MESSAGE FROM THE PACT TEAM

We are proud to share with you our final PACT Newsletter of the year. This was a year in which we worked hard to increase the importance of PACT (Parents Ask Call Talk) in our school community. Our goal was, and continues to be, to reach out to our school community to strengthen the bonds of communication between parents and children, parents and parents, and parents and the school.

Along with our GLCs, parents and Administration, our PACT team has worked to manifest these goals through both our grade level parent programs and these newsletters. Parents were invited to school for evenings of education and discussion. Programming included:

- PACT staff facilitated discussion with ninth grade parents using real life scenarios to explore opening lines of communication about decision making and understanding different families’ approaches to teen parenting
- An interactive evening with tenth grade parents sharing what students are learning in their Health and Beit Midrash classes regarding sexuality, wellness and good decision making
- An eleventh grade evening for students with Bernie Horowitz who shared a powerful story about his experience as a parent and about adolescent substance abuse here in the Riverdale Jewish community
- A senior parent forum on parenting a child when he or she is embarking on independent adult life

Additionally, our newsletters have sought to educate our school community on strategies and current literature regarding the life of teens. Through topics such as the digital life of teens, alcohol and substance abuse, sexuality or simply how teens spend their free time, we hope our newsletters have served as a springboard to further reflection and communication on how we parent and guide our teens and find that fine balance between giving them both independence and supervision.

While there are too many to mention by name, I would like to thank our hard working staff and all of the parents who displayed their commitment to PACT through volunteering to speak, share, write and coordinate our programs.

In the coming year, we look forward to more newsletters, guest speakers, panels and other opportunities for learning and conversations. As always, we would love to hear from you. Email us with ideas for newsletters or programming suggestions. Have a safe, restful and relaxing summer!

- Rabbi Aaron Frank and the PACT Team
As finals are fast approaching, your child may be feeling more stressed than usual. A certain amount of stress is healthy and normal but too much stress can impact a student’s ability to perform on their final exams. Below are some simple suggestions to help your child manage their workload and reduce his or her stress while studying.

1) Time management - Encourage your child to use his/her planner and develop a study schedule. This will allow him/her to focus on one subject at a time rather than become overwhelmed by a very long list of exams and projects. When developing a study schedule, it is important to be realistic about how much time is necessary to prepare. While scheduling 20 minutes per subject is probably not sufficient, scheduling 10 hours per subject is also not necessary.

2) Environment - Students study in different ways. For one, music or other white noise may make processing information smoother while for the next, a distraction free environment is necessary. Take a moment to talk with your child about which environment is really best for him/her. Have your child think about an exam that was successful and what kind of environment facilitated that success.

3) Technology - Many of the students at SAR participate in online study groups and contribute to online study guides. Therefore, telling students to remain offline is not always the best advice. However, it may be in their best interests to keep the technology in a public space to avoid the temptation to get caught up in the social aspects of social media and not stay focused on the academic ones.

4) Active learning - One of the most common misconceptions among students is that reading class notes is studying. Reading notes is a passive activity. It does not require the brain to engage in any meaningful way. Therefore you should encourage your child to include other active strategies along with note reading. Re-writing notes, teaching the material to a parent, sibling or pet, engaging in study groups or creating quizlets are just some suggestions for active learning.

5) Sleep - As always, sleep is vital for teenagers and more so during final exams. Talk to your child about realistic "shut down" times. Encourage him/her to log off computers and even turn off phones well before the time set to go to sleep so that he/she gets as much uninterrupted sleep as possible.

6) Study groups and review sessions - Encourage your child to take advantage of review sessions run by teachers and to meet with classmates in school who are putting together study groups.

7) Breaks - Remember that breaks should be built in to any successful study regime. Scheduling breaks can reduce the temptation to get distracted by other activities. It also serves as a reward for remaining focused for a period of time. It’s often easier to push through the last 15 minutes of a task when you know that you have a 20 minute break coming up to catch up with friends, play a game or eat a snack.

8) Stay calm - If you become anxious about the amount of time or the manner in which your child chooses to study, you need to be thoughtful about how you communicate these worries to your child. Your anxiety can become their anxiety. Fighting with your child will most likely have a negative result as well. While discussing these suggestions and strategies with your child can be productive, it is important to allow him/her the room to figure out how to make studying work. In the end, while finals are important and help develop valuable skills, the final exam grade is only a percentage of the final grade for the course and will not drastically change a student’s average.
SCENARIO: ENTRIES INTO DISCUSSION WITH YOUR CHILD

This section addresses how parents navigate the challenge of parenting with respect to the academic life of their children. In the hopes of leading toward more reflective lenses as finals are upon us, we asked a number of our faculty to respond to the following scenario:

A FAMILY THERAPIST was speaking with the parents of a high school student. The parents expressed frustration that their teenager was not putting forth adequate effort on his studies and extracurricular activities. The parents lamented, “We just don’t understand why he won’t give his best effort! If you are doing something, why not do your best?!”

The therapist replied, “I would never tell a child to ‘do their best’ or ‘try their hardest’ in such a broad way. If he tries to do his best on everything, he’ll burn out. I would tell him to do his best for the things that matter the most to him, and to do good enough on the rest.”

SAR PERSPECTIVES in response to the therapist:

Dr. Mark Shinar
Director of General Studies

While I think there is certainly a more elegant way in which the therapist could have offered his advice, I see a nugget of wisdom in his words. The truth is that high school is one of the only times in students’ lives when they are asked to be good at everything - to excel in math and sciences, the humanities, Judaic studies and extracurricular activities. Once students move on to higher education and careers, they

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Mr. Michael Courtney
Director of College Counseling

I disagree with the therapist’s advice and believe that this guidance goes against the philosophy of SAR High School and our unique grading scale. We never tell our students that they must be the best at everything; rather, we stress that they must try their best in everything. As SAR stresses a student’s level of responsibility and commitment through “Investment in Learning,” we have created a culture where we value effort and award

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Dr. Russell Hoffman
School Psychologist

On the whole, I agree with the therapist’s position in this scenario. One of the things that I like about his bit of advice is that it is realistic. It strikes a balance (or, at least, it aims to strike a balance) between aspiring for greatness and recognizing one’s limits. Some people feel that these two concepts are incompatible, that striving for greatness means going all out or going past one’s limits. Personally, I think that these two

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tend to specialize, to home their attentions in on their passions and talents. In that way, the therapist in the scenario is certainly hitting on a valuable notion when advising the student to “do his best for the things that matter most to him.”

Ultimately, however, I think the advice is too easily misinterpreted and runs the risk of sending the wrong message to the student. Terms like “do your best” and “do good enough” are platitudes with no specific guidelines or benchmarks for success. How do you know when you are doing your best? What exactly does “good enough” look like to a teenager? Even more concerning: is it reasonable to ask high school students to determine what matters most to them at this developmental stage in their lives? There are many ways in which a student might identify what matters most. Some of those ways might be thoughtful - a passion, deep interest, or proclivity. Other students, however, may make that decision in a more whimsical way - a teacher they like or a course that “looks better” on a transcript.

So, what should the advice here be? The first piece of advice should be pointed towards the parents. It’s important for them to reflect seriously about what is frustrating them so much about their child’s behaviors. Is it because the child has a problem or because they have a problem? Are they frustrated because their child is not doing well, or are they frustrated because their child is not living up to their own set of standards and expectations? These are hard questions to untangle, but they are critical, nonetheless. Sometimes, teenagers need to be given the autonomy necessary to make their own decisions and live with the consequences. We can advise and guide, but we cannot force. Doing so will rarely yield the results that we hope for.

Once the parents understand their own motivations, they can then turn their attention towards their child. We should never set low expectations for our children, but we should be thoughtful about asking the right questions and finding the best resources to help guide them to find their passions. Resume building and padding will not inspire the outcomes we are hoping our children will achieve. Rather, the more we, ourselves, model and expose our children to wonderful volunteer opportunities and activities and show them the beauty of learning and discovery, the more likely they will be to put forth more effort to identify and pursue their own passions.
(Response from Mr. Michael Courtney)

students’ work ethic and middot via a separate grading category. We are all aware that our school’s mantra is “It’s not just what you learn. It’s who you become.” This slogan aligns with the Investment in Learning ethos. SAR strives to create a culture where students see the big picture and recognize that their actions have an impact beyond the building and years 14-18 of their teenage lives. Students here receive a high school education that is more focused on investing in their studies rather than expecting straight A’s in Quality of Work. Consequently, I have no problem advising students that they should attempt to achieve straight A’s in Investment in Learning. We cannot expect every pupil to be equally strong in literature, history, mathematics, science, Hebrew language, a second foreign language, Talmud, Tanakh, Machtshevet Yisrael, and physical education. But we can expect every student to recognize why it is important to try in each of these subjects. There is obviously a value in being educated in both the secular and Judaic curricula. To pick and choose which subjects to prioritize is not setting the stage for reality: it is akin to an employee of an organization believing that he/she can select which projects to give their 100% and which ones to shirk in hopes of just getting by. I believe that always trying to be responsible is the education we’d like to impart as we mentor students to be successful adults at 18, 28, and 38.

Furthermore, college admission offices appreciate the Investment in Learning category. They see it as offering a fuller picture of the student rather than the mechanized singular grade that they are accustomed to reviewing. They recognize that the grading scale at SAR mirrors the overall experience at our institution where teachers pay attention to the unique needs of every student.

The extracurricular arena is another question. As a coach in the high school, I stress that in every practice or game, a player must try his hardest. Overt detachment lands a player on the bench as this behavior emphasizes the individual person over the community; quite simply, it goes against the meaning of team! While I can never expect every player on my basketball team to be equally skilled, I do expect every player to be equally invested in bettering the team. A student need not be engaged in a laundry list of extracurricular activities; instead, within the few that he/she is part of, he/she must commit and contribute to the success of the activity.

The high school years are incredibly formative and developmentally important. Of course, one can change his/her work ethic if said student matures after high school. But it is our role as educators to tap into the potential of every pupil and ensure that the burgeoning young adult has established the skills to become successful beyond SAR. Ultimately, prioritizing one’s work ethic should not be compromised.

(Response from Dr. Russell Hoffman)

seemingly contradictory ideas are both equally necessary for success. It is equally important for me, on the one hand, to know my strengths and know where I can probably excel, and, on the other hand, to acknowledge and understand my weaknesses and know how and when they might undermine me. This is the key to success - having aspirations, and striving to achieve those goals by strategically harnessing my strengths to work around the areas that can potentially obstruct my efforts. That is a general principle that I think is at the heart of leading a balanced life and is fundamental to a balanced approach to education.

In the scenario, the therapist is suggesting that the parents apply this general principle to the tricky task of teaching teenagers how to budget their time and choose their priorities. I think that is a fine message to send a teenager: “You don’t have to be a perfect student, but we do expect you to be a conscientious and strategic student.”

The tension at the heart of this scenario is not lost on me. The parents are frustrated by their child’s seeming lack of effort (or motivation or investment or initiative...). If the parents’ expectation of their child is that they will invest all of themselves in their academic and extra-curricular pursuits, then this conflict is inevitable. (Imagine the righteous indignation we would feel if our employers and/or families expected 100% investment from us at all times.) However, the therapist’s suggestion recasts the parent-child conflict in a different - and, I would suggest, more constructive - context. Now the tension is not so much about motivation/investment as it is about setting priorities and considering the value judgments that inform how we allocate our time. That is still shaky ground for many parents and children because of the generation gap - parents and children do not always share the same values and priorities. But now this is a conversation - not an all-or-nothing ultimatum. And even when parents and children do not see eye to eye on the relative importance of competing demands on their time (i.e., an art project vs. a history essay, math homework vs. ultimate frisbee, SAT prep vs. updating my blog, etc.), they can hopefully agree on the need to be discriminating and to think about their relative importance. This is a crucial life lesson for teenagers, and it is one for which parents are often the primary teachers.
There was once a time when summer was summer and the lessons we learned were from the neighborhood pool, around the campfire or the camp baseball diamond. Summer knowledge was not culled from our school textbooks. Those were used from September through June and school work was not a part of the summer routine. But I have learned, both as a parent and a school administrator, that summer work in 2015 is simply part of life.

In reflecting upon and reading about the topic of summer work, it seems that it falls into one of the following categories:

1-Summer Head Start—This type of work is preparatory work for the coming year. Reading the first novel for English class, learning the Perek of Mishna that will be used for Gemara, or mastering the first two chapters of a science AP all allow teachers and students to begin in September hitting the ground running.

2-Review Work—This serves to keep the skills learned in the previous year sharp and fresh. Reviewing Hebrew grammar or keeping up with Physics problems gives the assurance to the coming year’s teachers that the students will be prepared to face the curricular challenges in the coming year.

3–Keeping in the Game of Learning—This type of work often presents more options for students. Reading one of a selection of books, learning the student’s choice of Mishnayot or reading three articles from any Hebrew newspaper all aim for students to understand the value of learning subject matter while, at the same time, giving them the autonomy to choose their own material within certain disciplines.

With these different models in mind, schools aim to assign constructive and valuable work.

Certainly, many of the questions that arise when assessing the value of homework altogether emerge with thinking about summer work. Yet, summer work also has some unique challenges.

Schools must be especially careful to monitor the amount of summer work given. They must make the challenging decision of which disciplines can give summer work and which type they assign. It is never ok to overwhelm students with too much homework and this is especially true in the summer.

In thinking about summer work, schools must also acknowledge that rising seniors have added pressures in addition to schoolwork over the summer. If our college guidance departments are encouraging polishing up the college essay or working on applications, teachers must keep this in mind when evaluating the summer workload.

Additionally, while there are always exceptions, there are obviously many more barriers to academic motivation over the summer. Understandably, some students are simply less motivated, if at all. Also, some are only motivated when they are given tasks that seem different from those during the school year. Teachers and parents alike must realize that expectations in the summer cannot and should not be the same as during the school year. They must also remember that teens often respond best to autonomy and choice. This is even more true in the summer. The more choice we give when it
REFLECTIONS ON SUMMER HOMEWORK
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comes to summer assignments, the more that students may find the
difference refreshing and therefore be more motivated to apply
themselves to their summer work.

Finally, follow through is key. While some summer work counts for
grades and other summer work counts for extra credit, all too often,
students feel that their summer work is not truly graded and counted as
promised. If we give summer work, we must be clear about what it is
worth and make our conversations in the fall reflect the articulated
expectations.

If we ask schools to realize that summer work presents different
challenges, parents must also realize this as well. While parents must
know what motivates their kids during the school year, they must also
adjust expectations when it comes to the effort they expect from their
children during the summer.

Teens might pace themselves differently in the summer, for a whole host
of reasons, given their various plans and activities. If a child is leaving
for an intense summer trip or camp experience for nine weeks, the
schedule and expectation of time investment may be different than those
of a teen who is not going away at all.

In the true spirit of PACT, communication when it comes to summer work
will lead to success. Certainly open communication between parents and
teens is key. Parents should make a plan with their teens at the
beginning of the summer as to the most realistic and efficient way to
approach their summer work.

Once your child receives his/her summer assignment from SAR High
School, which he/she will soon, please also feel free to reach out to the
school with any questions or concerns.

Talking to our children, to the school and maybe even other parents
about how to best tackle the work in June, may allow more buy-in and
success come September.

(1)“Summer Homework: Yes or No
http://www.greatschools.org/students/homework-help/4280-summer-homework-yes-or-no.gs

From academic to
social challenges, in
this final newsletter
of the year, we are
focusing on
parenting during
the summer months.

To view an article by
EMPOWERING
PARENTS

on how to handle
summer problems,
Click Here

Although this article refers to
"troubled children," the advice is
valuable to parents of all children.

Now that summer
is here - slow down
and use the time to
communicate with
your child.

Watch your email for
SAR High School's
Summer Reading Assignments
to arrive mid-June.
ADVICE FOR PARENTS:
HOW TO MANAGE RISKY BEHAVIOR IN THE SUMMER MONTHS

- Share your rules and expectations with your child about curfew, communicating home when going out, and knowing his/her whereabouts.
- Have conversations about your family values around drugs and alcohol.
- Let your child know that if they are in a dangerous situation they can call you for a no-questions ride home.
- Continue to monitor your child’s whereabouts. Confirm plans in advance where s/he’ll be, with whom, and at what time s/he’ll be home.
- Be awake when your teen arrives home so that you can observe any signs of alcohol or drug use.
- Maintain family rituals such as eating dinner together.
- Find creative alcohol/drug-free ways for your teen to feel “cool” and have fun.
- Summer is a great time for you and your teen to take a class, volunteer, or experience something new together.
- Have a “conversation jar” – discuss different scenarios and ask for your son or daughter’s opinions and offer real decision-making opportunities.

Just because school is out, PACT is still in!