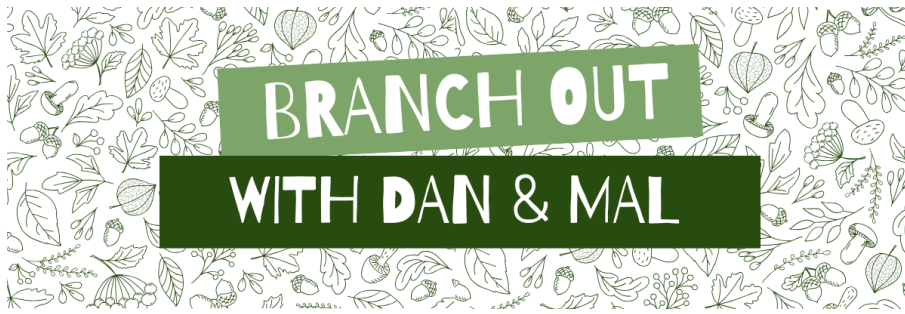




Welcome to Branch Out with Dan & Mal, a weekly newsletter on all things health, wellbeing, and wellness at Midland!

OAKay, Let's Talk...

Mallory's Report:

Winter break was lovely and restorative, and it feels wonderful to be back with students. I came down with a cold during the last two weeks of break, which served as an important reminder of just how draining illness can be—the lack of energy, the difficulty focusing, the general discomfort. When we're healthy, it's easy to underestimate what others are going through or to assume they'll bounce back on our timeline. This experience reinforced for me the importance of holding space for student illness and the very real fatigue, discomfort, and frustration that comes with it.

Dan's Report:

As I've walked around campus over the past couple of days, the consistent theme I'm noticing is *renewal*. The longer break offered time for reflection that shorter spans don't often afford us. Seniors are ready to make the most of their last months at Midland, juniors are settling into their final semester before stepping into senior leadership, sophomores are deepening their understanding of who they are, and freshmen are no longer so new, and establishing deeper roots of connection to Midland.

With *renewal* comes a valuable opportunity to reaffirm past commitments, establish new goals, and further evolve into who we are and who we want to be. All of these steps take courage and intentionality, and in many cases we'll need to lean on one another to push through. Growth and evolution are imperative to living a satisfying life, so let's really embrace community this semester to be stronger and healthier TOGETHER!

In a Nutshell -- Deep Dive of the Week

As I was reading The New York Times right before break, an article caught my eye: "Review of Medical Cannabis Use Finds Little Evidence of Benefit." Substance use has

been one of my primary areas of focus in health education, so I was eager to learn more. The article examined a comprehensive review published in November 2025 in the Journal of the American Medical Association that analyzed over 2,500 studies on cannabis.

It's an excellent piece, and I highly recommend reading it in full (along with the JAMA study), but here are some key takeaways:

1. While 27% of adults in the U.S. and Canada have used cannabis for medical purposes—primarily for pain, anxiety, and sleep—**researchers found little to no solid evidence supporting its effectiveness for these conditions.** The UCLA-led study concluded that only a handful of FDA-approved cannabinoid medications have demonstrated clear benefits, specifically for chemotherapy-related nausea, HIV/AIDS-related appetite loss, and certain severe pediatric seizure disorders.
2. High-potency cannabis products (those containing more than 10% THC) were associated with notably higher rates of mental health concerns. Users experienced psychotic symptoms at nearly twice the rate of low-potency users (12.4% vs. 7.1%) and generalized anxiety disorder at a significantly elevated rate (19.1% vs. 11.6%).
3. Approximately 29% of people using cannabis for medical purposes met the criteria for cannabis-use disorder. **Daily cannabis use was also linked to increased cardiovascular risks, including higher rates of heart disease, heart attack, and stroke.**

This research reinforces why evidence-based conversations about substance use matter so much. If you have questions about cannabis, other substances, or health decisions in general, my door is always open. I'm here to help you navigate these topics with accurate information and without judgment.

Acorny Ending

Some reminders from our Health Office email earlier this week, if you missed it:

1. New Recovery Lap System

If you are excused by Dan or me from a class, we'll give you a form (similar to the Blue Sheet) to take with you when you speak with your teachers about what you missed. You'll have 24 hours from when we give you the sheet to bring it back to us with your teachers' notes. If you don't return the completed form within 24 hours, we'll automatically assign recovery laps (two for each class missed). We're piloting

this system for Term 3 and would appreciate your feedback and input as we test it out.

2. Reminders About Missing Class

As much as we love our Adirondack Chair squad out front in the morning and after lunch, it is not a reason to miss class. If the bell rings and Mallory or Dan haven't had a chance to meet with you, please head to class and come back during a break. Your health and wellbeing is our priority, so of course there are exceptions if you are experiencing a mental health or medical emergency—but in general, you should not be missing class to wait to see us.

3. Breakfast Check-In

The expectation is that you check in at breakfast unless you are physically unable to get out of bed. If you are sick on a Tuesday and Mallory excuses you, this does not roll over into an excuse to miss breakfast on a Wednesday. Breakfast check-in is a crucial safety check, and we need you to be there even if you don't feel well.

4. Scheduling Sessions with Dan:

If you'd like to talk, the easiest way is to use this [LINK](#) to self-book a time. You can also catch Dan on campus or email him directly to schedule. If no times are available through the booking link or you need support sooner, don't walk away thinking there's no availability—email Dan and we'll find a time that works. The key is to reach out directly so we can make it happen.

We're on your team—and we're rooting for you.



Mallory McPherson-Wehan
Health Director



Dan Petrocelli
School Counselor