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Mental Health in Schools Policy Paper

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6 Introduction

7 The Organising Bureau of European School Student Unions (OBESSU) is the platform for cooperation
8 between the national school student unions active in general secondary and secondary vocational
9 education in Europe.

10 The policy paper on mental health gives an overview of the importance of inclusive mental health
11 education, mental health Services, teacher's training and supportive & preventive school environment.

12 This policy paper is an outcome of a year-long process within OBESSU involving the working group on
13 mental health, 'The Headstrong School Student Convention' (19th-21st of November 2018) and the
14 contributions of OBESSU Member, Candidate and Affiliate Organisations.

15 High Quality & Inclusive Mental Health Education

16 Students often feel isolated when facing mental health issues. This may be due to stigma, and lack of
17 understanding and awareness of mental health. As students may not be familiar with the topic, they are
18 not able to evaluate their own mental health and react appropriately, whether it be towards others or
19 themselves. Students that face mental health issues are often at a high risk of early school leaving, as
20 they are unable to find space and support in the educational system mental wellbeing is an essential part
21 of people's academic journey and overall life. Therefore, students need to be provided with the tools to
22 help them to understand and act for their own mental health issues and the ones in their community.
23 Having cross-curricular and inclusive mental health education, that has equal value to physical health
24 education in national curricula would ensure that students gain the knowledge and understanding that
25 enable them to act as aware citizens throughout their life.

26 Therefore, OBESSU demands:

- 27 ● Mental health education to be a part of national curricula;
- 28 ● Mental health education to be recognised as having equal value to physical health education;
- 29 ● Mental health education to be cross-curricular.

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31 Mental Health Services

32 In the 21st century, the school environment pushes students to their mental limits. The school
33 environment is highly stressful for students that are hindered from carrying out their schoolwork. students
34 need to be in a school environment that supports their mental health and acts as an agent of prevention
35 for mental health deterioration. students spend a significant amount of their life within schools and they
36 need to be holistically healthy in order to pursue their education. Often, secondary schools employ
37 personnel to carry out medical work within each school. However, students have raised concerns on their

38 insufficient presence. In order to combat the current lack of support and prevention, students need
39 professional and community support to be available throughout the school day. OBESSU believes that
40 schools should provide the option of high quality and free-of-charge mental health services in the form of
41 an on-site psychologist, keeping into account the students-psychologist ratio, in order to meet the high
42 demand for mental health services. Regular mandatory check-ups with school psychologists would break
43 the barrier of not talking about mental health.

44 Therefore, OBESSU demands:

- 45 ● Secondary schools to ensure a supportive and preventive school environment for students;
- 46 ● Secondary schools to ensure access to high quality and free of charge mental health services in
47 schools, including through on-site psychologists;
- 48 ● Adequate resources devoted to an increased presence of psychological personnel, therefore
49 lowering the student ratio of students per psychologist in order to meet students' needs for
50 mental health services.

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52 **Teacher's training**

53 Teachers are often the people closest to students. Their role in contributing to a school environment that
54 is supportive and preventive is crucial. Every student has different needs. When it comes to mental health
55 needs, teachers should be trained to be able to identify these needs. Educational authorities need to
56 implement compulsory continuous teachers' trainings on the mental wellbeing of students recurrently.
57 OBESSU believes that teachers need to be provided with the knowledge and tools to detect and
58 accordingly react to signs and potential symptoms of mental health issues. Teachers need to know where,
59 when and how students can seek further help, both within and outside of schools.

60 Therefore, OBESSU demands:

- 61 ● Educational authorities to organise regular, modern and mandatory teachers' trainings on
62 student's mental health;
- 63 ● Teachers to be equipped with the knowledge and tools to detect, accordingly react to signs and
64 potential symptoms of mental health issues.

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66 **School Student Support**

67 It is important for students to feel acknowledged by their peers. In order to abolish the stigma about
68 mental health, students need peer support outside of the classroom. OBESSU believes that one crucial
69 way of educating students about their rights and mental health is through peer-to-peer education. School
70 student unions need to stand together, and demand that physical and mental health be recognised
71 equally. School student unions play a fundamental role when it comes to raising awareness of mental
72 health of students, as well as when it comes to organising educational and support activities. youth clubs,
73 associations and other civil society organisations need to build strong alliances of support, information
74 and capacity building.

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76 Therefore, OBESSU demands:

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- School student unions and peer support groups to be given the space inside and outside of schools to raise awareness on mental health issues;
 - Governments, local institutions and schools to create ad-hoc funding opportunities to foster peer education in the field of mental health;
 - Full recognition of school student unions and peer support groups as relevant actors in guaranteeing the wellbeing of school students.