

#HearNowON

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

What We Heard

School Mental Health Ontario (SMH-ON) and Wisdom2Action (W2A) launched **#HearNowON: Student Voices on Mental Health** to connect with secondary school students in Ontario on their priorities regarding mental health. 1,028 students and young people across Ontario participated through an online survey and approximately 159 young people participated through regional forums or the data analysis process.

1187
PARTICIPANTS

THREE KEY OBJECTIVES WERE EXPLORED:

- 1 TO DETERMINE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' MENTAL HEALTH KNOWLEDGE NEEDS AND LEARNING PREFERENCES.**
- 2 TO GATHER STUDENT IDEAS FOR BUILDING MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS, REDUCING STIGMA, AND ENHANCING WELLNESS AT SCHOOL.**
- 3 TO LEARN MORE ABOUT WAYS THAT STUDENTS WOULD LIKE TO GET INVOLVED IN PROVINCIAL, REGIONAL, SCHOOL BOARD, AND SCHOOL-LEVEL MENTAL HEALTH INITIATIVES.**

97%

WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH IN SCHOOLS

Mental Health Knowledge

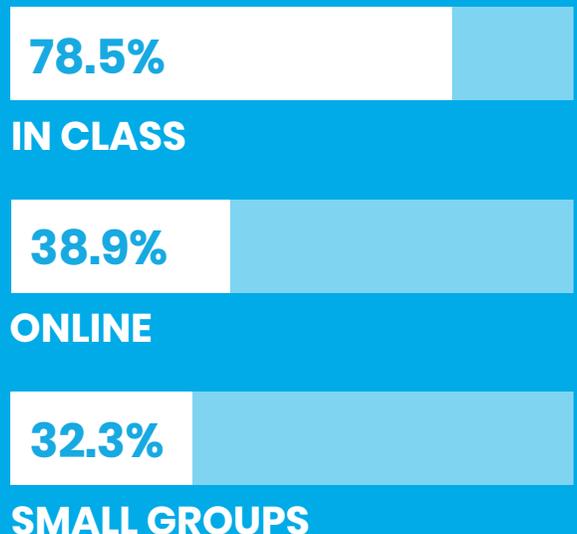
A resounding 97% of survey respondents indicated that they want to learn more about mental health at school. In particular, respondents highlighted that they want to learn most about:

- early warning signs of a mental health problem,
- ways to cope with their thoughts and emotions,
- how and where to ask for help, and
- how to help a friend.

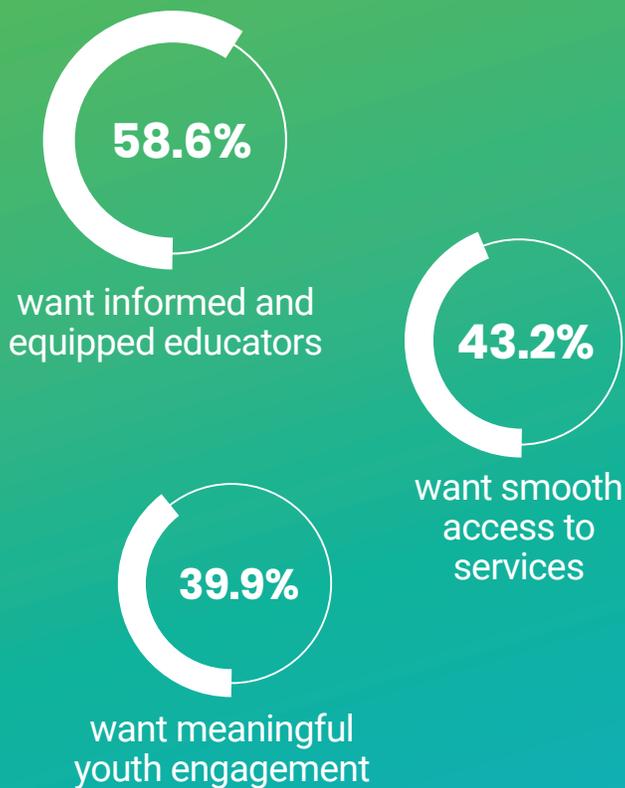
Students also noted the importance of developing social-emotional skills related to coping with transitions, stress, maintaining healthy relationships, staying optimistic and hopeful in the face of challenges, managing their emotions, and engaging in emotional self-care.

Student Learning Preferences

The majority of survey respondents, 78.5%, indicated they want to learn about mental health in the classroom as part of regular instruction. Other methods were endorsed much less frequently; 38.9% indicated that on-line learning could be useful and 32.3% were in favour of small group discussions during lunch or after school. Students would like to learn from mental health professionals, educators, and parents, but noted that educators and parents need support/resources to ensure that they have the most up-to-date, evidence-based knowledge in this area first.

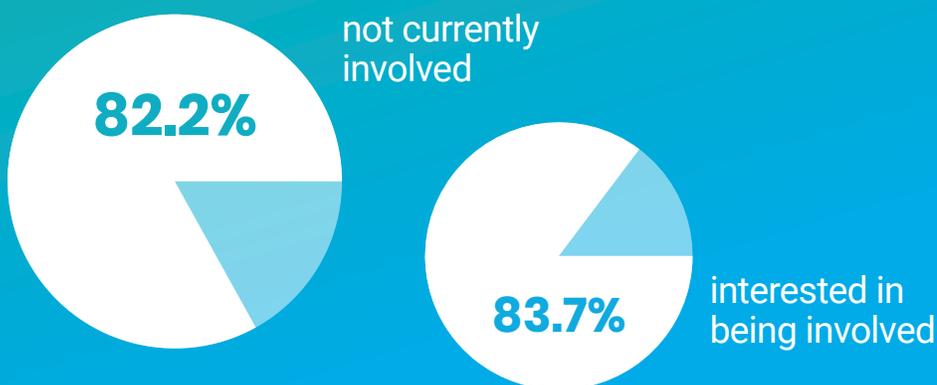


Priorities for School Mental Health



The most frequently endorsed priorities by survey respondents for school mental health more generally were: ensuring educators are informed and equipped (58.6%), providing smooth access to services and supports (43.2%), and offering a platform for meaningful youth engagement (39.9%). In addition, particularly through the regional forums, students highlighted the importance of bringing a lens of equity to this work, encouraging a broader understanding of the connection between discrimination and mental health problems, and stronger staff and student education on anti-discrimination, inclusion and anti-oppression.

Student Engagement and Leadership



82.2% of survey respondents indicated they are not currently involved in mental health leadership initiatives at their school. 83.7% indicated interest in being involved in mental health leadership.

Ideas for Student Engagement and Leadership

Students indicated that they have an important role to play in peer helping, and sharing of mental health information with other students, but that they need training and support in this area from adult allies who have expertise in this area. Students also suggested that students can help with promoting self-care practices at school and highlighted how important it was to set a tone where social and emotional wellness is prioritized. They noted that they need greater support for mental health clubs, events, and other initiatives, so that good ideas can spread and take hold.

Next Steps

Through this initiative, we heard from more than 1,000 students and identified five key recommendations to inform school mental health work moving forward.

We look forward to working alongside students to bring these recommendations to life as part of Ontario's School Mental Health Strategy.

- 1 STUDENTS WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH, AS PART OF THEIR REGULAR SCHOOL DAY**
- 2 STUDENTS WANT THEIR TEACHERS TO LEARN MORE ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH SO THEY CAN BE A STRONG RESOURCE IN THIS AREA**
- 3 STUDENTS WANT BETTER AND CLEARER ACCESS TO SUPPORTS AND SERVICES THROUGH SCHOOL**
- 4 STUDENTS WANT US TO HONOUR DIVERSITY AND PRIORITIZE INCLUSION AND BELONGING**
- 5 STUDENTS WANT TO BE BETTER INFORMED ABOUT, AND ENGAGED IN, MENTAL HEALTH PROMOTION AND STIGMA REDUCTION INITIATIVES**