CALM-R: Creating and Optimizing the Impact of a Multisensory Mental Wellness Space in Public Schools

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Despite millions of teenagers feeling overwhelmingly stressed, mental health resources are often inaccessible, expensive, and/or under-promoted. Using 235 responses from opt-in anonymous questionnaires, a multisensory mental wellness environment (Calming Room) in a local high school was created. This project aimed to determine its effectiveness qualitatively and quantitatively. The hypothesis predicted that use of the wellness space would be associated with a measurable change in focus and mood, with indication through quantitative (self-reported stress level scores, likeliness to recommend to peers), and qualitative (observed behavioral changes) data. Quantitatively, among 39 participants surveyed, a median reduction of stress levels by nearly 1/3 was found (3 point median drop on a 10 point scale). A Wilcoxon signed-rank test found results to be highly statistically significant ($p < 0.00001$). 82.1% on a Likert scale were likely or very likely to recommend the space. Qualitatively, students were visibly more relaxed and focused, becoming less distracted, and with students bringing peers in sessions after. Dim lighting, water ambience, and quietness were found to be the most effective elements employed. These results guided the creation of an accessible mental health website for the studied public school district (~18.7k students served), and pointed to potential for integration of these affordable spaces and elements for stress management and proactive mental health promotion.

Awards Won: