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College Writing 1

24 April 2023

Argument Essay~Mental Health Education Mandate

The Center for Disease Control describes mental health as “our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel, and act. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make healthy choices.” (CDC.gov, reviewed September 2022). There are various complex challenges that American high school students must deal with, including anxiety, depression, drug abuse, family dysfunction, social conflicts, violence, and learning and behavioral disabilities. Given the information, why do high schools not recognize mental health education as an essential course? If mental health education were incorporated as part of American high schools’ core curriculum, it would provide students with essential skills to help them cope with the inevitable stresses of life, increase internal awareness, identify their talents, and develop emotional intelligence to facilitate healthy relationships. Mental wellness is crucial at every stage of life, from childhood to adolescence and throughout adulthood.

As they begin to enter adolescence, high school students typically begin to experience a myriad of interpersonal issues that lead to emotional and behavioral problems. Additionally, when adolescents experience adverse life events, childhood abuse, drug addiction, or various traumatic experiences, it has a negative impact on their mental health and they are left at risk. (Konaszewski, K). Although the need for high school students to learn and practice mental health education is widely acknowledged, high schools often concentrate their attention on identifying learning disabilities, and the needs of more obvious hindrances to academic progress. Since high

schools are considered a place for gaining academic intelligence and skills associated with academic achievements, they fail to recognize the value of mental health education has on aiding students with learning disabilities. High schools need to view students' mental health disabilities as equal barriers to academic success as serious as learning disabilities. The National Library of Medicine reports that there is a large number of people with poor mental health either have learning disabilities, or emotional issues that are often mislabeled as learning disabilities due to lack of awareness. (National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE); 2016 Sep.)

Educating students about mental health gives them an understanding of their personal learning style and explores different studies that interest them. Students that have a healthy awareness about their emotions, and have been taught how to manage them in a healthy way enables them to concentrate on their studies and promotes their overall success. The New York State Education Department states that "the quality of the school climate may be the single most predictive factor in any school's capacity to promote student achievement." (NYSED.gov 2023).

According to the CDC, "Mental disorders change the way children typically learn, behave, and handle their emotions, which causes distress and problems getting through the day." (CDC.org, reviewed March 2023). When mental health education is understood by high schools as essential students with better self esteem enabling them to not only achieve academic success but contribute positively to society in the future.

High schools often continue to face the stigma associated with mental illness despite the common knowledge that mental wellness is a key asset for students' social and emotional development. Schools do not see the critical need even with the constant stream of social issues, students with unstable family structures, and the rise in anxiety and depression among students. If high schools had a fundamental shift in their perspective in regards teaching the psychological

aspect of health not a high schools' primary mission. Attitudes and beliefs about mental illness are shaped by personal knowledge and comprehension about it, eventually diminishing the stigma.

High school would be the best time and place for students to focus on their development, and the effects that mental illness has on them and society. Giving students understandable information regarding their mental health will normalize the importance of speaking about their emotions, diminishing the stigma promoting mental wellness. The CDC states, "focusing on establishing healthy behaviors during childhood is more effective than trying to change unhealthy behaviors during adulthood." As students develop a sense of connection and belonging as they learn about mental health, and having healthy conversations about their emotions. A student's personal development has an effect on their overall well-being. Mental health education is a critical aspect of helping high school students learn the strategies necessary to manage stress. The BMC Journal presented Gibson and Clarbours' research, which focused on examining the relationship between stress management and mental well-being in adolescents. Their research involved two hundred adolescents and concluded that "Resilience is an important predictor of the mental health of juveniles, primarily with respect to its positive indicator. The stronger the severity of resilience, the greater the satisfaction with life and mental well-being of the juveniles surveyed. In addition, two coping strategies, seeking support from others and coping through emotions, mediated the relationship between resilience and mental well-being." (Konaszewski, K)

Mental health is essential for dealing with normal stress and trauma of adolescence, and given the increase of social issues, the importance of social support and education in high schools is imperative. Through high school, students will learn the fundamentals of mental health

and well-being, providing them with a better understanding of their internal changes as well as how to support and facilitate healthy relationships in all areas of life.

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