



2022 Piton Fellowship Youth Cohort: Self-Sufficiency in Colorado Schools

Our definition of **self-sufficiency**:

Being emotionally and intellectually independent enough to not only satisfy one's basic needs, but also to fulfill desires and reach joy.

Not just surviving, but thriving.



THE LINK BETWEEN MENTAL HEALTH AND SELF-SUFFICIENCY

We believe that in order for people to reach our definition of self-sufficiency, their mental wellness must be prioritized.

Common themes from survey responses and our own discussion:

1. There is not enough value placed on mental health in society, and this stigma affects students from a young age.
2. Schools are in the unique position to either help or harm students' relationships with their mental health.
3. Students want adult support where:
 - a. Trust has been built.
 - b. Their identities are reflected, so that the unique struggles that come with them can be properly supported.



WHAT THINGS LOOK LIKE NOW



About K-5 Social-Emotional Health Pilot Plan



COLORADO
Department of Education

“The intent of the K-5 Social-Emotional Pilot Program is to place a team of school mental health professionals in every pilot program school and will allow the team, in partnership with classroom teachers, to provide needed support for young students and their families at a critical time in their education. A significant goal of the pilot program is to ensure that students of elementary age receive the right level of necessary services, in the right place, and at the right time to help remove the burden placed on teachers to be everything to a student, from therapist to family counselor, and instead allows teachers to return to their primary task: teaching.”

IMPLEMENTING SOLUTIONS

1. Hire more qualified staff
2. Foster open dialogue to spread awareness and reduce stigma
3. Make psychiatry, counseling, and medication more accessible to student by helping them navigate resources at school
4. Teach sustainable self-awareness, self-care, and coping strategies.



HOW NUTRITION LEADS TO SUFFICIENCY IN COLORADO SCHOOL SYSTEMS

Food insecurity is commonly seen through reduced quality and variety, desirability of diet, eating patterns, and reduced food intake & currently affects nearly 50 million people nationwide most frequently, families with children. In Colorado more than 566,000 people are food insecure, 147,120 of them being children.

Results in cognitive delay as well as emotional, and physical development delay

Solutions:

Giving more support to initiatives like Hunger Free Colorado, the Healthy Hunger Free Kids Act, No Child Left Behind, etc.

General affordable meal prices & good quality meals

Before and after school meals as well as summer meals (low to no cost)

Home etc classes (required)



Were you prepared **socially** for the world after highschool?

Three things that you think are essential to self-sufficiency that aren't taught in the public school system?

“Making meaningful connections with people who motivate you to be better”

“Communication skills and info on healthy relationships”

“wellness (meditation, seeking therapy, asking for help)”

“Overall healthy habits that contribute to one’s mental health and stability. Things like learning to set boundaries & how routines that include self-care keep you sane.”

independence

stressmanagement

openmind

mentalhealth

selfawareness

creativity

affirmations

communication

interpersonalskills

health

selfcare

relationships

wellness

sexed

timemanagement

emotions

Relational Education in Colorado

- DPS will soon require **only 20 minutes** of SEL at schools
- CASEL standards aren't implemented in counseling
- SexEd is **NOT** required
 - 27.6 % currently sexually active
 - 83.6% Of sexually active students did not use effective pregnancy preventive methods before last sexual intercourse (YouthOnline - 2019 survey)

What I propose

- Bridge Counselor
- CASEL Counseling
- Including Alumni Collective's (Ednium)

HOUSING SECURITY: HOW YOUTH HOMELESSNESS LEADS TO INSUFFICIENT HUMANS IN THE FUTURE

Youth Homelessness runs rampant in our society but in Colorado (specifically in the Denver Metro area), it is at an all time high. Not only does Youth homelessness lead to those kids experiencing humiliation but also missing out on basic life skills that haunt them in the future. While homeless, the individual does not have a secure home so they are constantly moving from place to place just accepting any type of lift up that is offered. So at the end of the day, **these individuals are just surviving, not THRIVING.**

**END YOUTH
HOMELESSNESS**



As it stands in Colorado Recently

- *“According to the 2020 Point in Time (PIT) Count, which was conducted before COVID-19 began, 189 unaccompanied youth were experiencing homelessness in Denver. Eighty youths slept in emergency shelters, 55 were placed in transitional housing, and another 54 youths were unsheltered.”*
- The problems that lead a family to homelessness often multiply and worsen for some time before the individuals and the family as a whole can alleviate them and regain self-sufficiency
- To recover from homelessness and achieve self-sufficiency, housing assistance alone is not enough for most families. Most require assistance and opportunities in areas at least as comprehensive as the issues that caused their homelessness in the first place
 - Areas of need include financial planning, substance abuse counseling, further education, parenting classes, mental health counseling, and treatment for chronic illnesses (including HIV/AIDS), among a host of others
- Some “stressors” on homeless children are precisely the same as those experienced by the family as a whole
 - homelessness can cause children to experience setbacks in developmental growth, educational achievement, nutrition, and overall physical health
 - Constant humiliation from their peers
 - Their language and motor skills are likely to be delayed
 - poor education quality or the constant moving in and out of schools might be the primary causes
 - Homeless children attend school less and do worse in school than children with a permanent residence
 - food and shelter may keep a mother from taking the time to enroll her child in the local school

MAIN CAUSES OF HOMLESSNESS

- **substance abuse (estimates range from 5-50 percent of the homeless fit this category)**
- **mental health problems (8-30 percent) and related deinstitutionalization**
- **pregnancy or recent birth (Bassuk and Weinreb, p. 350)**
- **domestic violence (and the increased reporting of domestic violence)**
- **lack of social support or using it up**
- **dramatic changes in family structure**
- **incarceration**
- **situational factors (“external” causes, such as layoffs and other forms of economic adversity)**
- **lack of affordable housing (blamed for both causing and sustaining homelessness)**

WHAT HAS BEEN DONE:

- Food
 - Providing free lunch for all
 - Providing nutritious lunch and breakfast
- Safety
 - Providing counselors/school leaders who are safe spaces for the homeless
 - These people do not judge and help where they can
- Transportation
 - Schools ask for address' to help make a plan on how to get to school for those who do not have stable housing
- Kindness
 - Encouraging those who are homeless to speak with adults and their peers without feeling judgement
 - Also having people understand if there is unexpected behavior from someone who us experiencing homelessness
- Self Care
 - Officials/Teachers educating their students on how important it is to take care of yourself

WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE NOW:

- Representation
 - Giving more aid to those who need it
 - Having unlimited resources
- Teaching
 - Giving classes that teach the basic skills/needs
 - Giving classes that will prepare students for the real world

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT (VOTING AND POLITICS)

Problem:

- Lack of voting and political material in curriculum
- Reported fear from teachers (mainly civic) about talking about current social and political issues
- Students aren't properly being taught about the voting process
- Students aren't educated on their rights
- Lack of in depth teaching of American history that doesn't prioritize the white perspective

Solutions:

- Protection to support teachers teaching their students about current issues
- Mandatory curriculum relating current issues to history
 - Speech and Debate and Model UN should be implemented and required
- Community engagement

CULTURAL COMPETENCY (DEI, RACE, INCLUSIVE HISTORY)

Problem:

- Many Colorado public school districts have DEI programs implemented, but nothing required from the students as far as legitimate engagement
- Lack of in depth teaching of American history that doesn't prioritize the white perspective

Solutions:

- All students and teachers should be required to complete DEI training courses implemented throughout the school year
- Race and Gender inclusive history curriculum

LANGUAGE LEARNING

Problem:

- DPS classes are primarily taught in English
 - This can cause multilingual speakers to lose their primary language
- Study abroad is not accessible
- Many Colorado public schools don't require students to learn a language in middle school

Solutions:

- Accessible study abroad opportunities
- Require students to “bilingual” by curriculum standards by the time they graduate
- More language inclusive classes/ programs that don't exclude non English speakers

FINANCIAL LITERACY

Financial Literacy- “Possessing the skills and knowledge on financial matters to confidently take effective action that best fulfills an individual’s personal, family and global community goals.” (National Financial Educators Council)

The 5 B’s:

- **Budgeting:** saving and smart purchasing
- **Borrowing:** loans, interest, and credit
- **Banking:** accounts, security with financial information, scams and rip-offs
- **Building wealth:** investment, home ownership, and earning potential
- **Tax Basics**



“Real world stuff”

Sample Math Curriculum Outline:

FRESHMAN: Algebra 1
SOPHOMORE: Statistics } These two would vary depending on math level.
JUNIOR: Financial Literacy Basics
SENIOR: Financial Literacy: Setting Up For Success

... Rather than just mandating an elective, building it into the math requirements for graduation so students feel like they are learning applicable skills.

Higher-level math could be offered as elective courses instead.

COLLEGE AND CAREER PREP IN COLORADO

- ICAP
- Lack of career-driven class
- Is college is the only way?
 - IS there an alternative?

OUR SOLUTION

- [Forward Think] - still in process
- Help students network
 - Help students find scholarships

FORWARD →
THINK

Mental/emotional
wellness

Relational education

Nutrition and
food security



Housing security

Civic
engagement

Career and college
preparation

Language learning
through immersion

Cultural competence

Sources

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