

WELLNESS CENTERS

Wellness centers can significantly reduce the stigma associated with seeking mental health services, as well as increase attendance and the likelihood of graduation. **Wellness centers are easily accessible, designated safe spaces on school campuses and are designed to support student's healthy development, wellness and mental health** by offering integrated prevention, early intervention, peer support, and direct service programs and opportunities. Wellness centers promote an inclusive school culture and ensure school is a place where all youth belong and are welcomed.

In the **California Healthy Kids 2022-23 mental health report**, more than 30% of students reported feeling 'chronic sadness,' one in seven said they'd considered suicide, more than one third reported social and emotional distress and more than one half said they had a low degree of satisfaction in their lives.

There is strong evidence in support of these investments at schools. *A recently released comprehensive analysis of 213 studies of school-based social and emotional learning initiatives and programs found that youth enjoyed improved social skills, attitudes, and behaviors; recovered more quickly from trauma and saw dramatic improvements in academic achievement as a result of school based social-emotional and mental health programs.*

SCHOOL WELLNESS CENTERS contribute directly to school and school districts goals such as improved rates of attendance, support for children with special needs, and parent and guardian engagement.

"It's a place where kids can come and get nourished physically, emotionally, and socially. And if we're not addressing students' social, emotional, and behavioral struggles in school, then they're not going to do well academically, either. How can we expect students to manage their own emotional health but not teach them how or give them the space they need to do so?"

Joaquin Moraga Intermediate School has a dedicated room as its Wellness Center. Named after a recently deceased teacher at JM, Leslie Cary, it is staffed full time. Any student can drop in if they are feeling distressed, sad, or overwhelmed by any emotion. An intake is done to assess whether the student might require a more direct clinical evaluation or intervention. A full time staff member as well as a qualified licensed counselor are available. Students who utilize the center can choose to read, listen to music, do calming exercises, or, if they choose, speak to a qualified staff member.

Lamorinda Sunrise Rotary Club recognizes the well documented need and efficacy of wellness centers at schools. The club's **Youth Services Committee** has chosen to target middle school-aged children in their efforts to reach a younger, underserved, and vulnerable community.

This year our involvement has included:

1. **Funding** the purchase of audio visual equipment for students to listen to relaxation and meditation tracks while in the center.
2. **Funding** the training of a support animal (dog) that will be at the center several days a week beginning next Fall. Research has consistently shown that support animals are extremely effective at helping this age group of children to regulate their emotions.
3. **Researching** local experts in the field of mental health, particularly focusing on topics of cyberbullying and other online abuses and **funding** workshops for counselors and students in these areas.
4. **Sponsoring** a *Good Character Award* that involved teachers, counselors, and staff who nominated students who in their actions reflected Rotary values of *Truthfulness, Fairness, Kindness, and Service to Others*. The club hosted the award winners, their parents and families, administrators, teachers, staff, the Moraga Mayor, and members of Lamorinda Sunrise Rotary Club to an awards luncheon March 8.

