Student Wellness Leader Project

Project Description

The Student Wellness Leadership Training Project was a culturally responsive initiative aimed at increasing mental health awareness, engagement, and access to wellness resources among Black and African youth in Los Angeles-based schools. A consultant with demonstrated experience working with Black and African communities was hired to lead the project.

The initiative successfully recruited and trained a cohort of Black and African students through the Student Wellness Leadership Training curriculum. Participants received foundational knowledge in mental health outreach, with an emphasis on the cultural, systemic, and social factors impacting the well-being of their communities. The training explored the effects of chronic stress and generational trauma on communities of color, while equipping students with practical tools for their own wellness practices. Mindfulness-based strategies were introduced to help students embody the principles they would later share with their peers.

Following the training, students co-developed and facilitated peer-centered wellness workshops that promoted open dialogue, resource-sharing, and healing-centered engagement. These workshops were rooted in the students' lived experiences and cultural identities, and they addressed both traditional and non-traditional approaches to mental health within the Black community.
Through the development of this youth-led model, the project strengthened student leadership in school-based wellness programs and successfully increased participation in mental health and self-care activities among Black and African students.

Program and promotional materials

BECOME
A STUDENT WELLNESS LEADER

HELP PROMOTE MENTAL HEALTH AND REDUCE STIGMA

- 12-Hour Course
- Class Start 3/22/2025
- Food Provided

ENROLL NOW!

$250 Stipend upon completion

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DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH
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WELLNESS · RECOVERY · RESILIENCE
SUBCOMMITTEE

Link clicks ⓘ	401	Cost per Link Click ⓘ	$0.32
Views ⓘ	17,302	Reach ⓘ	12,654

Activity

Post engagements
446

Link clicks
401

Post shares
26

Post reactions
15

Strengths and barriers of the Project

Strengths

A key strength of the project was the strong interest and engagement from students. Many were eager to join and expressed genuine excitement about learning how to support mental wellness within their communities. Their willingness to participate actively—and take leadership roles—demonstrated a high level of self-awareness and maturity. Parents were also supportive, especially during the enrollment phase, showing trust in the program and a clear desire to see their children involved in something meaningful and growth-oriented.

This openness was made possible, in part, because of my organization's long-standing presence and credibility within the community. Having already built relationships and trust with local families, outreach and recruitment were met with enthusiasm rather than skepticism. For the most part, families were receptive to the program and recognized the value in their children being involved in something that promoted leadership, emotional intelligence, and wellness practices.

Barriers

Despite the program's overall success, several barriers did arise. One early challenge was communicating the deeper purpose of the program to families and community members. While students were quick to grasp the value of mental health training, some adults struggled to understand why wellness education—especially with a mental health focus—was important. This was compounded by skepticism from a few individuals regarding participant compensation. Some questioned why students were being paid to attend, which required intentional conversations about the importance of valuing youth labor, time, and contributions, especially when engaging in leadership and peer support roles.

Another significant barrier emerged during the final student presentations. Participation and attendance from family and friends during these events were noticeably low. When asked, students shared that their supporters often cited lack of time or short notice as the primary reasons for not attending. However, from a programmatic perspective, there seemed to be additional underlying factors. Presentations were scheduled on Saturdays, which may have been viewed by some parents as a much-needed break from parenting responsibilities, particularly after a long work week. In some cases, this time may have been used to rest, manage household responsibilities, or simply recharge.

Additionally, cultural perceptions around mental health appeared to influence attendance. Many parents come from backgrounds where mental health is not commonly discussed or prioritized, and for some, the idea of a mental health-related presentation may not have resonated as a valuable or necessary event to attend. It's also worth noting that many of the participating students demonstrated a high level of independence and self-sufficiency. Because of this, some parents may have felt less urgency to attend, believing their child was already capable and thriving on their own.

Summary of the Retrospective Post-then-Pre Questionnaire responses

Questions	Before todays event					After todays event				
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I can accurately identify my emotions as I experience them.	1	1	3	10	0	1	0	1	8	5
I effectively manage my stress in challenging situations.	0	1	4	9	0	0	0	1	8	6
I empathize with others' feelings, even when their experiences differ from mine.	0	0	8	7	0	0	0	5	5	5
I communicate effectively with peers and adults.	0	2	3	10	0	0	0	1	8	6
I consider the potential consequences before making decisions.	0	1	4	10	0	0	1	0	7	7
I am knowledgeable about how chronic stress affects mental and physical health	0	2	3	10	0	0	0	1	8	6
I recognize the impact of chronic stress on communities of color	0	0	5	10	0	0	0	0	8	7
I am aware of strategies to manage and reduce chronic stress in my life.	0	0	6	9	0	0	0	1	7	7
I feel confident in my ability to lead discussions about mental health with my peers.	0	0	5	10	0	0	1	0	7	7
I am committed to advocating for mental health awareness in my community.	1	0	5	9	0	0	0	0	8	7

The Student Wellness Leadership Project included a pre- and post-assessment to measure changes in students' emotional intelligence, mental health awareness, and leadership confidence. A total of 25 assessments were collected, but only 15 were sufficient for evaluation, as the remaining contained duplicated or incorrect responses.
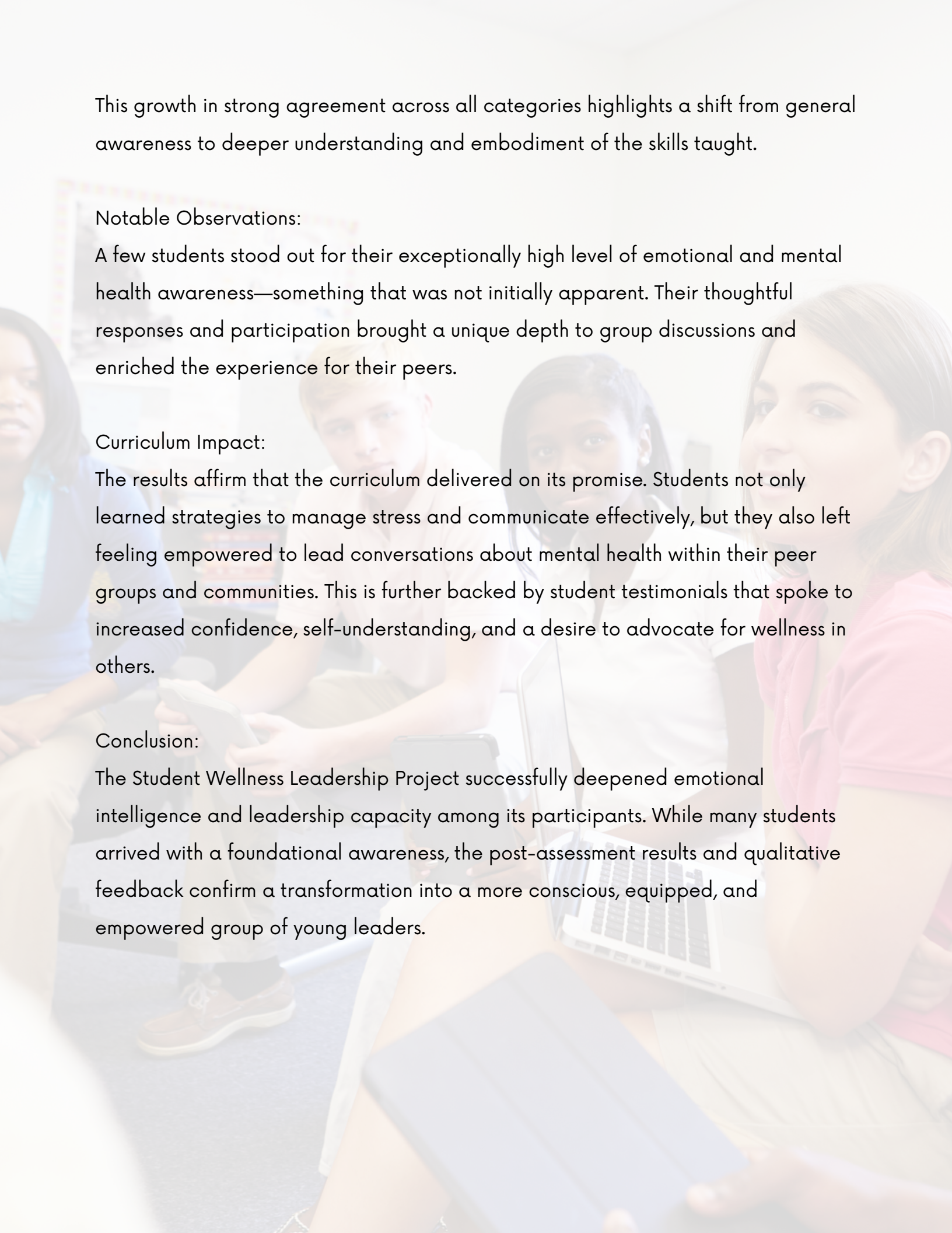
Key Findings:

Upon arrival, students already demonstrated a notable level of self-awareness and emotional insight. Many participants showed strong agreement or agreement in areas such as identifying emotions, managing stress, and empathizing with others—even before the curriculum began. This suggests that the student cohort entered the program with a foundation of emotional literacy.

However, after completing the program, there was a measurable increase in awareness and confidence across every category.

For example:

- The number of students who "Strongly Agreed" they could identify their emotions rose from 0 to 5.
- Confidence in leading mental health discussions increased, with 7 students reporting "Strongly Agree" post-event, up from 0.
- The ability to recognize the impact of chronic stress on communities of color also saw a jump in "Strongly Agree" responses—from 0 to 7.

This growth in strong agreement across all categories highlights a shift from general awareness to deeper understanding and embodiment of the skills taught.

Notable Observations:
A few students stood out for their exceptionally high level of emotional and mental health awareness—something that was not initially apparent. Their thoughtful responses and participation brought a unique depth to group discussions and enriched the experience for their peers.

Curriculum Impact:
The results affirm that the curriculum delivered on its promise. Students not only learned strategies to manage stress and communicate effectively, but they also left feeling empowered to lead conversations about mental health within their peer groups and communities. This is further backed by student testimonials that spoke to increased confidence, self-understanding, and a desire to advocate for wellness in others.

Conclusion:
The Student Wellness Leadership Project successfully deepened emotional intelligence and leadership capacity among its participants. While many students arrived with a foundational awareness, the post-assessment results and qualitative feedback confirm a transformation into a more conscious, equipped, and empowered group of young leaders.

Testimonials from participants of the Project

"Learning how to actually control and handle my emotions better."

"Knowing different methods to handle stressful situations independently and how to help others in many situations while they're dealing with a battle of mental health."

"I like how much information was given there was some stuff that I didn't know or wanted more clarification on and I received it and I asked questions."

"I liked how interactive the training was. Ms. O was very nice and respectful throughout the training which enhanced the experience."

"I liked learning about the mental health and learning ways managed stress and understating my emotions."

"Being able to feel seen and heard, as well as talking with other people when we did activities."

"I love how passionate O is! She is very resonating and I can tell she enjoys talking about this."

"I love how much i gained from this program and how much better of a person i have become."

Recommendations for LACDMH for decreasing gaps in service delivery.

To ensure smooth project implementation and reduce unnecessary challenges for both vendors and DMH liaisons, it is critical that all information—particularly deliverables, pricing, and timelines—is consistent and accurate across all platforms, including the Statement of Work and the ISD Vendor Portal.

In our recent experience, a mismatch between the Statement of Work and the vendor portal caused a significant delay of nearly 60 days. As a result, we faced major setbacks in securing venue space and recruiting participants—two foundational elements essential to the success of the project. These inconsistencies not only hindered our ability to meet deliverables in a timely manner, but also created confusion and added stress on both ends.

Moving forward, ensuring alignment between all official documents and platforms will help prevent these avoidable disruptions, support more efficient collaboration, and allow vendors to execute their responsibilities with clarity and confidence.