The History of Mental Health at Belmont Hill
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Over the past two decades, Belmont Hill has made great strides in the field of mental health, going from virtually nonexistent counseling to a thriving program that assists over 15% of students and numerous faculty members and parents annually. Twenty years ago, there was only Mr. Bassett, a legendary crew coach with a Masters in counseling, who regularly spoke with boys on the side. Then, in 1993, Dr. Melvoin was introduced to Dr. Michael Thompson. A few months after their initial conversation, Dr. Thompson was brought in to help start what would eventually become Belmont Hill’s mental health program.

“I’m not sure everyone appreciates how fortunate we are to have Dr. Thompson,” Dr. Melvoin said. “He came as our consulting psychologist. Since then he has published 8 books and speaks literally all around the world, yet we still see him weekly, now as our supervising psychologist, working with students, parents, faculty and staff.”

Yet even though bringing in Dr. Thompson was a great first step, he was not immediately embraced by the school. Dr. Thompson said,

“Belmont Hill had never had a psychologist, and there were some people that thought that I was going to undermine the advisor system. The school relied on coaches, advisors, and effort, because that was, and still is to some extent, Belmont Hill.” But even so, Dr. Thompson quickly became integrated into the Belmont Hill community and was the leader of what would eventually become our counseling program.

After bringing in Dr. Thompson, the school showed its further commitment to the mental health of its students by bringing in Dr. Bepi Raviola and Ms. June Schmunk.

Dr. Raviola is a Belmont Hill graduate and psychiatrist that has worked at the Children’s Hospital and with Partners in Health. He comes in once a week to meet with the health team. Ms. Schmunk has served as the school counselor for the past eight years. Even though she came in only eight years ago, there was still some uncertainty as to how many boys would be willing to go to see her at first. Ms. Schmunk recalled,

“I remember when I was hired, Mr. Goodband said, ‘You are going to have the easiest job. Nobody is going to come talk to you. You’re going to kick your feet up and read magazines all day.’ He really didn't believe that kids would ever come to a counselor.” This attitude, which not only pervaded Belmont Hill at the time but also society in general, has changed dramatically over the past ten years for the better. Recently, Ms. Schmunk upped her time from two days to three days a week, and kids are constantly seen filing in and out of her room.

“I think it’s great that more people are seeking help,” she said. “We all can grow and improve and I feel privileged to be a part of that process with students.”