

CHALLENGESUCCESS



2024-2025

ANNUAL REPORT

*We see proof
every day
that lasting
change is
possible when
we center
student voice.*



A MESSAGE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Each year, I am reminded that the work of Challenge Success is both urgent and deeply hopeful. Across the country and around the world, schools are striving to build learning environments where every student feels a sense of well-being, engagement, and belonging. This work isn't easy, but it's essential.

This year's report celebrates the courage and creativity of the students, educators, and families who are reimagining what success can look like. From student-led research on coping strategies to schools transforming their schedules and classrooms to better support balance and joy, we see proof every day that lasting change is possible when we center student voice.

Our team is proud to have partnered with over 100 schools last year, across 26 states and 11 countries, all of which are committed to fostering environments where students can excel academically and thrive emotionally. These stories remind us that when we listen to students and act together, we create systems that help young people thrive in every sense of the word.

Thank you for being part of this movement. Your generosity fuels our mission and ensures that more schools and families can join this work. Together, we are shaping a future where every student feels seen, supported, and inspired to succeed on their own terms.

Megan Pacheco

MEGAN PACHECO
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

ABOUT OUR WORK

Challenge Success is a non-profit organization affiliated with the Stanford Graduate School of Education. We work to improve K-12 student well-being, engagement, and belonging with the aim of all students leading healthier, more balanced lives.

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



LEVERS FOR CHANGE

We believe that school communities must be a place where students have positive outcomes in engagement, well-being and belonging, especially those for whom identity, culture, or socioeconomic status has resulted in barriers to access and success. To that end, we use three levers in the way we support school communities:

**Center change in
the student
experience**



**Co-design with
all community
members**



**Implement research-
based, equity-centered
policies and practices**



*Visit our website to learn more
about the School Change Process.*

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.

OUR S.P.A.C.E FRAMEWORK

At Challenge Success, we have organized our research-based, equity-centered strategies into a framework we call S.P.A.C.E. This framework embodies our vision to create educational systems that 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. We have identified five categories of change that contribute to positive outcomes in student well-being, belonging and engagement.



SUPPORTIVE SCHEDULE
& USE OF TIME



PEDAGOGY THAT
ENGAGES



ALTERNATIVE & AUTHENTIC
ASSESSMENT



CLIMATE OF CARE



EDUCATION FOR
EVERYONE

COPING WITH STRESS:

How Students Are Adapting in a Complex World

At Challenge Success, we recognize that academic pressure, social dynamics, family expectations, and global events are ever present in students' day-to-day lives. And while these stressors persist, we are encouraged by the ways students are learning to cope with them. In collaboration with our partner schools, we're seeing students develop adaptive coping strategies. These practical, often self-driven methods are helping students to manage stress in healthier and more sustainable ways.

Drawing on data from over 50,000 high school students surveyed between 2022 and 2025, we found that while stress remains a concern, many students are employing proactive coping tools. These include physical activity, artistic expression, social support, and reframing negative thoughts, skills that are protective for mental health and academic engagement. Challenge Success surveys indicate a positive correlation between students' confidence in their coping skills and their well-being, engagement, and belonging at school.

A Framework for Understanding Coping

Understanding how coping works in a school context requires a clear framework. We propose a four-part structure. Each component provides a key point of intervention for educators and school systems.

**STRESSOR****APPRAISAL****RESPONSE****REFLECTION**

36%

of adolescents report being **quite confident** in their ability to cope with everyday stress.

36%

of adolescents report being **somewhat confident** in their ability to cope with everyday stress.

28%

of adolescents report **low or no confidence** in their ability to cope with everyday stress.



What Is Adaptive Coping?

Adaptive coping includes responses such as problem solving, seeking help, strategizing, and reframing the situation. These responses are constructive, engagement-oriented, and associated with better emotional and behavioral outcomes. Maladaptive coping, by contrast, includes procrastination, denial, helplessness, and/or giving up. These disengagement strategies may offer short-term relief but often lead to long-term setbacks (Skinner, Pitzer, & Steele, 2013; Skinner & Wellborn, 2019).

Our data show that 36% of adolescents report being confident in their ability to cope with everyday stress. Another 36% are somewhat confident, and 28% report low or no confidence. While not the same as measuring whether children's actual coping is adaptive or maladaptive, we posit that confidence in coping is a useful proxy for the sense that a child's coping skills are well matched with the amount and nature of stress they are experiencing. Higher confidence in coping means a better perceived match between stress demands and available resources; lower confidence points towards a more unhealthy mismatch between demands and resources. Notably, lower confidence in coping correlates with higher incidence of physical symptoms due to stress.

Figure 1. How confident high school students are in their ability to cope with stress

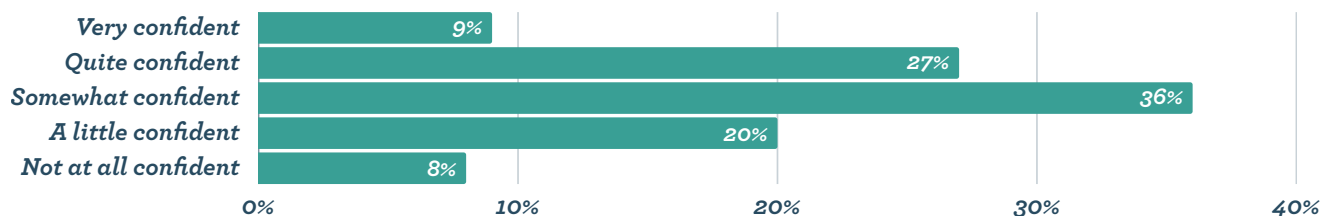
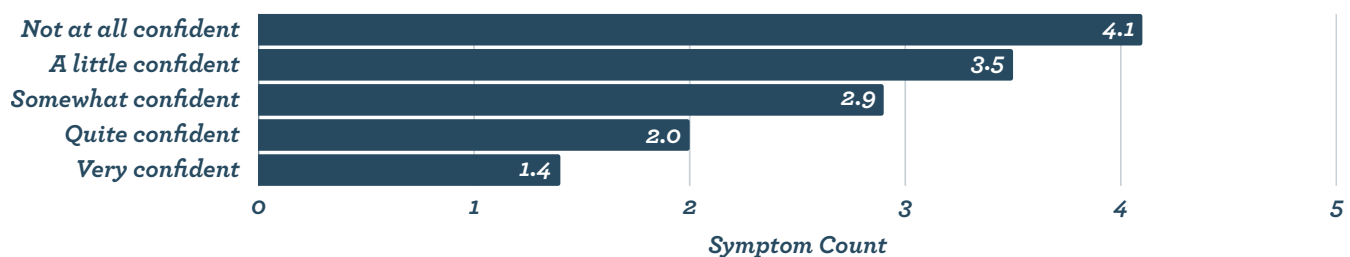


Figure 2. High school students' ability to cope with stress by health symptom count



Challenge Success-Stanford Survey of Student Experiences, 2022-2025, n=83,491 high school students; physical symptoms of stress include headaches, exhaustion, difficulty sleeping, stomachaches, etc.



Interested in learning more? [Download our full Coping Brief here.](#)

STUDENT-LED INNOVATION:

Coping Research at Miramonte High

At Miramonte High School, a group of students inspired by Challenge Success took research into their own hands. Partnering with Challenge Success staff, they created and distributed their own school-wide coping survey and presented their findings to peers, teachers, and school leaders.

Their presentation revealed valuable insights:

72%

of students reported experiencing academic-related stress.

54%

of students reported feeling burnt out.

“We wanted to understand what our classmates were feeling—and more importantly, what helped them feel better. We learned that small changes can have a big impact.”

-Student

These findings not only informed local changes, such as advisory check-ins and mindfulness breaks during class, but also inspired students to begin drafting a paper for potential publication.

STUDENT-LED INNOVATION:

Coping Research at Miramonte High

Their research, combined with student feedback, points to several strategies for building resilience and mitigating burnout:



Prioritize Sleep

A recurring theme from students was the critical importance of prioritizing sleep. This emphasis on healthy sleep contrasts sharply with some less healthy coping mechanisms students reported, such as relying on caffeine, skipping school, or simply “toughing it out” until burnout inevitably strikes.



Move Beyond Test-Heavy Approaches

Students advocated for different ways of assessing learning that move beyond traditional, test-heavy approaches. They suggested incorporating more projects, discussions, and opportunities to develop artistic skills, such as posters. Students can take action in their communities and feel motivated to be engaged as a result.



Student-Teacher Communication

One solution emerged as a crucial component for addressing student burnout at a school level: improved student-teacher communication. Students consistently emphasized the need for teachers to offer specific guidance on study tools and the exact test format, detailing how they can best prepare for their particular class. Even more significantly, students expressed a strong desire for teachers to be openly receptive and empathetic when discussing student stress levels.



Read the full [research piece by Miramonte Students x Challenge Success here.](#)

A SPOTLIGHT ON OUR SCHOOL PARTNERS

We are proud to celebrate our school partners and the powerful transformations they've made in student well-being, engagement, and belonging. Check out a few of the new School Spotlights we published this year that highlight the impact of the Challenge Success School Partnership!



KAMSC

Learn how Kalamazoo Area Math and Science Center reduced academic pressure without sacrificing learning.



HTMNC

Read about how High Tech Middle North County built on its strong culture and increased student belonging.



[Read our School Spotlights here!](#)



112

Through our School Partnership, Workshops, and Surveys, we worked with a total of 112 schools, districts, and school groups during the 2024-25 school year.

37

Our work reached at least 26 states and 11 countries outside the US, in addition to virtual attendees from far and wide.

39,919

Thousands of students completed our survey in the 2024-2025 school year. Along with students, 2,181 faculty and staff completed surveys, as well as 4,457 parents and caregivers.



Visit our website to learn more about our surveys for students, parents / caregivers, and faculty / staff.

THANK YOU TO ALL OF THE SCHOOLS & DISTRICTS THAT WORKED WITH US IN 2024-25!

Arkansas School for Mathematics,
Sciences, and the Arts - AR
The High School for Math, Science, and
Engineering at the City College of NY - NY
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Action Day Schools - CA
Advanced Math and Science Academy Charter
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Brentwood School - CA
Bret Harte Middle School - CA
Brooks School - MA
Campbell Hall Episcopal School
(Upper School) - CA
Carmel High School - NY
Carnegie Vanguard High School - TX
Castilleja School (Middle School team) - CA
Castilleja School (Upper School team) - CA
Chandler School - CA
Cheney High School - WA
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Crofton House School - BC
Crosstown High - TN
Cupertino Union School District - CA
Dawson School - CO
Dominguez High School - CA
Episcopal School of Jacksonville - FL
Flintridge Sacred Heart Academy - CA
Frensham School - Australia
Glen Rock High School - NJ
Graland Country Day School - CO
Gulliver Preparatory School (Middle School) - FL
Gulliver Preparatory School (Upper School) - FL

Head-Royce School - CA
Henry M. Gunn High School - CA
High Tech Middle North County - CA
Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy - IL
Imago Dei Middle School - AZ
Incarnate Word Academy - Corpus Christi - TX
Independent Schools Association of the Central States - IL
Irvington High School - NY
Jesuit High School - CA
Jewish LearningWorks - CA
Kalamazoo Area Mathematics and Science Center - MI
Kentucky Country Day School - KY
La Cañada Unified School District - CA
Laguna Beach Unified School District - CA
Legacy Magnet Academy - CA
Lick-Wilmerding High School - CA
Los Alamitos High School - CA
Marin Academy - CA
Marist Catholic High School - OR
Mayfield Senior School - CA
McAuliffe Middle School - CA
Millennium School - CA



Miramonte High School - CA
 Miss Porter's School - CT
 Mission San Jose High School - CA
 Montclair Kimberley Academy - NJ
 Napa Valley Unified School District - CA
 Northwood High School - CA
 Oak Middle School - CA
 Oak Park Unified School District - CA
 Pembroke Hill Upper School - MO
 Phillips Brooks School - CA
 Pinewood School - Middle Campus - CA
 Pinewood School - Upper Campus - CA
 Ransom Everglades School - FL
 Regis High School - NY
 Rhinebeck High School - NY
 Rothesay Netherwood School - Rothesay
 Rye High School - NY
 Rye Middle School - NY
 SHOFCO Schools - Kenya
 Saint Ignatius High School - OH
 Samueli Academy - CA
 Shady Side Academy (Middle School) - PA
 Shady Side Academy (Upper School) - PA
 Shanghai American School - China
 St. Andrew's Episcopal School - MD
 St. Stephen's & St. Agnes School-Lower School - VA
 St. Stephen's & St. Agnes School-Middle School - VA
 St. Stephen's & St. Agnes School-Upper School - VA

"As I reflect on the last four years of partnership with Challenge Success, I want to express my heartfelt appreciation. The teachings, the research, and the guiding tenets of your work have left a profound mark on our school and on me personally. Your message and your mission resonate deeply."

*-School Partnership
 Administrator*

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THANK YOU TO OUR GENEROUS DONORS FOR THEIR SUPPORT

\$810,350

Total philanthropy from July 1, 2024 to June 30, 2025, including fundraising events, grants, and individual contributions/pledges, and in-kind donations.

The following list includes donor recognition for July 1, 2024 through June 30, 2025. Every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of names. If you have any questions or feedback, please reach out to giving@challengesuccess.org.

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"We want our community to be somewhere where parents, teachers, and students are working together to create the best school and best environment we can."

-School Leader

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Visit our website to read the bios of our wonderful team members and learn more about their expertise.

*Outgoing member

YOUR SUPPORT MATTERS TO STUDENTS ACROSS THE COUNTRY

2025 FALL ANNUAL FUND

Last year, you helped to raise over \$400,000 in our Annual Fund drive! Stay tuned for events and updates coming this fall to kick off our fundraising for the year.

November 12-December 31, 2025

SAVE THE DATE: FEBRUARY 11 2026 WINTER FUNDRAISER

We can't wait to see you in-person again in February! More details coming soon!

February 11th, 2026 | San Francisco, California

The Officer's Club at the Presidio

YOU ARE OUR GREATEST AMBASSADORS

Word of mouth is the number one way that schools and families learn about us. Who do you know in your networks - near and far - who you might introduce to our work? Consider inviting them to an event, sharing a post on social media, or forwarding a newsletter sometime this year.

READY TO MAKE A GIFT TODAY?

Scan the code to visit our [website](#) and learn about all of the ways you can support Challenge Success, including gifts through Donor Advised Funds, corporate matching, and more. Gifts are welcome and appreciated any time before June 30, 2026. Tax ID: 45-3767621.

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