

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.

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