

“OUR VOICES MATTER”

2023 Youth Summit Report

A collaborative project by
the Tippecanoe Resilience
& Recovery Network -
Prevention Subcommittee

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Executive Summary

In March 2023, the Tippecanoe Resilience and Recovery Network – Prevention Subcommittee hosted the fifth annual “Our Voices Matter” Tippecanoe County Youth Summit. The purpose of this event is to allow a safe space for area teens (aged 14-18) to share their experiences with mental health, coping behaviors, and more.

The Prevention Subcommittee is made up of 24 community organizations spanning leaders in the sectors of mental health; health care; K-12 and higher education; research; public health; service agencies; and community networking. The overarching goal of this committee is to target prevention efforts for mental health, substance use, suicide, and stress coping behaviors. For the 2023 Youth Summit, members of this subcommittee were trained in best practices and acted as moderators to guide student conversations and generate discussion.

The 2023 Youth Summit was held in-person at a local manufacturing company’s meeting space. In total, approximately 82 students, ranging from freshmen to seniors, attended from schools across the county. These students were placed into 20 total groups. Student groups answered eight *sets* of questions totaling 16 *individual* questions. In addition to answering questions, the students were asked to write “Thank you” notes to a supporting adult in their life as well as tie ribbons on a tree to represent supporting adults.

The findings express three major takeaways. These takeaways include:

1. Students are experiencing real mental health challenges. When asked which mental health issues impact youth the most, students – for years – have named anxiety and depression as the top two mental health concerns. However, what is most surprising is how well students define and describe these concerns, indicating that students really understand what it feels like to either have anxiety or depression. This finding is of concern given rising national attention surrounding youth mental health and suicide.
2. For the second consecutive year, students indicate that the most commonly used substances are also the substances they deem the highest risk (i.e., nicotine and alcohol). Students continue to provide clarity regarding how they define high risk, with most student groups indicating that addictive qualities make the substance highest risk. Furthermore, these substances are discussed during conversations with students about poor coping behaviors for stress. This finding is significant because it highlights not just the most used substances by teens, but also highlights students’ perceptions of substance risks and substance use as a coping mechanism for stress.
3. Approximately 85% of students at the 2023 Youth Summit could identify a supportive adult at school. Like previous Youth Summit events, students overwhelmingly desire to build a trusting relationship with school staff or other adults. However, students do not hope for just any relationship, but, instead, one that is built on mutual elements of trust, respect, dignity, and one that treats students as maturing adults with real feelings.

Students express that they want to discuss real, adult topics like mental health in a productive, open-for-conversation type of way.

Of the 63 students who attended the Youth Summit and completed an evaluation, nearly all (58 out of 63) indicated that they would be willing to participate in an event like this again.

Methodology

The Tippecanoe Resilience and Recovery Network – Prevention Subcommittee connected with schools in Tippecanoe County. School counselors were asked to select up to 15 students who would be open to discussing their thoughts about different areas of their life including: school life, personal life, social life, and more. Individual school counselors decided which students to invite. It was recommended that counselors chose a diverse student audience.

The 2023 Youth Summit was held in-person at a local manufacturing company’s meeting space on March 8, 2023. The event began with an introduction which welcomed students to the event; described the event’s purpose; expressed the safe space students had entered; and described the layout of the event. The questions, conversations, and discussions began in small groups of about four to seven students. The room was divided in half, so two tables asked the same questions. Specifically, tables 1-8 asked the same questions as tables 11-18. Tables 9, 10, 19 and 20 were designated for students to think about and recognize adults they have a bond or relationship with. Students were asked between one to three questions at each table by the moderator, and a corresponding notetaker recorded the students’ answers anonymously. Moderators and notetakers were trained in best practices for leading and reporting on focus group style conversations prior to the event. Student groups were given 15 minutes to discuss the questions at each table before they rotated to the next table and question. In total, the students answered eight sets of questions totaling exactly 16 individual questions. These questions included:

- 1. What have you learned or noticed about yourself since the pandemic? For example, life changes, attitudes, school life, mental health, home life, work life, physical health, or something else? What have you learned or noticed about your peers since the pandemic?*
- 2. What do you think are the biggest stressors high school students face today?*
- 3. What substances do you think youth are using the most? What substances do you think are high risk? How would you define “high risk”?*
- 4. What issues do you think youth are dealing with that schools need to be paying more attention to? What can school staff do to help? Tally Question: Please raise your hand if you can identify one adult you feel connected to at school.*
- 5. What mental health issues do you think impact youth the most? How would you define or describe the specific issues you mentioned?*
- 6. What barriers stop teenagers from asking for help for themselves? What barriers stop teenagers from asking for help for someone else?*

7. *If you had the chance to sit down with the mayor or county commissioners, what would you tell them the community is doing well for you? What would you explain needs to be done more for youth outside of school?*
8. *How do high school students cope with stress in a good way? How do high school students cope with stress in a bad way?*

Before the students departed from the event, they completed an evaluation to rate the event. The questions within this evaluation included:

1. *What is your year in school?*
2. *Please rate the following statements on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).*
 - a. *I felt heard when I shared my ideas in today's event.*
 - b. *I learned new things from other students in today's event.*
 - c. *I believe positive change will come from my responses.*
 - d. *I enjoyed participating in this event.*
 - e. *I am inspired to make a change from today's event.*
 - f. *I would be willing to participate in an event like this again.*
3. *Please share something specific that you learned from or during today's event.*
4. *How many supportive adults do you have in your life?*

In the months after the Youth Summit, the subcommittee began work on the content analysis from the event. Eight members of the subcommittee coded all 16 questions and the student evaluation from the event. These subcommittee members work in the sectors of education (K-12 and collegiate levels); research; mental health (counseling and programming); and community networking. Questions were organized and separated into individual questions.

One important note to make is that student responses were anonymous, confidential, and coded as group responses. A limitation in reporting this way is that the subcommittee reports on the *student groups* who respond in a certain way, and *not the number of students* who express an idea. Therefore, not all groups have students who express an idea and not all groups agree on each idea that was expressed.

The members met several times throughout a three-month period to determine the steps in creating this content analysis and to begin coding uniformly. These members completed rounds of intercoder reliability on the same questions. Then, questions were divided evenly amongst the group to code in pairs of two. After all questions and responses were coded and content analyzed, the members began writing this report. Below are the findings from the 2023 Youth Summit.

Thank you especially to the following members for their contribution: *Bonnie Crawford; Elizabeth Jones; Laura Kooiman-Cox; Chuck Newton; Amy O'Shea; Brenda Renaldo; Megan Ulrich; and Katie Walter.*

Findings

Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic

The subcommittee asked students the question, “*What have you learned or noticed about yourself since the pandemic?*” and offered examples, such as: life changes, attitudes, school life, mental health, home life, work life, and physical health. Compared to last year, the subcommittee modified this question to ask students specifically about things they may have noticed *about themselves*. Twenty out of 20 student groups answered this question. The top themes are below.

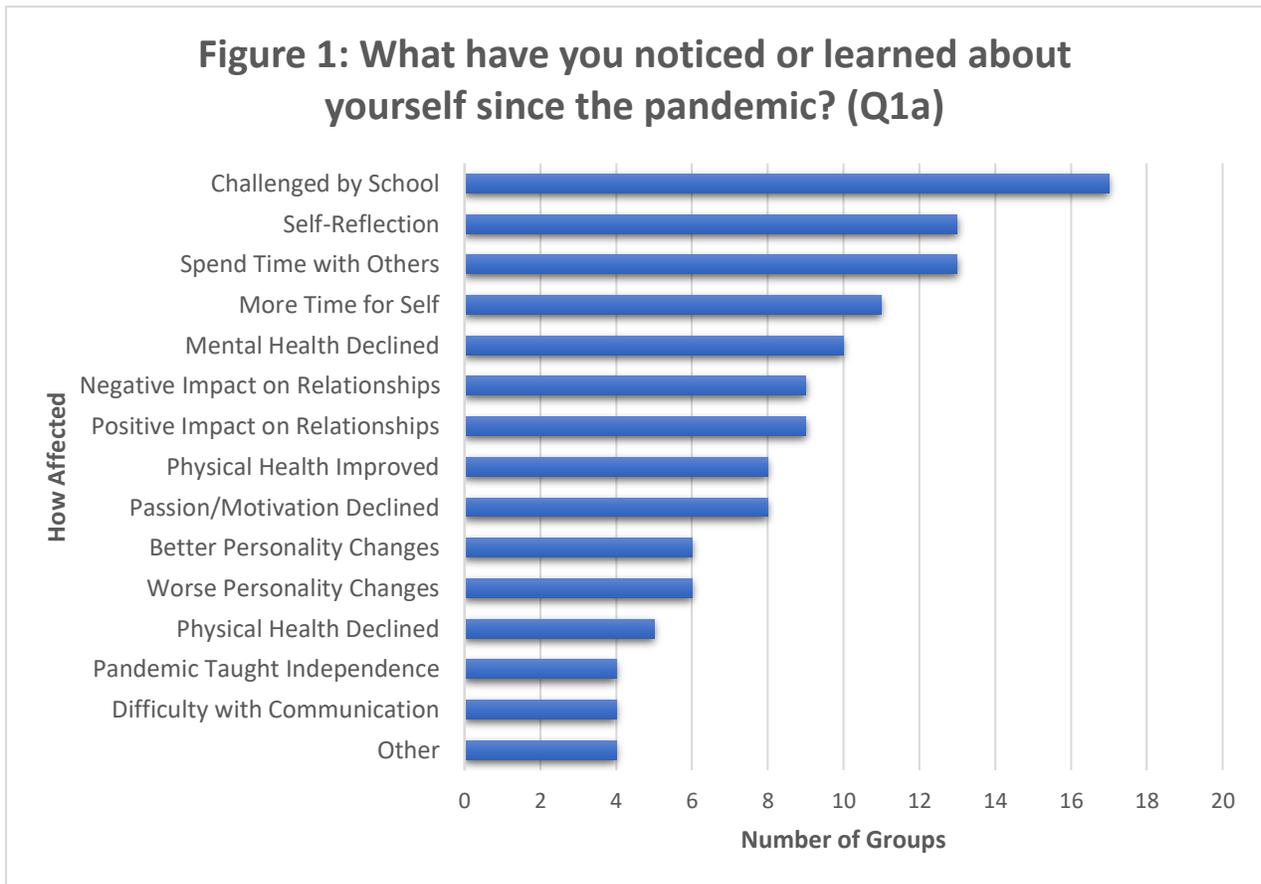
The subcommittee categorized their responses into fifteen themes, which include (from most discussed to least discussed): students report that they were challenged by school now more than before the pandemic (mentioned by 17 groups); the pandemic made them more self-reflective (mentioned by 13 groups); the pandemic made them want to hang out more with others and not be alone (mentioned by 13 groups); the pandemic gave students more personal time (mentioned by 11 groups); their mental health declined since the pandemic (mentioned by 10 groups); the pandemic impacted their relationships negatively (mentioned by nine groups); the pandemic impacted their relationships positively (mentioned by nine groups); their physical health improved since the pandemic (mentioned by eight groups); their passion, motivation, and self-discipline declined since the pandemic (mentioned by eight groups); their personality changed for the worse (mentioned by six groups); their personality changed for the better (mentioned by six groups); their physical health declined since the pandemic (mentioned by five groups); the pandemic taught them independence (mentioned by four groups); they have experienced difficulty communicating or with social interactions since the pandemic (mentioned by four groups); and four groups mentioned an “Other” theme.

First, 17 out of 20 student groups responded that they noticed they have been challenged by school more now (post-pandemic) than before (pre-pandemic). Students cited that they are, in some ways, more challenged by school now that they have experienced a variety of different teaching methods (i.e., in-person, virtual, hybrid, etc.). One student specifically shared how their high school experience has fluctuated between these different teaching methods: one year was in-person; another was online; and another was back in-person but with frequent breaks.

Next, 13 out of 20 student groups said that the pandemic made them more self-reflective. Students shared that the pandemic allowed them time to explore more about themselves and their interests. Other students shared that the pandemic made them realize the things in their lives that are important and to value these things more than they did before the pandemic. Thirteen out of 20 student groups also shared that they noticed that they wanted to spend more time with others and not be alone. Some students shared that they would do almost anything to be around their friends or others and avoid alone time.

Additionally, 11 out of 20 student groups shared that they noticed the pandemic gave them more time for themselves. Students shared that the pandemic gave them alone time, and while this was not always favorable, it did allow them to value self-care or intentionally take time to do things for themselves.

Below, Figure 1 visually represents the number of student groups who mentioned each theme.



Next, the subcommittee asked the question, “*What have you learned or noticed about your peers since the pandemic?*” This question was asked for the first time during the 2023 Youth Summit, and again, specifically asked students to identify what they noticed *about their peers*. Nineteen out of 20 student groups responded to this question. The top themes are below.

The subcommittee categorized their responses into eleven themes, which include (from most discussed to least discussed): students noticed their peers’ personality change for the worse (indicated by 11 groups); the pandemic impacted their peers’ relationships negatively (indicated by eight groups); they noticed their peers were challenged by school since the pandemic (indicated by eight groups); they noticed their peers wanted to hang out more with others and not be alone (indicated by six groups); their peers had a difficult time communicating or with social interactions (indicated by four groups); the pandemic impacted their peers’ relationships positively (indicated by four groups); their peers’ mental health declined (indicated by four groups); their peers’ personality changed for the better (indicated by three groups); their peers’ passion, motivation, and self-discipline declined (indicated by three groups); they noticed that their peers self-reflected (indicated by two groups); and “Other” notices (indicated by three groups).

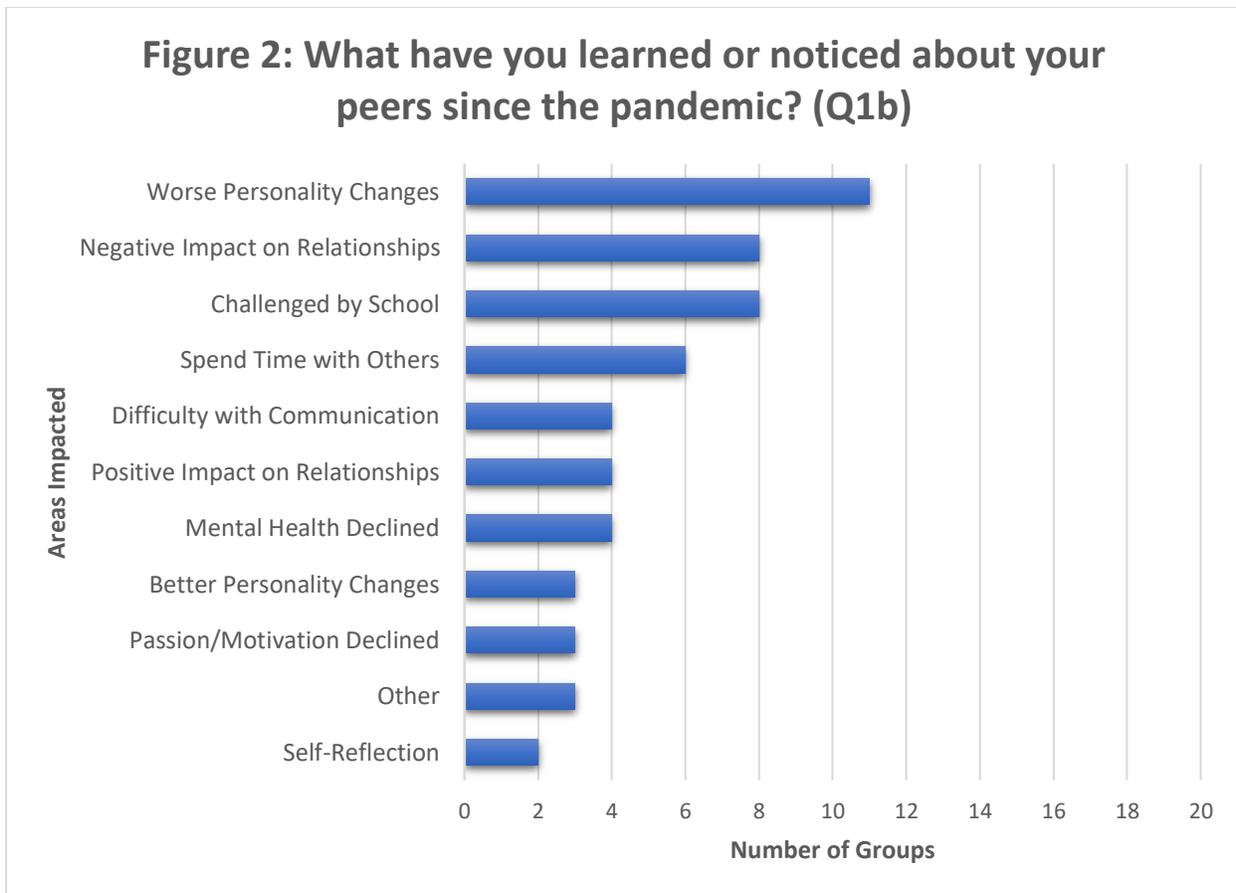
First, 11 out of 19 student groups shared that they noticed their peers’ personality changed for the worse. For example, students noticed that their friends started to become antisocial, shy, or

introverted; worried about being around many people; or appeared to stop caring about other people.

Next, eight out of 19 student groups said that they noticed the pandemic impacted their peers' relationships negatively. Students discussed that the pandemic made it difficult to stay in contact with a big group of friends and, in ways, the pandemic has refined their friend groups to only close friends. Students often discussed losing touch with their friends.

Eight out of 19 student groups shared that they noticed their peers were also challenged by school more now (post-pandemic) than before (pre-pandemic). Some students noticed their peers appeared to stop going to school as frequently, while other students noticed their peers stressed more frequently about their grades or declines in their GPAs.

Below, Figure 2 visually represents the number of student groups who mentioned each theme.

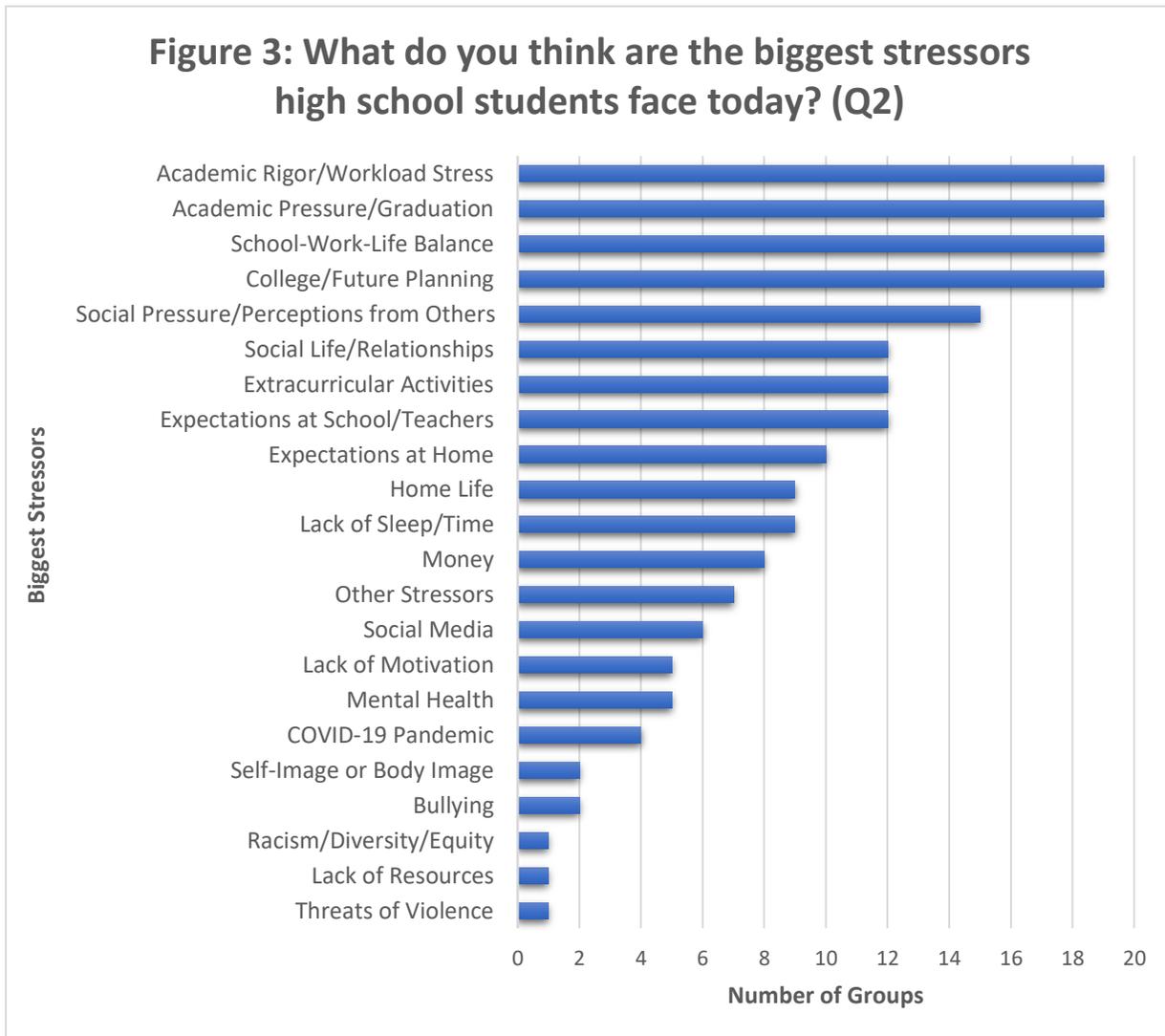


Stressors

The subcommittee also asked the question, “*What do you think are the biggest stressors high school students face today?*” This question was asked previously. Twenty out of 20 student groups responded to this question.

The subcommittee categorized their responses into 22 themes, which include (from most discussed to least discussed): stress related to the academic rigor and work load (mentioned by 19 groups); the academic pressure or stress about graduation (mentioned by 19 groups); the school-work-life balance stressor (mentioned by 19 groups); stress regarding college and future planning after high school (mentioned by 19 groups); stress from social pressure or perceptions from others (mentioned by 15 groups); stress from their social lives and relationships (mentioned by 12 groups); stress from extracurricular activities (mentioned by 12 groups); stress from the expectations from school or teachers (mentioned by 12 groups); stress from the expectations at home (mentioned by 10 groups); stress from the student's home life (mentioned by nine groups); stress from the lack of sleep or lack of time (mentioned by nine groups); stress from money (mentioned by eight groups); "Other" stressors were mentioned by seven groups; stress from social media (mentioned by six groups); stress from a lack of motivation (mentioned by five groups); mental health-related stress (mentioned by five groups); COVID-19 pandemic-related stress (mentioned by four groups); stress related to self-image or body image (mentioned by two groups); bullying-related stress (mentioned by two groups); stress related to racism, diversity, and equity (mentioned by one group); stress regarding a lack of resources for mental health specifically (mentioned by one group); and stress related to threats of violence or gun violence in school (mentioned by one group).

Below, Figure 3 visually represents the number of student groups who mentioned each theme.



Substance Use

Next, the subcommittee asked each student group questions about general substance knowledge and uses. First, the subcommittee asked the question, “*What substances do you think youth are using the most?*” Compared to previous Youth Summit events, the same question was asked previously in the 2022 and 2021 Youth Summits. Twenty out of 20 student groups responded to this question.

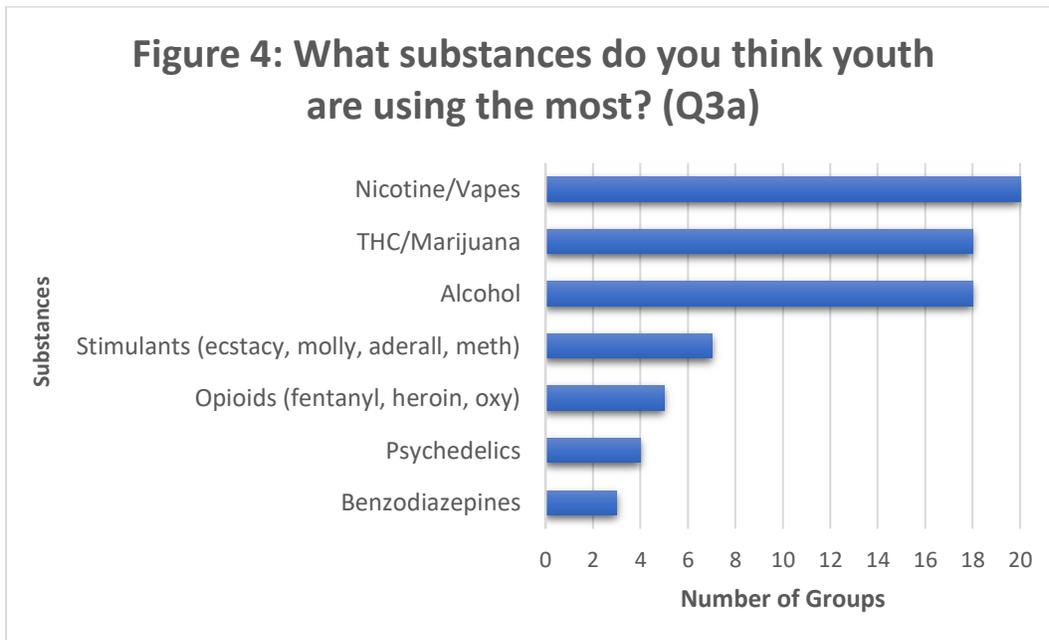
The subcommittee categorized their responses into seven themes, which include (from most discussed to least discussed): nicotine/vapes (mentioned by 20 groups); THC/marijuana (mentioned by 18 groups); alcohol (mentioned by 18 groups); stimulants: ecstasy, molly, Adderall, meth (mentioned by seven groups); Opioids: fentanyl, heroin, oxy (mentioned by five

groups); psychedelics (mentioned by four groups); and Benzodiazepines: Xanax (mentioned by three groups). The findings from the top five themes are below.

First, 20 out of 20 student groups shared that nicotine/vaping is frequently being used by youth in Tippecanoe County. Students reported that vaping is easy to hide and use throughout the day, even during school. Additionally, 18 out of 20 student groups shared that they are seeing many students using marijuana/THC. They reported smoking weed in the bathroom at school and two groups mentioned the use of edibles. Third, 18 out of 20 student groups or 90% of the groups shared that students are using alcohol, particularly on the weekends.

Additionally, 35% of the groups (seven out of 20 groups) shared that students are using stimulants such as Ecstasy, Molly, Adderall, etc. Students indicated that these pills are made available by taking them from their parents or stealing them from others. Finally, 25% of the groups (five out of 20 groups) reported that Opioids are being used. Students have reported that Oxycodone, heroin, Percocet and Fentanyl are all in use among youth in the community.

Below, Figure 4 represents the number of student groups who mentioned each theme.

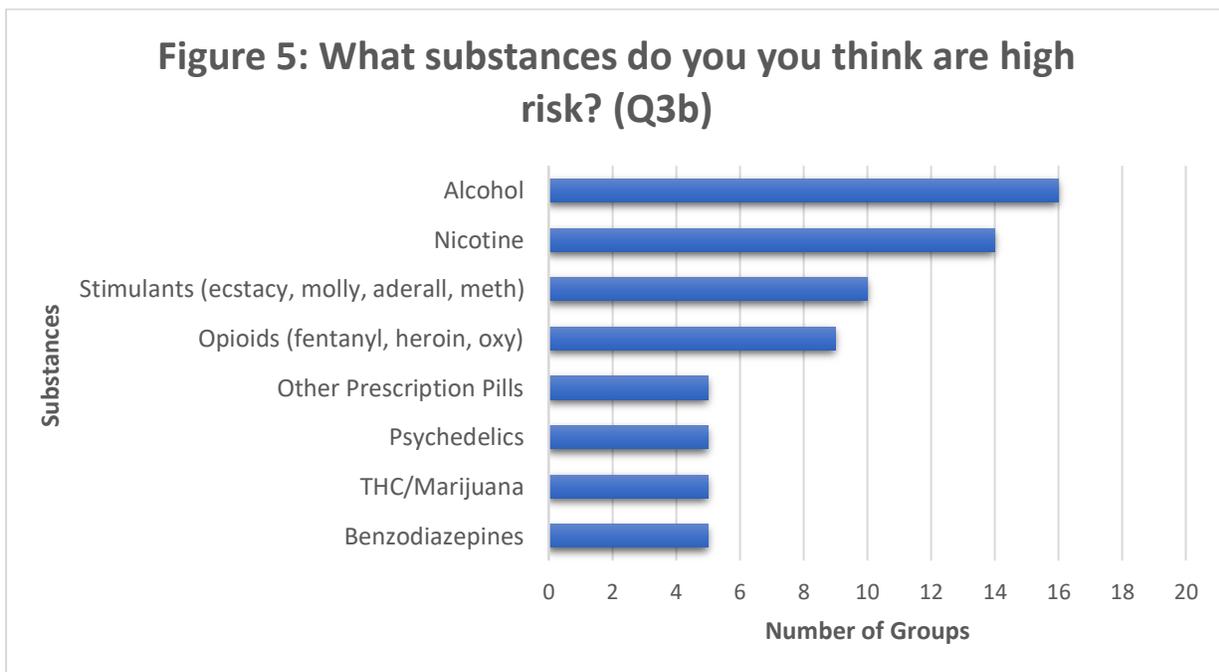


The subcommittee then asked each student group the question, “*What substances do you think are high risk?*” The same question was asked previously at the 2022 and the 2021 Youth Summits. Twenty out of 20 student groups responded to this question.

The subcommittee categorized the student responses into eight themes, which include (from most discussed to least discussed): alcohol (mentioned by 16 groups); nicotine (mentioned by 14 groups); stimulants: ecstasy, molly, Adderall, meth (mentioned by 10 groups); Opioids: fentanyl, heroin, oxy (mentioned by nine groups); Other prescription pills (mentioned by five groups); psychedelics (mentioned by five groups); THC/marijuana (mentioned by four groups); and Benzodiazepines: Xanax (mentioned by four groups).

First, 16 out of 20 student groups shared that they consider alcohol to be the highest risk substance that youth use. Students indicated they felt alcohol was dangerous because it can be addictive and can impair driving, leading to potential death. Additionally, fourteen out of 20 student groups shared that nicotine is a high-risk substance. Students believe that vaping can lead to the use of other, worse drugs and it causes you to become addicted to it. It is readily available and used frequently in schools, hallways, bathrooms, etc. Third, 50% of the groups (10 out of 20 student groups) mentioned that stimulants are a high-risk substance. They report that teens can purchase Adderall from their peers. Opioid use is reported in nine out of 20 groups, and students have said they are more deadly, and you can overdose on them, especially when you don't know what you are getting. There can be social pressure among friends that causes people to try new things that appear to be safe. Finally, 25% of the groups mentioned other prescription pills as high risk. They talked about any pills people get from a medicine cabinet that are not prescribed to them as being dangerous.

Below, Figure 5 represents the number of groups who mentioned each theme.



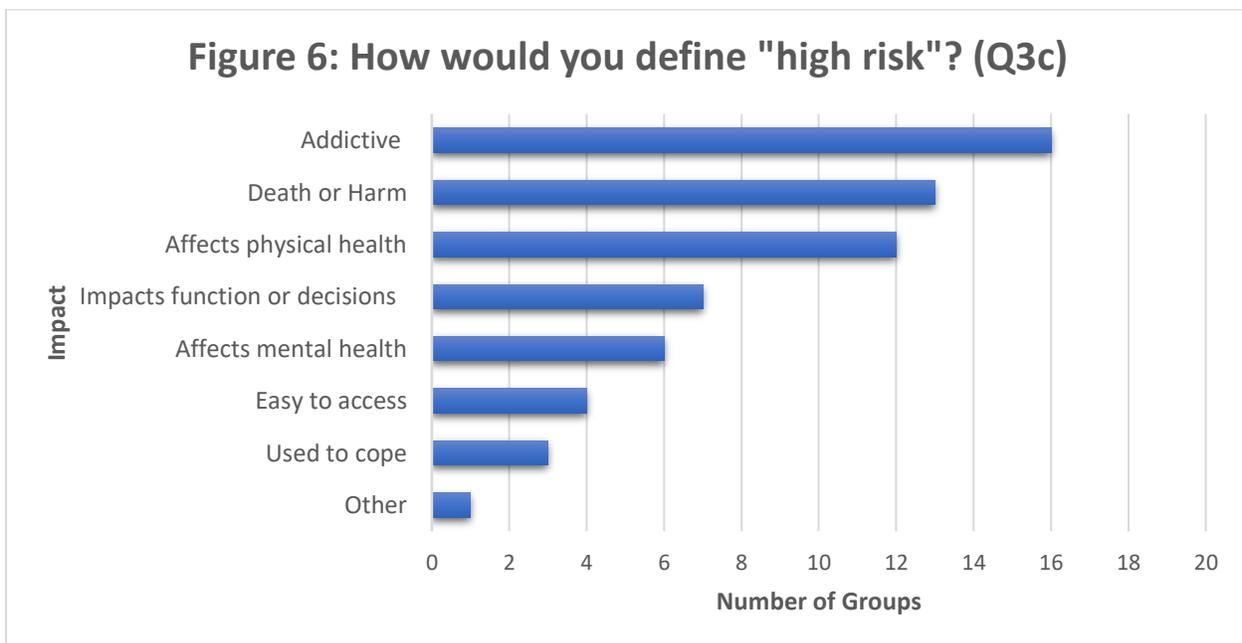
In the last question in the set regarding substances, the subcommittee asked each student group the question, “*How would you define ‘high risk’?*” This question was asked to students in the 2022 Youth Summit. Twenty out of 20 student groups responded to this question.

The subcommittee categorized the student responses into eight themes, which include (from most discussed to least discussed): addictive qualities (mentioned by 16 groups); possibility of death and harm if used (mentioned by 13 groups); affects physical health (mentioned by 12 groups); impacts how you function or make decisions (mentioned by seven groups); affects mental health (mentioned by six groups); ease of accessibility (mentioned by four groups); used as a way to cope (mentioned by three groups); and “Other” (mentioned by one group). The findings from the top five themes are described below.

First, 16 out of 20 student groups shared that the addictive properties of a substance make the substance high risk. Students report that the greater the likelihood of addiction, the higher risk the substance becomes for the student. Students suggest that when someone is addicted, they cannot function without the substance. Additionally, 13 out of 20 student groups suggested that a high-risk substance could potentially lead to death or harm. This could be due to overdose or even due to impairment caused by the drug, such as drunk driving. Twenty percent of groups felt that high risk included things that affected a person’s physical health. This could include damage to the brain long term, causing it to deteriorate, or even lung or liver damage from vaping or alcohol.

An additional 35% (seven out of 20 groups) say that high risk drugs impact how you function or make decisions. This could include anything impairing your sense of judgement and anything that could negatively impact your life or other peoples’ lives. Finally, 30% or six out of 20 groups mention that high risk drugs affect mental health. Students relate that high-risk substances can be harmful to your mental health or the mental health of others or can be used as a way to cope with mental health issues.

Below, Figure 6 represents the number of groups who mentioned each theme.



Recommendations for Schools

Next, the subcommittee asked the students about their school lives and any recommendations or suggestions they may have for bettering their school experience. The subcommittee asked each student group the question, “*What issues do you think youth are dealing with that schools need to be paying more attention to?*” Compared to previous Youth Summit events, this question was asked previously in the 2022 and 2021 Youth Summits. Twenty out of 20 student groups responded to this question.

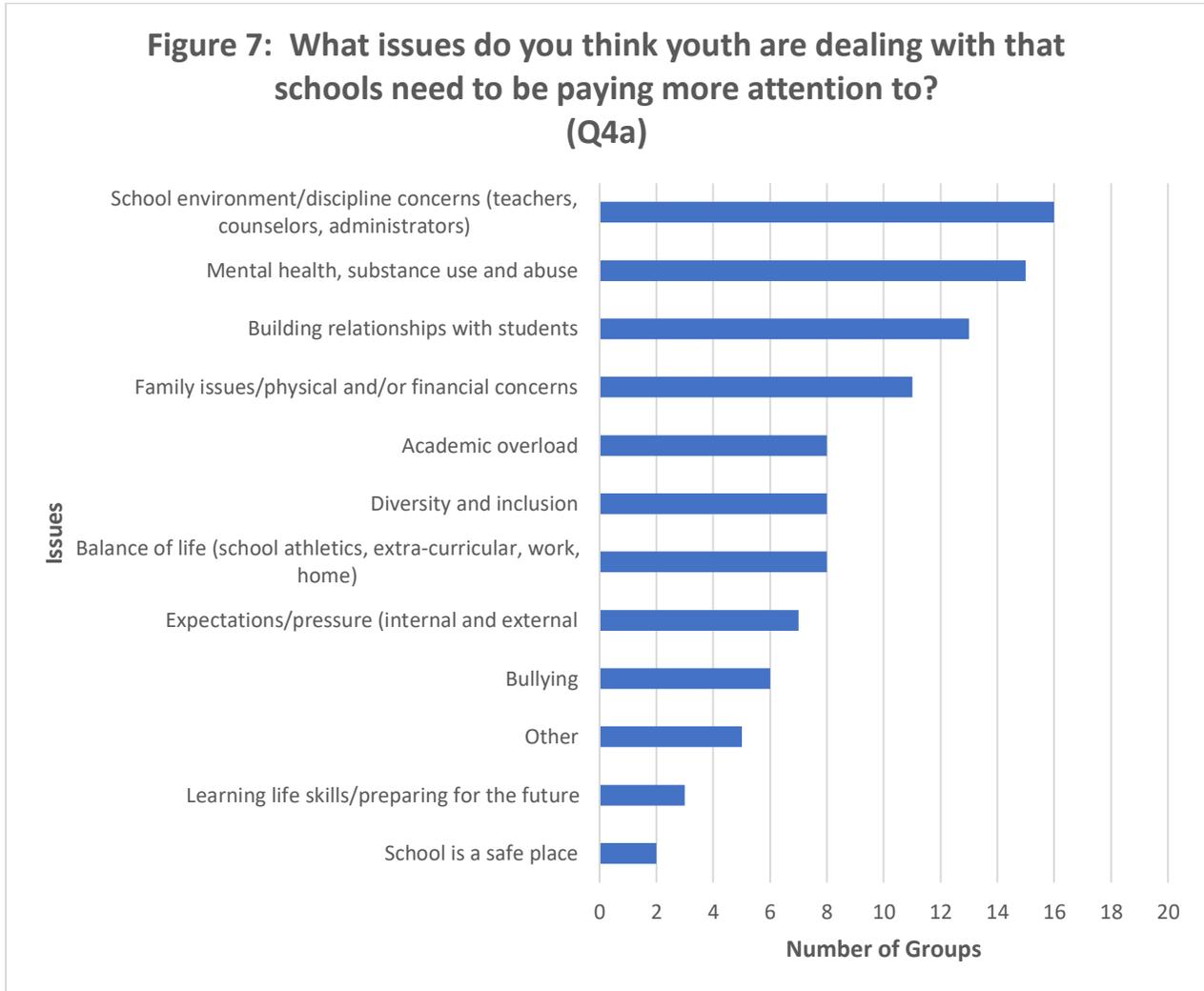
The subcommittee categorized their responses into twelve themes, which include (from most discussed to least discussed): students report that schools could pay more attention to the school environment/discipline concerns including teachers, counselors and administrators (mentioned by 16 groups); students indicate that schools could pay more attention to mental health, substance use and/or abuse (mentioned by 15 groups); students mention that schools could pay more attention to building relationships with students (mentioned by 13 groups); students indicate that schools could focus more on family issues as well as physical and financial concerns (mentioned by 11 groups); students share that schools could also focus more on the “academic overload” that students incur (mentioned by eight groups); students also mention that schools could pay more attention to diversity and inclusion (mentioned by eight groups); students express that schools could focus more on the balance of life issues including school, athletics, extra-curriculars, work, home (mentioned by eight groups); students share that schools could focus more on internal and external expectations and pressure (mentioned by seven groups); students also expressed concerns over bullying (mentioned by six groups); students indicated that the school could help more with teaching them life skills and helping them prepare for the future (mentioned by three groups); and students mention that schools should be a safe place where students can feel safe and heard (mentioned by two groups). Five responses were given by one group each. These responses are listed under the “Other” theme and include: Troubled kids get the wrong discipline, Lack of motivation, Male teachers dress coding girls, Relationship struggles and Staff homelife impacts school life. The findings from the top five themes are below.

First, most often, 16 out of 20 student groups suggested that schools could focus more on improving the school environment and focusing on discipline concerns. For example, one student shared, Administration fails to act when complaints and threats are reported,” while another student noted, “You hear the N word nearly every day, and nothing is taken seriously or addressed.” Second, 15 out of 20 student groups shared that schools could pay more attention to student’s issues, needs, or resources for mental health, substance use and/or abuse. One student suggested, “Addiction should be talked about more and not be so taboo.” Third, 13 out of 20 student groups discussed that school staff should work on building relationships with students. One student shared “Teachers talk to us like we aren’t adults, especially when we go to them to have a conversation, but I want to be listened to as a normal person. I am not dumb.”

Additionally, 11 out of 20 student groups shared that family issues as well as physical and/or financial concerns should be acknowledged and addressed. One student indicated, “Stuff is going on outside of school like home life; there will always be people who are taking advantage of the resources, but for the most part the students really need help.” Three different themes each had eight out the 20 groups mention the theme. Students mentioned academic overload with one student stating, “Students get so overwhelmed through the day that when they get home, they have no motivation or energy to work on overwhelming amounts of homework.” The topic of diversity and inclusion was also mentioned by eight groups. One student mentioned, “Be aware of our differences and appreciate them; they can help us instead of hurt us.” Finally, eight groups also mentioned that schools should look at student’s ability to balance life. Students indicate that they have many irons in the fire including school, athletics, extra-curriculars, work

and home. One student stated, “Some teachers are good but mainly the school isn’t good at realizing that the students have more than just school, extra-curriculars, athletics and band. It is a lot.”

Below, Figure 7 showcases the number of student groups who mentioned each theme.



The subcommittee, then, asked each student group the question, “*What can school staff do to help?*” Compared to previous Youth Summit events, this question was asked previously in the 2022 and the 2021 Youth Summits. All 20 out of 20 student groups responded to this question.

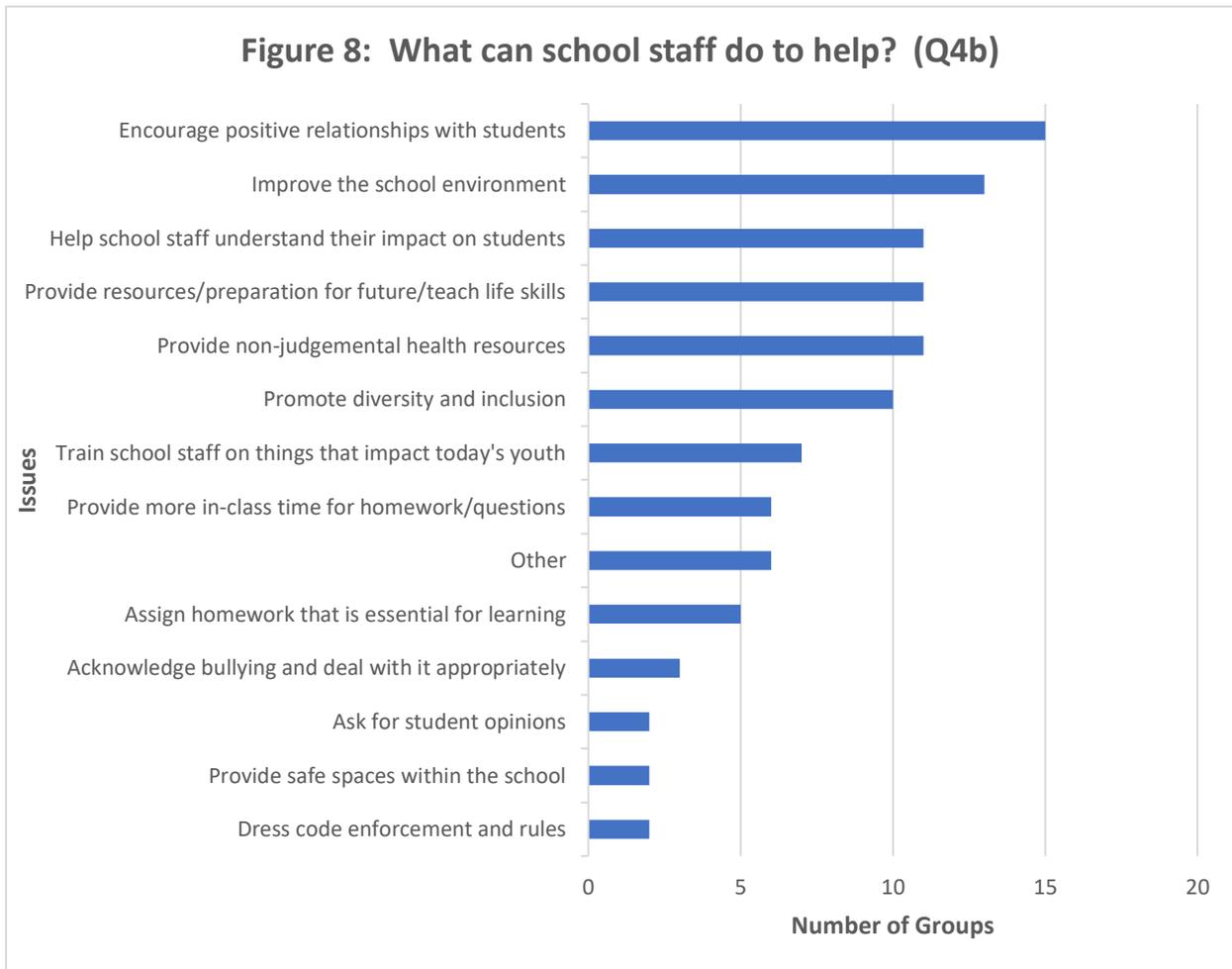
The subcommittee categorized their responses into 14 themes, which include (from most discussed to least discussed): school staff could encourage positive relationships with students (mentioned by 15 groups); school staff could improve the school environment (mentioned by 13 groups); school staff could help the staff understand their impact on students both positive and negative (mentioned by 11 groups); school staff could provide resources, help with preparation for the future and teach life skills (mentioned by 11 groups); schools could provide non-judgmental physical and mental health resources and help (mentioned by 11 groups); school staff

could promote diversity and inclusion (mentioned by 10 groups); school staff could be trained on things that impact today's youth (mentioned by seven groups); school staff could provide more in-class time for homework completion and questions (mentioned by six groups); school staff could assign homework that is essential for learning rather than busy work (mentioned by five groups); schools should acknowledge bullying and deal with it appropriately (mentioned by three groups); schools could ask for student opinions and use them when making decisions (mentioned by two groups); schools should provide safe spaces within the school (mentioned by two groups); and school staff could develop equitable dress code rules and enforcement (mentioned by two groups). Six responses were given by one group each. These responses are listed under the "Other" theme and include Therapy dogs, Start school later, Have mental health days, Require no parent permission to get help, Support all school activities and Block scheduling. The findings from the top five themes are below.

First, most often, 15 out of 20 student groups shared that school staff should encourage positive relationships between staff members and students. This is the same theme that was listed first in the 2022 Youth Summit report. Students are still looking for positive relationships with the adults in their schools. For example, one student mentioned, "Teachers could get to know their students outside of the classroom and actually connect with them on a more personal level to show that they care and build trust." Second, 13 out of 20 student groups shared that school staff should work to improve the school environment. One student suggested that there should be "more accountability and follow through when issues and concerns arise." While another suggested, "Try something new; don't be afraid to try it and see what students think." Third, 11 out of 20 student groups shared that the school should help the staff understand their impact on students. This impact can be both positive and negative. One student suggested that "Teachers need to listen to student concerns and be accountable to how their words impact students on a personal level. Another student stated that "Teachers need to realize the impact of their job on students and that it isn't just a job."

Additionally, 11 out of 20 student groups shared that school staff could teach life skills, provide resources and/or help with preparation for the future both for post-secondary education and careers. One student shared that perhaps school staff could "give students information and resources on food pantries and hunger prevention programs." Another student suggested that schools should talk about other career paths besides college. Also, 11 out of 20 student groups wished that schools would be able to provide non-judgmental physical and mental health resources and help. One student indicated that the school should "provide a clinic for students for 'embarrassing' issues like STD's, injuries, harm reduction training, sex talk, pregnancy, etc." Another suggested that it would be a good idea to "expand on mental health help and resources."

Below, Figure 8 showcases the number of student groups who mentioned each theme.



Next, the subcommittee asked each student group the question, “*Can you identify one adult who has made a connection with you at school?*” This question was new to the 2022 Youth Summit, and was repeated again in 2023 because past reports indicated that students desperately wished to build and cultivate a relationship with school staff members. Of the 82 students who participated in this year’s summit, 69 or 84.15% of the students indicated they had made a connection with an adult at school. Many of the students had more than one person they felt comfortable going to when they needed to speak to an adult. Some of the students mentioned specific names of faculty that they feel comfortable going to. This is an increase from an 80% connection response in the 2022 summit.

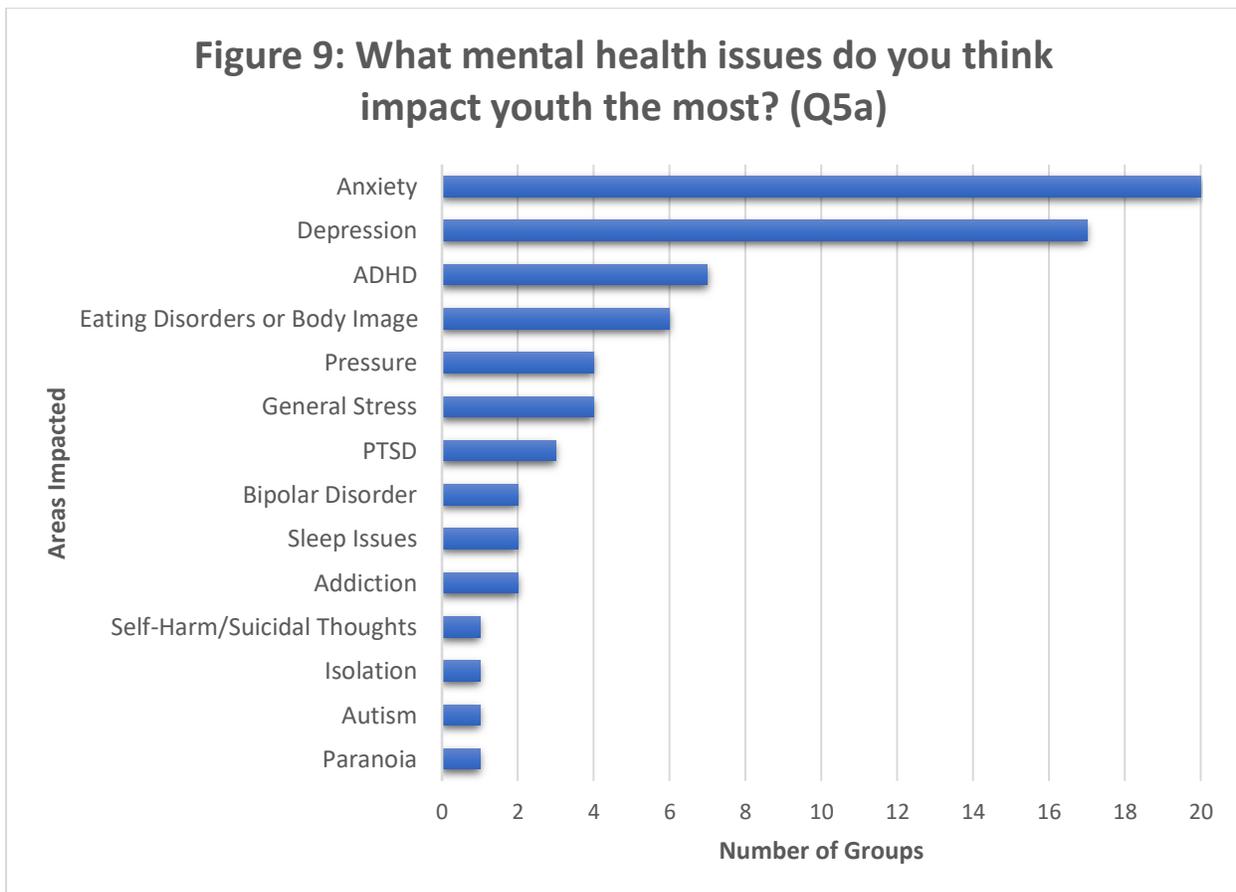
Mental Health Issues Impacting Youth

The subcommittee asked the question, “*What mental health issues do you think impact youth the most?*” This question has been asked in previous Youth Summit events. Twenty out of 20 student groups responded to this question. The top themes are discussed below.

The subcommittee categorized their responses into fourteen themes, which include (from most discussed to least discussed): students indicated that youth were impacted by anxiety (mentioned by 20 groups); depression (mentioned by 17 groups); ADHD (mentioned by seven groups); eating disorders or body image issues (mentioned by six groups); general pressure (mentioned by four groups); general stress (mentioned by four groups); PTSD (mentioned by three groups); Bipolar Disorder (mentioned by two groups); sleep issues (mentioned by two groups); addiction (mentioned by two groups); suicidal thoughts or self-harm (mentioned by one group); isolation or feeling alone (mentioned by one group); autism (mentioned by one group); and paranoia (mentioned by one group).

In previous Youth Summit events, students have overwhelmingly shared that students experience depression and anxiety most commonly, compared to all other mental health issues. This theme is true again for the 2023 Youth Summit.

Below, Figure 9 showcases the number of student groups who mentioned each theme.



As a follow-up questions, students were also asked the question, “How would you define or describe the specific issues you mentioned?” This question was asked in the previous Youth Summit. Twenty out of 20 student groups responded to this question.

Below, Figure 10 showcase the responses given by students.

Figure 10: How would you define/describe the specific issues you mentioned? (Anxiety and Depression)

| Anxiety | Depression |
|---|--|
| feelings of feeling scared of failure | feeling worthless and suicidal thoughts, the burden |
| constantly feeling anxious, constantly stressing yourself out, shouldn't ignore the other entirely | self-isolates, drown themselves in it (hard for them to reach out for help) |
| panic attacks, lose it all, more extreme than just being stressed | Can't feel happy for a very long time |
| with anxiety I feel like I do not have time for social interaction or feel so overwhelmed I can't handle it | depressed people can be happy sometimes but going through something (struggling behind closed doors) |
| feels never ending | feelings of sadness or emptiness |
| I find myself hyperventilating | drained, completely drained, exhausted, can't sleep at night or sleep too much |
| in school I cannot breathe sometimes, and I need a minute to recuperate but it makes me feel guilty to have to get up and leave but they don't see that it is a health problem | when you feel so trapped in your situation that you turn to the thoughts of suicide |
| overwhelming worry | not as vibrant as it was before |
| always on edge | cloud covering over everything |
| worried about what is going in and want to be aware of what is going on around me | dullness, moving through the fog |
| fear that things might happen, overthinking things | bitterness and unworthy/undeserving |
| anxiety is just constant | numbness, scared feeling, sad, don't care |
| just thinking to yourself i am not doing anything right | chronic sadness |
| constant feeling of uneasy and antsy and triggering | being overwhelmed |
| overwhelming, not being able to think or thinking too much | constant looming darkness |
| chemical imbalance in your brain (biological component) | not seeing a way out |
| worrying about the possible outcomes that could happen | feeling like you are alone |
| physical symptoms from anxiety (headaches, stomach aches, shaking, depends on the person, pull the back of my hair sometimes, shake legs, bite nails, pick at skin on the lips) | you can't get out of bed in the morning, just cry and cry and cry, I have depression and cannot make it to school most of the time |

Barriers That Stop Youth From Seeking Help

Next, the subcommittee asked students about the possible barriers they feel exist when seeking help from others. Specifically, the subcommittee asked each student group the question, “*What barriers stop teenagers from asking for help for themselves?*” Compared to previous Youth Summit events, this question was asked previously, but in 2022, this question was segmented from one question that asked about seeking help for self *and* others into two separate questions that individually asked about help-seeking barriers for themselves and help-seeking barriers for others. The question was again asked in two separate questions at the 2023 summit. Twenty of 20 student groups responded to this question. It should also be noted that this question does not ask specifically about mental health concerns, but that was the underlying intent of the question. In addition to discussing getting help with mental health concerns, nine of the 20 groups also included getting help with academic concerns/questions in their answers. The themes that evolved were for both social/emotional and mental health concerns as well as academic concerns.

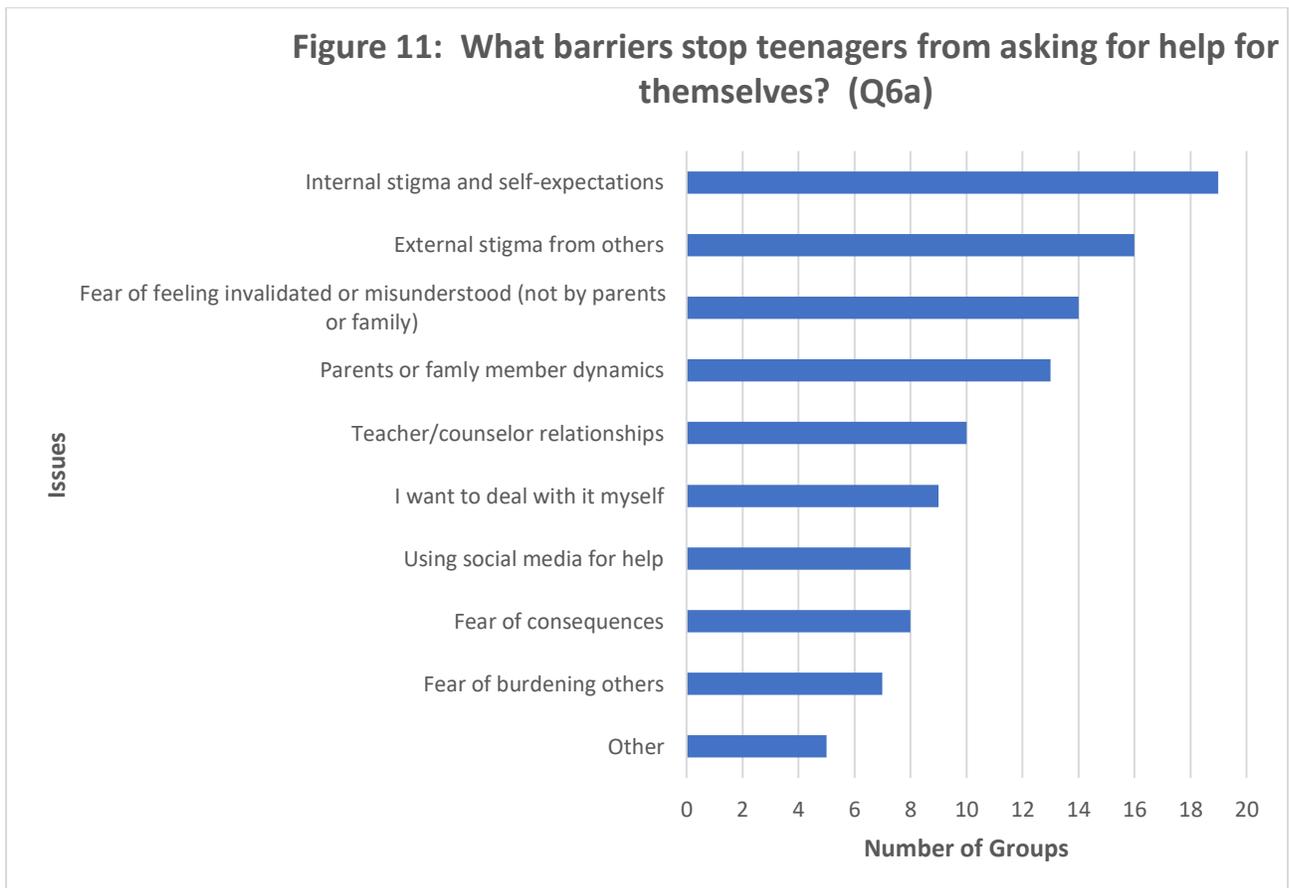
The subcommittee categorized their responses into ten themes, which include (from most discussed to least discussed): students discussed that they feel an internal stigma and a self-expectation that stops them from seeking help for themselves (mentioned by 19 groups); students indicate that an external stigma from others also prevents them from seeking help for themselves (mentioned by 16 groups); students report that the fear of feeling invalidated or misunderstood stops students from seeking help for themselves but not by parents and family (mentioned by 14 groups); students indicate that a barrier to seeking help for themselves is their family dynamics such as parents or other family members not being receptive to helping students (mentioned by 13 groups); students report that their teacher/counselor relationships are a barrier to asking for help (mentioned by ten groups); students indicated that they want to deal with the problem themselves and not involve others (mentioned by nine groups); students indicate that they prefer to use social media and the internet to seek help rather than in person (mentioned by eight groups); students indicate that the fear of consequences is a barrier to asking for help (mentioned by eight groups); and students report that another barrier to seeking help for themselves is that they do not want to burden others with their problems or needs (mentioned by seven groups); Finally, one response was mentioned by two groups and three responses were mentioned by one group. Those five responses were grouped in the Other category and include Won’t get the help that is needed, My problem isn’t important enough, People don’t believe they need help and Teachers don’t have the time to help. The findings from the top five themes are below.

First, 19 out of 20 student groups shared internal stigma and self-expectations as a barrier to seeking help. This was also the most mentioned theme in the 2022 Youth Summit report. For example, one student mentioned that there is a “fear or thought that if I ask for help, they will view it as a weakness.” Another student indicated that “asking for help is overwhelming.” Second, 16 out of 20 student groups shared that external stigma and expectations from others is a barrier to asking for help. This theme was also the second mentioned theme in 2022. Students express that they are afraid of judgement or of being made fun of for asking. Third, 14 out of 20 student groups shared they had a fear of feeling invalidated or misunderstood by others, but not

their parents or family. Students are afraid that they will be brushed off or that their problem will be downplayed or invalidated, making them feel like their problem is not important.

Additionally, 13 out of 20 student groups shared that family dynamics, or in some cases parents specifically, are a major barrier for students wishing to ask for help. For example, one student shared, “Parents compare their lives to us growing up and it is not the same.” Another student mentioned that “A lot of parents do not understand what their kid is saying.” In addition, ten out of 20 student groups shared that their relationships with teachers and counselors is a barrier to seeking help and that to ask for help from a teacher or counselor there must be a trusting relationship built first.

Below, Figure 11 showcases the number of student groups who mentioned each theme.



Additionally, the subcommittee asked student groups about the perceived barriers to seeking help for others. Specifically, the subcommittee asked each student group the question, “*What barriers stop teenagers from asking for help for someone else?*” This question was asked in the same way at the 2022 Youth Summit. Twenty out of 20 student groups responded to this question.

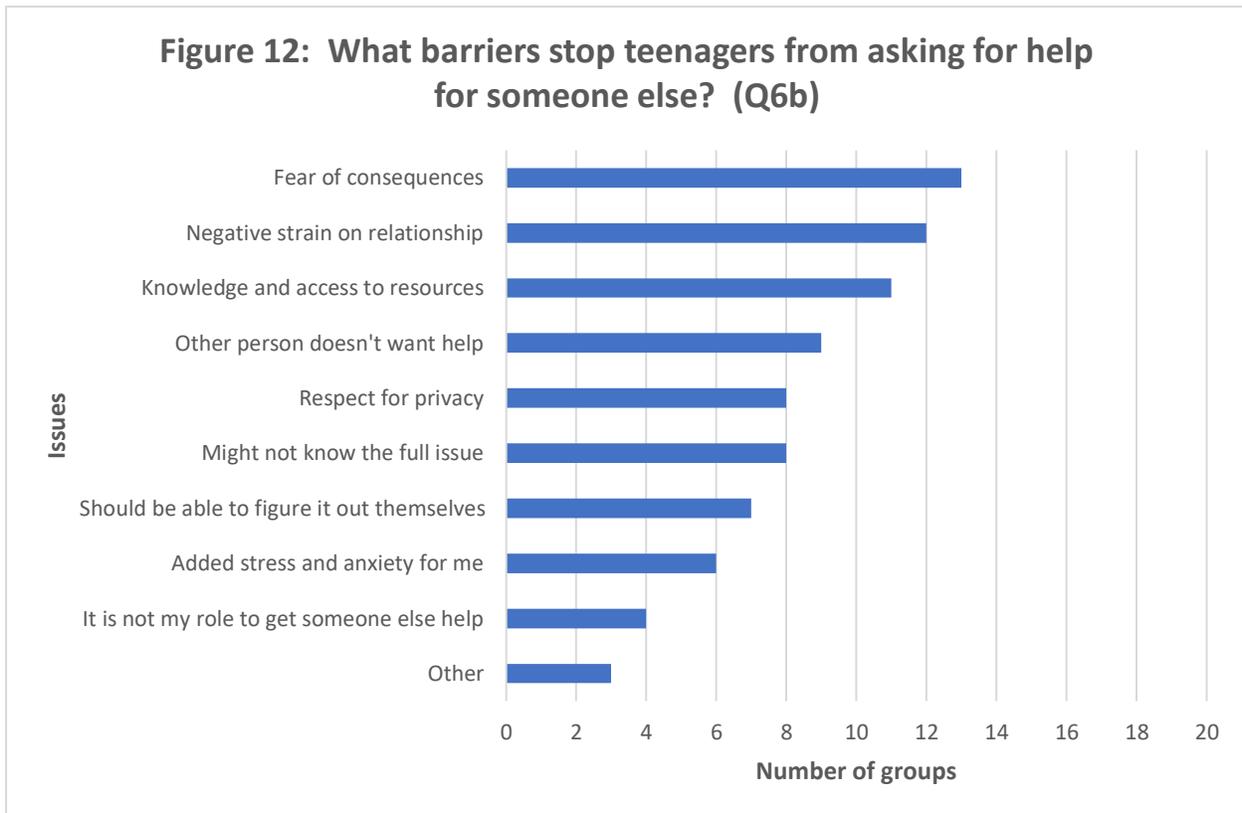
The subcommittee categorized their responses into ten themes, which include (from most discussed to least discussed): students report a fear of consequences as a barrier for seeking help for others (mentioned by 13 groups); students report that a major barrier regarding asking for help for someone else is that the student does not want to strain the relationship with the other

person (mentioned by 12 groups); students also report that they do not have knowledge of or access to all the resources that exist for asking for help for someone else (mentioned by 11 groups). Students explained that another barrier to asking for help for someone else is that the other person does not want help (mentioned by 9 groups); students indicate that they wish to respect someone else's privacy and this respect of privacy becomes a barrier to seeking help for that person (mentioned by 8 groups); students indicate that they might not know the full scope of the problem, issue, or situation, and therefore, may not ask for help for someone else because they just simply do not know everything that is going on in that person's life (mentioned by eight groups); students also do not become involved because they believe that the affected student should be able to figure it out themselves (Mentioned by seven groups); students also mention that a barrier that impacts their willingness to help others is the added stress and anxiety they personally experience when they become involved with others' problems (mentioned by six groups); and students also suggest that they do not see getting help for someone else as their role (mentioned by four groups). Three responses were mentioned by one group each. These responses were placed in the Other theme which include They keep it to themselves, Fear of becoming involved and Nothing will happen when I ask for help. The findings from the top six themes are below.

First, 13 out of 20 student groups shared that they have a fear of the consequences that might occur because they got involved. Students often define 'consequences' as a peer getting in trouble with their family, at school, or even with the law, if they tried to get help for them. One student mentioned that there is a "fear that it will make the situation worse." Another student mentioned that you can "have good intentions, but it backfires." Twelve out of 20 groups indicated that asking for help for someone else might negatively strain their relationship. For example, someone might be mad or not trust them anymore if they tried to seek help for them. One student stated, "Don't want to say something and then that friend gets mad or stops being your friend." Third, 11 out of 20 student groups shared that they felt they lacked knowledge and/or access to the resources necessary to help someone in need. "There are different scenarios and different ways to handle things; I am scared of doing the wrong thing if I tell someone."

Fourth, nine out of 20 groups indicated that they will not step in to help someone because the other person does not want their help. They are independent, and they want to handle the situation on their own. One student raised the question, "Where do you go after they say they don't want help?" Two different themes were mentioned by eight out of 20 groups. The first is respect for privacy of the other student that kept teenagers from seeking help for someone else. Teenagers can sometimes feel that they would not want someone else to share information about them and that they should not share this type of information about someone else especially without their permission. The same number of groups indicated that they would be less likely to become involved because they might not know the full issue that the student is dealing with. One student indicated they had a "fear of getting into trouble for not knowing exactly if someone needs help or not."

Below, Figure 12 showcases the number of student groups who mentioned each theme.



The Positives of the Community

The subcommittee also asked each student group the question, “*If you had the chance to sit down with the mayor or county commissioners, what would you tell them the community is doing well for you?*” Compared to previous Youth Summit events, this question was asked previously. Twenty student groups responded to this question. There were a few responses that did not address the positives in the community and therefore were omitted from the findings.

The subcommittee categorized their responses into ten themes, slightly modified to account for the varied answers from previous responses, which include (from most discussed to least discussed): community resources and support such as “several food pantries around the community” (mentioned by 11 groups); educational opportunities (mentioned by ten groups); places to hang out/things to do that highlight options for different activities and ways to get involved (mentioned by ten groups); Safety/Resource Officers to keep tabs on everyone (mentioned by eight groups); places to work/volunteer, like the Polar Plunge (mentioned by eight groups); diversity/inclusion (mentioned by eight groups); opportunities for youth to speak up (mentioned by four groups); mental health resources (mentioned by two groups); transportation including city buses (mentioned by two groups); and other topics including “neighborhood support/other homes” (mentioned by one group), “keeping pollution low” (mentioned by one

group), “needle exchange” (mentioned by one group), and “child care” (mentioned by one group). The findings from the five top themes are below.

First, eleven out of 20 student groups shared how the community is doing well in providing community resources/support in Tippecanoe and surrounding areas. Students commented that the community “provides resources for people that do need help and specifically mentioned food pantries and housing. One group mentioned that neighborhoods can be a good resource for providing safe spaces specifically stating, “I know that I have places that are safe in other people’s homes that I can go if I need to.” Although groups did not mention specific resources, several statements were made about efforts observed: “they are trying and putting in effort to put resources out.”, “trying to keep prices for things around the community at a reasonable level.”, “There are so many more charities to help people with different needs.”

Next, ten out of 20 student groups indicated that their community provides educational opportunities. Examples given were “GLCA”, “Scholarship opportunities”, and “not just traditional college, but also trade school or other options.”. Ten out of 20 groups also mentioned the community makes an effort to provide places to hang out/things to do. Specific community places and events mentioned were the mall, Purdue, Downtown, “doing great things with public spaces, rehabilitating areas, adding murals, farmer’s market”, the parks, the Celery Bog, 5 on 5 basketball at YMCA, and water parks. Eight of 20 groups mentioned safety and Resource Officers as something the community is doing well for youth. One group stated that Resource Officers help “keep tabs on everyone” and that “events feel like a safe environment.” Last, eight of 20 groups mentioned places to work/volunteer as well as diversity/inclusion, specifically mentioning Tippecanoe County’s efforts to have “open job interviews around the community” as well as “diverse business owners.”

Below, Figure 13 showcases the number of student groups who mentioned each theme.



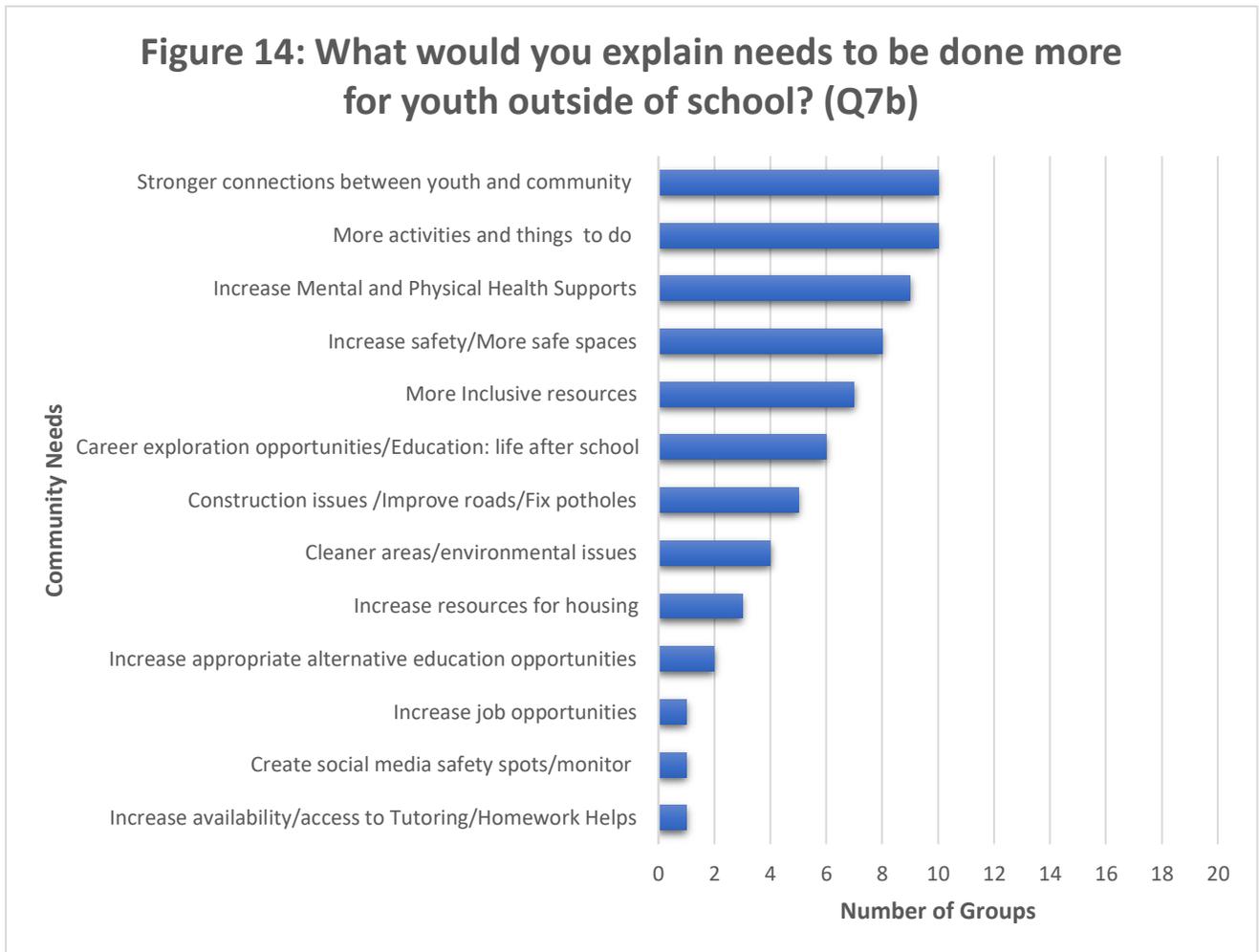
The Community and Youth

The subcommittee also asked each student group the question, “*What would you explain needs to be done more for youth outside of school?*” This question was asked at previous Youth Summit events. Twenty out of 20 student groups responded to this question.

The subcommittee categorized their responses into fourteen themes, which include (from most discussed to least discussed): stronger connections between youth and community such as “more events like the youth summit” (mentioned by 10 groups); more activities or things to do (mentioned by 10 groups); increase mental and physical health supports (mentioned by nine groups); increase safety/more safe spaces (mentioned by eight groups); more inclusive resources (mentioned by seven groups); career exploration and opportunities/more education on life after school (mentioned by six groups); construction issues/improve roads/fix potholes (mentioned by five groups); cleaner areas/environmental issues (mentioned by four groups) improve transportation (mentioned by four groups); increases resources for housing (mentioned by three groups); increase appropriate alternative education opportunities (mentioned by two groups); increase job opportunities (mentioned by one group); other topics such as: create social media safety spots/monitor (mentioned by one group); and increase availability/access to tutoring/homework helps (mentioned by one group). The findings from the top eight themes are below. Most of these themes are repeats of the 2022 Youth Summit themes in a slightly different order.

First, 10 out of 20 student groups shared that the community should provide stronger connections between youth and community. Suggestions included more events like the youth summit, more things to do in Lafayette for teens, and “More opportunities to talk to leaders to understand politics and to get educated on voting.” Second, 10 out of 20 student groups shared that the community could provide more activities and things to do. Suggestions include “parks, things to do, something new and exciting”; update the malls and make them more targeted towards teens these days, renovate”; and “club sports that are less competitive similar to intramural sports in college.” Third, nine out of 20 student groups also shared the need for increased mental and physical health supports. Suggested resources and examples include “pay attention to teenagers, they are struggling with mental illness at home, getting involved in gangs, running away and they [we] are not doing anything”; Lafayette having its own wellness center, and “more experiences with talking to counselors, and teachers understanding students are going through.” Fourth, eight out of 20 student groups shared that the community could increase safety and provide more safe spaces. Students suggested this could be achieved by the need to do a lot more for safety and “police departments could do better with the youths, educate on the laws better and make sure everyone knows what they need to do to stay out of trouble.” Fifth, seven of the student groups shared that the community could provide more inclusive resources. Examples and suggestions include “kids from underprivileged families are being left behind; improving on campus housing so that families don’t have as many Purdue students around them”; “less discrimination for LGBTQ population, and “is the community helping the under privileged in the summer?”. Sixth, six out of 20 student groups shared the need for career exploration and more education on life after high school. Seventh, five out of 20 student groups mentioned construction issues, improving roads and fixing potholes. Eighth, (in four groups out of 20) students cited the need for cleaner areas and environmental issues.

Below, Figure 14 showcases the number of student groups who mentioned each theme.



Coping Mechanisms

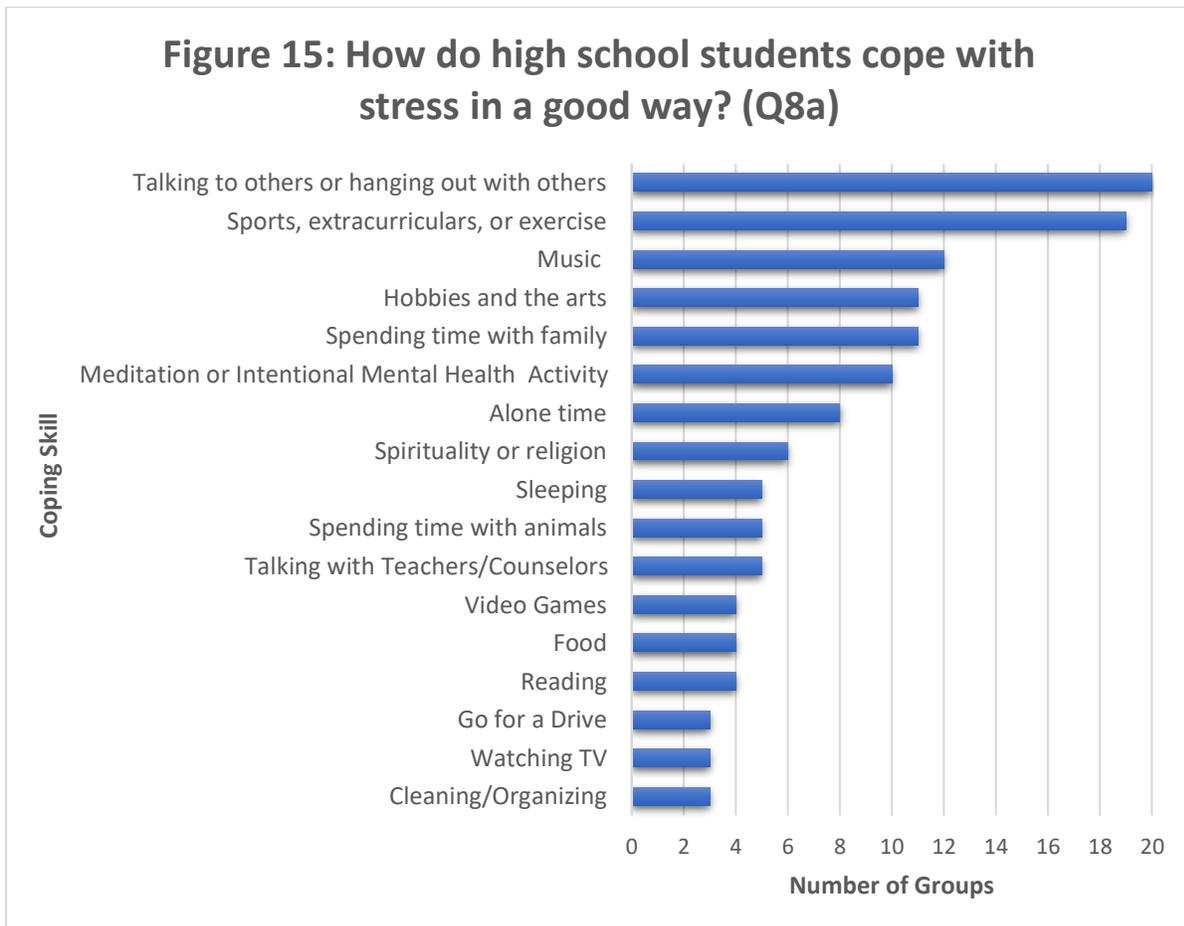
The subcommittee asked students about their coping behaviors and mechanisms for stress. Specifically, the subcommittee asked each student group the question, “*How do high school students cope with stress in a good way?*” Compared to previous Youth Summit events, this question was asked previously and was segmented into two questions based on clarifiers of “in a good way” and “in a bad way.” Twenty out of 20 student groups responded to this question.

The subcommittee categorized their responses into seventeen themes, which include (from most discussed to least discussed): talking to others or hanging out with others (mentioned by 20 groups); sports, exercise, or extracurricular activities (mentioned by 19 groups); using music (mentioned by 12 groups); participating in hobbies or the arts (mentioned by 11 groups); spending time with family (mentioned by 11 groups); meditation or an intentional mental health activity, such as deep breathing (mentioned by 10 groups); spending time alone (mentioned by eight groups); spirituality or religion (mentioned by six groups); sleeping (mentioned by five

groups); spending time with animals (mentioned by five groups); talking with teachers and counselors at school (mentioned by five groups); playing video games (mentioned by four groups); food (mentioned by four groups); reading (mentioned by four groups); go for a drive (mentioned by three groups); watching television (mentioned by three groups); cleaning and organizing (mentioned by three groups). The findings from the top five themes are below.

First, 20 student groups described spending time with friends as a good way to reduce stress and provide a healthy distraction. Nineteen of the twenty groups shared that they use sports, extracurriculars, or exercise to positively cope with stress. Third, 12 out of 20 student groups shared that they use music to positively cope with stress; they described both creating music and listening to music. Fourth, 11 out of 20 student groups shared that they cope with stress by participating in hobbies and the arts, such as by drawing or creating art. Additionally, 11 out of 20 student groups mentioned positively coping with stress by spending time with family.

Below, Figure 15 represents the number of student groups who mentioned each theme.

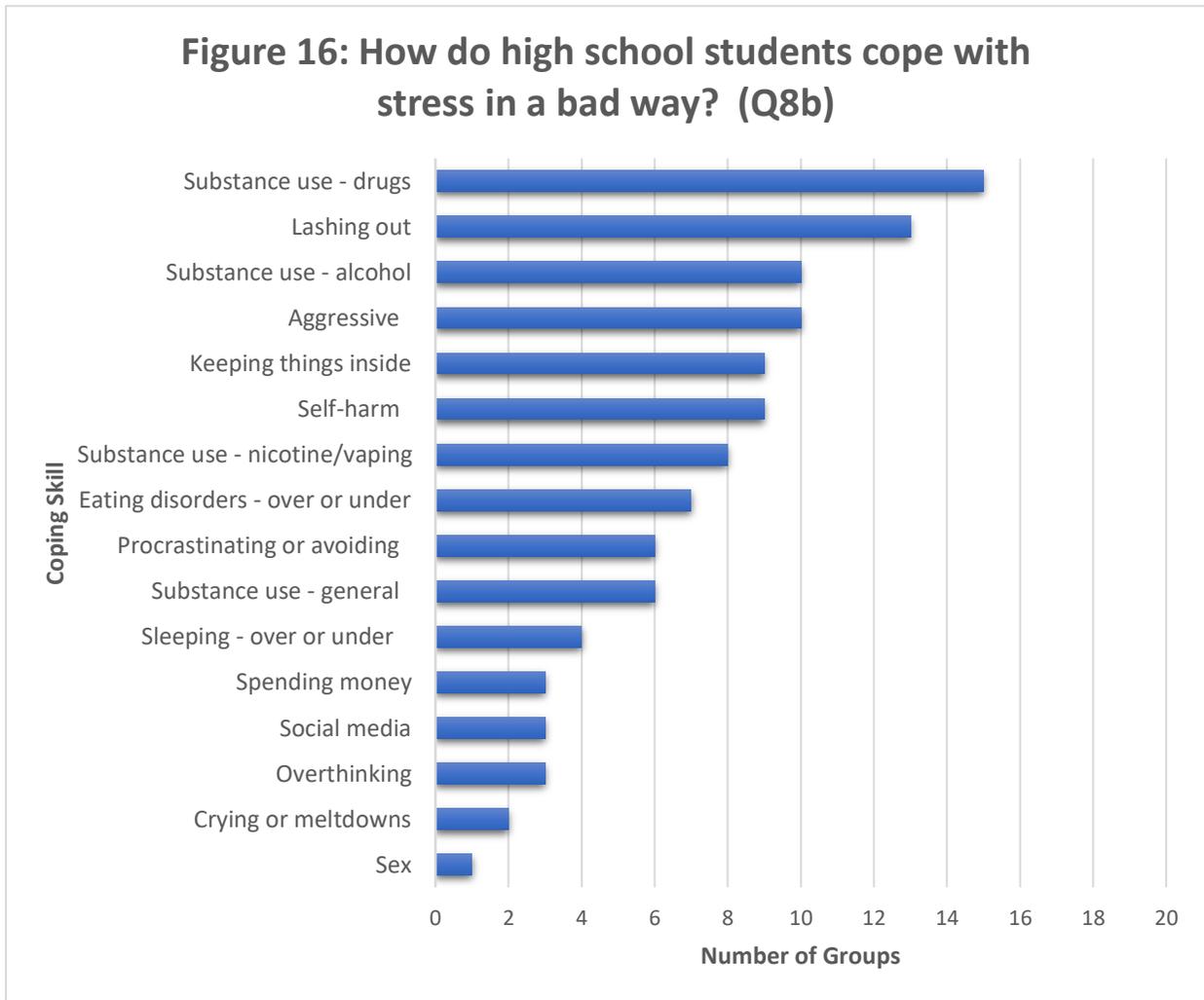


In tandem, the subcommittee also asked each student group the question, “*How do high school students cope with stress in a bad way?*” Twenty out of 20 student groups responded to this question.

The subcommittee categorized their responses into 16 themes, which include (from most discussed to least discussed): substance use via drugs (mentioned by 15 groups); lashing out at others (mentioned by 13 groups); substance use - alcohol (mentioned by 10 groups); aggression towards others, punching things, fighting (mentioned by 10 groups); keeping things inside and not disclosing things to other people (mentioned by nine groups); self-harm (mentioned by nine groups); substance use – nicotine/vaping (mentioned by 8 groups); eating disorders related to both not eating or over-eating (mentioned by seven groups); procrastination or avoiding things (mentioned by six groups); substance use-general (mentioned by six groups); sleeping in terms of oversleeping or not sleeping enough (mentioned by four groups); social media, such as TikTok and Instagram (mentioned by three groups); spending money (mentioned by 3 groups); overthinking about situations (mentioned by three groups); crying or experiencing meltdowns (mentioned by two groups); sex (mentioned by 2 groups). The findings from the top five themes are below.

First, 15 out of the 20 student groups mentioned substance use via drugs as a negative way that high school students cope with stress; Second, 13 out of 20 student groups referred to lashing out at others (e.g., snapping at others). Third, 10 out of 20 groups of students shared substance use-alcohol and 10 out of 20 student groups described avoiding and being aggressive (e.g., snapping at others) as negative coping mechanisms. Some students shared that aggression could be related to student experiences of domestic violence in the homes. Additionally, keeping things inside and not disclosing things to other people was mentioned by 9 out of the 20 groups.

Below, Figure 16 represents the number of student groups who mentioned each theme.



Conclusion

The 2023 Youth Summit celebrated youth voices, while also diving deeply into the real and complex lives of high school students. The Tippecanoe Resilience and Recovery Network – Prevention Subcommittee asked local high school students eight *sets* of questions, totaling 16 *individual* questions. The findings throughout this report indicate local area students’ perceptions of issues regarding stressors, mental health, substance use, coping behaviors, and ways in which school staff or the community at large could help youth. Below, are three major takeaways from the conversations.

1. Students are experiencing real mental health challenges. When asked which mental health issues impact youth the most, students – for years – have named anxiety and depression as the top two mental health concerns. However, what is most surprising is how well

students define and describe these concerns, indicating that students really understand what it feels like to either have anxiety or depression. This finding is of concern, giving rising national attention surrounding youth mental health and suicide.

2. For the second consecutive year, students indicate that the most common substances are also the substances they deem high risk (i.e., nicotine and alcohol). Students continue to provide clarity regarding how they define high risk, with most student groups indicating that addictive qualities make the substance highest risk. Furthermore, these substances are discussed during conversations with students about poor coping behaviors for stress. This finding is significant because it highlights not just the most used substances by teens, but also highlights students' perceptions of substance risks and substance use as a coping mechanism for stress.
3. Approximately 85% of students at the 2023 Youth Summit could identify a supportive adult at school. Like previous Youth Summit events, students overwhelmingly desire to build a trusting relationship with school staff or other adults. However, students do not just hope for just any relationship, but, instead, one that is built on mutual elements of trust, respect, dignity, and treats students as maturing adults with real feelings. Students express that they want to discuss real, adult topics like mental health in a productive, open-for-conversation type of way.

Student Evaluation

Approximately, 82 students attended the 2023 Youth Summit. A total of 63 of these students completed a post-event evaluation with the following questions:

1. *What is your year in school?*
2. *Please rate the following statements on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).*
 - a. *I felt heard when I shared my ideas in today's event.*
 - b. *I learned new things from other students in today's event.*
 - c. *I believe positive change will come from my responses.*
 - d. *I enjoyed participating in this event.*
 - e. *I am inspired to make a change from today's event.*
 - f. *I would be willing to participate in an event like this again.*
3. *Please share something specific that you learned from or during today's event.*
4. *How many supportive adults do you have in your life?*

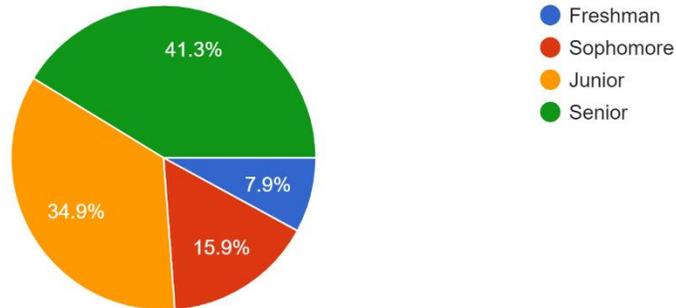
The findings of this student evaluation are below.

Year in School. Of the 63 students who responded to the student evaluation, five identify as freshmen students; 10 identify as sophomore students; 22 identify as junior students;

and 26 identify as senior students. Therefore, about half of the students who responded to the survey identify as upperclassmen students.

What is your year in school?

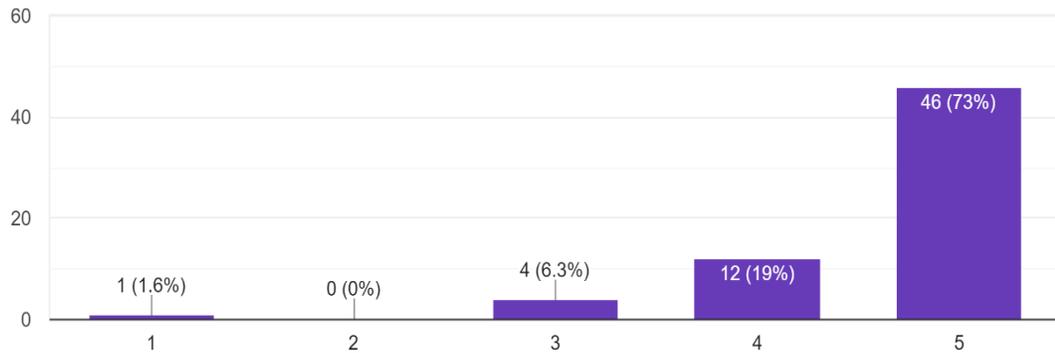
63 responses



Rating the Youth Summit Event. Of the 63 students who responded to the student evaluation, nearly all students (58 out of 63 students) indicated that they agree or strongly agree with the statement, “I felt heard when I shared by ideas in today’s event.”

I felt heard when I shared my ideas in today's event.

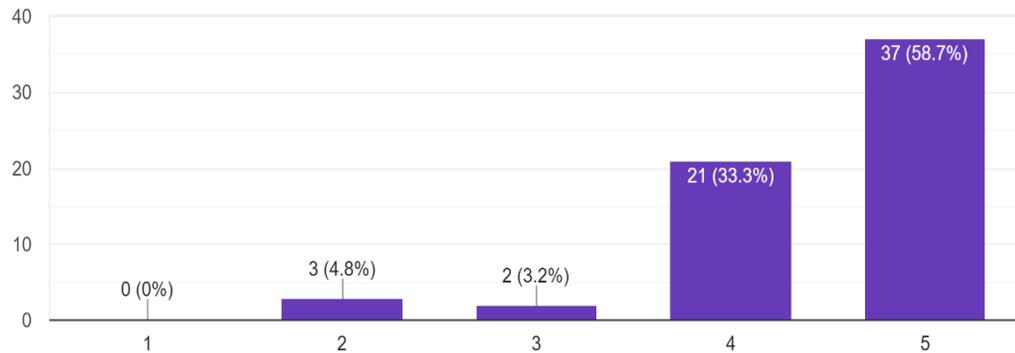
63 responses



Next, 58 out of 63 students indicated that they agree or strongly agree with the statement, “I learned new things from other students in today’s event.”

I learned new things from other students in today's event.

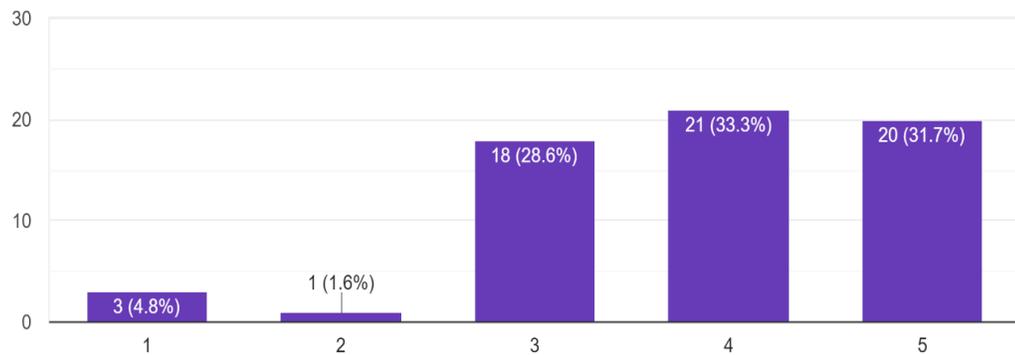
63 responses



Third, 41 out of 63 students indicated that they agree or strongly agree with the statement, “I believe positive change will come from my responses.”

I believe positive change will come from my responses.

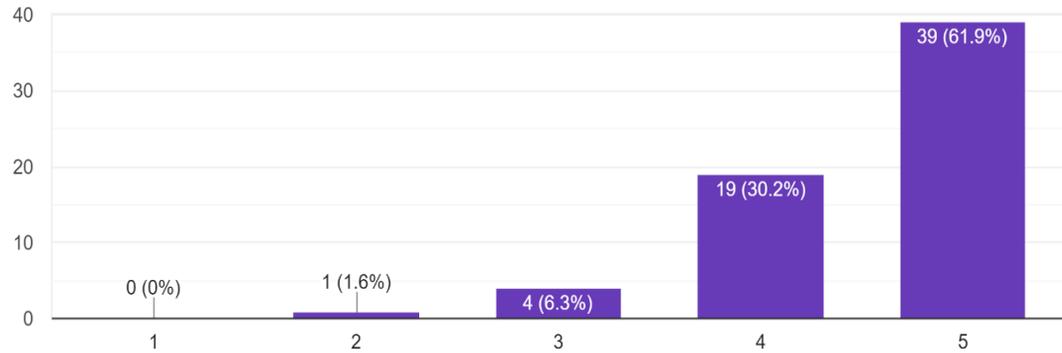
63 responses



Fourth, 58 out of 63 students indicated that they agree or strongly agree with the statement, “I enjoyed participating in this event.”

I enjoyed participating in this event.

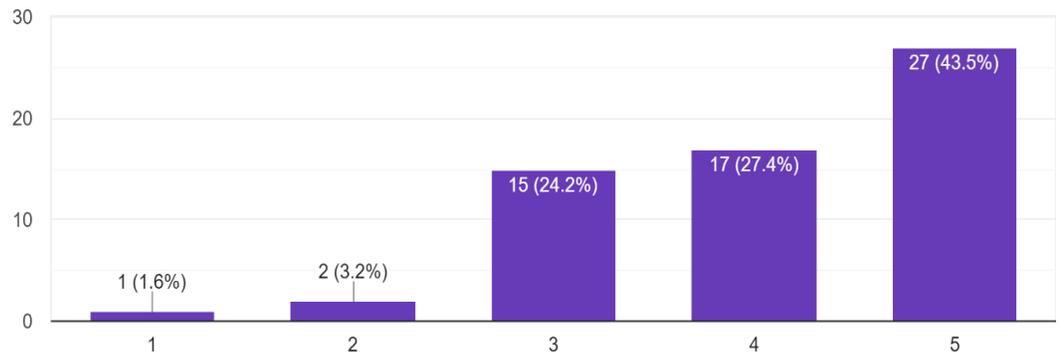
63 responses



Also, 44 out of 63 students indicated that they agree or strongly agree with the statement, “I am inspired to make a change from today’s event.”

I am inspired to make a change from today's event.

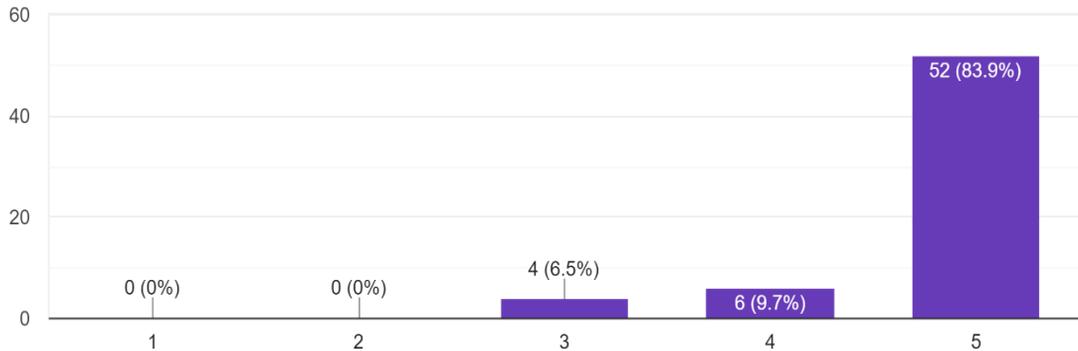
62 responses



Lastly, 58 out of 63 students indicated that they agree or strongly agree with the statement, “I would be willing to participate in an event like this again.”

I would be willing to participate in an event like this again.

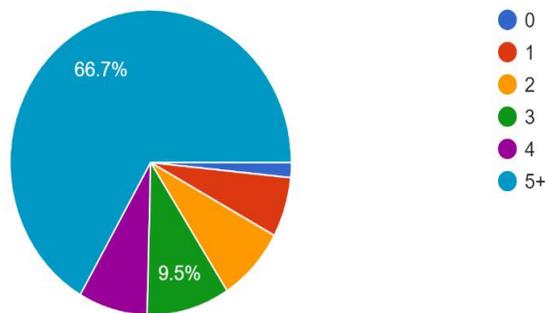
62 responses



Students were also asked the question, “How many supportive adults do you have in your life?” 42 out of 63 students responded that they can identify five or more supportive adults in their life.

How many supportive adults do you have in your life?

63 responses



Something Learned. Students were asked to share something specific that they learned from or during the 2023 Youth Summit. Sixteen students shared that they learned that students have different experiences than themselves, while 15 students shared that they learned that students have similar experiences. Twelve students shared that they learned something noteworthy about the prevalence of mental health, substance use, or stress, often citing that they learned many students struggle with these challenges. Eight students shared that they learned of new resources that exist for them, because of this event. Six students shared that they are now generally more aware of other students’ experiences

and lives, because of this event. Five students expressed that they learned that others in their lives or the community are trying to help students.

Moving Forward

Each year that the Youth Summit event is held, it is the hope of not just the Tippecanoe Resilience and Recovery – Prevention Subcommittee, but also the students who attended and engaged, that their voices, thoughts, ideas, and suggestions will be shared with the greater community. Often, this ‘sharing of voices’ means a few things.

First, it is the hope of the Prevention Subcommittee that this report and previous reports are shared among key decision leaders and stakeholders in the county, surrounding counties, and state. Key decision leaders and stakeholders include mayors; county commissioners; congressional leaders; governmental leaders; school staff administrators, counselors, teachers, and change makers; mental health agencies, therapists, counselors, and others in the field; health care agencies; community health and public health workers; parents, guardians, or advocates for youth; researchers; and more.

Second, it is the hope of the Prevention Subcommittee that action, when possible and appropriate, is taken to address the key issues that students have shared. For example, for years now, students have shared an overwhelming desire to build trusting, authentic relationships with school staff. There is an opportunity that exists, based on these conversations during the Youth Summit, to cultivate these types of relationships with teens across the county.

Third, it is the hope of the Prevention Subcommittee that this Youth Summit event continues for years to come. Students overwhelmingly express their appreciation for being able to participate in events like these, and rate events like these very favorably in post-event evaluations. The findings of the Youth Summit have and continue to shape key programs, services, and initiatives that support youth, and work to prevent mental health issues, substance use, suicide, and negative stress coping behaviors.