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FLORIDA

South Florida Student Idea Becomes Mental Health Support Law

By **Ari Odzer** • Published September 23, 2021 • Updated on September 23, 2021 at 7:00 pm



Students had the idea, and now it's a state law: their school ID cards now have mental health support info printed on them. NBC 6's Ari Odzer reports

The mental health of high school and middle school students has never been a bigger concern.

Both the Broward and Miami-Dade school districts invested more money and resources into the emotional health of their students this year, and students see the need, as well.

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"I feel like a lot of kids struggled with this virtual school year," said Annie Farooq, a junior at McArthur High School in Hollywood.

That's how it started, an idea inspired by pandemic stress leads to a tangible way to help kids. Student identification cards for all public middle and high school students now have the suicide prevention hotline and crisis text line printed on their back sides. These can be crucial resources for any students who might be having serious issues.

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"While researching we saw that some of the highest rates of like, depression, suicides, self-harm, were all within middle school and high school, particularly being in high school," said Emily Moro, a senior at McArthur High.

Moro and Farooq were part of the team at their school which won the statewide Democracy In Action contest with that proposal, to put mental health information literally in the hands of every high school and middle school student.

One year later, it's a state law, a law the team at McArthur actually wrote themselves.

"I think what they did is absolutely amazing," said debate teacher Sarah Beauchamp, who had several of the team members in her class. "This impact, I really don't think it can be measured."

For example, Farooq said she had a depressed friends who actually contemplated suicide.

"I'm so happy because when I think of this I think of my friend, and I think of how he struggled but now I can think of all the kids in Florida who are struggling and with this, the crisis text line and suicide prevention line, they can get the help that they need and it's really more accessible to them," Farooq said.

To become a state law, it didn't happen by magic, a lawmaker had to get involved, and in this case, it was state Rep. Dan Daley, of Coral Springs.

"I want to thank the students, I'm so very proud of you, we're all very proud of you in Tallahassee," Daley said. "And so we're gonna be helping your classmates all across the state of Florida and you did that."

They did that, by looking for a way to help their community, and by playing their cards right.

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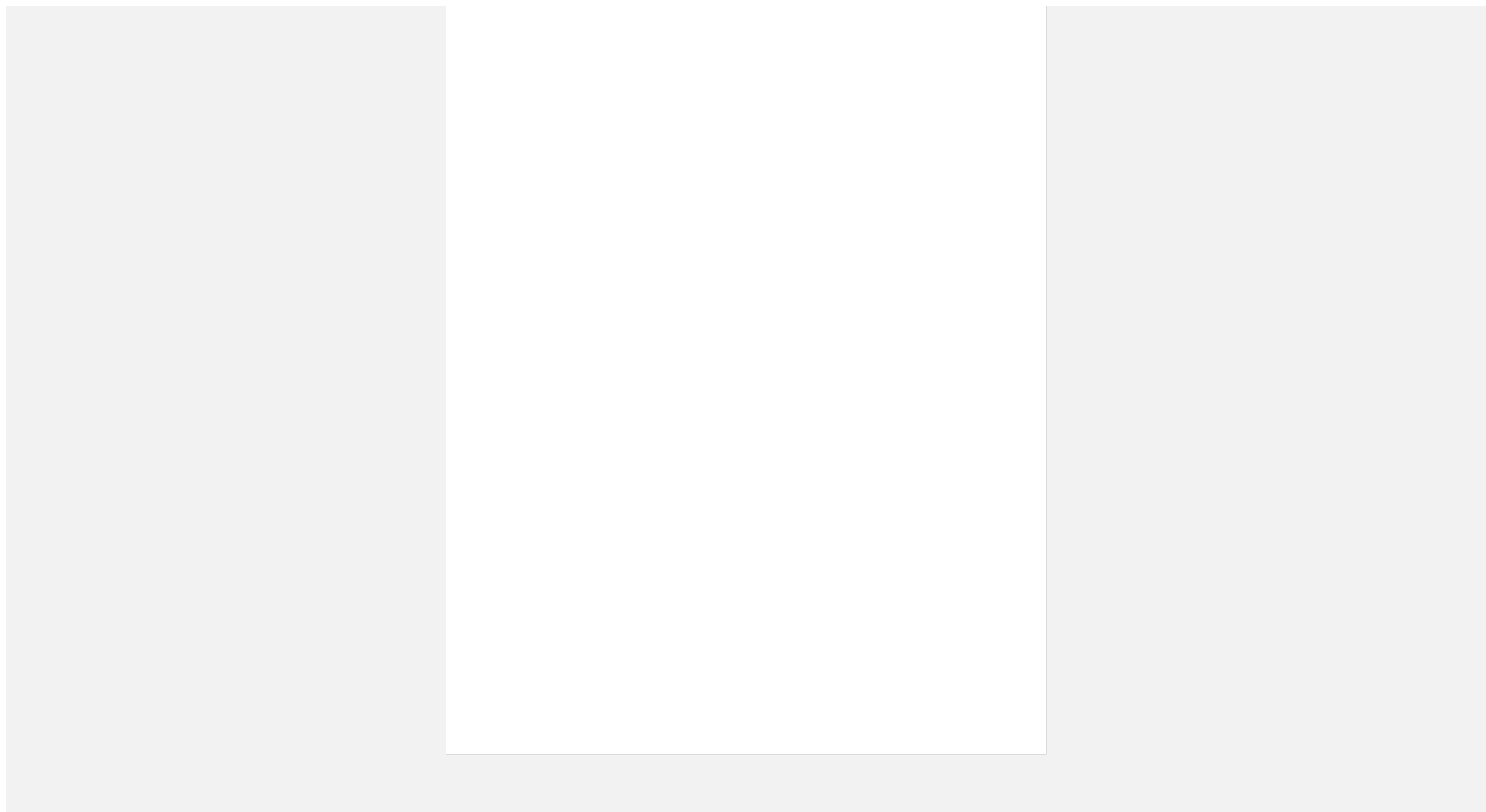
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