

***Mikva
Challenge***

2020

**TEEN HEALTH
COUNCIL**

TEEN HEALTH COUNCIL



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TEEN HEALTH COUNCIL

The Teen Health Council (THC), through collaboration with the Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH) and the Chicago Public School's (CPS) Office of Student Health and Wellness, works to improve the physical, mental, and sexual health of youth in Chicago. THC works with Lurie Children's Hospital to learn about and inform their peers on the impacts of stress and trauma on mental and physical wellbeing.

FRAMING QUESTION

How can we incorporate youth voices into trauma-informed policy at CDPH and CPS?

SUMMER SNAPSHOT

The Teen Health Council works to educate and discuss public health and health disparities in order to bring awareness on these issues and promote health equity, through the power of youth voice and action. The framing question for this summer's Teen Health Council is: How can we incorporate youth voices into trauma-informed policy at CDPH and CPS? Each of the recommendations presented address this question, however, due to the myriad of events occurring both nationally and locally, we decided to incorporate a section to emphasize the significance of racial inequities and their impact on public health. Thus, we investigated the ways in which racial inequities impact the health of various demographic groups within Chicago.

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FORWARD

Despite ranking as one of the most diverse cities in the US, Chicago also holds the title as one of the most segregated. As such, Chicago possesses one of the most inequitable distribution of resources within the country, closely tying racial and ethnic identification to inaccessibility and greater health risks. Areas predominantly populated by minority groups, especially Chicago's South and West sides, suffer from limited access to healthy food options, high quality health care, preventive education, and mental health services and digital resources. This leads to overrepresentation in unemployment, homelessness, teen pregnancy, preventable STDs, alcoholism and drug use, chronic and mental illnesses and higher rates of overall death. As part of Mikva Challenge, we are aware of the breadth of inequity and how it affects numerous aspects of life in our city, with each council taking on issues related to housing, education, juvenile justice, and policing. Thus as the Teen Health Council, we decided to narrow our focus upon the following topics: sexual education, mental health, as well as the COVID-19 pandemic.

COVID-19 has shined a light on the continued prevalence of racial disparities and racial inequities within Chicago, and it has further generated the racial-wealth gap between various communities. We have seen minority groups lack transportation and food access, and subsequently face risking their health with spikes in cases within their communities and/or losing their livelihood. Moreover, due to these circumstances we have seen spikes of racist aggression against certain racial and ethnic groups.

Another one of the major issues emphasized by our council includes the relationship between the BIPOC communities and health care systems. Often, due to inadequate insurance, lack of medical services in minority communities, and racially charged assumptions by health care professionals, minority communities contract significantly more preventable diseases than their white counterparts. In a conversation with West Side United's director, Tenisha Jones, we discussed the lack of access for residents, particularly surrounding Chicago's major healthcare institutes. Lack of adequate treatment paired with a history of racial stigma leads to mistrust in the healthcare system, and a reduction in the overall health of BIPOC communities.

In mental and sexual health, the stigmas embedded within older generations of racial minority groups create a barrier from providing and receiving proper care and education, which in turn often prevent them from seeking help. Moreover, generational trauma within households further strengthens these stigmas. These traumas often occurred from malpractice, racial bias, and for mental health specifically, the falsification of mental illnesses which leads to instances such as desensitization, higher rates of aggression, and substance abuse. The following recommendations outline ways to increase health equity for youth throughout the Chicagoland area.

TEEN HEALTH COUNCIL

Recommendation 1:

New CPS Sexual Health Policy

TRANSPARENT CURRICULUM

We recommend a general syllabus to present what students must be taught prior to instruction. We recommend that transparent and open access to the sexual education curriculum be added into the Curriculum Equity Initiative and for it to be prominently shown on the Chicago Public School's (CPS) website.

- The syllabus should be distributed via email to all parents/guardians/CPS Community and available on the CPS website prior to instruction.
- The syllabus should include a checklist of all the mandatory lessons that are required to be taught across all CPS schools at each level.
- Students and parents should be able to keep teachers accountable for covering all lessons listed by having a method for reporting fallacies or inconsistencies in their school's sexual health delivery.

Why It's Important

For students to receive the complete understanding of the curriculum, students and families have to see it firsthand. Teachers also need to be held accountable for any potential prejudices or lack of capacity to teach sexual health topics. A transparent curriculum will allow the CPS community to reasonably catch any false information being taught, enforce proper sexual health education, and advocate for any changes.

PARENTAL OPT-OUT

CPS's current sexual health policy gives parents the option to opt their child out of certain lessons for the curriculum. **We recommend** that parents should *not* be given the option to opt-out of the lessons that explain gender and sexuality identities because it contradicts CPS' anti-bullying and anti-discriminatory policies. We believe that opting out of those two topics leads directly to prejudice.

Why It's Important

The Center of American Progress' data showed that in 2016, 1 in 4 people who identified as being LGBTQ reported they experienced acts of discrimination in their lives. Opting out of identity based curriculum can aid in creating a negative environment for students due to ignorance, and can directly aid in the spread of prejudice.

According to the 2019 YRBS survey, LGBT students were twice as likely to report bullying in school and even miss school due to the feeling of being unsafe. CPS needs to work towards dismantling cis and heteronormativity in their system if they are truly anti-bullying/prejudice/discrimination. By requiring these lessons to be taught, we expect more students will learn to understand one another and the rates of bullying will decrease.

AVAILABILITY OF RESOURCES

Sexual health resources need to be available to all students. **We recommend** that if schools are unable to provide aid past what is required, they should provide network specific resources. Additionally, a section of the CPS health curriculum should be based around informing youth of where to access resources and what their rights are when it comes to sexual health.

This should include but is not limited to:

- Locations of queer (LGBTQIA+) specific resources (Center on Halsted, Howard Brown, etc.)
- BIPOC specific resources/locations
- Locations of Sexual Health Aid (i.e. Planned Parenthood, etc.)
- Directory of contacts for students to report incidents to (specifically in cases of discrimination, abuse, as well as when a teacher is not teaching Sex Ed to the full capacity of the curriculum [ex:skipping sections])

Why It's Important

In order to make health equitable for all communities and to ensure the safety of CPS students, these resources need to be brought to schools. According to 2019 YBRBS data, 22.57% of LGBT students have missed school due to feeling unsafe compared to the 10% of Cisgender Heterosexual students. If students can't get the support and safety at school, they need to be able to get support/safety at verified locations for youth.

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Recommendation 2:

CDPH Youth Mental Health Services

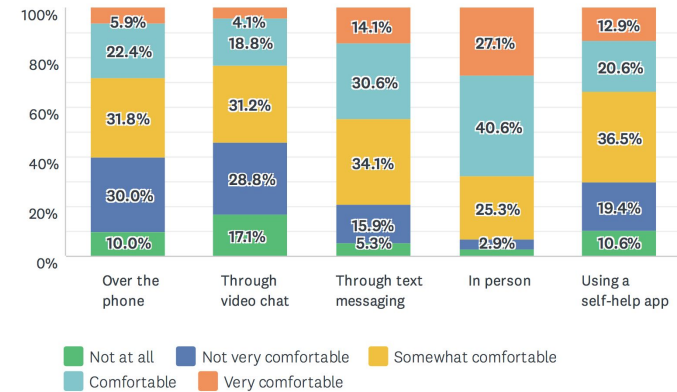
We recommend that the Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH) provide mental health services to youth through text messaging and in-person sessions that follow the appropriate COVID-19 guidelines for safety. We also recommend that CDPH spreads awareness of these services through social media platforms.

Why It's Important

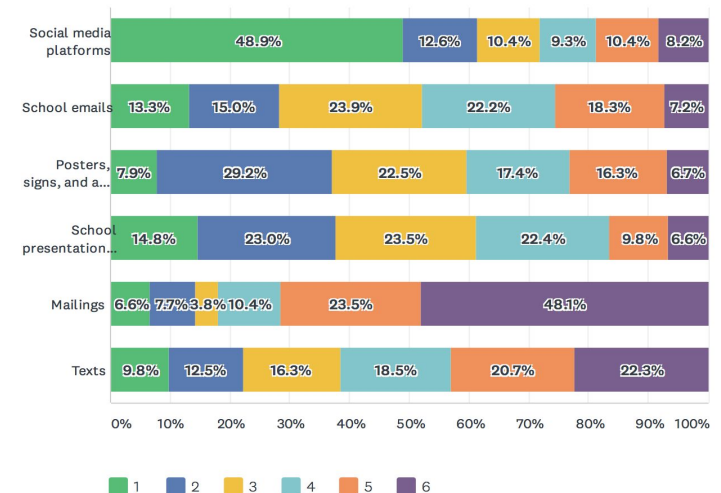
In order to get the most accurate and beneficial resources in place, policymakers need to hear the voices of those affected. Therefore, it is essential to have the voices of youth in policies that pertain to them. We surveyed youth in Chicago to find the best way to deliver mental health services and inform them of said services. It asked about the services already existing in their schools/communities, how it could be improved, who they would prefer to talk to, and their preferred method of communication. Over the course of a week, close to 200 people responded. We used these statistics to form a recommendation for the Chicago Department of Public Health. This survey broadened the scope of youth voice the Teen Health Council has by reaching out to a variety of Chicago youth.

Combined with our research, we believe our recommendation embodies the best informed resolution. Contrary to CDPH's initial plan for youth to use video chat services, our results showed that it is the least preferred method, with 45.9% of respondents answering they would not be comfortable with this. Additionally, we found that most people were comfortable with text messaging and in-person sessions, with 93% of people comfortable with in-person sessions and 78.8% of people comfortable with text messaging (see top right graph). One respondent said, "Having a computer didn't help at all, it just made me feel more alone...what I find helps most is having someone talk back and feeling like someone actually cares." If it is decided to move forward with text or call services, it should be with a licensed professional, as 88.2% of respondents said this would be comfortable for them. This allows for specialized treatment where the person can feel more connected with the attention they're receiving. In order to best make these resources known to youth, they should be shared through social media as 48.9% of respondents rated it most effective (see bottom right graph). We believe the CDPH should employ these statistics into their decision making process and provide mental health services to youth through in-person services that follow safety guidelines. In the case that in-person is not available, services through text messaging should be the next area of focus.

Q11 How comfortable are you with each of the following methods of talking about mental health?



Q8 What is the best way to share information about mental health services with youth? Please rank the following methods of communication by effectiveness (most effective = 1 to least effective = 6).



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Recommendation 3:

CPS Healing Centered Framework

We recommend that Chicago Public Schools (CPS) include weekly after school support groups led by a social worker in all high schools as a part of the new Healing Centered Framework for schools.

We recommend that CPS adds after school programs in high schools that will act as a peer support group, administered by a social worker who is culturally representative of each unique CPS high school. These social workers should have specific training on intersectional issues such as race, gender, sexuality, and socioeconomic status. These support groups will be open to all students. The main focus of these groups is to support students in becoming agents of their own healing and wellbeing. This will provide all CPS students an opportunity to share personal experiences and feelings with peers, while also receiving guidance and support from a professional.

Why It's Important

In 2016, the Teen Health Council made a similar recommendation to ours. For their recommendation, they surveyed over 200 young people across Chicago and found that 71% of respondents felt most comfortable talking about mental health with their friends. We have not seen any results from their recommendation, so we are bringing this back with updated information as to why peer-support programs are even more crucial now, especially with the new CPS Healing-Centered Framework. To back up our mental health related recommendations, we created a new survey to see how comfortable youth feel talking about mental health.¹ In our survey this year, we found similar results to the survey in 2016. Our survey showed that 70% of students said they would feel comfortable or very comfortable talking to a friend or peer their age about personal mental health. About only 27% of students surveyed said they would feel comfortable or very comfortable talking about their mental health to an adult family member, and about only 15% said they would feel comfortable or very comfortable talking to a teacher. This is why we support the idea of having PEER support groups in every CPS school.

According to the U.S Department of Health and Human Services, one in five youth experience mental health issues during their school years. In Chicago, many students and their families get most of their resources from CPS, which is why it is important we also extend the mental health services provided in each school. By implementing support groups in every school, students can come together to share personal stories and express emotions. These support groups will benefit students in many ways, such as decreasing loneliness and feelings of isolation.

We also believe that social workers should be the ones leading these after school support groups, and as much as possible, those social workers should represent the communities that they serve. Students of color need to see representation in their group's social workers as they will understand their diverse cultures and unique experiences in a way that white staff may not. With professionals leading these programs, it will ensure that our students are not only sharing their emotions, but also actively learning about wellbeing, mindfulness, healthy coping strategies, and any other resources outside of school that they might need.

¹ See Recommendation 2 for more info on our survey and methodology.

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Recommendation 4:

COVID-19 Youth Mask Design Competition

We recommend that the Chicago Department of Public Health create and promote a citywide, youth-focused face mask design competition, with several prizes for winners to encourage the use of masks for the youth of Chicago.

In the City of Chicago, youth and young adults are the main demographic with rising COVID-19 cases. We recommend that the City of Chicago host a mask design competition to promote mask wearing among young adults. This mask competition will be for Chicago youth to express their creativity and will ultimately lead to a mass production of their design on masks to be distributed in an equitable manner to the different areas of Chicago on a need basis, thus increasing youth input in mask-wearing and encouraging mask use by youth. Our recommendation for the details of the competition are as follows:

Steps of Action

Action Step 1: Marketing

We have created a sample poster to promote this competition (see right). We recommend that posters be displayed around the city where Chicago youth can see them. In addition to posters, we recommend a social media campaign to market this competition to youth across Chicago. Using hashtags can be especially helpful to spread the word and promote participation due to their accessibility and catchiness (i.e. #MaskOn).



Chicago Mask Designing Competition

Milieu Challenge

1ST \$ we want (you)th to participate in the years FIRST EVER mask designing competition. You get one disposable mask and your head and heart .

2ND \$ Creativity from all over the city of Chicago is welcomed!

3RD \$

#MaskOn

CDPH
Chicago Department of Public Health

SHARE

Guidelines listed below:

- You must create something ORIGINAL
- You have the option of making a 3-5 minute video about mask safety and the importance of youth wearing masks in our day and time or write a 500 word essay with the same topic
- No inappropriate or discriminatory content
- You have to live in the city of Chicago in order to submit your art
- Most importantly have fun and let your artistic skills erupt :)

SPREAD THE WORD

***Along with the top three winners receiving prize money every participate will be added to a raffle to win smaller but just as exciting prizes

(Continued) Recommendation 4:

COVID-19 Youth Mask Design Competition

Action Step 2: Entry Submission

Contestants should be given the option to submit either a 500-word essay or an informational video along with their mask design. The essay or video must include the following: an explanation of the contestant's mask design, the youth's thoughts on the importance of wearing a mask, instructions on how to properly wear a mask, and how they as young people will practice/encourage others to social distance and wear masks. Additionally, with the consent of the participants, the city of Chicago should compile some of the video submissions into service announcements and use them to encourage mask wearing among youth. Teenagers and other young adults are better encouraged by others their age, so using our peers as informants of social distancing and safe/correct mask wearing will encourage others to be safe.

Action Step 3: Selection Process + Prizes

In order to both eliminate inappropriate mask designs and to avoid being overwhelmed by competition entries, we recommend that those involved in judging the competition narrow finalists down to 10 masks. From there, the final decisions should be left up to an online poll open to youth in order to maximize the youth voice. An active and advertised online poll could help publicize the mask competition and give youth a sense of voice in the masks they wear. Additionally, everyone who enters a design into the competition will automatically be entered into a raffle for a gift card. First, second, and third place will also win a gift card. To keep the theme of social distancing alive, gift cards for Spotify, Visa, Amazon, and Steam could be used, all of which can be used from the comforts of social distancing at home.

Action Step 4: Mask Distribution

Upon completion of the competition, masks should be mass produced, then equitably distributed throughout the Chicago area. Masks should be easily accessible for free in schools, parks, community centers, food pantries, and any public health institution. Furthermore, the distribution of masks should be based on COVID-19 positivity rates in the ninety Chicagoland zip codes. The ninety zip codes will be split into three tiers based on COVID-19 positivity rates with tier 1 having the highest number of cases, and tier 3 will be the lowest. Forty percent of the distributed masks will be given to tier 1, thirty-five percent of masks will be distributed to tier 2, and twenty-five percent of masks will be distributed to tier 3. This method will allow people in higher COVID risk neighborhoods to be more protected as well as lowering the disparities of minority neighborhoods in the fight against COVID-19.

Why It's Important

Many efforts to stop the spread of Covid-19 have been targeted toward the older generation because they are at higher risk. This has led many young adults and especially youth to ignore social distancing guidelines as well as mask wearing, overall leading to the recent increase of COVID-19 cases. It was reported that on July 14, there were 192 cases in Chicago (based on a rolling average) and 30% of those cases were among people from age 18-29. It is essential to promote mask wearing to youth especially since "researchers calculated that, among people aged 20 years and under, a probable 81.9% would present no symptoms following infection with the coronavirus." Face coverings especially have been recommended by the CDC in order to reduce the risk of infection by people who are asymptomatic, however, youth tend to ignore these guidelines. Hosting a youth mask design competition is a way to target mask wearing among youth. Young adults and youth are still impressionable and a competition geared towards them will allow them to take interest in social distancing and proper mask wearing.

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