

5-2022

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**You Matter: Finding School Based Support For Children Dealing With Mental Health
Challenges**

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LS 400: Senior Capstone

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May 20, 2022

Abstract

This study sheds light on the importance of providing easily accessible mental health support to all students. Advocating for mental health is important as the number of students who are suffering from mental health challenges increases. It is argued that many students are currently suffering from depression and anxiety and unfortunately schools are not doing a satisfactory job of providing support. After conducting research through the use of a survey and interviewing a school social worker three different action options were thoroughly discussed to find school based support for children dealing with mental health challenges. Providing a permanent specialist and implementing a wellness center within the school, it is argued to be the most effective way to achieve the goals of providing school support for children who are dealing with mental health issues.

Setting the Stage

I was about eleven when I began noticing myself falling into a deep state of depression. The days were long, and I soon lost any desire to do what made me happy. Of course, I was not always like this, but it soon took over. There were days when I would dread the thought of getting out of bed because, at that moment, sleep was all that made me forget. Since a young age, I have seen and gone through things I would never wish on my enemy. Head filled with these negative thoughts that never seemed to disappear, I was lost and alone. How was I supposed to work through these issues that I barely grasped? I was so young and afraid of what my parents might say or what my teachers would think. I never felt like there was a space for me to articulate the pain that had filled my heart. As the years went by, I got better, so I thought.

My whole experience in high school was a blur. I was not in a good place mentally, afraid to speak up on how I was feeling, fearing that no one would care, let alone do anything to help. I was a good student. I did my work and got good grades, but I stopped caring. I was so lost, and I remember bits and pieces of me just crying myself to sleep praying things would get easier and that my thoughts would leave me be. I would hear a female voice yelling at me, reminding me of the failure I am, that I am not loved, but this entire time it was me. It was my voice filling my head with these thoughts. I was the one feeding into the hurt, ravenous for the mistreatment because I "deserved" it. I would sit there and have no hope for what was to come. It was already bad enough that I was always so anxious it just added to my stress.

I grew up in a Hispanic family who never took mental health seriously. So how could I open up when my parents would tell me I was too young to feel that way? I did not have an outlet, and I had no idea where or who to turn to. I never wanted to burden my friends, so I kept

everything inside. I had no choice but to bottle up my emotions. Though the bottle would soon turn into jugs and gallons as I kept everything to myself. Eventually, I would explode and lash out at the ones I loved.

I was not myself anymore; I barely recognized myself. I had no motivation, and the sparkle in my eyes disappeared. A walking corpse who seemed to go unnoticed by everyone in her life. Perhaps I just got good at pretending to be okay and putting on a smile. As much as I needed help, I preferred helping others over myself. I never got the help I needed in my K-12 education, but God knows I needed it. My school did not have any resources for us. When I briefly mentioned to my counselor what I was feeling, he completely ignored my cries for help. The one time I grew enough courage to speak up, I was ignored and treated as if my feelings were nothing.

My mental health was getting out of hand, and I felt like I had no control over my life. During this time around my junior year of high school, something had happened that I am not entirely comfortable saying. Still, it was terrible, and I felt incredibly disgusting. I never thought someone who claimed to love me would hurt me the way they did. The depression got worse after that night. I remember being home alone sobbing because, in some sick way, it was my fault that it had happened; if I just did not go out or if I had worn something else, maybe then I would have been okay. These thoughts consumed me, and they would not stop. Everything got worse, and these thoughts soon turned into me wishing that I would depart from the earth and maybe then I'd be at peace.

Eventually, those thoughts would manifest, and I soon found myself with a knife ready to commit the unforgivable. I remember writing the note and just wanting everything to be over in a split second, but something in me stopped me. The fear of ending my own life was a strong

enough willpower to put me at a halt. The year 2016 would have been my last. Now that I am in my final year of college, I finally got the help I needed and was adequately diagnosed with depression and anxiety.

As someone who has dealt with mental health issues, I understand how it feels to be alone and not have the resources set in place to help. To be surrounded by those you can not turn to. Schools are supposed to be a safe haven for children. They should be comfortable enough to speak their feelings. My experience is also why schools need to hire professionals who can talk and provide adequate help for students suffering from mental health issues. So I am advocating for schools to bring awareness of mental health in our youth. It will inform the students, but it is also a great way to stop them from falling into a darker place, eventually saving their life.

Literature Synthesis & Integration

Mental health illnesses in middle school students have increased at an alarming rate. There continues to be a stigma that surrounds mental health and students are not getting the proper support. Several teachers are not properly trained to assist students facing mental health issues. Therefore it is vital that the topic is addressed, in order to find school based support ultimately helping students manage their mental health before it is too late.

What is the Problem?

Approximately one in five children are diagnosed with mental health problems in the United States, and "over 60% of youth with major depression do not receive any mental health treatment" despite living in areas with greater access to resources (MHA, 2018). However, children living in low poverty areas are at a disadvantage due to limited resources and the lack of

availability of qualified mental health professionals. Often schools within rural areas do not have the funds to adequately support their students, leaving them to deal with things independently. According to Howell and Mcfeters (2008), "research has shown that poverty, particularly persistent poverty, is associated with poorer mental health status in children" (2008). Another researcher found that African American and Latino children were more likely to develop mental health issues due to their socioeconomic status and upbringing (Alicia , 2011). However, despite their race, gender, and age, anyone is susceptible to developing mental health issues. Children ranging from eleven to thirteen are at a greater risk of developing a form of mental health problems as they weave their way into school as schools heavily influence the way they feel, think and act (CDC, 2018). Middle school is a "crucial period for developing social and emotional habits important for mental well-being" (World Health, 2003). So it is essential to have a supportive school environment as well as have proper resources available (World Health, 2003).

According to research, mental health illnesses have risen at an alarming rate within the youth population, "Globally, one in seven 10-19-year olds experiences a mental disorder." (World Health, 2003). Moreover, multiple factors contribute to the recent rise in youth mental health challenges, such as exposure to stress, school or home-related, socioeconomic status, the need to fit in with others, and the exploration of one's identity. When the issue is ignored, and the students are not getting the proper support, their mental health declines, resulting in poor academic performance, impaired judgment, a constant feeling of hopelessness, irritability, fatigue, and even thoughts of suicide (NAMI, 2022). However, these are just a few of the multiple signs associated with mental health.

Schools continue to sit back as these children suffer without getting the proper resources to help them fight the urges to end it all, to find that motivation that the school often confuses for laziness. The issue is that middle school students are developing mental health issues at a rapid rate but schools are not doing an adequate job of providing support and if there is no support their mental health will decline.

Why is it an Issue?

Mental illnesses are severe conditions that can affect mood, behavior, and thinking. "1 in 10 young people have a mental health challenge," in most cases, these children experiencing some form of mental health disorder have it severe enough to affect how they perform in school and at home (Kessler, 2005). According to studies, only a tiny portion of students are likely to seek help; as many as 80% do not receive the mental health support they need (Kataoka, 2002). Studies suggest that students choose not to seek help because no available resources are implemented in their schools (citations needed for studies you are referring to). Moreover, the children also have difficulty seeking help because of the stigma that surrounds mental health (Navhope).

There is a negative image when talking about mental health, and often students facing these challenges do it alone because they fear that they may be seen as weak. According to the AIMS (2022) organization, over 17 million children have a mental disorder, and several students go years without help. Mental health issues, when left unattended, can result in truancy, lack of motivation, irritability, and much more. According to NAMI, "untreated or inadequately treated mental illness can lead to high rates of school dropout, substance use, and early death," the issue will continue if nothing is changed. Moreover, NAMI also states:

Undiagnosed, untreated, or inadequately treated mental illnesses can significantly interfere with a student's ability to learn, grow and develop. Since children spend much of their productive time in educational settings, schools offer a unique opportunity for early identification, prevention, and interventions that serve students where they already are. However, the youth are still not receiving adequate support as teachers are not trained to see the warning signs of mental health. Moreover, teachers are not given adequate training to help students or to make correlations between the students' lack of performance and their mental health. This can become a significant problem because students suffering are being punished instead of being directed toward a mental health professional who can help break down why the student's behavior has changed. Teachers often feel as if they are not qualified to be of assistance to students facing mental health challenges. According to the Mental Health Foundation, a survey discovered that teachers had made "no links between issues such as poor accommodations, isolation, and financial problems and students Mental Health and did not see it as their role to solve these problems" In addition, some teachers refused to believe that it was anything more than a child being "lazy" or stressed (MHA, 2018). Not to mention how schools do not require that their teachers attend training that will help them understand the challenges and correlations to mental health. Teachers spend a majority of their day with their students so it would make sense that they are better equipped to help support their students.

What Should Be Done?

There are several approaches that can be taken, in order to support middle school students facing mental health challenges. Teachers, principals, as well as other staff may be the first to witness if a child is going through something. So it is important that they are given proper training to help them recognize the early warning signs. Early prevention is crucial as it will help

to avoid a worsen mental state. The more awareness that is brought to mental health will help to destigmatize the negative connotations that come with speaking up about facing mental health challenges. According to ACMH (2003) the type of interventions that “ are chosen need to be based on the individual needs of each child and be able to flex in order to provide more or less support as needed” but meeting mental health needs require better resources and training for educators.

Since middle school students are at that age where they are beginning to understand and figure out what they like and do not, it can be pretty challenging and stressful as they may outgrow friends. Other factors such as school work and peer pressure may be reasons as to why children are developing mental health challenges. Therefore, schools must advocate for support from the community to help assist the students and get better training to prepare educators and other staff members. In doing so will help students with mental health challenges and prevent them from further walking down a path of pain.

Conclusion

Overall, mental health is a major topic of concern in the youth community. Advocating for mental health is essential in helping support the students facing mental health challenges. Not only does it affect their psychological well-being but it also affects their performance in school resulting in a drop in attendance and bad grades. In order to help the students, mental health needs to be openly talked about, and resources need to be implemented in schools.

Method

For this Capstone Project, researchers investigated how mental health challenges in youth have risen at an alarming rate and what to do about this trend. Based on an analysis of data and

literature reviews, the researchers used their knowledge to prepare an action plan to inform parents, students, community partners, and staff about the types of resources, if any, that are being provided for their students. Ultimately, this is important because mental health plays a more significant role in today's society, and it is often a struggle for most students to seek support.

Context

The Monterey Peninsula Unified School District is located on the Central Coast of California in Monterey. The district was established in 1961 in Monterey Bay. This district stretches along many cities that lie within Monterey county such as Marina, Del Rey Oaks, Monterey, Sand City, and even Seaside. This district consists of many schools that lie within these cities along with implementing the teaching method of being a Traditional School which also means this is why they are considered as Public Schools. This district is considered community-oriented because of how well known this district is. The district's ultimate vision is to “envision a school system that serves all students well, and engages each student in deep learning that prepares them to solve the challenges of the 21st century.”

Participants and Participant Selection

Based on our research, we chose this district due to the location and ability of communication. This seemed most convenient to us because of the fact that this district was easily accessible to us as well as being easily reachable. Unfortunately, we reached a time in our project where the interview process had gone wrong so we took matters into our own hands and still strived to hear the many voices that we were eager to hear from. This stemmed from attending a meeting that taught us more about AIMS as well as going through the length of speaking to a school social

worker. After conducting those steps of research, we then sent out a survey to 18 students which then was completed over zoom. After conducting the interview process, we then gathered all the data and concluded our research.

Researcher

This topic is meaningful to us because we know from personal experience how difficult it is to deal with mental health problems and not have a safe place to share your discomforts. We know all the hardships that come along with mental health challenges and how it may be hard to go through the day when a voice whispers in your ear that you are not good enough. We believe that we are qualified to carry out this project because we know what is to come when there is no support. Therefore, finding school-based support for children dealing with mental health challenges is vital for students to thrive in school. We remembered to stay mindful of what we were asking to not accidentally trigger the interviewee. We also made sure to be conscious of any biases.

Semi-Structured Interview and Survey Questions

1. What is your gender identity?
2. What racial/ethnic group do you belong to?
3. From a scale from one to five how would you rate your awareness of mental health? One being not aware and five being aware.
4. What does mental health mean to you?
5. Is there an increased need for mental health services within the youth community?
6. Do you think you are being supported by your school when it comes to mental health?
7. How comfortable are you with having conversations about mental health?

8. If you were going through a challenging time, where would you go for support?
9. Do you think your school would benefit from an on campus wellness center (that supports mental health, education/career and offers family support services)?
10. If a wellness center is implemented, how likely are youth to utilize the space and services?
11. What benefits come from wellness centers ?
12. Since opening your doors in 2019 has there been an increase in students coming forth who need support?
13. What services are offered at the wellness center?

Procedure

Participants were given a survey that consisted of 9 questions regarding mental health. The surveys were sent out April 27, 2022 and were taken by 18 students. Participants were also interviewed. All interviews were done individually. When it was not possible to interview the two participants in person, they were invited to complete a zoom interview. A semi- structured interview was used for the zoom interviews, to allow for follow-up questions to unclear, interesting or unexpected responses. All interviews were scheduled at the convenience of the interviewee and took approximately 15 minutes to complete. The survey was closed May 1st, 2022 and the data was gathered.

Data Analysis

Transcribed interviews were coded and analyzed for emergent themes.

Results

For this Capstone Project, middle school students were given a survey to see what they think could be done to improve the resources that are provided to them regarding their mental

health. We also interviewed a school social worker, Intervention Specialist, and a counselor to help find school-based support. This is important because many students are faced with mental health challenges and are not supported by their schools. Based on an analysis of the data and the relevant research literature three themes emerged (see Table 1). Evidence-based decision-making required evaluating each potential Action Option by the following criteria: Effectiveness; Accessibility; and Cost. By implementing all three evaluation items, schools would get a better understanding of what types of resources they could potentially offer to their students based on their mental health needs. Based on the evaluation of each Action Option an action will be recommended and justified.

Table 1

Evaluation of Action Options

	Effectiveness	Accessibility	Cost
Wellness center	High	High	High
Train staff members	Moderate	High	Low
Hire a mental health professional	High	Moderate	High

Wellness Center/Action Option 1

The Salinas unified school district will be the pioneers of implementing Wellness Centers within the school setting in the Monterey peninsula school district. Wellness centers are fairly new and Harden middle school is in its third year. The Harden middle school has a wellness team that consists of thirteen professionals, including two community health and human services interns, four counselors, an intervention specialist, one social worker, a school psychologist, a behavioral health therapist, and other working members to help support students from various issues that may be harming their mental health.

According to Carolyn Jones schools in Sacramento county and Fresno county have implemented school based wellness centers and now the Fresno county's Office of Education has clinicians in 107 schools and eventually plan to have clinicians in all 300 of their schools. San Francisco Unified is another district that has opened wellness centers and currently operates at 19 different schools helping over 16,000 students (sf wellness). According to the San Francisco Wellness Center the center's goal is to "assist with connecting with all students, with focus on the most vulnerable students and families to assess basic needs," as well as "connecting with existing Wellness clients, especially students who were in crisis to help them manage their stress, depression, family, chronic health issues, etc."(SF wellness).The wellness centers are there to increase the overall well-being of their students.

Another school that is doing an effective job of supporting their students is a high school in Palo Alto, California. In 2016 the wellness center located at the Palo Alto school had been visited about 2,500 times less than three months into the school year (Kadvany). Wellness centers were developed to meet the needs of the students and are meant to be a safe space for all students to come to whenever they need help;ranging from a variety of things such as taking a break, needing guidance or simply to eat a snack. According to Kadvany (2016) , 29% of

students came in for social or emotional issues regarding home and social life and 62% of students sought help due to mental disorders such as depression, anxiety, and other disorders causing a strain on their mental well being (Kadvany 2016). The wellness center located at Harden Middle School in Salinas, California also shares its successes, as it is improving the attendance rate and behavioral issues. The Wellness Center not only is accessible to students in person but can also be accessed through virtual means of communication. Virtual calming rooms are offered and students have access to twelve different rooms that they can access at any time (HMS). Wellness Centers are a perfect way for students to reach out and connect with specialists who are focused on giving school-based support.

This action option is highly effective, as it will allow students to go to a space that fully supports their needs and mental well-being. The accessibility will also be high since the Wellness Center will be on-site and students would be able to easily walk over. School districts would hire more counselors, social workers, and psychologists to support their student needs, but cost can be of concern because of funding. However, the cost would be low as nonprofits and other agencies would pay for a majority of the services. A con of this action option is that parents may be against their students going to get help due to the stigma that surrounds mental health.

Trained Staff Members /Action Option 2

Oftentimes it is commonly questioned on why students do not speak up about their mental health or why they seem to shut down when the topic is brought up. The second action option is that staff members should receive Mental Health Awareness training. They can attend workshops hosted by the school district that teaches staff the basic understanding of what mental health challenges are, how to understand the signs, and how to help resolve or attempt to resolve the signs. They could potentially host this training weeks prior to when school starts, so that way

they are capable of refreshing their understanding or even getting started with completing their required training. By having staff members trained in this specific field, it could provide great assistance to students who are constantly looking out for help but are afraid of reaching out because they fear that they have no reliable resource in tact. When reflecting on the effectiveness of this action option it is moderate because even though students do find comfort in speaking to some teachers, the student still may not even speak up about what they are going through.

Accessibility is no problem since the resources that the students would need are staff members. The survey data indicate that r students find comfort in reaching out to their teachers for these specific types of conversation. I do find that being there as some type of guidance is what most teachers sign up for because students oftentimes look up to their teachers most.†The pros and cons of this option, there may be trouble if the staff member is not capable of helping the student who reached out or being able to keep composure when faced with their students mental well-being

Assigning Mental Health Professionals /Action Option 3

On-site mental health professionals are essential to creating and sustaining safe spaces for students. They are educated and trained to provide adequate resources and help students dealing with mental health challenges. Having a school-based mental health professional can help destigmatize the topic and make it safer for students to reach out. Moreover, it is effective in having a professional at school as it will be easily accessible for students who do not have the resources outside of school to speak to someone. Although there are already school counselors working in schools, hiring a therapist or a psychologist would benefit the students, as well as easing up on the caseloads that each counselor has.

This action is highly effective, as on-site mental health professionals are specifically tasked with helping students with mental health challenges and disorders. With the implementation of specialized mental health workers, students will benefit greatly. The accessibility may be moderate because it may not be easy to have a mental health professional at every school in the Monterey Peninsula due to the cost being high.

Recommendation

After thorough consideration of all three options, we recommend that schools implement wellness centers on campus as well as hire mental health professionals to help better assist their students' needs. Based on the data collected, there is confidence that these are the best solutions to help students better understand and cope with their mental health challenges. In the next sections concessions, limitations, and even potential negative outcomes will be addressed.

Concessions

Though the two options of implementing a wellness center as well as hiring mental health professionals, the other option of training staff members should still be considered as it does itself have its own potential strengths if implemented. For example, this action option allows for more awareness of mental health challenges to take place as well as the school community representing that they care about their students because this option allows staff members to understand mental health challenges as well as being capable of pointing out the symptoms and knowing exactly how to help or provide guidance for their students. When having teachers train in this situation is that the classroom environment would change in a positive way rather than negatively (For Educators). By bringing more awareness as well as involving staff members more when it comes to this topic allows for more students to feel as if a safe space for them is

implemented daily. If there is no significant change that takes place, this problem of mental health challenges within youth would still be present and still be considered a problem in today's society. Unlike the other two action options, the cost of this action option would be considered to be the cheapest option since it would only require the staff members to gain training from a certified individual who best represents this case on campus and can do so by teaching and providing the training that staff members need. Ultimately, it does not go unnoticed that though this is something we did not recommend, this is still something that we believe contains its own strengths.

Limitations

Although we chose the action options of implementing a wellness center and hiring a mental health professional to be on-site, there are still limitations that arise. For example, the focus of these action options are so that students have reliable and easily accessible resources to better help them understand and speak about the challenges that they are facing. It is quite unfortunate, but we are not guaranteeing that every student will be using the wellness center or even attempting to reach out to the mental health professionals. This ultimately means that even though the resources are there and they are professionally reliable, it does not mean that every student will consider using the resources that are being provided for them.

Potential negative outcomes

For both action options, there may be potential negative outcomes that should be considered. For instance, by hiring a mental health professional, the students may feel pressured or even intimidated because of this person's title. Along with that, students may feel discouraged or even embarrassed at even showing their face in the wellness center because they may fear potentially seeing their friends there. Moreover, the stigma that surrounds mental health may

make it more difficult for students to reach out and utilize the resources because of the negative connotation it has. There may also be a possibility that the wellness center and mental health professionals be let go due to the lack of students who are using their resources or if there is a cut in the program.

Conclusion

Despite all of the limitations and potential negative outcomes, we still recommend implementing a wellness center, as well as hiring a mental health professional to help better support students' needs. These two action options contain the strongest reach of all three options due to the credibility of these resources being provided as well as how reliable these resources would be. Once students are comfortable with speaking up about their mental health as well as using these resources, they may refer these resources to others. If we want to effectively address the mental health challenges within the youth, then we need to start providing better resources along with listening to our students when needed. It is apparent that these two action options are superior and listed as the top two because these would be the best solutions moving forward.

Action Documentation

Mental health is a major topic of concern in the youth community. Middle school students are at high risk of developing mental health challenges. Often they do not get the support that they need because there are no resources that are accessible to them. Low self esteem, feelings of worthlessness, a loss of passion, and no motivation can lead to a more severe problem if they are continuously ignored. Therefore, finding school based support is essential in helping students get the proper support they need while dealing with mental health challenges. Three action option plans emerged after conducting research on correlating literature and collecting data from surveys and interviews. The survey results as well as the two interviews

with the stakeholders helped us in weighing out our action options. The first option is to implement wellness centers in the schools located in the Monterey Peninsula school district. The second option is to get better training for teachers to better equip them when dealing with students who may be dealing with mental health challenges. The third and final option is to hire a mental health professional that is on-site for the students as a way to better assist the students needs. The recommended action option is a combination of implementing wellness centers on campus as well as hiring mental health professionals to help better assist their students' needs. This action option was chosen based on the data collected from a survey, an interview with a school social worker, and scholarly studies on mental health.

The recommended action was suggested through an email that was written and addressed to the superintendent and assistant superintendent of a California unified school district. The emails explained that after intensive research, analysis of literature and the data collected from the survey and interviews, two action options emerged that state that schools should begin implementing wellness centers and hiring mental health professionals and having them on-site for more accessible support. Additionally the email explained what the issue was, the action options, and explained the importance of the action options.

Lastly, the emails thoroughly explained our Capstone Project and the formulated actions to address the issue at hand. It was explained that our action is only a suggestion and should be shared to others in hope of spreading awareness on mental health challenges in the youth and finding school based support. We did receive a response from the assistant superintendent and he directed us to someone who he believes can help with our action plans. Unfortunately, for the superintendent we have not received a reply regarding our email and recommended action plan.

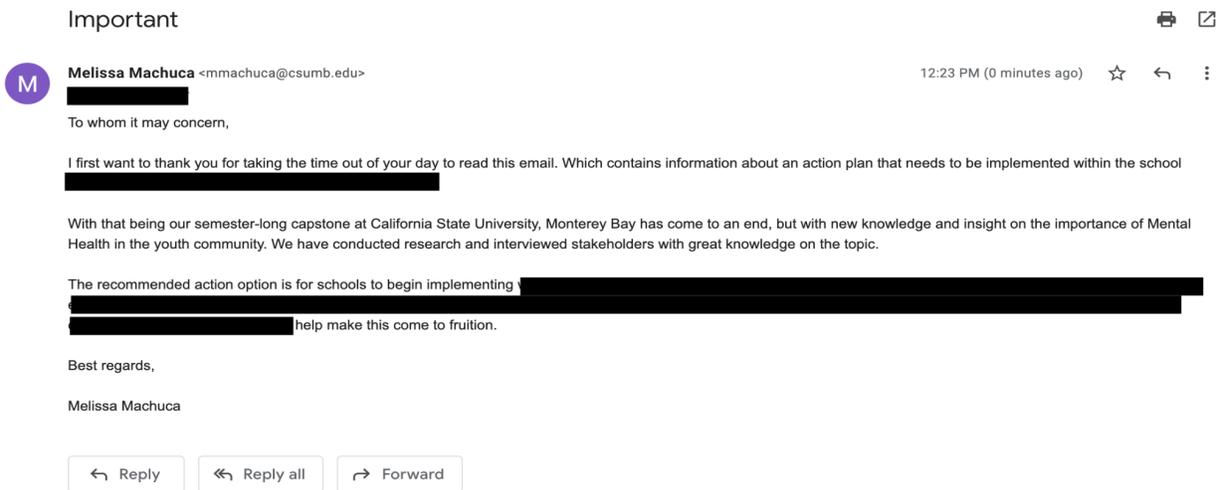


Image 1. A screenshot of an email sent to the assistant superintendent of the school district.



Image 2. A screenshot of an email sent to the superintendent of a California unified school district

After completing our research and collecting data, we were not surprised by how many middle school students felt unsupported by their school when it came to their mental well being. However, we did not expect to have 18 students take our survey; we thought we would only receive 3 to 5 back. So when we checked our data we were shocked by how many students took the time out of their day to take our survey to help us help them. Before we began our Capstone project, we wish we would have known how to manage our time more effectively to allow us to not feel so overwhelmed.

The critical next step after completing our Capstone project is to continue advocating for mental health in the youth and find them school-based support so they can finally begin their journey of healing. It is vital to remain informed about the severity of mental health and the harmful effects when they do not receive the help they need.

Critical Reflection

After completing my Capstone Project, I learned quite a few things about myself that I had not looked at before. It became clear that I needed to manage my time more effectively because I found myself overwhelmed most of the time. At the beginning of my Senior Capstone, I had no idea what to expect. I had several ideas of what I wanted my project to focus on. Yet, I could not find myself sticking to one idea until I remembered how a friend who took the Senior Capstone two years ago told me to write about something I am passionate about. So I did and was determined to focus on mental health in the youth and finding school-based support for the students. This stems from my own personal experiences with struggling with mental health and not having the resources to help me. My experience allowed me to actively engage on the topic and learn more about how middle school students are at a high risk of dealing with mental health

challenges. As a future educator, it is my job to ensure that my students get the right resources to support them in their time of need. Unlike them, I never got the chance to speak out about my depression and anxiety until I was in college. I fear that if we do not find school-based support and bring awareness and advocate for mental health. The consequences may be irreversible.

During the project, I had difficulties with the stakeholders. It was challenging to gather data when the school backed out last minute. I was stressed and worried about what would happen if I could not find stakeholders, but I pulled through and got my data through the use of surveys, an AIMS presentation, and an interview with a school social worker.

Although I was stressed and overwhelmed throughout the entire project, I learned to persevere through the pain and suffering, to be able to advocate for mental health, and help spark a change. They are our future and I will dedicate my career to helping my students as we tackle the issue together. No longer will their mental health be neglected.

Synthesis and Integration

The Liberal Studies MLOs, required coursework, and Capstone Action Research Project at California State University, Monterey Bay have impacted me tremendously and my professional development. Although it was challenging at times, it has been the best two years of my life as a Liberal Studies undergraduate. To begin with MLO 1: Developing Educator, I feel that I have improved my thinking, writing, and critical speaking skills significantly as I completed my Action Research Project. The project gave me the opportunity to connect and speak with students whose mental well being is of utmost importance and gained insight on how they feel schools are supporting them. It also gave me the opportunity to speak with other professionals in the field. I have also gained quite a few skills that will further my growth as an educator who now has a better understanding of the school and the community. Additionally,

with MLO 5: Subject Matter Generalist, I feel that I have demonstrated a greater level of competency in the subject area content and have completed a coherent in depth research project for successful practice in California public education. Allowing me to broaden my knowledge about mental health challenges in the youth community. As I move forward in my career as a future educator, it is necessary for me to continue advocating for mental health in the youth and help bring awareness to better assist my students. I will also use what I have learned as an undergraduate student to provide quality education for my students.

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