

# A Community-Engaged Research Approach to Understanding Youth Mental Health

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## BACKGROUND

Every year, it is estimated that nearly 1 in 5 adolescents and young adults in the United States experience a severe mental health disorder. The impacts of mental illness can be dire, with suicide recently becoming the second leading cause of death for those aged 10-24, causing almost 7,000 lives lost in 2017. There are, however, recent efforts to support adolescent mental health. Schools are increasing the number of mental health profession staff. The FCC has established 988 as the national suicide prevention hotline. And national conversations are exploring factors that impact mental health, such as adverse childhood experiences and trauma-informed care. Despite these efforts and others there has been a drastic increase in mental health challenges, including suicide attempts among our youth. Notable, in an underserved neighborhood in Los Angeles, depression metrics within the community were significantly reduced by promoting community conversations, integrating community ideas into research, and compensating the community for their work. However, community-engaged research projects are limited, especially among youth populations. In this project, high school students are empowered as young investigators to design, administer and evaluate a mental health survey for youth.

## RESULTS

High Schools Represented	Grades Represented
James Madison HS	8 sophomores
Health Careers HS	8 juniors
Ronald Reagan HS	3 seniors
St. Anthony Catholic HS	
Zacharias Early College Leadership Academy	
John Jay Science and Engineering Academy	
South San Antonio HS	
Travis Early College HS	
Central Catholic HS	
Antonian College Preparatory HS	

Survey Objectives (Number of Questions)	
Background & Demographics (12)	Stress (3)
Racism (5)	Depression (3)
Sexuality (12)	Suicide (16)
Environment (10)	Trauma (5)
Relationships (11)	Anxiety (7)
School Performance (11)	Coping strategies (9)
Jobs/Extracurriculars (9)	Risky Behaviors (27)
Physical Health (15)	Screen time and Social media (16)
Mental Health (17)	Mental health education (5)
Pandemic (6)	Survey feedback (5)

Scan the QR code to see the young investigator application



## CONCLUSIONS

### Young people are excited about making impact

- Twenty-six students applied for the original 16 young investigator spots. Due to the passion and drive seen in many students' applications, 19 young investigators were selected.
- Originally, four 1-hour meetings were scheduled for survey design. Throughout the survey design meetings, it was clear that the young investigators were passionate about designing a comprehensive and impactful survey. The young investigators met for six 1.5-to-2 hour meetings to design the survey.
- Currently, the young investigators are leading discussions with their counselors and principals to approve the administration of the survey at their respective high schools. Some young investigators are also helping with writing the IRB protocols.

### Schools want to support their students' mental health

- School administrators stated that the COVID-19 pandemic has led to unprecedented disruption and stress in our youth's education and mental health.
- School administrators expressed a strong desire to incorporate mental health resources at their schools, including the administration of this survey.
- Initiatives like the CARE Zone at South San ISD, which partners with community agencies to provide mental health services for students and their families, is critical to support youth. **More work is needed to better understand the mental health challenges and needs of youth.**

## METHODS

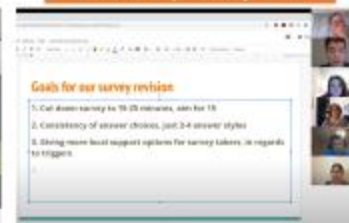
Nineteen high school students were recruited from the UT Teen Health Youth Leadership Council. The young investigators represent 10 high schools across Bexar County. Throughout 8 virtual meetings over 3 months, the young investigators designed the mental health survey and administration protocol. The principal investigator and UT Teen Health designed structured meetings to encourage discussion and empower student voice. During each meeting, the research team researched, discussed, designed and revised the survey objectives and questions. In the last meeting, the research team designed the survey administration protocol for their respective high schools. Additionally, a Community Advisory Board composed of three adolescent mental health professionals from the community provided guidance and survey feedback.



The survey design was facilitated via Zoom and Google Slides



Young Investigators were guided by a Community Advisory Board



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This project is supported by the 2019-2020 Community Engagement Small Project Grant by the Institute for Integration of Medicine & Science

