

**Chloe Appel**

One in five high school students in the United States suffers from a diagnosable mental health condition such as anxiety or depression. It may be difficult to understand the impact or significance of ‘one in five’. To bring this statistic a little closer to home, in Montgomery County, one in five high school students is equivalent to the student population of Winston Churchill, Richard Montgomery, Magruder, Walt Whitman, and Wootton High Schools combined. Nearly 10,000 students in Montgomery County are struggling with a diagnosable, treatable illness every single day. Approximately 50% of these 10,000 students will be diagnosed, get the care they need and grow up to be our future doctors, lawyers, teachers – our leaders of tomorrow. The other 50% – equivalent to the population of Richard Montgomery and Wootton High Schools are not diagnosed and are at an increased risk for drug abuse, alcoholism, and suicide. Now imagine governments across the country looking at these same statistics. The impact is staggering.

My name is Chloe Appel, and I am a rising sophomore at Magruder High School. I am a strong student activist, fighting for mental health advocacy, stricter gun laws, and equal education for special needs students. I am an active member on the Education Policy Board of Montgomery County Regional Student Government Association. I am also ‘one in five.’ While I am fortunate to have excellent caregivers to help me keep my anxiety under control, when I look at my peers I cannot help wondering who is suffering in silence. Who could need help and no one is aware? And even if we were aware, would we know what to do?

We need a change in mindset and policy from reaction to early action, promotion and prevention. We need a comprehensive approach to mental health education, access to trained

mental health professionals and removing the stigma about mental health conditions. For

Montgomery County, I propose the following:

- Community and school-based mental health awareness campaign describing mental health conditions and warning signs. In the school-based program, trained professionals would guide students to learn about recognizing and responding to warning signs of mental health concerns in friends, using coping skills, support systems, and seeking help for themselves and friends.
- Community and school-based mental health professionals readily available with a focus on youth mental health and wellness.
- Community and school partnerships with Stop the Stigma dedicated to eradicating the stigma society places on mental health issues through educating the public.

Mental health is more than statistics and math problems, it is in families, among our friends and in our communities. Having a mental health condition should not be any different than a physical illness. In the same way we would not expect Bryce Harper to play with a broken arm, we should not expect our children to grow with a mental illness. With constant reassurance and the educating of warning signs, we as a county can support the ‘one in five.’

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