



# NHSC Youth Council Newsletter

Fall '23

We are the National Health Schools Collaborative Youth Council - a collective of 17 high school students from across the United States who are passionate about creating change in schools. Representing youth from coast to coast - from Anaheim, CA to Washington, DC - we utilize our lived experiences and research to craft the following set of recommendations to improve mental health in schools. We hope that our recommendations capture the laments, concerns, and yearnings of every high school student in the US. We believe that our ideas and action steps can be useful to schools at every income level; urban, suburban, and rural.

## Recommendations for Improving Student Mental Health in Schools

In August, our youth council met with adult leaders of the National Healthy Schools Collaborative (NHSC), which included professionals from Kaiser Permanente and other national organizations who work to promote healthier schools. The most impactful moments of this meeting were sharing our personal experiences in school settings. This discussion made clear that we need change in our schools - and it is time for youth to join adults to be a leading force behind solving mental health challenges in our schools.

After six months of research and discussion, the NHSC Youth Council came to a consensus regarding three priorities for mental health in our schools.



National  
Healthy Schools  
Collaborative

## Recommendation 1 - More Student Advocacy for Mental Health

We strongly recommend that students take a stronger stance in voicing their concerns and suggestions for the betterment of their schools. When we scrutinize why so many seemingly good policies ultimately disintegrate into dysfunction, the key lies in a simple truth: adults are not students, and the reasoning behind school policies is too often based on assumptions rather than students' lived testimonies. As a new wave of mental health challenges confronts us this year, it is vital that we - the students - take part in finding the solutions. We should take action to build a mental health advocacy platform in order to build a coalition of like minded students and adult allies that can rally to influence our local communities and decision makers.



### *Specific Actions to Increase Student Advocacy on Health Issues in Schools*

- Evaluate if your school has platforms that center around student voices (for example monthly student-principal meetings, student voice surveys, student representative councils, etc.)
- If there are no existing programs, initiate a program that allows students to collaborate with faculty and administrators to facilitate dialogue and propose reforms
- Call for opportunities in which students form professional relationships with their school board and city council in order to amplify students' influence and power

## Recommendation 2 - Better and More Accessible Resources for Mental Health in Schools

One of our top goals is to reduce the disparities in health resource access across school campuses nationwide. To achieve this, we recommend balancing the number of counselors and social workers and to provide students with easier access to needed mental health resources. Even without significant funding changes, schools could provide individual and group support resources, including strategies such as peer-to-peer mentors, free student talk spaces, and student-directed learning services. Considering the amazing diversity many schools enjoy, we implore schools to reframe their mental health missions to be more inclusive towards the needs and interests of students of all races and ethnicities. We are confident that our schools will empower students with the tools to better address all their challenges, mental, academic, and more.



## *Specific Actions to Improve Access and Quality of Mental Health Resources in Schools*

- Utilize Technology! As a district, contemplate partnerships with companies like Better Help or TalkSpace to provide students with access to free online resources
- Tailor support for the diverse communities present by funding varied after-school programs, sports, tutoring, etc.
- Partner with organizations like [Communities In Schools](#) to expand community resources available for students
- Fully utilize resources like social media to broadcast pertinent student support information and highlight student success in academics, athletics, and extracurriculars
- Promote existing school resources such as nurses and social workers by creating easy-to-understand materials for students (in the form of posters, outreach, etc.)
- Fully utilize the student population as a resource by creating peer-to-peer mentor groups and/or upperclassmen-led tutoring and mentoring services.

## **Recommendation 3 - Improved Student-Staff Relationships**

A healthy relationship with peers and adults leaves a lasting impression on students and refills their future outlook with optimism. An effective school culture requires a focus on the whole student's development and not just their test scores. Our recommendation is to introduce innovative teaching, counseling, training, and assessment measures that support students and staff both inside and outside the classroom and bring more relevant instruction strategies to schools across the country. With better training and guidance for all staff and more holistic measures for student development and progress, we are confident we can build healthier, more trust-filled schools where young people can thrive.



## Specific Actions to Improve Student and Staff Relationships

- Each month or quarter, consult a team of students that discuss school culture and staff relationships to set objectives and work together to set monthly and/or quarterly goals
- Establish connections with organizations such as [Eye To Eye](#) and [Attendance Works](#) to discuss reforms like AI-facilitated project-based learning
- Prioritize developing effective disciplinary measures through restorative justice training



Check out NHSC Youth Council Newsletters to learn about our recommendations on the latest issues we identified in schools nationwide and employ our innovative solutions at your school!

Email [brian.brady411@gmail.com](mailto:brian.brady411@gmail.com) to stay in touch.



To see our full list of recommendations, **NHSC Youth Council Recommendations for Improving Mental Health in K12 Schools**, click [HERE](#)

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