

SUMMARY OF STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH SURVEY RESULTS

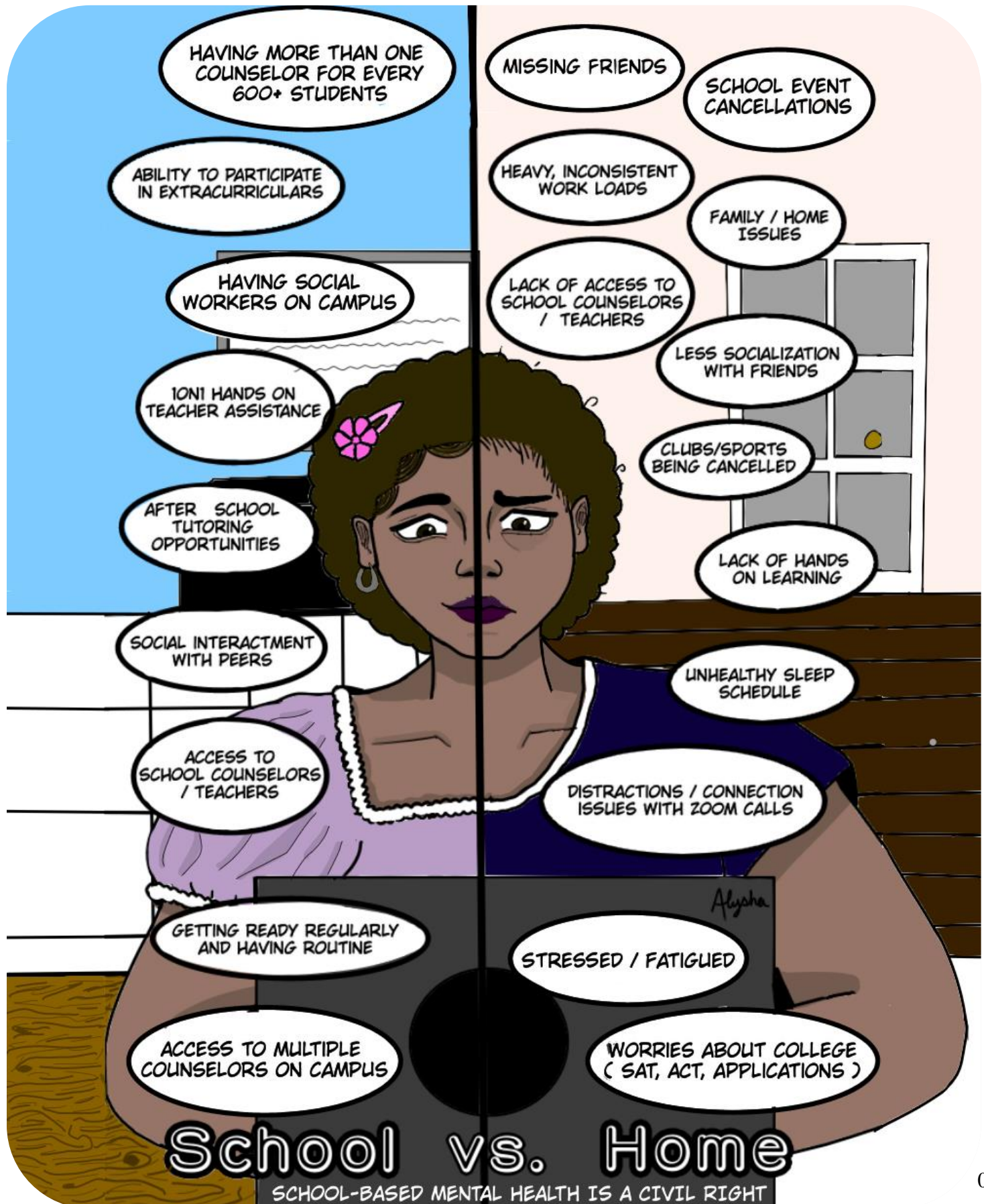


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Cover Art by Alysha Boone, 11th Grader at Foshay Learning Center

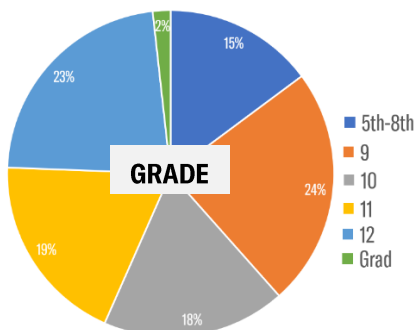
Research by Youth Liberty Squad & ACLU of SoCal [Students are considering a full report with additional student perspective.]

KEY FINDINGS

- 22% of students reported receiving mental health services before the pandemic.
- **32%** of students who were not receiving services feel they may now need services.
 - Thus, **over half of California's students** could need mental health support.
- 65% of students rated their mental wellness at 7 or above on a scale from 1-to-10 pre-pandemic.
- **Less than 40%** of students rated their current COVID-19 mental wellness at the same level.
 - **23%** of students rated their mental wellness at a three or less, and this requires immediate action.
- Some of the most frequent words by students to describe their mental state were boring, lonely, overwhelming, and anxious.
- Students shared hundreds of responses to open-ended questions that indicate significant stress.
- Students expressed that they're overwhelmed with school work, the well-being of their families, general uncertainty, and missing out on their high school experiences.

OVERVIEW AND DEMOGRAPHICS

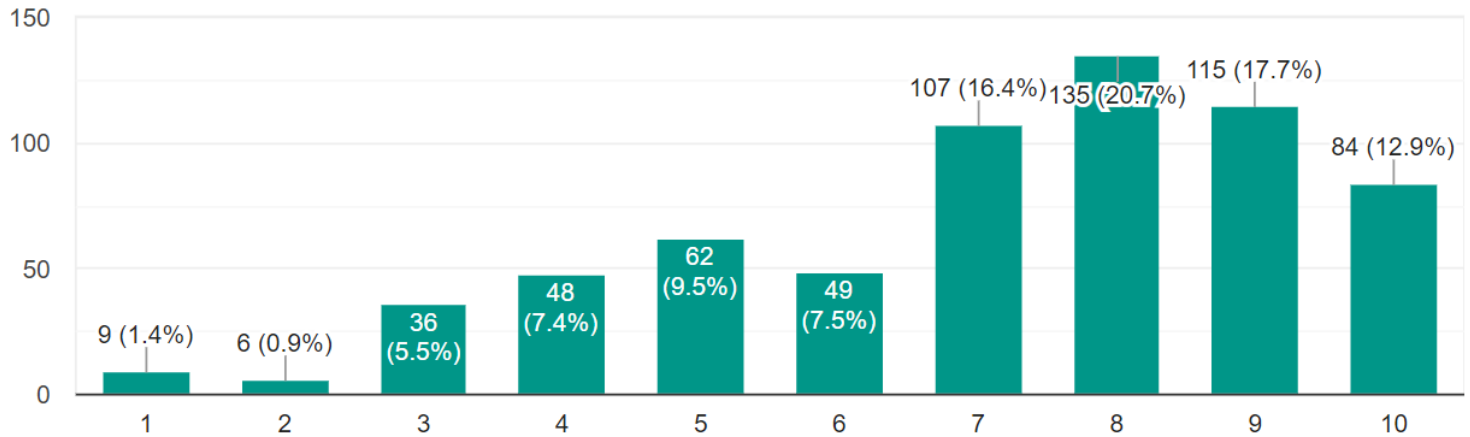
NUMBER OF STUDENT RESPONSES: 653
 NUMBER OF SCHOOLS: 68
 NUMBER OF DISTRICTS: 49
 LGBTQ STUDENTS: 22%
 SURVEY DATE: April 25th-May 1st 2020



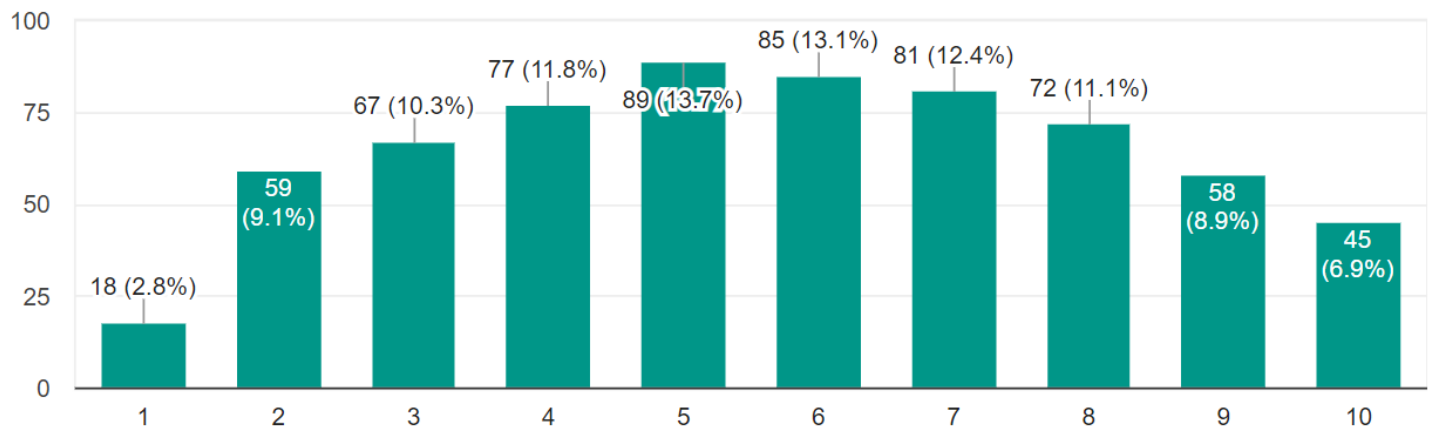
STUDENT REPORTING OF MENTAL WELLNESS

1) How would you rate your mental wellness before the pandemic?

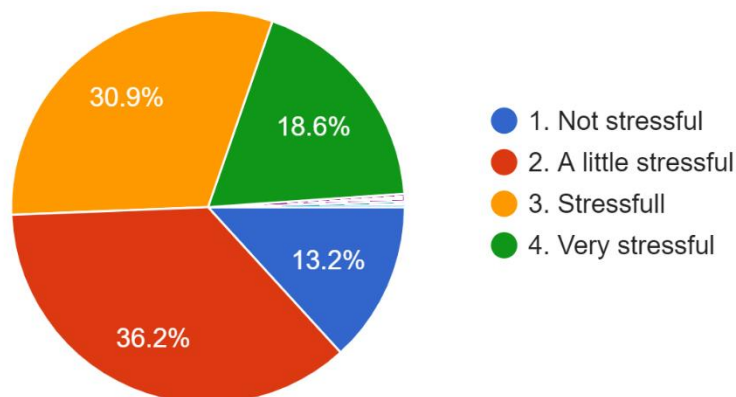
(Survey defined “mental wellness” as our ability to cope with the normal stresses of life and work productively.)



2) How would you rate your mental wellness now?

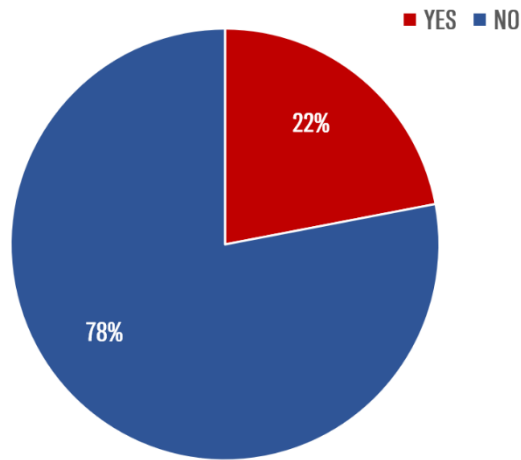


3) Has the pandemic caused you to stress or worry?

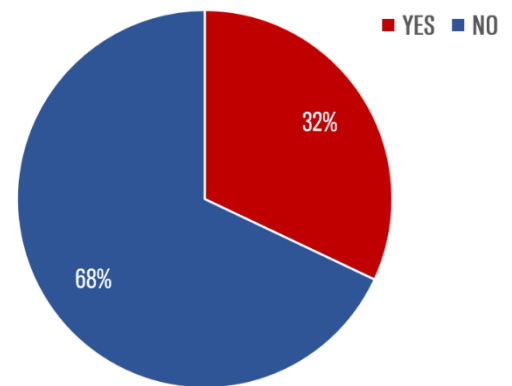


4) Pre-post pandemic and the need for mental health services

PERCENT OF STUDENTS RECEIVING COUNSELING OR THERAPY (SELF-REPORTED)



PERCENT OF STUDENTS NOT RECEIVING MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES WHO NOW FEEL THEY MAY NOW REQUIRE SERVICES (POST-PANDEMIC)



SHARE THE REASONS WHY YOU FEEL STRESSED

1. "There's a lot of unknowns at this time regarding jobs, health, money, and overall outlook. Typically after a traumatic event there's a grief period. In this pandemic, the grief is never ending as we await direction from politicians of when shelter in place is lifted. Far too many of our youth are stressed out themselves and want normal. Unfortunately, a lot of parents are not equipped to be teachers especially those with language barriers or those who don't have access to technology. This is going to have a lasting effect as there will be a lot of learning gaps"
2. "I feel like I'm being pushed to do more work now than ever before, and there's a lot of pressure with family. Sometimes I don't think they realize how dependent they can be on me at times. It becomes extremely overwhelming at times."
3. "I feel overwhelmed by the amount of schoolwork I am getting. I feel like I am being assigned more work than I can handle in certain classes. The pandemic already adds enough stress into my life, I think that we shouldn't be as overwhelmed with schoolwork given the circumstances."
4. "Furthermore, I am an extrovert. Hugging my friends, talking to teachers and sitting next to classmates are now luxuries. I have had dreams about hugging people and wake up crying"
5. "Many of us need to talk to our therapists and feel like someone is actually hearing you out instead of just telling how you should feel."
6. "We're receiving double the work we would've received while we were still in school. Packets on packets that must be finished in a month that are not being taught to us, nothing is being learned in my perspective."
7. "I am an extrovert who depends on school and friends as my only support system, since my home is not an ideal environment. Basically all of my coping skills have been taken from me due to this quarantine and I have become extremely mentally ill due to this situation."
8. "I honestly don't feel like I'm learning anything at all. My stress and anxiety has never been higher and at this point the only thing that can save it all is what I get on the SATs next year. This distance learning isn't helping at all, I don't even know why the word 'learning' is in it. It just feels like I'm being piled with unnecessary work."

9. "Its scaring me because parents are fighting about work and money. We are already poor, just got off of government help and now i dont know whats going to happen and i know I can't do anything"
10. "I have to work so my family earns money since 2 people in my house hold have been layed off. And I'm afraid I might get COVID-19."
11. "Some students dont have a healthy environment at home. People in the district or the teachers in the classroom dismiss the change in circumstances and continue assigning tons of work that accomplish nothing but add to our stress."
12. "well i am working right now at a grocery store so i am busy constanlty. When i get home i am really tired and don't have the effort to finish my school work so then i fall behind on my school work."
13. "Many companies have had to let off workers and such, and my family has been affected by this issue. This is going to cause us to move out of the city during summer. I have a background of moving a lot, but I didn't expect to have to move again during my high school career."
14. "I have no idea what the world will look like a month from now, let alone next term. As I try to prepare for AP Exams and the ACT, I'm unsure if colleges will even accept them. It's harder to meet with college counselors, harder to have in class discussions, and harder to interact with my peers. I may not see my friends who are seniors until after their first year at college. Some friends are in bad home situations and so I'm worried about them and spend a lot of time talking with them. I'm also someone who has trouble with organization, so it's harder managing work. I'm an asexual lesbian, and not out to my parents, and while my parents are fairly LGBT+ friendly and I'm not at all unsafe, I'm not ready to come out and being constantly at home reminds me of that a lot. I'm also very politically engaged, but watching the news right now is very stressful. I'm not miserable, exactly, but everything just feels.. off."
15. "I have to balance my classes zoom meetings, homework, AP exams to study for, and work. Currently Im the only one working in my family therefore I provide any necessities for my family. I work during the night so its difficult to wake up early."
16. "My father is a grocery store employee, and before this he wasnt considered essential. As people rush to stock up, my dad is forced to work restlessly every day, exposing himself to the very nature of things were supposed to stay away from. My mother doesnt work- she is not legally able to. I lost my job as well, at our local shopping mall. I dont know how Ill save up for college without a job, but Ill do what I can to make it work."
17. "I am a people person and I need to be outside to thrive. My well-being depends on the ability to teach and explore with others and it's scary that won't be a reality for a while."
18. "I feel like I am working more now. Virtual is never ending, constant virtual meetings, endless emails, I feel like I don't have enough time to manage my home life & work life, the balance is not there."
19. "I am a Junior and I feel that now Im teaching myself since I just get to watch YouTube lessons and then just turn in my homework online. I also have younger siblings and they have homework due online as well and because my parents barely understand technology I have to be like my siblings teacher and balancing both my education and my siblings is very difficult. I feel very stressed out because its too much to handle all at once."

WHAT HAS BEEN MOST SUPPORTIVE DURING THIS TIME?

1. "During this time whats helped me the most is my family friends and my music. It might be weird but my music gives me a feeling that everything okay and i'm safe."
2. "My teacher who checks on our mental health often. My therapist as well and my friends checking up on each other"
3. "The thought that we might go back to school eventually"
4. "The thought that medical experts are fighting for the slightest hope these days, music constantly comforts me and my hobby allows me to express myself however I want to."
5. "My teachers who check in and don't assign a crazy amount of work."
6. "A few teachers understand everyone is having trouble, so they've been effectively communicating with us and listening to our input. It's so nice to know that some teachers care about our mental health during this time."

7. "Free meals"
8. "Most helpful has been technology. Helps stay connected with others and provides access to workout videos, music, tutorials, etc to keep busy."
9. "Im a peer counselor in school and the teacher usually gives us podcast and breathing exercises and that helps me"
10. "Staying in touch with my therapist"

WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR BIGGEST CHALLENGE DURING THIS TIME?

THEMES: Lack of motivation, not being able to see their friends, being stuck at home, keeping up with school work.

1. "the feeling of wanting to go outside and go places. But have the realization that I can't"
2. "Staying focused with school work and not just giving up"
3. "Getting my work done on time because the signal gives out, or the wifi doesn't have a strong connection, and I live with a lot of family so it's very hard to concentrate."
4. "I think my biggest challenge has been my mental health. I personally don't have the best mental health but going to physical school pushed me to care about my appearance but now that school's online its made me not care so much about my appearance and slowly fall back into that depressive state."
5. "Keeping up with school work while trying to maintain healthy and happy. Before this pandemic I was finally getting over feeling depressed and now its coming back and it's hitting really hard."
6. "Coping with stress and my mental health"
7. Staying sane- I didn't realize how much I value human interaction until now. I know boredom is the least of our worries, but at some points it becomes unbearable.
8. "Staying mentally stable"
9. "It's difficult for me to keep up with online assignments at home. Having a routine at school was really healthy for me (mentally and physically). Now that we have to stay at home, I'm still having trouble finding a good routine for myself so I can take care of myself and still do my schoolwork."
10. "not having motivation or any energy"

WHAT SHOULD YOUR SCHOOL DO TO PROVIDE MORE SUPPORT RIGHT NOW?

THEMES: Less work/homework, offer more opportunities for youth to get mental health supports online.

NOTE: MORE OF THIS TO COME IN FULL REPORT BY YOUTH LIBERTY SQUAD

1. "Give a bit less work, because even though I try my best to finish the work it piles up and it gets stressful."
2. "Surveys like this or on different topics to stay connected with school and keeping our minds on something different."
3. "I like online classes because it allows me to see and talk to my teachers, especially when they're a teacher I like and the class is fun, but I feel that the schedule for them is poorly thought through because a lot of my classes happen at the same time and I feel like I miss out on instructions."
4. "Less homework, I do it for about 11 hours a day."
5. "Assign less work, as many students dont have the drive, mental health, resources, or material to do it."
6. "this might sound biased but the amount of work teachers are assigning is completely absurd. my mental health has taken a complete nosedive (and so has the mental health of my friends) because of the mountain of work we are getting. at this point, many of us dont do it because we have completely given up."

7. "Webinars that get students together and simply talk things out as a way to comfort or try to make an arts and craft activity."
8. "I would like it if the school communicated more on how to stay healthy (mentally and physically), and what grading will look like for the rest of the school year."
9. "be more understanding of the pandemic and how it is affecting our mental health rather than working us like robots"
10. "Therapist contacts."
11. "I think they should make counselling sessions on something like zoom for those who need it. "
12. "I think besides having the counselors there should be therapists that can be available to us"
13. "I think that teachers shouldn't be giving so much work because all it is busy work we're not really learning anything. The school can also let students know that they can get help and there are people they can still talk to, we all our feeling really lonely right now and some may feel that nobody cares about them or wants to talk to them. I know that a lot of students are dealing with depression right now and teenage suicide rates have increased by a lot, showing them that even in this time they are not alone and that they will be able to get through this will help a lot."

WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE CHANGED IN YOUR SCHOOL NEXT YEAR?

THEMES: Increased supports, especially for physical and mental health

1. "A school nurse would be nice."
2. "We need school social workers and more counseling groups. Far too many of our youth need an outlet."
3. "More free dress days and more activities in class or at lunch or school in general. School events for support for people in LGBTQ, or anyone who needs it."
4. "The school is doing everything they can"
5. "I don't know if this is already an option or not, but an inbox where people can write what they need help on (mental health or academic) and receive an answer from the counselors through a letter or another form of response where the student doesn't need to see the counselor face-to-face. I know a lot of people who get nervous around teachers and counselors and that would prefer to vent their problems without having to speak to a counselor or teacher in person."
6. "Nutrition breaks"
7. "I would like to see more resources available for students regarding their mental health. For academics, a peer tutoring program would be helpful. Also, I know many students are going to be very behind, so I'd love to see a course/program dedicated to ensuring those students can not only catch up but also avoid falling even more behind when schools reopen."
8. "Study sessions, similar to the advisory that was during the school day."
9. "better support for people with adhd (less distractions in classrooms, allow people to listen to music/multitask)"
10. "START AT 8:30. The law was already passed why not start now. Kids need more sleep. My second choice would be less homework. We already go to school for over 6 hours I don't need more work to do."
11. "I liked that one advisory during the school day that we had. I tend to be really busy, as I am a student athlete and have responsibilities at home to take care of, so having a regular study hall where I can get homework done or catch up on school work would be really helpful so that my day is less stressful."
12. "Not sure but an aid to students who struggle with mental health disorders. I know i get severe anxiety and i am overwhelmed many days in school. Sometimes i ask my parents to take me home because i can't take it but they don't allow it. I want there to be a place to go when overwhelmed to breathe and take a few minutes before returning to class."
13. "I would like my school to focus more on mental health than completing work."
14. "I think there should be a club or group because there are kids out there who are getting mentally and physically abused. But some of them may not be able to say anything or call someone, they might be

scared to tell someone else. So I think there should be a support group or a place someone can go to, to feel safe and know there are people who care about them and can help them.”

15. “MORE check ins on mental health and state cuz many breakdown and it gets in the way of peoples class work”
16. “I want to see more mental health dedicated events and days. Offering volunteer work and hours will help many students who lack community service hours and couldn't work this year. Many students are going to be very stressed when school starts again. It'll be another sudden adjustment that we all have to adapt to once more, so it will be very difficult.”
17. “The school is doing the best it can it's just more of the students not using the opportunities”
18. “Personally, I would love more college planning, especially one on one because I understand that it is geared towards students who want to attend California schools, and that you say that California requirements are pretty much universal, but for those of us who don't want to go to a California school I am learning about some things I never knew I had to do, and that is a little scary.”

SHARE ANY IDEAS FOR A WEBINAR WE WOULD HOST FOR STUDENTS

THEMES COMPILED BY YLS STUDENT ANTHONY FLORES-ALVAREZ

More to come in full report.

- COVID-19
 - Epidemiology
 - Importance of Social Distancing and wearing protective equipment
 - Stats and info on the impact of COVID
 - On different people
 - students
 - The cause and effect of COVID-19 on different communities
 - Minority communities
 - LGBTQ+ Community
 - How will things be after the pandemic?
 - How are things now?
 - What's the silver lining of what's going on?
- How to ensure one's self-sustainability/care
 - Coping mechanisms
 - Stress and anxiety management
 - Tasks to keep busy
 - Mental health resources and routines that are available to students
 - Small exercises that help one's mental health
 - Cooking
 - Painting
 -
 - Resources specifically for the LGBTQ+ community
 - Motivational talks
 - How to stay motivated?
 - How to deal with isolation?
- How to pursue advocacy right now
 - Reaching out to counselors about school policy changes
 - Ways to help our communities
 - Student rights during the pandemic
 - How to unite different communities?
- Student perspectives of this ongoing pandemic
 - How they're dealing with;
 - School

- College
 - COVID-19
 - Stay-at-home orders
 - Mental Health
- School
 - Tips on maintaining good grades
 - Tips on time-management and fighting procrastination
 - Tips on how to talk to school administration
 - Tips on how to make the best of online learning
 - Choosing a college (Deadline is May 1)
 - Anthony: I say we have a small segment where the seniors help other people that possibly haven't decided yet and are struggling to
 - Small segment specifically for seniors
 - College Admissions Cycle 2020-2021
 - How to keep up with school work?
 - How to make sure students are ready for the next school year?
 - How will the next school year be affected?
 - How to prepare for the next school year?
 - How to pursue social advocacy in college
 - Majors
 - Involvement
- Check-in with students attending
 - Small fun activities that all attendees will enjoy
 - Mental health check-in
 - Space to let attendees speak and/or give input to show the rest of attendees that they're not alone and to give them a platform to fight their loneliness and/or stress
 - Allow a space for LGBTQ+ people to show their pride
 - Some students are in households where they have to suppress who they are

LIST OF SCHOOLS REPRESENTED IN SURVEY DATA

- Animo Pat Brown Charter High School
- Academy for Academic Excellence
- ALL TRIBES CHARTER
- Alliance Collins
- Animo Pat Brown Charter HS
- Ann Sobrato High School
- Artes magnet
- Ashley
- Ayala High School
- Butterfield Charter High School
- California Military Institute
- CCLA Artes
- Cesar Chavez Learning Academy
- CLU
- Coachella Valley High School
- Condor high school
- diego hill central charter
- Downtown Magnets High School
- Flintridge Sacred Heart Academy
- Foshay Learning Center
- Fremont high school
- Gavin Righetti
- Geffen Academy
- Granada Hills Charter HS
- Harbor High
- Hercules High School
- High tech high international
- Hiram W. Johnson High School
- Hoover Middle School
- Hueneme high school
- Indio middle school
- Irvington High School
- John Burroughs High School
- Josue
- Liberty High School
- Liberty Middle School
- LMCHS
- Luther Burbank HS
- Malibu High School
- Manual Arts High School
- Martin A.
- Middle College High School
- Montclair High
- Nogales High school
- Olympian High School
- Redondo Union High School
- Ridgeview
- Rio Linda High School
- Riverside Poly High School
- Roosevelt Elementary
- San Fernando High School
- San Luis Obispo High
- Segerstrom High School
- Sierra High School. Continuation School
- Sierra Pacific High
- SLO High
- Sonoma Valley High School
- SPHS
- St. Mary's College
- The Palmdale aerospace academy
- Ula Simonsen-Webb
- USC High
- Village High School
- Washing Steam Magnet
- Washington Middle

LIST OF DISTRICTS REPRESENTED IN SURVEY DATA

- Burbank Unified
- central coast
- Chaffey Joint Unified High School Dist
- Chino Valley Unified
- Coachella Valley Unified District
- DSUSD
- Fontana
- FUSD
- Gilroy Unified School District
- Green Dot
- Grossmont Union
- Hanford Joint Union
- Irvine Unified School District
- Kings county district
- LAUSD
- Lemoore Union Elementary School District
- Liberty Union High School District
- LUHSD
- Morgan Hill Unified
- Oakland Unified School District
- Ontario
- Oxnard union school district
- Palmdale school district
- Paradise Unified School District
- Paramount USD
- Pasadena Unified School District
- Perris Union High
- Pleasanton Unified School District
- Porterville Unified School District
- PUHSD
- RBUSD
- Riverside Unified School District
- Rowland Unified School District
- Sacramento City Unified
- San Bernardino Unified School District
- San Francisco Unified School District
- San Luis Coastal
- Santa Ana Unified School District
- Santa Cruz County
- Santa Monica Malibu Unified School District (SMMUSD)
- SCUSD
- HJUHS
- SLCSUD
- Sonoma Valley Unified School District
- Sweetwater Union High School District
- Twin Rivers
- Ula Simonsen-Webb
- West Contra Costa
- Whittier union high school district

STUDENT ESSAY #1

Isabella Osgood

Junior at San Luis Obispo High School

The Equation of a High Schooler

Yesterday, I was so bored at home that I cleaned my room. Shocking, I know. Because of the weekslong school closure due to the global pandemic of COVID-19, I have finally resorted to rearranging Ikea furniture and feather dusting for entertainment. But while I was cleaning (and dancing to “Stayin’ Alive” by the Bee Gees- a song that suits the given situation), I made an important discovery in the depths of my closet.

Under a denim jacket I thought I had lost months ago at the beach, I found some yearbooks. As I was flipping through the nostalgic pages of my middle school and elementary school tenures, one of the messages scribbled in the back of my 8th grade yearbook caught my eye. A short, slightly smudged note from Mr.

Benitez-Foster, who was an incredible history teacher, mentor, coach, and friend to me, which reads: “Bella, thank you for being the coolest and happiest person. Have a great summer- Mr. BF”. I was perplexed by the way he described me as the “happiest”. As I skimmed through other sweet messages, I re-experienced who I was as a person three years ago and frankly, it shook me. My classmates and teachers described me as “driven”, “funny”, “outgoing”, “a leader”, with an “energy and attitude [that is] contagious”. Pictures of my younger self sporting colorful, trendy clothing supported the idea that I had once been lively, fearless, and outspoken before I walked the halls of high school. It was hard to believe that over the past three years that felt like a decade, I had gone from a talkative, ever-smiling girl to a stressed, anxious, and introverted woman. *What happened*, I asked myself mentally, *when did I lose this part of myself?*

Now, I only raise my hand to speak in class after planning and editing the exact words I’ll say aloud. I keep a small group friends, avoid socializing and being in the spotlight, and spend my lunches in the back alcove of the library, studying and doing homework. I’ve cried in the bathroom over less-than-great grades countless times and have imagined dropping out of high school dozens more. I am an excellent student, one look at my Powerschool records or my clean notes will tell you that. But behind hours of hard work, there were hundreds more that I spent lying awake in bed, dreading an upcoming exam, anxiously anticipating a grade on an assignment, or stressing about constructive criticism in the margins of an essay returned to me.

My mental health has corroded incredibly since the first day of my freshman year, most likely due to the high standards that my parents and I have, as well as the suffocating competitiveness between me and my classmates. I have struggled with depression, severe anxiety, and extreme stress, and so have a lot of my classmates. And the severity of this problem gets worse with each passing year, shown by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention’s reports that depression and anxiety have been increasing over time, with

“[diagnoses of either anxiety or depression] among children aged 6–17 years increasing from 5.4% in 2003 to

8% in 2007 and to 8.4% in 2011–2012”(“Data and Statistics on Children's Mental Health”). The hard truth is, when you factor in the pressure put on college and job applicants to be well-rounded, relationships that teenagers are exploring with romantic partners and friends and family, and family and personal issues, the equation of a highschooler is simple: school plus stress times expectations equals poor mental health.

Unfortunately, the majority students, regardless of the rigor of their courses or what percentile of intelligence their standardized test scores may reflect them to be, battle mental health issues, but only a small percentage receive professional help. Whether it may be lack of access, lack of parental consent, or even stigma that keep teens from therapy or medication, many teens bottle up their emotions or turn to social media, rebellion, or alcohol and/or drugs to remedy their problems. A 2016 national study reported that “alcohol and drug abuse was highest among adolescents with prior anxiety disorders (17.3% and 20%, respectively) and behavior disorders (15.6% and 24%, respectively)” (Conway, Kevin P, et al). It shows that nearly two-thirds of teen substance abusers struggle with at least one mental health issue. Cases of mental health issues are also more prone

to teens who are minorities: teens of color, those who are part of the LGBTQ+ community, teens who are parents or are providers for their household, for example. The National Alliance on Mental Illnesses website states that “high school students who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual are almost five times as likely to attempt suicide compared to their heterosexual peers” (“LGBTQ.”). “A report from the U.S. Surgeon General found that from 1980 - 1995, the suicide rate among African Americans ages 10 to 14 increased 233 percent, as compared to 120 percent of non-Hispanic whites” says the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health (“Office of Minority Health.”). A study by Jeanette M. Scheid, MD, PhD, published in the *Psychiatric Times* in 2016 states that “42% [of teenagers in foster care] had at least one mental health disorder; of these, nearly one-third had 2 disorders and one-fifth had 3 disorders” (Scheid, Jeanette M.).

And the statistics continue on.

Because of the coronavirus, mental health in students has been a hot topic and the responses to the nationwide shelter in place have been mixed. When I first heard that in-person school was being cancelled indefinitely, I jumped for joy because that meant no more puffy-eyed all-nighters or stress dreams about exams. Next to me, a 12th grade teammate burst into tears. She knew that the closure of schools meant no prom, no graduation, none of the fun senior year traditions that the 2020 class spent over a decade working towards and looking forward to. My fleeting relief was quickly replaced with disappointment, as upcoming SAT, ACT, and AP testing dates that I have spent all year preparing for were cancelled or postponed. The junior class has been uneasy for the past few weeks, as we continue to receive emails from colleges who will be changing their admissions process due to these vague “special circumstances”. The format of AP testing has been completely revised, making it difficult for students and teachers alike to anticipate and prepare for the abridged exams. Some students struggle from being at home with family members all day; they may have parents who are ‘essential workers’, meaning they continue to work despite the threat of a raging virus, which leaves many teens having no choice but to take on the duties of a parent (like one of my underclassmen friends, who spends her day looking after her four younger siblings); other students may be holed up with abusive family members or with family that don’t accept them (for example, one of my friends who identifies as transgender is stuck surrounded by people who use his dead name and don’t accept his transition). Many are too scared to go outside because of the seemingly endless reports of the terrors of COVID-19. One of my close friends has had multiple nervous breakdowns, afraid her grandparents and other family will be inflicted with illness. Another of my acquaintances is struggling to deal with her own father being hospitalized due to coronavirus. A lot of my peers have used our newfound spare time to pick up new hobbies, whether that be baking, sewing, learning to speak another language, or building a climbing wall. A teacher from my school, who recently had a child, is probably a little glad to be able to share so much time with her newborn. The recent protests against quarantine and the president’s tweets have added to the stress of the situation.

Personally, both my mental and physical health has soared due to lack of stress. I’ve been sleeping more than the recommendation of nine hours per night- a big improvement from my average of five or six hours- and got to make cherished memories transforming my garden alongside my mom. Clearly, school closure has been a double-edged sword, and it is unclear whether it is a blessing or a curse.

It’s clear that the majority of my peers long to be back in the classroom with our eccentric, beloved teachers, surrounded by loud, funky friends and classmates, busy with clubs and sports, celebrating school rallies and spirit events, missing even the smallest joys of school- like the infamous chocolate chip cookies sold on campus break and at lunchtime. The consensus seems to be that though we all wish to have things revert to pre-quarantine life as soon as possible, this historic era we are living in will not disappear without making an unforgettable mark in our lives, which means an unforgettable mark in student mental health, whether it be for the better or the worse.

On the last page of my 8th grade yearbook, I saw a message from Mr. Adams, a student teacher from science class who taught me how to beatbox: “Bella, you’re funny and smart. Use these qualities to do great things”. Dilapidated mental health extremely limited my capabilities in years past, changing my entire persona and outlook on life. I went through dark times of self hatred and despair, thinking that I would never be able to achieve my life goals, and thus lost my bubbly, optimistic self. Luckily, I was able to work through my mental health issues thanks to loving friends and positive influences and am continuing to find a balance between taking care of myself and maintaining academic and extracurricular success. Student Mental Health Week will be an impactful way to advocate for mental health awareness and provide resources to those who need it. It is

imperative that students now and in the future are able to talk about mental health openly and have access to the help they want and need. Although I do not yet know how I will change the world, I do know the following; the first step to fixing the world is fixing and loving oneself, and that starts with mental health awareness. As Ariana Huffington, author, businesswoman, and co-founder of *The Huffington Post* rightly puts it, “If you take care of your mind, you take care of the world”.

STUDENT ESSAY #2

Subreen Nahal
Sierra Pacific High School

It's 6:30am and my grandparents are already arguing downstairs. I jump out of bed and start getting ready. I'm already running late. Our school rally is coming up and my mind is buzzing with ideas for posters, games, and spirit oriented games. Being a part of the Associative Student Body and being the Vice President of my school, community involvement and school spirit take up a lot of my time. In other words, I'm a huge nerd. I'm that kid who genuinely smiles at you in the hallways, has a big group of friends, and is close with all her teachers, classmates, and staff. The kid who tries her hardest to make everyone around her feel welcome, and never lets a sigh of attitude or rudeness slip.

Personally, I know that school has always been an escape for me from the daily issues, arguments, and stresses present at home. Being at school with Mr. Jameson the Spanish teacher blasting his music in the hallways in between classes, going to football and basketball games decked out in school spirit, kids complaining about the history test being nothing like what they studied in class, and hearing the daily announcements made on the speakers that nobody could really understand or hear, are all things that made highschool, highschool. The person I am at school feels much more genuine, more whole, you could say, compared to the emotionless face plastered on at home, which is a completely different person. Regardless of what happened at home, I would always be the first person offering you a ride to school when needed, offered to pay for your lunch when you didn't have money, and would facetime you at 11pm to explain the Chemistry topics that made no sense, but were showing up on the test the next day. Notice the past tense added to each of those words, signifying their past tense. All those memories seem blurry, so old, and in the past. This isn't just me, everyone in the world feels this way right now.

All of our brains are clouded with the thoughts of the current national pandemic known as Coronavirus, Covid-19, 2019-nCoV, a destroyer of society as we knew it, call it what you will. Sometimes I wonder what life would have been like if the current issues of the Coronavirus were not present. First off, many lives would have been saved, including my grandmas, who recently passed away from the Coronavirus, along with 10 others, in a nursing home. Now who will my grandpa argue with in the mornings? I think of all the memories I could have made with my classmates, all the late nights I would have stayed up studying for the AP tests the next day, and even how that rally I was so so pumped about, would have turned out. For me personally, it has been really difficult for me to suddenly and unexpectedly have my escape, school, being taken away from me. Coming home one day and receiving an email requesting all students not to return to school the next day because it was cancelled for the rest of the year was utterly shocking, and really hard for me to process. I'd imagine it was just as difficult or even more for some of my other classmates who likewise, could relate to school being an escape for them as well. An escape from the constant drama of: who said what to who, and who lied about what to her, at home.

While reading through the ACR-172 Mental Health Bill, I was mostly pleased but disappointed with one of the facts mentioned. The statement, in particular, that I disagreed with would be “The overuse of social media can result in students feeling disconnected from peers” My school, as well as all the others in our district, all have separate social media accounts for our school campus'. These have served us wonderfully in so many ways. With teachers posting videos encouraging students to remain indoors, students sharing motivational quotes through the schools account, having online rallies, spirit weeks etc., and honoring our seniors and their college acceptances, our school's social media account has massively played an impact in bringing together the community in so many

ways. Especially how it is set up in my hometown, our school's social media involvement allows students to feel connected to one another, and stay in contact so we know we are not alone. So we know that we are all in this together.

In regards to the overall message expressed by the bill, and simply the thought of having a Student Mental Health Awareness week, is very enlightening to me. I believe that it will serve as a healthy reminder to future generations of what is currently going on in the world, and also will be a positive reinforcement that will push schools, for generations onward, to address mental health issues as valid issues, and implement certain mental health services within the school system to help identify and help to solve the concerns/complications students face or get them the help they need to do so. Although I feel that my school has a great system of doing so already, I know there are several schools which lack to provide students the proper help they need. The passing of the ACR-172 bill will ensure that schools all over California will, if not already, get a start on having a better support system for students. In my opinion after much research, and being a high school student myself, I feel that the ACR-172 is a substantial and necessary bill, which will serve as a beginning to an amazing wave of mental health awareness reforms for children, teens and students of all kinds, in the future.

Ultimately, not all mental health is the same. Although school has, and always will be, a comfort zone for me, for some people it may not be. However, it is without hesitation that I believe the passing of this largely substantial and impactful bill will most definitely bring more light to the topic of mental health for students, and would serve as a start of a possibly endless path of bettering the schooling system to the best of our ability.

“What mental health needs is more sunlight, more candor, and more unashamed conversation.” -

Glen Close

LETTER SUBMITTED TO GOVERNOR NEWSOM AND STATE SUPERINTENDENT THURMOND

May 8, 2020



The Honorable Gavin Newsom
Governor, State of California
State Capitol
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Tony Thurmond
State Superintendent of Public Instruction
1430 N Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Dr. Nadine Burke Harris
California Surgeon General
California Health and Human Services
1600 Ninth Street, Room 460
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dr. Linda Darling-Hammond
State Board President
California State Board of Education
1430 N Street, Room 5111
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Governor Newsom, Superintendent Thurmond, Dr. Harris, and Dr. Darling-Hammond,

We applaud your leadership during COVID-19 and all that you do for us fellow Californians. We understand you are receiving these letters daily and that you too could be experiencing struggles with your mental well-being. We therefore took the liberty to include some emojis to brighten your day. 😊

We are the Youth Liberty Squad, a group of High School aged youth founded by the ACLU of Southern California. We are taking part in California's first "Student Mental Health Week" (SMHW) with thousands of students and educators. We are working with the California Association of School Counselors to make this happen. This is long overdue, yet it comes at a most critical time. In anticipation of this day, we mobilized over 640 students to complete a survey to share the impact of COVID-19 on our mental wellbeing. The survey reached students across 60 schools and 40 districts and is one of the most significant projects to check-in on how students are feeling conducted by any organization in California. We reached back out to students and have the sign-on support of our peers at over 100 schools for this letter (see attachment). We also have the support of 33 organizations. We are reaching out to you because you are the leaders who have the most influence on the educational policy impacting us six million public school students, and we hope and expect a response.

This crisis is [impacting us students](#) in unprecedented ways. Health disparities are being magnified by the crisis and our leaders must take a proactive role to support the most vulnerable youth. Students of color make up nearly 80% of California's students. The Youth Liberty Squad is made up entirely of students of color, and we also have intersectional identities that make us especially vulnerable (LGBTQ, undocumented, etc.). Mental health support was already very inadequate before the crisis. California is 48th in the nation when it comes to access to school counselors. There are nearly [400,000 California students](#) in schools that lack a counselor but have a police officer. It is shameful that our state has twice as many school police than school social workers. In addition, there are more security guards in schools than there are nurses. All of this is unacceptable for a post-crisis world. Although COVID19 symptoms are physical, Americans are actually [more worried](#) about their mental health than physical health. Polls show at least [half](#) of citizens may be suffering from mental health issues during this crisis.

Our survey indicates that students feel stressed, depressed, stuck, and a variety of unpleasant emotions. We asked students to describe how they have felt in one word. This word cloud is a visual representation of the results.



The most common words selected by students (boring, lonely, overwhelming, anxious, sad, etc.) are also associated with increased risks of suicide. One senior at a high school in Northern California shared,

"It feels as if everything meaningful was taken away from my peers and I. Years of hard work led to this moment- celebrating and graduating. No longer possible, this leaves my hopes for recognition to a blur. My father is a grocery store employee, and before this he wasn't considered essential. As people rush to stock up, my dad is forced to work restlessly every day, exposing himself to the very nature of things we're supposed to stay away from. My mother doesn't work- she is not legally able to. I lost my job as well, at our local shopping mall. I don't know how I'll save up for college without a job"

Another student in Southern California shared,

"Many companies have had to let off workers and such, and my family has been affected by this issue. This is going to cause us to move out of the city during summer. I have a background of moving a lot, but I didn't expect to have to move again during my high school career"

Similarly, a student mentioned,

"I am an extrovert who depends on school and friends as my only support system, since my home is not an ideal environment. Basically all of my coping skills have been taken from me due to this quarantine and I have become extremely mentally ill due to this situation"

Additional student responses have been compiled [here](#) along with a summary highlighting how half of California's students may be in need of mental health support. At least 22% percent of students in our survey identified as LGBTQ, and they report struggling in homes where they are not fully able to express themselves. According to a CDC [study](#), 29% of LGBTQ youth surveyed attempted suicide in the previous year. California also has nearly 200,000 students experiencing homelessness who have lost a critical sanctuary on school campuses. Naturally, during such an overwhelming time it is dire for all students, especially those at such high risk, to have access to mental health resources. Many students also voiced distress caused by their schools' efforts to provide distance learning. According to responses, teachers have given students more work in the hopes of making up for the lost time, however this is proving to be detrimental to the mental stability of our students. We understand the panic associated with scrambling to address learning loss and college preparation, but students have expressed that they feel like they have to worry about their schoolwork more than their family during the pandemic. Even college students are dropping classes at record rates, so imagine the impact on K-12 students.

Despite the struggle experienced by students, there is hope and hundreds of students shared what has been most supportive in this time and they responded....

- Protect and support investments to ensure school environments are ready to support and prioritize children’s physical, mental, social, and emotional well-being.
- Send a directive to school districts to revisit the intensity of their distance learning programs and to allow for more individualized flexibility.
- Issue guidance to school districts to protect the rights of students with disabilities.
- Support holistic education and wellness by funding the arts. In our survey, students reported music, dance, and media as three of the most supportive and healing activities during the pandemic. Arts education is also a civil right and is another area where [California is significantly behind](#) the rest of the country.
- Support students and families (regardless of immigration status) experiencing issues with food security, housing, and healthcare that have long existed. Support and encourage districts to do the same.
- Support emergency funding to ensure that school environments are trauma-informed and responsive to the mental health needs of students.
- Declare your support for the Schools and Communities First ballot initiative and tax reform to remove California from the lower end of per-pupil funding.
- Support the release of as many incarcerated youth as possible. We are all on lockdown. Cages do not work.
- “Funds to provide training to teachers and school staff on recognizing and responding to trauma, to implement evidence-based practices for creating trauma-informed school environments and building wellness and resilience, or to support access to mental health screenings and connections /referrals for individualized mental health services while students navigate transitions back to school.” ([NCYL](#)).
- Support prevention and early intervention in schools. Support trauma screenings and trauma-informed care.
- Additional recommendations from our survey results are attached in the responses we received from 640+ students. We have also included student essays, poetry, and art from our “School-Based Mental Health is a Civil Right” contest.

Given the many ways in which this pandemic has added stress and anxiety to our lives, students have increased mental health needs that are currently not being met. We understand that cuts are inevitable because of the economic impact but we are the economic future of the state and our wellbeing cannot be diminished if we want California to have a prosperous future. The mental health of students cannot be left out of any plan for California’s post-pandemic future. Our supplemental document also includes powerful student essays from our “School-Based Mental Health is a Civil Right” contest that further highlight our struggles. Schools are community lifelines and provide a safe environment and other supports for students. We acknowledge that despite the many limitations that these institutions currently face they have continued to provide many of these resources. For that, we would like to thank officials for allowing them to continue to serve the community and supporting them. We look forward to hearing back directly from you and wish you and your families the best. 😊

Youth Liberty Squad of ACLU SoCal
Undersigned Organizations, Students, and Educators

CC: First Partner, Jennifer Siebel Newsom
Senator Connie Leyva, Chair, Senate Committee on Education
Assembly member Patrick O’Donnell, Chair, Assembly Committee on Education
Karen Stapf Walters, Executive Director, State Board of Education

LIST OF YOUTH LIBERY SQUAD MEMBERS

STUDENT NAME	SCHOOL
• Valeria Gonzalez	Alliance Collins Family College Ready High School
• Catherine Estrada	Alliance Collins Family College Ready Highschool
• Emily Chamale	Animo Pat Brown Charter High School
• Ashley Ruano	Apex Academy
• Jessica Sumuano	ArTES Magnet CCLA
• Dulce Torres	Centennial High School
• Jackie Valdez	Cesar E. Chavez Learning Academies
• Geena Morgan Welcome	Foshay Learning Center
• Zuly Hernandez	Foshay Learning Center
• Gino Meza	Foshay Learning Center
• Zaid Diaz-Arias	Granada Hills Charter High School
• Anthony Flores-Alvarez	Manual Arts High School
• Marley Saldivar-Lozano	Reseda Charter High School
• Viviana Cervantes	San Fernando High School
• Jose Sanchez	School of Social Justice at Linda Marquez High school
• Alyssa Arellano	South Gate High School
• Grecia Lara	South Gate High School
• Jennifer Meneses	USC Hybrid High College Prep
• Nadera Powell	Venice High School
• Ryan Pongo	Culver Park High Alum

LIST OF ORGANIZATIONAL SIGNATORIES

- Arts for Incarcerated Youth Network
- California Association of School Counselors
- California Association of School Psychologists
- California Association of School Social Workers
- California Association of Student Councils
- California School Nurses Organization
- Center for Juvenile Law and Policy
- Children Now
- Children's Defense Fund-CA
- Coleman Advocates for Children & Youth
- Collegenash! - Comcast UN Media Subsidiary
- Community Coalition
- Dolores Huerta Foundation
- East Bay Community Law Center
- Fathers & Families of San Joaquin
- Fresno Barrios Unidos
- GENup
- John Burton Advocates for Youth
- Latino Coalition for a Healthy California
- Lawyers's Committee for Civil Rights of the San Francisco Bay Area
- Legal Services for Children
- Mid-City CAN (Community Advocacy Network)
- National Association of Social Workers, California Chapter
- National Center for Youth Law
- Public Advocates
- Rainbow Pride Youth Alliance
- Resilience OC
- SBX Youth and Family Services
- The Unity Council
- West Valley Resistance
- Youth Forward
- Youth Justice Education Clinic, Center for Juvenile Law and Policy, Loyola Law School