

identity, college applications and transitioning to college.

Challenge Success, a Stanford-affiliated nonprofit, made many recommendations for reducing anxiety and stress in high schools, including later start times, reduction in homework and project-based learning.

The AUHSD schools addressed these issues by adding later start times on Mondays and Fridays, instituting Academy periods on Wednesdays and Fridays to give students time to work on homework, and adopting project-based learning, as typified by the new Living Earth biology curriculum.

Students can come to the Counseling Center at any of the AUHSD schools to discuss mental health challenges they are facing. "We look at the consequences of their actions - good or bad - and explore what they can do differently," says Gans. "I focus on self-care strategies and emphasize the importance of school/life balance."

If students are in serious distress, Gans makes an effort to ensure they have additional support systems, contacting the parent if a student appears to be suicidal. "When the student returns from hospitalization for treatment of anxiety or depression, it's necessary for an effective plan to be in place for a healthy transition back to school," says Gans.

The school shootings add another layer to some anxious students, according to Gans: "It can be difficult to concentrate when worried about your safety."

Parental influence is essential

Parents can help alleviate stress and anxieties, or they can contribute to their effects.

"It's important for parents to know about the challenges these students face and support them to lead healthier lives," says Gans. She mentioned skills such as listening without judgment, being aware of mood swings, and hearing about their frustrations without trying to fix them. "A student is often particularly grateful when a parent shares a similar past experience."

Gans warns that if parents are concerned, they should consider whether there has been a major shift in personality and/or changes in eating or sleeping habits. "If so," she says, "I suggest going to their pediatrician for a check-in and exploring outside therapy as further assistance and support."

As a sign of the times, Barakos recalls working with an elementary student recently who wanted to tell a scary story. "I thought it was going to be a ghost story, like around the campfire, but instead he used his best scary voice and told about a boy who is in lockdown in his class and hears the attacker approaching. At the end, the attacker is found sleeping in the janitor's room."

Barakos worries that instead of a monster in the closet, it is now part of a young person's mythology that real monsters can show up at school.

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