

**CHALLENGE SUCCESS**



**School District  
Impact Case Study**  
2018-2022

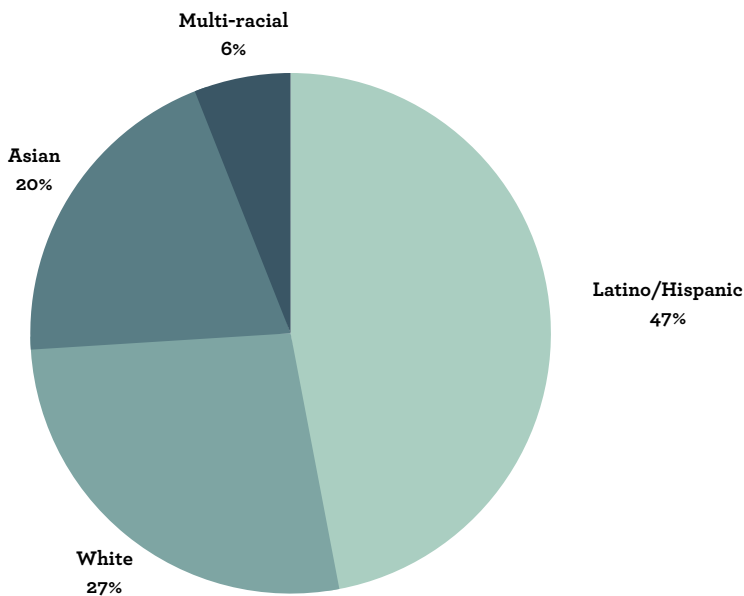


## DISTRICT OVERVIEW

This case study highlights the findings of a four-year partnership between Challenge Success and a large, urban school district in California. While the data provided in this report was gathered from 2018-2022, Challenge Success maintains an ongoing relationship with the district and continues to implement interventions within individual schools and at the district level.

We would like to express our gratitude to the students, faculty, and staff at the participating schools. Their engagement with this project, in spite of unexpected global conditions, was remarkable.

### Student Demographics: Race & Ethnicity



24,000

STUDENTS

28

SCHOOLS

98%

GRADUATION RATE

40%

FROM LOW-INCOME  
HOUSEHOLDS

19%

ENGLISH LANGUAGE  
LEARNERS

## Participating Schools

<b>High School</b>	2,938 Students 22% FRPM 7% ELL	43% Asian 21% Latino/Hispanic 8% Other Races/Ethnicities 27% White
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<b>Middle School</b>	798 Students 53% FRPM 27% ELL	9% Asian 74% Latino/Hispanic 5% Other Races/Ethnicities 12% White
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<b>Middle School</b>	694 Students 54% FRPM 34% ELL	9% Asian 79% Latino/Hispanic 4% Other Races/Ethnicities 8% White
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<b>High School</b>	2,387 Students 23% FRPM 6% ELL	10% Asian 44% Latino/Hispanic 6% Other Races/Ethnicities 40% White
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<b>Middle School</b>	936 Students 23% FRPM 7% ELL	10% Asian 35% Latino/Hispanic 26% Other Races/Ethnicities 29% White
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<b>K-8 School</b>	1,382 Students 14% FRPM 9% ELL	62% Asian 10% Latino/Hispanic 8% Other Races/Ethnicities 20% White
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<b>Middle School</b>	997 Students 20% FRPM 5% ELL	34% Asian 28% Latino/Hispanic 11% Other Races/Ethnicities 27% White
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<b>High School</b>	2,294 Students 58% FRPM 28% ELL	7% Asian 80% Latino/Hispanic 4% Other Races/Ethnicities 9% White
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FRPM = Students eligible for Free and Reduced Price Meals | ELL = English Language Learners



## ABOUT CHALLENGE SUCCESS

Challenge Success is a non-profit school reform organization that works to improve K-12 student well-being, engagement, and belonging through our School Program, Research and Surveys, and Workshops.

Our unique approach is grounded in research about effective education and healthy child and adolescent development, engages and educates all stakeholders in the school community, and focuses on elevating the voice and perspective of all students. While many other organizations address student needs after problems arise, we offer upstream solutions that help to create systems within schools where students are engaged, healthy, and thriving.

### Our Mission

Challenge Success partners with school communities to elevate student voice and implement research-based, equity-centered strategies that improve student well-being, belonging, and engagement.



### Our Vision

Our vision is that educational systems value each student for their unique identities, assets, and individual definitions of success and effectively prepare them for the variety of opportunities and challenges they will encounter in school and beyond.

### Our Equity Commitment

Challenge Success continuously examines and revises our work and seeks to disrupt patterns of inequity to further well-being, belonging, and engagement for each student, especially those for whom identity, culture, or socioeconomic status has resulted in barriers to access and success. We believe:

- Change starts with self, including active self-reflection to notice our own implicit biases and recognize how our lived experiences influence our perspectives and decision-making.
- All students, families, and communities have assets to build on and sustain.
- Centering design on those most marginalized by the current system benefits all students.
- Approaches to change must be systemic, context-based, and targeted at policies and practices.

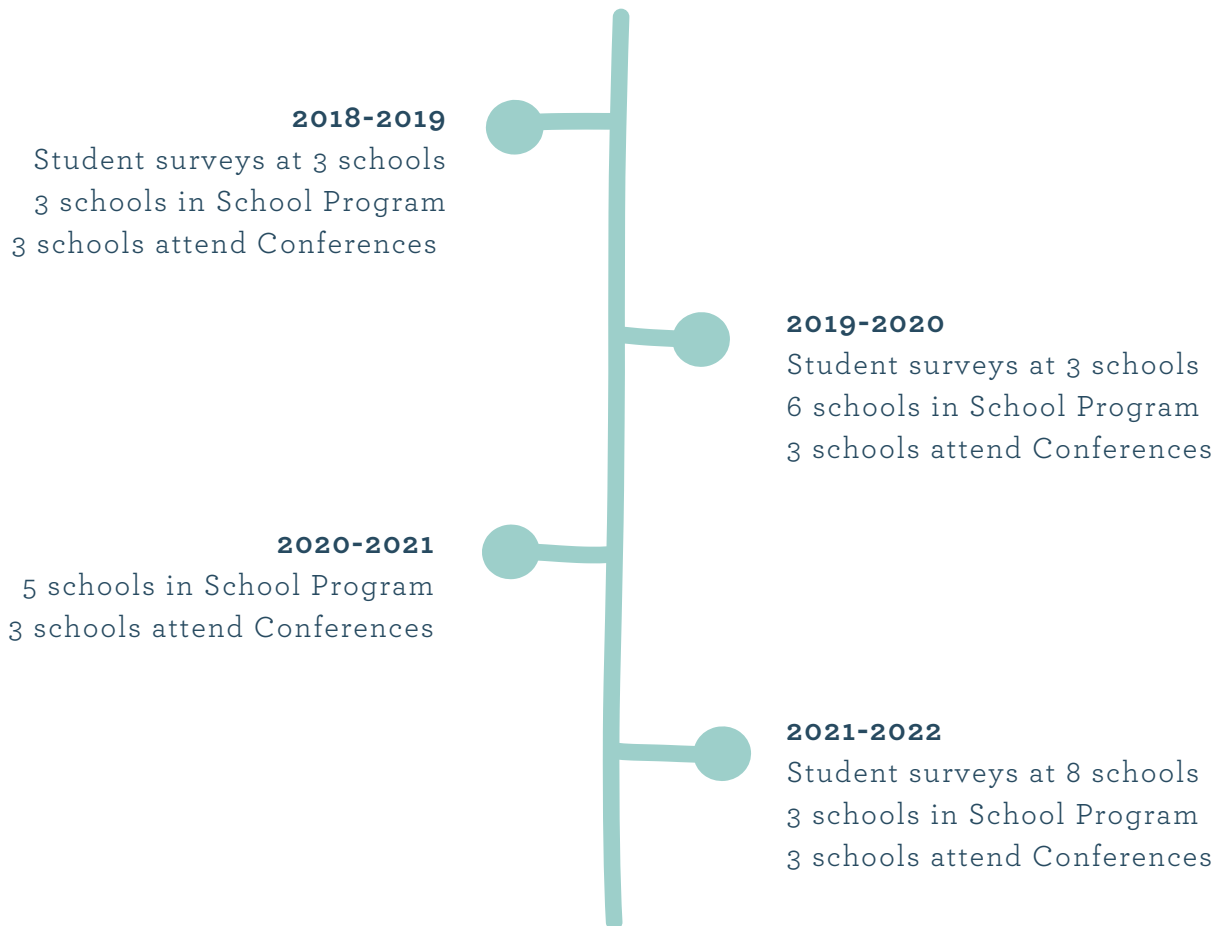


## PRIMARY QUESTIONS

### To what extent is the Challenge Success school program leading to measurable changes in student well-being, belonging, and engagement?

- Did participation in the Challenge Success School Program lead to healthier environments for students in participating schools?
- Did well-being, belonging, and engagement improve for students in participating schools?

## ENGAGEMENT TIMELINE





## ENGAGEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

### **Multi Stakeholder Involvement**

Each school created a team of 10 comprised of students, educators, and parents.

### **Partnership & Engagement with CS Staff**

Challenge Success provided a dedicated coach to partner with each school team through a process of data collection, piloting, consensus building, and broader implementation.

### **School Leadership**

School and district leaders were actively engaged in the interventions.

### **Student Survey**

Data was collected about the student experience to inform the approach.

### **School Level Changes**

Using the SPACE Framework, each school implemented changes to address issues revealed in the survey.

### **District Level Changes**

Through the four-year engagement, the district collected a substantial amount of qualitative and quantitative data to inform and shape broader policies and practices that aim to improve the educational experience and outcomes for all students in the district.



#### FROM A TEACHER:

*"You are not interfering with ambition (future) by prioritizing mental health."*



## STUDENT SURVEY

The Student Survey (also known as the Challenge Success-Stanford Survey of School Experiences) is a 30-40-minute online survey for middle and high school students that helps schools gather data and insights that lead to actionable changes designed to improve student well-being, belonging, and engagement with learning. Over 250,000 students have taken this survey since it was developed by researchers at the Stanford Graduate School of Education in 2007. The survey looks at indicators in nine different areas of the student experience:



### Health and Stress

Sources of stress, academic worry, and stress-related health symptoms among students.



### Sleep

Students were asked how much sleep they typically get, when they wake up / go to bed, and about the use of phones in their bedrooms.



### Academic Integrity

Frequency of academically dishonest behaviors.



### Support at School

Teacher care and support and student perceptions of school belonging.



### Engagement

Students' cognitive, behavioral, and affective engagement in school.



### Homework Load and Habits

Student perceptions of homework, including time spent and belief in its usefulness.



### Extracurriculars and Free Time

Participation in extracurricular activities and time spent on paid work and choice of free time activities.



### Family Expectations

Students' perceptions of their family's expectations and their ability to meet those expectations.



### Possible School Changes

Students' perceived efficacy of potential reforms that the school might implement to create a more supportive and engaging environment.

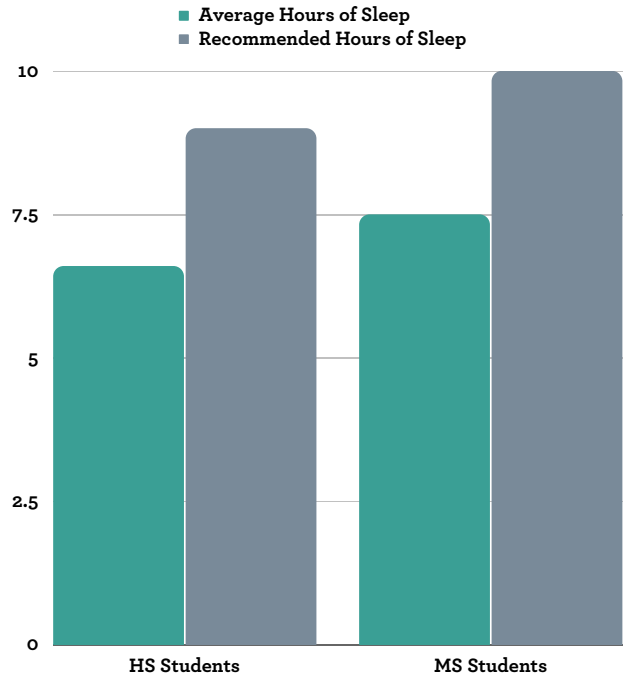
## INITIAL SURVEY RESULTS

### Themes that emerged from the first round of surveys conducted in 2018-2019:

- Many kids were missing school for health or emotional reasons.
- Major sources of stress for students were grades/tests/quizzes, workload / homework, lack of sleep, and college.
- Overall, there was a low sense of belonging at school.
- More than half of students were "doing school" or "disengaged" in learning.
- More than half of all students were getting less than 7 hours of sleep per night.



#### Average hours of sleep vs. recommended hours of sleep for middle and high school students:



#### Wordcloud from the student survey used to describe the school experience at participating schools:







## INITIAL SURVEY RESULTS

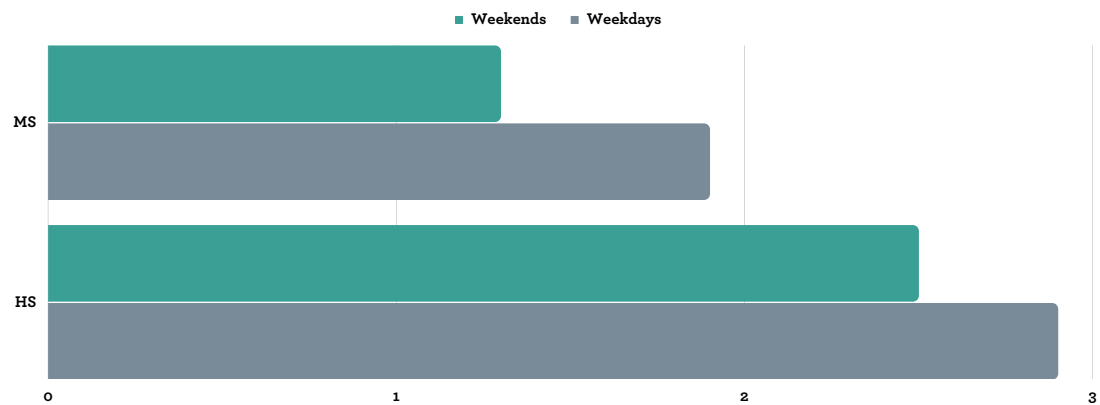


### School changes students felt would be quite or very effective:

- Add or enhance mental health resources and support
- Reduce homework load
- Have teachers coordinate due dates / test dates
- No homework on weekends / breaks
- Start the school day later



### Average hours spent doing homework on weekdays and weekends for middle and high school students



#### FROM A PRINCIPAL:

*"It is refreshing to get student perspectives and input."*



## STUDENT VOICE & AGENCY

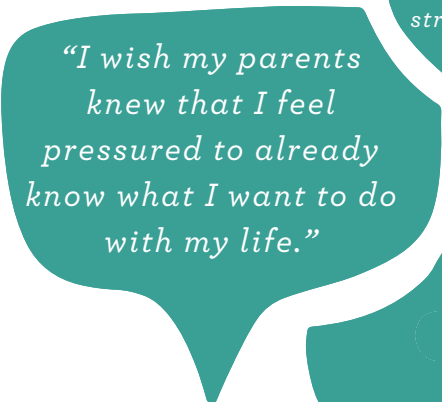
If we want to identify the root causes of stress and disengagement for young people - if we really want to know about the student experience - we have to hear it from the students themselves. When we take the time to collect data from students - whether it is quantitative data from surveys or qualitative data from focus groups, fishbowls, and other listening-in protocols - the data can better inform change efforts.

Likewise, inviting students into important conversations and soliciting their feedback can produce inspiring results. The themes that emerge allow schools to better understand where the pain points exist so they can take concrete steps such as piloting different interventions or implementing specific professional development.

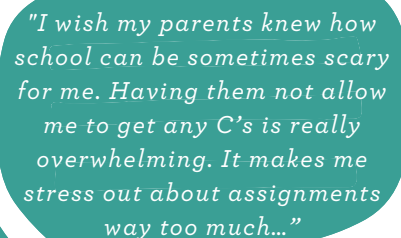
Students at the eight participating schools were asked for their input in a variety of ways, and their responses were instrumental in prioritizing the types of changes the schools decided to pilot.

### Listening In Protocols

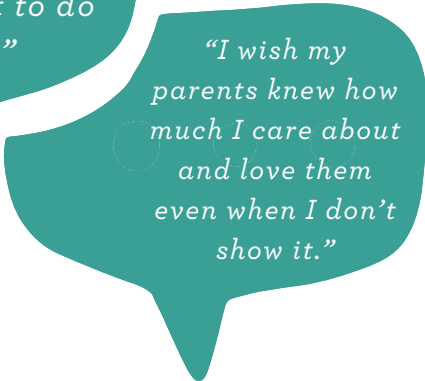
- Shadow Days: Teachers spent the day in a student's shoes to understand the pace and pressure they feel on a daily basis.
- Fishbowls: Students were convened to share their experiences and feelings on their school experience.
- I Wish Campaign: Students were given the opportunity to share what they wish their parents knew and what they wish their teachers knew about their experiences at school.



*"I wish my parents knew that I feel pressured to already know what I want to do with my life."*



*"I wish my parents knew how school can be sometimes scary for me. Having them not allow me to get any C's is really overwhelming. It makes me stress out about assignments way too much..."*



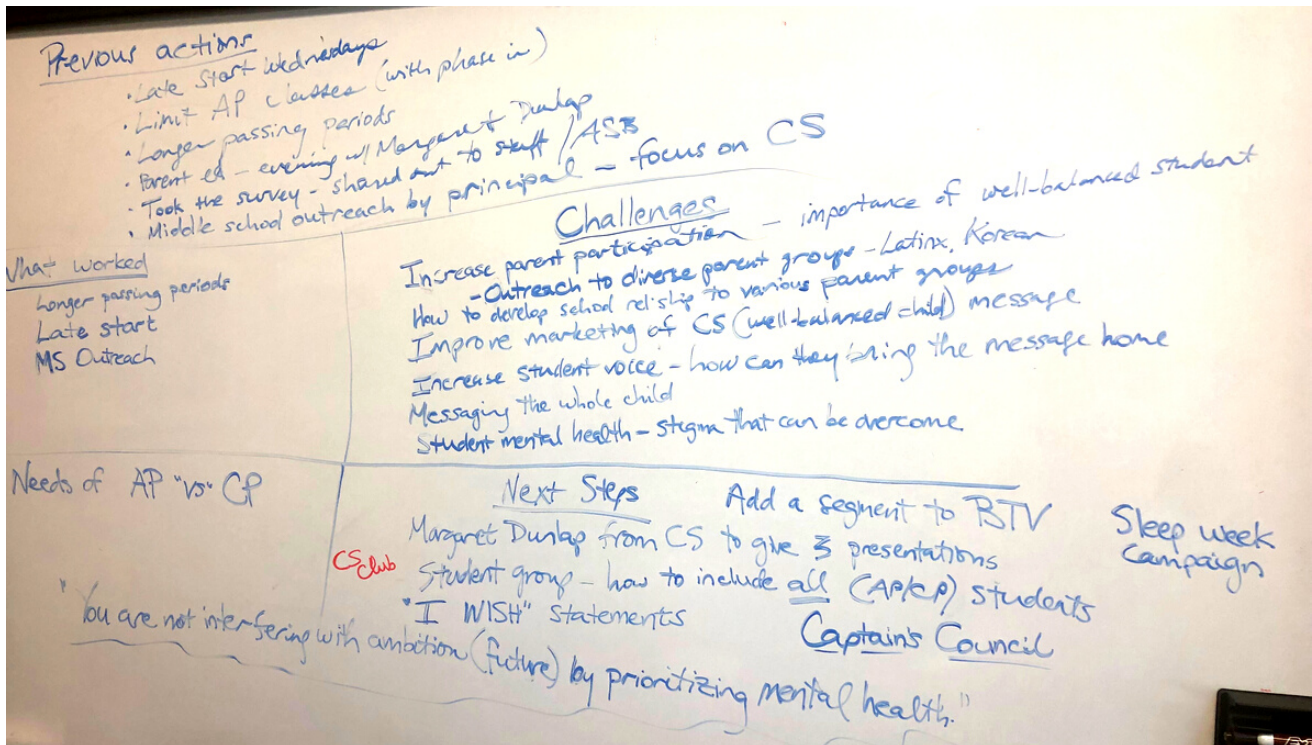
*"I wish my parents knew how much I care about and love them even when I don't show it."*



## SPACE FRAMEWORK FOR SCHOOL CHANGE

The Challenge Success SPACE Framework addresses school change through five key areas of the student experience. Based on the findings from the initial surveys and through a variety of approaches across all eight participating schools, teams piloted small-scale changes, tested their impact, and reported back on the outcomes.

On the following pages we share examples of the types of interventions that were piloted by the eight schools who participated in the Challenge Success School Program.



Above: School teams engaged in brainstorming with their Challenge Success coach to identify obstacles, what worked, and possible next steps.



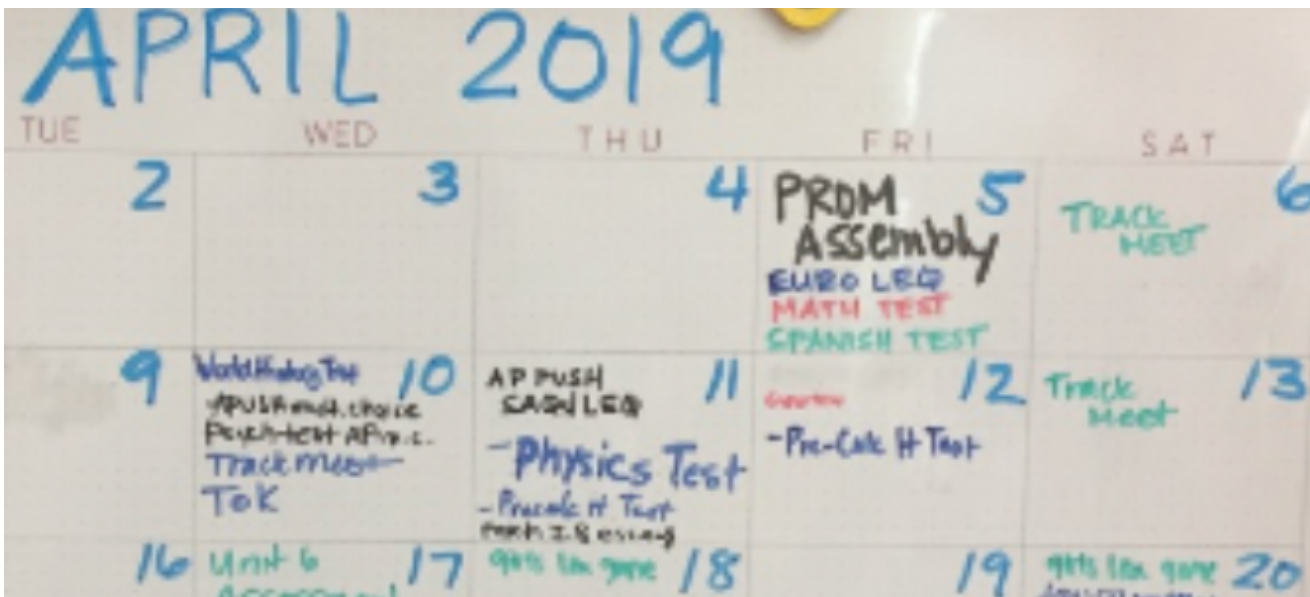
## STRATEGIES USED TO REDUCE STRESS AND INCREASE SLEEP

STUDENTS' SCHEDULE & USE OF TIME



- Use of tutorial
- No new instruction on Wednesdays
- Limit the number of AP classes students can take
- Extended passing periods
- Increased lunch and/or recess time
- Homework breaks on holidays and over the summer
- Implemented test / project / assignment calendars
- Implemented weekly late starts (prior to California mandate)

*Below: Example of a test/project calendar posted in a classroom to help students proactively manage their workload and communicate with teachers about competing demands on their time.*



### FROM A PRINCIPAL:

*"As Principal, what I've appreciated seeing is the trust-building that has happened. They're re-learning how to be collaborative and solve problems. They are learning how to work together and be respectful."*



## STRATEGIES TO INCREASE ENGAGEMENT AND ACADEMIC INTEGRITY



- Implemented more project-based learning - e.g. 6th grade exploratory projects
- Redesigned learning experiences to increase engagement and student agency
- Implemented 'revision and redemption' practices
- Utilized performance-based assessments
- Incorporated mastery learning approaches

PROJECT & PROBLEM-  
BASED LEARNING



ALTERNATIVE & AUTHENTIC  
ASSESSMENT



### FROM A TEACHER:

*"The feedback from the kids, even our most challenging kids, was great...it was such a shift when they were fully engaged in an activity that was for them and led by them."*



## STRATEGIES USED TO SUPPORT MENTAL HEALTH AND INCREASE BELONGING AND CARE



### Students

- Student-designed and led wellness activities, such as "Lawn Chair Lunches"
- Mental health campaign and integrated mental health activities
- Use of restorative practices

### CLIMATE OF CARE



### Adults (Educators, Families, Caregivers)

- Professional development & parent education around wellness, balance, sleep, and college admissions
- Professional development around project-based learning
- Professional development around equitable grading practices
- Professional development on homework and authentic assessment methods
- Professional development on strategies to support faculty and staff well-being
- Newsletters and website highlighting data from the partnership
- Book Clubs
- Sleep Awareness Week

### EDUCATION FOR THE WHOLE COMMUNITY



### FROM AN ADMINISTRATOR:

*"We had an amazing turnout for parent presentations. Having parents on our teams at each school has been life-changing. They now feel like they have a voice. Their voices are very strong amongst their peers. And so when you get one voice who is supportive and can help share that message, they have a whole different community that they can get that message out to."*

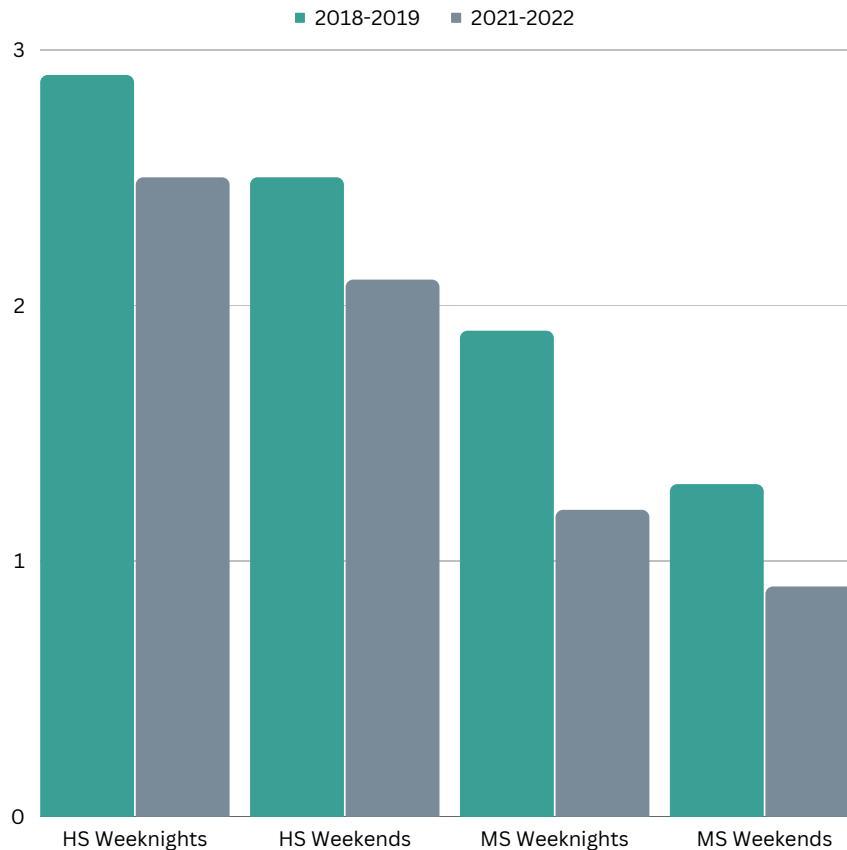


## QUANTITATIVE OUTCOMES

### When schools conducted the survey again in 2021 and 2022, results showed:

- More students at a participating high school have a trusted faculty / staff member they can talk to.
- Over 86% of high school students and over 82% of middle school students reported having a peer they could go to with a personal problem.
- High school students are getting more sleep.
- Homework load is reduced during the week and also on weekends for middle and high school students.

### Average hours spent on homework before and after engagement with Challenge Success:





## BEYOND THE DATA

While our quantitative data demonstrates that students have improved aspects of their well-being during our engagement with the district, it is important to note the context in which this project occurred. The global COVID-19 pandemic (which began in the spring of 2020 and significantly impacted the 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 school years) continues to have an impact on student well-being, even into the 2022-2023 school year. The school change journey is an ongoing process that requires long-term relationships between coaches and school leaders, and there will always be more work to be done to improve student well-being, engagement, and belonging.

In addition, we would be remiss not to acknowledge the external factors that influence the student experience. Pre-existing stressors such as systemic racism, violence, and the socio-political climate have an impact on child development and cannot be ignored.

Challenge Success maintains an ongoing relationship with the district and together we continue to implement systems-level changes that will impact students for years to come.

### Quotes from educator I Wish Campaigns

*"I wish students at our school knew that we want to put their mental health and enjoyment of their high school experience as a priority."*

*"I wish students at our school knew that we care about their health well-being MORE than we care about their grades."*

*"I wish students at our school knew how much we try to make lessons engaging for them."*

*"I wish students at our school knew that they are loved and cared for."*

*"I wish students at our school knew how much their teachers care about them."*

*"I wish students at our school knew that being happy with your education is more important than grades."*

### Quotes from parent I Wish Campaigns

*"I wish students at our school knew that we are listening to their concerns and working with teachers/parents to figure out how to make things better."*

*"I wish students at our school knew how important they are to this world. That they can move mountains with their faith and their abilities, despite the setbacks that we have faced this past year."*



**CHALLENGE SUCCESS**



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