



California HOSA Youth Speaking Up for Youth Mental Health Day 2019

CAL-HOSA CHARTERS: Cathedral City,¹ CIS Academy,² Coachella Valley High School,¹ Dinuba High School,³ Granite Hills High School,¹ Los Altos High School,² Madera South High School,³ Manteca High School,⁴ Palmdale High School,³ Sato Academy of Math and Sciences,² Southwest High School,¹ Valencia High School,² Venice High School,² Washington Union High School,³ Weston Ranch High School.⁴

California Charter Region:

¹ Region 5, ² Region 4, ³ Region 3, ⁴ Region 1

ABSTRACT

On March 27, 2019, 143 Cal-HOSA student leaders, 22 Cal-HOSA advisors, and six educators/ administrators from 15 Cal-HOSA charters gathered in Sacramento, California, to discuss and reach evidence-based consensus about student mental wellness and the unique role that Cal-HOSA plays in prevention and early intervention and workforce leadership for students between the ages of 12 and 21. One overarching consensus statement among Cal-HOSA students is the importance of acknowledging that early experiences do shape the development and trajectory of a young person's life. That is, early life experiences that are laden with trauma and chronic stress can have long-lasting effects on the behavior, learning, and physical and mental health of young people. The Cal-HOSA prevention and early prevention framework is a youth-defined strategy with a focus on early detection, combined with appropriate peer-led interventions that can change a child's trajectory from mental illness to one of wellness and full participation in school and community life (e.g., participation in workforce, successful relationships, and prolonged social and economic prosperity). The following pages contain five major themes and 30 statements from Cal-HOSA students as their call to action for policies to improve school-based mental health programs in California.

SPEAKERS

A total of 13 speakers, including Cal-HOSA youth leaders, educators, and mental health professionals representing community-based organizations

THEME 1: WORKFORCE AND LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT: TRAINING AND CAPACITY BUILDING

- Require (mandate) training for teachers/educators, staff, and students about mental health using mental health first aid requirement with certification.
- Allocate resources and user-friendly information to support teacher and Cal-HOSA advisor training.
- Ensure student leadership and community engagement opportunities have the potential to increase students' motivation to serve others.
- Allow participation of children and youths in workforce development activities that give them a meaningful role and sense of purpose in the area of mental health.
- Build youths' motivation (self-efficacy) in their college and career readiness to work with special populations (e.g., children with autism).
- Encourage children and youths to participate in organized community-focused work-based learning activities advocating for funding to support school-based mental health programs.

THEME 2: SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH: IDENTIFICATION OF RISK FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH MENTAL HEALTH DISORDERS

- Develop whole-school approaches and strategies to detect early onset of stress, toxic stressors, and pressure from home that could lead to anxiety and self-harm.
- Adopt whole-school approaches that highlight the negative impact of stigma and shame associated with mental health, and behaviors that reinforce stigma and shame.
- Identify specific aspects of social media that promote fear, bullying, and trauma among children and youth that feel marginalized.
- Develop an early intervention and bullying policy for schools to protect children and prevent fatalities.
- Educate teachers and school staff on risk factors associated with mental illness and suicide and stimulate open discussions among students, educators, and school administration.
- Encourage thorough discussion around this topic to fully understand its impact on youth from diverse backgrounds.

THEME 3: STRENGTH-BASED SOLUTIONS: INCLUSION, RELATIONSHIPS, AND PEER NETWORKS

- Provide access to adult mentors and role models to positively influence children and youths to gain self-esteem, self-efficacy, and relationships with peers, teachers, and parents.
- Encourage dialogue during school activities among parents and families that have similar experiences to dispel some of the negative attitudes and behaviors toward mental health issues.
- Promote communication and connections among students with similar life experiences, creating a sense of community and belonging that leads to positive physical and mental wellbeing and development.

- Develop school curriculum and classroom instruction that promotes self-discovery of personal and cultural strengths and core values (e.g., respect, empathy, courage, and social responsibility) build resiliency in children and youth.
- Foster peer-to-peer support groups to employ acceptance among those struggling with issues related to intrinsic motivation and resilient behavior in children and youth.
- Support social inclusion in schools by incorporating the Cal-HOSA model of providing equal access to opportunities regardless of children and youths' social, cultural, physical, demographic, sexual orientation and gender identity characteristics.

THEME 4: SAFE SPACES AND SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT (CLIMATE)

- Make prevention and early intervention in K-12 a priority or sense of urgency and not another missed opportunity.
- Dedicate time before, during, and after school to raise awareness and promote positive mental health.
- Encourage an open-minded, open-to-learn and listen, caring and social supportive environment to positively influence individual and group wellness.
- Engage in systemic and deliberate training for teachers to create safe spaces for children and youths to feel motivated to talk about life experiences and make meaningful connections.
- Create and promote welcoming and safe spaces where students can practice mindfulness activities.
- Develop safe space training for teachers and school staff with a focus on the LGBTQ community.
- Dedicate time away from academic lessons to engage children and youths in conversations about mental health by establishing a "mental health day" in schools for stronger academic performance and achievement.

THEME 5: YOUTH-DESIGNED STRATEGIES AND SOLUTIONS

- Ensure children and youths play a significant role in designing strategies that guide school-based mental health programs.
- Create opportunities for youths to participate in higher-level discussions and decision-making on what matters most to them.
- Promote children and youths' lived and life experiences through storytelling and hip-hop as a strategy aligned with English language arts.
- Empower students with the knowledge and skills that will help them detect early and deal with mental health issues of their own and their families and friends.
- Establish community engagement opportunities for children and youths to better understand the challenges that impact the lives of vulnerable populations, and design interventions to overcome those challenges.

STUDENT FEEDBACK

To assess the readability and accurateness of the key themes and statements, four Cal-HOSA advisors convened a small group of 52 students to review and discuss the content of the themes and statements. One advisor used a Socratic seminar approach in which students could openly and constructively react to and develop new inquiry about the themes and statements. The second, third, and fourth advisors organized a small focus group of students that participated in the March 27 breakout sessions, and asked them to read each theme and its statements, and offer reactions and changes to ensure segments reflect what matters most to youths, in terms of prevention and early intervention. Overall, the students felt that the themes and statements documented in this document capture their perspectives and recommendations to promote positive mental health, early identification of social determinants, and addressing stigma. For example, one student said this about having safe spaces and caring adults: "... it is very important for students to have a place or person to go to when dealing with mental health." Another said this about the themes and statements: "... these themes and statements are what need to be discussed in school environments [to promote] youth mental health [and wellness]." Some students used this opportunity to reflect on their Cal-HOSA chapter and experience: "[My] connection with Cal-HOSA... is the reason to come to school on some days," said one student. "A lot of times students' safe zone may be at school [Cal-HOSA] and once they leave the campus, many stressors that they may be dealing at home become more intense," added another student. On the other hand, students indicated that for these themes and statements to become practice policies, educators and school staff require more education, training, and understanding about the needs of special populations. "...our teachers need to receive safe-space training, and our LGBTQ student community would really benefit," said one student. One student summarized the experience this way: "The best part of our conference was hearing those personal experiences through their storytelling... We relate to them... Made me realize that I'm not the only one thinking those things... We need to have our poetry club do something similar... Students need to be part of discussions... How would you guys [policymakers] know how we feel or what we need if you are not including us in those discussions?" Another student summarized an action step this way: "Having connections between others (students, teachers, parents, etc.) in a positive manner allows for the comfortable dialogue that is needed to [break stigmas and move forward] discussing what used to be a 'hush-hush' topic."



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