



# BY ALEXANDRIA CITY HIGH SCHOOL



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## TOPIC

Mental health & emotional wellness

## TOPIC DESCRIPTION

Mental health and emotional wellness is a growing crisis in ACPS. According to our school survey of 26 students, 65% feel stressed or overwhelmed every day or a few times a week. 50% of ACPS students say mental health makes it hard to succeed in school, and chronic absenteeism is at 14%. Low-income students and students of color are most affected because they have the least access to help. This matters because when students can't get mental health support, it leads to more fights, absences, and students falling behind.

### BASELINE DATA & GOAL

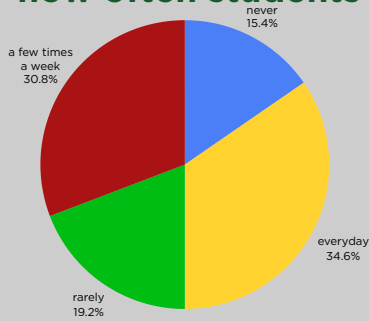
Data: 65% of students in our survey feel stressed or overwhelmed every day or a few times a week, and 50% of ACPS students say mental health makes it hard to succeed. (School Survey 2024, Mental Health America 2024)  
Goal: Reduce the number of students feeling overwhelmed from 65% to 40% by increasing access to mental health counselors in ACPS schools.

### CYCP GOAL & STRATEGIC AREA

Goal: All Alexandria children and youth are healthy and thriving.  
This connects because students cannot thrive when their mental health needs are not being met, especially with only 1 counselor per 400 students.

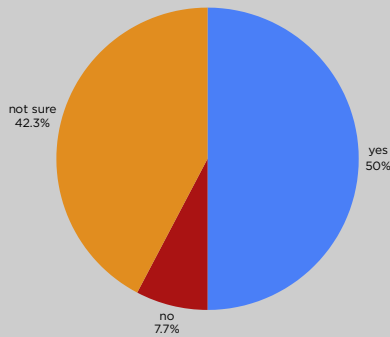
## WHAT IS HAPPENING RIGHT NOW?

Graph 1: "how often students feel stressed"



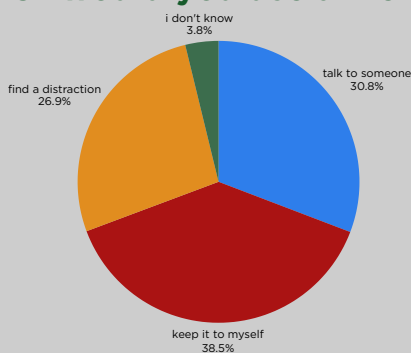
- What does it show? 65% of students feel stressed every day or multiple times a week.
- Why does it matter? Most students are constantly stressed but not getting help.

Graph 2: "should schools provide more mental health support?"



- What does it show? Half of students believe schools need to do more.
- Why does it matter? Students themselves are asking for more support.

Graph 3: "would you use a mental health resource"?



- What does it show? Over 65% would use or might use a mental health resource.
- Why does it matter? Students want help but resources aren't available.

## WHAT HAS ALREADY BEEN TRIED?

ACPS has created a mental health task force to address the growing crisis in schools. The district has placed counselors in schools, though only 1 per 400 students. ACPS has also partnered with Mental Health America to track and report data on student wellness. However, these efforts are not enough as 65% of students still feel stressed or overwhelmed multiple times a week.

## WHO CAN HELP?

**Stakeholder 1: ACPS School Board**  
The school board controls the budget and can hire more mental health counselors and allocate more funding for student wellness programs in every school.

**Stakeholder 2: Mental Health America (MHA)**  
MHA already tracks student mental health data in Alexandria. They can partner with ACPS to bring free mental health programs, training, and resources directly into schools to support students who can't afford outside help.



## WHAT HAS BEEN DONE SO FAR?

**Quantity:** ACPS has created a mental health task force, placed counselors in every school, and partnered with Mental Health America to track student wellness data. Students have also been surveyed to measure the scale of the problem.

**Quality:** These actions are not working well enough. There is still only 1 counselor per 400 students, meaning most students cannot access help. Fights continue to happen and absenteeism remains at 14%.

## IS IT ACTUALLY HELPING?

The actions taken so far are not making enough of a difference. Our school survey showed that 65% of students still feel stressed or overwhelmed multiple times a week, and 50% say schools should be doing more. Students are still keeping their emotions to themselves (38.5%) because there is no one available to help them. People are not better off — chronic absenteeism is still at 14% and fights continue to occur because the root cause, lack of mental health support, has not been fully addressed.

## WHAT SHOULD CHANGE? (YOUR SOLUTION)

The solution is to create an anonymous peer mediation program at ACHS where students can confidentially request help when dealing with anger, conflict, or emotional stress. Trained peer mediators would meet with struggling students and connect them to school counselors for proper support.

Our survey data supports this solution. 65% of students feel stressed or overwhelmed multiple times a week, yet 38.5% say they keep their emotions to themselves because there is no safe space to open up. Over 65% said they would use or might use a mental health resource if their school offered one, proving that students want help but lack access to it. Students themselves said good mental health means “having a peaceful state of mind” and “being happy, calm, and in control” — things they currently cannot achieve without proper support.

This program would work by having trained student mediators available during lunch and after school. When a student feels overwhelmed, they can anonymously request a meeting through a simple online form. The mediator would listen, provide support, and refer the student to a counselor if needed. This removes the embarrassment barrier that stops many students from asking for help. With only 1 counselor per 400 students, this peer program would fill the gap, reduce fights, lower absenteeism from 14%, and help students succeed both academically and personally.

## WHAT WILL HAPPEN NEXT?

If the anonymous peer mediation program is used, students will have a safe and confidential way to get help with stress, anger, and emotional challenges. Fight rates will decrease, chronic absenteeism will drop from 14%, and more students will feel supported at school. Students, teachers, and the whole ACHS community will benefit. Students will feel calmer and more focused, teachers will have fewer disruptions in class, and the school will become a healthier and more peaceful environment for everyone.

## CITATIONS

Eickert, C. (2025). Titan Changemaker Listening Session Handout [Handout].  
Mental Health America. (2024). The state of mental health in America. mhanational.org  
ACPS Student Support Services. (2024). Student wellness report. Alexandria City Public Schools.  
ACPS School Quality Profile. (2024). ACPS data report. Virginia Department of Education.  
WUSA9. (2024). Student mental health crisis in Alexandria.  
Aweke, M. (2024). Mental health and emotional wellness survey [Student survey]. Alexandria City High School.

## LEARN MORE

1. Mental Health America (mhanational.org) — Provides data, resources, and toolkits on student mental health. Helps schools understand the scale of the crisis and find evidence-based solutions.
2. RAISE: Alexandria's Trauma-Informed Community Network — Specializes in trauma-informed care for students affected by stress. Can provide training and support for peer mediators and school counselors.