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## MEMO

**To:** Board of Trustees  
**From:** Sam Ponts, Program Officer  
**Date:** February 18, 2026  
**Addendum:** Project GRAD Kenai Peninsula, Rural School Counselor Program

The following information is provided as an addendum to the Project GRAD Kenai Peninsula Rural School Counselor Program, which was reviewed by the Program and Planning Committee on January 21, 2026, and referred for full board approval. This addendum serves as a follow-up to the committee's discussion and addresses trustees' interest in receiving additional information.

### Curriculum and Student Survey

Project GRAD will implement two evidence-based curricula: Second Step Elementary and Sources of Strength. The Kenai Peninsula School District will purchase the Sources of Strength curriculum beginning this year. Both programs are widely used in school settings and are supported by extensive research demonstrating positive impacts on student wellbeing, school climate, and prevention outcomes.

Project GRAD will administer pre- and post-surveys to participating students to measure changes in knowledge, attitudes, and perceptions related to social emotional learning (SEL), coping strategies, and help-seeking behaviors. Project GRAD has previously used opt-in consent for SEL programming and will continue this practice for both curricula.

The Project GRAD counselor currently on staff with Project GRAD holds a Master of Education in Counseling and a Type C Special Services Certificate for School Counseling issued by the State of Alaska.

Supporting research on the selected curricula (see "Sources of Strength Research Summary") and the student survey instrument ("Lighthouse Paper Survey (grades 7-12)" and "Lighthouse Paper Survey (grades 3-6)") are included in the attached materials.

### Sustainability and Federal Grant Timeline

Project GRAD is actively pursuing federal funding to support long-term sustainability of counseling and prevention services.

#### Native Youth Community Projects (NYCP):

- Application deadline: Late April/Early May 2026
- Award notification: September 2026
- Project GRAD is developing a CTE-focused NYCP proposal that would support up to five additional years of counseling services in participating communities.

Alaska Native Education Program (ANEP):

- Application deadline: February/March 2027
- Award notification: September 202

Both NYCP and ANEP prioritize counseling and mental health services as core components of holistic educational support.

Project GRAD also intends to pursue Rural Health Transformation Program (RHTP) funding. The State's plan identifies youth behavioral health as a priority within the Health Beginnings focus area.

Project GRAD funding history is included in the attachments ("Project GRAD - Program and Planning Committee Follow-up" page 5).

# Alaska Mental Health Trust Program & Planning Committee Follow-Up

## Project GRAD Kenai Peninsula Rural School Counseling Program

Project GRAD appreciates the opportunity to provide additional information following the Alaska Mental Health Trust Program & Planning Committee meeting. The following responses address the committee's inquiries and demonstrate our organization's commitment to data-informed decision making, prevention and early intervention, and crisis response, core priorities outlined in the Alaska Mental Health Trust's strategic plan.

### Curriculum Inquiry

Project GRAD plans to implement two evidence-based curricula: Second Step Elementary and Sources of Strength. Both programs are widely used in school settings and supported by extensive research demonstrating positive impacts on student wellbeing, school climate, and prevention outcomes.

#### Second Step Elementary:

- Independent studies representing more than 25,000 students demonstrate that Second Step programs deliver increased academic motivation, improved school climate, reduced disciplinary referrals and suspensions, heightened prosocial behaviors, and strengthened family-school engagement.
  - <https://support.secondstep.org/hc/en-us/articles/36958804267803-Evidence-of-Effectiveness-Second-Step-Elementary-and-Second-Step-Middle-School-Digital-Programs>
- A two-year randomized control trial with 7,300 students (K-2) across 61 schools found that students receiving Second Step had increased social-emotional skills and decreased disruptive behaviors compared to control groups, with strongest effects for students with lowest baseline skills.
  - <https://www.cfcchildren.org/wp-content/uploads/research/low-et-al-second-step-rct-2015.pdf>
- A meta-analysis of 24 primary research studies found that students participating in Second Step demonstrated increased program content knowledge and increased prosocial outcomes.
  - <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0022440518301080>

#### Sources of Strength:

As outlined in our grant application, Sources of Strength is a nationally recognized, evidence-based suicide prevention program that has demonstrated a 29% reduction in new

suicide attempts in participating schools. The program has been successfully implemented in tribal and rural communities and uses peer-leader models to change norms around help-seeking.

*(Attached is a summary of current research)*

*link: <https://sourcesofstrength.org/wp-content/uploads/securepdfs/2025/09/EVIDENCE-BASE-SUMMARY-reasearch-2025.pdf>*

Project GRAD has previously used opt-in consent forms for student participation in SEL programming and will continue this practice for both Second Step and Sources of Strength implementation.

## Assessment Inquiry

Project GRAD will administer pre- and post-surveys to participating students to measure changes in knowledge, attitudes, and perceptions related to social-emotional learning, coping strategies, and help-seeking behaviors. Our evaluation approach aligns with the Trust's emphasis on data-informed decision making.

We have extensive experience administering surveys for our Alaska Native Education Program (ANEP) grants and will be providing examples of surveys previously used to measure student improvement over grant periods. Our assessment plan includes:

- Pre- and post-surveys measuring student perceptions of adult support, help-seeking attitudes, knowledge of resources, and identification of protective factors
- Tracking of counseling sessions, classroom lessons delivered, crisis interventions, and referrals made
- School records data including attendance and disciplinary referrals for students receiving counseling services

## Sustainability

Project GRAD is committed to sustaining this counseling position beyond the one-year Alaska Mental Health Trust funding period through a multi-faceted approach:

### Federal Grant Timeline:

Native Youth Community Projects (NYCP):

- Application deadline: Late April/Early May 2026
- Notification of award: September 2026
- Project GRAD is currently developing a Career and Technical Education (CTE) focused NYCP proposal that would include five additional years of counseling services for these communities.

Alaska Native Education Program (ANEP):

- Application deadline: February/March 2027
- Notification of award: September 2027

- Project GRAD has had significant success with ANEP funding over the past two decades and will include one or possibly two counseling positions in our next ANEP application, as counseling is integral to our mission of increasing graduation rates.

### **Curriculum Sustainability:**

The Kenai Peninsula Borough School District (KPBSD) will be purchasing the Sources of Strength curriculum starting this year. Schools will be able to request materials to use with their students. However, many of the schools we work with will not have the staffing necessary to implement these lessons. Our counselor can help deliver these resources and lessons to schools, ensuring they continue for years to come even after specific grant funding cycles end.

### **Long-Term Impact:**

The Sources of Strength curriculum empowers youth to become messengers of positive change within their schools and communities, creating peer-led impacts that extend beyond the grant period. This project builds protective skills among younger students through Second Step Elementary instruction, establishing a strong foundation for long-term positive mental health outcomes. By instilling these skills early in elementary grades (K-6), we are helping create lasting change that will benefit these communities for years to come.

### **Alaska Rural Health Transformation Program:**

The Alaska Rural Health Transformation Program, which is supported with federal funding and includes behavioral health for youth a priority under the Healthy Beginnings Initiative, further reflects continued federal commitment to mental health services in rural Alaska Native communities. This alignment with statewide health priorities positions our project well for sustained funding through multiple pathways.

## **How Does the Federal Government Feel About Supporting Counseling?**

In Project GRAD's experience, the federal government continues to demonstrate strong support for school-based counseling and prevention services, particularly within programs serving Alaska Native and tribal communities.

Recent federal funding opportunities have emphasized critical areas including behavioral health, substance use prevention, and trauma-informed approaches. Many components within the federal government still prioritize these elements in education grant applications, even as the broader conversation around SEL has evolved. Specifically, the Native Youth Community Projects (NYCP) and Alaska Native Education Program (ANEP) programs remain strongly supportive of counseling and mental health services as core components of holistic educational support.

Project GRAD's most recent annual performance report to the U.S. Department of Education included detailed documentation of counseling services and SEL lesson delivery and received positive feedback from program officers. This demonstrates continued federal recognition of the value these services provide to students.

Furthermore, although the federal funding landscape has changed significantly in recent years, the government maintains treaty responsibilities to Tribal Nations in the areas of education and health. These responsibilities are foundational and widely expected to continue regardless of administration changes. Together, these factors give Project GRAD confidence that federal funding can remain a viable component of long-term sustainability for school-based counseling services in Alaska Native communities.

## Credentials of Counselor

The counselor currently on staff with Project GRAD holds a Master's of Education in Counseling and a Type C Special Services Certificate for School Counseling issued by the State of Alaska. Selina has worked in these four communities for eight years and has developed strong, trusting relationships with students, families, schools, tribal councils, and community partners.

Her extensive experience in rural Alaska Native communities, combined with her deep understanding of the cultural context and specific challenges these students face, makes her uniquely qualified to provide effective, culturally responsive counseling services. Selina's established relationships are a critical asset, students and families already know and trust her, which significantly reduces barriers to help-seeking and creates a foundation for immediate impact. Selina is able to play a central role in crisis response and intervention, working closely with administrators, families, and community partners to assess risk, provide immediate student support, and coordinate follow up services to ensure student safety and stability.

*(Selina's resume is attached)*

## Parent Interactions

School counselors operate under professional ethical standards established by the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) that carefully balance student wellbeing, confidentiality, family collaboration, and legal obligations.

### Confidentiality and Communication:

School counselors maintain confidentiality in counseling relationships to build trust with students. However, they share information with parents when necessary for:

- Student safety (concerns about self-harm, suicide risk, or harm to others)
- Legal obligations (suspected abuse or neglect, court orders)
- Serious educational or developmental concerns that require family involvement

Counselors are transparent about these limits from the outset, helping students understand when confidentiality applies and when information must be shared. This approach protects student trust while meeting legal requirements and supporting healthy family engagement in a student's overall success.

### Family Collaboration:

Parent communication typically focuses on general concerns, progress, and developmental observations rather than private student disclosures from confidential counseling sessions. Counselors work to:

- Keep families informed about their student's general wellbeing and progress
- Encourage and facilitate family involvement when appropriate and beneficial to the student
- Provide parents with resources and strategies to support their child's social-emotional development
- Often encourage students to share concerns with their parents directly, with counselor support

This balanced approach protects student trust, meets legal requirements, respects cultural values around family, and supports healthy family engagement in a student's overall success. In Alaska Native communities where family and community connections are particularly strong, counselors work respectfully within these cultural contexts while maintaining appropriate professional boundaries.

## Project GRAD Funding History

Project GRAD has historically demonstrated strong capacity to secure and manage funding from diverse sources, positioning the organization well for long-term sustainability:

### Funding Sources:

- **Federal:** Alaska Native Education Program (ANEP), 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC)
- **State:** Sustained state funding for afterschool programming for over eight years through the Department of Health and Social Services
- **Foundation and Corporate:** Various foundation grants and corporate partnerships
- **Contract Services and Donations:** Fee-for-service arrangements and individual donations

Since 2016, Project GRAD has secured over \$16 million in federal and state funding, demonstrating strong organizational capacity to maintain and grow services. The organization is increasingly partnering with tribal organizations such as Chugachmiut and the Chugach Regional Resources Commission, and continues to build relationships with Alaska Native corporations and foundations.

Most significantly, Project GRAD maintains longstanding partnerships of more than twenty years with the Kenai Peninsula Borough School District, tribal councils, and local communities. This deep community trust and established infrastructure positions us well for sustained funding.

## Data Showing SEL Supports Academic Achievement

Research consistently demonstrates that strengthening social-emotional learning skills improves academic achievement, attendance, and engagement. These gains expand students' postsecondary options and contribute to healthier, more positive life outcomes. Key research findings include:

- A comprehensive 2023 meta-analysis published in *Child Development* (led by Yale professors Christina Cipriano and Michael Strambler) analyzed 424 experimental studies of SEL programs across more than 50 countries, involving over 500,000 students in grades K-12. The study confirmed that students who participated in SEL programs demonstrated improved academic performance, social-emotional skills, attitudes, behaviors, and overall wellbeing.
  - <https://medicine.yale.edu/news-article/new-research-published-in-child-development-confirms-social-and-emotional-learning-significantly-improves-student-academic-performance-well-being-and-perceptions-of-school-safety/>
- SEL interventions that addressed the five core competencies (self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making) increased students' academic performance by 11 percentile points, compared to students who did not participate (CASEL meta-analysis).
  - <https://casel.org/fundamentals-of-sel/what-does-the-research-say/>
- The positive impact on academics lasts long-term: Years after students participated in SEL programs, their academic performance was an average of 13 percentile points higher than students who did not participate.
  - <https://casel.org/fundamentals-of-sel/what-does-the-research-say/>
- SEL builds social and emotional skills that increase student engagement, leading to improved grades, test scores, attendance, and homework completion. Students with stronger social-emotional skills are more likely to graduate high school and enroll in postsecondary education.
  - <https://casel.org/fundamentals-of-sel/what-does-the-research-say/>
- A 2022 meta-analysis examining SEL programs specifically in elementary and middle schools (grades K-8) found positive effects on overall academic achievement, with benefits observed across reading, math, English language arts, and science.
  - <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC12649258/#sec4-behavsci-15-01527>
- Analysis of six evidence-based SEL programs has demonstrated that for every dollar invested in SEL there is an \$11 return, making it not only educationally sound but also economically beneficial.
  - <https://casel.org/fundamentals-of-sel/what-does-the-research-say/>

We appreciate the Planning Committee's thoughtful questions and the opportunity to provide this additional information. We remain available to address any further inquiries or provide additional documentation as needed.

A Summary of current

# Evidence-Based Research

JULY 2025



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*“Sources of Strength intervention reduced the overall odds of a new suicide attempt by 29%.”*

Prepared and compiled by  
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American Journal of Preventive Medicine, 2025



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## SOURCES OF STRENGTH EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Sources of Strength is a best practice, strength-based, upstream suicide prevention and mental health promotion program that has shown effectiveness in both preventative upstream and intervention outcomes. Sources of Strength provides exceptional, high quality training for both youth and adults in secondary schools and community-based settings, and has moved even further upstream with an elementary model featuring a fully stratified K-5 curriculum, which is informed by the evidence-base and research on our Secondary Program<sup>1</sup>. The Sources of Strength Secondary Program has been involved in several large randomized control trials and is one of the most rigorously evaluated and broadly disseminated prevention programs in North America. The Sources of Strength Secondary Program is considered the first suicide prevention program to demonstrate effectiveness in using Peer Leaders to enhance protective factors associated with reducing suicide across a school population<sup>2</sup>. A 2025<sup>3</sup> study published by the American Journal of Preventive Medicine found that the Sources of Strength Secondary Program intervention reduced the overall odds of new suicide attempts by 29%. In addition, 2023 research published in Injury Prevention identified Sources of Strength as the first universal intervention to show a statistically significant reduction in youth suicide mortality through a randomized control trial. Together, these findings show that the program reduces both suicide mortality and suicide attempts. Sources of Strength teams are active across the United States, Canada, the Mariana Islands, and many American and Alaska Native and First Nations communities.

Sources of Strength's [Secondary Peer Leader Program](#) and [Elementary Curriculum](#) are both listed on the [National Best Practices Registry \(BPR\)](#) by the Suicide Prevention Resource Center (SPRC)<sup>4</sup>. Sources of Strength is also included in the U.S. Health and Human Services, Rural Health Information RHIhub<sup>5</sup> for universal programming. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Preventing Suicide: A Technical Package of Policy, Programs, and Practices<sup>6</sup>, features Sources of Strength as an evidence-based Peer Norm Program, stating:



<sup>1</sup> See "Elementary Program Research" below for specific Elementary Program Research

<sup>2</sup> Wyman, Peter A., et al. "An Outcome Evaluation of the Sources of Strength Suicide Prevention Program Delivered by Adolescent Peer Leaders in High Schools." *American Journal of Public Health*, vol. 100, no. 9, 2010, pp. 1653–1661. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2009.190025>

<sup>3</sup> Wyman, Peter A., et al. "RCT of Sources of Strength Testing Impact on Suicide Attempts and Tests of Moderation by Sexual Violence Victimization and Perpetration." *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, vol. 68, no. 3, 2025, pp. 465–474. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/39617103/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://bpr.sprc.org/program/sources-of-strength/> & <https://bpr.sprc.org/program/sources-of-strength-elementary/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/toolkits/suicide/2/schools/programming>

<sup>6</sup> <https://stacks.cdc.gov/view/cdc/44275>, pg 29

"Evaluations show that programs such as Sources of Strength can **improve school norms and beliefs about suicide** that are created and disseminated by student peers. In a randomized control trial of Sources of Strength conducted with 18 high schools (6 metropolitan, 12 rural), researchers found that **the program improved adaptive norms regarding suicide, connectedness to adults, and school engagement**. Peer Leaders were also more likely than controls to refer a suicidal friend to an adult.

For students, the program resulted in increased perceptions of adult support for suicidal youths, particularly among those with a history of suicidal ideation, and the acceptability of help-seeking behaviors. Finally, trained Peer Leaders also reported a greater **decrease in maladaptive coping attitudes** compared with untrained leaders."

**" Sources of Strength intervention reduced the overall odds of new suicide attempts by 29%."**

*American Journal of Preventive Medicine, 2025*

Sources of Strength as an evidence-based strategy has been promoted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, the Suicide Prevention Resource Center, the National Institute for Mental Health, and many other researchers and partners.

## **1. PRIMARY OUTCOME RESEARCH**

### ***RCT of Sources of Strength Testing Impact on Suicide Attempts and Tests of Moderation by Sexual Violence Victimization and Perpetration<sup>7</sup>***

This study on Sources of Strength, funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and published in the American Journal of Preventive Medicine in 2025, was conducted in partnership with the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, the University of Rochester, and the University of North Carolina. Results from this study showed that the **Sources of Strength intervention reduced the overall odds of a new suicide attempt by 29%**. The study found that the program demonstrated effectiveness across diverse demographics, showing that Sources of Strength is effective for teens from many backgrounds, including different genders, races, and ethnicities. This evidence continues to underscore the importance of partnering with young people as Agents of Change and Connectors to Help; their voice and influence have tremendous power to create positive change and connection in their schools and communities. The study also highlighted that implementation fidelity matters; schools that fully committed to running the program as designed saw the best results.

<sup>7</sup> Wyman, Peter A., et al. "RCT of Sources of Strength Testing Impact on Suicide Attempts and Tests of Moderation by Sexual Violence Victimization and Perpetration." *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, vol. 68, no. 3, 2025, pp. 465–474. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2024.11.008>

"Results from this study showed that the Sources of Strength intervention reduced the overall odds of a new suicide attempt by 29% in this school-based, cluster randomized trial (n=20 high schools, 6,341 9th–11th-grade students). Findings also showed that Sources of Strength's impact on reducing suicide attempts was comparable across demographic subgroups of the school-student population (i.e., gender, grade, and race/ethnicity). Likewise, program effects were comparable for students on the basis of suicide attempt history at baseline, suggesting that Sources of Strength exhibited comparable performance for students with more severe suicide risk histories. These findings thus suggest that Sources of Strength has the capacity to produce population-level effects for this important outcome."

### ***Impact of Sources of Strength on adolescent suicide deaths across three randomized trials<sup>8</sup>***

These findings, published in Injury Prevention in 2023, combined three separate randomized control trials conducted on Sources of Strength over the course of a decade, containing 40,747 student years of exposure. The results show zero suicide deaths in Sources of Strength implementation condition schools and four deaths in control condition schools, representing an aggregated suicide rate of 20.86 per 100,000 in control schools compared to 0 in schools implementing Sources of Strength. While



***“Implementation fidelity matters; schools that fully committed to running the program as designed saw the best results.”***

***American Journal of Preventive Medicine, 2025***

Sources of Strength does not inoculate a school or community from experiencing suicide loss, prior to this study's publication, no universal interventions had demonstrated a reduction in youth suicide mortality in a randomized controlled trial (RCT). **This makes Sources of Strength the first universal intervention to achieve a statistically significant reduction in youth suicide mortality through an RCT.** Taken together, these findings solidify Sources of Strength, and by extension, the movement towards upstream, strength-based, and social diffusion strategies as critical components in our fight against the devastating impact of suicide in the U.S. and abroad. This study emphasizes the importance of implementation fidelity, showing that increased student help-seeking behaviors over one school year were subsequently lost in schools where implementation fidelity declined.

<sup>8</sup> Wyman, Peter A., et al. "Impact of Sources of Strength on Adolescent Suicide Deaths across Three Randomized Trials." *Injury Prevention*, vol. 29, no. 5, 2023, pp. 442–445. <https://www.scholars.northwestern.edu/en/publications/impact-of-sources-of-strength-on-adolescent-suicide-deaths-across>

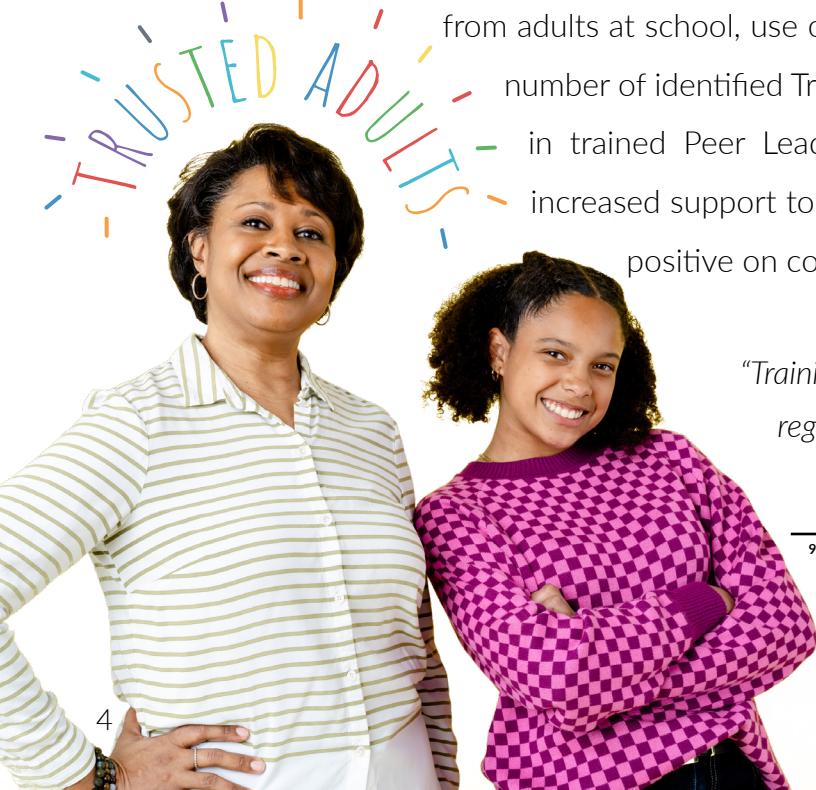
"This study's results combining three prior trials ( $n=78$  high schools) suggest Sources of Strength reduced student suicides, but also that broader state-wide roll-out trials are needed to confirm this initially promising signal. Specifically, if the current results are replicated, scaling up the programme across a moderate-sized state could translate to more than 100 saved lives over a decade."

"Sources of Strength improved school-wide protective norms (eg, help-seeking acceptability) and student help-seeking behaviours (eg, referral of suicidal friends to adults).

"The present findings add to evidence that Sources of Strength and other network-based interventions that modify peer and adult relationship systems are a uniquely promising strategy and now worthy of even broader population roll-out studies."

### **An outcome evaluation of the Sources of Strength suicide prevention program delivered by adolescent Peer Leaders in high schools<sup>9</sup>**

From 2007 to 2009, Sources of Strength was the subject of one of the nation's largest studies (at the time) on Peer Leaders and their impact in suicide prevention. The results of this study, evaluated by the University of Rochester, were published in 2010 in the American Journal of Public Health and showed a direct impact on Peer Leaders as early as four months after implementation. **This study showed Sources of Strength to be the first suicide prevention program involving Peer Leaders to enhance protective factors associated with reducing suicide at the school population level.** The study found trained Peer Leaders reported much more positive expectations that adults at school help suicidal students, more rejection of codes of silence, and decreased maladaptive coping attitudes. Training also substantially increased norms for help-seeking



from adults at school, use of the Sources of Strength coping resources, and the number of identified Trusted Adults. School engagement was also increased in trained Peer Leaders. Concerning Peer Leaders' behaviors, training increased support to peers, and the intervention impact was directionally positive on connecting distressed peers to adults.

*"Training improved the Peer Leaders' adaptive norms regarding suicide, their connectedness to adults, and their school engagement, with the largest gains for*

<sup>9</sup> Wyman, Peter A., et al. "An Outcome Evaluation of the Sources of Strength Suicide Prevention Program Delivered by Adolescent Peer Leaders in High Schools." *American Journal of Public Health*, vol. 100, no. 9, 2010, pp. 1653–1661. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2009.190025>

those entering with the least adaptive norms. Trained Peer Leaders in larger schools were four times as likely as were untrained Peer Leaders to refer a suicidal friend to an adult. Among students, the intervention increased perceptions of adult support for suicidal youths and the acceptability of seeking help. Perception of adult support increased most in students with a history of suicidal ideation.

*“Sources of Strength enhanced in the group of Peer Leaders a set of protective factors including their norms pertaining to help-seeking, connectedness with adults, and school engagement. The preceding protective factors, in addition to being associated with lower risk for suicidal behavior, are also associated with reduced risk for school dropout, depression, and substance use problems, thereby indicating that Sources of Strength may have broad, positive benefits for high school students. The overlap of suicide prevention objectives with other educational and health promotion goals that are priorities for schools and communities, such as keeping students enrolled in school and increased achievement, can increase the feasibility of disseminating this Peer Leader intervention. Also facilitating the evaluation of this intervention in schools was our use of a wait-listed design, because schools are generally not comfortable with being placed in a control condition for such a serious outcome as suicide.”*

## **2. SECONDARY RESEARCH AND SUB-PAPERS**

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### ***Peer-adult network structure and suicide attempts in 38 high schools: implications for network-informed suicide prevention<sup>10</sup>***

A 2019 study published in the Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry used a social network-informed approach to examine how both risk and protection can diffuse through relationship networks in school settings. Conducted in schools implementing Sources of Strength, the research explored how the structure of students' social networks—including the quality, quantity, and equity of connections with trusted and trustworthy adults—can influence suicide risk. The study found that students who had stronger connections with adults experienced lower rates of suicide attempts. These protective effects were amplified in friendship groups where multiple students shared strong ties to the same Trusted Adults, particularly when those adults had previously been sought out for help. The findings highlight the importance of fostering shared adult connections and peer social cohesion as key protective factors within school communities.

*“Schoolwide peer and youth-adult relationship patterns influence suicide attempt rates beyond individual student connections. Network characteristics associated with suicide attempts map onto three theory-informed domains: social integration versus thwarted relational needs, group cohesion, and suicidal students' social influence.”*

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<sup>10</sup> Wyman, Peter A., et al. “Peer-Adult Network Structure and Suicide Attempts in 38 High Schools: Implications for Network-Informed Suicide Prevention.” *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, vol. 60, no. 10, 2019, pp. 1065–1075. <https://acamh.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/jcpp.13102>

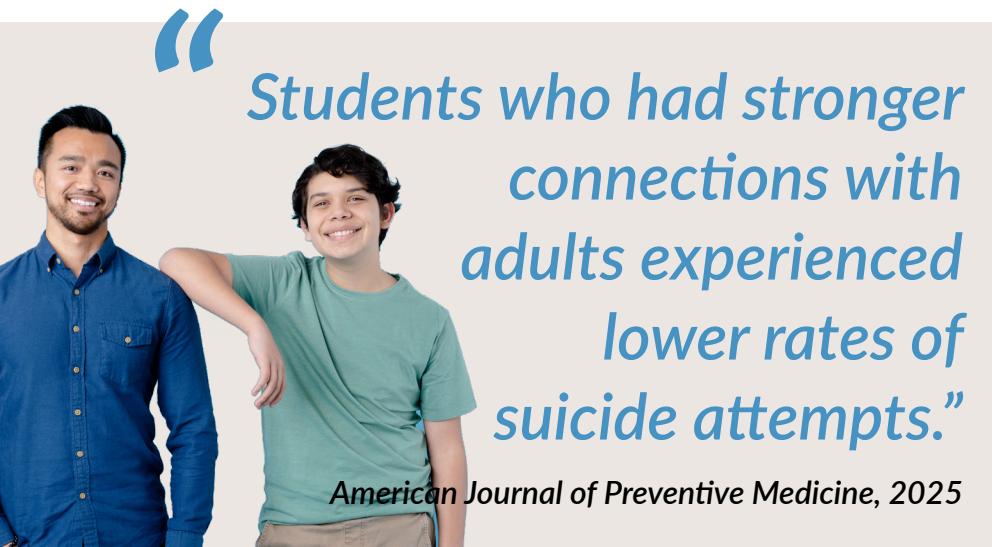
"Our study findings have implications for developing network-informed suicide prevention (NISP) approaches in schools and other education settings. First, NISP is likely to be most effective and safe by incorporating multiple foci: maximizing protective bonds across school populations, increasing opportunities for group cohesion, including integrated youth-adult networks, and promoting influence of youth with healthy coping."

***Positive-Themed Suicide Prevention Messages Delivered by Adolescent Peer Leaders: Proximal Impact on Classmates' Coping Attitudes and Perceptions of Adult Support. Suicide and life-threatening behavior<sup>11</sup>***

This study, published in 2015 in Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior, evaluated positive-themed messages by Sources of Strength Peer Leaders in 36 classrooms. Of the 706 high school students evaluated, 12.7% of students reported suicide ideation within the past year. This was the first study to demonstrate that Sources of Strength measures, including peer modeling, positive or strength-based messaging, and classroom interactions, were promising alternatives to suicide prevention strategies that focus on risk and negative mental health problems. Evidence in this study demonstrated that students with recent suicide ideation benefited more than students without suicide ideation in increasing help-seeking acceptability, perceptions that natural protective factors can help with coping, and the belief that adults can be engaged,

caring, and helpful for suicidal youth.

This study suggests that distressed youth respond more favorably to messages that convey strength and hopefulness. It also showed that distressed youth may more favorably view messaging styles that model healthy coping over a directive style, which may undermine autonomy and promote reactivity.



"Peer Leader presentations enhanced help-seeking acceptability, attitudes about overcoming barriers to helping suicidal youth, perceptions that adults can help suicidal youth, and the naming of specific Trusted Adults."

<sup>11</sup> Petrova, Mariya, Peter A. Wyman, Karen Schmeelk-Cone, and Anthony R. Pisani. "Positive-Themed Suicide Prevention Messages Delivered by Adolescent Peer Leaders: Proximal Impact on Classmates' Coping Attitudes and Perceptions of Adult Support." *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*, vol. 45, no. 6, 2015, pp. 651–663. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/25692382/>

## **Emotion Regulation Difficulties, Youth-Adult Relationships, and Suicide Attempts Among High School Students in Underserved Communities<sup>12</sup>**

This study, published in 2013 in the Journal of Youth and Adolescence, used a cross-sectional design to examine the associations between self-reported suicide attempts, emotion regulation difficulties, and positive youth-adult relationships in 7,978 high-school students, 683 of whom had reported a suicide attempt in the past year. The participating students were in 30 high schools from predominantly rural, low-income communities. Improving emotional regulation and increasing positive youth-adult relationships are components of the Sources model for creating more protective environments. Adding validity to the Sources of Strength measures, the study found:

*"After accounting for depressive symptoms, emotion regulation, and demographic factors, students with who reported connections to parents or other adults in their family that they saw as trustworthy, safe, and supportive were less likely (OR = 0.76, CI: 0.67, 0.87) to have had a suicide attempt within the past year. Having caring and trustworthy adults at school also significantly reduced the likelihood of a suicide attempt (OR = 0.85, CI: 0.74, .98), above and beyond depressive symptoms, emotion regulation, and the youth-family communication. Having a Trusted Adult in the community was associated with fewer suicide attempts in models that controlled only for demographic covariates, but not in models where symptoms of depression were taken into account."*

***The study suggests  
that distressed youth respond  
more favorably to messages  
that convey strength and  
hopefulness.***



<sup>12</sup> Pisani, Anthony R., Peter A. Wyman, Mariya Petrova, Karen Schmeelk-Cone, David B. Goldston, Ying Xia, and Madelyn S. Gould. "Emotion Regulation Difficulties, Youth-Adult Relationships, and Suicide Attempts among High School Students in Underserved Communities." *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, vol. 42, no. 6, 2013, pp. 807-820. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC3654393/>

## Associations Between Suicidal High School Students' help-seeking and their attitudes and perceptions of social environment<sup>13</sup>

This study, published in 2012 in the Journal of Youth and Adolescence, examined patterns and predictors of help-seeking behavior among 2,737 students in 12 high schools in rural or underserved areas. Of the surveyed students, 381 had seriously considered suicide in the past year. The relationship between adolescents' help-seeking disclosure and help-seeking attitudes and perceptions of social resources was examined among suicidal help-seeking youth, suicidal non-help-seeking youth, and non-suicidal youth. This research aligns with how Sources of Strength supports adaptive coping skills and improves social norms around help-seeking and perceptions of adult support. Conclusions of the study provided added validity to the Sources of Strength measures, finding:

*"Healthy coping, help seeking norms, and Trusted Adults were linked to greater adolescent disclosure of suicidality and intentions to seek help. This study supports prevention strategies that change student norms, attitudes and social environments to promote help-seeking among adolescents with SI. Promising intervention targets include increasing students' perceptions of the availability and capability of adults to help them, and strengthening students' understanding of how existing resources can help them cope.*

*"Students who reported having had SI in the past 12 months and who had disclosed the fact to an adult and sought help (HS group) reported greater help- seeking acceptance, increased perceptions that adults help suicidal youth, and stronger intentions to overcome peer secrecy requests, compared to suicidal students who had not disclosed or sought help (NoHS group). These students were also more engaged at school and perceived more resources that would help them cope. Across attitudinal and social measures, help-seeking adolescents with SI were indistinguishable from their peers without SI (NoSui group). Help-seeking adolescents with SI (HS group) differed from peers without SI (NoSui group) only on depressive symptoms. Suicidal help-seeking and non-help-seeking groups reported comparable levels of depressive symptoms, and both were higher than the non-suicidal (NoSui) group on this measure."*



<sup>13</sup> Pisani, Anthony R., Karen Schmeelk-Cone, Douglas Gunzler, Mariya Petrova, David B. Goldston, Xin Tu, and Peter A. Wyman. "Associations between Suicidal High School Students' Help-Seeking and Their Attitudes and Perceptions of Social Environment." *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, vol. 41, no. 10, 2012, pp. 1312–1324. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/22562217/>

### **Teenagers' attitudes about coping strategies and help-seeking behavior for suicidality<sup>14</sup>**

This study, published in 2004 in Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry looked at a self-report survey completed by 2,419 high school students in six New York State schools over three years to identify youths' attitudes about coping and help-seeking strategies for suicidal ideation/ behavior and examine their demographic and clinical correlates. This study supports the logic model and the Sources of Strength approach, leading the University of Rochester research team to identify Sources of Strength as a promising intervention program for further research. Findings of this foundation study include:

*"High-risk adolescents' attitudes are characterized by core beliefs that support the use of maladaptive coping strategies in response to depression and suicidal thoughts and behaviors. Targeting such attitudes is a recommended component of youth suicide prevention efforts."*

## **3. QUALITATIVE FINDINGS**

### ***Qualitative Process Evaluation of Rural Schools: Uptake of Change Processes and Contextual Factors Influencing Implementation Within a Primary Prevention Program for Youth<sup>15</sup>***

A qualitative evaluation of Sources of Strength implementation in rural schools revealed that the program's core mechanisms—expanding peer networks, promoting help-seeking, and strengthening Trusted Adult connections—were successfully taken up in schools with strong cultural alignment and leadership buy-in. Findings support Sources' theory of change, grounded in Diffusion of Innovations Theory, and underscore the importance of readiness and contextual fit in achieving sustainable, school-wide norm change.

## **4. STATE-BASED FINDING**

Several areas have chosen to implement Sources of Strength for state, regional, and district-level implementation and have utilized internal and external evaluations. Highlights from some of those implementations include:

### ***Matchstick Sources of Strength Implementation in Oregon Elementary and Secondary Schools***

Since 2019, the University of Oregon Suicide Prevention Lab (UOSPL)<sup>16</sup> has partnered with Matchstick

<sup>14</sup> Gould, Madelyn S., David Velting, Michael Kleinman, James G. Thomas, and Michele Chung. "Teenagers' Attitudes about Coping Strategies and Help-Seeking Behavior for Suicidality." *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, vol. 43, no. 9, 2004, pp. 1124–1133. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/15322416/>

<sup>15</sup> Yoder, Jamie, Anne Williford, Lauren Ortega, Dorothy L. Espelage, Sherri LoMurray, Damary Ruiz, and Natalie Kennedy. "Qualitative Process Evaluation of Rural Schools: Uptake of Change Processes and Contextual Factors Influencing Implementation Within a Primary Prevention Program for Youth." *Prevention Science*, vol. 21, no. 8, 2020, pp. 1093–1103. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32865660/>

<sup>16</sup> [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1hNkRf43ot\\_KEgMRU6U-6aBz5KLcdiUJx/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1hNkRf43ot_KEgMRU6U-6aBz5KLcdiUJx/view)

Consulting to assess the implementation of Sources of Strength in Oregon. The evaluations focused on gathering and analyzing data related to skill acquisition and application. Overall, the evaluations indicated that Sources of Strength programs in both secondary and elementary schools effectively trained participants to increase suicide prevention awareness and promote protective factors around mental health. Evaluations of the Sources of Strength Secondary program included post-training surveys with Adult Advisors (194 total responses) and Peer Leaders (1,131 total responses), as well as focus groups with Peer Leaders. Adult Advisor training was generally well-received, with participants indicating high levels of agreement on several aspects of the training. Specifically showing that more than 90% of surveyed adult participants agreed the training was engaging, trainers demonstrated content knowledge, the content was useful, that the program was a good fit for their school, and that they felt confident in implementing the Sources of Strength program. Peer Leader training was also generally viewed favorably, echoing many of the surveyed adults' findings in addition students reported confidence or high confidence in their ability to connect a struggling friend to an adult (80%), plan messaging campaigns (74%), and intervene with a friend who is suicidal (68%). The high school with multiple years of implementation had the least challenges/barriers, as well as 100% agreement across all rating questions (e.g., closeness with other peer-leaders). All peer-leaders agreed that participation allowed them to become closer to other peer-leaders. Evaluations of the Sources of Strength Elementary program included post-training surveys with coaches (122 total responses) and end-of-year reflection surveys (51 total responses). Coaches' training was generally effective, with high agreement across all acceptability ratings, including more than a 90% agreement that the training was effective, that they would recommend the training to others, and they they understood the concepts. Reflection surveys indicated that at least 90% of Coaches were able to effectively deliver the curriculum lessons, observed students actively applying what they had learned, and 100% felt students understood the content. For a detailed understanding, you can access the full report here: [UOSPL 2023 Sources of Strength Summary Evaluation Report.](#)

### ***ThedaCare, Central and Northeastern Wisconsin Rural Schools***

ThedaCare's Sources of Strength report<sup>17</sup> focuses on five years of Sources of Strength implementation beginning in 2019 in rural schools across central and northeastern Wisconsin. Developed in partnership with the Northeast Wisconsin Mental Health Connection, the program was implemented in 14 eligible high schools and two middle schools across nine counties, including Calumet, Outagamie, Winnebago, Green Lake, Marquette, Menominee, Shawano, Waupaca, and Waushara. The report highlights several success stories from the 16 schools, which demonstrated increased student engagement and cultural

<sup>17</sup> ThedaCare. Sources of Strength Report. April 2025. ThedaCare, <https://thedadcare.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/WEB-ThedaCare-Sources-of-Strength-Report-FINAL.pdf>

shifts toward more supportive, connected school environments. Evaluation data suggests the program has had a meaningful impact on school culture and student mental health. ThedaCare and its partners remain committed to sustaining and expanding the initiative, with a focus on building long-term support systems for youth mental health across the region. For a detailed understanding, you can access the full report here: [ThedaCare Sources of Strength Report.](#)

### **Sources of Strength: Ohio**

An independent evaluation<sup>18</sup> was conducted to assess the overall effectiveness of the secondary program in Ohio using a pretest-posttest design to compare student outcomes before and after the program, and included surveys from Peer Leaders and Adult Advisors to gauge their perceptions. The evaluation by King Consulting during the 2023-2024 school year indicated several positive outcomes. A total of 1,510 students completed the pretest survey and 1,067 completed the posttest survey. Results showed that students at posttest reported feeling significantly more connected and accepted by their peers, supported by students and adults, and cared about by other students in their school. Additionally, students demonstrated increased knowledge and willingness to take action regarding suicide prevention, experienced less sadness, felt more equipped to support friends in crisis, and showed a reduction in bullying, physical fights, and school avoidance. Peer Leaders and Adult Advisors echoed these positive perceptions, noting increased confidence in supporting students' mental health and stronger connections with students. The evaluation concluded that Sources of Strength is associated with significant positive changes and has a beneficial impact on both students and adults. For a detailed understanding, you can access the full report here: [Ohio Independent Evaluation.](#)

***Evaluation data suggests  
the program has had  
a meaningful impact  
on school culture and  
student mental health.***



Additional states and provinces throughout North America have utilized evaluation to support their Sources of Strength implementation.

For more information or questions, please contact us at [hello@sourcesofstrength.org](mailto:hello@sourcesofstrength.org).

<sup>18</sup> [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1qeIS7fq6\\_Aen44DKEYyr0gUK\\_1aYc0wd/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1qeIS7fq6_Aen44DKEYyr0gUK_1aYc0wd/view?usp=sharing)

## 5. ELEMENTARY PROGRAM RESEARCH

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Sources of Strength employs an evidence-based, best practice, strength-based approach to wellness and prevention. By moving upstream in the prevention cycle, the Sources of Strength Elementary Model increases health and wellness through empowering students and adults to create communities of belonging and connection to empower a well world. The Sources of Strength evidence base shows that the further we move upstream to support the development and identification of protective factors that promote healthy lives, the better equipped young people will be to navigate the natural ups and downs of life. The Sources Elementary Program is a social and emotional learning program that provides a universal classroom curriculum designed for each grade level for grades kindergarten through fifth grade. The model also includes a 2-day Elementary Coaches Training. This training helps participants become fluent in the curriculum content and offers tools to facilitate ongoing Coaching Meetings for personal reflection and connection to support staff wellness. The Elementary Program is informed by the Sources Secondary Peer Leader model, which is an empirically research-based model that has been implemented in North American schools for 25+ years. The Elementary model follows the same tenets of the evidence-based Secondary Model, emphasizing upstream, strength-based, positive youth development and youth-adult connection approaches. Sources Elementary was introduced to US schools in Fall 2020. Sources Elementary has been implemented in urban, suburban, rural, and tribal settings and presently partners with over thousands of schools in over dozens of states and provinces. Evidence is emerging that indicates the program's positive impact on students and adults.

### *A Preliminary Investigation of the Sources of Strength Elementary Program Model: A Mixed Methods Study Prevention Research Center at Colorado State University 2024 (Publication pending)*

A 2024 mixed-methods evaluation of the Sources of Strength Elementary model, involving 220 educators and school staff across 17 states and provinces, demonstrated significant and wide-ranging positive outcomes for both students and adults. The findings revealed statistically significant improvements in several key areas of social-emotional development and school climate. Students exhibited marked improvements in emotional awareness and coping skills. Qualitative feedback emphasized students' enhanced ability to identify and express their emotions. There was also a substantial increase in student-adult co-regulation, highlighting improved communication and emotional connection between students and staff. Additionally, students reported a greater psychological sense of belonging supported by reports of improved peer relationships, increased empathy, and stronger community bonds—even among students not previously considered friends. The program also had a significant impact on adult participants, with improvements noted in self-awareness, self-management, and relationship skills.. Staff reported enhanced emotional

regulation, increased capacity for empathy, and greater awareness of their own emotional needs and support systems. Notably, the program contributed to normalizing conversations about emotions among students, thereby promoting a safe and inclusive school environment. These findings suggest that the Sources of Strength Elementary model effectively enhances social-emotional learning (SEL) capacities for both students and staff, strengthens relationships, and fosters a supportive school climate.

### ***Pilot Evaluation of the Elementary Social-Emotional Learning Program Sources of Strength<sup>19</sup>***

This 2023 article published in *School Mental Health* looked at a study conducted by researchers from the University of North Carolina and involved 1,022 students in grades 3–5 across 11 elementary schools in the Great Plains region of the United States. Data were collected at two time points during the COVID-19 pandemic: Fall 2020 (T1) and Spring 2021 (T2). The research utilized a pre- and post-test design, employing multilevel regression models to examine the associations between self-reported student exposure to the Sources of Strength program and various student outcomes. The study found that greater exposure to the Sources of Strength Elementary program was associated with improvements in several key areas: positive classroom climate, school belonging, help-seeking attitudes, student well-being, resilience, and lower reports of emotional problems. These findings suggest that even amidst the challenges posed by the pandemic, the Sources of Strength Elementary Program had a positive impact on students' social-emotional development. The research concluded that greater exposure to Sources of Strength may be considered a promising intervention for improving individual, classroom, and school-level protective factors in elementary school students.

### ***Summary of 2023 Evaluation: Sources of Strength Elementary - Conducted by the University of Oregon Suicide Prevention Lab<sup>20</sup>***

The 2023 evaluation of the Sources of Strength Elementary Program, conducted by the University of Oregon Suicide Prevention Lab, examined both the training of Elementary Coaches and their reflections after program implementation. Data were collected through post-training surveys over the 2021–22 and 2022–23 school years, and end-of-year reflection surveys following program delivery in 2022–23. Post-training survey data revealed high levels of training acceptability and perceived effectiveness. A vast majority of participants rated the training as effective (94%), would recommend it (95%), and felt they had a strong understanding of the curriculum concepts (99%). Follow-up surveys highlighted successful lesson

<sup>19</sup> Valido, Alexandra, Laura E. Robinson, Abigail B. Woolweaver, Allison Drescher, Dorothy L. Espelage, Amanda A. Wright, Darnell Ishmeal, M. Morgan Dailey, Anne C. J. Long, and Sherri LoMurray. "Pilot Evaluation of the Elementary Social-Emotional Learning Program Sources of Strength." *School Mental Health*, published ahead of print, 20 Jan. 2023, pp. 1–12. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/36712384/>

<sup>20</sup> [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1hNkRf43ot\\_KEgMRU6U-6aBz5KLcdiUJx/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1hNkRf43ot_KEgMRU6U-6aBz5KLcdiUJx/view)

delivery, with 90% of coaches reporting effective implementation and 92% observing students applying learned skills. Respondents praised the program's structure and student engagement, describing the lessons as both powerful and well-organized. Key challenges identified included limited instructional time and challenges in securing teacher and district-level buy-in. The most commonly cited student outcomes were increased empathy, stronger community engagement, and active use of curriculum content. Coaches also reported high personal satisfaction and enjoyment in delivering the program. Overall, the evaluation indicates that the Sources of Strength Elementary program is well-received by school staff, effectively implemented, and positively impacts student engagement and social-emotional learning.



KENAI PENINSULA  
Dreams

Graduation Really Achieves

### **Lighthouse Student Questions**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade: \_\_\_\_\_

1) Are all of your grades As, Bs, and Cs right now?  Yes  No

If you answered *no*, how many classes do you have Ds or Fs in right now? \_\_\_\_\_

2) If you need support to complete an assignment, is there someone you can get support from?  Yes  No

3) Are you on track to graduate?  Yes  No

4) Are you taking dual credit classes? (Includes JumpStart and college classes)  Yes  No

5) Are you taking credit recovery classes? (Includes GradPoint classes)  Yes  No

6) When you have difficulties in school that are not academic, is there someone you can look to for support?  Yes  No

7) Do you participate in any after school activities?  Yes  No

8) Do you participate in any clubs during or after school?  Yes  No  None available

10) How many adults can you reach out to for support at school? \_\_\_\_\_

11) How many adults can you reach out to for support at home? \_\_\_\_\_

12) How many adults can you reach out to for support in the community? \_\_\_\_\_

13) I am happy to be at this school  Yes  No

14) Do you enjoy learning at school?  Yes  No

15) Do you look forward to coming to school?  Yes  No

16) Do you like school?  Yes  No



KENAI PENINSULA  
Dreams

Graduation Really Achieves

How many days did you feel happy, joyful, or positive in the last week? (out of 7) \_\_\_\_\_

When we talk about anchors in Phlight Club, we are talking about trusted people. Which one is one anchor you can discuss problems with the most (circle one):

Adults    Parents/Guardians    Teachers    Family    Community Members    Other \_\_\_\_\_

DO you see a connection between what you learn in school and your life goals after graduation?

Yes     No

Is there anything Project GRAD staff can help you with? \_\_\_\_\_

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Date: Student Name: School: Grade:

**Student Questionnaire:** Check your best answer or fill in the blank.

1. Do you complete most of your schoolwork?

Yes

No

2. I have friends at school that support and care about me

Yes

No

3. Name at least one of the topics we are studying that is interesting and challenging to me.

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4. Do you like school?

Yes

No

5. I set goals related to my schoolwork and try to reach them.

Yes

No

6. In the last week, how many days did you feel sad, worried, or upset?

**Number of Days**

**None**

**1**

**2**

**3**

**4**

**5**

**6**

**Everyday**

7. Do you attend schools on most days?

Yes

No

8. In the last week, did you have to leave the classroom because of your words or actions?

Yes

No

9. If you need support to complete an assignment, is there someone you can get that support from?

Yes

No

10. What do you want to be when you grow up?

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11. How many adults at school (teacher, counselor, or others) do you feel comfortable asking for help if I have a problem?

**Number of Adults**

- None**
- 1**
- 2**
- 3**
- 4**
- 5 or more**

12. How many adults at home (parent, brother, sister, others) do you feel comfortable asking for help if I have a problem?

**Number of Adults**

- None**
- 1**
- 2**
- 3**
- 4**
- 5 or more**

13. How many adults outside your home (aunt, uncle, cousins, others) do you feel comfortable asking for help if I have a problem?

**Number of Adults**

- None**
- 1**
- 2**
- 3**
- 4**
- 5 or more**

14. If schoolwork or homework gets hard for you, what do you do?

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15. Select one of the skills for learning you used this week

- Eyes Watching**
- Voices Quiet**
- Body Still**
- Ears Listening**
- Focus Attention**
- Self-Talk**
- None**

16. Select one of the four steps of Problem Solving steps you used this week

- S: Say the problem without blame**
- T: Think of solutions**
- E: Evaluate each solution**
- P: Pick the best solution**
- None**

17. When we talk about anchors in Phlight Club we are talking about trusted people.

Which one is the anchor you can discuss problems with the most?

- Adults**
- Parents**
- Teachers**
- Family**
- None**

18. Which one of these Sources of Strength do you feel best about today?

- Generosity**
- Gratitude**
- Healthy Activities**
- Mental Health**
- Mentors**
- Physical Health**
- Positive Friends**
- Spirituality**
- None**

19. Which one of the following best describes when you are being assertive?

- I face the person when I'm talking to**
- I keep my head up and shoulders back**
- I use a calm, firm voice**
- I use respectful words**
- None**