

Hlub Zoo Student Survey Findings

Academic Year 2022-2023

Overview

Hlub Zoo, which translates into “Love well” or “Grow well” in the Hmong language, is a culturally specific school-based mental health program for Hmong American students provided by the Amherst H. Wilder Foundation. The program serves Hmong American students across various Saint Paul public and charter schools. Students in the program work with culturally matched therapists in individual therapy sessions, and also participate in large group activities with other Hlub Zoo students to experience information about their culture.

Hlub Zoo aims to promote success at home, in school, and in the community by providing culturally responsive, holistic mental health services to students and their families.

This survey aims to understand the outcomes of being in the Hlub Zoo program for students in grades 6 through 12. In total, 30 students completed the survey during the 2022-2023 academic school year. Not every respondent answered every question; percentages in this report are based on the sample size for each individual question.

The breakdown of students by grade (Table 1) and by gender (Table 2) are reported below.

1. Grade level of survey respondents (N=30)

	%
6 th grade	20%
7 th grade	10%
8 th grade	23%
9 th grade	17%
10 th grade	3%
11 th grade	17%
12 th grade	10%

2. Gender of survey respondents (N=30)

	%
Male	55%
Female	37%
Another Identity	0%
Don't want to answer	13%

Key findings

Students were asked to choose whether they strongly agreed, agreed, disagreed, or strongly disagreed with a list of statements regarding their mental health and well-being. A full table of results is in the Appendix.

In addition to the closed ended questions, students were also given the prompt “After working with my Hlub Zoo therapist...” to help guide their answers. Students were also asked to share up to three examples of how the Hlub Zoo program has helped them. Key themes from the open and closed ended questions are summarized below. Some comments were slightly edited for clarity.

Students feel more self-aware

Many students shared that their Hlub Zoo therapist helped them improve their ability to understand and process through their emotions. Eighty-three percent of students agreed or strongly agreed that they could understand their feelings more.

What the Hlub Zoo program helped me with is that they have helped me with my emotions and me understanding things better. – 8th grade Hlub Zoo student

It has helped me learn to understand my emotions better. – 7th grade Hlub Zoo student

I have learned a lot about myself that I didn't even know about. – 9th grade Hlub Zoo student

Students feel more comfortable to open up about their feelings with others

Many students shared that they had struggled with opening up about their emotions, often keeping many of their feelings hidden. Ninety-three percent of students agreed that they could talk about their feelings more since working with their Hlub Zoo therapist. The Hlub Zoo therapists created a space for students to be able to openly share their feelings.

I can open up more about the things that have been bothering me and the struggles that are happening in my life. – 8th grade Hlub Zoo student

I was helped of taking steps with my problems so that I could feel that I am not keeping every[thing] secretive or hidden. – 12th grade Hlub Zoo student

I've been communicating better and expressing my feelings a lot more than last year. – 8th grade Hlub Zoo student

Students' relationships and communication with friends and family have improved

Being in the Hlub Zoo program has helped students improve their relationships with friends and family. Seventy percent of students agreed or strongly agreed that they are getting along better with family members. Eighty-three percent agreed or strongly agreed they are getting along better with non-family members.

This program helped me by understanding from peoples' point of view. – 11th grade Hlub Zoo student

Having problems with friends--how I could improve socializing... - 6th grade Hlub Zoo student

Communicating with others a bit better. I'm a person who really isn't experienced in interacting with others and a lot of the time, I don't know what to do. – 9th grade Hlub Zoo student

Students feel more capable of coping and regulating their emotions

Students agreed that Hlub Zoo has helped them learn healthy coping skills, and apply them during challenging times in their lives. Eighty-three percent agreed or strongly agreed that they have learned healthy ways to deal with their emotions, whereas 87% reported they could apply the skills they learned to control their emotions. Hlub Zoo has also helped students feel more confident in their ability to regulate their emotions.

In the beginning of the school year, it was hard for me to control my emotions and my stomach problems, but now Hlub Zoo has helped me control my feelings by taking deep breaths, speak up more, and just being me when I need to. – 6th grade Hlub Zoo student

[Hlub Zoo] helped me plan out different coping mechanisms that would benefit me on emotions and feelings. – 12th grade Hlub Zoo student

Hlub Zoo helps students increase their confidence and self esteem

The Hlub Zoo program has helped students improve their self-esteem. Seventy percent of students agreed or strongly agreed that they felt more confident and loved themselves more since working with their Hlub Zoo therapist. Eighty-three percent agreed or strongly agreed that being in Hlub Zoo has made them feel that their voice mattered.

One way is that it helped me grow more confidence. – 6th grade Hlub Zoo student

This program has helped me regain my mental health, as well as make me feel like I matter. – 8th grade Hlub Zoo student

I feel more confident with myself, and I'm much happier than before. – 9th grade Hlub Zoo student

I was really pessimistic about myself, but recently I've felt less pessimistic and a bit more optimistic about myself. – 9th grade Hlub Zoo student

Students feel proud to be taking care of their mental health

Mental health is often a “taboo” topic in the Hmong community. It is often something not well understood or acknowledged by many.¹ Sixty-three percent of students felt like they could talk about mental health with others in their community. Nearly all students in the Hlub Zoo program (97%) felt proud of working with their therapist and taking care of their mental health.

Hlub Zoo is helping students appreciate and understand their Hmong identities

A major component of the Hlub Zoo program is to help students find strength in their cultural identity as Hmong Americans. To assess the impact of participating in Hlub Zoo on students’ cultural identity, participants were asked “*Since joining Hlub Zoo, have there been any changes in how you feel about...*”, and were given the option to select from a list of statements regarding different aspects of one’s Hmong identity (e.g., Being Hmong, ability to speak Hmong, wearing Hmong clothes, something else). Students were given the option to select all that applied.

¹ Vang, C., Sun, F., & Sangalang, C. C. (2020) Mental health among the Hmong population in the U.S.: A systematic review of the influence of cultural and social factors. *Journal of Social Work, 21(4)*, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468017320940644>

One in three students (37%) reported there have been changes in how they feel about being Hmong since joining the Hlub Zoo program. About one in four (27%) reported changes in how they felt about their ability to speak Hmong. Students also shared that they are better able to understand the cultural context of their relationship with their parents.

Throughout the survey, students were asked to share three examples of how the Hlub Zoo program helped them, and if there were any changes in how they felt about their cultural identities since joining Hlub Zoo. The following quotes below reflect some of these students' responses.

I suppose that kind of Asian culture as to which the children/parents don't express their feelings toward one another. – 9th grade Hlub Zoo student

I suppose my parents (mostly father) knowing about how I emotionally/mentally feel a bit more than last. – 9th grade Hlub Zoo student

What I would say has change is how I feel with my Hmong community because I feel closer to it than ever. – 12th grade Hlub Zoo student

Students most frequently know they can talk to friends and their therapist about mental health

Students were asked to share who they could talk to about their emotions. Students most frequently said their therapist and friends. About three out of four students (76%) reported that they could talk to their therapists, and over half (55%) could talk to their friends.

Students are satisfied with the services they receive from Hlub Zoo

Overall, students were satisfied with the services they received from their Hlub Zoo therapists. All of the students who completed the survey felt respected by their therapists and were happy to be in the Hlub Zoo program. Over ninety percent of students felt understood by their therapist, and felt that working with their therapist made them feel better.

Limitations

- It is important to recognize that these survey findings cannot be generalized to all Hlub Zoo students. Hlub Zoo serves over 100 students from grades 2-12; only 30 students in grades 6-12 participated.
- The survey did not measure students' baseline level of cultural identity. It may be possible that students already had a strong connection to their Hmong identity, and, thus, may not have experienced any changes in how they felt about the cultural aspects listed in the survey.

Appendix

Program outcomes

A1. SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL OUTCOMES

How much do you agree with the following statements? (N=30)	% of students who responded "Agree" or "Strongly agree"	% of students who responded "Disagree" or "Strongly disagree"
I can talk about my feelings more	93%	7%
I can understand my feelings more	83%	17%
I get along better with my parents, guardians, or family	70%	30%
I get along better with others	83%	17%
I have learned healthy ways to deal with my emotions	83%	17%
I can use the skills I learned with my therapist to control my emotions	87%	13%
I feel more confident	70%	30%
I love myself more	70%	30%
I feel like my voice matters	83%	17%
I feel proud of seeing my therapist/taking care of my mental health	97%	3%
I feel like I can talk about mental health with others in my community	63%	37%

A2. PERCEIVED SOCIAL SUPPORT

I know I can talk to...when I need to talk about my emotions (N=29)	%
Another person	7%
No one	7%
My teachers	31%
My siblings	34%
My parents/guardians	38%
My friends	55%
My therapist	76%

A3. CULTURAL IDENTITY OUTCOMES

Since joining Hlub Zoo, have there been any changes in how you feel about... (N=30)	%
No change	40%
Being Hmong	37%
Something else	33%
Your ability to speak Hmong	27%
Eating Hmong food	20%
Your interest in learning to speak, read, or write Hmong	17%
Your ability to speak English	17%
Going to Hmong community events	10%
Wearing Hmong clothes	10%
Practicing Hmong traditions	7%

A4. PROGRAM SATISFACTION

How much do you agree with the following statements? (N=29)	% of students who responded "Agree" or "Strongly agree"
My therapist helps me feel better	93%
I feel like my therapist understands me	97%
I feel like my therapist respects me	100%
I'm happy that I started seeing my therapist	100%

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