

Study Guide for 2024 Policy Debate

Resolved: The Taiwanese government should institute the mental health leave for secondary school students.

Research on mental health has been steadily growing during the last 45 years, especially since 2010 in the USA (Hernández-Torrano, 2020), and is now often seen as one pole on the continuum from mental health to mental illness. The World Health Organization has defined mental health as “a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and can make a contribution to her or his community” (World Health Organization, 2004 as cited in Hernández-Torrano, 2020). Stress is also a reality of the life that students may face in Taiwan. According to a 2023 survey by the Child Welfare League Foundation, around 10% of students experience severe levels of stress with schoolwork being one of the top three sources of stress (兒童福利聯盟, 2023). Also, the Ministry of Health and Welfare's 2022 mental health survey for secondary school students revealed concerning numbers of junior and senior high students who have contemplated or attempted suicide, with a rising suicide rate ranking as the second leading cause of death among adolescents (Guo, 2022). Currently, students can receive official leave from class for a variety of reasons with proper documentation. However, if personal leaves or unexcused absences reach one-third of class hours, the student shall receive a zero in the subject, and if accumulated absences amount to half of the total school days, the student shall be suspended (Ministry of Education, 2021).

With the growth in awareness of mental well-being, there is an increasing movement to incorporate mental health leave policies into the administration or regulation of a school year. Several American states have passed legislation since 2019 allowing for children and teens to take varying numbers of “mental health days” during the school year (Nelson & England, 2023), and as of the end of the 2022-2023 academic year, 12 Taiwanese universities have also implemented their own mental health leave policies (NOWnews, May 7, 2023). Can mental health leaves truly alleviate the stress afflicting local secondary school students? Would the mental health leave be a viable and positive addition to the regulations governing the administration of high schools in Taiwan? Given the fact that the majority of research into mental health has been done in Western countries with over half of publications being produced in the United States (Hernández-Torrano, 2020), is the concept of a mental health leave appropriate and feasible for Taiwan?

As this is a policy debate, both the affirmative and the negative should address a comprehensive policy involved with or conceived for this resolution. When arguing for the benefits or costs in your case or the opposition's, consider points related to the magnitude, probability, and/or time frame, and support your viewpoint with both clear

reasoning and concrete and contextualized evidence. Here is a word of caution: This debate tournament, aligning with “traditional” policy debate, prioritizes the use of logic and evidence, as well as arguments from the pragmatic perspective (i.e., the benefit-and-cost analysis of the policy itself), instead of something purely philosophical or only based on critical theories. Thus, a case containing only arguments that challenge a certain mindset or assumption made by the opposing team, often from the perspective of a critical theory (called a *kritik*) is strongly discouraged. The negative counterplan, if the negative decides to run one, must be *non-topical* (meaning the counterplan cannot affirm the proposition, i.e. you can't include a mental health leave in your counterplan) and *non-conditional* (meaning the negative cannot ditch their counterplan during the debate), and preferably philosophically or practically incompatible with the affirmative plan to prevent the affirmative from running a permutation argument (i.e., arguing the affirmative plan and the counterplan are not *exclusive* and can be implemented at the same time; negative needs to show that their counterplan or repair will exclude the possibility of implementing mental health leaves).

Following is a list of references meant to provide some groundwork for debaters, which means it is by no means comprehensive or flawless. Many of the references also contain information or arguments that may not be directly relevant and thus warrant closer examination. Students are highly encouraged to continue researching beyond these preliminary references to deepen their understanding of the issue and strengthen their arguments in preparation for their debate rounds.

Works Cited

Guo, X. (2022). 立法院全球資訊網-學生心理健康輔導機制之相關問題淺析 [Legislative Yuan World Wide Web - An Analysis of Issues Related to the Mental Health Counseling Mechanism for Students].

<https://www.ly.gov.tw/Pages/Detail.aspx?nodeid=6590&pid=225118>

Hernández-Torrano, D., Ibrayeva, L., Sparks, J., Lim, N., Clementi, A., Almukhambetova, A., Nurtayev, Y. R., & Muratkyzy, A. (2020). Mental Health and Well-Being of University Students: A Bibliometric Mapping of the Literature. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.01226>

Ministry of Education. (n.d.). 教育部主管法規共用系統-法規內容-高級中等學校學生學習評量辦法 [Measures for Assessment of Students' Learning in Senior High Schools]. <https://edu.law.moe.gov.tw/LawContent.aspx?id=GL001247>

Nelson, K., & England, A. (2023, May 9). These are the US states allowing student mental health days. *Verywell Mind*. <https://www.verywellmind.com/us-states-allowing-student-mental-health-days-5270047>

NOWnews (May 7, 2023). *跨世代／12 所大學設心理假！專家籲制度應保有隱私、去汙名化* [Mental health leave: Experts call for privacy and destigmatization] Retrieved from: <https://www.nownews.com/news/6132355>

兒童福利聯盟 [Child Welfare Coalition]. (2023). 2023 年臺灣國高中生心理健康調查結果 [Results of the 2023 Mental Health Survey of National High School Students in Taiwan]. Retrieved from: https://www.children.org.tw/publication_research/research_report/2544

References

Abrams, Z. (n.d.). Student mental health is in crisis. Campuses are rethinking their approach. <https://www.apa.org>.
<https://www.apa.org/monitor/2022/10/mental-health-campus-care>

Buck, D. (2021, November 30). The Problem with ‘Mental-Health Days’ at Schools. *National Review*. <https://www.nationalreview.com/2021/11/the-problem-with-mental-health-days-at-schools/>

Caron, C. (2021, October 14). Why Teens Are Advocating for Mental Health Days Off School. *The New York Times*.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/08/23/well/mind/mental-health-day-laws-kids.html>

Cofe. (2022). 十二年國教學生心理健康假- 提點子- 公共政策網路參與平臺 [Twelve-year State Education Students Mental Health Leave - Tips - Public Policy Online Participation Platform]. <https://join.gov.tw/idea/detail/a49e78d7-1d80-4a5d-943d-f528824666f6>

Guo, X. (2022). 立法院全球資訊網-學生心理健康輔導機制之相關問題淺析 [Legislative Yuan World Wide Web - An Analysis of Issues Related to the Mental Health Counseling Mechanism for Students].
<https://www.ly.gov.tw/Pages/Detail.aspx?nodeid=6590&pid=225118>

Holloway, C. (2023, June 12). Is taking a mental health day actually good for you? *Cleveland Clinic*. <https://health.clevelandclinic.org/is-taking-a-mental-health-day-actually-good-for-you/>

Ingalls, N. (2023). Mental Health Days Help Kids, But Systemic Barriers Prevent Widespread Use. *Verywell Mind*. <https://www.verywellmind.com/mental-health-days-and-kids-survey-6361951>

Mahnken, K. (2022, March 8). Student ‘Mental Health Days’ Catching On In More States. <http://www.the74million.org/article/more-states-are-allowing-students-to-take-mental-health-days-but-could-the-practice-backfire/>

Ministry of Education. (2021). 教育部主管法規共用系統-法規內容-高級中等學校學生學習評量辦法 [Measures for Assessment of Students' Learning in Senior High Schools]. <https://edu.law.moe.gov.tw/LawContent.aspx?id=GL001247>

Onque, R. (2022, August 26). 74% of parents think schools should allow mental health days—these 12 states already do. *CNBC*. <https://www.cnbc.com/2022/08/23/12-states-that-allow-mental-health-days-for-kids-in-schools.html>

Partners, M. S. (2019, October 10). The Futility Of Mental Health Days. *Forbes*. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/mindsharepartners/2019/10/10/the-futility-of-mental-health-days/?sh=3ac99eac2d25>

Prothero, A. (2023, February 7). More schools are offering student mental health days. Here's what you need to know. *Education Week*. <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/more-schools-are-offering-student-mental-health-days-heres-what-you-need-to-know/2023/01>

Sandmeier, M. (2020). Are mental health days for students a good idea? *www.psychotherapynetworker.org*. <https://www.psychotherapynetworker.org/article/are-mental-health-days-students-good-idea>

Styx, L. (2023, May 9). States are now accepting “Mental Health Day” as a valid reason for missing school. *Verywell Mind*. <https://www.verywellmind.com/the-growing-acceptance-of-mental-health-days-for-students-5199076>

Weir, K. (n.d.). Safeguarding student mental health. *https://www.apa.org*. <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2020/09/safeguarding-mental-health>

Yurcaba, J. (2023, January 23). Why Taking a Mental Health Day Often Isn't Enough. *Verywell Mind*. <https://www.verywellmind.com/news-why-taking-a-mental-health-day-often-isn-t-enough-5081450>