

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 8, 2020

Media Contact:

Dr. Loretta Whitson, executivedirector@schoolcounselor-ca.org, (909) 260-4780

Students Demand CA Leaders Address Mental Health Services

Data shows hundreds of students are experiencing severe stress from COVID-19's impact

SACRAMENTO — Today, students from over 80 schools across California delivered a letter to Governor Newsom, State Superintendent Thurmond, and other state officials outlining concerns of students on the impact COVID-19 has had on their mental wellbeing. A coalition of 33 organizations and staff and students from 35 schools signed on to this letter in support of the students' request for additional mental health resources from the state.

The student mental health initiative was led by the Youth Liberty Squad (YLS), an organization of high school student leaders working with the ACLU of Southern California.

"We understand that you are dealing with many unprecedented emergencies right now," said **Anthony Flores, a senior at Manual Arts High School in Los Angeles**, in the letter to state leaders. "But through the information gathered in our survey in which we asked students to recommend solutions, we would like to present ways in which problems affecting students can be resolved."

In the letter the students call on:

- The state superintendent to issue a directive to districts to stop using LCAP funds intended for high-needs students on law enforcement in schools;
- State leaders to host a virtual town hall on student mental wellness that elevates student voices;
- The governor to fund additional mental health resources like school counselors, psychologists, nurses, and social workers through the federal stimulus CARES Act.

YLS surveyed 650 of its peers through social media and digital organizing and found that over 65% of students rated their mental wellness at seven or above on a scale from one to 10 before the pandemic began. Less than 40% of students rated their current COVID-19 mental wellness at pre-pandemic levels, while 23% of students rated their mental wellness at a three or less on scale of one to 10 – one being terrible.

"Reading the vivid accounts of stress experienced by California youth appeal to the very core of the work by school counselors," said **Dr. Loretta Whitson, executive director of California Association of School Counselors**. "COVID-19 has resulted in a mental health crisis and we are just beginning to understand its extent. We must not lose sight of this as districts consider

reopening schools in the fall. Leaders across the state must take into account the traumatic impact this crisis will have on learning.”

According to the survey, roughly 22% of students reported receiving mental health services before the pandemic. The survey found that an additional 32% of students who were not receiving services may now need services; thus, over half of California’s students could need mental health support.

The survey asked students to “share one word to describe your overall feeling during the pandemic.” YLS then created a word cloud to display how the most common words used by students (boring, lonely, overwhelming, anxious, sad, etc.) are also associated with increased risks of suicide. The letter includes quotes from peers who feel deprived of milestones, coping mechanisms, and opportunities to save for college.

“Forty-eighth in the nation when it comes to mental health support at school, California was already failing its students pre-pandemic by not providing the mental health support they deserve and need,” said **Sylvia Torres-Guillén, director of education equity at the ACLU of Southern California**. “Resources must be allocated to support students holistically – with a team of counselors, nurses, social workers, and psychologists.”

Cosponsors of the students' letter include the ACLU of California and the California Association of School Counselors. Supporters include organizations like the California School Nurses Association and the California Association of Student Councils.

Read the letter: Letter to [Governor Newsom](#) and [Student Wellness Survey Summary](#)

###