Mental Health & Gen Z

What *Educators* Need to Know

Springtide
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CONTENTS

Interested in reflecting on this report with more depth and guidance? *A Guide to Turn the Tide* presents a series of reflections and prompts designed to be used by individuals or small groups, or as the foundation for large-group workshops and conversations, as you journey through *Mental Health & Gen Z: What Educators Need to Know*.

Mental Health & Gen Z
AT SCHOOL

57% of young people say **they have experienced trauma**.

43% say they **don't feel they are living fully**.

34% of young people tell us when it comes to their mental health, they are **not flourishing**.

Young people experience different rates of mental healthiness at different levels of school.

*Percent of young people who say they are **not flourishing** in their mental health:*

Level	Percent
High school	34%
College	31%
Middle school	29%
Trade school	28%
Graduate school	23%
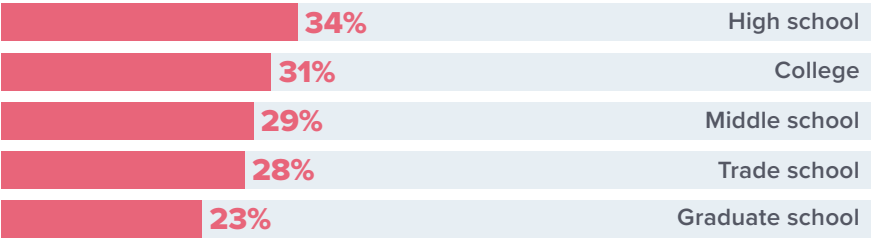
High schoolers are more likely than other students to report poor mental health.

THE SPRINGTIDE SERIES ON MENTAL HEALTH

SPRINGTIDE KEY FINDINGS

While young people value seeing a therapist who shares their basic values, *not* **sharing identity markers isn't likely to make them hesitate.**

▶ **71%** agree or strongly agree that it's important that mental-health services are offered in their native language.

Nearly 60% say it doesn't matter if they share the same racial or ethnic background as their counselor/therapist.

Reasons young people hesitate to see a therapist

Parents don't take concerns about their students' mental health seriously
**45%**

Religious differences
33%

Ethnic or racial differences from the people available to them at school
32%

Young people of color are more likely than white young people to agree or strongly agree with the statement below:

"It would be important to me that a mental-health counselor share the same racial or ethnic background as me." ▼

|	
57%	Black/African American
48%	Asian
47%	Hispanic/Latino
35%	White
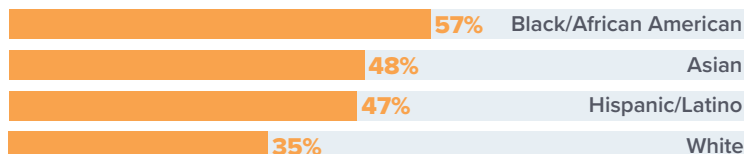
There are many reasons young people don't take advantage of the resources provided by schools for mental-health response—despite perhaps needing those resources.

This report focuses not on adding crisis or first-aid resources to the stockpile already available to students, but rather on creating environments that are more mental-health friendly at their very core.

The Belongingness Process

Springtide's Belongingness Process identifies three steps or building blocks for creating belonging for young people. And this experience of belonging—of deep and varied connections within a community—is critical for their mental health at school. For each step, trusted adults can take obvious actions. Schools often do well with these critical building blocks, but there are opportunities to dig deeper into each of these dimensions as well, to increase belonging in educational settings.

LEVEL 1: NOTICED

LEVEL 2: NAMED

LEVEL 3: KNOWN

Increased Sense of Belonging
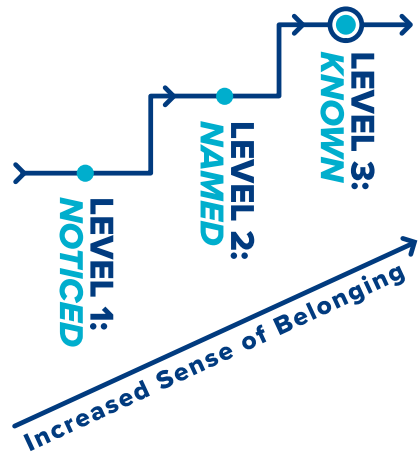
LEVEL 1: NOTICED

LEVEL 1: (I am) Noticed

The perception of being noticed by another—being seen or acknowledged, even in the most straightforward ways—is the initial step toward a sense of belonging. It is here that young people describe the power of being invited into relationship and having others become interested in them. Consider this comment from a young person we interviewed when conducting our initial research for *Belonging*: "The dominant experience of young people when it comes to interacting with adults is of being dismissed. I just don't expect them to pay attention to me." The simple act of seeing generates an initial sense of belongingness for a young person, which creates a foundation for deeper relationships.

We asked young people to tell us whether they experience being *noticed* at school. The majority of young people do feel they are acknowledged by adults or peers on a daily basis while at school.

71% Adults **acknowledge my presence at my school**.

**78%** At my school, **at least one person says hello to me every day**.

While most students agree that they don't feel they need to hide who they are at school (63%) or confirm that they don't feel anonymous or invisible at school (61%), the margins for those who don't agree are significant. This opportunity to "notice" students at a deeper level, to see the students who are marginalized and make a special effort to connect with them, is critical for building a community of belonging.

63% of students agree with the statement **"I don't feel I need to hide who I am at my school."**

61% of students agree with the statement **"I do not feel anonymous or invisible at my school."**

59% of Hispanic or Latino students agree.

62% of Asian students agree.

Only 43% of nonbinary students agree.
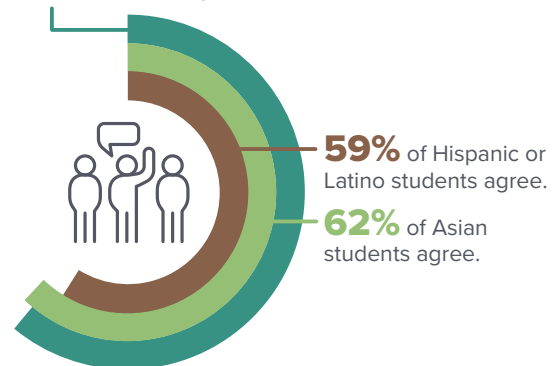
Tide-Turning Tip

Help facilitate peer-to-peer connections. When it comes to conversations about mental health, young people naturally turn to one another. Therefore, the more peer connections they have, the better. You can facilitate these connections by providing opportunities for students to build community. And you can help young people *help one another* not only with more connections but with more skills. Consider extending mental-health first-aid and awareness training to students so they can be better equipped to help their friends and, importantly, so they know when to bring a concern to a trusted adult. Sports teams, dorm communities, music groups, book clubs—all these types of communities can be strengthened with more opportunities to connect *outside* the primary activity (that is, by hosting retreats or dining nights together), and with more opportunities to learn how to care for one another well.

EXPECTATIONS AT SCHOOL

How to Create Expectation and Tool Alignment

"I have friends who are **punished if they don't get As**. And I think it **puts a lot of stress on them, especially when** they're already going through problems that are not recognized by their parents. I think there is a lot of pressure put on us to do really well, to balance all of these things, you know, especially when our mental health concerns are not being heard, it makes it even harder."

—Ara, 16

"The stereotype is that [mental health] is a freedom from all forms of anxiety or whatever. I mean, if you have no anxiety in your life, you're probably dead. So I think it's important that you just are able to **manage** your anxiety or the normal stresses of day-to-day life."

— Spencer, 22

"They'll say, you know, *Hey, you hear mental health matters to us,* but then there's very little action to be taken because how can you act? **How are you going to tell me that my mental health matters when I'm staying up all night, I'm pulling all-nighters to get an A in this class?** And then in the same breath, say like, *Oh, growth mindset.* [. . .] It's like, **you're telling me two completely different things. You're telling me that I need an A**, that I need to succeed. I need to be the best. It's so competitive. **And then you're [also] telling me that my mental health matters**. . . . It seems very like optic . . . yeah, it's performative."

—Araceli, 25

"Even your guidance counselors at school will be like, *Oh, is everything okay? Oh no, it's not? Well,* **I'll help you, but you have to get a good grade on your test because you don't want your grades suffering**. It's stuff like that. Like . . . we just need somebody to talk to, who's going to help us. Who doesn't have any motive besides just wanting us to get better. . . . Our guidance counselors, even though they're great, they have that mode of like, *Okay,* **how are we going to pass those classes?** *And how are we going to make you feel better about life?"*

—Julie, 17

Young people like Ara, Araceli, Spencer, and Julie voice something we hear consistently during interviews: Students are overwhelmed. They feel immense pressure. When asked how school impacts their mental health, nearly every young person we interviewed described stress, pressure, anxiety, and burnout. Ara describes the way pressure *about* school doesn't just come from school, but from several sources. Julie and Araceli express frustration when those who are *supposed* to equip them to succeed offer only check-ins that double-down on the importance of fulfilling the expectations already in place. Spencer notes that he doesn't expect total relief from anxiety, but just the ability to *manage* it, the chance to not be totally overwhelmed by day-to-day expectations.

What is expectation?

Expectations are standards that emerge from narratives about how to succeed in life. Young people experience varied and layered sets of expectations. Springtide's interest in expectations is not just that social narratives exist about who and how to be in the world but also how those expectations *are* or *are not* realistically achievable for young people at school.

Making expectations achievable for students is a matter of aligning expectations and tools to make sure students are prepared to succeed. Alignment is about making sure the tools fit the task, and vice versa. And schools are at the forefront of a movement toward better reconciliation between student needs and classroom expectations. Our data demonstrate that the majority of young people *do* feel they

It's time to create a campus culture that is mental-health friendly instead of reacting to mental health crises.

Springtide's newest research from over 4,000 surveys and 80 interviews with young people ages 13 to 25 shows exactly what young people need in order to thrive in their schools. *Mental Health & Gen Z: What Educators Need to Know* reveals a model for addressing mental health proactively among students.

WE'LL SHOW YOU:

. . . how **CONNECTIONS** form the foundation for a sense of belonging that can combat record levels of loneliness among Gen Z.

. . . the importance of having tools that align with **EXPECTATIONS** in order to support a diverse student body with a variety of pathways to success.

. . . why **PURPOSE** is the critical missing ingredient leading to poor mental health for Gen Z.

The mental-health crisis among young people has reached epidemic proportions. And administrators, coaches, faculty, social workers, and staff are at the front lines of this crisis, meeting young people every day during some of their most formative years.

We're not here for handwringing. We're here to show you how build structures campus-wide that are mental-health friendly and rooted in research.

We're here to turn the tide.

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