

Common Ground is a coalition of Bay Area schools that have joined together to enhance parent education. The goal of the coalition is to provide opportunities for parents and educators to learn from experts in a variety of fields, to share ideas with others, and to support each other's efforts to enrich our local communities.

The Common Ground Speaker Series features dynamic speakers who are nationally recognized for their expertise in specific areas of parenting, education and/or health. Each year, we strive to present a balanced series that addresses a wide array of issues confronting parents and educators.

Common Ground Member Schools

The Carey School
Castilleja School
Charles Armstrong School
Crystal Springs Uplands School
Gideon Hausner Jewish Day School
The Harker School
Hillbrook School
Keys School
Menlo School
Mulberry School
The Nueva School
Phillips Brooks School
Pinewood School
Ronald C. Wornick Jewish Day School
Sacred Heart Preparatory School (Atherton)
Saint Andrew's School
St. Joseph's School of the Sacred Heart
St. Matthew's Episcopal Day School
Stanbridge Academy
Trinity School
Woodside Elementary School

Getting School Right: Helping Kids Stay Healthy, Happy & Engaged:

A Panel Discussion with David Elkind, Ph.D., Madeline Levine, Ph.D., Denise Pope, Ph.D. and Brad Sachs, Ph.D.

Listen

Love unconditionally

Make time for play

Figure out who your child is

Take time as a family for rituals

Set aside time for yourself and your partner

Resist the peer pressure to feed the sources of stress we are all putting on our children. Take a leap of faith and resist. Be an advocate for other parents.

These were the appeals to the audience at a standing-room-only event hosted by the Common Ground Speaker Series on the evening of October 17, 2007. The event featured four distinguished voices in education – Denise Pope, David Elkind, Madeline Levine and Brad Sachs – who offered strategies for parents to help their children become happy, healthy and engaged in learning, despite the increased stress being placed on them on many fronts. Over the course of the evening the panel challenged the audience to rethink the definition of success and consider the harm being done to children by the ever-increasing pressure to be good at everything.

Denise began by sharing examples of students, parents, teachers and administrators caught up in the increasing demands of homework, sports and extracurricular activities. While everyone is responding logically to the demands of their environment, the results are increasingly stressed-out kids and families, who according to the business leaders still aren't prepared for the workplace.

This situation is taking its toll on our children:

- ♦ 3.22 million children were treated for depression in the last 5 years; twice that of 5 years ago
- ♦ 8.5% of all children have attempted suicide
- ♦ 75% of all high school students have cheated at some point
- ♦ When asked about school, children say they are bored and tired and feel like "robo"-students

In the face of these alarming statistics, Denise asked the panel to share their thoughts on the sources of increasing stress, and what parents can do to help their children become happy, health and engaged in learning.

Why are the pressures on our children increasing?

As the have/have-not gap widens, parents are increasingly anxious about their children's economic future, which drives families and schools to push children to "achieve." The media adds fuel to the fire by constantly reminding parents they aren't doing a good-enough job for their children. Yet, parents feel increasingly isolated from extended family, communities and support networks that helped manage stress in the past.

The push to achieve is beginning at preschool levels, where there is a trend to push elementary curriculums to younger and younger ages. But since rates of development can vary so much at young ages, children who aren't ready for elementary curriculum concepts may end up feeling dumb and not smart enough to be in school. Many other countries do a better job at recognizing the need for early play – which is critical for imagination and creative thinking – and don't push reading and writing to begin as early as you see in the United States.

Older children are pressured more and more to be great at everything. But even when kids are

Mark Your Calendars

Deadly Persuasion: What Advertisers Really Sell Our Kids with Jean Kilbourne, Ed.D.

Don't miss this chance to hear Dr. Jean Kilbourne, a pioneer in understanding the effects of advertising, as she explores the damage caused by pervasive and persuasive advertising on the hearts and minds of our young people. Her presentation is guaranteed to be fascinating, fast-paced and filled with humor.

Tues, November 13, 7:00PM
Castilleja School
1310 Bryant Street
Palo Alto
(650) 328-3160

Wed., November 14, 7:00PM
Crystal Springs Uplands School
400 Uplands Drive
Hillsborough
(919) 342-4175

**Thurs., November 15, 8:45AM
(Morning Session)**
Harker Middle School
Blackford Campus Cafetorium
3800 Blackford Avenue
San Jose
(408) 248-2510

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achieving, those children aren't feeling successful - leading to problems such as depression. Increasingly, children today aren't showing the typical outward signs of stress or depression. More and more it is the high achievers who are having issues. Performance and learning are NOT the same, and the notion that kids need to perform well at everything needs to be re-examined.

What do happy kids look like?

Kids who are truly happy are confident and connected, have a strong sense of self and autonomy. They can relate well to others and know that they are not the center of the universe. A robust sense of self is critical and parents need to understand the value of internal motivation in order for children to be able to think for themselves and self-regulate (for example, saying no to drugs).

Happiness comes from being responsible and competent and developing a sense of mastery, which comes from confidence, curiosity and awareness. Fundamentally it is who you are and how you are loved, and your sense of giving and receiving love that determine happiness, not external measures of success or achievement.

What can parents do?

Accept and love your child for who he/she is. A child's identity rests on whether he/she feels deserving of parents' love, and the lens through which parents examine their children forms the basis for children's self-esteem. Growth happens as long as they are loved and accepted AS THEY ARE, rather than how we want them to be. Have more faith in them than they have in themselves, because THAT becomes the fuel for their growth and success.

Establish Rituals. Slow down; chisel away at the sense of a runaway life. Eat together. Family meals are one of the best predictors of a healthy adolescence. It's not the food! It's the fact that the parents are taking the time to be together and sacrificing for their children.

Volunteer together. Help children see that there's more to life than consumerism. Help them find a sense of purpose and meaning in something beyond just them.

Find the right level of involvement for your child - Balance nurturing with discipline. Focus on leading, not being liked, but find the leadership style that fits your child. Make sure you are thinking about what's best for them; not what's best for you.

Communicate with your children. Listen; be wholly engaged and present with your child. Give and take - rather than always asking your child questions, consider sharing your experiences. Go one week without asking your child a question. Instead, find another way to talk with your child, or invite them to talk to you. Say, "Tell me about that" or comment, share your perspective and invite them to share their perspective. Help your children imagine the worst possible thing that could happen, and then talk through how to handle it.

Manage the technology. Balance screen time with outside time. Get kids outside to play, relate with each other and stay in touch with nature.

Give your child space. Children need to have their own experiences separate from their parents. You don't need to be present at every athletic competition. This frees children from the pressure from ALWAYS being the center of attention, and frees parents to have a life of their own.

Take time for yourself. Parents who take care of themselves model good behavior for their kids.

Start slowly. Change one thing at a time. Set aside 20 minutes to relax with your children, or add dinner together one more time per week.

Stand up for your child at school. If homework gets out of hand - the basic rule is 10 minutes per grade level, starting at 1st grade - work with your teacher and school to bring it under control.

Relax. Keep things in perspective. Remember, most people DON'T remember their 4th grade science grade!

Have hope. A lot of organizations are working to support you and make changes to benefit our children.

Redefine success. It is who you are and how you are loved, and your sense of giving and receiving love that determines your happiness, not external measures of achievement.