

Recommended Strategies from ACHS Students to Build a Stronger Culture of Belonging

Expand access to safe, supportive spaces at school and in the community.

Students recommended school clubs, after-school programs, group activities, and community spaces where young people can connect with peers and trusted adults, talk through personal struggles, manage stress or anger, and receive help before problems escalate. They emphasized locating and promoting these spaces in neighborhoods where young people may face greater barriers to support.

Sources: Sara Al Bahlani, *Improving Student Access to School Counselors at ACHS*, 2026; Ahmad Ehsan Nazar, *Mental Health Support for Students at ACHS*, 2026; Dua Sajjad, *Mental Health*, 2026; Eliud Monge-Paz, *Mental Health Awareness*, 2026; Yasin Bhuiyan, *Students Struggling with Mental Health & Depression*, 2026; Perez, *Cyber Bullying in Social Media*, 2026; Storks, *School Safety & Security in ACPS*, 2025; Maurice Brown, *School Awareness & Safety of Students*, 2026; Yakoub, Mussa Seman, & Legend Barnes, *School Safety/Security*, 2025; Jackson Dundon & Jamar Cannon, *Student Student Safety and Security At ACHS*, 2026; Isis Jones, *Youth Mental Health and School Safety,* 2026; and hamiditabasum, *School Safety*, 2025.

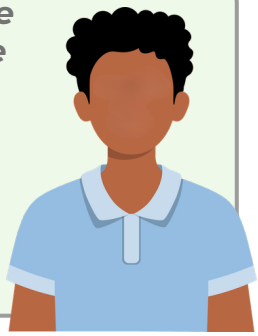


"ACHS could offer more counselor check-ins, peer support groups, stress-relief activities, and safe spaces where students can talk openly about their experiences and emotions."

~ Jonatan Perez, 2026

"ACHS should create more quiet and safe spaces where students can relax and talk openly."

~ Ahmad Ehsan Nazar, 2026



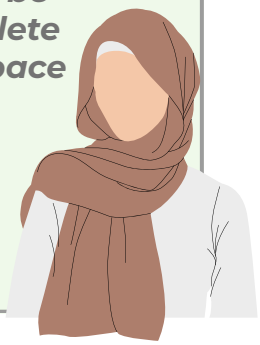
Ensure every student can identify a trained, trusted adult at school

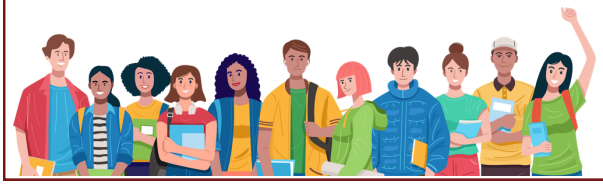
Students recommended requiring all teachers and school staff to complete credible safe-space and trauma-informed training during protected, paid professional-development time. They called for recurring training, ongoing coaching rather than one-time workshops, culturally relevant community partners, and student and family input into how the training is designed and evaluated.

Sources: Mahlet Melke, *Safe Space Program for ACHS,* 2026.

"Teachers should be required to complete a credible safe-space program in order to be trusted adults."

~ Mahlet Melke, 2026





Recommended Strategies from ACHS Students to Build a Stronger Culture of Belonging

Create a more welcoming, inclusive, and engaging school climate

Students recommended helping new students feel welcomed and build friendships, creating more opportunities for students to talk and connect with one another, making learning more engaging and purposeful, and building an inclusive culture where students feel respected, supported, and able to belong. They also urged ACPS to balance safety rules with student well-being, open communication, and trust rather than relying only on restrictive policies. Students also recommended promoting clubs, after-school programs, schoolwide activities, and other opportunities that help young people connect with peers, take a break from academic pressure, and build a stronger sense of community.

Sources: Dylan Barrios, *Welcoming School Environment*, 2025; Herbert Rodriguez Aleman, *School Safety*, 2025; Nixon Josue, *School Safety*, 2025; Jones, *Youth Mental Health and School Safety*, 2026; and Yohannes, Lemus, and Benitez, *Safety & Security in Schools & Communities*, 2025.



"I want every student to feel welcomed so that every child in Alexandria has a strong start in life and school."

~ Dylan Barrios, 2025

"School should be a place where students feel protected, supported, and like they're actually learning something."

~ Herbert Rodriguez Aleman, 2025



Balance security with dignity, fairness, and student well-being

Students supported clear expectations and consistent responses to violence, bullying, and other unsafe behavior. At the same time, they cautioned that locked bathrooms, unclear or overly strict restrictions, disrespectful interactions, and policies developed without sufficient student input can increase stress, limit access, and deepen mistrust between students and school staff. They recommended regularly reviewing safety policies using student surveys, audits, and dialogue; holding security personnel accountable for respectful and professional conduct; and ensuring that safety measures protect students without unnecessarily harming their mental health, freedom, trust, or access to basic needs.

Sources: Yohannes, Lemus, and Benitez, 2025; Farmer, *ACHS Security Guards*, 2026; Mishaal, *Student Safety*, 2025; Storks, *School Safety & Security in ACPS*, 2025; Hammoude, *School Safety and Security/Bullying*, 2026; Amar Muhammad, *School Safety & Security*, 2026; Zeanise and Kristy, *Violence in Schools*, 2026; and Roger Sierra, *Student Representatives at ACHS*, 2026.



"It undermines student trust in adults who are supposed to protect us, makes us less likely to report real safety issues, and increases stress during the school day."

~ Rilo Farmer, 2026

"Safety cannot come at the expense of student well-being...New restrictions, such as locked bathrooms and overly strict regulations, have led to a disconnect between students and administration, worsening mental health concerns and limiting student freedoms."

~ Almaz Yohannes, Emily Lemus & Layla Benitez, 2025

