



Brain Health Scholar Program Overview

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 2 years and 4 terms. The program includes opportunities to serve the community at an advanced level as a Brain Health Community Educator and through different tracks (e.g., Early Childhood Brain Health Promotion, Youth Mental Health, Brain Healthy Lifestyle-Public and Community Health, Arts and Culture, Dementia Risk-Reduction, Brain Healthy Nutrition).

Nomination and Application Process

The Brain Health Scholar program is open to high school (15 years or older), undergraduate, and graduate student leaders who participate in a youth program, attend a school or a school within a school district (others by special consideration), or college/university that are collaborating with the Brain Health Initiative.

An authorized representative of the nominating organization nominates identified student leader(s). The qualified candidate(s) should have an interest in science, medicine, health and human services, and/or education. Brain Health Scholars have the right to refuse the nomination and may withdraw from participation at any time during the project.

Program

Brain Health Scholars have the opportunity to participate in a hybrid model with Brain Health Initiative clinicians and scientists. Specifically, Scholars 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. Scholars participate in didactic training related to the science of brain health, as well as the scientific process of community-based research. Scholars also receive training, tools, and resources to translate science into action to impact themselves and those they care about, as

well as to promote and protect brain health, fight brain illness and improve brain performance for all ages throughout the community.

This program is also strategically planned to personally support youth thought leaders and those they interact with through the stressful period of adolescent and young adult development, to normalize and destigmatize their lived brain health and illness experiences and to share the science of brain health and performance.

The Brain Health Scholar must have reliable access to the internet. Some elective research, community engagement, and outreach responsibilities will require transportation. All scholars receive an annual certificate of participation documenting service hours.

Duties include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Complete confidentiality agreement.
- Attend and complete didactic training including webinars, labs, and presentations on the science of brain health and research methods.
- Upon completion of training, serve as a Brain Health Community Educator.
- Complete the BHI youth stakeholder prioritization survey. In doing so, the research assistant will contribute a youth perspective on the brain health risk and protective factors in their community, and help to shape the research, community engagement, and intervention agenda.
- Assist in all stages of the research process on various BHI projects, including needs assessment, planning (program design), implementation and evaluation. BHI research projects may be descriptive, qualitative, quantitative, or exploratory.
- Assist in creating communications and recruitment of future Brain Health Scholars.
- Assist with creating press releases and participating in media events regarding the BH Scholar program.
- Serve as Brain Health Champions in schools and at community events.
- Manage and respond to project related emails.
- Receive support in the college undergraduate and graduate admissions process through letters of introduction and personal outreach by BHI faculty to the scholars' top college choices.

[Watch a short video about the Brain Health Scholar Program](#)

Pilot Program Outcomes

In its inaugural program, more than 69 students were appointed Brain Health Scholars and completed 6 months working with BHI faculty, 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 three of the most prevalent brain health risk factors among Sarasota and Bradenton youth are sleep, emotional well-being, and stress. Further work with the students clarified the role that social media and sedentary lifestyle plays in interrupting

sleep, decreasing emotional well-being, 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 development 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 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 transforming how we promote optimal performance and approach brain illness.

[View letters from current and previous Brain Health Scholars.](#)

Brain Health Scholar Program Components



Brain Health Scholar Program

The two year, four term program consists of didactic online **training, labs, research** and **service**. In terms 2-4 Scholars participate in service activities with community partners as a Brain Health Educator in a track of choice* (e.g., Early Childhood Brain Health Promotion, Youth Mental Health, Brain Healthy Lifestyle-Community Health, Arts and Culture, Dementia Risk-Reduction, Brain Healthy Nutrition, Adolescent Reasoning and Brain/Mental Health Storytelling as track options).

Term 1	Term 2
<ul style="list-style-type: none">—● Lifestyle Medicine for the Brain training—● Intro to Community Based Research Methodology—● Labs (practical application of core brain health content and research methods)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">—● Brain Health Community Educator training—● Facilitator training in track of choice *—● Service: <i>Be Brain Healthy; Be Brain Powerful Campaign and Challenge</i>; Participate in chosen track *
Term 3	Term 4
<ul style="list-style-type: none">—● Continuing education and Labs (practical application of core brain health content and research methods)—● Service: <i>Be Brain Healthy; Be Brain Powerful Campaign and Challenge</i>; Participate in chosen track*—● Facilitate short presentations as Community Brain Health Educator	<ul style="list-style-type: none">—● Continuing education and Labs (practical application of core brain health content and research methods)—● Service: <i>Be Brain Healthy; Be Brain Powerful Campaign and Challenge</i>; Participate in chosen track*—● Facilitate short presentations as a Community Brain Health Educator

www.brainhealthinitiative.org

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



SCHOOL BOARD

Charlie Kennedy
Chair

Rev. James Golden
Vice Chair

Mary Foreman
Dr. Scott L. Hopes
Gina Messenger

SUPERINTENDENT

Cynthia Saunders

P.O. Box 9069
Bradenton, FL 34206-9069
215 Manatee Avenue West
Bradenton, FL 34205
941.708.8770
www.manateeschools.net

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,

Cynthia Saunders
Superintendent



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, appearing to read "Cynthia Saunders".

Cynthia Saunders
Superintendent of Manatee County Schools

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jennifer Bencie".

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