

TAG in Action: Identity Wellness Centers



As part of its national call to action, **Adolescent Health, Think, Act, Grow**® (TAG), the Office of Adolescent Health in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has identified a number of successful strategies for improving adolescent health throughout the country.

The Goal

Identity Wellness Centers offer a range of programs and services that improve student's cognitive, physical, social and emotional development.

The Game Plan

Identity was founded in 1998 as a community-based organization to meet the needs of Latino youth and families. Based in Montgomery County, Maryland, Identity now assists more than 3,000 in-school and out-of-school Latino and other vulnerable youth and their families who live in high-poverty areas and who are most at-risk for poor academic and economic outcomes.

Identity is the lead agency at three Montgomery County area high school Wellness Centers. The Wellness Centers provide a broad array of evidence-informed programs and services focused on improving the physical, social, emotional, and mental well-being of the students. The wide variety of programs and support services offered include on-site health screenings and mental health counseling, curriculum-based after-school programs, mentoring and case management services, and restorative practices. In the 2015-16 school year, Identity worked in collaboration with health and youth development partners to serve over 1,300 diverse youth.

In addition to providing school-based health center services, the Wellness Centers offer opportunities for physical activity and recreation, family gatherings, student service learning and youth leadership training. Although the Wellness Centers serve all students enrolled in the school, they specifically target those who have few protective factors or demonstrate risky behaviors. Identity's annual evaluation of their Wellness Centers' outcomes demonstrate improvements in students' emotional well-being, increases in connection to school, and decreases in risky behaviors.

The Winning Plays

Identity meets the needs of the youth they serve by developing comprehensive and integrated programs that respond to specific and evolving community needs. Identity's Wellness Center model is based on Positive Youth Development concepts and regards youth as assets to be nourished rather than problems to be fixed. Youth are provided with opportunities to forge positive and trusting relationships with caring adults on staff. Staff also work with parents or other key adults in the youth's life to repair and reconnect the parent-child bond. Carolyn Camacho, Identity Youth Centers Director, shared that "relationships with reliable and caring adults and their peers can be healing for youth facing challenges such as poverty, family separation, discrimination, immigration status, cultural isolation and other traumatic experiences."

Learn More

Identity, Inc.
<https://identity-youth.org/>

