

STATE OF STUDENT MENTAL WELLNESSES CALIFORNIA



REPORT 2022



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STUDENT ART: We are grateful to students all over California who shared their art for mental health and social justice. View more at www.theroadtofind.org.

SPECIAL THANKS: To the brave students who shared honest opinions and difficult memories for us to write this report. Gratitude to our Youth Liberty Squad for inspiring and leading this work. Thank you to the counselors and mental health professionals across the state who helped distribute the survey and created a safe space for students to share. Thank you to everyone who reviewed and contributed to this report.

CONTENT DISCLAIMER: This report discusses issues of mental health, suicide, social anxiety, panic attacks, depressive symptoms, body image issues, self-harm, and other issues using the direct language utilized by students in the surveys.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report examines student wellness and access to school-based mental health support throughout multiple years of the pandemic. Student mental health is highly connected to student success and well-being. Findings from the surveys indicate students are experiencing a host of mental health issues, including but not limited to an increase in social anxiety, panic attacks, depressive symptoms, body image issues, self-harm, and suicidal ideation. California students were already among the most underserved in the country in terms of school-based mental health. This underprepared students and the public educational system to respond to the pandemic.

Statewide surveys were administered to students in April 2020 and March 2021. The surveys were completed by over 1,200 California students, from 45 school districts in over 20 counties, and reveal that the emergency has evolved into a crisis during the pandemic. Access to school-based mental health is a civil rights issue for students and parents. All California students at every level deserve mental health professionals who can address students' unmet needs, increase career and college access, and provide academic support. This report utilizes both quantitative and qualitative analysis methods to uplift student voices regarding an unprecedented crisis. It also details student advocacy related to this data that resulted in letters to state officials, testimony in the California Legislature, a petition with thousands of signatures, and more documented in this [PBS article](#).

Everyone, but especially policymakers, should find it troubling that 63 percent of students reported an emotional meltdown, 43 percent of students reported a panic or anxiety attack, 22 percent of students reported three or more days where they could not participate in school because of mental health, and 19 percent of students reported suicidal thoughts. Despite the federal and state governments' unprecedented investment in school-based mental health and reported investment by schools over the past two years, only 17 percent of students reported increased access to mental health services in 2021 while the overwhelming majority (83 percent) did not experience a change. Over half of students reported the need for mental health services in both survey years, with over 22 percent of students desiring services for the first time each year. Roughly one-fifth of students (22 percent) felt they might be traumatized and would not be the same because of the pandemic and 45 percent of students reported feeling depressed. These findings suggest that our students need either a continued investment with the expansion of services to address wellness and social-emotional support or better implementation of the available funds.

Some of the recommendation include the following:

- Increase and sustain historic investments in mental health services for youth.
- Fund state-level, student-led initiatives to address student stigma
- Increase funding on school counselors, psychologists, social workers, and nurses to address high caseloads.
- Sustain and increase funds for Community Schools that are equipped to provide comprehensive school-based mental health support.
- Continue to invest in school-county partnerships for the delivery of mental health services to students and families.
- Support holistic education and wellness by funding the arts and music/art/dance therapists in schools.
- Increased oversight and accountability for districts and schools spending billions of dollars on mental health.

INTRODUCTION & SUMMARY OF RESEARCH

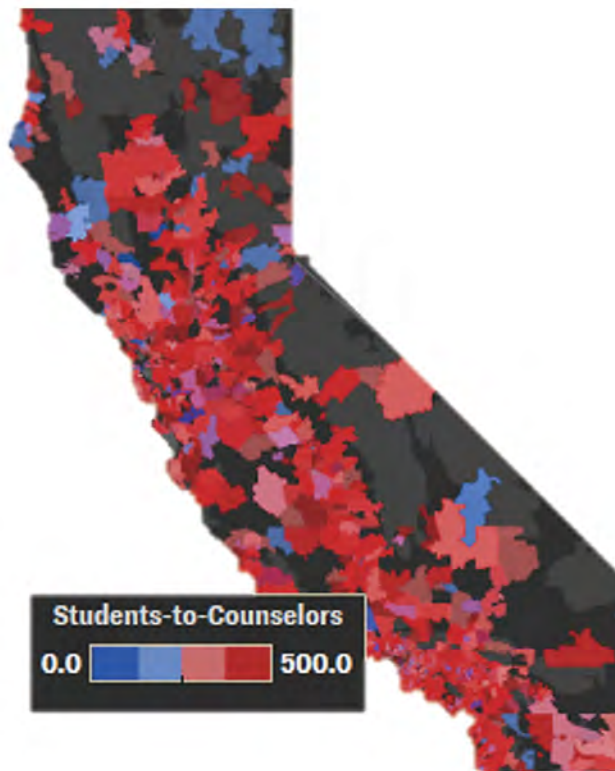
INADEQUATE STUDENT SUPPORTS IN A CARE-LESS CALIFORNIA

Long before the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic increased social isolation, economic hardship, and other factors that heighten stress, California students already faced an unprecedented need for mental health support. The National Institute of Mental Health found suicide was the second-leading cause of death for Americans ages 10 to 24 in 2017.¹ According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the suicide rate among children ages 10 to 17 increased by 70 percent between 2006 and 2016.² The [California School Climate, Health, and Learning Surveys](#) administered from 2017-2019 found 16 percent of high schools students seriously considered suicide.³ The survey found that LGBTQ+ youth considered suicide at a rate three times the rate for heterosexual youth (44%). A 2019 analysis of the data found that up to 70 percent of students in some California schools and 32 percent of students in some school districts contemplated suicide.⁴ Affluent communities like Palo Alto began experiencing “suicide clusters” in schools or multiple deaths in close proximity among students.⁵ Other studies conducted before the pandemic confirmed that students were experiencing record levels of depression and anxiety, alongside multiple forms of trauma.⁶ A Pew survey conducted nationally in 2019 found that 70 percent of teens felt anxiety and depression were major problems among their peers.⁷ Suicide rates among California’s Black youth ages 10-24 doubled from 2014 to 2020, and is twice the statewide average ([California Department of Public Health](#)).

In their 2020 California Children’s Report Card published weeks before the COVID shut down, Children Now found mental health to be the number one reason children in California are hospitalized.⁸ In this 31st annual report, California received a “C-” grade for its limited programs providing health, education, and family services, and more to young people. California received an “F” for its high ratio of students-to-counselors, nurses, social workers, and psychologists in school. A 2019 ACLU report examining federal data found that California students had some of the highest student-to-staff ratios in the country despite being the state with the largest economy.⁹ The report found California ranks 48th in the nation when it comes to school counselor access. Nationally, there was one counselor for every 444 students. In California, there is one counselor for every 682 students. The report also found over 95 percent or 5.9 million of California’s 6.2 million students were in schools where counselor caseloads exceeded the recommended ratio of one counselor for every 250 students. The map graphic on the next page is a visual representation of this issue and school districts and regions with counselor ratios exceeding the expert recommendation are in red.

As the chart below demonstrates, the pattern of high student-to-staff ratios is consistent across all PPS (Pupil Personnel Services) positions¹⁰. Social workers had the highest ratio in the state with just one social worker for every 6,132 students, which is troublingly 25 times the recommended ratio of one social worker for every 250 students.¹¹ Some studies have found students are 21 times





more likely to get counseling from school than anywhere else, but California schools lag far behind in providing students with mental health support.⁴⁰ School staff like social workers, psychologists, and nurses provide more than just extra support for students. They provide essential services for student success, which makes access to such school-based mental health a civil rights issue.

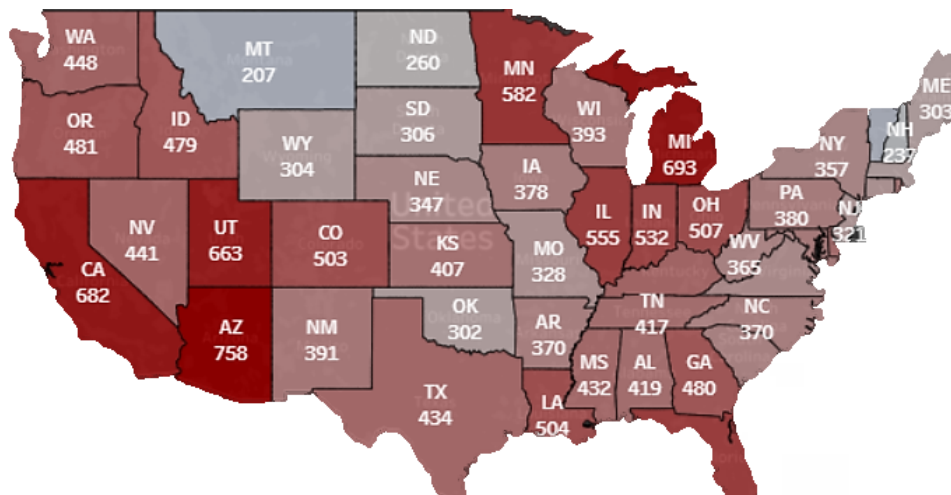
“One day I was stressing about grades and I started crying at school. A counselor saw me and brought me to her office. She didn’t judge me at all, she just listened. It definitely worked. I saw her a few times. I’m really grateful my school offered that.”

-Youth Liberty Squad Student in LA
([EdSource, 2022](#))

STUDENT-TO-STAFF RATIOS COMPARISON 2018¹²

RATIO	PROFESSIONALLY RECOMMENDED	NATIONAL AVERAGE	CALIFORNIA
Student-to-Counselor	250:1	444:1	682:1
Student-to-Social Worker	250:1	2,106:1	6,132:1
Student-to-Psychologist	700:1	1,526:1	998:1
Student-to-Nurse	750:1	936:1	1,482:1

CALIFORNIA HAS THE 3RD HIGHEST STUDENT-TO-COUNSELOR RATIO IN THE NATION



SCHOOL-BASED MENTAL HEALTH AND PPS STAFF DEFINITIONS

	PROFESSIONAL DEFINITION
SCHOOL COUNSELOR	Providers who are typically the first SBMH providers to interact with students when they are struggling. School counselors not only have specialized knowledge in supporting students as they navigate the curriculum, but they also have training in establishing safe learning environments, monitoring and responding to behavior to improve school climates, and creating relationships between students, teachers, and parents that promote greater interpersonal connections.
SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKER	Provider that helps families and school staff navigate community systems to better support the students' needs. They assist with the various barriers such as poverty, inadequate healthcare, community violence, homelessness, domestic violence, and other issues that impact students and their performance in school. School social workers also facilitate innovative prevention and intervention programs in areas like substance abuse, bullying, anger management, and more.
SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGIST	Providers who are trained in both psychology and education with specialized knowledge in advocacy for children and specialized knowledge meant to address learning, motivation, behavior, mental health, social development, and childhood disabilities. They are also critical to ensure evidence-based assessments and interventions for students. A report by the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) found that qualified school psychologists can help address issues such as “poverty, mental, and behavioral health issues, bullying, homelessness, increasing cultural and linguistic diversity.”
SCHOOL NURSE	Provider who provides critical support to both physical and mental health. They help with behavioral screening and referrals to health care providers in the community. They also support treatment compliance where appropriate.

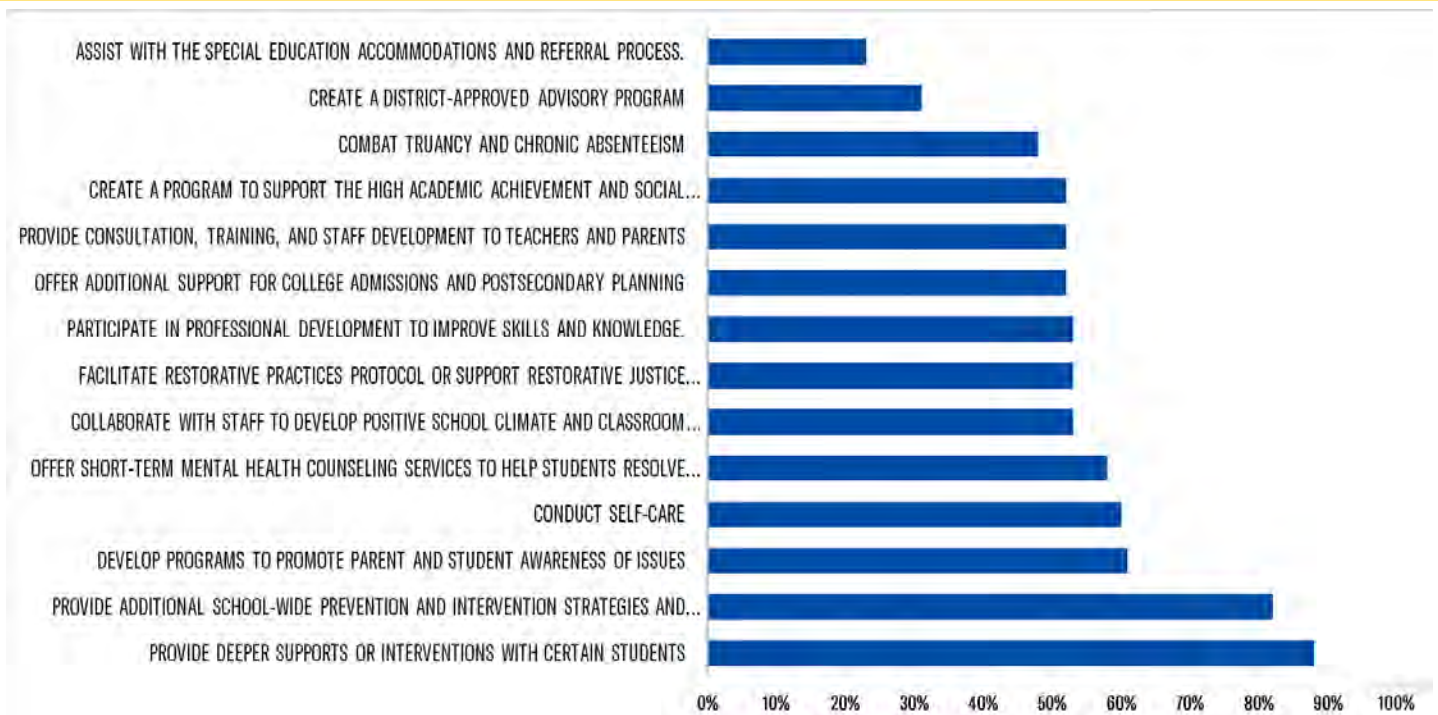
*Child Welfare and Attendance Providers are also PPS credentialed staff that assist with school-based mental health support and services.

CALIFORNIA SCHOOL COUNSELORS AND NURSES CASELOAD SURVEY

From 2018 to 2020, before the pandemic, surveys were completed by hundreds of school counselors and nurses across California with the support of the California Association of School Counselors and California School Nurse Organization. This was done to better understand the impact of California PPS staff having some of the highest caseloads in the country. In their responses, over 87 percent of counselors reported that the greatest barrier they face is the insufficient time they have to meet with students. Over half of counselors also reported that being assigned to non-counseling duties created barriers for them serving students. Over 70 percent of counselors reported that 10 percent or more of their time had to be devoted to non-counseling duties like supervision, test coordination, or scheduling. Over 40 percent of school counselors reported that they devoted over 25 percent of their time to non-counseling duties. Dozens of counselors also reported serving 900+ students, and this is nearly four times the recommended ratio/caseload of one counselor for every 250 students.

When asked about what they would do with the time recovered from decreased caseloads, over 86 percent of counselors reported that they would offer deeper support and interventions for students. The second most common response was providing additional schoolwide prevention, intervention, and counseling strategies. The chart below highlights other responses to this question and ways decreasing counselor caseload increases support for students. The third most popular option related to conducting self-care confirms the burnout issues that the counselors are facing.

IF YOU HAD A DECREASED STUDENT CASELOAD OR FEWER NON-COUNSELOR DUTIES, WHAT WOULD YOU DO WITH YOUR TIME? (Check all that apply)



Over one-third of the school nurses who completed the survey said they served more than 2,000 students and over 70 percent served more than 1,000+ students. Similar to the counselor survey, the most common barrier to serving students was insufficient time to meet with students because of the high caseloads (82%). When asked what would allow them to do their job more effectively, “decreased student caseload” was the number one option (72%) with “increased support from the district or county” (62%) as number two. One nurse stated *“I care for 3,500 students at 7 schools. I’d love TWO more school nurses (well, ideally 1 nurse per school, but I know).”*

This perspective was also expressed by students in the 2020-2021 surveys administered for this report. In response to the question asking students about what they wanted to see in their school next year to better support students after the pandemic, one student shared *“a school nurse would be nice.”*

Although the surveys conducted with school counselors and nurses were not conducted with other PPS staff, the issue of serving a high number of students impacts the other positions as well. School social workers and psychologists in California also have ratios several times higher than the national and expert-recommended average. Their services often require more intensive and therapeutic treatment with individual students, so serving a high number of students could have an even more detrimental effect.

FROM CRISIS TO STATE-OF-EMERGENCY

The United Nations referred to the pandemic as the “tip of the iceberg after years of neglecting child mental health.”¹³ Educators and advocates in California were demanding state officials to address the underinvestment in school-based mental health long before the pandemic. The limited response and action by the state contributed to students and schools being unprepared for what would come. According to a Gallup poll from May 2020, 29 percent of U.S. parents stated that

their children were “already experiencing harm to their emotional or mental health” as a result of COVID-19-related closures and 14 percent said their children could only hold out for a few more weeks “until their mental health suffers.”¹⁴ The Children’s Hospital Colorado declared a State of Emergency over the mental health of youth and the Chief Medical Officer acknowledged “our kids have run out of resilience.”¹⁵ By April 2021, Colorado experienced a 90 percent increase in youth behavioral health visits in emergency departments compared to April 2019. Data from the University of California San Francisco (UCSF) Children’s Hospital showed a 50 percent increase in suicidal ideation between January 2020 (14%) and January 2021 (21%). The UCSF Children’s Hospital Oakland reported a 63 percent increase in patients experiencing mental health emergencies in 2020 compared to 2019.¹⁶ In October 2021, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, and the Children’s Hospital Association came together to declare a National State of Emergency in Children’s Mental Health.¹⁷ In this unprecedented action, this group of 77,000 physicians and hundreds of hospitals declared the “worsening crisis in child and adolescent mental health is inextricably tied to the stress brought on by COVID-19 and the ongoing struggle for racial justice and represents an acceleration of trends observed prior to 2020.”

As schools and districts across California pivoted to distance learning, research and student experiences confirmed both challenges and benefits. The Policy Analysis for California Education surveyed 32,000 students across California about how they felt about distance learning and their personal sense of well-being.¹⁸ Although students at all grade levels reported positive experiences with teachers, they also reported feeling sad, worried and disconnected from their peers. The study found students with disabilities and English Learners were also more likely to feel disconnected from their peers and struggle with well-being. Students attending schools serving a higher percentage of low-income and BIPOC students (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) were less likely to have access to their online schoolwork and spent less time each day on their schoolwork. The deaths and hardship from the pandemic also disproportionately fell on students and families of color. A study in the journal *Pediatrics* found Native American children were 4.5 times more likely to have lost a primary caregiver than white children.¹⁹ Latine²⁰ children were twice as likely to lose a loved one while Black children were 2.4 times more likely. A report that compiled hundreds of studies to assess the impact on students also found that Black and Latine youth experienced more adverse effects of the pandemic when compared to white students.²¹



“Lack of mental health resources isn’t just a result of changes due to COVID-19 — the pandemic exposed an existing problem. Student mental health has never been prioritized in this state. California ranks 48th in the nation when it comes to access to school counselors.”

-Catherine Estrada
Youth Liberty Squad Student
Los Angeles

Despite the increased likelihood of hardship, children of color tend to access mental health services less than their white counterparts.²² In California, the Department of Health Care Services found Latine and Black beneficiaries (under 21 years old) access mental health services from MediCal managed care plans at significantly lower rates than white beneficiaries. Black beneficiaries in California accessed services at only half the rate of White beneficiaries and Latines accessed services at less than 60 percent the rate of their White counterparts.²³

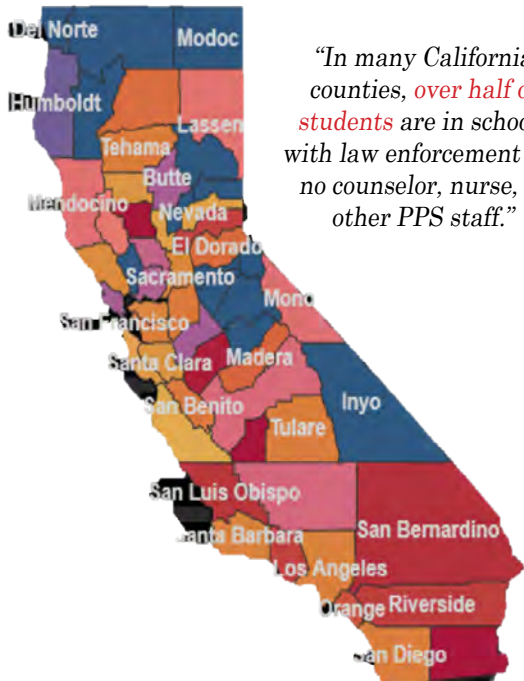
In their 2020 report that focused on “[schools as centers of wellness](#),” California’s Mental Health Services Oversight and Accountability Commission acknowledged a “pre-existing student mental health crisis has grown deeper and more widespread.” In response to the pandemic and recovery funds from the federal government, state officials in California have provided funds to “transform California’s behavioral health system for children and youth into a world-class, innovative, and prevention-focused system where all children and youth are routinely screened, supported, and served.”²⁴ Recent initiatives have created an influx of billions of dollars for school-based mental and behavioral health initiatives aimed at transforming the system for California’s young people.²⁵ According to an August 2021 survey administered by the California Department of Education, over 95 percent of schools reported that they have expanded mental health services.²⁶ Unfortunately, the student survey data collected in May 2021 discussed in this report indicated that students were still experiencing a decrease in access to mental health support in their schools. There is still much more to be done to undo the decades of underinvestment in student mental and behavioral supports and to provide California students with the services they need and deserve.

INADEQUATE SUPPORTS AND THE SCHOOL-TO-PRISON PIPELINE

Over 79 percent of California’s K-12 students are students of color and over 60 percent of students are socioeconomically disadvantaged.²⁷ Policies and practices associated with the School-to-Prison Pipeline disproportionately target these students, especially when it comes to mental and behavioral health issues. A study of 60,000 schools in over 6,000 districts found that Black and low-income students were far more likely to be punished than offered emotional supports if they “misbehave.”²⁸ The study affirmed that schools and districts serving BIPOC and low-income students are more likely to maintain criminalized disciplinary policies (suspensions, expulsion, police referrals, or arrests) and less likely to serve students through behavioral plans put in place as required by laws like Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Schools serving BIPOC students also historically have less access to PPS staff. Nearly 90 percent of school districts in Humboldt County, which has the highest concentration of Native American students in California, did not employ a single school nurse. Over 68 percent of school districts in the county also did not employ a psychologist.²⁹

A 2019 report by the American Civil Liberties Union found California had the highest number of students in schools with police but no counselors.³⁰ According to the federal data examined in the report, California enrolled 23 percent, or 390,000, of the nation’s students in schools with police but no counselors. California was also one of the few states in the report found to have twice as many school police than school social workers. The federal data also revealed that California schools had more security guards in schools than nurses. In total, over 30 percent or 1.8 million of California’s students are in schools that have a police officer but no nurse, counselor, social worker, or psychologist. In many California counties, over half of students are in schools with law enforcement but no counselor, nurse, or other PPS staff. Students have raised these concerns to Governor Gavin Newsom and state officials with the support of thousands of signatories and hundreds of students across the state (Appendix E). In some California counties, upwards of 60 percent of students attend schools with these deficiencies, and the map below provides a visual of the issue.





“In many California counties, **over half of students** are in schools with law enforcement but no counselor, nurse, or other PPS staff.”

These staffing configurations criminalized students and further undermined the ability of California schools to adequately respond to a global pandemic and mental health crisis. Here are a few examples from California students in recent years that demonstrate the danger of prioritizing law enforcement over support staff.

EXAMPLE: California student referred to law enforcement/probation for mental health needs.

**RIVERSIDE COUNTY
YOUTH ACCOUNTABILITY TEAM REFERRAL**

Minor's Name: [REDACTED] D.O.B: [REDACTED] Age: 12 Gender: M

Current School: Nicolet Middle School District: Banning Grade: 6

Reason for Referral: A concerned BUSD staff member called after speaking with parent.

Problem Areas

<input type="checkbox"/> Truancy	<input type="checkbox"/> Suspension	<input type="checkbox"/> Graffiti	<input type="checkbox"/> Absenteeism
<input type="checkbox"/> Gang Activity	<input type="checkbox"/> Weapons	<input type="checkbox"/> Defiance	<input type="checkbox"/> Disruptive Behavior
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other: Does not want to attend school.			

Mental Health Issues

<input type="checkbox"/> Alcohol	<input type="checkbox"/> Drugs	<input type="checkbox"/> Domestic Violence	<input type="checkbox"/> Abuse Issues
<input type="checkbox"/> Previous MH Intervention		<input type="checkbox"/> Currently receiving Services	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other: Anger/grief issues. Separated from father. Uncle died last year.			

LAW ENFORCEMENT, BUT NO SOCIAL WORKER:

Both state and federal data suggest Riverside County has one of the highest student-to-social worker ratios in the state, with just one social worker for every 6,132 students.³¹ A student was grieving their family member, and instead of receiving a social worker or mental health professional to heal, the student was placed on “voluntary probation”. In July 2018, the ACLU Foundations of California, the ACLU, and the National Center for Youth Law filed a lawsuit against Riverside County challenging the unconstitutional program. The parties ultimately settled the lawsuit by stopping the practice, and Riverside County agreed to provide an investment of nearly 8 million dollars over five years into community-based organizations that deliver critical programs aimed to help at-risk youth.

LAW ENFORCEMENT, BUT NO NURSE:



Kalila Williams is a student activist who fainted one day at her Los Angeles school. Instead of a nurse, health professional, or educator at Kahlila’s side when she woke up, it was a police officer. He immediately criminalized her and asked if she was on drugs or committing a crime instead of prioritizing her health. Kahlila shared her story with PEOPLE Magazine when she was awarded for PEOPLE’s Girls Changing the World in 2020. Her work in LAUSD helped reduce the school police budget by 25 million dollars.⁴¹

2020 STUDENT WELLNESS FINDINGS

In response to the lack of attention to student mental health at the beginning of the pandemic, students with the ACLU of Southern California's Youth Liberty Squad began administering a student wellness survey across California in April 2020. This instrument was developed and disseminated with the support of educators, mental health professionals, researchers, and advocates. Over 650 students across 49 school districts in California completed the survey. Students shared hundreds of responses to open-ended questions that indicated they were experiencing significant stress and mental hardship. Many students expressed that they were overwhelmed with school work, the well-being of their families, general uncertainty, and other issues. As part of California's first [Student Mental Health Week](#) in May 2020, the students sent the findings to Governor Gavin Newsom, State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Thurmond, and other state officials as part of a [plea for expanded mental health services and wellness opportunities in schools](#).³² The letter was signed and supported by students from over 100 schools and over 30 organizations, including the California Association of Student Councils (Appendix C). Students also followed up with testimony to the California Legislature (June 2020 /Appendix D) and a petition (Appendix E) to the Governor, and the ongoing campaign is in this [PBS article](#). This section describes more of the findings from that initial April 2020 survey and is followed by a section discussing the 2021 survey.



Youth Liberty Squad Students Display Banners for their first Arts Justice Assignment, May 2019



Youth Liberty Squad Students meet with State Board of Education staff after their petition, February 2021

TIMELINE OF YOUTH LIBERTY SQUAD ADVOCACY FOR STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH AND #COUNSELORSNOTCOPS

- **MAY 2019:** Students create their banners to display at their school: “Counselors Not Cops,” “Students not Suspects” and “Resources not Police Forces.”
- **AUG 2020:** Students present to the California Department of Education’s Student Mental Health Policy Workgroup.
- **SEP 2020:** Students submit advocacy letter to LAUSD.
- **OCT 2020:** Students launch their petition for #CounselorsNotCops and #ArtsNotArrests.
- **JAN 2021:** Students deliver their petition to state officials with thousands of signatures. Students host separate meetings with representatives from the California Senate, Assembly, and State Board of Education.
- **FEB 2021:** Students host the Power to the Youth summit with over 350 student attendees. Student Angelina Duran creates #BreaktheStigma sticker sent to over 100 students across the state.
- **APR 2021:** Students administer their 2021 student wellness survey.
- **MAY 2021:** Students present survey findings for Student Mental Health Week 2021.
- **JULY 2021:** Published “State of Student Wellness” Factsheet.
- **JANUARY 2022:** Published “State of Student Wellness” Report with another petition to state officials.
- **FEBRUARY 2022:** State of Student Wellness Event to be hosted with ACLU, CASC, CASP, and Children Now.



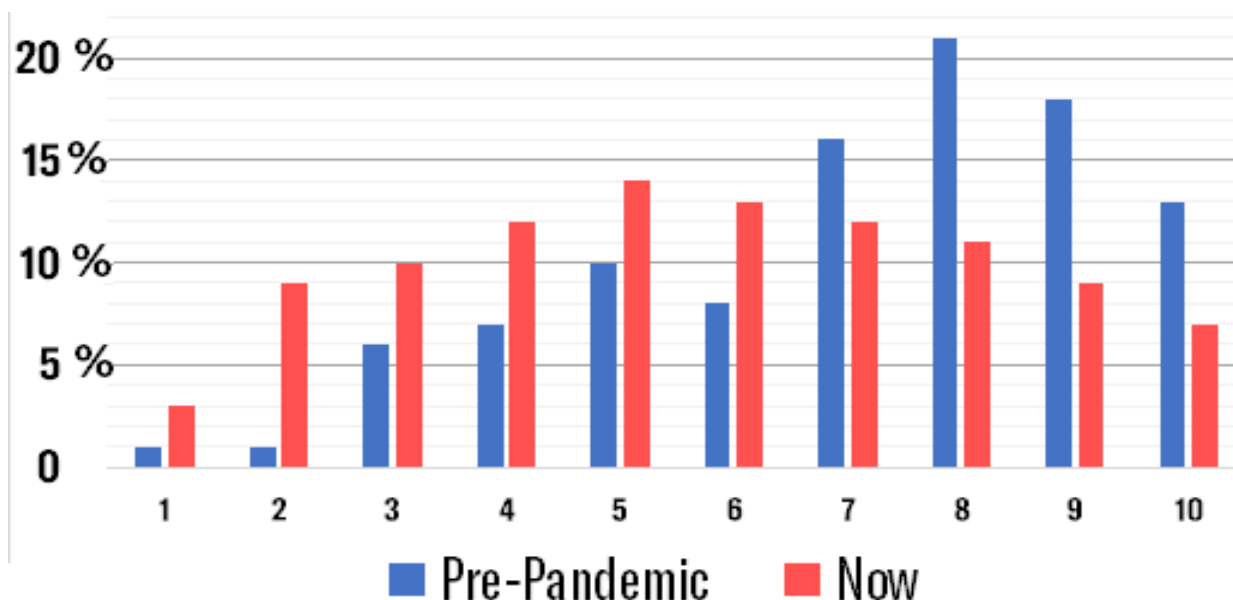
[Click here to sign](#) the latest petition in support of student mental health or visit www.acluaction.org/prioritizehealth

View Sonia’s video testimony on the [ACLU CalAction’s Instagram Page](#).

STUDENT DESCRIPTIONS AND RATINGS OF MENTAL WELLNESS

The survey asked students to describe and rate their mental wellness in several ways. Students were asked to rate their mental wellness before the pandemic on a scale from 1-10 (1 = terrible and 10 = doing really well). “Mental wellness” was defined as our ability to cope with the normal stresses of life and work productively. Roughly 69 percent of students selected 7 or above to indicate they were in a stable or good state of wellness. Only 24 percent of students selected a 5 or below, and 8 percent selected 3 or below, indicating they were struggling with their mental health before the pandemic. When asked to rate their current mental wellness during the pandemic, the 2020 respondents selected significantly lower ratings. This time, only 39 percent of students rated their current COVID-19 mental wellness at a 7 or above. The number of students selecting 3 or below almost tripled to 23%. The chart below compares student ratings of their mental wellness before and during the pandemic (April 2020).

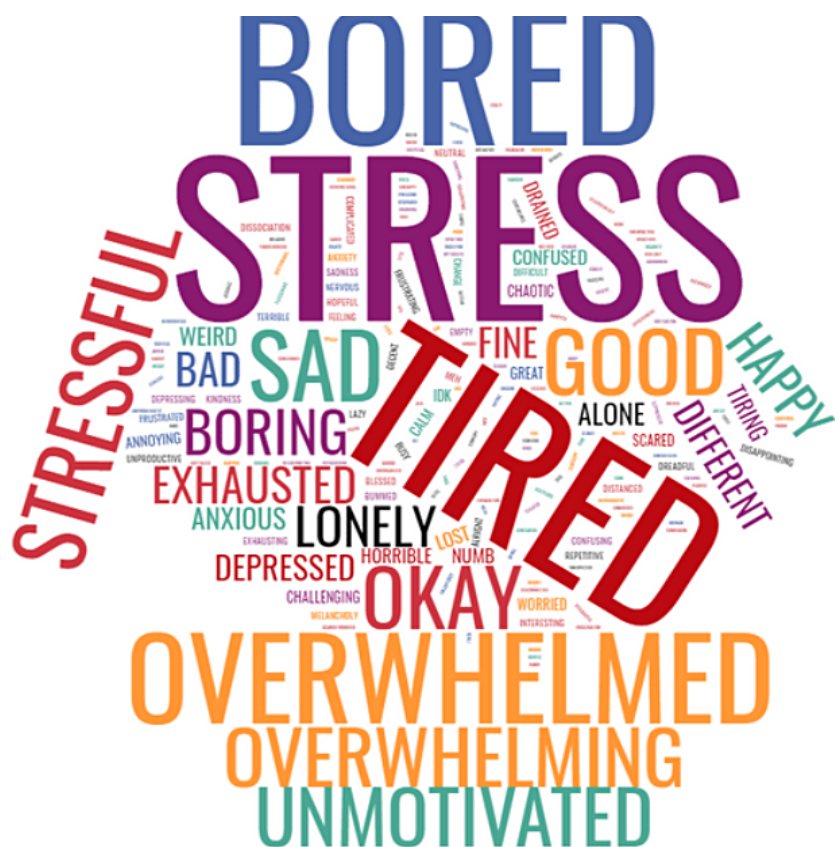
STUDENT RATINGS OF MENTAL WELLNESS* (1-10)



* “Mental wellness” was defined as “our ability to cope with the normal stresses of life and work productively.”
10 = doing really good, and 1= terrible

Another question asked students to share one word to describe their overall feelings during the pandemic and “stay at home” order. Some of the most frequent words used by students to describe their mental state were boring, lonely, overwhelming, and anxious. The 20 most common words are listed below, and all but three of them are negative words. The word cloud also provides a visual representation of the student responses where the size of the word indicates its popularity.

MOST POPULAR WORDS IN 2020 USED BY STUDENTS TO DESCRIBE FEELINGS (2020)



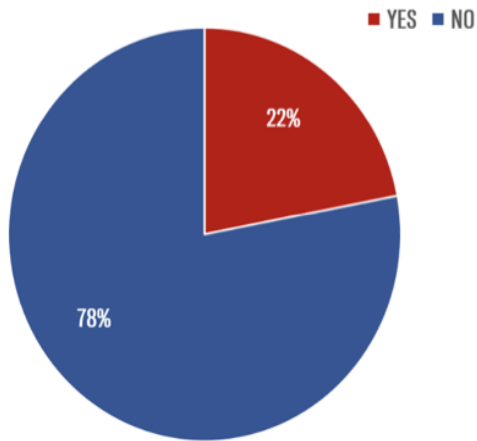
- 1 Bored
- 2 Boring
- 3 Stressed
- 4 Overwhelmed
- 5 Sad
- 6 Depressed
- 7 Stressful
- 8 Overwhelming
- 9 Anxious
- 10 Tired
- 11 Good
- 12 Unmotivated
- 13 Stress
- 14 Lonely
- 15 Confused
- 16 Relaxed
- 17 Anxiety
- 18 Frustrating
- 19 Calm
- 20 Uncertain

STUDENT ACCESS AND NEED FOR MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES IN 2020

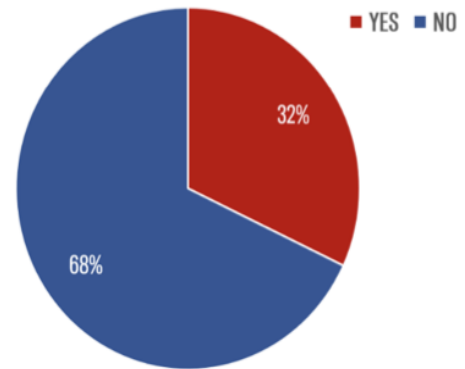
When the pandemic began in 2020, California students were among the least likely in the nation to have access to mental health support and counselors at their schools. Research indicates up to 80 percent of youth who need mental health services do not receive services in their communities because existing mental health services are inadequate.³³ Students are almost as likely to receive mental health services in a school setting as they are to receive treatment in a specialty mental health setting. In 2019, 15 percent of youth ages 12-17 reported receiving mental health services at school, compared to 17 percent who received services from a specialty provider.³⁴ The 2020 survey asked students if they were receiving any counseling or therapy, and the 2021 survey asked students about the settings. In the 2020 survey, 22 percent of students reported receiving mental health services before the pandemic. The survey also asked students who were not receiving mental health services if they felt they needed services now. Overall, 32 percent of students who were not receiving services felt that they may now need services because of the pandemic. When combined with the 22 percent of students who were receiving services before the pandemic, this suggests that over half (54%) of California students could now require mental health services.

PRE-POST PANDEMIC NEED AND ACCESS TO MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

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

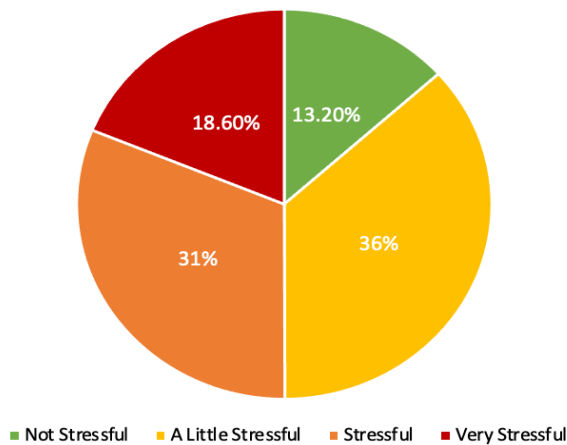


PERCENT OF STUDENTS NOT RECEIVING MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES WHO NOW FEEL THEY MAY NOW REQUIRE SERVICES (POST-PANDEMIC)



WHY ARE STUDENTS STRESSED?

Has the pandemic caused you to stress or worry?



Nearly half (49.6%) of students reported feeling stressed or very stressed as a result of the pandemic in the 2020 survey. Comparatively, 13 percent of students felt the pandemic was not stressful and 36 percent felt it was a little stressful. When students were asked to share reasons for their stress, a variety of themes emerged. Many students expressed feeling stress related to economic issues and their impact on their families. For example, one student explained

“It’s scaring me because parents are fighting about work and money. We are already poor, just got off of government help and now I don’t know what’s going to happen and I know I can’t do anything.” **10th Grade, San Luis Coastal Unified**

“I feel like I’m being pushed to do more work now than ever before, and there’s a lot of pressure with my family. Sometimes I don’t think they realize how dependent they can be on me at times. It becomes extremely overwhelming at times.” **8th Grade, Lemoore Union Elementary District**

Additionally, some students felt pressure to provide for their families due to financial hardships.

“I have to work so my family earns money since two people in my household have been laid off. And I’m afraid I might get COVID-19.” **10th Grade**

Other students expressed feelings of stress related to school in two ways. First, students expressed stress as a result of falling behind academically due to distance learning. One student even remarked *“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.”* **11th Grade**

Students also expressed stress from the coursework being assigned to them. As one student described, *“Some students don’t 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.”* **11th Grade, Coachella Valley Unified**

Students also expressed a significant amount of hardship coming from limited social interaction and connecting with friends. As one student explained, *“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.”* **12th Grade, Los Angeles Unified**

Similarly, another student remarked *“I... depend 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.”* **10th Grade, Irvine Unified**

Some students expressed stress related to the political climate as well. One student shared *“I’m also very politically engaged, but watching the news right now is very stressful...everything just feels off.”* **12th Grade**

Finally, some shared feelings of grief as contributing to their stress. *“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.”* **8th Grade, Gilroy Unified**



STUDENT VOICES IN ACLU’S YOUTH LIBERTY SQUAD

“One of the main reasons I applied to YLS was because I heard about the work you guys did regarding mental health. This is a topic very close to my heart. During my sophomore year there was an incident that my family and I unfortunately witnessed. Following that my mental health really took a fall and I began suffering from anxiety. I was lucky enough to have my counselor just sit and listen to me, to all the pent up feelings I was dealing with—what happened, stressing with my rigorous course-load, feeling isolated from my peers. It was after talking to someone that things did start getting better, I definitely felt less alone.”

-Angelina Duran
Student, Los Angeles

KEY THEMES IN THE DATA CHART (QUALITATIVE SUMMARY)

FAMILY & FINANCIAL PRESSURE	"I have to work so my family earns money since 2 people in my household have been layed off. And I'm afraid I might get COVID-19."
ACADEMIC PRESSURE	"Were 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."
MISSING PEERS AND FRIENDS	"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."
POLITICAL STRESS	"I'm also very politically engaged, but watching the news right now is very stressful."
MENTAL HEALTH	"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."
RESILIENCE & HOPE	"I hope that this helps colleges and other schools realize how much mental health really affects a persons ability to do well in their academics."

The survey also asked students to identify what has been their biggest challenge during a pandemic. Some of the themes that emerged here were lack of motivation, not being able to see their friends, being forced to stay home, and difficulties in keeping up with school work. Challenges with school or schoolwork was the most popular response. Students also reported having trouble with sleeping, physical fitness, boredom, maintaining a positive attitude, and mental health (greatest challenge). Many students also shared that they do not have home environments that are conducive to learning.

WHAT'S YOUR BIGGEST CHALLENGE RIGHT NOW?

- *"[M]y 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."*
- *"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."*
- *"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."*
- *"Staying focused with school work and not just giving up"*
- *"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."*
- *"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."*
- *"The feeling of wanting to go outside and go places. But have the realization that I can't"*
- *"Coping with stress and my mental health"*
- *"Not having motivation or any energy"*
- *"Staying mentally stable"*

2021 STUDENT WELLNESS FINDINGS

Beginning in March 2021, we administered another student wellness survey across California. The survey asked the same questions from the 2020 instrument along with some follow-up and additional questions. This time, over 590 students completed the survey across 45 school districts and 22 counties in California. Similar demographics of students who completed both surveys and a breakdown of both survey years can be found in Appendix A. The list of school districts and counties represented in the data can be found in Appendix F.

STUDENT DESCRIPTIONS AND RATINGS OF WELLNESS

The 2021 survey also asked students to “rate their mental wellness” on a scale from 1 to 10, with 1 being the worst. Students were also asked to rate their pre-pandemic mental wellness. Although roughly 70 percent of students rated their pre-pandemic mental wellness at a 7 or above, only 42 percent of students rated their current mental wellness at a 7 or higher. This was a slight increase from 39 percent of students who selected that option in the 2020 survey but still significantly lower than pre-pandemic levels. The number of students who rated their wellness 3 or below was 16 percent in 2021, which is twice the rate of pre-pandemic levels, but a decrease from 23 percent of students selecting this option in 2020. This indicated limited progress had been made by students when it comes to mental wellness. The chart below provides the breakdown and comparison of student responses to this question across the survey points.

STUDENT RATINGS OF MENTAL WELLNESS PRE-2020-2021 (SCALE 1-10)

	PRE-PANDEMIC	APRIL 2020	APRIL 2021
7 OR ABOVE	69%	39%*	42%
5 OR BELOW	24%	46%	44%
3 OR BELOW	8%	23%	15%

Students were once again asked to provide a single word to describe their feelings. Some of the most frequent words used by students to describe their mental state were stressed, tired, and bored. The most common words are listed below, and all but 15 of them are negative words, a slight improvement from 17 of the 20 words describing negative emotions in 2020. The words “stressed” and “bored” appear as two of the three most frequent words in both years.

MOST POPULAR WORDS IN 2021 USED BY STUDENTS TO DESCRIBE FEELINGS

1	Stressed	11	Boring
2	Tired	12	Lonely
3	Bored	13	Happy
4	Okay	14	Exhausted
5	Overwhelmed	15	Bad
6	Stressful	16	Different
7	Sad	17	Fine
8	Good	18	Depressed
9	Overwhelming	19	Anxious
10	Unmotivated	20	Alone

Roughly 46% of the words used by students in the 2021 instrument were negative while 40% were mixed/neutral and 13% were positive. Findings from the 2021 survey indicate students are experiencing a host of mental health issues, including but not limited to an increase in social anxiety, panic attacks, depressive symptoms, body image issues, self-harm, and suicidal ideation. The 2021 survey provided several options for students to select in response to the question “Which of the following have you experienced in the past year?” Students were able to select more than one impact and the most popular by far was “lacking motivation.” More than three out of every four students (77%) selected this option. One student elaborated on this by sharing “*my biggest challenges are staying focused and motivated. I’ve wanted to get myself in the best mental and physical shape I’ve ever been but I can’t find the motivation and push to do it.*”

The second most common challenge reported by students was “feeling overwhelmed,” which was reported by 72 percent of students. Other student responses indicate that schoolwork was a frequent source of this. More than 63 percent of students reported experiencing an emotional meltdown or breakdown as a result of being overwhelmed, and this was the third most common experience. Nearly half of students reported feeling depressed (45%). Panic or anxiety attacks were reported by 43 percent of students, and at least 38 percent of students experienced a day where they could not participate in school because of mental health. More than one-fifth of students (22%) experienced three or more days where they could not participate in school because of mental health. Suicidal thoughts were reported by nearly 20 percent of students, and 6 percent of them acted on or sought help in response. At least 11 percent of students reported engaging in self-harming behavior like cutting. These findings indicate a significant portion of California students were experiencing mental hardship or crisis. The chart below summarizes responses to this question. Less than 2 percent of students said they did not experience any of these behaviors. Other experiences reported include “loss of social energy and not talking,” “retriggering eating disorder,” and self-doubts.

STUDENT EXPERIENCES IN THE PAST YEAR (APRIL 2021)	PERCENT
Lacking motivation	77%
Feeling overwhelmed	72%
Emotional meltdown or breakdown from stress or being overwhelmed	63%
Feeling depressed	45%
Panic or anxiety attack	43%
A day where I could not participate in school or do work because of your mental health	38%
Three or more days where I could not participate in school or do work because of your mental health	22%
I have been having suicidal thoughts myself	19%
Talking with a friend about their suicidal thoughts	17%
Engaged in self-harming behavior like cutting	11%
I acted on or sought help for suicidal thoughts	6%

Students in the 2021 survey were also asked “how has the pandemic impacted you?” and provided several options from which to choose. Students were able to select multiple options, and roughly two out of three students (66%) reported that their mental health was negatively impacted by the pandemic. The second most common option related to students’ physical health being impacted and 58 percent of students experienced this. Thus, the student responses indicate that the pandemic has been more detrimental to their mental health than their physical health. Over half of students reported feeling burnt out (55%) or overwhelmed with distance learning (51%) and this was confirmed in the qualitative open-ended responses. About a fifth of students (22%) felt they might be traumatized and would not be the same again, and an equal number of students said they had three or more days of school where they could not participate because of mental health challenges. Over 31 percent of students reported losing a loved one during the pandemic. One student mentioned losing “more than five family members.” This amount of loss and trauma has implications for establishing grief and healing spaces in schools. Some of the open-ended comments submitted by students in response to this question are below. Only 16 percent reported not being impacted by the pandemic in a significant way.

“I have lost all motivation in school this year. School ends in two months and I have not learned a single thing.” 11th Grade, Imperial Unified

“[I’ve become] even more easily distracted than earlier years, lack of any sort of motivation, and not being able to help myself with any of these issues.” 8th Grade, Inglewood Unified

HOW HAS THE PANDEMIC IMPACTED YOU?	PERCENT
My mental health (anxiety, stress, depression, etc.)	66%
My physical health (weight gain or loss, eyesight, etc.)	58%
I feel burnt out right now	55%
I feel overwhelmed with virtual learning. I have limited time for self-care	51%
My home environment or noise/distractions makes school difficult	42%
I lost of a loved one	31%
I feel like I might not be the same again. I might be traumatized.	22%
The pandemic HAS NOT impacted me in a significant way	16%
I had to take a job to support my family	5%
I had to move to a new place	4%

The 2021 survey also asked students to share other challenges that they experienced over the past year. Hundreds of responses were received to this question, and they are clustered into the themes below.

MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES

The most common theme in student responses to their challenges involves mental health. Hundreds of open-ended student responses discussed mental health challenges, and some students wrote entire paragraphs. Anxiety and depression were frequently mentioned by students. Many students reported experiencing panic attacks, some for the first time. Social

anxiety in particular was a recurring theme, due to the isolation students are experienced during the lockdowns. Several student comments touched on suicide, and resources for support were provided in the survey in anticipation of this. Some of the students who shared the most about their mental health challenges thanked researchers for the opportunity to share.

QUOTES FROM STUDENTS ABOUT THEIR MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES

*“I’ve had **dozens of mental breakdowns**, I lost all of my friends, a little bit of suicidal thoughts, I’m not motivated by anything anymore” **8th Grade, Imperial Unified***

*“I have gone through incredibly **intense depressive episodes** ... I have never had anything lower than a 3.4 GPA and starting this semester I struggled, so I am currently failing two classes.” **11th Grade, Los Angeles Unified***

*“My anxiety has been up so much. **I get more anxiety attacks now** than before the pandemic. I had barely had any anxiety at all before covid, and now I’m used to it.”
8th Grade, Imperial Unified*

*“A **traumatizing event** occurred during the pandemic where my **ex tried to commit suicide**, and I couldn’t do anything to help because we were early in the pandemic & in lockdown”
10th Grade, San Diego Unified*

*“I developed and struggled with panic attacks and social anxiety. I also developed (anxiety?) tics. **Suicidal thoughts became a problem but I was always scared to speak up about it so I kept it to myself and relieved my stress with self-harm.** It came to the point where I planned on committing the night before new year’s. Instead, I cried ... It was- and still is- really hard for me to be the person I was before. I’m also a bigger person so to lose weight, I’ve tried starving myself but end up eating more than I should. Recently, there was a time where I ate so much and felt guilty about it after to the point that I cried about it. I became very isolated and so used to the sadness that sometimes it brings comfort, and I hate it. OH! I also figured out my gender identity which I had a hard time figuring out. **When I came out to a family member as genderfluid**, I was told “some things are accepted, others are not,”... which really **crushed my spirit cause...** I appreciate they/he pronouns rather than she/her and would like to be seen as either a boy or nonbinary more but since everyone already knows me as a girl, that’s what I am to everyone... Thank you very much for this.” **8th Grade, Hart Union School District***





*"I've become **severely anti-social and get really bad social anxiety when talking to anyone new**, even online and with family members like cousins and grandparents."
8th Grade, Inglewood Unified*

*"I fell into a **deep depression** and the only reason I'm doing better now is because of medications and I'm ignoring my responsibilities, instead watching stupid videos and making myself feel better. It's a constant uphill battle." 11th Grade, Santa Monica-Malibu Unified*

*"Feeling useless ... struggling through things myself and my grades going down hill real bad I still don't care at this point. **I find it pointless.**" 9th Grade, Greendot Charter Schools*

*"I feel like **school does NOT accommodate my mental health**. It's made me adopt a **give up** mindset and not all of my teachers are lenient." 9th Grade, Corona-Norco Unified*

*"I'm more quiet now i don't really like to talk or speak up **i get anxious when someone calls my name like a teacher through zoom**" 9th Grade, Imperial Unified*

*"I've become so closed off from everyone that I get **anxiety attacks whenever I think about people seeing me.**" 9th Grade, Imperial Unified*

*"I don't remember anything this past year. **everything's murky and unmemorable.**"
8th Grade, Imperial Unified*

*"I can't sleep anymore and I'm tired all day. ...**sad all the time for no reason.**"
11th Grade, Los Angeles Unified*

*"[D]eveloped an **eating disorder** and felt more anxiety and **depression**" 10th Grade*

*“I experienced **panic attacks and anxiety for the first time** around July.”*

*“I’ve been struggling with **three different mental illnesses.**”*

*“The **smallest things** seem to **overwhelm** me”*

*“Feeling **suicidal** and **self harming often.**”*

*“**I don’t care** about myself **anymore.**”*

ACADEMIC STRESS

Students had a difficult time performing academically at the level they expected. Many students cited unrealistic academic expectations as a source of stress. Students reported that their teachers assigned more homework with “unreasonable due dates,” even though they had less instruction time. Some students expressed that their teachers did not take their familial and financial responsibilities into account.

“I am tired of the school board pretending like they care about students. Our teachers continue to pile hours of homework on us as if our whole life should revolve around school, when in reality most of us have jobs, siblings to take care of, and family problems that we also have to deal with.”
11th Grade, Santa Monica-Malibu Unified

*“Having a lot of **school work to do, from 7am till 11pm everyday** during my first semester was really tough.”* *12th Grade, Corono-Norco Unified*

*“[M]y school is trying to help by reducing the hours, it makes no difference because I’m receiving so much homework. All this **homework has prevented me from taking time to care for myself and my mental health.**”* *10th Grade, Lakeport Unified*

“I feel as if teachers don’t take into consideration that our mental health matters and they act as if this pandemic isn’t hurting us. One teacher of mine said that even though we are in a pandemic, she is expecting us to uphold a standard that some students could not reach. She doesn’t take into consideration how we feel.” *10th Grade, San Diego Unified*

*“Many teachers assign so much homework with very unreasonable due dates and then say it is our fault we didn’t do it. I have a teacher that will **assign homework and only give us until 3:30 pm that day to do it,** not considering my other classes at all.”* *11th Grade*

“The internet was a huge struggle and I kept falling behind. I’d catch up and then lose motivation, I used to get straight A’s and now have straight C’s and D’s as of now.” *12th Grade*

FAMILY & HOME LIFE

The COVID-19 pandemic has blurred the lines between school and home life, forcing low-income students to remain productive in homes where they may share space with their family

members and have limited internet access. Students also were forced to add home responsibilities while learning remotely; for example, one student explained that they had to watch their baby nephew while doing school.

“I saw my mom almost dying and haven’t had the time to heal because of school, grades, homework, testing, studying. I’m doing all this just to be able to get into a good college but haven’t taken the time to heal. My mom is doing better now but it was something traumatic.”
11th Grade, Los Angeles Unified

Many students also experienced a significant loss of life in their families, and this had a significant impact on their mental well-being.

“My grandma and uncle passed away in the same week and I was super close to my uncle which hurts so much.” *11th Grade, Greendot Charter School*

“I have lost more than 5 family members and it has been very hard without them.”
9th Grade, Imperial Unified

“Multiple moves from foster families not working out and a crazy group home”
11th Grade, Pasadena Unified

“A lot of traumatizing stuff has occurred, and the house of my family became very toxic then before covid-19. my mother’s and my relationship has been getting worse to the point of me living with my grandmother so it won’t become worse, me and my parents don’t talk unless its needed.” *10th Grade, Alameda County*

RACISM AND ANTI-ASIAN HATE

A few Asian American students expressed feeling anxious to be in public, especially with their families, due to the increase in anti-Asian hate crimes that started in 2020.

“I’m mentally exhausted from how COVID has impacted Asian Americans. My family and I are scared to go out in public.” - Carlsbad Unified Student, 8th Grade



“Recently there has been Asian hate crimes and I’m half Laos meaning half Asian, I’ve had a friend once say something really offensive and I called him out... My grandparents are Asian and elderly and A lot of young adults are beating them up which makes me scared for them...It just makes me sad how the World is nowadays like why can’t we just be in peace and be united as one.”
9th Grade, Imperial Unified

Other students also discussed the impact of racism and the social/political climate on their mental health as well. Experts like the [American Psychological Association](#) have acknowledged racism’s “destructive psychological, social, educational, and economic effects on human rights and human welfare throughout the lifespan.” A June 2020 survey conducted by the ACLU of SoCal revealed nearly 75% of students were experiencing additional stress because of the injustices and uprisings after the murder of George Floyd. Students from more than 25 schools completed the survey and 60% of them said their schools failed to acknowledge the injustices and global movement. The survey was inspired by Black and Brown students in ACLU SoCal’s Youth Liberty Squad who petitioned their high school in South LA to finally create space for students to heal and be heard.



“We are drained. We need support. We need the teachers that we respect so dearly to respect our mental health and opinions and show our schedules and minds some mercy. We ask for solidarity for students who are prioritizing the Black Lives Matter movement and are getting arrested, injured, battling mental health issues and choosing to educate their peers and friends rather than study for a final.”

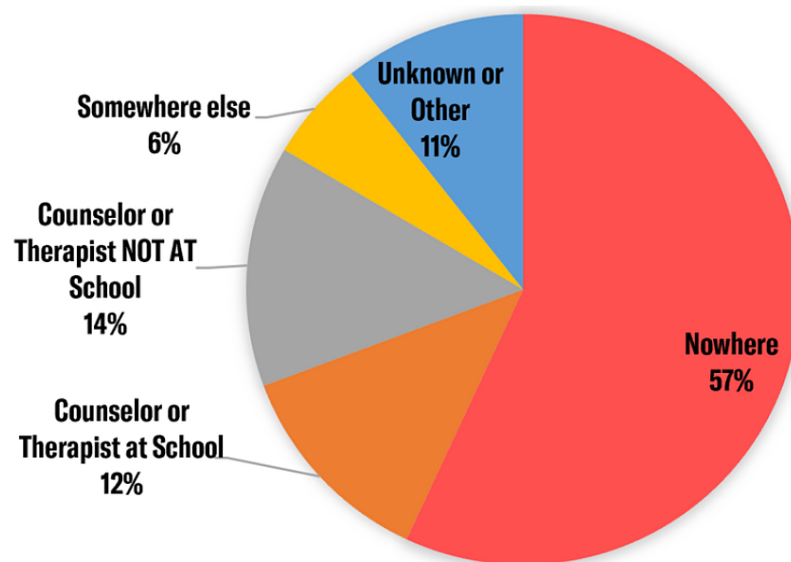
-Youth Liberty Squad Students Petition to their South LA High School

STUDENT NEED AND ACCESS TO MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES IN 2021

Like the 2020 survey, the 2021 student wellness survey also asked about student need and access to mental health services. Several additional questions were asked here, including “has anyone personally asked you about your mental wellness over the past three months?” The responses to this question about wellness check-ins were stunning. Over 42 percent of students reported that no one checked in on their mental health in the past 90 days. Although this question wasn’t asked in the 2020 survey, several students left open-ended comments thanking researchers for inquiring about their mental wellness and claimed no one else was doing so. Students were mostly asked about their mental wellness by family members (32%) or friends (34%). About 26 percent of students were asked about their mental wellness by a school staff member. More specifically, 11 percent of students reported being asked by their teachers, 7.2 percent by a coach or advisor, and 7.7 percent by a school counselor or mental health professional. Roughly 10 percent of students said they were asked about their mental health by a counselor or mental health professional outside of school.

When asked, “[i]n the past year, where did you get help from a counselor or therapist?” 57 percent of students answered “nowhere.” However, 47 percent of students reported that they did not need services when asked a separate question. Roughly 12 percent of students reported seeing a counselor or therapist at school while 14 percent reported seeing a mental health professional outside of school. Roughly 6 percent of students indicated they received services “somewhere else” and several students listed specific mental or behavioral health providers like Kaiser Permanente Health. Only 15 percent of students reported receiving mental health services before the pandemic compared to 22 percent of students in the 2020 survey. Distance learning and the COVID-19 pandemic have pushed students to consider and seek mental health services for the first time. One-fifth of students (20%) required counseling but had never received services, and 8 percent of students received counseling or therapy for the first time during the pandemic.

IN THE PAST YEAR, WHERE DID YOU GET HELP FROM?



When mental health supports are most critical, far too many California students reported receiving fewer services. Twenty percent of students reported no change, 9 percent reported a decrease and 54 percent reported they were not sure about mental health services at their school. After more than a year of the pandemic and global shutdown, only 17 percent reported an increase in mental health services at their school while the overwhelming majority (83%) did not experience a change and access to services.

Although open-ended comments mostly describe the mental health services as helpful, some students found the services to be judgmental or no longer needed.

“I tried a counseling system called Teen Counseling. I tried it out for 3 weeks but quit because the counselor I had was judging me and I didn’t like it. I don’t think my mom cares about my mental health so she isn’t looking into anything else. I think I’ll be fine without any help”
9th Grade, Imperial Unified

“I have received therapy but I don’t think I need it now” **11th Grade**

TRANSITION BACK TO IN-PERSON INSTRUCTION

More than 3 in 4 students (76%) reported that their school instruction had been remote during the past 30 days when the survey was administered in April-May of 2021. When asked about the return to in-person learning, California students expressed mixed feelings and significant anxiety. Forty percent of students were “nervous” or “extremely nervous” about returning to school while only 19 percent of students reported being “not nervous.” A significant source of stress was the possibility of contracting COVID-19 or spreading it to their family members. The open-ended responses revealed that many students were also nervous about socializing after a year under lockdown.

“I’m nervous and a bit scared due to me not doing well in online school. I’m afraid of what the teachers would say, but I feel okay knowing that I will be able to learn something without distractions at home.”

“I feel like I will be doing better online than in person because of my social anxiety and constant thoughts of others judging me.” 8th Grade

“I am personally opting out of returning for the rest of the year. I feel the school is greatly rushing the process. Even though they say they will be cleaning thoroughly, I know that the school was extremely dirty normally. I find their goals unrealistic and even morally questionable.” 11th Grade

*“I had **many meltdowns. I have Autism and trying to understand online was hard ...I had to get more help from my school psychologist and my mom and it made me feel bad about myself because I was doing very well before... Now that I am back on campus for school 4 days a week and playing baseball again I am doing better.” 10th Grade, San Ramon Valley***



“Hybrid has already improved my mental health, it’s been easier to communicate with my teachers about late work and working things out to make sure I pass.” 11th Grade

“[S]cared of being judged because I have changed a lot physically compared to a year ago and I am very self-conscious” 12th Grade

“I don’t feel comfortable returning to school unless I am vaccinated. I don’t trust others to socially distance from me.” 12th Grade

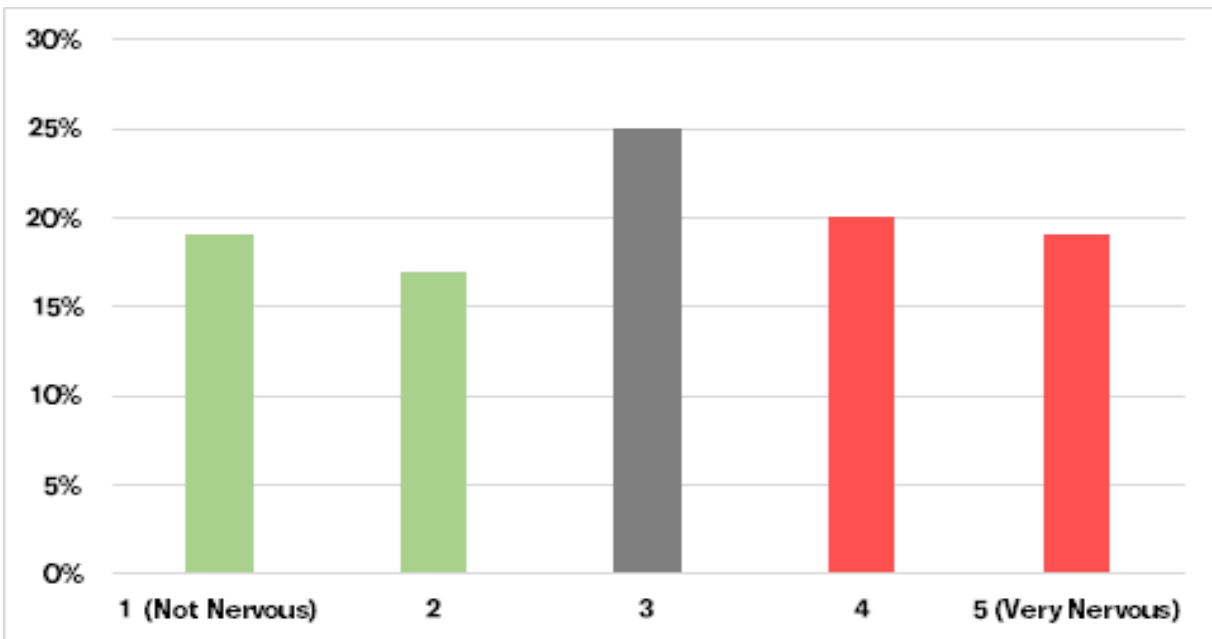
“I went to school today and a kid took his mask off in class so I don’t want to go back.” 8th Grade

“I feel like I’m going to be overstimulated and fail.” 11th Grade

“I want to return and get back into the normal routine” 9th Grade

Although some students made comments in appreciation of the flexibility of distance learning, many expressed dissatisfaction. Many students felt that in-person schooling would improve their mental health and grades, and some felt excited about going back to school and interacting with their friends. While these feelings seem contradictory, they are not mutually exclusive.

HOW NERVOUS OR ANXIOUS ARE YOU ABOUT RETURNING TO SCHOOL?



STIGMA AND OTHER BARRIERS TO SERVICE

Students were asked, “[i]f you were very sad or stressed, would any of these things stop you from talking to a counselor or therapist?” Students were provided with a list of nine options to respond to this question. Open-ended space was also provided to better understand the barriers and stigma issues that prevent students from seeking mental health support. The top reason students avoided mental health services was fear of parents finding out. About one-third of students (32%) selected this option. This is troubling because students have a right to limited confidentiality and privacy from their parents with mental health professionals as long as it does not involve harm to another or themselves. Stigma issues also extended to peers: 18 percent did not seek out services because they were worried that other students would find out they sought out mental health support. Confusion was also a prominent theme, as 19 percent of students were not sure where to go for help. Further barriers to service were also influenced by the confusion that such services were costly, which deterred 15 percent of students from talking to a professional.



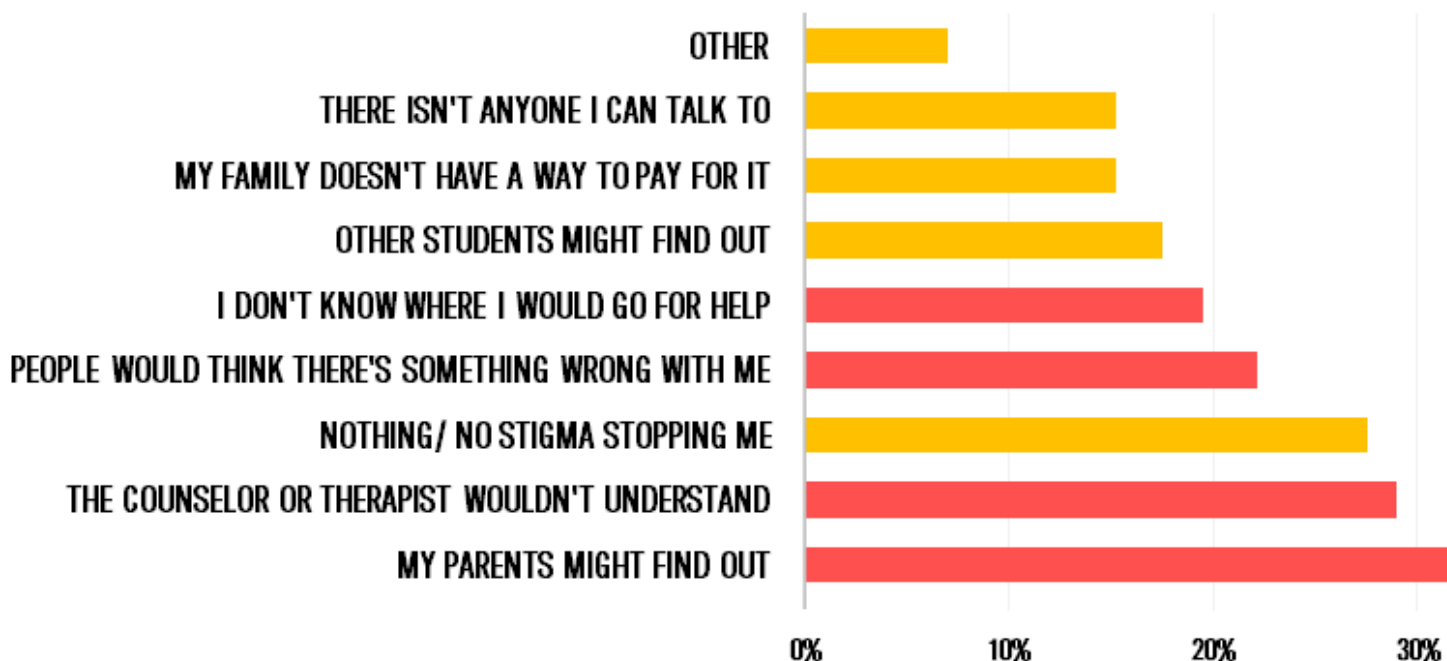
The data also demonstrated a troubling disconnect between students and counselors/therapists, exemplified by 29 percent of students feeling they would be misunderstood by mental health professionals. Fifteen percent of students felt that “there isn’t anyone” they could talk to, meaning they either do not have access to mental health professionals or they do not feel heard by those to whom they have access. Some students have also internalized the stigma surrounding mental health services. About 1 in 5 students (22%) would not seek services out of fear of people thinking there is “something wrong” with them, making this the third most common reason students avoid mental health services.

Mistrust was another barrier preventing students from seeking services, although it was not one of the nine options listed. A few students shared stories with the police being called which further exacerbated their mistrust and faith in seeking help.

“I don’t trust anyone. I tried talking to friends. What did they do? For example a friend called the cops on me because I told her about mental state. I just can’t trust anyone. Neither friends, teachers, even people close to me. I don’t trust because what will they do? Nothing.” 11th Grade

“[A] friend she called the cops they came to talk with me now. I don’t talk to her any more. I can’t trust any more including whoever is reading this” 10th Grade

IF YOU WERE VERY SAD OR STRESSED, WOULD ANY OF THESE THINGS STOP YOU FROM TALKING TO A COUNSELOR OR THERAPIST?



CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

“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.” 12th Grade, San Francisco

RESPONDING TO AN UNPRECEDENTED STUDENT WELLNESS STATE-OF-EMERGENCY

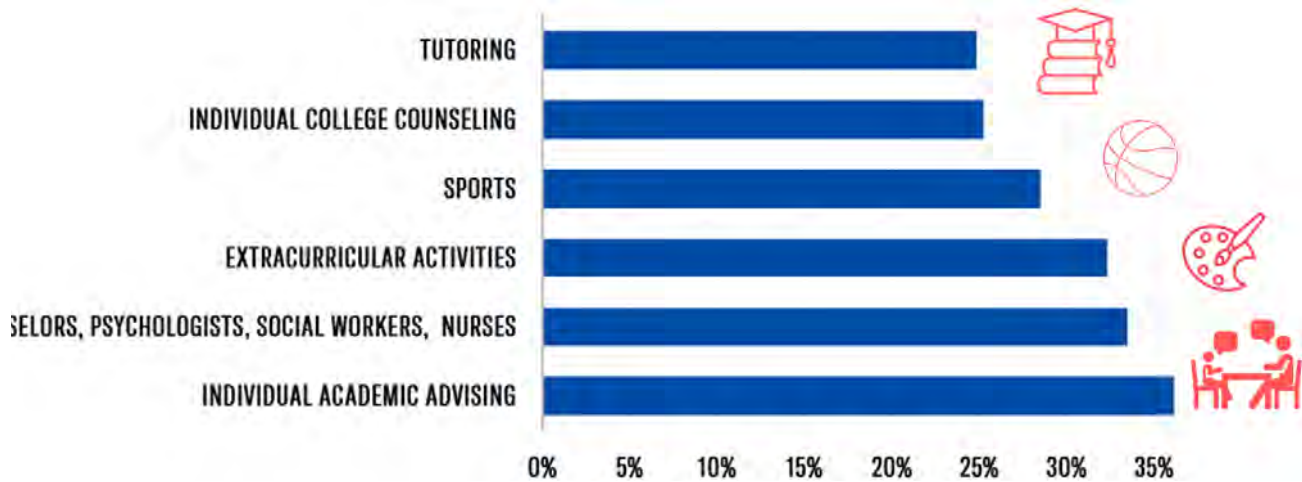
Student wellness data collected in 2020 and 2021 across California indicate students are experiencing significant mental hardship and trauma. More medical professionals and historians are recognizing that this crisis is unlike anything students have experienced previously. The pandemic still has not ended, and society and governments have struggled to respond to an evolving crisis. Over the past two years, schools have often been the focus of the debate whether to open up and “return to normal,” often at the expense of students and educators. Significantly more care and consideration must be given to students and their mental wellbeing. Students need far greater investments in mental health supports to help them address the increased trauma, social anxiety, depression, self-harming behavior, body image issues, and every other indicator of stress. Everyone, but especially policymakers, should find it troubling that 63 percent of students reported an emotional meltdown, 43 percent of students reported a panic or anxiety attack, 22 percent of students reported three or more days where they could not participate in school because of mental health, and 19 percent of students reported suicidal thoughts.

To provide insight for educators, mental health practitioners, and policymakers, we asked students to identify what has been most supportive during the pandemic. We also asked them to identify the supports that schools should be providing and the changes that should be implemented. Both qualitative and quantitative data reveal that social relationships with others, positive outlets (art, sports, journaling), and socio-emotional support helped most students cope with the pandemic. Students reported that school staff had both negative and positive effects. One student felt that the school board “does nothing to help,” while another student felt that teacher check-ins with students were very helpful. The academic stress from distance learning and increased work reduced the positive impacts of educators. Several students noted that access to therapy, mindfulness, and other socio-emotional supports were helpful. Alone time and self-care activities were also noted by students to be supportive and helpful. Artistic expression and hobbies helped students feel less stressed and overwhelmed. Students were creative in finding ways to cope, which underscores the main recommendation of this report: seek and prioritize student voices as California’s school-based mental health undergoes historic investment and transformation.

“I feel like listening to music and playing my instruments and just laying down next to my dog outside looking at the stars relaxing helps me.” 11th Grade

In a multiple-choice question that presented students with options like tutoring, sports, extracurricular activities, and more, “individual academic advising to get back on track” was the most popular option with 36 percent of students selecting it. The second most common option was more counselors, nurses, psychologists, and social workers (34%).

WHAT SHOULD YOUR SCHOOL DO TO PROVIDE MORE SUPPORT?



STUDENT QUOTES ABOUT WHAT’S BEEN MOST SUPPORTIVE

“[M]y friends and family and even a couple teachers who would check up [on] our class every few [days] made a difference.”

“My friends. The school board simply does nothing to help.”

“Spending time on creative hobbies to avoid thinking about the depressing reality we live in”

“Music has helped a lot. Whenever I wanted to drown out sounds from around me, I’d listen to music. I would also listen to music to help prevent or help calm the panic attacks that I get.”

QUALITATIVE THEMES THAT EMERGED ABOUT WHAT IS SUPPORTIVE TO STUDENTS

ALONE TIME & SELF-CARE	RELATIONSHIPS	HOBBIES & CREATIVE EXPRESSION
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Self-Care/Mental Health Days ● Going on walks ● Watching television ● Self-reflection ● Journaling ● Sleeping on time ● Listening to music 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Family and Friends ● Educators/Mental Health Professionals/Mentors ● School-based counselors ● In-person school ● Pets and animals ● Spending time with others ● Attending virtual events ● Video calls with loved ones ● Using social media ● Church and religion ● Romantic partners ● Online friends 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Spending time outside (ie: gardening, roller skating) ● Sports ● Exercising/going to the gym ● Reading ● Involvement in social justice spaces ● Video games ● Playing instruments ● Painting/drawing ● Crocheting

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

STATE-LEVEL RECOMMENDATIONS

- Increase and sustain historic investments in mental health services for youth. Form a student oversight committee to monitor the impact of these investments. Ensure the funds are spent on highly-qualified mental health professionals.
- Further investigate the ongoing impact of COVID-19 on California's students. We will produce further State of Student Wellness reports, but more in-depth studies need to be conducted into individual aspects flagged in this inaugural report (sleep, exercise, student motivation, grief, social anxiety, academic support needs, etc.).
 - Survey parents and educators as well.
- Fund state-level, student-led initiatives to address student stigma and support programs to educate students on mental health, wellness, help-seeking, and privacy rights.
- Increase funding on school counselors, psychologists, social workers, and nurses to address high caseloads. As the surveys administered to hundreds of California PPS staff demonstrated, the quality of services delivered to students is compromised when staff caseloads are several times higher than what experts recommend. Prioritize funding first to the schools serving the most high-need students, which generally are those currently with the highest staff ratios in the state. Fund and support school-wide support teams.
 - Prioritize funds for school psychologists to help schools develop interventions and responses to the increase [in behavioral problems](#) from traumatized and unhealed students returning to school. Develop supports and suicide intervention protocols that do not criminalize students or mental health problems.
 - Ensure culturally-responsive, student-centered, and trauma-informed approaches to mental and behavioral health issues.
 - Do not respond to student needs with law enforcement, surveillance, or criminalization that further traumatizes youth and stigmatizes mental health services. Enact legislation to decriminalize school settings, including legislation to eliminate some of the statutory mandates for schools to notify law enforcement of various kinds of student behavior.
 - Do not pair school-based mental health professionals with police to further embed law enforcement in the mental health system. They are not mental health professionals. Public and mental health issues cannot be resolved with criminalization.
- Sustain and increase funds for Community Schools that are equipped to provide comprehensive school-based mental health support. Although there are roughly 5,000 Community Schools nationwide, only 200 or so are in California.³⁵ That's a fraction of a percent of the 10,000+ schools across the state. Over 10 percent of schools nationwide are in California, but only 4 percent of Community Schools are in the state.
- Continue to invest in school-county partnerships for the delivery of mental health services to students and families.
 - Prioritize sustained partnerships that build therapeutic relationships with students over multiple years to build trust.
 - Ensure systems and structures are in place for the coordination of services. Ensure community-based mental health professionals are coordinated and supervised in their school-based activities by credentialed pupil personnel services staff as required by California Code of Regulations Title 5, Section 80049.1(c).
 - Set statewide goals for child mental health based on key metrics related to overall mental well-being, access to care, and quality of services as [recommended by the Hoover Commission](#). Set goals specific to race/ethnicity/language to ensure vulnerable students are not ignored.

- Ensure that schools' response to attendance/truancy issues focus on addressing the problems that cause a student to miss school, rather than punishing the student/family for missing school. Over 22 percent of students indicated they missed at least three days over the school year related to mental health reasons. It's cruel and unusual to punish students and families for missing more than 10 days when educators and other professionals are not held to the same standard.
- Support and fund innovative workforce development programs to combat the historic unavailability of mental health professionals, especially BIPOC professionals. Fund scholarships and pipeline programs starting at the high school level to increase the cultural and linguistic diversity of mental health professionals and address the limited availability of different positions.³⁶ The number of school social workers, for example, must triple to meet expert recommendations.
- Invest in peer support programs for students to continue to support each other. Findings from the survey indicate peers played a more supportive role than family. Offer training and stipends to students since California has one of the highest concentrations of students from low-income backgrounds. This would also help overcome workforce development, language barriers, and more. Partner with student leadership organizations in hundreds of California schools like California Association of Student Councils and Cal-HOSA (Health Occupations Students of America). Partner with PPS organization for supervision and training to reach thousands of school counselors, nurses, psychologists, and social workers.
- Increased oversight and accountability for districts and schools spending billions of dollars on mental health. In October 2021, the State Auditor criticized the California Department of Education's inadequate monitoring of the 24 billion dollars of COVID relief funds. The state report concluded that the CDE *"[M]ust improve its oversight of these funds... to ensure that LEAs spend the funding before the associated deadlines and comply with relevant requirements. Education [CDE] has not ensured that LEAs consistently submit required quarterly reports that include the amounts they have spent on various allowable categories. Without these reports, Education lacks the data it needs to administer the funds and to adequately oversee how LEAs are using the funds to mitigate the effects of the pandemic."*³⁷
- Redirect Juvenile Justice and Crime Prevention Act funds from law enforcement programs that criminalize youth to community-based organizations and non-law enforcement government programs that provide mental health services and other supports.
- Require counties to spend at least 22 percent (percent of youth in California) of the [millions of unspent](#) Mental Health Service Act/Prop 63 funds in responding to student and youth mental health to heal from the pandemic and crisis. In terms of youth mental health, this report demonstrates that history has seen no rainier days. Ensure these funds support community partnerships as well as PPS positions.
- Support districts in building capacity and utilizing the billions of funding available through the [Children and Youth Behavioral Health Initiative](#).
- Fund a full-time position with the California Department of Education to provide comprehensive training and technical assistance to school districts for supporting LGBTQ students. Critical areas of support should include guidance around protecting student privacy, ensuring school systems and policies respect students' identities, and creating safe and welcoming spaces at school for students to be their authentic selves.
- Enact legislation to mandate at least one semester of comprehensive health education, including mental health education, as a graduation requirement and fund its implementation. This pandemic has highlighted an urgent need to strengthen our collective public health comprehension and skills. California needs to reinvest in education that will give students lifelong tools and strategies to navigate health information and challenges, identify resources for support, and make healthy decisions.
- Support holistic education and wellness by funding the arts and music/art/dance therapists in schools.

COUNTY-LEVEL RECOMMENDATIONS

- Maximize Mental Health Service Act/Prop 63 funds to prioritize spending to support school-based mental health access. Cite and quote AW op-ed
- Redirect Juvenile Justice and Crime Prevention Act funds from law enforcement programs that criminalize youth to community-based organizations and non-law enforcement government programs that provide mental health services and other supports.
- Incorporate universal screening for student mental health, Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES), and other forms of trauma into county-level health systems and partnerships.
- Better oversight by the County Office of Education over [illegal spending on funds that can be spent on evidence-based mental health interventions on law enforcement](#).
- Support districts in building capacity and utilizing the billions of funding available through the [Children and Youth Behavioral Health Initiative](#).
- Invest in Psychiatric Mobile Response/PET teams throughout the county to increase the response time to students displaying suicidal behavior. Lack of investments and availability here results in students being in crisis for hours before receiving transportation to a hospital, or law enforcement being used to transport students.

DISTRICT LEVEL RECOMMENDATIONS

“Support from administrators and teachers and to be included and seen as an important part of the team instead of a separate entity of the school and step-children or just the “band-aid givers” or the help.” --
California School Nurse

- Clarify student rights to mental health days for excused absences (AB 516).
- Funding and incentives for schools to combat stigma led by students.
- Prioritize and normalize LCAP/LCFF spending for student mental health and PPS staff.
- Require schools to inform students about their rights, privacy, and mental health support to eliminate the stigma that over 30 percent of students attested to.
- Support schools and staff in participating in the Youth Mental Health First Aid (YMHFA) and suicide prevention training offered by CDE at no cost to schools and districts.
- Prioritize and explore partnerships and accessing Medi-Cal to meet the social, emotional, and mental health needs of students in schools. The [California Children’s Trust created this guide](#) that explains the basics and specifics for maximizing Medi-Cal in schools.
- Track the impact of investments in school-based mental success and PPS staff (attendance, academic, behavior, school climate, contact/meetings, SEL surveys) to justify further investments.
- Mandate increased flexibility and empathy from teachers to limit academic stress students are experiencing.
- Apply for Grants to create/expand Community Schools and other holistic education models.
- Ensure that schools invest in creating welcoming and supportive environments for LGBTQ students by training staff on students’ rights to privacy, ensuring school systems and policies respect students’ identities, and creating safe and welcoming spaces at school for students to be their authentic selves and protect their well-being.
- Develop a model for coordinated care and student support teams that integrates third-party providers at school sites. Coordinated care teams should meet weekly and all school staff be clear on the referral process and services available for students.³⁹

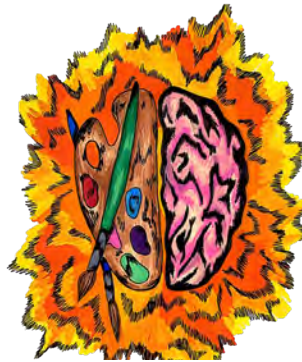
SCHOOL-LEVEL RECOMMENDATIONS

- Maximize Medi-Cal reimbursements to increase funds to pay for more student mental health services. Millions of parents and students have a right to services through this billion-dollar system that can fund services at school.
- Normalized Wellness Wednesdays or other weekly activities that introduce the entire school to self-care, healing, and breaks. Model what prioritizing self-care looks like and support staff self-care.
- Administer research-based and professionally supported surveys to assess the ongoing trauma of the pandemic coupled with information to access mental health.
- Student-driven and culturally responsive spaces and art projects like ancestral altars to support grieving.
- Support resocialization space for students through after school opportunities, increase the budget for student clubs and activities.
- Retain and invest in school counselors, social workers, and other PPS staff to support school-wide support teams. Follow [best practices for PPS staff](#).
- Increased empathy and flexibility from teachers to limit the academic stress that students experience.
- Provide Know Your Rights information and outreach for students: teach students about their rights (privacy, Med-Cal/low-income) and opportunities for seeking mental health services. This should be included in all school-based information about mental health or suicide prevention. Multi-lingual Know Your Rights information coming soon from our www.myschoolmyrights.com resource.
- Stigma-busting activities, campaigns, contests, and annual events led by students. Normalize talking about mental health, wellness, help-seeking, anxiety, etc.
- Ethnic studies or race-conscious curricula for students, racial/ethnic resources for students. Several students indicated in open-ended responses that fear of racial harassment contributed to their anxiety.
- Refrain from using and filtering programs to monitor students' online activity and communications, including for risk of self-harm, and refrain from using police to respond to non-emergency mental health issues. Mental health is not an excuse to surveil students. Surveillance technology invades student privacy and undermines the trust that students need to feel comfortable reaching out to the adults on campus when they need help.
- Implement support circles for students covering a broad range of topics (grief, social anxiety, self-harm, substance abuse, etc.).
- Create a wellness space for students. As one student described, "I want there to be a place to go when overwhelmed to breathe and take a few minutes before returning to class."

10 DEMANDS FOR STATE OFFICIALS FROM STUDENTS IN THEIR 2020 LETTER

These were originally included in a May 2020 letter to Governor Newsom, Superintendent Thurmond, and other state officials with the support of over 100 schools and 33 organizations.³⁸ The initiative was led by students at ACLU SoCal's Youth Liberty Squad. As of December 2021, students have not heard back from most of the state officials who received the letter although meetings occurred with the State Board of Education and others.

- Issue a letter in support of Student Mental Health Week (now 2022) and acknowledge access to school-based mental health as a civil rights issue (low-income/BIPOC/LGBTQ+ students do not have the same access as their counterparts).
- Host a town hall on student mental wellness. Invite students to speak at the forefront. We (YLS) are happy to help you organize this and can recommend other student organizations that should be engaged.
- Issue a directive calling on districts to stop spending LCAP funds intended for high-needs students on law enforcement in many school districts. A [report](#) by Pomona Student Union Youth Organizers and other/some of the signatories of this letter found over 40 percent of districts in Southern California are illegally spending LCAP funds. Direct them to spend money on counselors, not cops.
- Continue to address the digital divide and inequalities that have been exposed in the transition to distance learning. Consider the impact on students experiencing homelessness and the 1.1 million students who are English learners in the state.
- Invest the federal stimulus funding provided by the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act into more mental health resources such as school counselors, school psychologists, school nurses, and school social workers (PPS/credentialed).
- Protect and support investments to ensure school environments are ready to support and prioritize children's physical, mental, social, and emotional well-being.
- 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.
- "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.



"The State must act decisively to establish the leadership structure to support these local efforts and provide the technical assistance required to make schools 'centers of wellness and healing'" - CA Mental Health Services Oversight and Accountability Commission

[Click here to sign](#) the latest petition in support of student mental health or visit www.aclucalaction.org/prioritizehealth

CALIFORNIA ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS STATEMENTS

2020-2022 President, Dr. Jeannine Topalian, LEP

The COVID-19 pandemic has exasperated the mental health needs of our students; thus, creating another pandemic in mental health, especially for our most vulnerable populations. The data is clear- students are voicing their opinion, their right by providing insight into what they want to see in their school communities-school based mental health professionals - to be able to engage in learning by improving their mental health. Shouldn't we listen to what they want?

Stephanie Murray, MA, CASP Co-chair: Mental Wellness Committee

The pandemic and related school closures significantly increased and brought to light an already existing need for increased social-emotional learning and support for students. School psychologists, other school-employed mental health providers, schools, and districts have been working hard to expand the support to meet this need as well as to educate teachers and other staff in recognizing signs that a student may need extra support as well as to strengthen resilience in all students. This report brings to light the need and challenge of doing a better job of letting students know that help is available and in making it feel more accessible to those students and families.



CALIFORNIA ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL COUNSELORS STATEMENTS

Dr. Loretta Whitson, Executive Director of CASC

Counseling doesn't happen absent of having highly-qualified mental health professionals trained to work in our schools. While this report reflects an urgent need to address student mental health, California also must look at the long-term workforce development needs that will sustain mental health services for years to come.

Josh Godinez, Board Chair, California School Counselor of the Year 2019

Given the critical need of students, the immediate focus is for all students to have equitable services from experts in school-based mental health: school counselors, school psychologists, and school social workers. Every region, county, school district, and school in California must make this a sustainable priority.



APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS

SURVEY/INSTRUMENT:

Each survey instrument had 22 questions that ranged from open-ended, multiple-choice, scale (1-5 or 1-10), and more. The initial 2020 student wellness survey was developed with input from researchers, students, counselors, and other educators. It incorporated questions from instruments like the California Healthy Kids Survey while narrowing questions towards mental health and wellness. The instrument was piloted with the Youth Liberty Squad of the ACLU of Southern California in early April 2020 for feedback. The survey was anonymous although an optional response allowed for students to share their email. Less than 10 percent of students actually shared their contact information and most stayed anonymous. Some students who shared thoughts and experiences with suicidal ideations were sent follow-up emails with thank-yous and mental health resources. Improvements for clarity were made to the 2021 survey based-on responses to the 2020 survey.

SURVEY PARTICIPANTS/SAMPLE:

STUDENT GENDER

FEMALE	60%
MALE	35%
NON-BINARY/GENDER FLUID	3%

STUDENT GRADE LEVELS

8th Grade or Below	23%
9th Grade	20%
10th Grade	16%
11th Grade	18%
12 Grade	22%

SCHOOL DISTRICTS AND COUNTIES REPRESENTED IN DATA:

See Appendix F

DATA COLLECTION AND SURVEY DISTRIBUTION:

The surveys were distributed through students/Youth Liberty Squad, community groups, school counselors, and other educators. The 2021 survey was shared by the California Department of Education on some listservs. Cleaning, Recoding single words, Re-categorizing miscellaneous responses case-by-case

LIMITATIONS:

All research has limitations, and this report is no different. First, students were asked to rate their pre-COVID mental wellness in hindsight. This could increase the likelihood of them assigning a higher value to their pre-COVID wellness state. The survey was also not administered to a randomized sample due to the urgency and resources. It was administered to students who self-selected and decided to participate. Although there was significant geographic diversity, the sample size of 1,200+ is small for a state like California with over six million students. Furthermore, the

2021 survey did not receive as many responses (590) as the 2020 survey (658). This study did not look at race and social-economic status since the majority of California students are BIPOC and socioeconomically disadvantaged. The study also did not attempt to track the same cohort of students over the two years although many students completed the surveys both years. Finally, the survey did not identify the number of students meeting clinically-elevated symptom distress.

APPENDIX B: STUDENT BLOG ABOUT SURVEY & PETITION

About the Youth Liberty Squad: The Youth Liberty Squad is a youth leadership program created to engage high school students to inspire them and provide them with the tools to become the next generation of social justice leaders.

“Governor Newsom should fund student mental health”

By Catherine Estrada

JANUARY 6, 2021

In the early days of the COVID-19 lockdowns, as schools transitioned from in-person to remote learning, students were among the first to feel the effects of social isolation. We suffered silently as schools adjusted to virtual learning while paying little attention to the impact of this transition on students’ mental health. But the lack of mental health resources isn’t just a result of changes due to COVID-19 — the pandemic exposed an existing problem.

Student mental health has never been prioritized in this state. California ranks 48th in the nation when it comes to access to school counselors. Experts recommend one counselor for every 250 students, but in California there is just one counselor for every 682 students and one social worker for every 6,000 students. Our state has twice as many school police as school social workers and many districts have more police than nurses.

The reality is that California has over-invested in a punitive school policing system and left student health underfunded. Even on our own campuses, we were suspects before we were students. And now, during the stay-at-home order, we are denied access to counselors and left alone to fend for ourselves.

In May 2020, the [Youth Liberty Squad](#) (YLS) distributed a survey to students and received over 600 responses from students across California. The results of the survey highlighted the inadequate access to mental health resources during a global pandemic. Responses from students explicitly expressed anxiety, feeling overwhelmed, and misery as a result of social isolation.

I read all of the responses, including one from an individual who lost their job and expressed how that created uncertainty in their path to college. At the time, I was a junior. I read the responses with the hope that by the time it was my turn to apply to college, I could go to school and get the help I needed. Now I’m a high school senior, and I consider myself lucky because I managed to apply to college and have regular meetings with my school’s social worker. But I am only in contact with the social worker because of other personal circumstances.

I can’t help but think of my peers and close friends who aren’t offered support because perhaps their situation is not as fragile as mine. What about the 1.8 million students in California who attend schools with no social workers? Especially in this time of uncertainty, that help should be accessible to all. I live in a wealthy state, and yet access to mental health still seems like a luxury and not a right.

The YLS transformed the information from the survey into action, writing a letter to Superintendent Thurmond and Governor Newsom on behalf of all students in hopes of change. The letter summarized students' need for virtual tutors to address learning loss, prioritizing school-based mental health, and support for holistic education and wellness by improving access to the arts. Although the YLS has presented its findings to the California Legislature and the California Department of Education, half a year has passed with little response or action.

As a student, I feel mental health check-ins between administrators (teachers, social workers, counselors, etc.) and each and every individual pupil should be mandatory along with a period of rest. For example, my high school gives us a week of lecture and time with teachers without assigning new assignments in order for us to catch up — something called a “Power Week”, and my peers and I find this time useful and restorative.

The inaction of state leaders won't stop us. Our work is just beginning. We've [gathered signatures for a petition](#) for school-based mental health support as a civil right. Our leaders must listen to students who are seeing the impact of the government's decisions on our daily lives and our mental health. Students feel ignored by these policymakers, who have left us with a limited response and no support. Join us in our fight and demand state officials prioritize student mental health now.

APPENDIX C: MAY 2020 STUDENT LETTER TO GOVERNOR & STATE OFFICIALS

May 8, 2020

The Honorable Gavin Newsom, The Honorable Tony Thurmond, The Honorable Dr. Nadine Burke Harris, Dr. Linda Darling-Hammond

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.

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....([see original letter](#))

We understand that you are dealing with many unprecedented emergencies right now, 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. We also connected with educators and advocates for input. Here is a list of suggestions for your offices to consider prioritizing student success and wellbeing.

- Commencement: High school seniors have a great deal of uncertainty and fear that is compounding with anxiety. We have been deprived of a moment we and our families – particularly for families with students who are the first to graduate from high school – have looked forward to for years through graduation, and we are still figuring out if we will have any ceremony at all. Consider delivering a virtual commencement address to the Class of 2020 to provide encouragement and assurance.
- Invest in virtual tutors and other forms of supports such as “sufficient resources for the summer months to provide school meals and to address the significant learning loss that has occurred”
- Urge colleges to support flexible planning when considering the impact on college admissions and anxiety about the fall. After this hectic time, schools should be allowed time to transition.
- Issue a letter in support of Student Mental Health Week and acknowledge access to school-based mental health a civil rights issue.
- Host a town hall on student mental wellness. Invite students to speak at the forefront. We are happy to

help you organize this and can recommend other student organizations that should be engaged.

- Issue a directive calling on districts to stop spending LCAP funds intended for high-needs students on law enforcement. A report by Pomona Student Union Youth Organizers and other/some of the signatories of this letter found over 40% of districts in Southern California are illegally spending LCAP funds. Direct them to spend money on school-based mental health and counselors, not cops.
- Continue to address the digital divide and inequalities that have been exposed in the transition to distance learning. Consider the impact on students experiencing homelessness and the 1.1 million students who are English learners in the state.
- Invest the federal stimulus funding provided by the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act are spent on more mental health resources such as school counselors, school psychologists, school nurses, and school social workers.
- 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 ORGANIZATIONAL SIGNATORIES

- Arts for Incarcerated Youth Network (Arts for Healing and Justice)
- 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
- Colleegecash! - Comcast UN Media Subsidiary
- Community Coalition
- Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund
- 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

APPENDIX D: JUNE 2020 STUDENT TESTIMONY TO CA SENATE ABOUT SURVEY

June 5, 2020

The Honorable Patrick O'Donnell
Chair, Assembly Committee on Education

Dear Assemblymember O'Donnell and Members of the Education Committee:

My name is Anthony Flores-Alvarez, and I'm a junior at Manual Arts High School in South Los Angeles. I address you on behalf of not only the ACLU of Southern California's Youth Liberty Squad, but countless other students across California. I want to take this opportunity to thank you for providing me a space to voice our concerns. We understand you have to deal with a multitude of pressing concerns facing California students daily and that you too could be experiencing struggles with your well-being. Thank you for your work.

However, today I want to highlight one concern that has only been exacerbated by COVID-19: student mental health. For me, mental health has been something that I have spent the past three years in high school fighting to safeguard. However, due to COVID-19, I finally lost that battle. From the daily burnouts caused by schoolwork piles and taking care of my siblings, to the anxiety attacks caused by the increased uncertainty of the college admissions process, I unfortunately always find myself choosing to do work over maintaining my mental well-being. And with schools now closed, access to mental health resources has been more difficult than any assignment my teachers could ever give me.

However, mental health support was already very inadequate and inaccessible before the crisis. California is currently 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. In schools, our state has twice as many school police as school social workers, and more security guards than nurses. This reality is unacceptable. As the pandemic continues to magnify health disparities, our leaders must take a proactive role in supporting California's most vulnerable youth. One method of doing so is increasing accessibility to mental health services, such as counseling. Increased access to counseling and mental health services correlates with lower rates of expulsion, suspension, and incidents of fighting—even among students who do not participate in counseling programs. In addition, comprehensive counseling programs correlate with making students feel safer, improving relationships with educators, and fostering culture change at the school site. To shed light on these issues, the Youth Liberty Squad helped organize California's first "Student Mental Health Week" alongside students, teachers, and organizations, such as the California Association of School Counselors. Our first course of action involved mobilizing over 640 students to complete a survey to share the impact of COVID-19 on their mental well-being. The study reached students across 60 schools and 40 districts, in one of the most significant student mental health projects conducted by any group in California. After compiling all the data findings from the survey, one thing remains clear: this crisis is impacting students in unprecedented ways. For example, when asked to share one word to describe their overall feeling during the pandemic, the word cloud (included in the letter Youth Liberty Squad sent to Governor Newsom and other state leaders, attached) illustrates students feeling overwhelmingly "Stressed", "Sad", "Tired", "Overwhelmed", "Unmotivated", and "Anxious". When asked to rank their stress level during COVID-19 on a scale of Not Stressful to Very Stressful, 50% of our students reported being very stressed or moderately, while 39% reported being at least a little stressed. Unfortunately, that is only the tip of the iceberg. In only two weeks, friends who I would always turn to for positivity and motivation were completely transformed into students who now openly admitted they needed therapy. Regrettably, however, my friends were not alone. Our survey also found that in addition to the 24% of students that reported receiving mental health services before COVID-19, 27% of students who were not previously receiving mental health services feel like they could use them now. This finding means that more than half of California students could require mental health services once schools reopen.

Similarly, when students were asked "on a scale from 1 meaning "terrible" to 10 meaning "really good", how would you rate your mental wellness before the pandemic?", 65% of students reported scores in the upper 6-10 range, with only about 7% of students reporting a score close to "terrible". However, when asked "How would you rate your mental wellness now?", 51% of students reported scores in the bottom 1-5 range, with 21% now reporting a score close to "terrible." These numbers are shocking in themselves, but when you

remember that this is about the well-being of teenagers, it truly puts into perspective how crucial it is to maximize access to mental health resources at all schools across California.

Under the principle belief that students should not become merely another statistic, we gave students the space to tell us the reasons they feel stressed. Among numerous and equally valuable responses, we saw the majority of students reporting similar reasons. For example, some students are stressed because they are scared that their parents or family members could contract COVID-19. Specifically, some students stated that they are particularly concerned about their parents and family members who have underlying medical conditions or constitute essential workers. Moreover, other students reported that they are stressing because of the negative relationships and environment that exists in the very home they are currently confined to. For example, in one student's own words, "I loved to get away from home and go to school for a while to forget any issues, but now things have gotten harder, and it hasn't been easy to handle these conflicting emotions." Another student said, "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." Even a school counselor said, "...making phone calls and being stuck on a computer anxiously waiting and thinking 24/7 how are my students feeling at home without much outside time really has me worried."

However, the most common reason why students are stressing during this pandemic has been as a result of balancing vast sums of schoolwork with other responsibilities. We expect our students to excel academically, do assignments on time, and go above and beyond the homework without considering that some students have up to 8 classes (some of whom are college-level) that are continually uploading new assignments and tests. Simultaneously, these students have to deal with not only a global health pandemic, but countering feelings of boredom, stress, anxiety, fatigue, and sadness that weigh heavily on their mental and physical health. Additionally, most students have to spend countless hours every single day glued to computer screens. Why is this important you may ask? A Harvard Medical School study showed that increased exposure to blue light (emitted from our computer screens) throws off our body's circadian rhythm, causing a lack of sleep. Lack of sleep has been linked to increased risk of depression, as well as diabetes and cardiovascular problems.

Unfortunately, that is for the students who are in a good scenario and only worry about schoolwork and their well-being. Imagine the student living in a small studio apartment with his family of 8, having to focus on doing piles of online assignments and exams for up to 9 different courses while simultaneously caring for their siblings or grandparents. That student still has to worry about countless clubs, extracurriculars, SAT/ACT preparation, college essays, and the entirety of the college admissions process. More and more, we are seeing students have to choose to do schoolwork over sustaining their mental well-being. That is why it is imperative that we not let the lives of every student that you represent become an abstraction.

When you think of the students you are making decisions on, that should translate to the 16-year-old African-American student from a small, low-income neighborhood who's trying to balance her mental health with all her studies and still taking the time to go grocery shopping for seniors in her community. It should translate to the young Latino student that turns to school as his only source of counseling because his parents spend long nights screaming and yelling over filing for divorce, leaving him without anyone to turn to, let alone room to focus on school. Overall, these examples are crucial because they allow us to truly comprehend the extent to which students have been impacted and efficiently be able to plan how to best reopen schools with their mental health in mind.

That is why we asked our students to share what they would like to see changed in their schools next year. The vast majority of students touched on the same thing: they want schools to highlight student mental health. They want to walk into school every morning and see not only that the school administration cares for their mental well-being, but that they attempt to check-in with students. They want to see the California Department of Education not only establish and celebrate Student Mental Health Month but also highlight student mental health all year long.

Most importantly, however, they want to see the replacement of cops with counselors, nurses, social workers, and psychologists. For example, nearly 1.9 million students attend a school with police but not a full complement of health and mental health providers (including a nurse, psychologist, social worker, and counselor). Similarly, 5.9 million of the state's 6.2 million students (96 percent) were in schools where counselor caseloads far exceeded the ratio (250-1) recommended by the American School Counselor

Association. In fact, in my district, LAUSD, there are more cops in schools, then there are school nurses. Although administrators believe that the presence of police at our schools will improve school safety, it is from personal experience that I can confidently say I do not feel safe when I see police. Every morning, I wake up at 5 am, prepare my things for school, and make my daily journey from my small studio apartment in West Hollywood to Manual Arts High School in South Los Angeles. And every morning, if I'm not welcomed by the four police cars that are always parked conveniently in the front of the school, then I see the four police officers staring me down as I rush through the front doors of what was once a haven for me: my high school. It no longer feels like I'm going to school to genuinely enjoy a space of learning and growth because, during each passing period, I see the same four officers yelling at kids to get to class and pulling aside those that seem "suspicious." This is not an isolated incident, either. No credible research establishes a link between spending on law enforcement and school safety. In 2018, a WestEd Justice & Prevention Research Center survey found that: "[t]here is no conclusive evidence that the presence of school-based law enforcement has a positive effect on students' perceptions of safety in schools," and "common non-curricular policing strategies have no overall effects on measures of crime or discipline in schools."

That is why I, alongside countless students, teachers, and counselors, firmly believe school districts across California should follow what the Minneapolis Public School Board did and terminate their contracts with police. The city's public school board unanimously approved a resolution to end the district's agreement with the Minneapolis police department. This resolution comes after an online survey of Minneapolis students had received more than 1,500 responses, and about 90% of them supported terminating the district's contract with the police. The Minneapolis teachers union had also endorsed the change, calling on the city to invest in additional mental health support for students instead. California school districts should follow Minneapolis and school board members across the country that are taking action to get police out of their schools. After all, studies have shown that more students enter the criminal justice system when more police officers are in schools, sparking concern that officers fuel a school-to-prison pipeline that disproportionately harms students of color.

However, what may be the primary reason why school districts should follow the Minneapolis Public School Board is due to the current events occurring not only in each corner of our country but overseas as well. Following the tragic killing of George Floyd, an African-American father of a 6-year-old girl, at the knee of a Minneapolis police officer and under the eyes of other Minneapolis police officers and civilians, protests have quickly spread across the United States and internationally in support of Black Lives Matter. At these protests, there is one group of people that have taken up arms with the African-American community and shown constant support: the youth. Today's youth have joined the ongoing protests in record numbers proving that not only are we civilly engaged, but most importantly, that the issue of police brutality is one that deeply resonates with us. Continuing to allow police officers on our school campuses will not only make some students afraid of attending school (causing added stress and worry to the school environment) but create tension amongst teenagers and police. For the safety of our students, push for school districts to terminate their contracts with local police departments, and help rid our educational system of the systemic racism that has plagued our country's institutions.

Given the many ways this pandemic has added stress and anxiety to our lives, students have increased mental health needs that are currently not being met. We are the state's economic future, and our well-being cannot be neglected 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. Schools are community lifelines and provide a safe environment and other supports for students.

Although we acknowledge the limitations that these institutions currently face, we must ensure they continue to provide the very resources millions of California students depend on. I hope you do not try to use this presentation as your token example of listening to students and that you don't simply sit and listen; you do your job and take what you heard into consideration when you think of improving conditions for students across California. I am merely 1 of over 6 million lives and futures that are currently in your hands. Thank you.

Sincerely,
Anthony Flores-Alvarez, Senior in LAUSD Schools
Student and Member of the Youth Liberty Squad

APPENDIX E: 2021 STUDENT PETITION TO GOVERNOR & STATE OFFICIALS

SUPPORT COUNSELORS AND THE ARTS, NOT COPS AND ARRESTS

Delivered with 4,000+ signatures in January 2021 to:

- Governor Gavin Newsom
- Tony Thurmond, State Superintendent of Public Instruction
- Dr. Linda Darling-Hammond, State Board President, CA State Board of Education
- Dr. Nadine Burke Harris, California Surgeon General
- Senator Connie Leyva, Chair, Senate Committee on Education
- Assemblymember Patrick O'Donnell, Chair, Assembly Committee on Education
- Brooks Allen, Executive Director, State Board of Education
- Dr. Mark Ghaly, Secretary of Health and Human Services

We, the undersigned California students and concerned adults, write to urge you to act to protect and support the mental health of California students. We submit this petition in support of the letter sent to you by the Youth Liberty Squad and endorsed by dozens of organizations on May 8th, 2020. We urge you to take action to ensure that California schools no longer treat their public school students like criminals and instead provide holistic supports that will help them recover from the pandemic and thrive, including investing more in school-based mental health, arts education, and other critical resources. Youth leaders from more than 60 schools highlighted the following facts and recommendations in the May 8th letter. We demand a response and leadership to support students in this unprecedented time of crisis.

CARE-LESS AND COP-FULL CALIFORNIA

- California is 48th in the nation when it comes to access to school counselors.
- In a state with over 10,000 schools, in a time of pandemic, there are just 2,500 school nurses.
- There are nearly 400,000 California students in schools that lack a counselor but have police.
- There are twice as many school police than school social workers in California schools.
- There are more security guards in California schools than there are nurses.
- There are over fifty research-proven benefits of an arts education, including increased IQ, verbal skills, math skills, well-being, empathy, creativity, and self-esteem, all while decreasing stress and anxiety. Despite the evidence showing an arts education supports wellness and academic success, just 39% of California students are enrolled in arts courses, one of the lowest rates of enrollment in the nation.
- School police, by contrast, have been found only to contribute negatively to school environments and students. Nearly 90% of students in our statewide survey indicated they supported the permanent removal of police from schools and the reinvestment of the resources into counselors, arts, and other evidence-based student supports.

All of this is unacceptable, but particularly egregious in a post-crisis world.

We urge you to take the following actions, many of which were presented in the May 8th letter:

- Prioritize school-based mental health in your governing and budgeting. California schools need thousands of additional counselors, nurses, social workers, and psychologists. The state needs to work with districts to ensure that funding is available for these essential school personnel.
- Further support holistic education and wellness by improving access to the arts, which has been shown to support student mental health and address trauma. 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.
- Prioritize art access for the students with the least access. This includes students with disabilities, English Learners, incarcerated youth, Black students, and other vulnerable students. Black arts matter and we prioritized this theme in our first student art journal.
- Host a Student Wellness Town Hall to examine the underinvestment in student mental health supports, the inequalities in how those supports are provided, and the opportunities for leadership on these issues.
- Demonstrate stronger leadership in the movement to remove police from schools. This can begin with the Governor in partnership with State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Thurmond, immediately seeking the input of grassroots, youth development organizations around the state as he makes appointments to the recently created Young People's Task Force, to ensure full representation of those youth most affected by the school to prison pipeline and the presence of police in schools.
- Continue to address the digital divide and inequalities that have been exposed in the transition to distance learning. Consider the impact on students with disabilities, students experiencing homelessness, and the 1.1 million students who are English learners in the state. Invest in innovative supports and virtual tutoring. Provide schools with support to ensure that they are providing mental health and other critical resources remotely during the pandemic.
- Meet with representatives of the Youth Liberty Squad to discuss how to ensure that California schools devote resources to counselors, not cops, and arts, not arrests!

APPENDIX F: LIST OF COUNTIES AND SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN SURVEY

23 COUNTIES

1. Alameda
2. Contra Costa
3. Imperial
4. Kern
5. Kings
6. Lake
7. Los Angeles
8. Monterey
9. Orange
10. Placer
11. Riverside
12. Sacramento
13. San Bernardino
14. San Diego
15. San Francisco
16. San Joaquin
17. San Mateo
18. Santa Barbara
19. Shasta
20. Sonoma
21. Stanislaus
22. Tulare
23. Ventura

Some students who completed the survey also attended other charter and private schools not affiliated with any of these districts.

46 SCHOOL DISTRICTS

1. Apple Valley USD
2. Berkeley USD
3. Brea-Olinda USD
4. Cajon Valley USD
5. Carlsbad USD
6. Coachella Valley USD
7. Compton USD
8. Corona-Norco USD
9. Centinela Valley Union HSD
10. Daly City
11. Desert Sands USD
12. Eastside Union Elementary
13. Eureka Union SD
14. Galt Joint Union HSD
15. Green Dot Charters
16. Hacienda La Puente USD
17. Hanford Joint Union HSD
18. Hart USD
19. Imperial USD
20. Inglewood USD
21. Kern High USD
22. Lakeport USD
23. Los Angeles USD
24. Modesto City Schools
25. Montebello USD
26. Mountain Union Elementary
27. Oxnard Union HSD
28. Palmdale USD
29. Pasadena USD
30. Pittsburg USD
31. Porterville USD
32. Reef-Sunset USD
33. Salinas Union HSD
34. San Diego USD
35. San Ramon Valley USD
36. Santa Maria Joint Union HSD
37. Santa Monica-Malibu USD
38. Santa Rosa City Schools
39. Santa Ana USD
40. Sequoia Union HSD
41. South Monterey Joint Union HSD
42. Sweetwater Union HSD
43. Tahoe Truckee USD
44. Twin Rivers USD
45. Ventura USD
46. Wiseburn USD

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