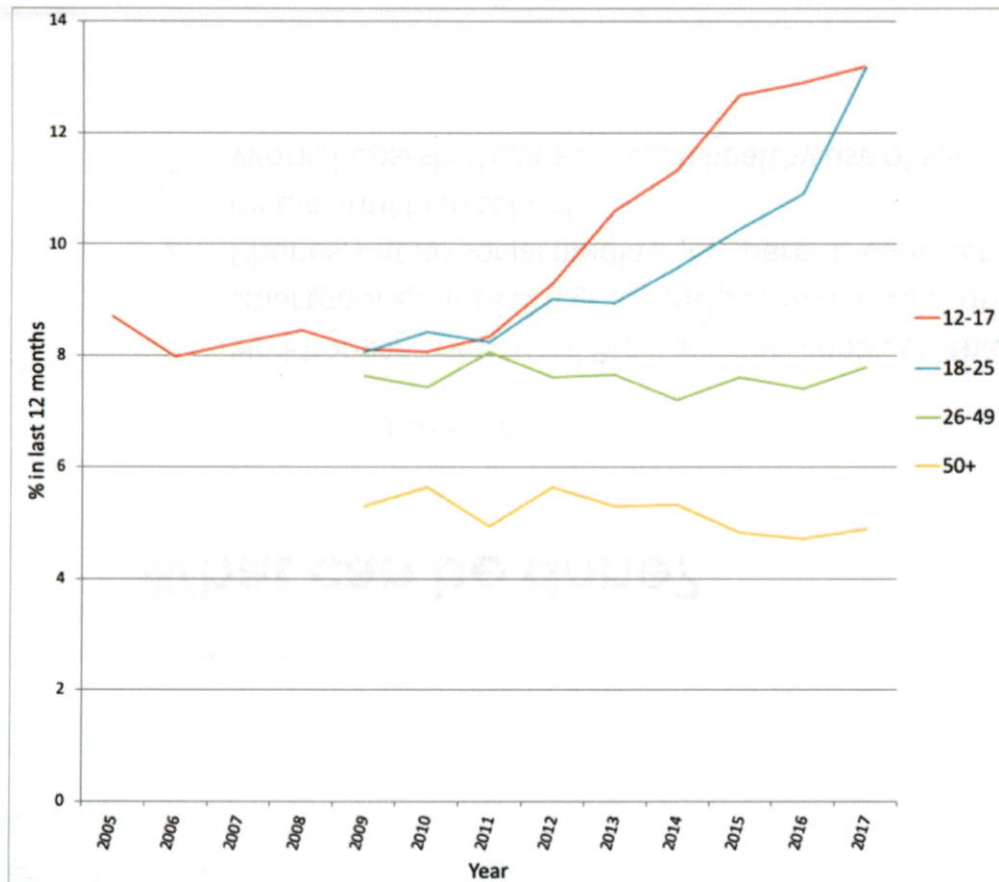
Twenge, J.M., Campbell, W.K. Media Use Is Linked to Lower Psychological Well-Being: Evidence from Three Datasets. *Psychiatr Q* 90, 311–331 (2019).

Twenge JM, Joiner TE, Rogers ML, Martin GN. Increases in Depressive Symptoms, Suicide-Related Outcomes, and Suicide Rates Among U.S. Adolescents After 2010 and Links to Increased New Media Screen Time. *Clinical Psychological Science*. 2018;6(1):3-17.



So the theory goes...

- 2010 - Social media usage among teens started ramping up
- 2010 - Self report depressive episodes, self-harm, and suicide ideation begin to increase
- 2010 - Hospital admission for self-harm begin to increase
- Recent research suggests that social media enhances bullying
- We've come to understand bullying trends among teens and adolescents over the past few decades
- It should follow that increases in depressive symptoms along this timeline are generational...Are they?



- Increases in self-report MDE appear only for younger generations
- Presumably, the older generations were more mature and mentally prepared when social media became “normal”



What can be done?

Three “levels” of remedies

1. No Phones...”Wait until 8th” - parent “contract” that they will not provide their children with smartphones until 8th grade (<https://www.waituntil8th.org/>)
2. Phones, but no social media pact - parent “contract” that they will not allow their children on social media until high school
3. Workshops/strategies to teach healthy use of social media



Is this Happening in Stonington?

Recent survey of SPS students, grades 6-12 , approximately 25% of the respondents indicated social media has had an impact on their mental health. Common reasons indicated:

- Fear of being left out
- Body image distortion
- Comparing myself to others
- Negative tones/themes, related to treatment of each other





District Resources

- School Psychologists, Social Workers and Guidance Counselors
 - Specialized training to support student with mental health and social issues
- Specialized curriculum addressing both mental health and online safety
 - Health, Advisory, SafeSchools
- Assemblies and Presentations Specific to Online Safety



Current Initiatives

- State DARE Officer Family Presentation on Internet and Social Media Safety- March 2022
- Dr. Greta Francis from Brown University - Family Presentation- Spring 2022
 - How to manage child's anxiety
 - "Family accomodation" with anxiety - we cater to the anxiety instead of confronting them
- Second Step Curriculum - K-8 (mainly advisory)
 - Addresses mindfulness, healthy relationships, cyberbullying, conflict resolution , recognizing stress and anxiety
- Family Liaison Specialist/Crisis Interventionist
 - Significant needs at West Vine (Title 1), instead of getting them, we hired additional clinician (psychologist)/family intervention,
- Potential future partnerships with Child and Family Agency
- Suicide Awareness Training for staff via SafeSchools training platform



What's next?

This should not be a one time conversation... so,

- Middle/High School Admin Committee
- Resources/education for families in the form of presentations, newsletters
- Continuing student surveys (climate survey and mental health surveys)
- BOE Goal?
 - Board can support by advertising and attending parent-focused district programming is vital
 - Being a continuous part of the conversation

Parent Advisory Statement 12/9/21

DEI Parent Advisory Committee

The Parent Advisory Committee was founded on the principles of promoting diversity, equity and inclusion within Stonington Public Schools (SPS) and our community. As we enter a new year, and welcome new board members to the Stonington Board of Education, we wanted to take the time to introduce ourselves, share our mission, and seek the support of the Board to continue the very important work ahead of us to create a more diverse, equitable and safe learning environment for our students.

Diversity is the representation of different and unique identities, characteristics, experiences and perspectives. Equity is giving every person what they need to succeed by increasing access, resources, and opportunities for all, especially those who are underrepresented and have been historically disadvantaged. Inclusion is a welcoming culture in which differences are celebrated and everyone is valued, respected and able to reach their full potential. Diversity, equity and inclusion represents people of all ages, races and ethnicities, abilities and disabilities, genders, religions, cultures and sexual orientation.

Our Committee is dedicated to supporting ongoing efforts within our schools, creating new ideas and events that are school and community based to bring more awareness and education surrounding DEI, working with our town leaders, and various groups within SPS such as the Anti Racist/AntiBias Committee, DEI Site Leaders Team, Alliance for Acceptance, and the Anti Racism Reading Circle. Our Committee is composed of many citizens of Pawcatuck and Stonington. We are education specialists, town employees, teachers, social workers, small business owners, paraprofessionals, volunteers, coaches, students and most importantly, parents of students or students attending Stonington Public Schools. As we continue to meet and work together to create positive change within Stonington, it is our hope that we have the full support of our Board of Education and that together we can all set the example and standard for embracing diversity, equity and inclusion in our beautiful town.