

From the Desk of Lance Friis, NHS Crisis Counselor

Academic Stress

Of late, reports of the debilitating effect of academic stress on high school students can be found in various media outlets. This stress has been **linked to everything from lack of sleep to violence and suicide**. Concern about academic stress has come from students and parents here at Northgate. The **mantra** seems to be that a student **must be exceptional** in their studies and extra-curricular activities, so they can get into a competitive and exceptional university and then into an exceptional graduate or professional school, so they can get an exceptional job. Any misstep or loss of focus will result in abysmal failure from which there is little chance of recovery. **While this is an exaggeration and not the desired message** of most parents, many of our students seem to **feel** this way. Let's take a brief look at the ways academic stress effect our students at Northgate.

I wish to begin by acknowledging that admittance to top universities is **more competitive** than it was in the past. Grades and extra-curricular activities do play a significant role. The answer, however, does not lie in piling on **excessive** prep courses, study sessions, Honors/AP courses and activities. High school is stressful and it is accurate that stress can lead to depression, substance abuse, and thoughts of self harm. **Sleep deprivation** is a common complaint of high achieving students and some times is worn as a badge of honor. The combination of sleep deprivation and stress lead many of our students to make poor choices. Academic success does not insure that high achieving students will be immune from seeking relief from stress by using drugs and alcohol, engaging in sexual activity, or engaging in self harm.

Parents can help their children not only by **monitoring their activities**, but also by helping their students make **realistic decisions** for time and work management. Parents can allow their children to **develop their own** academic and professional goals and not expect them to follow in a path designed solely by mom and dad.

An article on this topic appeared in Diablo Magazine last spring.

It can be found on line at

http://www.diablogmag.com/archives/view_story/480/