



Basic Knowledge about Mental Health



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INTRODUCTION

Hello, we are The Team! We are part of the Fox Valley CARES Student Research Institute, and our main goal is to educate people on the basic knowledge surrounding mental health. In our research, we came across many questions about students' mental health in the AASD. After thinking and questioning for a couple of hours, the big question we came up with was, "Do you think the current resources for mental health impact students in the AASD area?" Our goal with this question was to find out if students and teachers/staff part of the AASD (Appleton Area School District) had reliable resources when it comes to learning/teaching more about basic information about mental health. In our report, we discussed the difference between the way teachers/staff and students think, comparison between students' and teachers'/staff's knowledge, and understanding some basic knowledge!

BACKGROUND

What is mental health?

Mental health is an important topic that is not as discussed as it should be. For years, there has been a stigma around discussing mental health. This stigma has prevented people in the community from seeking help and not feeling alone. As a community, we need to break this stigma and give a voice to the voiceless. The Team took on this research project to bring awareness to the community, and start a change in the community and AASD. By implementing this change in the AASD, we hope to make students more comfortable with seeking help. We also hope that we will increase the basic knowledge on mental health in schools with teachers and students.

What are some current issues of mental health in AASD?

The issues in AASD & Wisconsin are the lack of funding in mental health resources (PBS), students missing from school due to mental health struggles (Post Crescent), lack of professional counselors in schools (PBS), and the increase in number of students who are in needs for mental health support (Post crescent).

AASD's student mental health resource receives funding from the WEA Member Benefits Foundation and Wisconsin Educators Association Council, the organizations that were created for the benefit of public school employees and their families, and teachers are donating to help assist in getting the help for students to access their mental health (WEAC). However, WEAC is mainly consisting of staff and teachers at school, meaning teachers and staff are directly donating their salary to school's mental health resources. In addition, the AASD's goal was to reach 120k

to fund for mental health, but they mostly received funding under 70k meaning the AASD aren't able to completely fund for mental health support like they intended to (AASD).

An Article that aided in the research and understanding of mental health is listed below:

<https://mindfulhealthsolutions.com/why-mental-health-should-be-taught-in-schools/>

The article listed above discusses the stigma surrounding the topic of mental health and how this stigma has impacted the reluctance of schools to teach mental health. Mental health issues are something that a lot of children and teens face. The reluctance of schools to educate students on the topic of mental health does not take away the fact that mental health issues occur and neither does it prevent it. By teaching students about mental health, schools can give students an opportunity to understand themselves and their peers. By helping them understand themselves, the school can provide students the ability to identify mental health struggles among their peers. They are also making them an option for help to their peers who may struggle with talking to adults.

This article then highlights the consequences of failing to educate students on the topic of mental health. If mental health is not taught in schools, students may end up feeling alone. They may feel like they have been abandoned and left to go through their mental health struggles alone, which could negatively impact their future. Dealing with mental health struggles in silence could lead to catastrophic outcomes such as suicide. In order to help prevent this and challenge the stigma surrounding mental health, talking about mental health conditions should be normalized. When this stigma is broken, students will feel more comfortable with talking about their mental health struggles and asking for help.

METHODOLOGY

We began choosing our topic, which is the basic knowledge about mental health in the AASD. Then we wrote our goals. We figured that we wanted to know about how much similarity there is between what is taught about mental health and what students want to know. Our team also wanted to learn about how the current mental health resources the AASD provides have any impacts on students.

We determined that doing surveys was the better option to collect data for our research goal. We wrote and reviewed the questions, and asked the teachers and students to get favorable answers, which can help us to better understand their experience about mental health in school. Then we separated our questions into one survey section for students and then another survey section for teachers and staff members in the AASD.

After reviewing survey responses from our participants, we collected quantitative and qualitative data and analyzed them accordingly. We received 17 responses: 10 from teachers and staff and 7 from students.

7 Students	10 Teachers and Staff
Valley New School: 29% Appleton East High School: 29% Appleton West High School: 29% Appleton North High School: 14% Caucasian/White: 29% Black/ African American: 29% African: 14% Asian: 14% Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander: 14%	Valley New School: 10% Appleton East High School: 50% Appleton West High School: 20% Columbus: 10% Middle School: 10% Caucasian/White: 80% Black/African American: 20%

FINDINGS:

Student findings:

Through the survey that we conducted, the Team decided to group what stood out most in the responses into themes. The Team was able to find three common themes that surfaced with most of the responses for the students. These themes allowed us to understand how much impact the knowledge of mental health has had on the participants. These themes are: awareness/unawareness of mental health/mental health struggles, education on the meaning and importance of mental health, and understanding the difference between mental health, mental illnesses and mental disorders.

Awareness/Unawareness of mental health/mental health struggles

When people have awareness on the topic of mental health and its struggles, it reduces misconceptions of mental health. It allows people to know that mental health exists and that there are ways to seek help if they ever find themselves struggling with it. Through the evaluation of the student survey, we realized that the number of students who were not aware of mental health and its struggles outweighed the number of students that were aware. The majority of the participants noted in the survey that their teachers or staff rarely connected them with mental health resources nor made mental health more well known by talking about it. This can be seen in Image 1 and 2 below. Although the AASD can improve in raising the awareness of mental health in its schools, the participants have noted that there are some clubs in their respective schools which have helped them increase their awareness on mental health. The survey showed

that most students feel like Sources of Strength and Equality Club have had the most impact on their awareness of mental health. This can be seen in image 3 below.

IMAGE 1

Have any teachers/staff tried connecting you with mental health resources?

7 responses

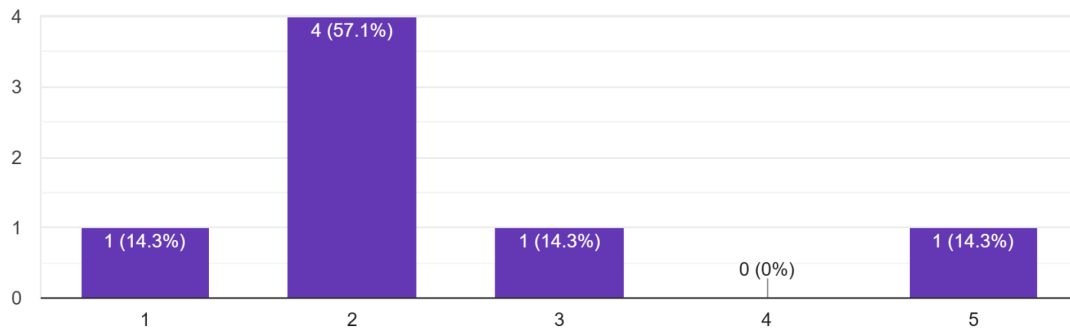


IMAGE 2

How often do you see teachers/staff teaching or making mental health more aware inside of school?

7 responses

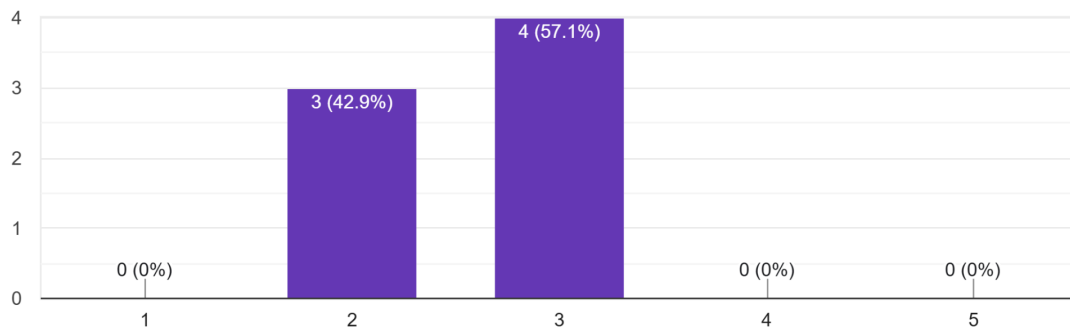
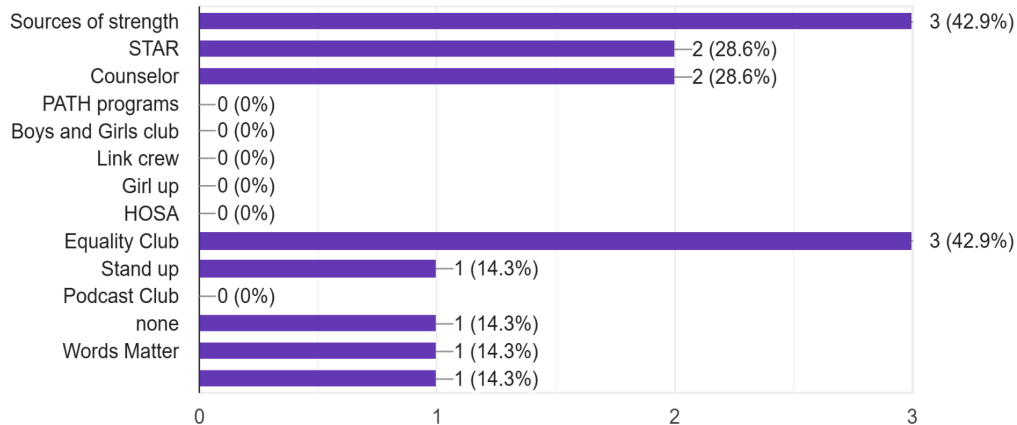


IMAGE 3

Mark the following AASD programs and services that have an impact on your awareness of mental health?

7 responses

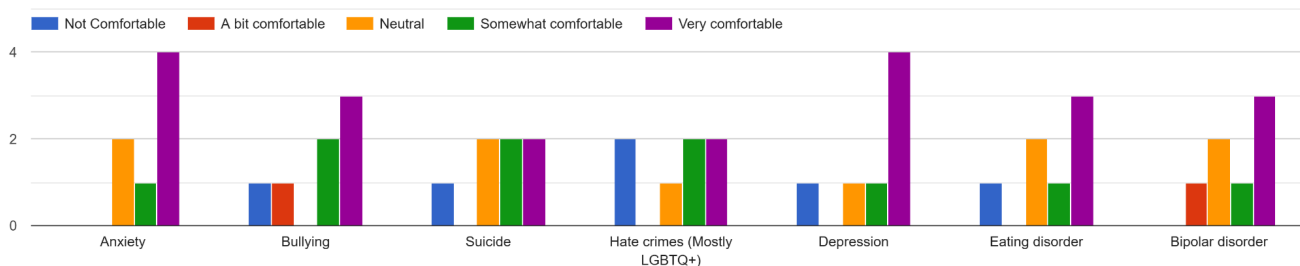


Education on the meaning and importance of mental health

Education is defined as the process of acquiring information and knowledge about a particular subject or field. With education, people are able to empower themselves with knowledge about certain things. Education on the meaning and importance of mental health should be a key part of the AASD curriculum. From the survey we realized that a lot of students did not learn anything about mental health from school; however, they would like to learn more. Many students expressed that they want to learn about the importance of mental health and suggested that it could be incorporated into the school curriculum. One of the survey questions asked the participants what topics of mental health they would be open to learning about and these were the results. About 52% of the student participants were most comfortable with talking about the topics of depression, bullying, and anxiety. About 31% of students are somewhat comfortable with the topics of suicide, bullying, and hate crimes. About 17% of the participants are not at all comfortable with the topics of bullying, suicide, hate crimes, and eating disorders. This can be seen in Image 4 below. The AASD needs to implement a change that will allow for the addition of the topic of mental health into the school curriculum.

IMAGE 4

What is your comfort level in learning the following topics about mental health? (Scale 1-5)



Understanding the difference between Mental health, Mental illness, and Mental disorders

Many people tend to confuse the definitions of mental health, mental illness, and mental disorders. Although these topics center around the main idea of the wellbeing of the mind, they all have different meanings. Mental health is defined as the emotional, social, and psychological state of well-being. It affects how people think, feel, and act. Most people believe that mental illness and mental disorders are the same but they are different. Mental illness can be defined as the conditions that influence a person's feelings, mood, and behavior. It affects more than just the mind. There is a wide range of mental illnesses. These illnesses include depression, anxiety, and so much more. Mental disorders on the other hand can be defined as a disruption of the normal functioning of the body. Although many health professionals tend to use the terms 'Mental illness' and 'Mental disorders' interchangeably, they still have different meanings. 'Mental illness' is the more modern term of 'Mental disorders' that goes on to explain that mental illnesses affect more than just the mind (Mental Illness vs. Mental Disorder). It affects a person's body as a whole.

Teacher Findings:

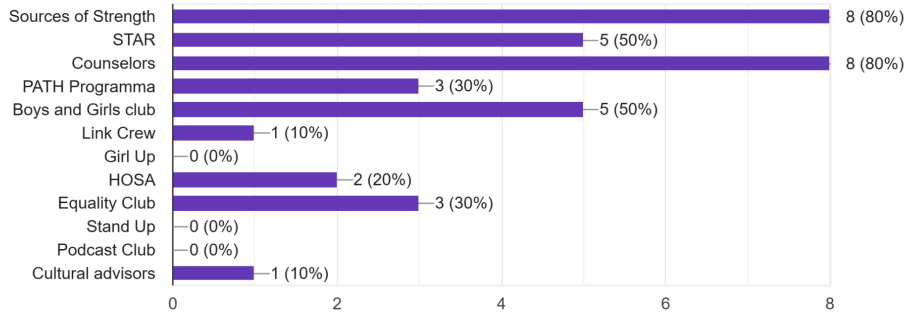
Same as students' findings, we decided to take codes and group them to the ones that matched or had similarities. After that process we got down to four: Awareness, School System, Resources, and Experiences.

Awareness: Teachers believe that students should get the right access to the knowledge about mental health. Most of them want to be advocates for students' mental health. For example, teachers voiced they are firm advocates for students' mental health and are eager to spread awareness about mental health. They say "*Dealing with mental health isn't bad and it doesn't mean one is crazy. It is an important and valuable part of our identity*" (Teacher's Survey). We also asked a question "Mark the following AASD programs and services that have an impact on students' awareness of mental health?" in the survey (Teacher's survey). In the graph below,

teachers believe that the following programs bring the most awareness to mental health: Sources of strength (80% of teachers), Counselors (80% of teachers), STAR which is an acronym for Scholars on target to achieve results (50% of teachers), and the boys and girls club (50% of teachers).

Mark the following AASD programs and services that have an impact on students' awareness of mental health?
10 responses

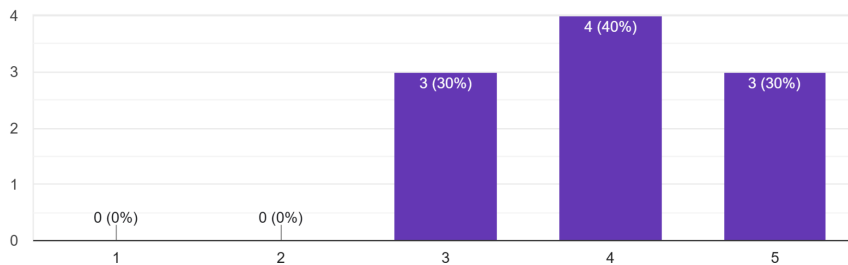
IMAGE 5



School system: Students need to trust their teachers to be able to tell them about what they are going through and be able to confide in them. The teachers need to learn how to communicate with students in school, even going to say *“Building relationships with my students, and students needing to understand the way the brain works with family trauma and ways to cope, and working to help students with their mental health.”* (Teachers survey). Additionally, teachers said that technology is closely related to students' mental health; specifically, students should regulate without the need of technology, cell phones, and social media. Another common theme was teachers wanting to add mental health to their curriculum so that they can educate their students about mental health and that if they were going through issues, they could reach out for help and feel comfortable asking their friends and others for help

IMAGE 6

How comfortable are you with teaching students about mental health?
10 responses



Resources: In the survey, teachers mentioned they used a lot of outside mental health training materials. This can help teachers to reach out to students and help them find resources that will be helpful with supporting students' mental health. Finding information through projects and working with teachers can help students to open up and feel safe with that teacher about what they are going through. An example a teacher gave was *“Teaching students how to help peers with crises and who they can reach out to when needed, and helping others understand and that there is always someone out there to help them.”*(Teacher's Survey).

Have you connected any students with resources that surround mental health?

10 responses

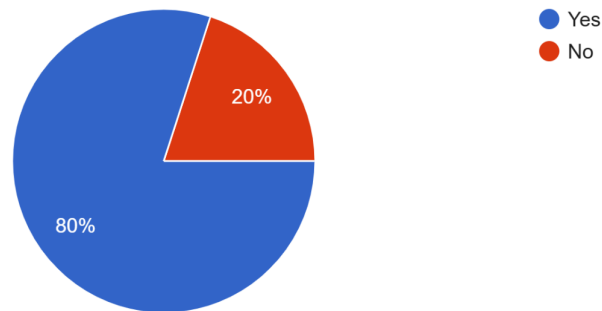


IMAGE 7

Experiences: In our staff survey, we found that a lot of staff had mixed comfortability about students' mental health issues. Majority of teachers were pretty comfortable having conversations with their class about mental health, discussing certain topics, and building a safe space for their students. However, a good amount of teachers were not at all comfortable with bringing up certain conversations or teaching certain topics surrounding mental health, this was because they felt as though they were not prepared nor educated on some topics. These topics included: ED (Eating disorders), bipolar disorder, hate crimes (Mostly directed towards the LGBTQ+), suicide, etc. These topics listed above were the ones that most teachers were not comfortable talking about during class, because they did not have any type of experiences or knowledge on these topics.

IMAGE 8

What is your comfort level in teaching the following topics about mental health?

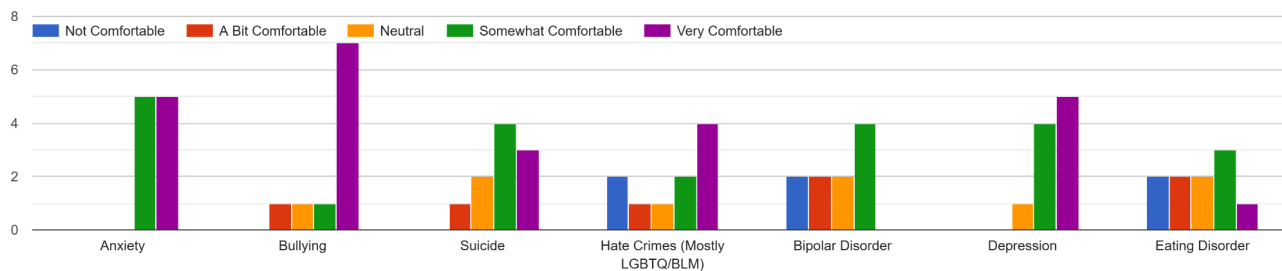
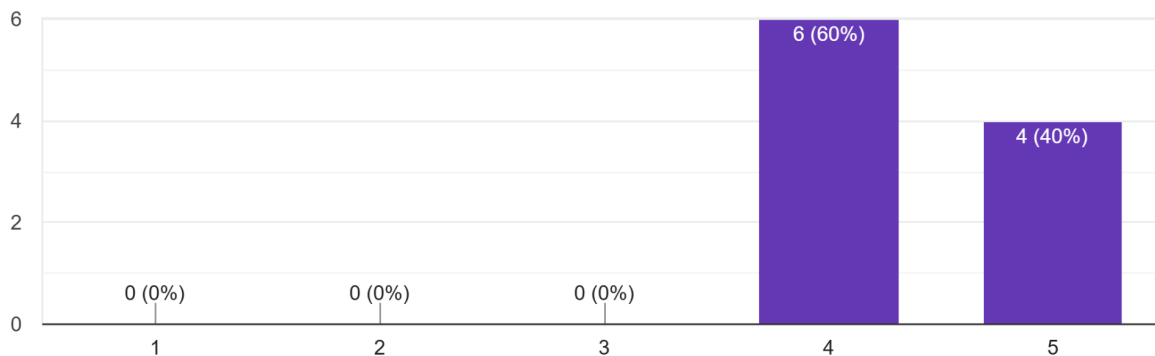


IMAGE 9

How comfortable are you supporting students who are experiencing mental health crises?

10 responses



THEME COMPARISON:

Students' Awareness & Teachers' Awareness of Mental Health:

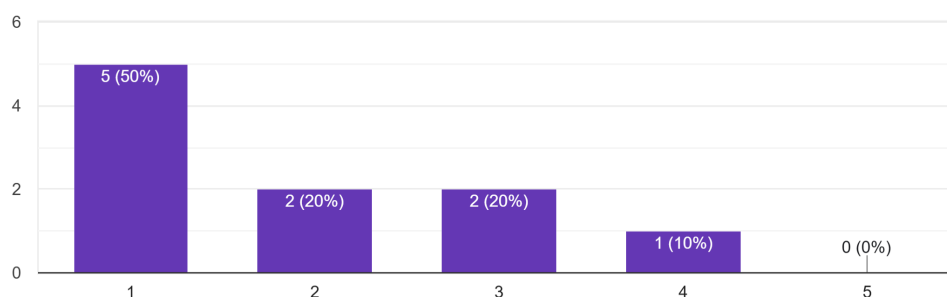
Through our teacher and student surveys we came to the realization that both teachers and students believe that there should be more mental health awareness in the AASD. The student participants noted that they feel their teachers do not reach out to them about mental health topics. Although the student survey showed that teachers do not reach out to students about mental health, the teacher survey showed that the teachers do not receive the proper resources to bring about awareness to their students. This can be seen in image 10 below in which the majority of teachers note that they do not use district materials to teach about mental health. This is mainly because the district has not provided them with enough materials to teach about it. One of the teacher participants said "I was not given any materials". Without the proper resources, teachers are not able to bring awareness about mental health to students. Without awareness,

teachers and students will continue to remain in the dark about the topic of mental health and mental health struggles.

IMAGE 10

How often do you use the district materials to teach about mental health? What materials do you use to teach about mental health?

10 responses



Education & Resources:

In the survey, students and teachers were asked a similar question “What AASD programs and services have an impact on your awareness of mental health?” for students and “what AASD programs and services have an impact on students' awareness of mental health?” Teachers reported that Sources of Strength and counselors have an impact on students’ mental health. In comparison, students reported that Sources of Strength and Equality Club have an impact on students’ mental health.

At the end of both surveys students and teachers responded to a similar question. Teachers were asked, “What do you think students should know concerning the topic of mental health?” Students were asked, “Input question: About what can AASD do to improve their education regarding mental health?” Both responses were different. For example, teachers were saying that students should know they are not alone, that there is help out there for students who struggle with mental health, that students should learn how to value how they feel because it is a part of their identity. On the other hand, students were saying how they would like more resources, wanting people whose profession deals with mental health to come in and talk, and also wanting teachers to put mental health into their own curriculum not just to have little conversations in class.

RECOMMENDATIONS

What actions should be taken based on the findings?

- Encore classes teaching about mental health such as gym
- Classes that talk about triggering topics (trauma-informed teaching practices)
Examples: Give supportive feedback to reduce negative thinking, and Employ Thoughtful Reactions.
- Instead of implementing mental health surveys in homeroom, the school could have mental health professionals come in and talk about mental health. They could have some hands-on activities to engage the kids.
- Mental Health Day
 - Possible activities:
 - Education about mental health and available resources
 - Remind people of healthy ways of coping
 - Guest Speakers
 - Fun, hands-on, educational activities
- Teachers making connections with students. (they have someone to connect with so they don't feel alone) Examples: Doing check in with students, so they can make sure everything is okay in general and decompress from the stress in school and home life. Include mental health in the curriculum.(to normalize mental health talk and topics) This will help students understand what mental illness they might be struggling with, and how to support themselves. The curriculum will also encourage teens/students to be more comfortable talking about it amongst each other.
- The AASD should talk or have a day to educate students on mental health with hand-on activities and presentations. (Presentations that inform the students and teachers about mental health; not just a slide with links or QR codes.)
- Students seem less aware about mental health than teachers, so the AASD could assign teachers to share facts about mental health with their students in SSR/Flex. (Hands-on or not).

RESEARCHER REFLECTIONS

Naiara - “I signed up to the Student Research Institute because I wanted to do something more than what I am normally used to, I did not want to waste my summer being at home doing nothing, I wanted to increase my knowledge about mental health. This topic was important to me because I believe that mental health is really important in every part of our life because not having a good mental health can cause difficulties in all aspects of life, like relationships with family, friends and community. I am proud of what we have done over these past 3 weeks.”

Amanda - “When I signed up for the Student Research Institute, I honestly didn’t expect the research to be so informative and fun to interact with people who had similar goals than me. I would’ve usually spent my summer in my house, waiting for school to start again and never expecting my summer to be anything different, but I had so much fun with The Team. I’m glad I

signed up for the Institute because I enjoyed the friends I've made and reconnecting with friends I haven't talked to in a while.

Eunice - "I decided to join because I wanted to make a change and learn new things"

Shola - "I decided to join this institute because I wanted to try something new and by doing that, I could hopefully make a change in the community. So far this institute has been fun and very informative. I enjoyed this research program and I hope that our research can inspire others and make a difference in our community"

Serenity - "I decided to join the CARES institute because I plan to go to college for something that has connections with social justice, and I had thought this was a perfect opportunity to learn, find my purpose and to make money."

Sierra - "When I found out about this Institution I was excited! I always had a love for social justice topics. When I got accepted I couldn't wait to learn more. This institution has taught me so much that I can't wait to use my knowledge in the outside world."

Hilary (Facilitator) - "This Research helped show me that when students are given an opportunity to learn deeply about ideas that are important to them, they can learn at a high level and apply righteous academic students to team based work."

Jesus (Facilitator) - "I have been so excited to participate in the research institute, and use my research skills to train students and improve our education."

Caleb (Facilitator) - "Institute is both challenging and rewarding for me. As someone who is fresh out of college, it required huge effort to mentor and facilitate a whole research team. But I very much enjoyed getting to know my team of researchers, getting into community-based research, and envisioning what is possible for all of us. I am grateful for this experience."

IMPLICATIONS

The impact of this research: Research question Do you think the current resources for mental health impact students in the AASD area? The Team (Tyrell, Amanda, Naiara, Sierra, Shola, Serenity, and Eunice) believes this project will inform and help people become aware of how teachers and students have knowledge on mental health and how they use this summer experience with all of us has been fun and informative because we all got to put in our perspectives and help shape how mental health is treated within schools which is important. After all, mental health/illness has been rapidly growing over the years causing more people to either drop out or skip school, so we hope that all this information will help reduce this number if implied. The skills we improved along the way were team-building, communication, literature review/research, and problem-solving skills.

APPENDIX

Participant data, questions, or any other documents that would be helpful to include

[Team Study Design](#)

[Survey Link](#)

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