



when teens lead the way

Evidence For The Widespread Impact Of Peer-Led Mental Health Support

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forward: why this research matters

by Lauren Anderson, CEO

Our Minds Matter is grounded in the belief that **teens themselves can be part of the solution** to the youth mental health crisis.

While we have empirical data showing the individual benefits of direct participation in our program, thus far we've only received qualitative feedback that our approach works school-wide. In conversation and through our end-of-year evaluations, teens who participate in OMM clubs consistently tell us about the positive impact they create across their entire school communities. Last year, for example, the 3,700+ teens who participated in clubs reached 87,000+ of their peers. This reach is key to **our theory of change and our strategy for scale**:

if a small group of teens can create “ripple effects” of lasting cultural change across their schools and communities, then replicating our club model (with its relatively low cost of implementation) will yield broad impact.

But we haven't had the ability to empirically study this effect. **Until now.**

I am so excited to share this white paper—our first-ever empirical evidence of how OMM creates “ripples” of change. The benefits of OMM clubs ripple across the student body.

They also ripple across multiple areas of students' individual lives, from academic to social outcomes. Taken alongside our previous years of external research and our consistent internal evaluations, this new study helps bolster our belief that **OMM's work equipping teens with mental health skills ripples throughout our society.**

about the research:

In partnership with Dr. Jordan Booker, Associate Professor from the University of Missouri and an established youth researcher, we surveyed students at four schools in our partner school districts during the 2024-25 school year. Approved by the University's IRB office, this research included two schools with active OMM clubs and two without—creating a control group and enabling us to research our widespread impact.

key takeaways:

1. Help-seeking behavior increased across the student body.

Teens who attended schools with OMM clubs but didn't participate in the club were more comfortable seeking help from a school counselor than peers at non-OMM schools. This suggests OMM's peer-led campaigns benefit the entire student body.

2. OMM teens reported greater mental well-being.

Controlling for other variables, OMM club members scored higher on multiple social and personal adjustment measures than peers who did not participate. Combined with our internal evaluations, which show matched samples of OMM participants improving mental wellbeing over the course of each school year, this research deepens our evidence that OMM tangibly improves teens' mental health.

3. OMM increased academic motivation, kindness, and life satisfaction.

For multiple areas of student well-being, the research associated improved measures of mental well-being with improved social and academic outcomes. You can dig into the nuances in the attached report, but here's the bottom line:

mental well-being is the foundation of so many other vital factors in young people's lives.

why this matters:

Every year, we see more clearly that by addressing the youth mental health crisis, we're laying the groundwork of well-being for generations to come. This important research complements our long track record of conducting rigorous internal evaluations and innovating new pilot programs, all with the goals of maximizing the levers of impact. For example, our

recent alumni focus group provided compelling examples of how teens from OMM carry mental health tools and skills into their personal lives and careers well beyond their days as OMM club members. (See that study [here](#)).

With the youth mental health crisis at its current level and scope, we know we need new solutions to reach farther and faster. We also know we need to change our culture to prioritize well-being in all aspects of our lives. Teen-led models are an important part of that story—and this finding is an important validation that our model is impactful and cost-effective.

The more we learn and study our work, the more we see how powerful early investments in mental health are in creating lifelong and society-wide dividends.

what's next:

OMM has grown rapidly in recent years, including reaching 60% more teens over the past three years. Our footprint has grown, too, and we are now working in close partnership with four public school districts in the Washington, DC area.

Now, we are building a strategy to scale to new districts and regions. With this emerging evidence, we are thrilled to take the next step in our organizational journey, as we expand this vital work toward a day when no teen dies by suicide.

executive summary

There is growing recognition that schools play a critical role in supporting the mental health of young people, particularly those from historically underserved and vulnerable communities. At the same time, schools are grappling with a rise in youth mental health crises and increasing pressure on already overextended school mental health professionals.



These realities highlight the urgent need for innovative and inclusive interventions. Our Minds Matter (OMM) is designed to meet teens where they are and empower them to be changemakers within their school community. By leveraging peer influence and focusing on upstream, preventative strategies, OMM fosters social connectedness, enhances coping skills, and helps youth build supportive networks in schools.



During the 2024-2025 school year, we surveyed 200+ youth across two large public school districts in the Washington D.C. area to assess the relationship between involvement with OMM clubs and key indicators of adolescent mental health and school adjustment. The current investigation sought to build empirical evidence on the benefits of OMM programming for participating students and showcase indirect benefits among student peers at schools with active clubs.



insight 1: positive impact of omm club participation

- Students who attended more OMM meetings or held leadership roles reported stronger academic confidence and higher self-compassion.
- Student leaders scored significantly higher on measures of comfort seeking mental health support, underscoring the value of OMM engagement in fostering help-seeking behaviors.
- OMM club members scored higher than their non-club peers on multiple measures of social and personal adjustment outcomes, including but not limited to, feeling connected to others, academic motivation, willingness to seek support, and overall mental health.

insight 2: value of positive club experiences

- Perceptions of social support from other club members were strongly related to greater psychological well-being, academic motivation, and willingness to seek help from peers and adults.
- Students who viewed OMM club experiences as meaningful, enjoyable, and relevant to personal growth also reported stronger mental health outcomes.
- Notably, students with positive appraisals of their club experience were more comfortable seeking help from friends—a known area of hesitation for many adolescents for fear of being judged—suggesting OMM may help reduce peer-related stigma around mental health.

insight 3: benefits extend beyond active club members

- Students who were not active members but attended schools with OMM clubs reported greater comfort seeking support from school counselors than those at schools without OMM.
- This suggests a potential “ripple effect” of the program, where broader school exposure to OMM culture and messaging and/or peer-influence may benefit the larger student body.

insight 4: support-seeking linked to academic and emotional resilience

- Comfort seeking help from trusted adults and peers was associated with higher motivation in school, greater kindness toward others, and improved life satisfaction.
- These results align with OMM’s mission to equip teens with internal coping skills and build external social support among youth.

insight 5: school connectedness as a protective factor

- A strong sense of belonging and connection at school was associated with students’ ability to promote kindness, contribute to a caring school climate, and show greater academic motivation and psychological well-being.



implications for practice

The findings continue to build evidence that Our Minds matter’s school-based club model plays a critical role in the larger youth mental health ecosystem, working with other players to promote youth mental health and ending teen suicide. Students directly involved in OMM clubs consistently report stronger well-being and resilience. Moreover, school-wide exposure to OMM programming may enhance student openness to seeking mental health support, even among those not directly involved.

As OMM continues to expand at the local and national levels, these results highlight the program’s value as a scalable, teen-driven, and high-impact intervention. The teen-led model not only empowers teens to tailor the programming to their needs, it also means minimal staff time is required—making it an appealing option for schools seeking sustainable strategies to empower youth and supporting student mental health.



looking ahead

The findings suggest clear potential for OMM to serve as a key resource in fostering healthy school climates and youth development. Future work will focus on deepening our understanding of the mechanisms driving change—particularly the role of peer-to-peer influence—and identifying best practices for creating inclusive, school-wide approaches to mental health promotion.

We invite continued collaboration with educators, administrators, community leaders, and researchers committed to advancing youth well-being through innovative, evidence-based practices.

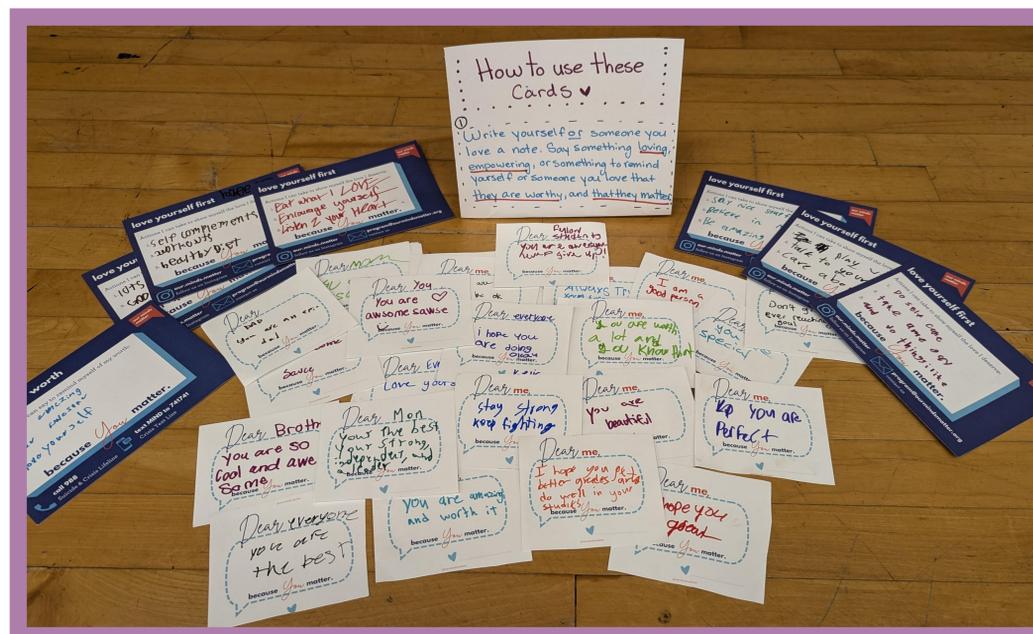
introduction

Today's teens are coming of age in an increasingly complex and challenging world shaped by social and political instability, the lasting impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, rapid technological advancements, and the escalating climate crisis. Self-reported levels of loneliness among young people have increased from before the pandemic, which is associated with poorer overall well-being (Farrell et al., 2023).

Not surprisingly, all of these stressors contribute to rising mental health issues among teens. Rates of depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts have risen among young people, with marginalized groups—including teenage girls, youth of color, and LGBTQ+ youth—experiencing disproportionately high levels of mental health risk due to longstanding systemic inequities (Verlenden et al., 2024). These concerning trends underscore the urgent need for a comprehensive, multi-faceted, and culturally responsive approach to youth mental health—**one that meets young people where they are.**

Schools are uniquely positioned to support teen mental health, serving as daily touchpoints for students where they can develop positive connections, be of service to their community in meaningful ways, and receive important and potentially life-saving mental health resources.

suicide is now the second-leading cause of death for adolescents 10-14 years old and the third for those 15-24 years old (CDC, 2024)



However, the well-documented shortage of school counselors across the nation highlights the urgent need for innovative and scalable interventions to ensure students' mental health needs are addressed. School-based, upstream prevention programs like Our Minds Matter (OMM) can complement other efforts to strengthen systems of care for all teens.

our minds matter (omm) is working toward a day when no teen dies by suicide.

In the face of a national shortage of mental health providers—particularly those who are culturally competent—OMM clubs provide a scientifically grounded, data-driven innovation that empowers teens to strengthen their own mental wellbeing, develop leadership skills, and become a frontline support system for their peers.

Launched in 2016, OMM club model is grounded in **JED’s Comprehensive Approach to Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention for High Schools**, an evidence-based framework shown to reduce suicide rates in certain boundaried communities (Knox et al., 2010). The OMM club model is designed to foster four key protective factors known to support mental health and reduce suicidal risk: social connectedness, positive coping and self-care/healthy habits, help-seeking, and prosocial skills.



social connectedness



help-seeking



positive coping & self-care / healthy habits



prosocial skills

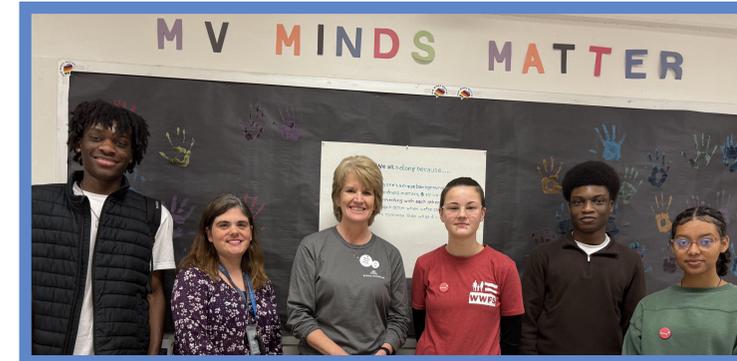
By building these protective factors, OMM clubs help students navigate life challenges and recognize early warning signs of mental illness before they escalate into crises. This **teen-led, school-based prevention** tactic creates a strong support network within schools while also easing pressure on overstretched school and community mental health resources.

omm works in close partnership with local school districts to extend the scale and impact of its work, and facilitate wider mental health interventions.

OMM staff engage high school students and staff to spark interest in forming an OMM club at their school. Each school-based club is sponsored by one to two school staff members, with at least one having training in mental health literacy and basic helping skills to ensure a safe and supportive environment for students. Club leaders—both student leaders and their adult sponsors—receive access to an online portal containing a robust library of club meeting activities and school-wide campaign guides.

Clubs are encouraged to follow a consistent meeting structure, beginning with a connection-focused ice-breaker to cultivate a safe, welcoming space and followed by a teen-led activity. The end of each club meeting includes a mindfulness activity and resource sharing. Sample club activities include gratitude games that integrate memory and movement, music activities to help identify and express emotions, and painting or craft activities that facilitate creative expression of feelings. To amplify their impact, clubs also host school-wide campaigns aimed at shifting the broader school culture around mental health. These campaigns might include creating bulletin boards promoting self-love and acceptance, organizing a

our minds matter



spirit week to build belonging, inviting therapy animals to school to support emotional wellness, and many more. OMM staff provide ongoing support to ensure successful implementation and club sustainability—offering funds, swag, on-site visits, and other technical assistance to help clubs grow and thrive.



our teen-led club model fills a critical and often overlooked gap in the youth mental health ecosystem by centering teen leadership, agency, and peer connection.

Grounded in empirical research, our approach reflects a growing body of evidence showing that effective mental health prevention programs not only support the social-emotional development of young people but also empower them to take meaningful action in their communities (Federal Interagency Working Group on Youth Programs, 2014).

By leveraging the power of peer support networks, we create a scalable, cost-efficient, and widely accessible source of mental health support within schools. Our model reimagines the traditional models of care which are marked by limited access, especially for historically underserved groups, and instead places teens at the forefront of change. In other words, we empower young people to improve their own mental well-being while equipping them with the tools to support and protect their peers, becoming active changemakers in addressing the youth mental health crisis.



about this analysis

In the current study, we set out to evaluate the benefits of OMM’s youth-centered, school-based club model—both for participating students and the broader student body in schools with active OMM clubs. Building on earlier pilot findings that showed greater involvement in OMM (e.g., number of club activities attended, student leadership roles, and perceived club support) was associated with lower levels of distress and higher levels of student adjustment, the present study expanded the existing empirical foundation by surveying students who did not participate in OMM clubs. This allowed for between-group comparisons to better understand the program’s broader impact across the school community. Using a **cross-sectional, quasi-experimental research design**, we explored the following research questions:

among omm club members, is greater club involvement linked to better mental health, personal adjustment, and academic functioning?

within schools that host active omm clubs, do adjustment outcomes differ between students who participate in clubs and those who do not?

are there measurable differences in student adjustment given the presence of an active omm club in the school?

was there evidence of indirect benefits of programming that students may still be exposed to without full involvement in clubs?

These insights contribute to growing the body of evidence supporting peer-to-peer, upstream prevention as a vital piece in the holistic efforts to address youth mental health crisis. By filling a key gap in the teen mental health promotion and suicide prevention literature, this research strengthens the case for investment in youth-centered, school-based prevention strategies. Most importantly, the findings offer actionable insights for funders, educators, and policymakers seeking to prioritize solutions that empower young people to thrive—now and into adulthood.

key findings: the importance of protective, peer-to-peer, and school-wide factors

During the 2024-2025 school year, we recruited 213 students from four high schools across two large public school systems in the Washington D.C. metro area. Participating schools either had an active Our Minds Matter (OMM) club during the school year or did not, allowing for comparisons between students who were exposed to OMM programming (either directly or indirectly) and those who were not.

Students were surveyed on a range of factors relevant to mental health and well-being. The questions were grounded in theories of positive youth development (Shek et al., 2019), the importance of strong personal resources (e.g., attitudes, strategies), dependable relationships, and safe environments—all of which are crucial in fostering healthy adolescent development. A central focus of the current study was to assess whether direct involvement with Our Minds Matter clubs and/or indirect exposure to OMM clubs was associated with elevated reports of student adjustment and functioning.

Key findings are summarized across three domains:

- **involvement and satisfaction with our minds matter**
- **openness to seeking support for mental health**
- **students' sense of connectedness within their school community**

— all recognized indicators of student positive adjustment and healthy functioning.



● involvement and satisfaction with omm

In previous years, research focusing on active club members showed growing evidence that involvement in Our Minds Matter (OMM) clubs—such as attending more club sessions or holding leadership roles—and positive appraisals of the club experience (i.e., feeling supported by fellow club members, viewing the club as a meaningful and positive personal or professional opportunity) were broadly linked to improved student outcomes. These included higher levels of well-being, lower levels of distress, and greater use of adaptive strategies for promoting mental health (Booker et al., 2023).

Building on this foundation, our most recent data collection continued to explore these associations. Among students in OMM clubs, we expected that greater club involvement would be associated with more positive reports of adjustment and functioning. Preliminary findings support this assumption:

students who attended more omm sessions during the school year reported higher levels of self-compassion in response to setbacks and greater confidence in completing demanding academic work (see figure 1)

figure 1: number of attended omm club meetings with students' academic self-efficacy (confidence)

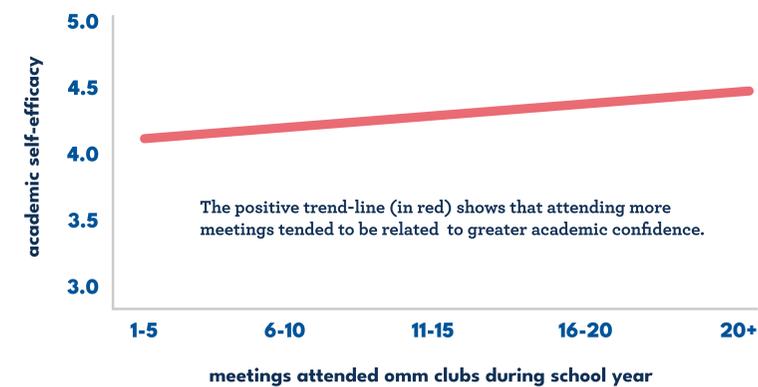
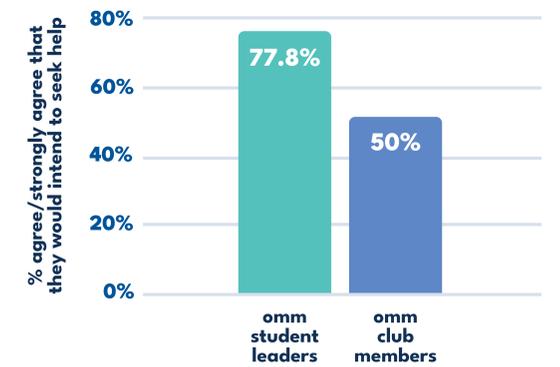


figure 2: leadership status and comfort seeking mental health support from parents



As expected, club leaders reported attending more OMM club meetings over the course of the school year. Along with higher levels of involvement, these **student leaders also expressed greater comfort in reaching out to others for mental health support** (see Figure 2). Most student leaders (77.8%) reported they strongly agreed with steps for reaching out to parents for mental health support, compared to club member peers (50.0%).

We also anticipated that students who held more positive perceptions of their OMM club experiences would report higher levels of adjustment and overall functioning—and the data provided strong support for this assumption.

notably, students who felt a stronger sense of social support from fellow club members consistently reported better outcomes across a range of areas

These included greater self-compassion, increased kindness toward others, stronger confidence in promoting caring behaviors within their school community, higher levels of psychological well-being (see Figure 3), greater academic confidence, and more comfort in seeking help for mental health and problem-solving needs.

Students' evaluations of their club experiences—such as how much effort club activities required, how enjoyable they found those activities, and how meaningful/relevant they perceived them to be for personal and professional growth—were also linked to stronger adjustment and functioning.

In addition to reinforcing the same benefits with social support, these positive appraisals were associated with higher academic motivation and a greater willingness to seek mental health support from a variety of sources, including out-of-school professionals, friends, parents, and school counselors. Of particular note is **the connection between club satisfaction and students' comfort in reaching out to friends for mental health support**—an area that remains a common point of vulnerability and nondisclosure for many young people (Corry & Leavey, 2017; See Figure 4). This finding underscores the potential of OMM programming to address critical barriers to peer-based support among youth.

figure 3: perceptions of omm social support and psychological well-being

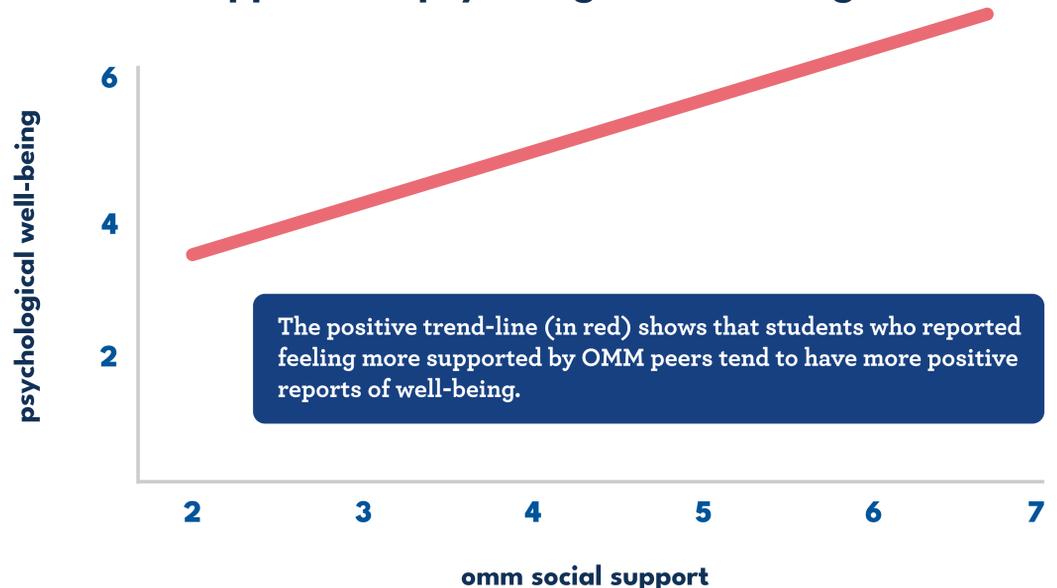
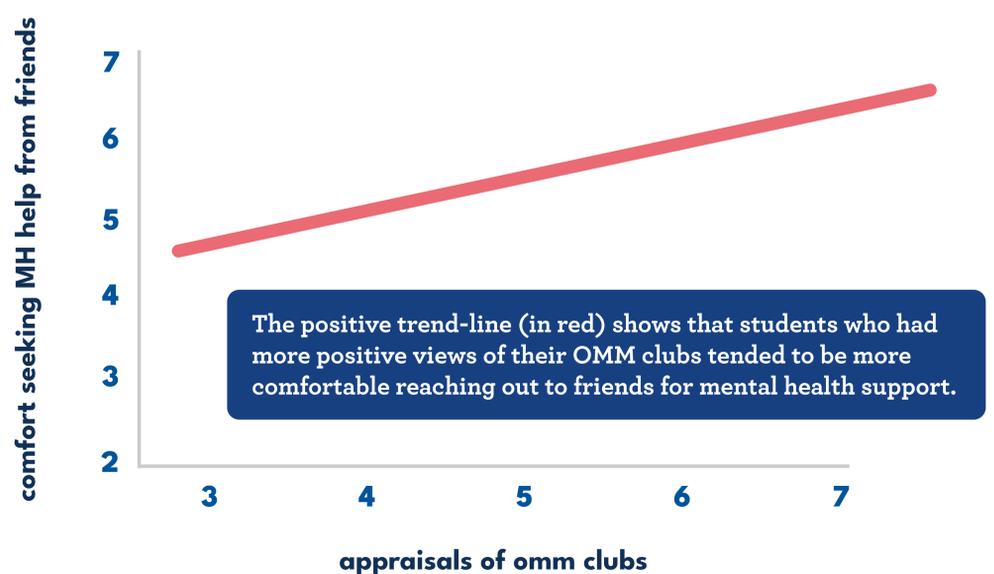


figure 4: positive appraisals of omm clubs and students' comfort seeking mental health help from friends



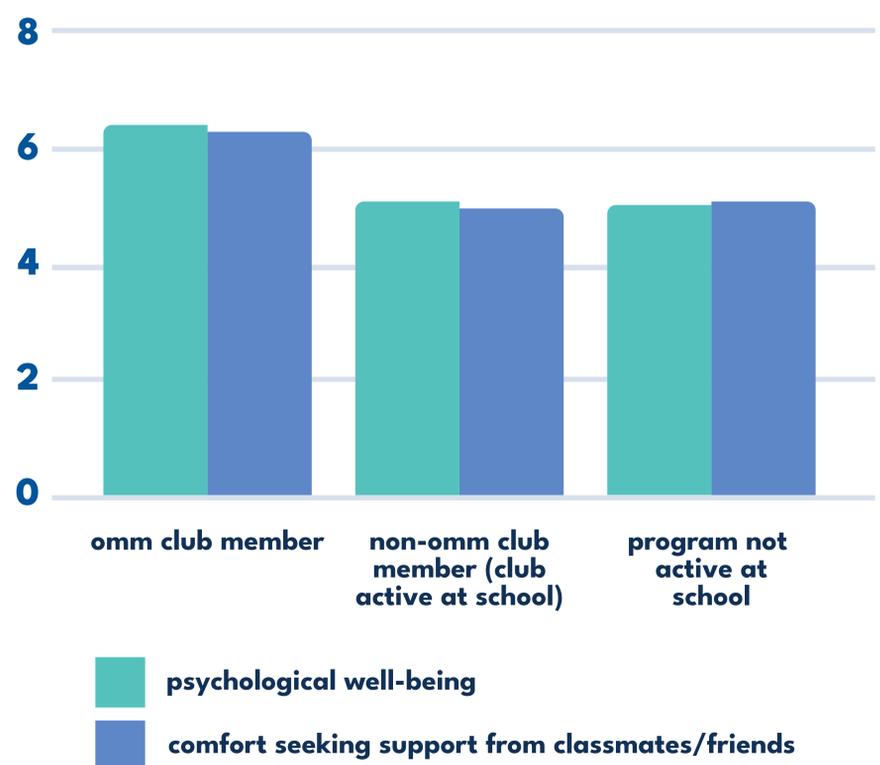
In addition to differences **among** active OMM club members, we explored differences **across** groups of students based on their level of involvement or exposure to OMM programming. Specifically, we compared: (1) students actively involved in OMM clubs, (2) students at the same schools who were not directly involved but may have been exposed to broader, school-wide OMM programming, and (3) students at schools without active OMM clubs.

We found some evidence that both **involvement in** and **exposure** to OMM clubs were associated with positive outcomes.

relative to non-participating students, omm club members reported higher average scores across multiple areas that are critical for healthy development

These areas include **stronger social and personal adjustment** (e.g. felt more connected to others, demonstrated greater kindness, higher levels of motivation for school and self-compassion, etc.), **greater willingness to seek support, and improved mental health confidence and wellness**. Examples in differences across groups of students are shown in Figure 5. Students actively participating in clubs reported higher levels of well-being (mean = 6.18) compared to peers at the same school (mean = 5.10) and peers at schools without OMM clubs (mean = 5.05).

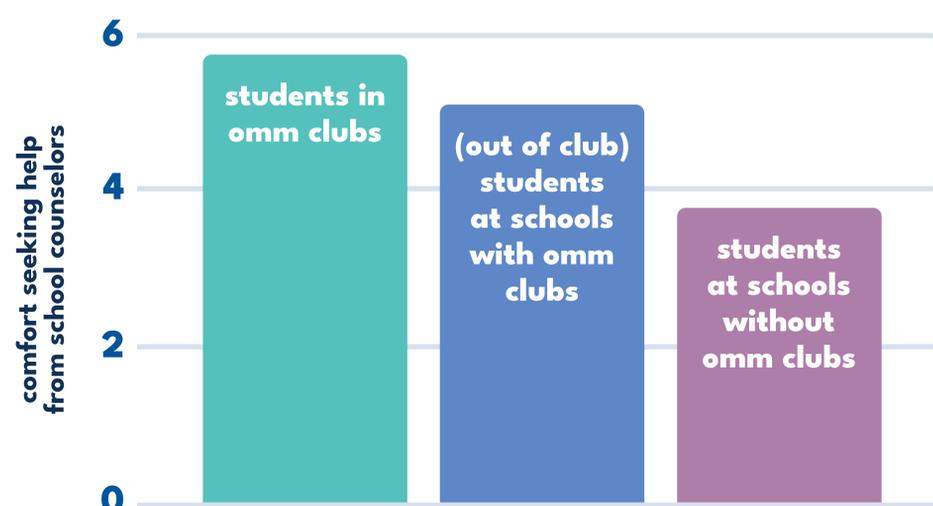
figure 5: well-being and help-seeking outcomes by omm club involvement and exposure status



comfort in seeking support from school counselors appeared to increase in relation to students' level of exposure to omm

See Figure 6 below. Those in OMM clubs (mean = 5.73) and peers at the same school (mean = 5.12) reported more comfort seeking mental health support from school counselors compared to peers at schools without OMM clubs (mean = 3.89).

figure 6: comfort seeking help from school counselors given omm club presence



Encouragingly, while students actively involved in OMM stood out with especially high adjustment across multiple measures, students across the sample (and across levels of exposure to OMM) reported relatively high adjustment overall, suggesting a generally healthy baseline of functioning across the broader student population.

● **openness to seeking support for mental health**

A core goal of Our Minds Matter (OMM) programming is to equip young people with the personal resources they need to support a healthier outlook and stronger adjustment, while also increasing their comfort and willingness to seek support from trusted figures—both peers and adults. This focus aligns with a broad body of research highlighting the importance of accessible and reliable psychological and problem-solving support in young people’s lives (MacPhee et al., 2015; Wesley & Booker, 2021), as well as the critical role of social support from parents and friends in promoting mental health during adolescence and young adulthood (Mitchell et al., 2025).

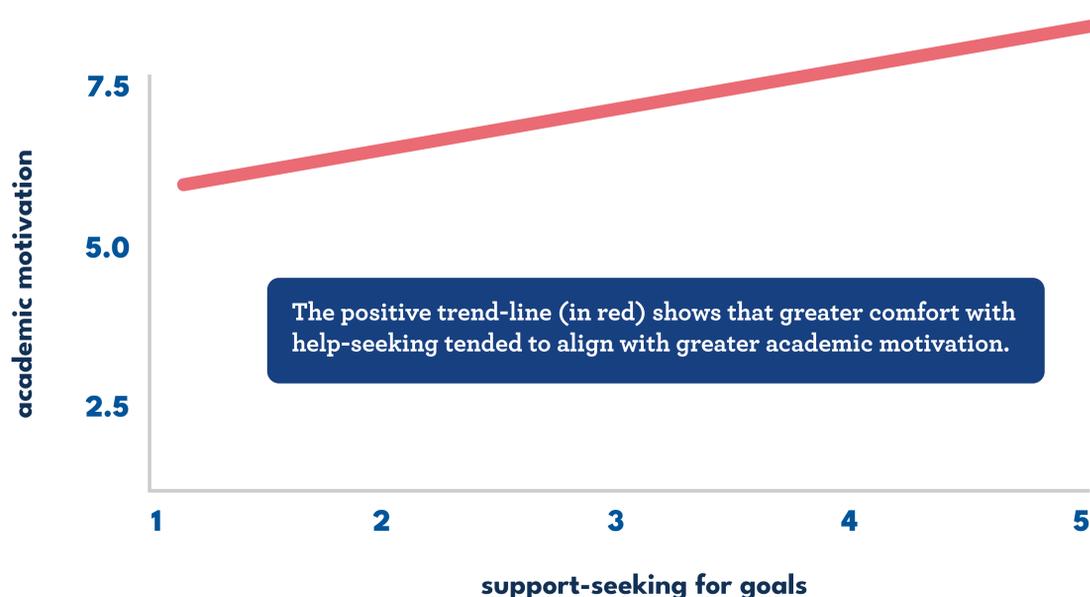
Our findings further reinforce this connection.

students who reported greater comfort in seeking instrumental (e.g. goal-oriented help) and mental health support from others also reported a range of positive outcomes.

These included increased kindness toward others and feeling better about their lives. Notably, it also included greater motivation and confidence in their academic work (see Figure 7).

Together, these results emphasize the value of a multi-faceted support system (Malecki et al., 2003), and highlight OMM’s unique contribution in fostering both internal coping strategies and external social supports. This comprehensive approach is essential for promoting meaningful, sustained mental health and well-being among youth.

figure 7: students’ academic motivation given comfort seeking support from others



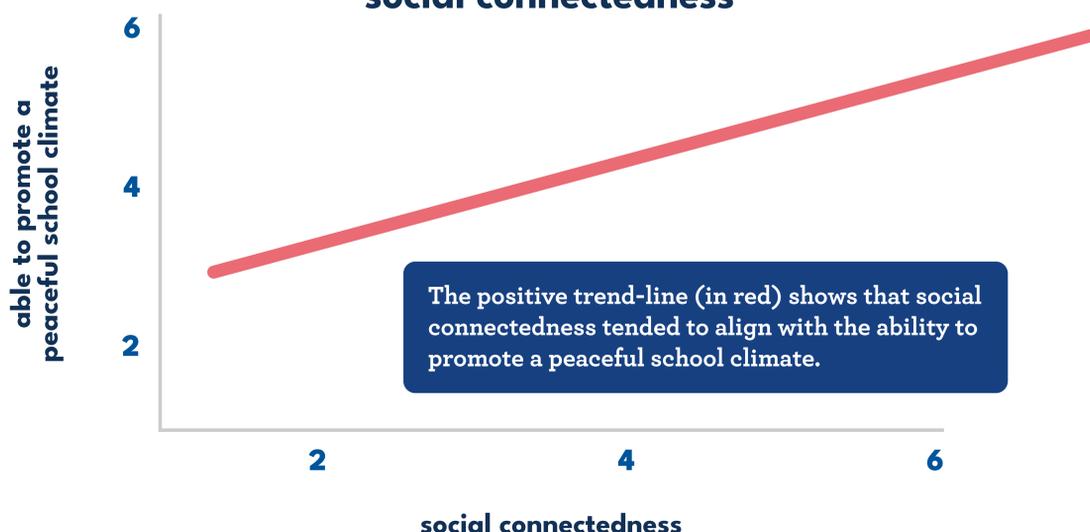
● sense of connectedness at school

A key driver of human behavior—especially during adolescence—is the desire and need to form positive, dependable relationships with others (Deci & Ryan, 2000). This motivation is reflected in how high school students often highlight the significance of strong peer networks and friendships as well as family ties in their personal narratives (Booker, Manson, et al., 2025). In this study, we examined students’ sense of social success and belonging at school as an indicator of **school connectedness**.

as with other key protective factors, students who reported stronger feelings of connection to others at school also demonstrated more positive outcomes across many areas of adjustment and success.

These students were more likely to report extending kindness to peers and contributing to a caring school climate (see Figure 8).

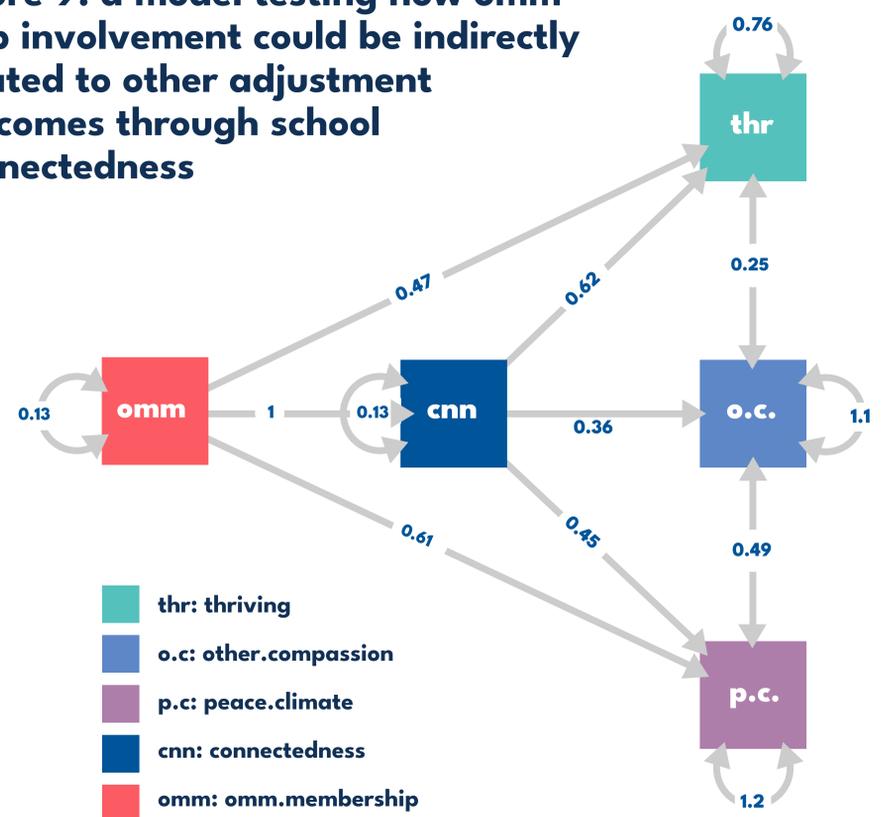
figure 8: students’ confidence they could promote a more peaceful school climate given reported social connectedness



They also expressed higher motivation to succeed academically, greater effort in their coursework, and stronger overall psychological well-being.

For students involved in OMM clubs specifically, our analysis shows that they tended to report higher personal adjustment in part because the clubs provide a positive and supportive social environment. Feeling connected to school—a benefit linked to club participation—is also closely related to ways club members reported greater kindness, well-being, and confidence in promoting a caring and peaceful school climate (see Figure 9). In other words, some of the positive effects of OMM involvement work alongside the sense of connection students feel at school.

figure 9: a model testing how omm club involvement could be indirectly related to other adjustment outcomes through school connectedness



our minds matter (omm) is working toward a day when no teen dies by suicide.

Previous evaluations of Our Minds Matter (OMM) school-based clubs have consistently highlighted its potential to uplift student mental health and broader adjustment in high school settings (e.g., Booker et al., 2023). Recent survey findings further strengthen this evidence, showing that both direct involvement in OMM clubs and higher satisfaction with club participation are strongly associated with greater adjustment across multiple areas of student functioning and well-being—particularly when compared to peers with less involvement or exposure.

most importantly, we found preliminary evidence of a ripple effect from peer-led omm clubs—reflected in greater openness to seeking support from school counselors among non-omm students at schools with active clubs, compared to their peers at schools without omm programming.

These findings are especially meaningful as OMM continues to improve and refine the club program—for example, by creating ready-to-use materials and easy-to-implement school-wide campaigns to foster a sense of connectedness at school, encourage healthy coping skills, all while encouraging more conversations around mental health to destigmatize mental health support-seeking. This growing body of evidence also serves as an important resource for schools and districts evaluating which programs to prioritize and invest in for promoting student adjustment and well-being.

omm offers a uniquely valuable model: it builds teen leadership, minimizes the demands placed on school staff's time, and shows clear promise in enhancing mental health outcomes.

As such, it represents a strong asset for schools seeking sustainable, teen-centered approaches to mental wellness. We remain encouraged by the continued potential of Our Minds Matter to foster healthy development and create more supportive school climates for all young people.





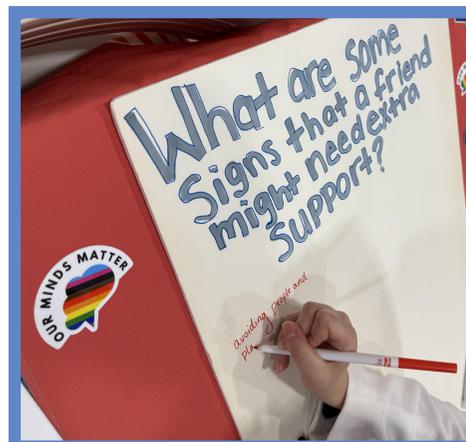
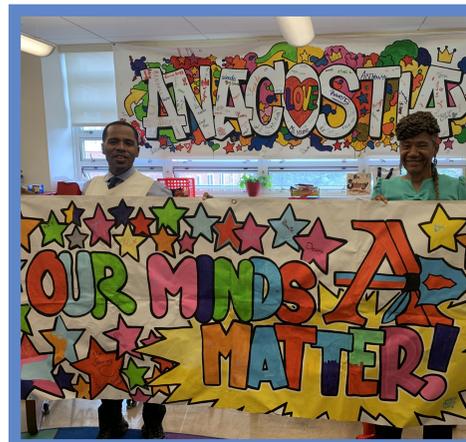
each omm club is shaped by the unique needs and interests of its student members.

Activities may include promoting kindness and support within the school, encouraging healthy coping such as affirmation, or delivering messages that reduce stigma around mental health and help-seeking—tailored to each school’s culture and priorities. At the same time, we are committed to identifying and promoting best practices that consistently support positive student outcomes. This includes evaluating variations in club programming, the potential benefits of broader school-wide initiatives—especially those that may influence peers who are not active OMM members—and the mechanisms underpinning peer support for promoting mental health and preventing teen suicide.

As we learn what works best, we continue to collaborate with club sponsors and student leaders to bring high-impact practices to more student bodies. We also actively engage with educators, administrators, community partners, and researchers who share a commitment to advancing student well-being. We welcome collaboration from colleagues and experts interested in contributing to this growing area of practice and impact.

In parallel, our team is building new evidence not only about the effectiveness of Our Minds Matter programming (Booker et al., 2023), but also about broader themes in positive youth development (Mitchell et al., 2025). We remain dedicated to understanding and sharing what we learn—working closely with students and school partners. This is a vital space for educational innovation, community engagement, and behavioral research.

as we move forward, we are proud to help lead efforts that advance this work, while partnering with others to address the meaningful questions that matter most to students, administrators, and the broader community.



As Our Minds Matter (OMM) continues to grow—reaching approximately 150 schools and 87,000 students in the 2024-25 school year—we see exciting opportunities ahead: to scale programming, refine programming to be more inclusive and appealing to all students, and strengthen the research base that demonstrates OMM’s impact on student mental health, school functioning, and risks for suicide.

87,000+

teens reached

150+

schools

We are actively cultivating new partnerships with school districts in regions with a strong OMM presence, i.e. the greater Washington D.C. metropolitan area, as well as across the country. Our goal is to provide schools with a practical, evidence-informed toolbox to help launch and sustain peer-led clubs, increasing reach and deepening impact.

call for action



conclusion

We recruited 213 students from the national capital region to explore how Our Minds Matter (OMM) supports social connection and mental health in schools. The results were clear: students involved in OMM clubs reported stronger academic confidence, a deeper sense of connectedness with others, and greater willingness to reach out for mental health support from trusted people in their lives. Students also shared that positive perceptions of club experiences and benefits of being involved in clubs were closely tied to their overall well-being and adjustment at school.

Importantly, the impact extended beyond club members. School-wide OMM events and activities created a “ripple effect,” encouraging more students across the school community to seek help and support for mental health challenges. These outcomes highlight the critical role OMM plays in equipping students with resources that not only **buffer** them from mental health concerns but also **promote** resilience, connection, and healthy development.

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technical notes

this appendix provides a detailed overview of the study’s methodology, including the research design, sampling strategy, data collection procedures, and analytic methods to assess the findings. our study methods and approach were reviewed and approved by the university of missouri institutional review board (IRB).

sampling

This research utilized a quasi-experimental design to examine outcomes across three pre-existing student groups: i) students who participated in OMM clubs during the 2024-25 school year (direct intervention group), ii) their non-participating peers from the same schools (indirect intervention group), and iii) students from schools without an active OMM club (control group).

school recruitment

We used **purposive sampling** at the school level, selecting high schools from school districts across the Washington D.C. metro area that have official partnerships with Our Minds Matter (OMM). With the support of internal district sponsors, we obtained approval from two of the three targeted school districts to carry out the study during the 2024-25 school year.

Within each approved district, eligible high schools were selected based on the presence or absence of an active OMM club during the 2024-25 school year. Schools were then paired on comparable student demographics, including student

body size, racial/ethnic composition, and the percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price meals. After securing district-level approval, the OMM Director of Impact contacted principals at eligible high schools to request school-level participation. To encourage school participation, we offered one or more of the following incentives: breakfast/treats for staff, donated school supplies, and customized reports with aggregate school-level findings. Ultimately, four high schools—two from each participating district—agreed to join the study. In each district, one school had an active OMM club while the other did not, allowing for meaningful comparison across intervention and control sites.

participant recruitment

We adopted **convenience sampling** to recruit individual student participants for this study. The aim was to recruit high school students (grades 9-12) enrolled in participating schools and use a single survey to address our research questions about Our Minds Matter. Students representing multiple gender and racial

sampling (continued)

identifications were sought for this study to reflect the diversity of the student populations within the participating school districts. To participate, students needed to be fluent in English in order to complete the survey in full.

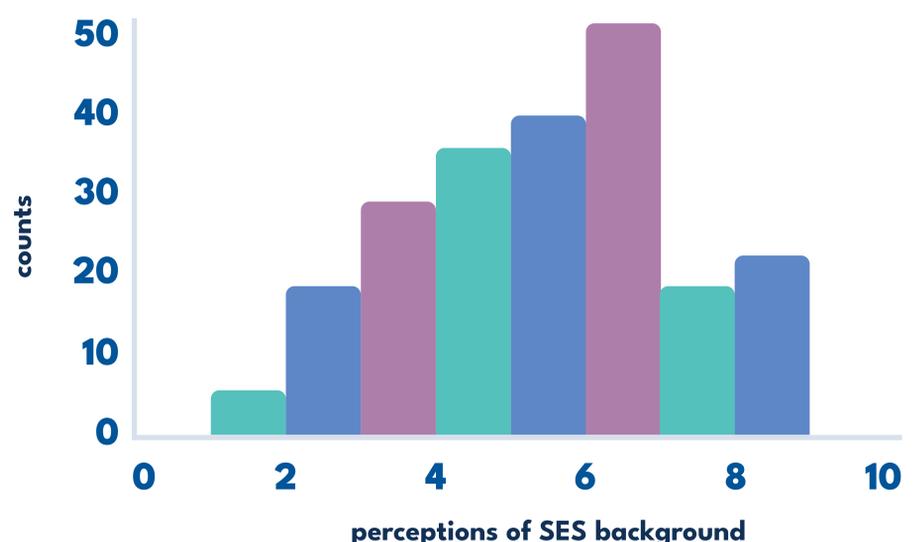
Student recruitment was conducted through a combination of in-person outreach by OMM staff and online strategies (e.g. school-approved announcement of research opportunities via communication channels like parents newsletter). Parents first reviewed information about the research study and gave consent for students to be recruited for this project. Interested students completed an informed assent before completing surveys. See the Data Collection Procedure section for additional detail. As a thank-you for their time, participating students received a \$10 Visa e-gift card incentive.

final sample

Survey respondents spent an average of 12 minutes completing the survey with a total of 213 students participating to completion. Participants represented all high school grade levels: 21.1% were in 9th grade, 26.8% in 10th grade, 23.9% in 11th grade, and 28.2% in 12th grade. More than half of the respondents identified as girls (58.7%). Students' racial and ethnic identities closely reflected the

demographic makeup of their schools and surrounding communities. The largest proportion identified as Black (53.1%), followed by White (19.2%), Asian (10.8%), Multiracial (5.6%), and Latine (5.2%). When asked how they perceive their family's economic background and status in the community—a metric of socioeconomic status—students reported a range of different statuses (see Figure 10 below). Regarding OMM club participation, 33 students were active OMM club members, 42 were non-participating peers from schools with an active club, and 135 were students from schools without an OMM club. This distribution allowed for meaningful comparisons across direct participants, indirect peers, and students with no club exposure.

figure 10: students' perceptions of families' socioeconomic backgrounds



**We were not primarily focused on possible gender differences in this work, but do recognize that there are different messages and standards about gender—about what it means to be more masculine or more feminine—that can influence how people respond to surveys like this (ex. Booker et al., 2025; Gryzman & Booker, 2024). We tested whether students differed on reports given their reports of identifying as female or as male. Among our measures, there was one difference, and girls reported showing more kindness to others on average ($t(207) = -2.31$, mean difference = .38, $d = -.33$, $p = .022$). We reiterate that kindness is for everyone, and average differences between girls and boys were modest. Still, this would fit with the ways people are shown how to think about, talk about, and show behaviors like kindness toward others in need, particularly when it comes to expectations of some social behaviors being more feminine.*

survey design

The questionnaire was developed by Principal Investigator (PI), Jordan A. Booker, Ph.D. from the University of Missouri and G Wei Ng, Ph.D., the Director of Impact at Our Minds Matter. The survey was derived from multiple standardized and widely used measures of youth in areas of:

social adjustment:

Social connectedness (Goodenow, 1993; Whiting et al., 2018), Kindness toward others (Plante et al., 2022), Confidence in promoting a more caring/peaceful school setting (Cornell, 2012)

personal adjustment:

Psychological well-being (Diener et al., 2010); Academic motivation (Vallerand et al., 1992); Academic self-efficacy; Self-compassion (Neff, 2003)

support-seeking for mental health concerns:

Comfort with support seeking (Greenglass et al., 2012), Willingness to seek help from various sources (i.e., mental health professionals, friends, parents, school counselors; Hammer et al., 2018)

mental health:

Confidence in reducing mental health risks and in promoting mental health wellness (McCarty et al., 2022)

broader school culture:

Peer pressure (Byrne et al., 2007); Perceived mental health stigma (King et al., 2007)

Note that many of these scales were further trimmed to balance time and energy demands for students. (see Reference for citations)

Participants also responded to a limited number of items created by the PI, specifically around OMM club involvement which include items assessing for perceived social support from the club, number of club activities, evaluations of OMM involvement, and relevance of OMM for career goals. Lastly, participants were prompted to provide demographic information including grade level, race, gender, SES, and GPA.

data collection procedures

We collected cross-sectional, online survey data between February and March, 2025 across four public high schools from two large school districts in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. Based on pilot findings, we anticipated that by the Spring semester, measurable impacts of OMM clubs would be observable among participating students.

With the support of school personnel, advanced study announcements were shared with parents/guardians, along with an informed consent form available in both English and Spanish to accommodate schools with high populations of English language learners. At schools with OMM clubs, club sponsors reminded members during club meetings to encourage participation.

In light of the widespread challenges in collecting signed parental consent forms—reported by school staff as a general barrier to any school-related activities—on-site recruitment played a critical role. OMM staff coordinated with schools to visit during non-instructional hours (e.g. lunch period) to minimize interruption to the school day and invite students to participate. Students with advanced parental consent received an email survey invitation the day before the site visit and were given the option to complete the survey at home or on-site. Interested students who were of consenting age were able to self-enroll to the study by scanning a QR code during the visit. Minors who expressed interest but did not yet have parental consent were provided with a take-home flyer containing QR codes linking to the consent and assent forms, along with the survey itself. They were instructed to complete both forms within a designated timeframe to remain eligible for receiving the incentive. All students were required to complete an informed assent or consent form prior to beginning the survey.

analytic methods

We used a set of quantitative and frequentist statistical approaches to address our primary research questions in this work. This means that we often presented tests with two possible interpretations, starting with an assumption that a null hypothesis best explains our data:

there may not be evidence of a systematic difference or relation between some set of measures (we did not have reason to reject the null hypothesis)

there is systematic evidence of some difference between a set of scores or some relation between a set of measures (we had reason to reject the null hypothesis in favor of an alternative hypothesis)

We primarily used t-tests and correlation tests for this work. T-tests allow for a comparison between two sets of scores—either between different groups of people (ex. OMM student leaders compared to OMM members who were not student leaders) or within the same people (ex. Someone’s reports of belongingness at a baseline and then the same measure one week later). These tests give us a statistical value based on the average, or mean, difference between two sets of scores, the amount of variance, or unexplained error, within these sets of scores, and the total number of responses (larger datasets provide more statistical power for successfully identifying a difference if it is present). Figure 2 depicts an example of a t-test.

Correlation tests allow us to test whether we can anticipate a score on one measure, given a score on another measure. These tests tell us simply whether there are positive or negative relations between different measures. Positive correlation scores mean that as one measure has a higher score, the other measure also tends to have a higher score. One example with children is 1) age and 2) height. Negative correlation scores mean that as one measure has a higher score, the other measure tends to have a lower score. Another example with children would be 1) age and 2) how often children tend to make spelling mistakes. Larger, absolute scores, indicate stronger evidence of relations between measures tested for a correlation. Figure 3 depicts an example of a correlation test.

appendix

table 1. descriptive summaries of sample-wide reports

Measure	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Connectedness	5.29	1.34	1.29	7.00
Psychological Well-Being	5.24	1.25	1.00	7.00
Kindness toward Others	5.65	1.19	1.00	7.00
Confidence Promoting Peace	5.02	1.29	1.33	7.00
Academic Motivation	7.57	1.20	1.33	9.33
Peer Pressure	2.16	1.12	1.00	5.00
Perceived Mental Health Stigma	3.97	1.07	1.00	7.00
Self-Compassion	3.80	.91	1.00	5.00
Academic Self-Efficacy	3.96	.88	1.00	5.00
Comfort with Support Seeking	3.63	.92	1.00	5.00
Willingness to Seek Help from Mental Health Provider	5.25	1.71	1.00	7.00
Willingness to Seek Help from Close Friend or Classmate	5.24	1.56	1.00	7.00
Willingness to Seek Help from Parent or Trusted Adult	5.26	1.77	1.00	7.00
Willingness to Seek Help from School Counselor	4.71	1.92	1.00	7.00
OMM Social Support	5.84	1.26	2.00	7.00
Evaluations of OMM Involvement	6.21	1.19	2.80	7.60
Relevance of OMM for Career Goals	4.05	.98	1.00	5.00

table 2. correlations of students' reports across all surveyed students

	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.	13.	14.	15.
1. Connectedness	.52	.42	.35	.70	.08	.48	.28	-.11	-.02	.41	.30	.39	.47	.37
2. Confidence Peace	–	.55	.42	.56	.06	.64	.44	-.02	-.06	.53	.40	.47	.48	.49
3. Compassion toward Others		–	.35	.48	.19	.57	.37	-.06	.01	.46	.44	.32	.44	.36
4. Self-Compassion			–	.36	.13	.30	.41	-.09	-.11	.36	.28	.18	.29	.24
5. Well-Being				–	.13	.50	.36	-.09	-.04	.44	.36	.32	.51	.37
6. GPA					–	.20	.27	-.06	.06	.08	.13	.04	.01	-.00
7. Academic Motivation						–	.52	-.02	-.03	.46	.38	.40	.45	.38
8. Academic Self-Efficacy							–	-.13	.00	.39	.33	.25	.26	.32
9. Peer Pressure								–	-.43	-.03	.03	-.01	-.08	.01
10. Mental Health Stigma									–	-.13	-.10	-.06	-.02	-.08
11. Support-Seeking										–	.33	.45	.44	.42
12. Openness to Mental Health Provider Help											–	.31	.58	.41
13. Openness to Close Friend Help												–	.33	.34
14. Openness to Parent Help													–	.54
15. Openness to School Counselor Help														–

Note. Bolded values are significant at the $\alpha = .05$ level. This means that we are confident the correlation test is not likely to be a fluke-to be a score of 0 instead. In this Table, correlations control for the influences of students' academic level and gender (meaning even if, for example, students in higher grades tended to have different scores in well-being or academic self-efficacy, that influence is accounted for with the table above).

table 3. correlations of omm club involvement with student reports of adjustment among active omm club members

	Current Leaders	Club Social Support	Number of Club Activities	Club Evaluations	Career Relevance
Club Social Support	.13	–	–	–	–
Number of Club Activities	.44	.36	–	–	–
Club Evaluations	-.08	.44	.12	–	–
Career Relevance	.08	.36	.12	.89	–
Connectedness	.13	.70*	.18	.09	.12
Confidence Peace	.20	.34	.13	.62	.60*
Compassion toward Others	.03	.41*	-.10	.56	.46*
Self-Compassion	.16	.28	.27	.42*	.49*
Well-Being	.05	.70*	.07	.20	.21
GPA	.06	-.14	.20	-.06	-.10
Academic Motivation	.15	.34	.05	.60*	.67*
Academic Self-Efficacy	.08	.17	.23	.41*	.49*
Peer Pressure	.15	-.02	.12	-.15	-.11
Mental Health Stigma	-.12	.08	-.07	.08	.07
Support-Seeking	.16	.21	.07	.60*	.67*
Openness to Mental Health Provider Help	.19	.02	-.03	.23	.32
Openness to Close Friend Help	.11	.37*	.16	.41*	.49*
Openness to Parent Help	.28	.14	-.07	.42*	.45*
Openness to School Counselor Help	.15	.17	-.18	.47*	.53*

Note. Bolded values are significant at the $\alpha = .05$ level.

acknowledgements

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Last but not least, we extend our sincere thanks to all the club sponsors and student leaders across the 150+ high schools and middle schools in the Our Minds Matter network nationwide. Your daily commitment to changing the culture around mental health is inspiring and impactful. Thank you for being champions of youth mental health!

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