



Northern Illinois
University



Campus Partnership
Update



JED Campus Partnership

At Northern Illinois University, we believe that well-being is not an initiative but a foundation. It is the soil in which learning takes root, purpose is nurtured and success grows. Well-being is not separate from academic excellence; it is essential to it.

In December 2022, NIU entered a powerful, four-year partnership with the JED Foundation, made possible through state funding as we emerged from the COVID-19 pandemic. We entered this partnership not simply to address mental health on campus, but to fully reimagine how we care for our students as complex, dynamic individuals whose well-being is essential to their success. This collaboration was born from our deep commitment to student success and the understanding that success is most sustainable when students feel connected, supported and seen. In the time since, we have built more than a task force. We have established a deeply collaborative effort rooted in shared purpose and sustained by collective care. These efforts are anchored by the university's long-term commitment to well-being, reflected in university goal 2B: Continue to make our student experience more equitable and engaging; and in the theme of care and support in our model for student success. The JED Campus Team, composed of 25 dedicated members from across the university, began convening in 2023 and continues to meet regularly with openness and resolve. Guided by the Healthy Minds Survey's findings in winter 2023, the team has mobilized subcommittees aligned with JED's core strategic areas: life skills, social connectedness, crisis management and clinical services.

While this report marks the midpoint of our four-year journey with JED, it is not a conclusion but a catalyst. Our commitment to our students' mental health and well-being extends far beyond this partnership. We are laying the groundwork for today's Huskies and the generations that will follow — students who will thrive because we dared to do the deep work now.

I would like to extend my gratitude to the JED Campus Team. Your compassion and vision have shaped this report and this movement. I am also grateful to the Presidential Commission on Well-being. Their commitment to advancing wellness across our campus community strengthens every step we take toward a more caring, connected and resilient NIU. Let this report serve not just as a record of progress, but as a reminder: When we lead with empathy and act with intention, we create more than policies, we create the conditions for people to flourish.

With deep gratitude, enduring hope and our aspirations lifted high,

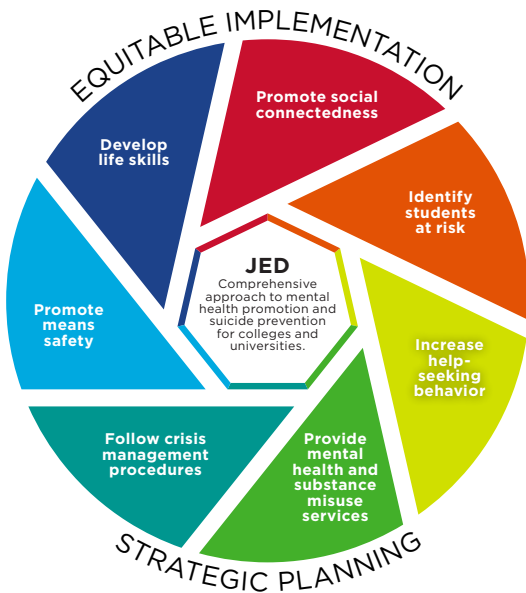
Clint-Michael Reneau, Ph.D.
Vice President for Student Affairs





JED Campus Partnership

Northern Illinois University recently completed two years of partnership with the JED Foundation, which marks the halfway point of our partnership and strategic plan. This strategic plan is based on a detailed self-assessment of NIU's health promotion, substance use and suicide prevention efforts. This report highlights some of the progress we have made toward our strategic plan goals in each of the JED domains: developing life skills, promoting social connectedness, identifying students at risk, increasing help-seeking behavior, providing mental health and substance misuse services, following crisis management procedures, and restricting access to potentially lethal means.



About JED

JED is a nonprofit organization that empowers teens and young adults by building resiliency and life skills, promoting social connectedness, and encouraging help-seeking and help-giving behaviors through nationally recognized programs, digital channels, partnerships and through the media. JED works with schools to put into place and strengthen existing systems, programs and policies to create a culture of caring that protects student mental health, builds life skills and makes it more likely that struggling students will seek help and be recognized, connected to care and supported. The JED approach is visualized as a circle with each area contributing to the comprehensive, holistic approach to well-being.

jedfoundation.org/the-story-of-jed/





Develop Life Skills

- A subcommittee conducted a comprehensive life skills inventory, surveying units across campus to determine the types and frequency of programming that helps students develop life skills.
 - ◆ More than 160 programs were identified across campus that are accessible to students and contribute to life skills development.
 - ◆ Five areas were identified as needing stronger programming and will be targeted for increased attention: meditation/ mindfulness, distress tolerance, conflict resolution, hazing and bullying.
- Procrastination Café, a communal, academic workspace hosted by Student Wellness, is one of their most popular initiatives. Over 220 students participated in fall 2024, with 97% of participants stating that the program increased their productivity.

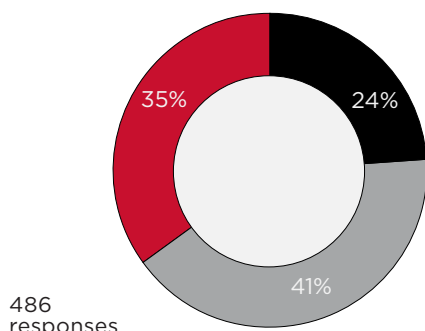


Promote Social Connectedness

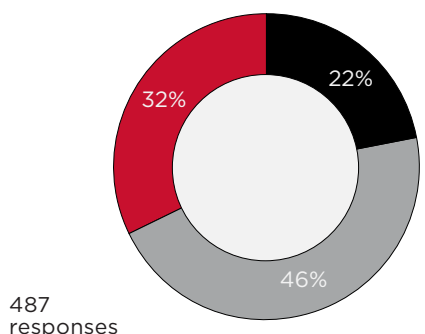
- NIU has multiple peer mentorship programs including the Student Life Excellence Development (SLED) Mentor program in the Center for Student Assistance, a program for students with disabilities through the Disability Resource Center, and mentorship for students involved in the cultural resource centers. Because of connections made through the JED Campus Team, many of these groups are now completing joint trainings on important topics like student mental health, enhancing peer connections and linking students to resources.
- Student Wellness continues to offer programming centering social connectedness: Crafting Connections hosted 126 students in the 2023-2024 Academic Year.



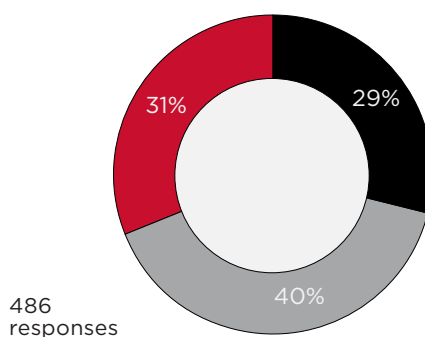
How often do you feel... ...that you lack companionship?



...left out?



...isolated from others?



- Often.
- Some of the time.
- Hardly ever.

Identify Students at Risk

- Student Wellness developed the A.S.K. Like a Huskie mental health support training. Through this training students will learn to help friends navigate mental health concerns with three steps: Ask, support and keep in touch. Trainings are being rolled out in spring 2025.
- Through the state of Illinois Mental Health Early Action on Campus Act and competitive grant funding, Student Wellness hired five additional peer educators, bringing the total number of peer educators to 10.
- Our Healthy Minds Study results revealed that students experience emotional or mental difficulties as barriers to their success (Figure 1). Faculty and academic advisors may be the first to notice the impact of a student's mental health concern, making training for these groups especially important.
- ◆ Currently, Counseling and Consultation Services offers trainings upon request (in addition to some regularly-occurring trainings for specific units such as Housing and Residential Services) but the JED Campus Team recognized that a more comprehensive approach is needed.

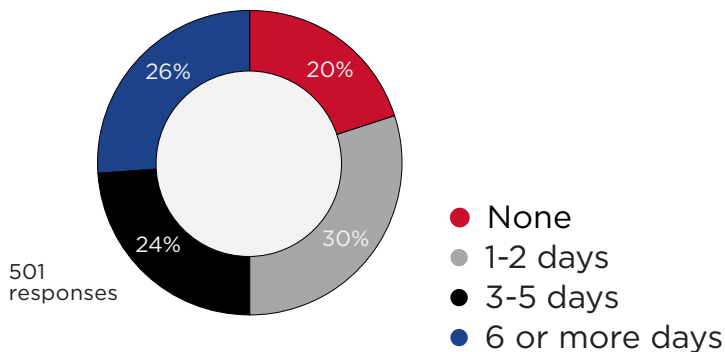
In the 2025-2026 Academic Year, trainings for faculty and staff on identifying students at risk will be updated as needed and new trainings will be developed in partnership with the Center for Innovative Teaching and Learning.

- ◆ Since its implementation in November 2024, the Mission AI Chatbot engaged students in several campaigns that asked them to report on their mental and physical health. To date, 747 students have been identified as high or medium risk because of their responses to prompting questions about mental health and/or well-being. Those students have received information about mental health resources as well as follow-up from professional staff.

Figure 1.

Measured in the Healthy Minds Study using the UCLA three-item Loneliness Scale. (Hughes, Waite, Hawkey and Cacioppo, 2004)





Academic Impairment

In the past four weeks, how many days have you felt that emotional or mental difficulties have hurt your academic performance?



Increase Help-seeking Behavior

- The Counseling and Consultation Services website will be audited by EAB through our existing EAB partnership in spring 2025. This audit will evaluate the website through the lens of best practices for students finding and reaching out for the help they need. Changes will be implemented based on EAB's recommendations.
- Counseling and Consultation Services, Employee Well-being and the Presidential Commission on Well-being partnered to host a Wellness Fair for students, faculty and staff April 16. The fair featured wellness screenings and demonstrations from community and campus partners such as Edible Campus, a sensory playground, arts and crafts, and a variety of workshops. Two hundred and thirty-six people attended (117 students and 119 faculty/staff).



Provide Mental Health and Substance Misuse Services

- Counseling and Consultation Services provided 1,253 individual therapy sessions in fall 2024, a 37% increase over fall 2023.
- The Student Government Association (SGA) passed a resolution Jan. 17, 2025, making harm-reduction education an official stance of the SGA, opening opportunities for funding and support for education and outreach efforts including naloxone training.
- The JED Campus Team verified that the student insurance plan offered through United Healthcare provides coverage for mental health, behavioral health and substance use disorder treatment (outpatient and inpatient), as well as multiple options for medication-assisted therapy for substance use disorders.



Follow Crisis Management Procedures

- The Student of Concern Committee meets weekly to discuss reports submitted through the website: niu.edu/student-of-concern.
- Members of the team completed a training with renowned campus threat and behavioral intervention expert Gene Deisinger in February 2025. The training will ensure the team is up-to-date on current trends and best practices.



Restrict Access to Potentially Lethal Means

- NIU's existing "conceal carry" policy, supported by 430 ILCS 66 - Illinois Firearm Conceal Carry Act which bans all weapons and firearms on campus, meets JED's standards for restricting firearms on campus.
- An environmental scan was conducted by a subcommittee of the JED Campus Team along with additional campus partners from Housing, the physical plant and environmental safety. The following high-risk areas were identified based on history of previous reports:
 - ◆ Parking garage.
 - ◆ Lagoons.
- Signs are being designed for the roof and stairwell of the parking garage, with installation targeted for May 2025. Funding for the signs was provided by the Illinois Mental Health Early Action on Campus grant. Additional information will be gathered to determine what measures would benefit the lagoons.



What's Next?

NIU recently reached the halfway milestone in our partnership with JED, a significant moment in our ongoing commitment to campus mental health and well-being. It's important to note that JED does not offer a "certification" or a defined endpoint for institutions. Instead, fostering a supportive and healthy campus environment is a continuous, evolving process — one that NIU will remain dedicated to. Looking ahead, the JED Campus Team is excited to continue collaborating to advance both JED's mission and the university's vision, ultimately strengthening a culture of care for all Huskies.

