



# **YOUTH HELP-SEEKING AROUND MENTAL HEALTH**

Promoting early identification through  
school-based mental health education

# SUMMARY

## Findings

### 1: Universal Programs Work

12% of students were more comfortable talking with a trusted adult, about their mental health, at school after completing the Erika's Lighthouse program.

### 2: Gaps

93% of students identified a Teacher as a trusted adult, but only 50% of them were comfortable talking with a trusted adult, about their mental health, at school.

### 3: Obstacles

Students that reported being uncomfortable talking to a trusted adult fell by 23% from pre to post program.

### 4: Title I Schools

Students in Title I schools were 7% less likely to identify a teacher as a trusted adult, compared to Non-Title I Schools.

### 5: Race & Ethnicity

The gains from pre-program to post-program were more substantial for students in predominantly-Black and Hispanic schools, by 9% and 11%, respectively, compared to 7% for students in predominantly-White schools.

### 6: Families Are The Most Important Trusted Adults

96% of students identified a Parent or Grandparent as a trusted adult, and over 75% of students were comfortable talking to a trusted adult about their mental health at home. This is, by far, the most important group for young people to turn to if they are in need.

## Recommendations

### 1: Implement Effective Education & Prevention Programs

Every school should have Tier-1, universal, evidence-informed mental health programs.

### 2: Go Deeper: Promote an Inclusive School Culture

Schools must take a comprehensive approach to youth mental health that educates and engages students, families and school professionals.

### 3: Respect Student Voice

Fostering meaningful opportunities for students to participate, share and positively impact their school communities is vital to ensure efforts are effective.

### 4: Community-Based Organizations Need to Start the Conversation

Community-based organizations, like after-school programs or sports clubs, can play a vital role in advancing conversations around mental health.

### 5: Community-wide, Comprehensive Approaches are Needed

A community-wide and comprehensive approach is essential to meaningfully address these challenges to support young people from early childhood and beyond.

### 6: Diversity and Representation Is Vital

Every young person is different and we should recognize, celebrate and include differences in our programs. And, while every young person is different - so is every classroom, community-based organization, school professional and family.

### 7: Partnerships Are Vital

School-based programs have a unique opportunity to help identify gaps in their own offerings and foster impactful partnerships that can fill those gaps, improve their own efforts and improve school cultures. There are also opportunities for providers and community-based organizations to work more closely together to ensure alignment.

### 8: Families Must Be Informed and Supportive

It is important to recognize that families are young people's most-identified trusted adults and that most students are comfortable talking about mental health at home.

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## Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the school professionals and students who bring our programs to life by championing mental health in their schools. Without their dedication to education and prevention, we would not be able to make the impact we have on millions of young people since 2004.

We are also thankful to our generous donors, volunteers and staff who keep our mission alive day in and day out.

### About Erika's Lighthouse

Erika's Lighthouse is a national nonprofit that believes every child deserves good mental health. We are on a mission to provide free mental health programs to any school, anywhere. Recognizing schools are the heart of every community, our programs work to educate and empower students, families and educators about mental health, depression and suicide.

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## Background and Purpose

Adolescents are experiencing mental distress at significant rates. The latest data from the 2023 Youth Risk Behavior Study reports that 40% of high school students have experienced persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness in the past year, up from 28% in 2011 (1). Over 90% of individuals who die by suicide have an underlying mental health issue (2). Among U.S. youth ages 10-18 years, suicide is the second leading cause of death (3). There are specific subgroups of youth who are more at risk for suicide, including youth who are Indigenous or Female, identify as LGBTQ+ or have experienced racism (1).

This means that early identification and intervention of mental health challenges is a key preventative factor for suicide.

Erika's Lighthouse knows that young people, when equipped with the right tools, are capable of supporting their mental health and advocating for their health. Youth help-seeking and self-reporting is a key factor in supporting teens' mental health. However, as this report will demonstrate, many young people are uncomfortable talking about mental health. It is important to identify ways to reduce this discomfort and help teens engage in meaningful conversations with trusted adults around mental health.

Erika's Lighthouse wants to help students identify trusted adults and increase their comfort level with speaking to those trusted adults. This study was completed to evaluate Erika's Lighthouse programs, collect valuable insights into teens' perspectives on help-seeking and trusted adults, and discover new ways to increase help-seeking.

Erika's Lighthouse Classroom Education programs teach mental health literacy, depression education and suicide prevention with the goal of reducing stigma, normalizing conversations, encouraging good mental health and, especially, encourage help-seeking. These 1-4 days programs are used in classrooms around the country to achieve these goals.

A key provider of this type of education are school communities. Erika's Lighthouse programs are designed to be implemented within school communities, by school professionals, and the data from this report was collected during the 2021-22, 2022-23, and 2023-24 school years from schools around the country teaching the Erika's Lighthouse Level II and Level III and using the pre-program and post-program survey tools.

## Methodology

A quantitative approach was used with diverse samples of students grades 5-12 across the U.S education system. The surveys were completed by students who participated in the Level II and Level III Erika's Lighthouse programs with both pre-program and post-program surveys. A total of 18,077 pre-program surveys were completed and 15,271 post-program surveys across 515 schools. This group was broadly representative of the U.S. schools, including private, public and charter schools, as well as urban, suburban and rural. Students represented various socio-economic groups, race and ethnicities, and geographies. Student demographic data was gathered from school-reported, public databases.

The pre/post surveys include 8-9 questions. In this report, we share the responses to the following two questions as they are most aligned with student help-seeking:

- Which of the following are examples of who could be a Trusted Adult (select all that apply).
- I would be comfortable talking with a trusted adult about my mental health (select all that are true).



# FINDINGS

## FINDING 1

### Universal Programs Work

Universal programs that impact every student in a school community, otherwise known as Tier-1 programs, are vital and effective in supporting youth help-seeking around mental health.

Students reported an increase in identifying those who could be trusted adults.

**Survey Question:** Which of the following are examples of who could be a Trusted Adult (select all that apply):

	Pre-Program	Post-Program	Change
Parent/Grandparent	95%	96%	1%
Teacher	85%	93%	8%
Counselor	84%	92%	8%
Coach	72%	86%	14%
Pastor/Rabbi/Religious Leader	63%	79%	16%

This is a key aspect of Erika's Lighthouse programs. Recognizing that any adult could be a trusted adult is important. Young people who have challenging home lives, struggle at school, or do not participate in community-based activities may need to be more creative and thoughtful about who they can speak with. And, in those instances, are encouraged to seek out prospective adults to ask for support.

While identifying potential trusted adults is important, students must also be comfortable speaking with them.

**Survey Question:** I would be comfortable talking with a trusted adult about my mental health (select all that are true):

	Pre-Program	Post-Program	Change
At home	75%	77%	2%
At school	38%	50%	12%
In the community	18%	28%	10%

The numbers represent a substantial increase in a student's comfort level in speaking with a trusted adult about their mental health. A full 12% of students were more comfortable speaking with a trusted adult at school after completing the Erika's Lighthouse program, while 10% were more comfortable speaking with someone in the community.

The Erika's Lighthouse program helped young people be more comfortable talking to an adult about their mental health, but it is also likely the program promoted increases in a young person's ability to identify new trusted adults.



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## FINDING 2 Gaps

There are significant gaps between who students know should be trusted adults, and who they are comfortable with talking about their mental health.

According to post-program surveys:

Which of the following are examples of who could be a Trusted Adult (select all that apply):		Gaps	I would be comfortable talking with a trusted adult about my mental health (select all that are true):	
Parent/ Grandparent	96%	19%	77%	At home
Teacher	93%	42%	50%	At school
Counselor	92%			
Coach	86%	51%	28%	In the community
Pastor/Rabbi/ Religious Leader	79%			

While the numbers of who could be a trusted adult are high, those numbers did not translate to who students are comfortable talking to about their mental health at home, at school or in the community.



### At home

While a large majority of students would be comfortable speaking about their mental health at home (up from 75% Pre-Program), a gap of 19% still exists.

A greater issue exists with help-seeking at schools. 93%, 92% and 86% of students identify a teacher, counselor or coach, respectively, as a potential trusted adult (up from 85%, 84%, and 72%). However, only 50% would be comfortable speaking with a trusted adult at school (up from 38% pre-program). School-based prevention programs, like Erika's Lighthouse, have a positive impact in helping normalize conversations and demonstrate to students that adults in their schools care about them and want to support their mental health. However, a 42% gap remains.



### At school



### In the community

Lastly, supporting student mental health in the community through trusted adults is a particular concern. Students can identify community-based adults as trusted adults, with 86% selecting a coach and 79% a religious leader. However, only 28% are comfortable speaking with a trusted adult about their mental health.

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**FINDING 3  
Obstacles**



While the majority of students can identify a potential trusted adult AND identify one they can trust, there are still young people who do not feel comfortable talking about mental health or do not have a trusted adult in their life. Learning more about these young people and how we can support them is vital for families and school communities.

**Students Uncomfortable Talking to a Trusted Adult about Mental Health**

**Students reporting “I am not comfortable” talking with a trusted adult about mental health.**

	Pre-Program	Post-Program
All Schools	21%	16%
First Time Implementation	21.6%	16.3%
Repeat Implementation	20%	15.6%

The percent of students uncomfortable talking with a trusted adult about their mental health fell by 23%. While the results are very promising, more work is needed. All students should feel comfortable having difficult conversations with a trusted adult. While there are many reasons a young person may be uncomfortable, there are actions that can be taken.

**Repeating Education and Conversations**

One area that demonstrates opportunity is repeating educational programming. Students in schools that were implementing programs for a second year or more reported lower rates of discomfort in both their pre and post program surveys, compared to students in schools receiving programming for the first time.

Normalizing conversations, establishing values, and equipping students with a shared vocabulary is effective and necessary. While this is an important step, school communities and families can be doing more to ensure every trusted adult in a student’s life is having meaningful conversations around mental health - in the home, school and community.

**Students Who Report Not Having a Trusted Adult**

The larger challenge for families, schools and communities are the number of students reporting not having a trusted adult. While it is heartbreaking, we must be positive and recognize there are opportunities to find solutions. We must also acknowledge the importance of relationship building between adults and students.

The number of students without trusted adults did not change from pre to post program - demonstrating that the lack of connectedness for students is real. It also underscores the value of a program that can improve comfort in speaking with a trusted adult. But, a short-term prevention approach will not create trusted adults for young people.

**Students who reported “No trusted adult”.**

Pre-Program	Post-Program
5.24%	5.23%

While the percentages varied by student demographics, the consistency between pre and post surveys was remarkably stable, roughly 1%.

A more comprehensive approach is required for schools, families and communities to address this challenge. The CDC has long discussed school connectedness and its role in positive mental health, substance use prevention, reduced bullying and other risk factors (4). We must focus on more upstream, broader programs that can impact school cultures and not just symptoms.

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# FINDING 4

## Title I Schools

The trends in the data from students in Title 1 schools, those with higher-rates of low-income families, differed. The comparisons between Title 1 schools and those that aren't were the most divergent of any other demographic breakdown.

Students in Title I schools, in pre-program surveys, reported a lower identification of potential trusted adults:

	Title I	Non-Title I	Difference
Teacher	80%	87%	7%
Counselor	78%	86%	8%
Coach	62%	78%	14%
Pastor/Rabbi/ Religious Leader	52%	69%	15%

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Post-program surveys demonstrated a continued pattern. The Erika's Lighthouse program did prove to be effective in helping close the gap between student populations, with students in Title I schools gaining 1-2% percentage points in identifying trusted adults. Students in Title I schools also increased their comfort level with speaking to trusted adults by almost 4%.



	Title I Schools			Non-Title I Schools		
	Pre- Program	Post- Program	Change	Pre- Program	Post- Program	Change
Teacher	80%	88%	8%	87%	95%	8%
Counselor	78%	87%	9%	86%	94%	8%
Coach	62%	77%	15%	78%	91%	13%
Pastor/Rabbi/ Religious Leader	52%	68%	16%	69%	85%	16%
	Average Change		12%	Average Change		11%

The Erika's Lighthouse program equally impacted students across Title I and non-Title I schools.

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FINDING 5

## Race and Ethnicity

Schools that are predominantly-Black, predominantly-Hispanic or predominantly-White (50% or more of the student population) saw substantial differences compared to the all schools.

Predominantly-Black schools averaged a 12% increase, predominantly-Hispanic at 15% increase and predominately-White a 10% increase, when excluding parents and grandparents, which are high across all groups. This ability of the Erika's Lighthouse program to reduce the gaps was also seen in Title I schools in Finding 4.

	Predominantly-Black Schools			Predominantly-Hispanic Schools			Predominantly-White Schools		
	Pre-Program	Post-Program	Change	Pre-Program	Post-Program	Change	Pre-Program	Post-Program	Change
Teacher	74%	83%	9%	77%	88%	11%	87%	94%	7%
Counselor	70%	81%	11%	76%	86%	10%	86%	93%	7%
Coach	57%	68%	11%	53%	73%	20%	77%	89%	12%
Pastor/Rabbi/ Religious Leader	45%	62%	17%	44%	63%	19%	68%	83%	15%
	Average Change		12%	Average Change		11%	Average Change		10%

Predominantly-Black and Hispanic schools reported similar rates of change with being comfortable talking to a trusted adult at home, school and in the community post-program.

One notable result is that students in predominantly-Black and Hispanic schools reported higher rates of not having a trusted adult post-program. Students in predominantly-Black schools reported almost double the rate of not having a trusted adult (8%) compared to students in predominantly-White (5%) schools. Students in predominantly-Hispanic schools also reported lower numbers (7%) than those in predominantly-White schools. These systematic issues need to be addressed.

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**FINDING 6**

## Families Are The Most Important Trusted Adults

Parents and Grandparents are students' most-identified trusted adults (96%), and the home is where over 75% of students are comfortable speaking about mental health.

There is a strong connection between students who identify parents and grandparents as trusted adults and those who indicate they do not have a trusted adult. In fact, across almost every demographic, the difference to 100% diverges by no more than 1.6% post-program. This demonstrates the importance of families being trusted adults for young people.

	ALL Students	Predominantly-White Schools	Predominantly-Black Schools	Predominantly-Hispanic Schools	Title I Schools
Parents/Grandparents	96%	96.7%	91.9%	92.9%	92.4%
No Trusted Adult	5.2%	4.6%	7.6%	6.9%	6.3%
Divergence from 100%	1.2%	1.4%	0.5%	0.2%	0.5%

We do not have enough data to know if identifying a parent or grandparent as a trusted adult is a prerequisite for students to be able to identify another trusted adult. But, it is a concerning comparison and outlines the importance of parents and caregivers in a child's life.

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# RECOMMENDATIONS

## for School Communities

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While the mental health crisis among young people may seem daunting, there are practical, actionable steps we can take to increase help-seeking behavior among youth.

### RECOMMENDATION 1

## Implement Effective Education and Prevention Programs

One clear example is to implement effective education and prevention programs around mental health, depression and suicide. From this study, the impact of short-term education is clear. Students can be educated about mental health and taught the skills needed to identify and speak to trusted adults.

Tier-1, universal programs that impact every student and stakeholder in a school building are powerful ways to alleviate the current youth mental health crisis.

- **Tier-1 Programs Improve School Climate** - Studies have demonstrated that Tier-1 programs improve school climates for both staff and students (5).
- **Tier-1 Improves Tier-2 (small group intervention) Effectiveness** - Studies have shown that an effective Tier-1 implementation leads to improved outcomes in Tier-2 intervention (6). We should expect the same in mental health interventions through the creation of shared values and vocabulary and a foundation of knowledge and understanding of mental health, depression and suicide.
- **Prevention Saves Money** - "A joint analysis by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine determined that every \$1 investment in prevention and early intervention for mental illness and addiction programs yields \$2 to \$10 in savings in health costs, criminal and juvenile justice costs and low productivity" (7).

### Consistent and Persistent Programming

We can also see signs of increased effectiveness when implemented every year, with every student. This recurring messaging can reinforce positive messages that normalize conversations and improve help-seeking by helping students identify additional trusted adults and increase their comfort with speaking about mental health.

### Age-Appropriate Programs Across Grade Levels

An opportunity to foster more consistent and persistent programming are programs that include scaffolding and sequencing over multiple grade levels. This allows for deeper learning of essential concepts and greater opportunities to practice skills that can support an increase in confidence and comfort communicating with a trusted adult.



The Erika's Lighthouse Classroom Education programs, two of which were reviewed in this study, consist of three levels of curricula schools can implement in grades 4-12. These age-appropriate programs are designed to introduce mental health literacy, depression and suicide to students as standalone programs or part of a sequence over multiple grade levels.

[Access Resources >>>](#)



## RECOMMENDATION 2

### Go Deeper: Promote an Inclusive School Culture

Our pre and post-survey data is focused solely on implementing Classroom Education programs. However, we believe many of the results can be even more significant when coupled with other impactful programs within school communities.

#### Being Comprehensive

One area schools should really focus on is a comprehensive approach to youth mental health. While specific intervention programs are frequently discussed, universal Tier-1 programs can easily be overlooked. But, they are essential to an inclusive culture that welcomes dialogue, help-seeking and early-identification. A full suite of Tier-1, universal programs can set a foundation of learning for students, staff and families and continue to engage them throughout the year. Beyond classroom education, there are other initiatives schools can support.

Erika's Lighthouse provides guidance on creating MTSS-aligned mental health task forces in schools, culture and visionary practices that can focus on promoting the ideal environment your school desires, and a comprehensive Data Center that includes a Tier-1 School Mental Health Assessment, Early-year and late-year school culture surveys, and six program evaluations to evaluate effectiveness throughout the year. Making data-based decisions around implementation has never been easier.

[Access Resources >>](#)



#### For Students - Peer-led Good Mental Health

One key opportunity is peer-led initiatives promoting good mental health, help-seeking and identifying prospective trusted adults. There are numerous such programs available, most of them for a fee.

Erika's Lighthouse offers Empowerment Clubs for grades 4-12 that are completely free, and actually offer grants up to \$500/school to implement schoolwide activities.

These efforts often include building-wide activities such as "I am a beacon of hope" where adults in the building can hang signs, wear buttons, or send messages to students identifying themselves as trusted adults around mental health. Another includes a poster campaign with value-based messages like "Everyone deserves good mental health" or "You are not alone. There is hope." These are just two of hundreds of examples.

Erika's Lighthouse Empowerment Club members also receive additional training on how to be peer champions and how to connect students in need with trusted adults in their schools.

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**RECOMMENDATION 2** *continued*

## Go Deeper: Promote an Inclusive School Culture

### For Families - Turn-Key Resources that Matter

One piece of school-based mental health work that is frequently missing are meaningful, easy to use family engagement materials. While families remain highest on the list of trusted adults youth are comfortable talking to about mental health, we need to ensure parents, grandparents and others are equipped to have those conversations. This is especially true since most resources are generally meant to be direct-to-family, making adoption by a school community more difficult.

Erika's Lighthouse Family Engagement resources are designed, specifically, to be disseminated through school communities in the form of Family Workbooks, Workshops, and other handouts available to educators, counselors and social workers. All of these resources are available in English and Spanish.

Erika's Lighthouse Family Workshops are available as facilitator guides with slideshows that any school can use to host their own workshop or webinar. They are also pre-recorded so they can be seamlessly sent to families to access educational resources on their own time.

The Workshops also have our companion Family Workbooks One, Two and Three that follow a family's journey through mental health. Just like our other programs, Family Workbook One: We All Have Mental Health is a universal guide, helpful for any family, to promote good mental health behaviors and conversations in their own home.

[Access Resources >>](#)

### Establish Values & Vocabulary - Schoolwide Campaigns

In addition, promoting Schoolwide Campaigns that help establish values and shared vocabulary can help align every stakeholder in a school community by demonstrating the commitment to mental health. A number of schoolwide campaigns are available, including awareness ribbons, large-format assemblies and more.

Erika's Lighthouse Schoolwide Campaigns support these efforts through:

- Give Voice campaign during September for Suicide Prevention Month,
- Positivity Pledge in May for Mental Health Awareness Month,
- Mental Health RECHARGE so educators, coaches, counselors and more can support five minute mental health breaks for students, and
- The Teen Toolbox, that can continue conversations and education outside the classroom.

[Access Resources >>](#)



### For School Staff - Training and Wellness

Another key piece is ensuring staff are trained and ready to act as trusted adults. While many schools engage in gatekeeper training, it is important to remember that gatekeeper training is not effective as a standalone intervention. It is imperative that training takes place in the scope of a comprehensive strategy.

Erika's Lighthouse Policy & Staff Training is designed to prepare every school professional to act as a trusted adult, but also understand the signs and symptoms of depression and suicide and includes modules on crisis intervention in the classroom. This training can be completed via the Erika's Lighthouse enlighten LMS or be hosted in a school by on-site professionals or contracted parties through the provided slideshows and facilitators guides.

It is also important to recognize that school staff can only support others if they are supported themselves. Erika's Lighthouse provides a number of wellness related resources that can also promote conversations around mental health among staff. This can truly generate a culture of dialogue and prevention. Conversations around mental health do not have to be scary. In fact, they should be a part of our everyday lives to help us cope and manage stress.

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# RECOMMENDATIONS

## for Schools and Community-Based Organizations

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### RECOMMENDATION 3

## Respect Student Voice

Representation matters. It is important for schools to leverage programs that represent and respect the true diversity of their student bodies. Fostering meaningful opportunities for students to participate, share and positively impact their school communities is vital to ensure efforts are effective. Students should have a role on appropriate leadership committees and task forces that determine school policy and program implementation.

We should also recognize students respond positively to hearing stories and seeing peers that look like and represent them. This can be especially true for underrepresented students who have historically had less access to culturally-appropriate mental health resources.

Erika's Lighthouse programs feature diverse students that almost every student in a classroom can identify with. The curriculum takes it a step further, allowing students to break into small groups and dive deeper into the stories of young people that they connect with. This allows the program to resonate with students during the Classroom Education lessons.

[Access Resources >>](#)

### RECOMMENDATION 4

## Community-Based Organizations Need to Start the Conversation

Students, particularly those in Title I schools, need additional connections to trusted adults. Community-based organizations, like after-school programs or sports clubs, can play a vital role in advancing conversations around mental health.

Erika's Lighthouse has created a series of turn-key programs that community-based organizations (CBOs) can easily implement. These resources include staff training, youth education, family engagement and awareness raising campaigns that can demonstrate and reinforce shared values and vocabulary. All of these resources are available at [www.ErikasLighthouse.org/resources](http://www.ErikasLighthouse.org/resources).

[Access Resources >>](#)



### RECOMMENDATION 5

## Community-wide, Comprehensive Approaches are Needed

Systemic challenges facing young people due to racism, discrimination and experiencing poverty limit their access to and comfort in speaking with trusted adults. Systemic barriers can be results of discrimination, poverty, accessibility, disparities in access to quality education, and cultural stigma. Many challenges are embedded in our society, limiting access and impact of any high-quality programs. An example of this is the number of students without trusted adults across many schools in our study.

A community-wide and comprehensive approach is essential to meaningfully address these challenges to support young people from early childhood and beyond. Leveraging Erika's Lighthouse resources for schools and community-based organizations is helpful. But, a more detailed and comprehensive approach, with strong referral networks, shared values and vocabulary and widely-represented participation is required.

**RECOMMENDATION 6**

## Diversity and Representation Is Vital

Every young person is different and we should recognize, celebrate and include differences in our programs. And, while every young person is different - so is every classroom, community-based organization, school professional and family. It is important that we work to be inclusive and promote maximum representation in programs. This isn't simply adding a few faces to programming. This is ensuring the structural aspects of school and community-based programs foster diversity and inclusion.

This is especially important for subgroups facing a heightened risk of mental distress and suicide, such as youth who are Black, Indigenous, Female or identify as LGBTQ+, according to the most recent YRBS data (1). Universal programs need to be inclusive of these students.

Erika's Lighthouse is enthusiastically working on this, but has more room for improvement. The future of Erika's Lighthouse classroom-based programs provide main content videos with a catalog of diverse youth - allowing students and schools to select the student voices who resonate with them. This is natively built into the curriculum to support and enhance youth empowerment.

[Access Resources >>](#)

**RECOMMENDATION 7**

## Partnerships Are Vital

No organization or program can accomplish what needs to be done alone. The challenges are too large and complex. Schools, in particular, are in need of strong programs that can be easily implemented. They must also work in partnership with one another. Schools use a tiered approach to identify and support students in need, called MTSS or RTI, that move students from Tier 1 to Tier 2 to Tier 3. Programs must be designed to work within that structure.

Programs typically operate within specific tiers, but are not sufficiently supporting schools in other areas that can properly transition students between tiers or support shared values and vocabulary. Partnerships have the power to change that and allow schools to effectively collaborate with a Tier 1 provider that is familiar with their Tier 2 or Tier 3 providers.

School-based programs have a unique opportunity to help identify gaps in their own offerings and foster impactful partnerships that can fill those gaps, improve their own efforts and improve school cultures. There are also opportunities for providers and community-based organizations to work more closely together to ensure alignment.

Erika's Lighthouse offers tiered program alignment opportunities to create just such partnerships, by promoting other programs, offering shared roadmaps for programs to schools, and providing guidance.

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# RECOMMENDATIONS

## for Families

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### RECOMMENDATION 8

## Families Must Be Informed and Supportive

It is important to recognize that families are young people's most-identified trusted adults and that most students are comfortable talking about mental health at home. But gaps still exist. It is important for families to be proactive about mental health in their homes.

Actively discussing and encouraging good mental health practices is a first step. Normalizing conversations about mental health is key. Not only will it equip young people to better manage their mental health, but also so young people can talk about mental distress early. Prevention and early intervention are the best tools available for families, schools and communities.

Erika's Lighthouse provides a robust suite of resources for families, including good mental health activities, workshops, and more. These include Family Workbooks, Family Workshops and other helpful activities, resources and guides. All of these resources are available in English and Spanish.

[Access Resources >>>](#)





# LIMITATIONS

## & Future Research

This study presents unique data on student perceptions of access to trusted adults before and after participating in a mental health literacy, depression education and suicide prevention program. Future research can explore data from the remaining survey items on the Erika's Lighthouse pre/post surveys. Advanced statistical analyses could be run to deepen our understanding of trends in the data.

### Erika's Lighthouse Data & Research

Erika's Lighthouse is determined to support school communities in identifying effective solutions to improve youth mental health. The Erika's Lighthouse Data Center provides schools with a suite of tools we believe can address a number of open questions from this study:

1. **Deeper Integration of Programs** - Can deeper integration of mental health programs in schools increase effectiveness of other Tier-1 mental health programs in schools?
2. **Consistent and Persistent Programming** - Does repeating programs annually and/or across grade levels increase effectiveness and the identification of trusted adults and a student's comfort in speaking with a trusted adult?
3. **School Culture** - Can mental health programs, and the depth of those programs, positively impact a broader school culture?
4. **Family Engagement** - Does additional family engagement increase the number of trusted adults at home and students' comfort in speaking with them?
5. **Statistical Significance** - Future reports hope to encompass a statistical significance analysis to determine impact.

### External Research

Other topics are outside the scope of what Erika's Lighthouse data can answer and requires its own research.

1. **Trusted Adults** - Can students create bonds with a trusted adult if they do not have a bond with a parent, grandparent or caregiver? Is it more difficult or complex? What steps can schools and community groups take to reduce barriers and foster relationships with those youth without trusted adults? Does having a trusted adult at home increase the likelihood of having a trusted adult in schools or in the community?
2. **Student Interpretation** - We do not have a full understanding of how students may interpret the questions. For example: "How does a young person perceive the questions?" or "How does a young person view 'In the Community' in regards to being comfortable speaking with a trusted adult?"



# CONCLUSION

The main conclusion: the Erika's Lighthouse universal, Tier-1 depression education programs are effective at increasing help-seeking behavior by helping youth recognize additional prospective trusted adults and increasing their comfort level in speaking to a trusted adult about mental health.

The Classroom Education programs are effective across all demographics, with every reviewed population seeing increases in the identification of trusted adults and the comfort level in speaking with trusted adults.

Schools that are Title-I and with a predominantly Black and predominantly Hispanic population saw greater gains with identifying prospective trusted adults, and similar rates of increase in comfort to speak with a trusted adult. Students in Title-I, predominantly Black and predominantly Hispanic schools still reported lower numbers of identifying trusted adults in post-program surveys - demonstrating the need to directly address systemic challenges and implement more school and community wide initiatives around mental health.

A short-term, Tier-1 intervention program has no effect on ensuring students have a trusted adult. It will take a concerted and deliberate effort to build up school and community connectedness around mental health. Erika's Lighthouse resources are comprehensive and aim to support these systemic efforts to build and deepen relationships between youth and adults in their communities. Every young person should have a trusted adult in their life.

This study uses data based on Erika's Lighthouse Level II and Level III pre and post-program surveys. As such, recommendations related to additional Tier-1 initiatives in schools were not accounted for in this report. Recognizing the effectiveness of these singular interventions, it is highly likely that additional wrap-around interventions in schools and community-based organizations would support and enhance these findings.

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# APPENDIX

## & Citations

### Level II: Depression Awareness

The Erika's Lighthouse classroom education program designed for grades 5-9. This teacher-led, video-based educational program educates students about the signs and symptoms of depression, encourages help-seeking and promotes good mental health. These lessons can be 1-4 days with each lasting 40-50 minutes.

### Level III: Depression Education & Suicide Awareness

The Erika's Lighthouse classroom education program designed for grades 8-12. This teacher-led, video-based educational program educates students about the signs and symptoms of depression, encourages help-seeking and promotes good mental health. These lessons can be 1-4 days with each lasting 40-50 minutes.

### Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS)

A framework of tiered instruction and interventions that ensure all students receive the appropriate academic, social, emotional and behavioral supports they need to be successful in school.

#### MTSS Tier-1

In Tier-1 all students should be provided universal, high-quality instruction. When Tier-1 is working effectively, 80-90% of students should make expected progress.

#### MTSS Tier-2

Tier-2 interventions are typically provided to 10%-20% of students who are not making expected progress with Tier-1 programming. These interventions are usually provided in a small group setting.

#### MTSS Tier-3

Tier-3 interventions are intensive, individualized interventions for students who did not make the expected progress in Tier-2. When the MTSS system is working effectively, fewer than 10% of students should be receiving Tier-3 interventions.

#### Pre-Test

The Erika's Lighthouse pre-test is disseminated and completed by students prior to the program.

#### Post-Test

The Erika's Lighthouse post-test is disseminated and completed by students after the completion of the program.

### School Demographics

All school demographics are from the 2019-20 U.S. Department of Education Public Data Listing.

### Trusted Adult

Someone who is reliable, dependable, trustworthy and who can help a young person. This person can be at home, school or the community.

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# Every student deserves good mental health.



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We're a nonprofit on a mission to provide free mental health literacy, depression education and suicide prevention programs to any school, anywhere.