

For a school that PREACHES KINDNESS the students do the OPPOSITE

WE NEED SUPPORT FOR THOSE WHO WON'T SPEAK OUT THE SUPPORT THAT THEY REALLY NEED

STOP RUINING OUR LIVES AND LET US BE WHO WE ARE. LET US BE STUPID AND CHILDISH AND PROCRASTINATE AND BE WHO WE ARE WITHOUT FEARING THE ADULTS OF THIS WORLD

THE DRUG PROBLEM EVERYTHING'S HARD and EVERYONE'S MEAN

A LOT OF STUDENTS ARE STRUGGLING AND ADULTS JUST TURN A BLIND EYE

they focus on the change in grades, not what causes them

people LOVE to bully others

WE NEED SUPPORT FOR THOSE WHO WON'T SPEAK OUT THE SUPPORT THAT THEY REALLY NEED

your students are and maybe they wouldn't hate you!

learn who



# the cracks in the system

Last month, you took a survey. This is what it said.

By India Turner, Evie Cuffaro, Cara Racenstein, Jonah Speyer, Ruby Cervantes, Lincoln Roch, Brandon Phillips, Savannah Griffis, and Nathan Phillips

There is a pressure to do everything: for parents, for college, and for the perfect image. You're expected to have that perfect 4.0, be part of — maybe even lead — a club, play a sport, have a job to pay for college, eat, bathe, commute, do homework, and somehow squeeze it all into a 24-hour day.

Oh, and sleep at least eight hours every night. And make sure to spend time with family and friends because that is essential for developing teenagers. And don't forget to have some downtime to rest your brain. And take time to do what you love.

Suddenly, it seems as if 20 hours of work must be done within a 24-hour day. These impossible expectations leave many high schoolers feeling stranded. Without anyone to talk to, many can go into freefall. While Monarch students are encouraged to take part in many different activities to enrich their high school experience, this encouragement has become a pressure for students to be and do everything. Many students are barely hanging on.

Last month, you took a survey. This is what it said.

The Counseling Department developed a survey to determine the needs of students, both academically and emotionally, and had students take it during an Access time. 905 students responded — over half the school. The statistics and comments shocked many administrators, teachers, and counselors.

Half of the respondents said they need help with raising grades and GPA, and more than half said they needed help coping with stress and anxiety.

Academics were the number one cause

of stress in students' lives. While these were the largest areas where students cried for help, they were certainly not the only concerns students had.

Over 100 people, about one in every nine Monarch students surveyed, said they need help with substance abuse. That's not one in nine students who use drugs or alcohol, but one in nine who recognize that they have a problem and want help.

Over 200 students said they need assistance with depression. Just as many said they needed help with relationships with teachers. One hundred students said they want help with an eating disorder. The list goes on and on.

After the multiple choice section of the survey, there was a comments section where students could voice other concerns. All of these comments were anonymous. Counselor Ben Holloway, and Principal Neil Anderson, read through every single one. They gave The Pack access to all of the responses and data.

In the comments section, hundreds of people cried out in frustration and begged for help.

"I feel like everyone's hanging on by their fingertips," one student reported.

"We live in a world where stress rules us all," another lamented.

"This is how the world works... it's what schools try to avoid [but] they focus on the change in grades, not what causes them," said yet another.

For many of these survey takers, the problem was larger than the amount of homework teachers gave or studying for the SAT. The problem was the culture of

Monarch, how do you REALLY feel?

51% of students want support for dealing with stress and anxiety

79% of students say academic pressure is a primary source of stress

55% of students want support with life skills for adulthood

51% of students want support with raising their grades



the school.

One commenter said, "For a school that preaches kindness, the students do the opposite. I've had multiple friends be brought to the point of self harm and suicide because of the culture of this school."

Principal Neil Anderson looked at these comments thoroughly. "I'm very thankful we conducted a survey like this to hear directly from students," he said. "We do a lot of good work, but there's a lot of room for us as a school to improve in."

Teachers met with counselors and administrators on March 6 to discuss the data from the survey.

"When Mr. Anderson read the comments he was like, we have to get these comments to the teachers, because this is the most powerful part of the survey to him," Mr. Holloway said.

The most prevalent theme that emerged from the data was the role stress plays in students' lives. Stress may come from a missing assignment. It might come from an upcoming test or outside of school. Stress can build quickly, and many students reach a breaking point.

"Students are under a lot more stress than they used to be 20 years ago," social studies teacher Ms. Deann Bucher said. "We don't know if it's classes or technology. We're just trying to figure out how to make everything more manageable."

Common stressors for students include an overabundance of homework, conflicts at home, and social media for students.

On the survey, 41.6% of students said they need help with stress and anxiety. While stress is an intrinsic part of life, for many students at Monarch stress seems to rule their life.

"There seems to be the perception that you need insane grades to get into an awesome college. That's not one hundred percent true," Ms. Bucher said.

Leah Pring '20 knows students feel the pressure Ms. Bucher described. "Students take on more because it looks good on college applications, pushes people into a desired field of study, and peer pressure," Pring said. "All their friends are taking advanced classes so they want to challenge them. Students also desire the label of being called 'smart,' so they will take several advanced classes. Students also just desire a high GPA."

Katy Sun '20 has felt overwhelmed with stress at times. "I would just write down what I had to do, and I'd start crying, and then just nothing would really get done," she said.

Students cope with stress in the first way comes to mind. Sun uses the power of positive thinking as a way out of stress. "Nowadays, whenever I feel stressed, I just I use motivation," she said. So say like, I know I feel this way right now, but once I get through A, B and C, I'm going to feel better. I kind of use that as a way to motivate myself to keep working."

Many students take several advanced classes, only to isolate themselves from the outside world. Social lives, family and friend communication, as well as relaxation time, are all very minimal. Some students feel they lack a school-life balance.

Clubs and activities at school are playing a big role. "Percussion goes year round, and I'm constantly practicing with friends after school or just after school in general," Annalie Haralson '21 said. "Overall, I end up spending very little time with family at home, which is unfortunate. All this contributes to me having very minimal time for homework, which stresses me out because I'm in five advanced classes."

When a student's homework load grows and stress builds, they need an outlet and a support system behind them. For some students, the survey revealed, the outlet can become drugs.

"Drugs are quite a large problem in this school, and I don't want to have to deal with the people who consume illegal

substances," a survey commenter said.

"There's a huge vaping problem," one commenter on the survey said. "On the school bus, in class, in the parking lot, in the bathrooms... it's everywhere."

Another commented, "you can see the clouds of vape wafting out of the bathroom. One day someone got mad at me for actually using the bathroom stall for its intended purpose."

Vape pens shoved at the bottom of backpacks, clouds of vapor floating in front of bathroom tiles, red eyes and pounding heads. Many perceive these as part of the culture of the school.

Not every student who struggles with substance abuse uses it to cope with stress. Some people use it to boost their popularity, or to simply get high and have a good time. No matter the reason, students are still abusing drugs here at Monarch.

Addiction problems can be difficult to break, but a girl named Gwen, who used to attend Monarch, was able to find recovery. She asked to only use her first name to remain anonymous.

When Gwen attended Monarch, she struggled with school. "I skipped classes when I didn't need to just because I didn't want to go," she said. "I was failing. I never showed up. I would stay home sick all the time and I just didn't care." This led her toward a life of drugs and alcohol.

However, she joined a sobriety group to take control of her addiction.

"I've been in this program for a while now. My parents were the ones that put me in there, and it took me like four months of struggling and getting high to realize that I wanted to do this," she said.

Over 100 of the 900 students surveyed said they are dealing with similar issues that Gwen faced when she was at Monarch. These respondents acknowledge they're struggling and want help from counselors and teachers.

When asked about these numbers, Mr. Anderson said, "We [staff] have to give ourselves the permission to see it for what it is. The kids we trust responded honestly, and that means something."

While many of these students turn to drugs because they feel alone and misunderstood, Gwen suggests the reality is very different, saying there is always someone who cares. "You're not alone. It's impossible to do it alone. Even if it's not yourself, but maybe family that's struggling," Gwen said.

Students are supposed to be able to go to their counselors, teachers and admin to get help with the problems they are unable to cope with on their own. Drug abuse. Anxiety. Depression. Stress.

And yet over 400 students with anxiety or stress, over 200 students with depression, and over 100 students with substance abuse issues still said they were struggling with these exact same things.

To help students with these problems, there is a system.

It includes counselors, teachers, administrators, and an interventionist, among others. This system works to help students with problems both big and small. To show they have someone in their corner and they aren't alone in their struggles. The survey found this system had some clear cracks.

First, there's a problem with the ratios.

Teachers normally have a docket of around 150 students,



## Mr. Anderson responds

### Our Principal's Reaction

#### What was your first reaction when getting the results from the survey back?

I found it very enlightening and helpful. We need to make sure though that the information we gathered is responded to. We also have to make sure this survey is not one and done but use the same survey or some iteration of it and see trend date over time.

#### Many students expressed needing assistance with substance abuse and eating disorders what do you think about that?

The survey does speak to the complications that kids face and the challenges students face these days, and the pressures they face because you had everything ranging from eating disorders to organization to, peers, and to parents.

#### What are some of your new like priorities and what changes do you plan on introducing or implementing to help add that extra support?

You have to be really purposeful about where you start because you can't just randomly pick and pick this one. We have to be careful because there might be ramifications over for the others so you want to pick something that you can control so that you can see to implementation and as you can ensure is done with quality fidelity intensity and consistency because otherwise you're kind of playing whack a mole and it might not be as effective long term as it might be in the short term and we're in a long term game. I want to support kids now but I also don't want to do it in a way that's haphazard I want it to be purposeful and strategic.

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oftentimes with more than 30 in a class.

"I think it's hard because teachers have so many things they have to cover and with the amount of students they have, it's difficult to get to know each one," Angelique Cervantes '21 said.

Then, there are the counselors, who give guidance and help with any social and emotional problems. They are here to work with and directly help the students. But, they face a similar difficulty.

"We each have about 430 students on our caseload," counselor Mr. Ben Holloway said. "And every student has their own unique and personal needs."

That means the counselors are often too busy to meet with students on demand. "If you try to make an appointment with a counselor, sometimes it can be a week out, which is not what we want," Mr. Holloway said.

"It's definitely better if we're able to talk to our counselors immediately. There's the counselor on duty but like they're just for like quick questions. To have an actual conversation you need an appointment," Jack McKinstry '21 said.

The majority students of Monarch are oblivious to certain limitations the counselors face, and even more don't realize they're similar to a normal therapist. "If you come to the counseling department for help with it, it's confidential, I will not tell admin," said Mr. Holloway, "Unless it's an immediate risk for yourself or others, I can't tell anybody."

**"I would just write down what I had to do, and I'd start crying, and then just nothing would really get done."  
-Katy Sun**

To fix these rations there's not much Monarch can do. "Moneywise we can only have as much support and help as the district can give us," Mr. Holloway said. But he and the other counselors are willing to try.

To provide additional support there's also a mental health interventionist. "I can't see all 400 of my kids, so the fact that she can build relationships with some of them helps, but her office is just constantly busy and having just one of and her is hard," Mr. Holloway said.

"She can look at family insurance and find therapists with different specialties that can be covered by insurance, but she is not an employee of BVSD," said school resource teacher Ms. Erin Gee.

Mr. Holloway said the school is considering several other changes. "Now that we have Access Time on Tuesdays, we're thinking of running counseling groups," he said.

However, there's the problem who has to take the first step before it's too late. This mostly falls onto the student. "You have to put the initiative on the student to seek the help," Mr. Evans said.

For many, reaching out can work. "If a student goes to a counselor freaking out about my class, or are stressed about something, personally, the counselor can then let me know, which is good information for me to have to help that student," language arts teacher Ms. Mary Prassa said. "If the student doesn't tell anyone, then I'd have no idea."

Not every student takes that initiative though. "I think some do, but I think there's a lot that don't," Ms. Prassa said. "I think sometimes they're too intimidated or don't want to seem weak."

When a student doesn't come forward their problems don't just go away, they just end up alone. "That's when it gets scary, if I'm perfectly honest. It gets scary when they're suffering alone," Mr. Evans said.

Ms. Prassa feels similarly. "For some kids, it can bring them to their breaking point. I've had students just start crying because they're so stressed," she said.

Katy Sun '20 knows what it's like to fall through the cracks. "At first, I did not deal with stress well. Most of the time I'd break down and start crying," Sun said. She's taking four



## The kid who does it all

What an excelling student has to say about the school system

By Cara Racenstein

People walk past Shajesh Sharma '19 oblivious to the great weight he tackles as an individual.

"I'm in four AP classes senior year. I'm also involved in a lot of extracurriculars like DECA, NHS, Science Honor Society, and I volunteer outside of school. I work at NIST, which is a government lab, so I would say that I take on quite a lot of stuff," he said.

Sharma also possesses an accumulative GPA of 4.70. On a regular basis his levels of stress fluctuate. "Sometimes some classes are more stressful than others for sure," he said. "I would say AP Lit stresses me out. Just LA in general. When it comes to math or science, I'm not very stressed out."

Stress transitions to outside of school. "It's other things that stress me out," he said. "Like, when there's a lot of things happening at the same time, especially senior year when

I'm applying to colleges, looking for scholarships, and everything happening at the same time."

His stress is not rooted in a specific teacher, but the things he doesn't particularly enjoy. "I'm in SRS (Science Research Seminar), and I'm working out the lab. It's pretty stressful, because it's three to six hours outside of school every week." Although something such as this may be distressing to most Sharma chooses to not give in to the rigor.

In regard to the school's support system of stress, he believes the recent survey proves the concern the counseling department holds for the students of Monarch. "The thing that the counseling department is offering, like stress relief activities, is a pretty good idea," he said. "I think what they already do, like finals week and the student center with the therapy dogs and other mindfulness sessions is a pretty good idea."

Sharma also has suggestions for

how teachers can help with stress. "Communicate to each other about workloads, because sometimes they all tend to have a test on the same day, which is really annoying. This especially happens right before spring break. Teachers tend to have tests or big projects due right at the end of the week," he said.

A percentage of teachers, Sharma says, are truly taking their stride to diminish the stress of their students. "Some teachers are incorporating stress-relieving activities, like my calc teacher. On block days, she has these popsicle sticks, where they each have an activity written on them. She pulls one, and then we do that activity for a minute. They're usually like exercises just to get the people and to relieve stress, especially during a long period. Other teachers, like my German teacher, has us go outside just to get fresh air. If more teachers did that, I think that'd be nice to hear," he said.

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AP classes and all weighted classes, which can be difficult.

But over the years she learned how to use the system the ways it's supposed to work. "I will email one of my teachers when I feel overwhelmed to work out an extension, and for my emotional health, there's one teacher, [language arts teacher] Mrs. Felknor who's always been a really good outlet to talk to," Sun said.

When teachers have the time and a student has enough courage it does work. "Between the combination of the teacher recognizing the kid and the kid advocating for themselves, they can get the help they need," Mr. Evans said.

Students and staff agree. This isn't the way the system should work. "I would love it if every student had a relationship with at least one teacher or someone they can talk to," Ms. Prassa said. "But I know not everyone does. There [are] students who are really quiet or it's just hard for them to form those relationships."

The survey highlighted serious problems at Monarch. It was able to show students are not happy with things as they are right now.

That was its purpose. Counseling wanted to see where students were struggling and needing help. That was also the easy part, the hard part is deciding what to do next.

"There's a lot we need to think about as a staff, and you have to be really purposeful where we start," Principal Neil Anderson said. "I want to support kids now, but I also don't wanna do it in a way that's haphazard. I want to be purposeful and have a strategy for it."

Staff members have brainstormed a few ideas. "We're looking at our homework policies and testing calendars so there aren't tests in all four subjects on one day," Mr. Holloway said.

Mr. Anderson believes these problems must be tackled one at a time. "You want to pick something you can control, you can see with implementation that you can ensure is done with quality fidelity, intensity and consistency," he said. "Otherwise, you're playing whack-a-mole, and it might not be effective in the long term."

In the meantime AP tests and finals keep creeping closer. Teachers are running out of time for their curriculum. Workloads are getting bigger. And stress for students is reaching a peak.



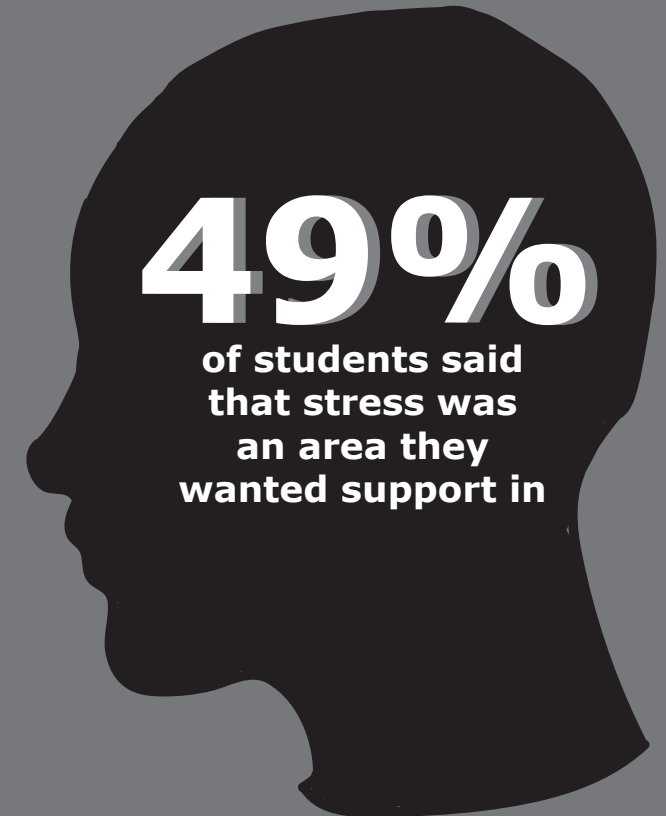
# The Stats

By Ruby Cervantes

## Overwhelming Ratios



- 1 counselor** per 400 students
- 1 interventionist** per 1700 students
- 1 social worker** per 1700 students



## Changes students want

### Smaller class sizes

Smaller class sizes was an obvious solution brought up by many students. Having smaller classes would make it easier for teachers to build connections to students.

### Teachers & students

Teachers trying to relate to students better by using things, such as humor. This connection will make it easier to learn and feel less intimidated.

### More counselors

More counselors was another option brought up. 4 counselors helping 1700 students doesn't work so having more is an obvious solution.

## What Monarch is doing

### Tutor times

Tutor time 4 times a week is offering students extra time to get homework done, study for tests, or just to take some time for themselves. This extra time for students is supposed to relieve stress and anxiety of everyday school life.

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### Group counseling

Monarch will be initiating group counseling sessions that will discuss topics from the survey, such as stress, drugs, anxiety, and social relations. These issues are all very prominent in Monarch and these group counseling talks will make sure most, if not every-one, gets the help they need.

### A new calendar

A calendar showing tests throughout the week is most likely in the making. There will be three to four tests in one day and teachers now realize this so hopefully by next years students should have tests, projects, or quizzes spread out throughout the week.

## HELP!

905 students were surveyed. Here's what they said they struggled and needed support with.

### Personal Lives



**109** need help with substance abuse



**267** need help with depression



**465** need help with stress/anxiety

### School Lives



**450** need help with appropriate course selection



**484** need help with career pathway options



**419** need help with study strategies