

## CASE STUDY

### Youth Wellbeing

# Schools Use Health and Wellness Surveys to Drive Action on Improving Student Health

### About the Schools

The Young Women's Leadership Schools (TYWLS) are a network of public schools that serve girls in New York City, operated by the Young Women's Leadership Network (YWLN). The five all-girls schools, serving over 2,500 students in grades 6-12, offer youth in low-income communities a high-quality college prep education. The majority of TYWLS students are youth of color. TYWLS alumnae earn four-year college degrees at an extremely high rate – nearly four times that of their peers.

### The Challenge

YWLN had a strong interest in improving TYWLS students' health and wellness outcomes, but students' needs were not fully understood by YWLN. In order to provide appropriate health and wellness supports to TYWLS students, YWLN needed a window into their needs.

### The Solution and Insights

Actionable Insights teamed up with Dr. Bonnie Halpern-Felsher, a nationally-renowned adolescent health researcher at Stanford University, to build a set of appropriately sensitive, validated survey questions for teachers/counselors and students. IRB approval for the study was obtained from both Stanford University and the New York City Department of Education. The surveys were administered online to consented TYWLS students and staff.

Actionable Insights analyzed the survey data and provided a timely report to YWLN that included the following insights:

- **Fitness & Nutrition:** Less than half of student respondents exercised more than two times per week. Slightly over half were a healthy weight (based on CDC BMI tables); one quarter were overweight and nearly one in five were obese. Up to 10% may have been experiencing issues with adequate food security and/or nutrition.
- **Mental Health:** Over a third of students felt their daily life over the past month was moderately or extremely stressful and nearly two in five responded to an adapted depression scale in a way that suggested they may have a depressive disorder.

- **Bullying:** Many students had experienced one or more forms of taunting or verbal bullying. The most frequent forms (e.g., being cursed at) were experienced by up to half of students. About 10% had experienced at least one aspect of social media bullying and/or physical bullying at least once in the prior month.
- **Trauma:** All participants in the teacher/counselor survey agreed on the importance of using a trauma-informed approach to serving vulnerable students. However, less than half indicated that they had training on being “trauma-informed.”

“Jen and Melanie supported us through our first-ever health and wellness assessment at our organization, which has been around for 21 years. This process was long and required dedication and commitment. We could not have done it without their hard work and expertise. The results have enabled us to continue our social work program in our five schools and we are in the process of developing advisory curriculum to address the findings.”

**Amanda Rosenblum, M.A.**  
Associate Director, Girls’ Education, YWLN

## Action Plans

Based on recommendations from Actionable Insights and Stanford University, YWLN has:

- Used data from the report to secure on-going funding for TYWLS social work interns.
- Obtained funding to bring training in trauma-informed instruction to TYWLS staff.
- Convened TYWLS leadership to identify next steps in the areas of:
  - ✓ Youth mental health
  - ✓ Bullying and relationship aggression
  - ✓ Nutrition and physical health
  - ✓ Teacher training/professional development

## About Actionable Insights, LLC

Actionable Insights helps organizations discover and act on data-driven insights to achieve better outcomes. Organizations come to Actionable Insights’ for help in:

- Measuring their impact
- Discovering key insights in their data
- Better telling the story of their work
- Planning and executing effective, data-driven action

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