

# MAIN OFFICE NEWSLETTER

Newsletter 2: September 16, 2017

## ***Self Care is an Important Part of Anxiety Reduction***

At Fairhaven High School we aim to teach the total student and believe that social and emotional learning is pivotal to academic success. One of the biggest obstacles in finding this success however, is anxiety in the classroom. Anxiety can present itself in many forms ranging from avoidance and somatic symptoms to disruptive behaviors, to name a few. Severe anxiety can be displayed in refusal behaviors that may lead to discipline referrals often leaving students, teachers, and parents asking, “what just happened?” With our theme of self-care for faculty and students and our goal of teaching the total student, it is no accident that our first professional development of the year focused on reducing anxiety in the classroom.

Jessica Minahan, behavior analyst and author of the *Behavior Code*, presented to the faculty on Thursday, September 14<sup>th</sup>, providing us with strategies, tools and interventions for supporting students with anxiety related or oppositional behaviors.

Jessica taught us that as anxiety increases, working memory decreases. This is how we can answer the question of “what just happened” after a student is sent out or misbehaves; the anxiety prevented the student from thinking clearly. This is often a result of frustrations, fears, and self-doubt. Jessica looks at behaviors as an opportunity to share a hidden feeling and a hidden request.

The presentation taught district employees strategies for reducing anxiety at any age level. Eager to learn how to best support all of our students, the FHS faculty sat on the edge of our seats as Jessica informed us of the reality of anxiety in our students lives and provided us with solutions to be proactive. We learned how to help our students manage those hidden feelings and requests. Instead of expecting a student to utilize their support plan when feeling “stuck” in the heat of the moment, we were equipped with how to reduce anxiety before it gets to a place where the working memory shuts down or the oppositional behavior surfaces.

Thursday afternoon reminded us to tap into the “why” of behaviors, to empower self-checks for regulation, practice thought stopping, and to take cognitive brain breaks when needed. All of these strategies are an important part of self-care. We strive to reach the total student in our everyday lessons, advisory program and through meaningful connections in the community. We know that anxiety in the classroom has powerful effects. This is our motivation for reducing it and leading the way through self-care.