

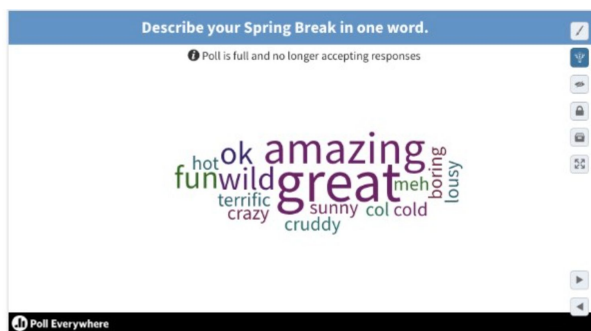
## SPTS Youth Council Curriculum Recommendations

Thank you for allowing us to collaborate with the Society for the Prevention of Teen Suicide. Your mission to promote mental health awareness among local youth is truly inspiring and has positively impacted many students. As requested, we are providing some feedback about the Youth Council 2019-2020 curriculum. We hope that our feedback is helpful when evaluating curriculum and creating new curriculum.

First, we analyzed past curriculum and have some specific critiques to the curriculum that we were sent. However, we did not observe the Youth Councils so if you feel that the activities worked well, then there is no need to alter them. During the wellness wheel activity, the students were encouraged to share what spokes they need to improve, which could be embarrassing in front of their peers. We think it may be useful for students to share a spoke of the wellness wheel that they fulfilled and feel confident in. Students should be encouraged to share specific activities that helped them to fulfill this area of wellness. Therefore, if a student feels that they need to improve their social health, they can learn from their peers who are confident about the social spoke of their wheel. This will also help the students to better understand how the wheel relates to real-life. In addition, there is some room for improvement in the goal setting activity. The students could be asked how they plan their goals. Do they write them down? Do they visualize them? Do they talk to their friends or parents about them? Do they concentrate on success or enjoy the process of self-improvement? These talking points could be incorporated to spark interesting conversations among Youth Council members.

Through analysis of Youth Council Data Analysis By Question, it was evident to us that only 30% of members were able to correctly identify the warning sides of suicide in the post-test.

This is a small minority of the group, and suggests that the warning signs of suicide should be taught in a more engaging manner. There is an online polling site called Kahoot which is frequently used in classrooms and that students can stream on their phones. The question appears on the screen and the students are able to poll in with their answer. It is very popular with students. We believe that this interactive format could be beneficial while teaching the warning signs of suicide and should help to improve the post-test results. While reviewing the Trusted Adult lesson, the adults and kids were separated for the majority of the lecture. We believe that more activities should involve the students and adults together. A site called Poll Everywhere could be employed in the Trusted Adult Lesson to help foster communication. This site allows students to submit answers by texting on their smartphones and will create a word visualization map (shown below). For example, students could be asked to submit characteristics of a trusted adult and then this could be portrayed on the screen to promote discussion.



Our first general recommendation is to encourage the Youth Council members to increase engagement with their school communities. Many meetings in the 2019-2020 calendar focused on the topic of self improvement and skill-building through fun activities. However, few meetings emphasized the importance of, and strategies for, sharing these values and skills to

students outside of the council. We believe that after SPTS council members gain knowledge from activities, they should have an opportunity to relay messages to their school communities. In order to further promote widespread community involvement, the last few minutes of meetings can focus on brainstorming how the skills could be effectively conveyed beyond the group.

We particularly like the PSA campaign introduced in February where students made videos for mental health awareness which were presented at their schools. This project should be repeated in the future, but instead of creating general PSA videos, the students could create videos that discuss how to navigate certain high school stressors such as bullying on social media or applying to colleges. Another way to obtain school wide engagement is for students to make messages for their morning announcements at school. These messages could be messages of hope, reminders of the importance of mental wellbeing, suggestions for maintaining mental health, news of school events that promote mental wellbeing, or news about mental health awareness events in the community. In the past, we know that students were passionate about organizing a walk, but that students lost interest. Other mental health organizations sponsor mental health awareness walks, and it may be logistically easier for SPTS to partner with another organization. An example would be NAMI, which promotes mental health awareness, fights stigma, and helps those affected by mental illness, which has NAMIWalks.

In addition, we believe that greater connection with high school administration could help to broaden the impact of SPTS. Although starting initiatives at high schools often involves complicated logistics, we believe that a mental health/suicide prevention student organization at could help to encourage increased involvement. If it is not possible to create a school

organization, an annual school event such as a mental health fair would also be a great addition to school communities. An example of a mental health fair would include an open space in a school (such as a gym or courtyard) lined with tables with representatives from different organizations as well as tables with wellness promoting activities such as making stress balls, writing notes of encouragement on post-it notes, and coloring.

Our second recommendation recommends a model which encourages student participation of Youth Council planning. Meetings often follow a few general formats, including group activities, creative projects, and presentations. Students can decide democratically which formats they prefer and help brainstorm future meetings. This process could be led by students who apply to become Youth Council Project Leaders and are willing to dedicate more time to SPTS. These chosen students could work with the staff to prepare each monthly meeting. Such a model is certainly more work and time-intensive, but it both provides students with the opportunity to mold sessions in the way that seems best to them, and provides students with important opportunities to develop leadership skills. If such a model is too labor intensive, then student input could be incorporated in other ways. For example, students could be asked to research public figures in their community with whom they would like to meet, and the Youth Council staff could invite individuals based on student requests. We know that student requests led to the meeting with Freeholder Kiley, which the students seemed to enjoy.

Finally, given the COVID-19 pandemic, we want to provide a few recommendations for conducting impactful online meetings. The SPTS Youth Council has already shifted to using Zoom for their meetings and invites students to chat with Susan on Sundays. The breakout feature on Zoom allows students to talk in small groups, and this could encourage small-group

discussions. Another way to foster connection between Youth Council members outside of the Youth Council meetings is send more frequent emails or start a groupme with all of the students. Youth Council members could undertake a project to create a student contribution to the “Sundays with Susan” video series. Hopefully, our video encourages students to become more involved in video creation. With staff encouragement and support, Youth Council members can use social media to spread messages of support and hope during these difficult times.