Changing the Narrative:
Using profiles in vulnerability to influence school culture
Hello!

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Participants will be able to:

- Identify a strategy to implement safe messaging practices using stories of hope and recovery on high school campuses

- Describe the importance of engaging student voice and student media in school-wide messaging campaigns related to mental health and help-seeking behaviors

- Brainstorm some ideas around the narrative that can change at their site/campus
And I believe that good journalism, good television, can make our world a better place.
—Christiane Amanpour

Read more at:
http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/keywords/journalism.html
Concerns, hopes and student messaging

- Please introduce yourself to someone you don’t know.
- What are your greatest concerns for your students & community?
- What are your greatest hopes for your students & community?
- What role do you want students to have in your community for addressing these hopes and concerns?
1. The Big Picture

2009-2015
2 Suicide “contagions”

7 year span
2009-2010 and 2014-2015

9 PAUSD students/alums who died by suicide
On-campus initiatives from 2010 on

**Student initiated**
- Reach Out, Care, Know (ROCK)
- Henry M Gunn Gives Me Hope website
- Post-it note campaigns
- Alumni Dialogue/WOPAC
- Titan Strong/I am stronger/A Titan Is... campaign
- Student Wellness Committee/Wellness commissioner
- Project Safety Net Liaisons

**Site/District initiated**
- Project Cornerstone
- Suicide Prevention Toolkit
- Mental Health and Wellness staff at high schools
- Revised bell schedule
- Wellness Committee
- YES! Program
- Wellness Centers
- WASC goal around student wellbeing
2. What The Oracle learned

2011-present
The Oracle: Then and Now

Then

- *The Oracle* covered the first suicide with a front page story in the June 2009 issue
  - Included details of the death
  - Included impact on school community
  - Included memorialization activities
Suicide reporting guidelines for safe messaging

- Coverage on subsequent suicides followed these reporting guidelines:
  - [https://afsp.org/about-suicide/for-journalists/](https://afsp.org/about-suicide/for-journalists/)
  - [http://reportingonsuicide.org/](http://reportingonsuicide.org/)

- Key ideas of guidelines:
  - Don’t sensationalize, or overly focus on the death
  - Include resources and hotlines for help
  - Report suicide as a *public health issue*, not a crime
  - Seek advice from suicide or mental health experts
  - Include sidebars about warning signs and what to do in psychiatric crisis if possible
  - Highlight that suicide is *preventable* and mental illness is *treatable*
The Oracle: Then and Now

Now

- The Oracle covers ideas and public health issues
  - Mental health on campus
  - Student groups: ROCK, Sources
  - External pressure on students
  - Wellness initiatives, programs and events
  - Emotional vulnerability
3. Changing the Narrative

2015-present
The Oracle’s contribution

Changing the Narrative

“Changing the narrative” is a phrase we like to define as changing the conversation and shifting the mindset on campus. We want to help change the narrative by normalizing everyday struggles and showing the beauty of vulnerability. To make this step, The Oracle will publish personal stories of strength, hope, healing and growth every other week.
Purpose of Changing the Narrative

- To give students/reporters the chance to tell a more personal story in a way that helps the reader
- Providing a thoughtful space where students can learn from each others’ struggles
- Telling stories in a way that promotes help-seeking instead of perpetuating trauma
- Focus on strength-based messaging and language like “hope, help and strength”
- Creating a network where students can serve as a positive resource for their peers (CTN is not anonymous)
Choosing all in: senior Lisa Hao’s journey of recovery
October 27, 2015

Written by Lisa Hao

As a journalist, I know the importance of storytelling. Personal stories can join communities by offering new perspectives and helping others feel less alone. Although I’m much more accustomed to reporting other people’s stories, I believe it is also important to finally share my own story of overcoming depression and maintaining recovery.

All in or all out. I repeated that phrase to myself throughout every therapy session. I understood that life consisted of neither black nor white, but I didn’t care. For me, I had to be either all in or all out.

I never thought the concept was difficult, yet I had to clarify my mentality to every therapist I met. “All in means that I’m content with life; I wholeheartedly want to be here and the thought of leaving does not even cross my mind,” I would patiently explain. “And all out means, well, all out. I finally stop speculating and just do it.” I believed that if it wanted to, depression could go away on its own. I didn’t treat depression for the illness it was, but instead waited for myself to miraculously get better.

I always hoped that the decision would be “all in” but I couldn’t imagine a time that I would not wonder about the “what ifs” of suicide. Since sixth grade, I had felt the same way. I started to romanticize death and felt most comfortable with sadness. I wanted to be “all in” but it frankly seemed too ideal. It seemed impossible.
CTN Guidelines
Therapeutic not therapy

- General ratio of trauma to recovery should be $\frac{1}{3}$ to $\frac{2}{3}$ covered in the story
  - Strengths-based, solution-focused
- Work closely with the writer to ensure the story flows and won’t contain triggers or sensitive, identifying info
- Publish certain pieces relevant to the time of year
- For non-Oracle writers, help them:
  - Identify a theme and write from the heart
  - Avoid specific details—make the trauma more universal and general so many readers can connect
  - Include advice, guidance, encouragement in terms of dealing with the struggle from a peer or trusted adult perspective
Things to be aware of

- Students who contribute often want to focus on the trauma and the specific details of what happened to them. Help them craft a story that will be more universal.
- It may be necessary to get administration into the loop, especially in a “heads up” way.
- Try to work with non-staff writers one on one so that you can talk them through the revisions. (We do this with the editor and adviser involved.)
- Stories don’t need to be super-dramatic to be effective.
4. Bringing it back to your site
What narrative can you change?

- With someone near you, brainstorm some ideas about what this could look like on your campus
  - What do you believe is the perception of mental health and/or health-seeking behaviors on your campus?
  - How willing do students seem to be when it comes to sharing their struggles? Is there a code of silence prevalent on your campus?
  - What are some ways this narrative-changing could take place?
  - What resources could you enlist to make this happen?

- Be ready to share out ideas
Recommendations for your schools

- Start small on your campus
- Partner with student and staff leaders on campus who can help initiate this change
- Include administrators to create buy-in and support
- Think about the “visibility” factor when planning campaigns/activities so that the school community can access the information more easily
- Tap into local resources in the community that can help with the wellness piece
Additional Web Resources


- American Foundation for Suicide Prevention: [https://afsp.org/about-suicide/for-journalists/](https://afsp.org/about-suicide/for-journalists/)

Thanks!

Any questions?

Reach us at
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Credits

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- Minicons by Webalys
- Presentation template by SlidesCarnival
- Photographs by Unsplash