Our Minds Matter – A Brief Summary of Findings from Students during the 2022-2023 Academic Year
Jordan A. Booker, Ph.D.

Background

Our Minds Matter (OMM; https://ourmindsmatter.org/) is committed to understanding and improving aspects of student adjustment and functioning, while promoting the mental health and broader school environment for students and partnering schools. As part of its mission, OMM aims to promote healthy behaviors and attitudes among students who participate in its programming, with the expectation that both student participants and others at their school will benefit from the ways students are learning to engage in healthy and supportive behaviors.

As part of an effort to evaluate the current areas of strength and ongoing potential for OMM, representatives of Promote Care & Prevent Harm and affiliate research partners are proposing to build on earlier efforts to ask student participants about progress and aspects of personal change during and following their participation with OMM activities. We are proposing to ask students about a broad set of items that are directly related to OMM's mission for improving behaviors and adjustment for students: aspects of social development, such as the ways they see themselves being supported by others and having positive connections with others in OMM and at school more broadly; aspects of character development, including ways students come to better incorporate perspective-taking, forgiveness, and gratitude in their daily interactions and learn new prosocial skills; aspects of academic development, including the ways students see themselves as more motivated and capable to achieve major goals in their classes; and aspects of personal development, which reflect broad forms of healthy, daily functioning and mental health for students.

We had 153 students who considered/opened survey invites. Of those, 97 completed a full survey across the Fall (46.39%) and Spring (53.61%) time points. We focus on those complete responses for now.

Among participating students, about half were current leaders in their respective clubs (50.52%). More students identified as cisgender girls (67.01%), and more students were juniors (35.05%) and seniors (36.08%).

Students completed brief reports about mental health and well-being topics, confidence students had for incorporating mental health approaches (i.e., uses of mindfulness, confidence in promoting a peaceful school climate), and reports on their involvement with and evaluations of OMM clubs (i.e., feelings of support from clubs; recognition of the ways club involvement was tied to personal and professional growth).

Were there meaningful differences given students' involvement as leaders in OMM clubs?
In most areas—like feeling supported by club members, being comfortable reaching out to others for mental health supports, and having well-being in life—student leaders and non-leader

members of OMM clubs had very similar overall scores, and the average scores were encouraging.

Usually, average reports of measures like perceived support and well-being and uses of mindful behaviors were above the possible midpoint on the survey—students were doing well in these areas overall. Still, students did take full advantage of the entire scale options as appropriate. These were not extremely positive or "pollyanic" reports (See the Figure below).

Figure 1. *Histograms of OMM Club Support Reports among Club Members and Club Leaders.*

OMM Club Support among Club Members	OMM Club Support among Club Leaders
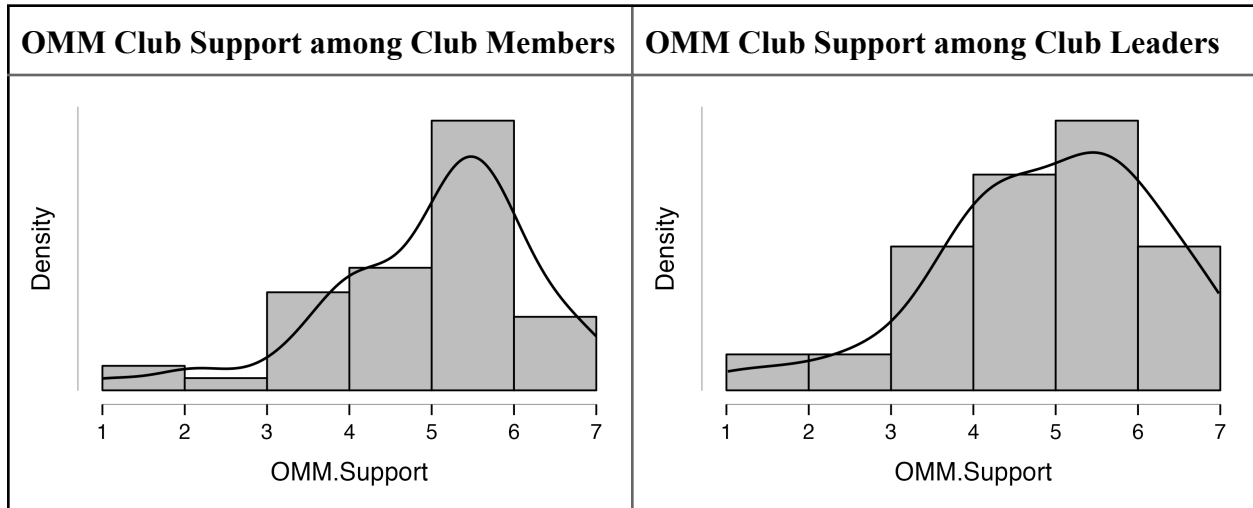
Note. There were <u>not</u> systematic differences in reported club support between club members and club leaders.

There were some areas of distinction, mostly in how students felt they were getting more out of clubs. Student leaders did find club involvement placed more challenges on their time and energy ($t(94) = -2.63$, $d = -.54$, $p = .010$), were tied to much greater personal growth as they reflected on their lives ($t(94) = -3.28$, $d = -.67$, $p = .001$), and were tied to greater professional growth as they reflected on their lives ($t(94) = -4.01$, $d = -.82$, $p < .001$). They seemed to be getting something out of increased responsibilities, which fits with what you would expect for many important extracurricular activities for students.

How Were Reports of Social Support from OMM Club Members Relevant for Other Student Reports?
Students reports of social support—or the emotional supports and relationship fulfillment they receive from other peers—from OMM clubs should be positively linked to other areas of adjustment and fulfillment. That is, feeling better supported should be tied to other good things going on for students. This would fit with other ways people tend to talk about social support as a concept across different relationships and with earlier evidence we have collected from OMM club members.

For students this academic year, OMM club support was linked to nearly every other measure we asked on. Students who felt better supported also reported showing more compassion to others, feeling like the school climate was more peaceful and kind, being comfortable reaching out to others for mental health supports, being confident they could promote their personal mental health, having greater well-being, enjoying and getting more out of clubs, and being more confident about pursuing career goals even. <u>This report of support from clubs is one of our best indicators that things are going well for students and that they're getting something meaningful out of their time with OMM clubs</u>. These links are especially encouraging as they point to the ways social support complements how students are picking up important tools and skills for supporting their own mental health and being responsive to their peers.

Figure 2. *Scatterplots of OMM Social Support Reports with Other Measures.*
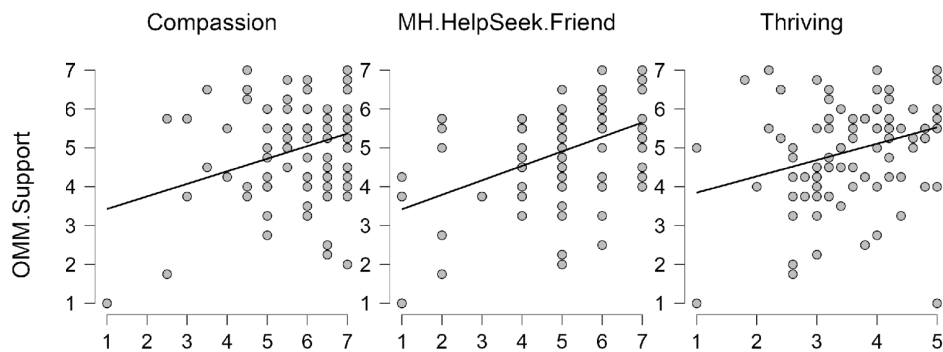
When students had higher reports of social support from their OMM clubs, they also tended to have higher scores on things like showing compassion to others, being comfortable reaching out to friends for mental health supports, and feeling like they had greater well-being and thriving.

Was OMM Club Social Support Relevant for Student Adjustment Beyond Other Important Aspects of the School Climate?

It is helpful to see evidence that factors like OMM club social support are relevant for different areas of student adjustment and success. It is also helpful to see that we're not capturing something that would be better explained by "third variables" – that there are other relevant influences that are at play. We considered whether students' views of people at their schools promoting more peaceful/kind environments, people at their schools promoting more peer pressure, and people at their schools promoting more stigma and discomfort addressing mental health topics might better explain scores for areas of adjustment when considered alongside repots of social support. These indicators of the broader <u>school environment</u> are also important to understand. Beyond OMM clubs, students are navigating many spaces with peers and instructors that are huge influences on their comfort and confidence day-to-day, and many additional relationships that are important to students are being developed and maintained in spaces beyond OMM clubs. Whether things are going well in these spaces or feel upsetting for students could be very important for how they act day-to-day.

Compassion for Others; Compassion for the Self

Students reports of compassion toward others and their reports of using mindful approaches in their daily lives were best informed by views of the broader school climate. When students believed their schools had more people working to show kindness and maintain a peaceful climate, they also reported engaging in kinder and compassionate behaviors toward their peers and toward themselves.

Table 1. *Regressions of Compassionate Strategies on School Perceptions and Club Support.*

	Compassion toward Others			Mindfulness and Compassion for the Self		
	Beta	SE	*p*	Beta	SE	*p*
Peaceful School Climate	**.50**	**.15**	**.001**	**.40**	**.10**	**.000**
Peer Pressure	.03	.11	.768	-.13	.07	.078
Mental Health Stigma	-.01	.18	.965	-.23	.12	.066
OMM Club Support	.17	.11	.112	-.06	.07	.408
$F_{(4, 91)}$	5.88			7.60		
Model Sig.	.000			.000		

Openness to Seeking Support for Mental Health Services from Others

Students overall comfort and strategies for reaching out to others with mental health needs were again informed by the broader school climate—and especially having a more peaceful and kind school environment. However, OMM club support was also closely linked to specific strategies of reaching out to friends, school counselors, and other professionals. Mental health stigma in schools was also closely linked to *greater* comfort reaching out to school counselors—likely a reflection of fewer avenues for turning to support outside of OMM clubs.

Surprisingly, this set of measures was not closely linked to comfort reaching out to *parents* for support. However, other reports on the family environment and relationship security between students and their parents—measures we tended to avoid for the sake of time and effort demands on students—would likely play a stronger role for such reports.

Table 2. *Regressions of Support-Seeking Strategies on School Perceptions and Club Support.*

	General Openness to Support Seeking			Comfort Seeking Support from a Field Professional			Comfort Seeking Support from Friend			Comfort Seeking Support from School Counselor		
	Beta	SE	*p*	Beta	SE	*p*	Beta	SE	*p*	Beta	SE	*p*
Peaceful School Climate	**.18**	**.08**	**.017**	.32	.20	.116	**.51**	**.18**	**.005**	**.50**	**.20**	**.014**
Peer Pressure	-.10	.06	.089	-.22	.15	.148	.00	.13	.987	-.23	.15	.136
Mental Health Stigma	.00	.09	.981	.17	.25	.501	.31	.22	.152	**.62**	**.25**	**.013**
OMM Club Support	.08	.05	.138	**.34**	**.14**	**.022**	**.45**	**.13**	**.000**	**.33**	**.14**	**.023**
$F_{(4, 91)}$	4.93			4.46			9.96			7.27		
Model Sig.	.001			.002			.000			.001		

Confidence and Satisfaction with One's Abilities and Next Steps

Students' reports on their confidence they could shape their own mental health (i.e., driving down major concerns, promoting health), as well as their satisfaction and thriving with the directions of their lives were also informed by these different measures. **Club social support was linked to greater confidence in promoting mental health—a major outcome of focus for OMM programs.** Other aspects of the school environment better explained psychological well-being and thriving when considered alongside club support, including the positive benefits of a peace-promoting school climate and the challenges of their being more mental health stigma in the school climate.

While separate measures like OMM club support were tied to students' confidence for moving toward the next steps in careers after high school—ways students were learning about what goes into the work they're interested in and developing relevant "soft" or professional skills for possible jobs—these items all together don't provide as clear a view on career confidence and self-efficacy, probably because of some *overlap* in the ways measures like club support and the school environment could help explain differences in career-related reports for students.

Table 3. *Regressions of Student Confidence and Well-Being on School Perceptions and Club Support*.

	Confidence in Reducing Mental Health Concerns			Confidence in Promoting Mental Health			Confidence toward Career Steps			Psychological Thriving		
	Beta	SE	p	Beta	SE	p	Beta	SE	p	Beta	SE	p
Peaceful School Climate	**.23**	**.11**	**.046**	**.26**	**.12**	**.036**	.17	.09	.053	**.29**	**.10**	**.005**
Peer Pressure	.15	.09	.089	.11	.09	.257	-.09	.07	.156	-.12	.08	.122
Mental Health Stigma	.02	.14	.912	-.09	.15	.558	-.11	.11	.326	**-.26**	**.12**	**.041**
OMM Club Support	**.25**	**.08**	**.003**	**.19**	**.09**	**.035**	.05	.06	.406	.10	.07	.167
$F(4, 91)$	6.34			4.21			3.40			7.57		
Model Sig.	.000			.004			.012			.000		

Early Insights of Change Within Students

15 matches from Fall and Spring datasets were identified. Preliminary analyses were performed to look at change within these students. Multiple measures showed change and that most changes were in desirable directions though did not reach statistical significance.

Graphs illustrating these changes can be found here.