



Brain Health Scholar Program

The Brain Health Initiative's (BHI) ***Be Brain Healthy Movement*** is designed, as one of many solutions, to engage and empower the Suncoast region by providing needed brain health knowledge, tools, resources, programming, and training in skill sets to enhance brain health outcomes at the individual and community level, for all ages. A comprehensive community engagement program is unfolding, offering and/or piloting enrichment (education, training, programs, and resources) for individuals who are interested in personal development and self-care, or in taking a more active role by gaining training on brain health they can share with the community, as a community brain health educator.

The **Brain Health Scholar** program provides education and training for Scholars over 3 terms and includes opportunities to serve the community at an advanced level as a Brain Health Community Educator and through different tracks (beginning with Adolescent Mental Health, Arts and Science of Brain Health, and Be Brain Healthy Lifestyle).

Application Process

The Brain Health Scholar program is a competitive appointment open to high school and college (16 years or older) student leaders who participate in a youth program or attend a private or public school within the greater Suncoast region or a BHI associated college or university. The Brain Health Scholar program is an inclusive program free to eligible candidates.

An authorized representative of a collaborating organization will nominate identified student leader(s). The qualified candidate(s) should have an interest in science, medicine, and/or health and well-being. The position requires about 20 hours of commitment per term. Brain Health Scholars have the right to refuse the nomination and may withdraw from participation at any time during the project.

Program

Scholars work with the Brain Health Initiative in its effort to promote and protect brain health, prevent and fight brain illness, and improve performance for all ages throughout the Suncoast region. Specifically, Scholars will help carry out the community engagement, research, and innovation agenda with the Brain Health Initiative to better understand and take action on the brain health and well-being concerns, values, priorities, and attitudes of both youth and adults. Brain Health Scholars will receive a certificate of participation that can be included in their college application portfolio. The certificate also documents their service hours contributing to this unique opportunity to assist in the work of the Brain Health Initiative, an effort supported, in part, by Massachusetts General Hospital, a Harvard Medical School Teaching Hospital. Beyond supporting

brain health, the experience of this program has been a differentiator during the college application process for many of BHI Brain Health scholars with elite college admission offices. Senior High School Brain Health Scholars may request a letter of introduction from Dr. Peabody to their top 3 choice college admission offices. All scholars may request a letter of support for scholarship applications.

2020-2021 Pilot Program Outcomes

In its inaugural pilot semester, more than 60 students were appointed Brain Health Scholars and completed 6 months working with BHI clinicians and researchers learning about brain health in general, and how to increase protective and decrease risk factors through lifestyle behaviors. The Scholars participated in didactic training related to the science of brain health, as well as the scientific process of community-based research. The Scholars participated in the development of the community perception and prioritization pilot and final surveys for youth and adults and through this process, learned that two of the most prevalent brain health risk factors among Sarasota and Bradenton youth are sleep and stress. Further work with the students clarified the role that social media and sedentary lifestyle plays in interrupting sleep and adding stress into their daily lives. This learning has crystallized for the BHI the need to work together on improving youth and adolescent mental health as one of four core themes for the Brain Health Initiative. With funding, the Brain Health Scholars will have the opportunity to work alongside BHI faculty and producers, writers, and researchers of the Netflix documentary, [The Social Dilemma](#). The students will lead a Community Town Hall panel discussion regarding the implications of social media use to youth and adolescent mental health. This will lead to the Brain Health developing a public health campaign to support brain healthy use of social media among youth and adolescents.

The potential of this program to boost brain health protective factors in youth and those with whom they associate while providing Scholars the opportunity to explore potential academic and career paths is enormous. Below are some quotes and attached is a portfolio from the inaugural 2020 class of Scholars about their experience in the program:

“I didn’t expect that my mental health, my physical health and even my grades would improve....but they did.”

“I turn my phone and all other screens off about a half hour before bed and meditate, this simply helps me sleep better.”

“The more I learned, the more I realized how pertinent brain health is to my own community.”

“The program taught me multiple important aspects that go into maintaining one’s brain health, as well as the extent to which brain illness is present in society today - more so now than ever before.”

“I was able to learn how social media, physical exercise, and even the foods you eat can affect the way your brain grows throughout your lifetime.”

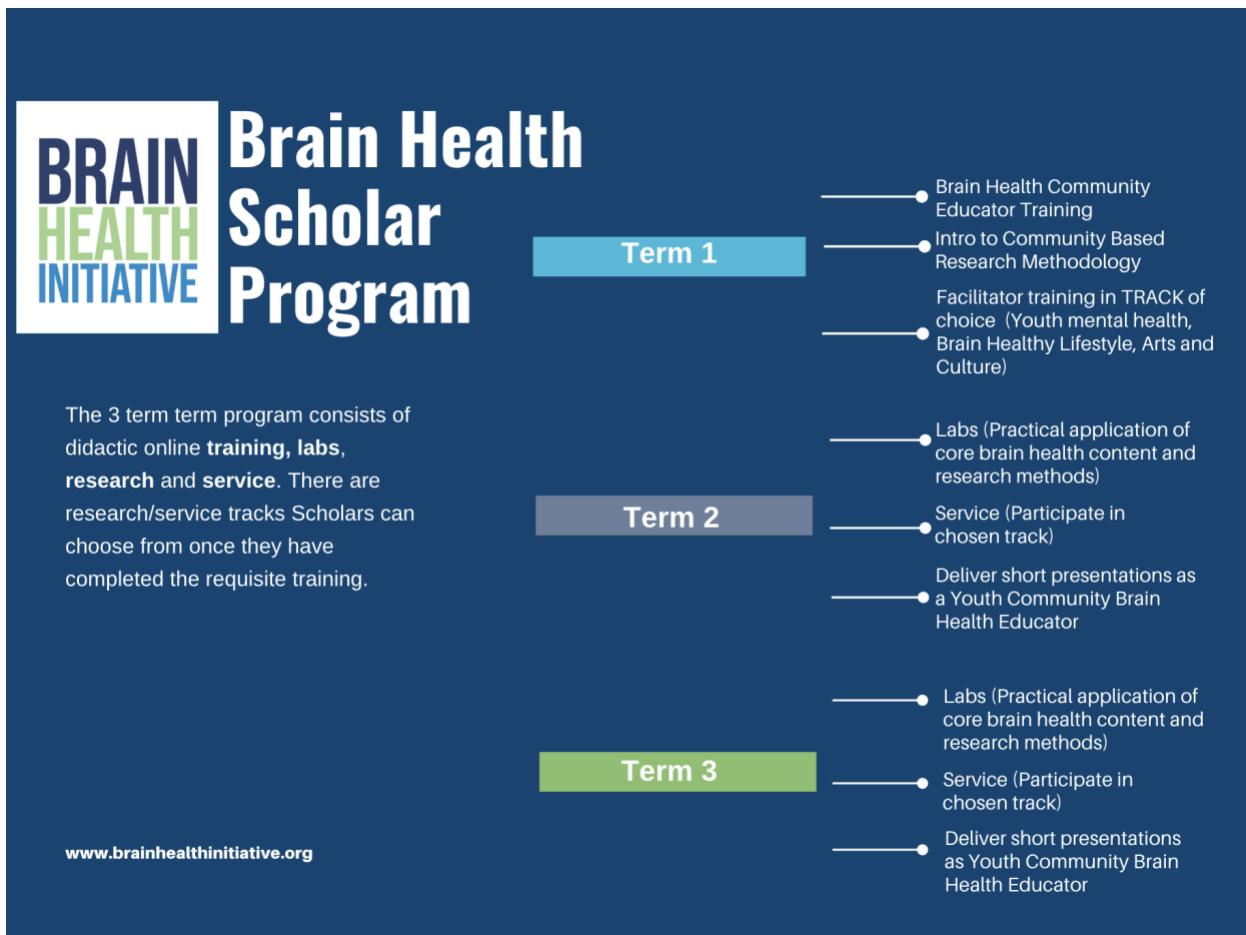
Superintendents from Manatee and Sarasota Counties have requested we offer the Brain Health Scholars program to students from every high school in the region. And more than two dozen College Admissions offices, having learned about the program through student college applications, are requesting the BHI resources to help establish Brain Health Scholar Chapters on their campuses.

This single program provides a compelling example of the ways in which individuals can learn to be brain healthy. It also equips participants with the tools to help lead the BHI's brain health movement and campaign for families and communities aimed at changing how we care for our brains and transform how we promote optimal performance and approach brain illness.

Funding Request

The Brain Health Initiative is eager to grow this program beyond the pilot and reach the diverse population of youth in the region. To extend further and develop and grow the Brain Health Scholars program, requires that we seek an infusion of financial support from the community.

Brain Health Scholar Program Components



- **Didactic Training**

- *Brain Health Community Educator Course*

Online, self-paced course that **educates** and **empowers** Scholars to be their own brain change agents to build and sustain their brain health, fitness, and performance across their lifespan with a focus on the pillars of brain health (e.g., nutrition, physical activity, sleep, stress resilience, cognitive stimulation, social connection). Scholars will learn about lifestyle risk and protective factors related to brain health and performance, and how they address the protective factors that can make the most difference for them, within a matter of months. The course also **equips** Scholars with the core content essential to their role as a community educator, along with access to a selection of related resources (e.g., access to the Brain Health Vital Signs screening tool, summary notes, handouts, evidence-based self-assessments, strategies and recommended books and articles, along with references for further self-study).

All Brain Health Scholars will be trained as a Brain Health Community Educator and required to make tbd# short community presentations related to *the Be Brain Healthy: Be Brain Powerful Campaign and Challenge* in the 2nd and 3rd terms.

- *Introduction to Community Based Research Methodology*

Topics covered include:

- Introduction to the research process
 - The scientific method and building community surveys for longitudinal research
 - Survey question development
 - Survey administration
 - Item testing
 - Developing a recruitment plan to increase community participation
 - Data analysis
 - Presentation of results

- *Chosen Track Training (Youth and Adolescent Mental Health, Leading a Brain Healthy Lifestyle, and Arts and Culture)*

See descriptions below.

- **Labs (practical application of core content)**

The focus of the labs is to provide opportunities for Scholars to learn to think like a scientist. Experiences will be unique each term and will be specific to the Brain Health Scholar cohort tracks and BHI current research.

- **Research and Service (end of school year town hall; present data collected and outcomes)**

Upon successful completion of the didactic portion of the program, the Brain Health Scholars become ambassadors of brain health and are in a prime position to begin to translate and communicate the science of brain health and to share this information throughout the community and across the lifespan. Scholars have the introductory toolset to change attitudes and behavior on brain health. Therefore, Scholars become an integral part of assisting the BHI in creating a

culture that proudly promotes how to protect this vital organ and build acceptance that each of us, young and older, can take steps to improve our brain health and prevent brain illness of all types.

Additional funding for the Brain Health Scholar program will also offer Scholars Science into Action Tracks.

Three Brain Health Science into Action Track Options:

1. Youth and Adolescent Mental Health Facilitator Track

The BHI has evaluated and selected the established Massachusetts General Hospital, and Harvard Medical School PRIDE Training Institute as a partner to help address the youth mental health challenges facing youth in the Sarasota and Manatee counties. The PRIDE Training Institute partners with schools, school systems and organizations to create communities of healing, locally, and globally. The BHI will offer the services of the PRIDE Training Institute and aims to increase access to mental health care by training and coaching community paraprofessionals and Brain Health Scholars to deliver cognitive behavioral skills to youth. The 4-week, (5 hours per week) summer training provides science-driven building blocks for these youth that will build resiliency and strengthen their emotional wellness as well as the peers they are equipped to mentor.

2. Brain Healthy Lifestyle Behavior Facilitator Track

The BHI has a longstanding relationship with BOKS, a research-driven, lifestyle behavior program designed to address the sedentary lives and poor nutrition that negatively impacts children's physical, brain, and social health by getting communities, especially kids, active and establishing a lifelong commitment to brain healthy lifestyles and physical fitness. The program is built on the science documented by Brain Health Initiative faculty, Dr. John Ratey in his book, *Spark: The Revolutionary New Science of Exercise and the Brain*. BOKS and the Brain Health Initiative will provide free physical activity curriculum, training and support to Suncoast region schools, youth development organizations, and healthy aging programs looking to establish and maintain impactful, scientific-based brain health programs focused on increasing protective factors of brain health—including fitness, nutrition, stress resilience, social connection, emotional well-being, meaning and purpose, cognitive stimulation, and general health. Brain Health Scholars will be prepared to be a BOKS Trainer and facilitate BOKS programming with youth (preschool through high school) and healthy aging (senior) groups in their community.

3. Arts and Culture Facilitator Track

The goals of this track include supporting the community, providing education about the arts and the implications of the arts for promoting and protecting brain health, preventing and fighting brain illness, optimizing brain performance while supporting brain development and healthy aging. Additional aims include inspiring and empowering the community to choose brain healthy behaviors, including enjoyment of, and participation in, the performing arts.

A wealth of scientific evidence demonstrates that appreciating, experiencing and participation in the arts enhances brain health, development, performance, recovery, and aging, through a variety of mechanisms. Brain Health Scholars, by promoting the arts through programs and events specifically designed to engage these mechanisms, will enrich both the culture and the brain health of the Suncoast region of Florida.

LETTERS OF SUPPORT



Office of the Superintendent
1960 Landings Blvd., Sarasota, FL 34231
941-927-9000 • fax 941-927-2539
SarasotaCountySchools.net

March 8, 2021

To Whom It May Concern:

I'm writing to inform you that the Sarasota School District is in complete support of the work of the Brain Health Initiative (BHI) and to add my voice to support the expansion of the BHI programs that affect not only schools but our total community. The BHI is currently conducting surveys to learn perceived community strengths and needs related to brain health, risk, protective factors, and brain illness across all age groups. The surveys also examine crucial issues related to how our students, teachers and personnel, and parents have experienced the COVID-19 pandemic. This is something that we recommend as being information to understand across our entire county.

This project, as I understand it, is currently funded through the generosity of the Charles & Margery Barancik Foundation, and includes the cities of Sarasota and Bradenton. However, the preliminary analysis of data from the pilot studies indicates that the information these surveys provide could greatly benefit our region if expanded to include the diversity of our wider counties and entire School Districts.

Further, we would like to see the expansion and continuation of the Brain Health Scholars program. Sarasota Schools have been fortunate enough to have more than 30 Brain Health Scholars to date who have had a positive experience and shown interest in continuing the program. We would like to see this opportunity extended to more students in Sarasota County Schools.

In conclusion, we are grateful to the Charles & Margery Barancik Foundation for supporting the BHI community-wide survey program to assess both youth and adult perceptions of community brain health and for supporting the pilot of the Brain Health Scholar program. We know that these initiatives will benefit our region if expanded across Sarasota and Manatee Counties.

Please give the expansion of funding to these projects your full consideration.

Yours very sincerely,

Brennan Asplen III
Superintendent of Sarasota County Schools



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SUPERINTENDENT

Cynthia Saunders

SCHOOL DISTRICT OF MANATEE COUNTY

March 11, 2021

Dr. Stephanie Peabody and Dr. Shelley Carson
Brain Health Initiative

Dear Drs. Peabody and Carson:

The School District of Manatee County (SDMC) has approved the following research proposed by the Brain Health Initiative.

The Brain Health Initiative has prepared two community-wide surveys (one for adults and one for youth between the ages of 14 and 21) that address the concerns and priorities related to brain health, brain health-risk and protective factors, and brain health illness, as well as community response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The School District of Manatee County has worked with members of the Brain Health Initiative to revise the surveys to provide the highest level of protection for our students while maintaining the scientific integrity of the surveys.

The Brain Health Initiative has completed the research proposal procedures necessary for our School Board to approve the project and this letter represents approval from the School District of Manatee County to conduct the research. The Brain Health Initiative is approved for the following:

- Introductory emails as well as a link to the *voluntary and anonymous* School District of Manatee County Adult Brain Health Community Perception and Priority Survey will be disseminated through the School District offices to teachers, school personnel, and parents with students in the high schools.
- Introductory emails as well as a link to the *voluntary and anonymous* School District of Manatee County Youth Brain Health Community Perception and Priority Survey will be disseminated through the School District offices to high school students whose parents have consented to participation.

The SDMC is pleased to participate in this important research.

Yours very sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Cynthia Saunders".

Cynthia Saunders
Superintendent

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To Whom It May Concern:

Our district is participating in a program of great value to our schools and community. We are writing today to recommend that the Brain Health Initiative Community Perception and Prioritization Survey be considered for expansion to a broader demographic. The Brain Health Initiative has provided a community-wide survey that has worked to address needs related to brain health across all age groups, as well as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The project is currently being implemented in the cities of Sarasota and Bradenton, but as we have examined the preliminary data, we have found that the impact these surveys have had is substantial and would benefit broader participation.

The demographics of the county are very different from those of Bradenton and we need to hear and understand the voices of those parents, students, personnel, and residents. We believe the information will help form a real-time picture of current brain health in our area and inform future education, public health, research, policies, and decisions related to brain health and performance. For example, from the pilot survey, we learned much about the perception and priorities of brain health and illness from our youth and adult leaders in Bradenton. This is such valuable information, but we would like to obtain this data from across the different economic regions of our county.

Additionally, we would like to see the expansion and continuation of the Brain Health Scholars program. Bradenton Schools have been fortunate enough to claim almost 30 Brain Health Scholars to date who have had a positive experience and shown interest in continuing to participate beyond the last semester. Our purpose in writing you is that we would like to see this opportunity extended to more students across our School System.

We are grateful to the Charles & Margery Barancik Foundation for supporting the Brain Health Initiative programs. If these programs are expanded, the diverse information provided by the residents throughout both counties and the increase of students throughout the region participating in the Brain Health Scholars program will be a long-term asset to our communities. Please give the expansion of funding to these projects your full consideration.

Yours very sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that appears to read "Cynthia Saunders".

Cynthia Saunders
Superintendent of Manatee County Schools

A handwritten signature in blue ink that appears to read "Jennifer Bencie".

Jennifer Bencie MD, MSA
Administrator/County Health Officer
Florida Department of Health in Manatee County