

Dear Santa Barbara School Board Members,

My experience with AHA! first began in our Freshmen Seminar class. As a result of the positive experience with the inclusive, reflective, and honest classroom dynamic AHA! created within our space, I decided to join in their Peace Builders capacity. The following describes the atmosphere of a Peace Builder's lunchtime meeting:

Looking around, the students in AHA! Peace Builders are reflective of our school's diverse demographics culturally, socially, and academically. Some students are recognized strong leaders, active in the direction of the peace circles and whole group conversations. Other students are timid, yet finding positive role models to fortify their own role within the organization. Some students are very sure of their identities, confident in knowing who they are as adolescents within our school and community. Other students are in the process of finding themselves, feeling safe because they will not be judged in this setting but rather supported in their personal process. To be a part of AHA! is to be heard, celebrated, and uplifted.

Mario Rodriguez

Dean of Student Engagement at SBHS

Dear Santa Barbara School Board Members,

AHA! is absolutely vital in our classes. AHA! provides embedded intervention to support the academic success of all students, with specialized supports for struggling learners such as small groups discussions, live roll play examples and role plays of topic examples/scenarios and classroom bonding/interaction that are each with an expert adult. The AHA! content discusses important Standardized health topics such as emotional flooding, stereotyping, “isms”, bullying and cyberbullying and privilege and resiliency. AHA! also supports ELLs because of the variety of teaching techniques that incorporate SDAIE strategies for every type of learner that include visual aid, auditory methods, kinesthetic learning, and multiple bilingual experts who can translate. Title I students are supported through the content of AHA! that encompasses education on these health topics because AHA! provides a safe space for the discussion of these important Health topics that are vital to all student success in and outside of the classroom.

Veronica Gines
Health Teacher, Santa Barbara High School
(previously San Marcos High School)

May 10th, 2018

Dear Santa Barbara School Board Members,

I have been the DPHS AHA! Peace Builders teacher on campus for the last two years. This means I attend the meetings as a liaison and help as needed. I have observed the professional staff of AHA! do types of work with students that I have not seen with any other group in my 10 years as a high school teacher. Teaching students how to connect with others, talk to people who are different than them, take on multiple perspectives, and have the students themselves been seen. This is a clearly planned and intentional program where students learn skills they put into action. Having the group on campus not only makes a difference to the individual students but has the potential for culture change on a campus, and in our community. In a time where students are really struggling from feelings of disconnection, Peace Builders teaches and applies critical life skills that are desperately needed.

Please seriously consider the possibilities that are within reach when AHA! Peace Builders are supported by the district. Please feel free to email me with any questions.

Sincerely,

Kristen Ritter
Science Teacher DPHS
kritter@sbunified.org

Dear Santa Barbara School Board Members,

This letter is in support of the AHA program which has been positively impacting students lives in our Health classrooms at SMHS for several years. We are greatly concerned that this program may not be funded next year. Now, more than ever, with an added emphasis in the district on social and emotional health, handlings of school violence including school shootings, online chat room threats and our site-specific transistions of administration at SMHS, we feel the AHA facilitators are desperately needed for the students. So many of these topics are vital components of our health curriculum.

The AHA program addresses real-life topics that teenagers encounter such as stereotyping, teen brain emotional flooding, the 'isms (racism, sexism, sizeism, ableism, heterosexism, classism and agism), healthy adolescent communication skills and resiliency. In addition, AHA provides needed curriculum support for bullying and cyberbullying. One of the aspects that we see most valuable from AHA is the ability to break the class into small groups for discussion which allows students to feel more comfortable and willing to share their feelings with their classmates. This would not be possible in our regular classroom setting due to student-teacher ratio and the anxiety many students feel about sharing and communicating in a large group.

The majority of the facilitators are licensed psychologists. They provide a critical platform for students to work with their peers to communicate and calm the anxiety and fear that is prevalent in schools today. They come in well trained, well prepared, and as instant motivators for the students during the days they are here. Students learn the tools needed to confidently resist negative peer pressure and how to be an ally to their peers. The students consistently ask when AHA is coming back and are so impacted by the curriculum and the presentations that several students are inspired to participate in the AHA Peacebuilders Program and the the AHA Summer Program.

Below is a snapshot some of the weekly topics covered by AHA:

Week 1: Norms and expectations, safe classroom environment, small group introductions.

Week 2: Stereotypes: Define "stereotype" and discuss the impacts of stereotyping on our community. Stereotype the facilitator activity. Small groups on stereotypes. Personal impacts of stereotypes and how to move forward.

Week 3: Teen Brain & Flooding: Emotional Intelligence and how the brain works. Presentation on healthy ways to cope with emotional flooding. Small group sharing - "Last Time You Lost It" Activity - identify body clue, body sensation, emotion, and response. Discuss healthy soothing & coping strategies.

Week 4: Isms: Break down seven "isms." Define racism, sexism, sizeism, ableism, heterosexism, classism, ageism. Small group discussions on isms that affect us and how that feels. Explore ways to intervene and to reduce isms.

Week 5: Bullying & Cyberbullying: Bullying Skit. Explore the feelings the four roles of the bullying situation might have. Discuss strategies that can be used to intervene. Small group discussion on personal experiences, ways they have intervened, and how the students would like to intervene moving forward.

Week 6: Privilege & Resiliency: We begin with a shortened privilege activity that will allow students to have a visual example of privilege. Small groups discussion of assets of resiliency and stress techniques.

We as the health educators in the the Santa Barbara schools would like to see the continued use of AHA to support our students provide critical and student centered curriculum. We would like to be part of whatever process necessary to retain their services in our classroom.

Sincerely,

SMHS Health Educators