Committee Addresses Stress at AB
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Stress is a big problem in people’s everyday lives and has hit AB students hard. Luckily, a group of volunteer teachers has arrived to lend a helping hand to the students. This group is the new Stress Management Committee, composed of fourteen volunteer faculty members who represent every part of the school and every department and level.

Last February, members of the administration decided to form the group because of the input they had received from faculty, students, and parents about the level of students’ stress. Mrs. Leavitt (World Language) and Mrs. Maxwell (Math) agreed to co-chair the committee. At the end of last year, the committee created and administered a questionnaire regarding stress levels to seniors, students of committee members, and faculty. They also met with a student forum that offered its opinions on the problem. All of the collected data confirmed that many students indeed suffer from too much stress. Faculty meetings were held last spring to consider the issue.

The faculty identified two major sources of stress for students and teachers: the midyear exam schedule and the PCR process. The administration decided to take immediate action and altered the midyear schedule. Rather than taking science and math midyears for two days each during separate weeks, students will now take both of the exams on two consecutive days, with three days of review prior to the exams. Assessments in other subjects will be prohibited during that week. Another area of concern was PCR Day, the day on which teachers give their recommendations for students’ classes for the following year. The Stress Management Committee decided to address this issue. “Concerns come from the number of overrides that the department chairs have to deal with every year,” Mrs. Leavitt said. “A lot of stress comes from students being in the wrong level [class].” She also suggested that students were “allowing their perception of what colleges were looking for to guide them in their course selection, instead of choosing what is reasonable for them.” For this reason, the committee is producing a worksheet that, if approved by department leaders and the administration, will be used for the upcoming PCR Day in February. The new handout presents the expectations of the different levels of classes so that students will be able to judge their capacity to manage the workload in each class. Also, Mrs. Maxwell and Mrs. Leavitt hope that, with the new PCR Day process, teachers will “have a longer time to consult with students about their level before the actual PCR day.”

The co-chairs also wanted to shed light on some current policies, of which many students might not be aware. First, there is the test postponement policy, which states that if a student has four or more tests on the same day, he or she can choose to move one of the tests to a later date, which can reduce stress. The committee is attempting to clarify and standardize this process and will propose a revised test postponement policy to the administration for implementation. Also, a new room has been added inside the nurse’s office for students to relax by themselves. This room is used as “a quiet, alone, de-stressing” space, says Mrs. Maxwell, and offers a bed, a DVD player, and soothing music. Even if you have not heard of any of these changes, you probably have seen one of the Stress Management Committee’s products. On the first day of school in homeroom, teachers passed out a sheet titled “Top Ten Ways to Manage Your Stress” to every student. This sheet contains good advice on de-stressing oneself, advising students to get enough sleep, eat nutritious meals, and be optimistic. So far, Mrs. Leavitt and Mrs. Maxwell have received “a lot of really positive feedback from everyone.” They find that “parents, faculty, and students are happy that we’ve formed this committee.” They have even met with the PTSO and sent a handout about stress to parents. “This problem is not only on the shoulders of teachers,” they concluded, “but students and parents can also take steps to limit the amount of stress in their lives.” Mrs. Maxwell and Mrs. Leavitt, along with all members of the committee, want to make sure that everyone knows that this is an ongoing process, that they are continuing to work on relevant issues, and that they are sympathetic to the concerns of everyone involved.