

Tonijoy Pimental Healthcare Studies

INTRODUCTION

Nan Project is a nonprofit organization that was established in 2015 in Beverly MA in honor of Nancy Cavanaugh who died by suicide. The project focuses on addressing the stigma around mental health as well as to spreading awareness around warning signs. The project does this through a peer mentor format by having other young people visit schools and share their journeys with mental health. They visit numerous Massachusetts schools every year and other community organizations.



INTERNSHIP PROJECT OBJECTIVE

- Increase impact on students
- Implement a pre-visit survey assessing student demographics, culture, and attitudes toward mental health
- Tailor presentations using survey results
- Improve student engagement through customized materials and speaker selection
- Develop a broader working model to support future presentations across Massachusetts schools

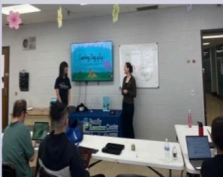
RELATED LITERATURE

- Previous research shows that school-based mental health programs can reduce stigma, improve help-seeking behaviors, and increase student understanding of available resources. Fein et al. (2023) found that student engagement clubs promoting open discussion of mental health created more positive attitudes toward mental illness in high schools.
- Lawson et al. (2026) reported that educators identified anxiety, emotional dysregulation, and peer relationship struggles as major concerns among adolescents, emphasizing the need for early intervention in schools.
- Additionally, Wilcox et al. (2023) found that peer-led mental health education improved students' confidence in supporting classmates and recognizing warning signs. These findings support the use of customized, school-based presentations to improve student engagement and awareness.

MATERIALS & METHODS

Materials:

- Pre-presentation teacher survey assessing classroom demographics and culture
- Survey platform (Google Forms) for data collection
- Coloring pages
- Printed Resource cards with crisis lines
- Note cards for personal student questions
- Trained peer mentors with diverse identities and backgrounds to speak
- Observational notes
- Informal student/teacher feedback
- Informal peer/advisor feedback



Presenting the new survey and coloring sheet prototype at evening day #14

Methods:

Collected data from 7 schools before any changes were made to the presentation format and then 9 after the changes were implemented

Distributed a pre-presentation survey to teachers assessing:

- Mental health familiarity
- Classroom demographics
- Cultural considerations
- Classroom environment

Analyzed responses to identify key classroom characteristics

Tailored presentations by:

- Adapting communication and examples
- Aligning speaker identity when possible

Delivered presentations on:

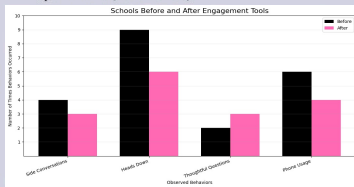
- Mental health warning signs
- Accessing resources
- Stigma reduction
- Collected observations on engagement and presentation effectiveness



Scan to see pre-presentation survey

RESULTS

- Classrooms demonstrated varying levels of familiarity with mental health topics
- Students in areas with lower socioeconomic status often had less education around mental health and warning signs
- Classroom environment and peer dynamics influenced student engagement
- Tailored presentations improved student participation and responsiveness (observational)



CONCLUSIONS

- Pre-assessment surveys are effective in tailoring mental health education.
- Customization improves student engagement and accessibility. More questions were being asked and less side conversations were occurring
- Inclusive tools support diverse learning needs
- These findings support pre-assessment surveys as an effective strategy for improving school-based mental health outreach.

REFERENCES

- Fein, E. H et al., (2023). Encouraging "Positive Views" of Mental Illness in High Schools. An Evaluation of Bring Change 2 Mind Youth Engagement Clubs. Health Promotion Practice, 24(5), 873-885.
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 Lawson, G. M et al., (2026). Educators' top concerns about youth mental health: A multimethod brief report. School Psychology, 41(1), 124-129.
<https://doi.org/corvette.salemstate.edu/10.1037/spi0000706>

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