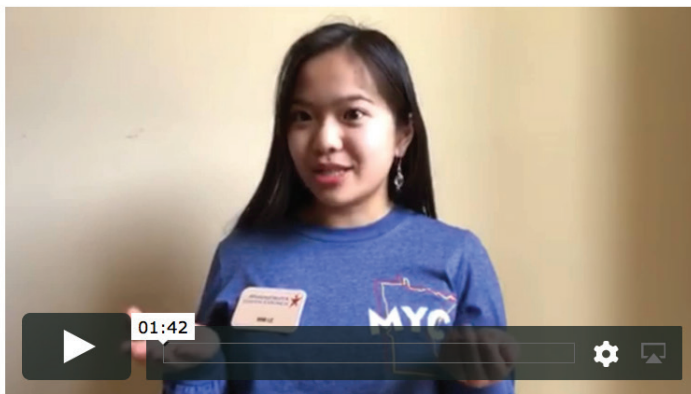


Minnesota Youth Council Forum Report

Minnesota Youth Council



As a student, you have a unique and important perspective on how to address the top issues facing our schools, including how to make schools safer and more supportive. Your participation in this WikiWisdom Forum may lead to YOU being part of a small group

Sponsored by the Minnesota Youth Council



Our democracy works better when more people participate in it.

Your experience as high school students gives you a unique and important perspective on how to address the top issues facing our schools, including how to make schools safer and more supportive.

We invite you to join the [Minnesota Youth Council](#) WikiWisdom Forum and share your ideas for solving the problems facing our

INTRODUCTION

MINNESOTA YOUTH COUNCIL FORUM REPORT

In the aftermath of yet another mass school shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, in February 2018, 20 students at that high school took to the national stage. They formed Never Again MSD, launched the Twitter hashtags #NeverAgain and #EnoughisEnough, and advocated for stiffer gun laws. Beyond their anti-gun advocacy, those students did something more: They focused attention on the potential power of America's youth.

In the wake of that national focus on student voice, New Voice Strategies partnered with the Minnesota Youth Council in a beta test of our new platform for online collaboration. We asked Minnesota high school students to tell us what challenges they face and propose solutions to those problems.

In an online conversation during the last three weeks of the 2017-2018 school year, Minnesota students shared 34 ideas and added 58 comments on issues ranging from college affordability to youth suicide. We are grateful for their participation during an especially busy time for high school students who are going to prom, studying for finals, competing in sports championships and more.

From that online conversation, 14 students who were particularly thoughtful and engaging were invited to participate in a second phase of the

process aimed at distilling the ideas into actionable recommendations for change. This report is derived from the online conversation, strengthened by the thought leaders. The report was written by Cindy Richards, an award-winning journalist in Chicago, but the ideas come straight from the students.

The Minnesota Youth Thought Leaders are: Ani Cassellius, Ava Kalenze, Alexander Knutson, Alyssa DeGrand, Arjun Maheshwari, Bethany Rufsholm, Hufsa Ahmed, Jacob Just, Logan Clarke, Lanea Rohan, Mimi Le, Muntaas Farah, Shreya Ram and Weston Loughmiller.

Of that group, seven—Ava, Mimi, Bethany, Logan, Weston, Muntaas and Hufsa—also participated in joint phone meetings to further hone the ideas and recommendations for action. The 14 thought leaders come from communities across Minnesota.

The students' ideas will be presented to Minnesota's two US Senators, Amy Klobuchar and Tina Smith.

SUMMARY ---

THE STUDENTS' IDEAS AT A GLANCE

Increasing Student Empowerment

- Bring your personal message about the importance of voting directly to the students.
- Bring voter registration into the schools.
- Encourage local school boards to create a student position on the school board.
- Get young people excited about democracy and the role they play in it.

Closing the Opportunity Gap

- Expand access to and promotion of the Post-Secondary Education Opportunity (PSEO) program in Minnesota.
- Provide student loan debt relief.
- Increase the number of guidance counselors at high schools.
- Invest in college preparatory programs for at-risk youth.

Reducing Student Stress

- Expand assessment approaches.
- Launch a peer-based group chat or hotline for stressed out students.
- Develop homework helplines.
- Increase funding for suicide prevention programs.
- Limit the amount of homework students are assigned.

Keeping Schools Safe for Everyone

- Set a better example for civil discourse.
- Step up federal enforcement of non-discrimination laws.
- Offer more inclusive sex education.
- Change the conversation about guns.
- Do a better job of enforcing the gun laws already on the books.

INCREASING STUDENT EMPOWERMENT

A report on youth involvement in American elections from CIRCLE, the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning, has some unsettling statistics for future civic engagement. In particular, the report says:

- Only about 50 percent of eligible young people voted in the 2016 presidential election.
- 80 percent of young eligible voters stayed home in the 2014 mid-term election.
- A growing percentage of young voters see themselves as independents; in the 2016 presidential election, only 40 percent identified themselves as Democrats while 30 percent said they were Republican.
- Millions of young people will be newly eligible to vote in 2018, and long-term investments are required to ensure that, by the time all youth turn 18, they are fully prepared to vote in local, state, and national elections, and that they feel a responsibility to participate.
- Young adults need to see voting as not just a right, but as a responsibility.

Finding ways to engage youth in our democracy at an early age is key to keeping them engaged long term. Yet high school students feel strongly that, like the pilgrims who tossed tea into the sea to protest “taxation without representation,” they are the victims of policies over which they have had little or no say. Students need to feel a personal connection to democracy and understand the critical role each individual can play. That requires changes in the classroom as well as in real life.

Bring your personal message about the importance of voting directly to the students.

Senators and their representatives can offer to speak at school convocations about the importance of voting and its impact on our democracy. CIRCLE hypothesizes that one reason young voters are uninclined to affiliate with one of the major political parties is because of a dearth of sustained outreach. Just weeks before Election Day 2016, CIRCLE found that only 30% of youth had been contacted by a presidential campaign or political party. The organization notes, however, that elections can be formative for young people; those who vote for one party in their first few elections are likely to remain loyal to that party for the remainder of their lives.

Bring voter registration into the schools.

Registration officials can set up tables in the school cafeteria once a week in the weeks leading up to an election. It would be an easy way for busy 18-year-old seniors to register. Equally important, it would send an important public message to all students that voting is an important privilege, right and responsibility.

**Munira A.**

Youth Voice

This year, nearly 18 million students will be able to vote, and it seems to be that no one takes this seriously, "because they're young and don't care".

This mindset is intensely bothersome to me, because most of the legislation that is being passed will impact our generation most heavily. The blatant disregard of our voices and our opinions is harmful to our country.

If we want to make a sustainable future for ourselves and those who will be most heavily impacted, we need to listen to the voices of the youth.

I believe it looks like this- installing more youth advisory boards and positions, supporting organizations that focus on youth, and importantly, actually working to listen to the voices of the youth.

Tags: **YOUTH VOICE**

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THIS MINDSET IS INTENSELY BOTHERSOME TO ME, BECAUSE MOST OF THE LEGISLATION THAT IS BEING PASSED WILL IMPACT OUR GENERATION MOST HEAVILY.

THE BLATANT DISREGARD OF OUR VOICES AND OUR OPINIONS IS HARMFUL TO OUR COUNTRY.

Munira A.



Alyssa D.

Student Representation on District School Boards

Students should be represented on their school boards just as students should be represented in the MN Legislature (without MYC!). Some school districts do this already; for example, St. Paul Public Schools has a "Student Engagement and Advancement" subcommittee, as well as Rochester Public Schools with their "Student School Board." More schools need student representatives serving on their school boards or entire school boards in order to give youth opportunities to have their voices heard regarding decisions being made that affect their everyday lives.

Joining a student school board may seem easy enough, but do not be fooled: I joined my student school board (Rochester Public Schools) last fall, while all other members had been on it since middle school. Coming in as an MYC member, I immediately noticed that the entire group was being used by district administrators as decoration. We were being manipulated and tokenized so they could say "Look! We listen to students! We're in a partnership."

I wrote a more extensive paper about my experience in joining a student school board for the first time titled "Student School Board or Student Fool Board? The Failure of Student Voice in Education," but it can be summed up in its conclusion:

A Student School Board should be a platform for students to voice their concerns and address issues that are important to them and the greater student body that they represent. I urge Rochester Public School District to reevaluate the way it handles student input. Rather than making a few students feel important by being on the board, the district needs to prove to all students that they are important, and their opinions make a difference. Rather than maintaining a Student Fool Board, the district needs to restructure and redefine their standards of student inclusion. Including students in the decision making process can lead to a mountain of benefits for the student, the school culture, and the school district. Embracing student voice in the education system is crucial to a successful education system.

Tags: **STUDENT VOICE**

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FOLLOW IDEA



INCLUDING STUDENTS IN THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS CAN LEAD TO A MOUNTAIN OF BENEFITS FOR THE STUDENT, THE SCHOOL CULTURE, AND THE SCHOOL DISTRICT. EMBRACING STUDENT VOICE WITHIN THE EDUCATION SYSTEM IS CRUCIAL TO A SUCCESSFUL EDUCATION SYSTEM.

Alyssa D.

Encourage local school boards and school districts to create a student position on the school board.

Making rules without input from the governed is un-democratic. We believe every school board should have a seat that is filled by a student. This could take many forms. It could be a seat that rotates among a team of students so there is a student expert ready to address any issue the school board faces—from academics to sports to extra-curricular to mental health and beyond. It could be an elected position voted on by the student body. It could be appointed by the principal and/or a committee of teachers. Regardless of the process, we believe that having a student representative on the local school board would demonstrate to students a commitment to democracy, give students a taste of representative government and ensure student voice is considered during board policy discussions.

Get young people engaged with democracy and the role they play in it.

History, civics and government curricula starting in the 9th grade should include instruction on the importance of voting, how one person's vote can make a difference and why it is every American's privilege and responsibility to vote. In 9th and 10th grade classes, this can be a part of the history lesson—how did voting affect the outcome of what happened? In 11th grade, the message can be more personal: How can one person effect change at the ballot box? In 12th grade, students should be taught how to register and vote, and why voting in local elections is just as important as voting in the higher profile state and national elections.

CLOSING THE OPPORTUNITY GAP

Two-thirds of Minnesotans who graduate college leave school with student loans--\$39,400 on average, according to The Institute for College Access and Success. Minnesota ranks No. 5 in terms of average debt. We rank No. 4 in terms of the percentage of students who take on debt to attend college—68 percent of Minnesota’s college students go into debt to pay for school. Across the country, Americans owe more than \$1.48 trillion in student loan debt, spread out among about 44 million borrowers.

Certainly, those statistics have far-reaching effects on our economy. Young adults who are paying \$300 or more in monthly student loan payments will be hard pressed to afford a new car or attain the American Dream of buying a house and will struggle to find long-lasting financial stability. But the New York Times noted a subtler consequence. Quoting Mark Kantrowitz, the publisher and vice president of research at SavingForCollege.com, The Times reported: Data shows low- and middle-income students enrolling in associate degree and certificate programs instead of bachelor’s degree programs. That, Mr. Kantrowitz said, is “of greater concern because students who could benefit from a bachelor’s degree are scaling back their educational attainment for no reason other than college affordability.”

But there are ways to make college more affordable, as well as ways to encourage students who might be the first from their family to attend to college.

Expand access to and promotion of the Post-Secondary Education Opportunity (PSEO) program in Minnesota.

This program, which allows high school students to take college courses for free makes it possible for a student to graduate high school with college credit. In some circumstances, a high school student who takes full advantage of the PSEO program could already have earned an associate degree by high school graduation. That means college cost could be cut in half.

However, we believe our schools do not do enough to promote this program, help students enroll or spread the word that this program is not just for the A students.

In addition, students sometimes need help to take advantage of the program. While PSEO provides transportation subsidies to students at or below the poverty level, there is little support for students whose families make more money. One successful program buses PSEO students from high school to the college for classes.



Ava K.

The Cost of College

High School students are so often told to do their best — so that they can get into a good college. For many students, this is a simple opportunity, and there is no hesitation when it comes to cost. For another group of students, college, or even secondary education is not possible because of socioeconomic status.

If a main goal in society is to actually bridge the gap between the higher and working classes, we have to start with an opportunity gap. As a high school student in MN who plans on attending college, I know paying for it will be a struggle. The most I can do is hope for scholarships and good financial aid.

I think that this is a concern of many young people and it's impossible to solve. Other states — like New York — have taken legislative action to ensure more students are able to attend college or a trade school after their high school education.

The question I pose is this: What actions are already being taken to aid students? What legislation has or hasn't been passed?

Tags: [AID](#), [COLLEGE](#)

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IF A MAIN GOAL IN SOCIETY IS TO ACTUALLY BRIDGE THE GAP BETWEEN THE HIGHER AND WORKING CLASSES, WE HAVE TO START WITH THE OPPORTUNITY GAP.

AS A HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT IN MN WHO PLANS ON ATTENDING COLLEGE, I KNOW PAYING FOR IT WILL BE A STRUGGLE.

THE MOST I CAN DO IS HOPE FOR SCHOLARSHIPS AND GOOD FINANCIAL AID.

Ava K.

Provide student loan debt relief and increase programs that help students avoid debt in the first place.

Expand funding for federal programs that help military veterans and Americorps volunteers pay student loan debt and look for other creative ways to help all students get a college education without taking on unreasonable debt loads. This can include expanding programs that educate students and their families on ways to get a college education without taking on massive debt, warn them about shoddy college loan programs and give them access to pots of college funding money they might not otherwise know about.

Increase the number of guidance counselors at high schools and clearly define their role.

When school funding is cut, guidance counselors are often among the first to go. That reduces student access to the help they need to navigate the college application process. While US senators don't have direct control over local school funding, they do have control over federal school funding. Growth in college graduation rates certainly is in the best interests of the country. So federal funding or grants to support guidance counselors who can lead students through the process is in the best interests of the country. School-based counselors who have been trained in mental health services also can play a role in mental health and suicide prevention (issued addressed in the next section of this report). Finally, help define the role of a guidance counselor to make it easier to recruit people into this job and easier to determine success.

Invest in college preparatory programs for at-risk youth.

At-risk youth and first-generation college students may need extra support in the post-secondary education application process. Without the role model of someone has navigated the unfamiliar waters, external help to complete the application, along with financial and emotional support may be of great value to struggling students striking their own path. Implemented support/counsel could be very useful to students in need.

**Alyssa D.**

College Prep Programs for "At Risk" Youth

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I USED TO BE IN THE FEDERAL COLLEGE PREPARATION PROGRAM CALLED UPWARD BOUND (UB), CONNECTED TO MY LOCAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE, RCTC. UB IS DESIGNED FOR LOW-INCOME OR FIRST-GENERATION STUDENTS OF ALL BACKGROUNDS WHO MAY OTHERWISE NOT CONSIDER COLLEGE AFTER HIGH SCHOOL. I WAS ACCEPTED INTO THE PROGRAM AFTER FINISHING 8TH GRADE AND IT WAS SUPPOSED TO BE A FOUR YEAR PROGRAM, ALL THROUGHOUT MY HIGH SCHOOL CAREER.

UNFORTUNATELY, WITH THE NEW ADMINISTRATION, THIS PROGRAM'S FUNDING WAS CUT IN THE SUMMER OF 2017, RIGHT BEFORE MY SENIOR YEAR WHEN THE RESOURCES OFFERED THROUGH UB WOULD HAVE BEEN MOST VALUABLE—WHEN I HAD TO NAVIGATE THE CONFUSING REALM OF APPLYING TO COLLEGES/ FINANCIAL AID/SCHOLARSHIPS.

Alyssa D.

REDUCING STUDENT STRESS

Suicide is the third leading cause of death for youth between the ages of 10 and 24, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The death rate from suicide has nearly tripled since the 1940s. But the deaths from suicide—about 4,600 each year across the US—are just part of the story. More young people survive suicide attempts. A nationwide survey of high school students in the United States found that 16% of students reported seriously considering suicide, 13% reported creating a plan, and 8% reporting trying to take their own life in the 12 months preceding the survey. Each year, approximately 157,000 youth between the ages of 10 and 24 are treated in Emergency Departments across the U.S. for self-inflicted injuries.

In 2016, suicide was the leading cause of death among youth between the ages of 10 and 17 in Minnesota; 111 Minnesota youths died from suicide. Minnesota has a goal of zero youth suicides. To achieve that goal, the state is focused on identifying and connecting youth who are at risk with services and building healthy communities that empower and support youth and families. Yet, this comes at a time when overall pressure on students continues to rise and the resources available to help them cope continues to fall.

Students are under a tremendous strain these days. They trade sleep for academic success, spending long hours toiling over homework assignments and preparing for tests that carry tremendous import for their future (whether it's a standardized test that will determine their class placement or a class final that will determine whether they pass a class). Every day, on top of all their activities and school work, students face the challenges of bullying, at-home conflict and the inappropriate use of substances.

Expand assessment approaches.

Students get stressed over tests that have the power to impact their educational future—whether that means standardized grade-level tests that determine things like whether they'll be in advanced classes, ACT and SAT classes that determine which colleges they can get into or final tests that determine whether they will pass a class. It's particularly challenging for students who don't test well or who suffer from "test anxiety." A better approach would be a portfolio of work that assesses students overall. Some colleges already have moved to this approach.

Launch a peer-based group chat or hotline for stressed out students.

This would be a safe place for students who just need someone to rant to. They can post anonymously in the group chat. Or set it up as a hotline and students can call and talk with a peer who would listen. The volunteers would need some training so they can recognize students who need more than someone to listen to them rant. In those cases, the students would be referred to the suicide prevention hotline or to professional counselors.

**Hufsa A.**

Mental Health of Stud

An issue currently facing health. The pressure to and get perfect grades and mentally. Just over a high school who committed to take the ACT test. Obviously behind him taking his own life happened the day of the at my school and confidently school has set up adequate feeling overwhelmed and with stress in our lives. The spark that many students mental health issues affect many students to help be school so that everyone about mental health with that high schools across discussing mental health it is very important to make available everyday at all mental standpoint. Mental something that has been change that for the future

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THE PRESSURE THAT IS PUT ON STUDENTS TO PERFORM WELL AND GET PERFECT GRADES ISN'T HEALTHY FOR ANYONE, BOTH PHYSICALLY AND MENTALLY.

JUST OVER A MONTH AGO, THERE WAS A STUDENT AT MY HIGH SCHOOL WHO COMMITTED SUICIDE THE DAY HE WAS SCHEDULED TO TAKE THE ACT TEST.

OBVIOUSLY THERE WERE MANY REASONS BEHIND HIM TAKING HIS OWN LIFE, BUT IT WAS NO COINCIDENCE THAT IT HAPPENED THE DAY OF THE ACT.

I CAN SPEAK ON BEHALF OF STUDENTS AT MY SCHOOL AND CONFIDENTLY SAY THAT WE DON'T FEEL THAT OUR SCHOOL HAS SET UP ADEQUATE MEASURES TO HELP US WHEN WE ARE FEELING OVERWHELMED AND THAT IT DOESN'T TEACH US HOW TO DEAL WITH STRESS IN OUR LIVES.

Hufsa A.

Develop homework helplines.

This would be a central number students could call to get help at night when their teachers are not available. It could be community-based, or it could be a more centralized program that could take calls from students anywhere. It should be staffed with qualified teachers who have expertise in the subject. They could be full time teachers who are paid a stipend to work the evening hotline, much like teachers are paid a stipend to coach a sport team or oversee a theatrical production. Or the hotline could be staffed by retired teachers or other professionals. But they should be paid staff to ensure they have the subject matter expertise and teaching ability students need.

Increase funding for suicide prevention programs.

We talked earlier about the need for more guidance counselors to help students navigate the college application process. But high school counselors need to be trained to deal with students' mental health challenges, too. There are programs that can operate in schools, but schools need money and support to pay for training teachers, school bus drivers, coaches and others who might be able to spot the signs of potential suicide.

Limit the amount of homework students are assigned.

Students disagree about the way to do this, but they agree that it's needed. Among the possible approaches: Schools can set time limits on homework (10 minutes of homework for each hour in class). Or schools can say that only certain classes can assign homework on certain days. This would be similar to block scheduling that gives high school students a college-like class schedule. So, say, English and math teachers can give homework on Mondays and Wednesdays, while history and science teachers give homework on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Or teachers could simply get together and compare notes on homework loads. That way, if one teacher is giving a huge test on Thursday, another teacher can refrain from giving a big homework assignment on Wednesday night. Or schools could agree to give students time in class to work on homework, ensure that students have a study hall period or alter class schedules once a week school wide to give students an extra hour of time during the school day to do homework or get help from teachers.

**Catherine M.**

How schools warp our perception of the world

A senator recently told me not to "let grades get in the way of [my] education." And I took that sentiment to heart. I embraced the simplicity of that statement—that learning is not confined to the walls of a classroom or the strict scale of grade point averages, and yet when the final weeks of my junior year rolled around, it seemed that myself and my peers were largely consumed by the stress associated with the expectations to succeed in a standardized classroom setting. I'm not sure how to legislatively "solve" this predicament, instead, I have some observations, facts, and personal experiences to share.

I remember vividly my first MAP (Measure of Academic Progress) test: I was in second grade, I wore a pair of shoes with flowers on it, and I remember as my classmates went to the computer lab as they slowly finished their tests. I was the only student left in the lab, so when I completed the test, I had to walk back to my classroom by myself. I remember the walk seemed to drag on for years. I was exceedingly nervous that my score was "bad" and that it would stand as a label being separated into the accelerated program or not. Never once did the test appear to serve as a test of individual growth, it solely seemed to be a label that would determine my status as a student and my classroom placement. When I arrived at my classroom, though, and I timidly whispered my score to my teacher she bounced on the balls of her feet and brought me in front of the class to tell them that I had scored "above any student that she has ever taught." And she meant for it to be a celebration. I can remember how the frowns of my classmates grew into smiles. Already, a sense of competition and anxiety surrounded standardized testing was instilled in us. Later that year, when the accelerated program began, I would walk past the computer lab that had so recently been a home to stress but was now at the "high potential" room. I remember a student who came to me later and asking why the school thought she was in the "high potential." looking back at this, where I thought I was upset with me, she was really only upset with a system that plucked out certain students to put on a pedestal. I can't speak to her experience in high school, but I know that the expectation to remain on that pedestal has been a constant in my academic career, and I wager that for many students that those who are meant to be in honors classes are the select few identified in elementary school hindered the progress of the majority.



A SENATOR RECENTLY TOLD ME NOT TO "LET GRADES GET IN THE WAY OF [MY] EDUCATION." AND I TOOK THAT SENTIMENT TO HEART...MOSTLY.

I EMBRACED THE SIMPLICITY OF THAT STATEMENT—THAT LEARNING IS NOT CONFINED TO THE WALLS OF A CLASSROOM OR THE STRICT SCALE OF GRADE POINT AVERAGES, AND YET WHEN THE FINAL WEEKS OF MY JUNIOR YEAR ROLLED AROUND, IT SEEMED THAT MYSELF AND MY PEERS WERE LARGELY CONSUMED BY THE STRESS ASSOCIATED WITH THE EXPECTATIONS TO SUCCEED IN A STANDARDIZED CLASSROOM SETTING.

Catherine M.

KEEPING SCHOOLS SAFE FOR EVERYONE

When people think about how to keep schools safe for everyone, much of their energy is focused on keeping students safe from shooters. Leaders call for locked down schools. Or TSA-style metal detectors. Or arms training for teachers. While school shootings grab headlines, there many other, more subtle ways that students feel unsafe in schools. Bullying. Dating abuse. Coming out challenges. Discrimination. A general air of incivility.

Set a better example for civil discourse.

While we don't blame national political leaders solely for the lack of civil discourse in our individual schools, we do believe that our leaders have a responsibility to set a better example for students. Modeling the ability to compromise and to have disagreements without being disagreeable should be requirement of holding national office.

Step up federal enforcement of non-discrimination laws.

The Minnesota Department of Human Rights has identified 43 school districts and charter schools in the state where suspension and expulsion data demonstrate discrimination against minorities. The data analysis shows that students of color comprise 31 percent of the population, yet receive 66 percent of all suspensions and expulsions; students with disabilities comprise 14 percent of the population, yet receive 43 percent of all suspensions and expulsions. And, the department noted, "Students who are absent from the classroom are less likely to graduate and achieve success later in life." The state has taken on this enforcement in the wake of cutbacks at the federal level. It should not be left solely to the states to enforce non-discrimination laws.

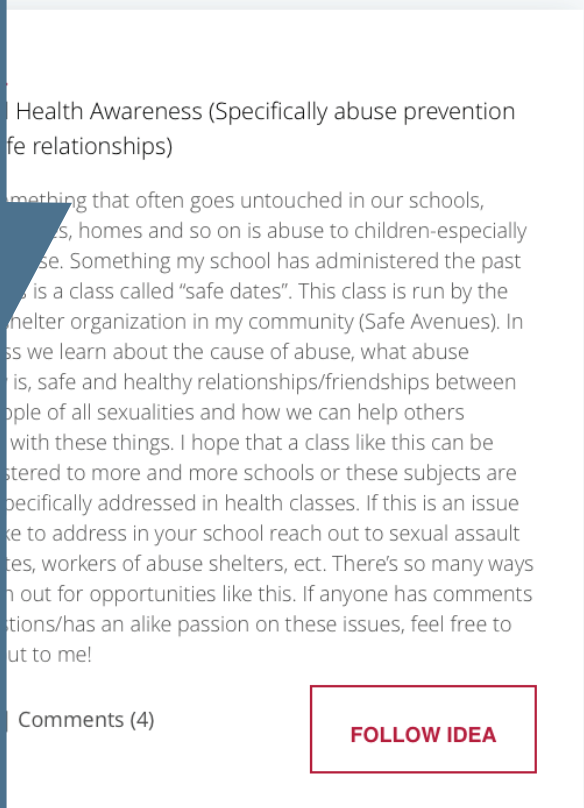


SOMETHING MY SCHOOL HAS ADMINISTERED THE PAST TWO YEARS IS A CLASS CALLED "SAFE DATES". THIS CLASS IS RUN BY THE ABUSE SHELTER ORGANIZATION IN MY COMMUNITY (SAFE AVENUES).

IN THIS CLASS WE LEARN ABOUT THE CAUSE OF ABUSE, WHAT ABUSE ACTUALLY IS, SAFE AND HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS/FRIENDSHIPS BETWEEN ALL PEOPLE OF ALL SEXUALITIES AND HOW WE CAN HELP OTHERS DEALING WITH THESE THINGS.

I HOPE THAT A CLASS LIKE THIS CAN BE ADMINISTERED TO MORE AND MORE SCHOOLS OR THESE SUBJECTS ARE MORE SPECIFICALLY ADDRESSED IN HEALTH CLASSES.

Amy H.



Offer more inclusive sex education.

Sex ed is traditionally taught only as heterosexual sex education. While it is difficult to come up with accurate statistics on the number of non-heterosexual people in the United States, studies and polls suggest that it could 5 percent of the adult population. The percentage could be higher for young people. But the statistics don't matter. Sex ed that is strictly hetero does not provide sexual health information that all students need. Students need to know how to have safe sex in all its forms because our sexual actions may not always align with our identities.

Change the conversation about guns.

Discussion of "gun control" is controversial, even among the students in this Idea Forum. But shifting the conversation to one about "gun violence prevention" could make a difference. Who doesn't want to prevent gun violence?

Do a better job of enforcing the gun laws already on the books.

Rally support in Congress for increasing appropriations to the Bureau of Alcohol, Firearms, and Tobacco. Conservatives are likely to agree to such an initiative because it furthers their "tough on crime" narrative; they are much more likely to agree to something that is stopping illegal activity.

**Ani C.**

Intersection of sexual health education for students

I am a student who will graduate in the fall. I will reflect upon my freshman year when I typically took a health course. The health course features sexual health education for school students.

However, the sexual health education for the LGBT+ community is not typically taught to lesbian and feel it is important.

Two main changes I would like to see if I become a teacher is:

- 1) sexual health education for all students
- 2) education on queer identities

What I and other students have learned is not taught through a heterosexist lens. I did a teacher or visitor experience. Knowledge of all types of gender identities is offered in class. Safe sex is taught to all students.

To be fair, the condom and lubricant program will also congratulate Minnesota's health program than other states. It can be given in the school based on the requirements required for students. It is important to be required to take comprehensive sexual education.

It is a trend in school for non-binary students whose pronouns not aligned to their perceived bodies to be left with the extra stress of coming out and asking for their correct pronouns. It is emotionally draining for students to come out. School needs to be a space where they feel safe to express themselves and be treated with respect. Health class can be an opportunity for the normalization of pronoun rounds and teaching details about transgender students and other gender identities. This will reduce the stress on misgendered or asked disrespectful questions about their gender outside the classroom.



IT IS A TREND IN SCHOOL FOR NON-BINARY STUDENTS WHO HAVE PRONOUNS NOT ALIGNED TO THEIR PERCEIVED BODIES TO BE LEFT WITH THE EXTRA STRESS OF COMING OUT AND ASKING FOR THEIR CORRECT PRONOUNS.

IT IS EMOTIONALLY DRAINING FOR STUDENTS TO CONSTANTLY COME OUT. SCHOOL NEEDS TO BE A SPACE WHERE THEY FEEL SAFE TO EXPRESS THEMSELVES AND BE TREATED WITH RESPECT. HEALTH CLASS CAN BE AN OPPORTUNITY FOR THE NORMALIZATION OF PRONOUN ROUNDS AND TEACHING DETAILS ABOUT TRANSGENDER STUDENTS AND OTHER GENDER IDENTITIES.

THIS WILL PUT LESS STRESS ON STUDENTS WHO ARE MISGENDERED OR ASKED DISRESPECTFUL QUESTIONS ABOUT THEIR GENDER OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM.

Ani C.

**Arjun M. MODERATOR PICK**

Gun Violence

One of the most pressing issues facing students in Minnesota—and across the nation—is gun violence. There have been 23 mass shootings in schools already in 2018; however, most state legislatures have refused to acknowledge the issue. Republicans are wary of change and Democrats are not unified in their opposition to the status quo, so the violence has toiled on. We should feel safe in our schools and communities, which is why



WE CAN COME CLOSER TO CREATING SAFER SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES BY TAKING COLLABORATIVE, UNCONTROVERSIAL, STEPS TO CONTROL GUN VIOLENCE. THE ISSUE OF GUN VIOLENCE SHOULDN'T BE A PARTISAN ISSUE—AND IT DOESN'T HAVE TO BE.

Arjun M.

crime are obtained illegally. So, precautions like background checks and bump stock bans are largely ineffectual. By appropriating funds to the Bureau of Alcohol, Firearms, and Tobacco for the specific purpose of crippling the lucrative gun black market, criminals will have a harder time accessing the guns used to commit mass shootings. Cracking down on illegal activity has always been a valence issue—so garnering support for a legislative initiative like this would not take too much political capital.

In conclusion

Students have strong opinions and lots to say about the issues facing America and its youth.

We believe these ideas will increase opportunities for long-term success, help connect students more closely to our democracy and ensure the youth of Minnesota are ready to lead when their turn comes.



The Minnesota Youth Council (MYC) is a collaboration of youth and adults working together to empower and mobilize young people across the state to exercise their voices, opinions and ideas and take action on issues affecting youth.



At New Voice Strategies, our mission is to create, incubate and launch projects to heal divides, restore compassion and strengthen our self-government.

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