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Argument Essay~Mental Health Education Mandate

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention 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.” (“Mental Health”). American high school students must contend with various complex challenges, including anxiety, depression, drug abuse, family dysfunction and interpersonal conflicts, as well as 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 academically, identify their talents, and develop emotional intelligence to facilitate healthy relationships. From childhood through adolescence and into adulthood, mental wellness is crucial for every stage of life.

The necessity of mental health education for high school students is generally accepted; however, high schools are widely seen as a place where students are required to develop the intelligence and skills they need to achieve academically, rather than mental health education. High schools often concentrate on students dealing with learning disabilities or issues hindering progress with their mandated classes rather than recognizing the value of mental health education. High school educational systems tend to view any action that is not directly related to mandated school subjects as diminishing resources from others more relevant to

education.(Adelman, H. S., & Taylor, L.). When high schools recognize the need and importance of mental education in high schools they will see a positive impact on the students' academic achievements and overall high school experience. More importantly, schools need to address the fact that students who struggle with their mental health face similar barriers as students with learning disabilities, and the need for mental education is vital to students' academic education. The National Library of Medicine reports that according to the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, a large number of people with poor mental health have learning disabilities or emotional issues that are often mislabeled due to lack of awareness about mental wellness (*"Relevance to Public Health"*).

According to the CDC, "Mental disorders change the way children typically learn, behave, and handle their emotions, which can cause distress and problems getting through the day."("Mental Health"). Providing students with education about their mental health will give them a better understanding of their learning styles and be able to explore the subjects which interest them the most. Students who have a healthy awareness of their emotions and are taught how to manage their anxiety, are likely to concentrate effectively on their studies. 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." ("Curriculum Instruction"). Students who are equipped with a mental intelligence attend school more often, participate in class and actively engage in school activities which creates a peaceful environment for increased success overall. The significant need for mental health education in high schools to help students promote self-esteem and achieve mental wellness cannot be overstated. It will not only allow students to gain techniques for high school success, but build healthy relationships and contribute positively to society as a whole in the future.

Often there is a stigma associated with mental illness that prevents high schools from offering mental health education, despite the fact that mental wellness is a crucial component of students' social and emotional development. As they enter adolescence, high school students typically begin to experience a myriad of interpersonal issues that lead to emotional and behavioral problems. When students experience various adverse life events, without the mental education or a way to process the events, they often begin to have a negative impact on their mental health, leaving many high school students at risk. (Konaszewski, K). If high schools prioritize working on the prejudices surrounding mental illness by providing knowledge and comprehension about it, eventually it will diminish the stigma.

High school would be an ideal time and place for students to concentrate on their personal development and the effect that mental illness has on them and their relationships, both in and outside of school. When schools give students the opportunity to discuss their emotions in a structured and supportive environment, like a classroom, it will normalize the practice of speaking about mental struggles and eventually that will lessen the stereotypes attached to mental wellness topics. Educating students about their mental health during the years when they attend high school will benefit them throughout the different stages throughout their life. 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 impacts their interpersonal development and 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 and the ability to adapt to challenging situations. Students

who have not been taught coping strategies often have unhealthy coping mechanisms, like violent behavior or substance abuse but stress management can help symptoms from mental health conditions, such as depression and anxiety. The BMC Journal presented Gibson and Clarbour's 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. Research conducted by Gibson and Clarbour, who tested the structure of the Resiliency Scales for Children and Adolescents showed mental health education helps the community, "young people experience different psychological, emotional and behavioral challenges or problems, especially when they are near the boundaries between childhood, adolescence and youth. Multidimensional barriers or life events could put them at risk of developing a sense of dissatisfaction with life that can lead to negative health outcomes, making them a vulnerable part of the young population." (Konaszewski, K). Through high school, students will learn the fundamentals of mental health and well-being, providing them with a better understanding of their internal changes. Students will have an internal awareness as well as mental capacity to facilitate healthy relationships in all areas of their life.

Konaszewski, Karol, et al. “Resilience and Mental Health among Juveniles: Role of Strategies for Coping with Stress.” *Health and Quality of Life Outcomes*, vol. 19, no. 1, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12955-021-01701-3>.

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