

Stress as Seen in the Lives of MHS Students

- Kathleen Alexandrou

According to Merriam-Webster, the definition of stress is “a state resulting from a stress; *especially*: one of bodily or mental tension resulting from factors that tend to alter an existent equilibrium.” High school students define stress a little differently. One student described stress as akin to anaphylaxis (which is a very serious, possibly life-threatening allergic reaction). Another described stress as having an overwhelming amount of obligations. No matter which definition resonates more with you personally, I can tell you from experience that both are accurate descriptions of how stress is present in the lives of students.

Everyone has been stressed out at some point in their lives. Right now, take a minute to remember the last time you were seriously worried about something. Now multiply the intensity of that feeling by fifteen, and imagine feeling like that for four years. That is the norm for a high schooler in this day and age: a feeling of acute stress all the time. It’s not a continuous line of high stress all the way through high school; there are high points and low points. In January, May and June for example, our stress levels spike due to exams. The same thing happens when we have a huge test coming up. Or three. Or five. I have friends who, on multiple occasions, have gone home and cried because they were so worried about school. You tell me, does this sound like it should be a regular occurrence in the life of a teenager?

High school students — particularly honors level ones — generally lack free time. Before we even factor in hours for homework and sleep, many students at MHS are student athletes, or they’re involved in theatre, or they devote their time to a club of some sort, or they have a job — possibly even all of these things. These extracurriculars, which are just as necessary for getting into a dream college as having good grades, take up many hours of our time, both before and after school. Many students I know don’t get home until five in the afternoon, if not later. A lot more are able to go home for a few hours right after school, but have obligations starting later on that go until seven or eight o’clock at night. Even with schedules as crazy as these, if assigned a manageable load of schoolwork — two or three hours, perhaps — attaining that much-needed nine hours of sleep would be possible. Instead, we go home after very long days and sit down to four or more hours of work every night. I don’t know anyone who goes to bed before 11:00 PM on a regular basis.

So, you might ask, what does all this mean? Should students give up extracurriculars and focus solely on schoolwork? Should they learn to live off five or six hours of sleep a night? Neither would be a good plan; a student’s extracurriculars are the second thing colleges look at, and not sleeping enough isn’t healthy. Reducing the amount of homework is the only other solution. It isn’t as if less homework would hurt our education – in fact, according to the Washington Post, the subject in which homework helps test scores the most is in math; in other subjects it’s superfluous. The Washington Post also stated, “[based off their studies,] there was no relationship whatsoever between time spent on homework and course grade, and no substantive difference in grades between students who complete homework and those who do not.” Not only is there a weak correlation between higher test averages and more homework, it has also been proven that spending more time on homework does not affect your grade; therefore, homework is unnecessary. If students were not assigned any nightly homework, with the exception of

studying for tests, we would be able to get the appropriate amount of sleep for our age without running out of time to relax, thus reducing our stress levels.