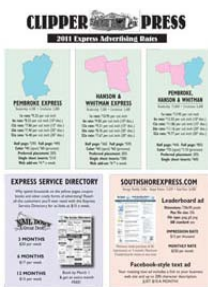


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alike — leaving for a new school and changing family approaches to be less demanding was the only answer. For a tragic few, suicide seems the only answer.

The pressure and the teach-to-the-test atmosphere has other consequences, Abeles' film shows. Students cope by demanding to know what material will be included on standardized tests to memorize it — only to forget it when the test is over.

"What is that going to mean when we have a whole population of dentists and doctors trained to a script?" a professor at a medical school said of the sense of entitlement to know in advance what is to be on a test.

"One of the things I saw at the end of the film was, 'Attend school committee meetings,' said School Committee Chairman Bob Hayes at the conclusion of the screening. "If you're involved in the education of your children, you ought to be involved completely in the education of your children."

One parent wondered about adding the pressure of household chores to the demands with which children are already dealing.

"Those are good pressures for our kids to have that go a long way to developing life skills," Abeles said. "As a parents we can't back away from that, there is a great deal of learning that comes from those experiences."

School pressures have begun to crowd out valuable experiences outside of schoolwork, she said.

Several former educators spoke up in support of Abeles' hypothesis during the question forum after the film. One brought up the film's exploration of the epidemic of cheating the pressure to perform has spawned in schools.

"There are two types of cheating," one former teacher said. "One was academic cheating which is rampant ... the second type of cheating is destroying their bodies in order to succeed — not getting sleep, taking drugs."

Another educator talked about the problems with standardized tests such as MCAS — particularly for special needs students, who often must struggle all day with the exams.

"If it wasn't torture, I don't know what is," he said.

Abeles was also asked about the likelihood of changes to college admissions requirements, which creates much of the stress students in the film talked about. She has already begun screening the film for admissions offices and has begun to see some success, but wants to see more by way of reductions in Advanced-Placement courses and extracurricular activity requirements they insist on, and which add to already stress-filled student schedules.

"The changes that have been going on have not been kid-friendly," said Conley School Vice Principal Michael Boise, who has been an educator since 1977. "They may be state-friendly, they might be test-friendly, but kids lose out. Behind our school is a beautiful playground. Not one kid plays there. — it's got to be structured as part of a team."

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