

"OUR VOICES MATTER!"

Youth Summit Report Spring 2025

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

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Executive Summary

On March 12, 2025, the Tippecanoe County Resilience and Recovery Network – Prevention Subcommittee hosted the seventh 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 various community organizations spanning leaders in the sectors of mental health; healthcare; K-12 and higher education; research; public health; service agencies; and community networking. The over-arching goal of this committee is to target prevention efforts for mental health, substance use, suicide, and stress coping behaviors. For the 2025 Youth Summit, members of this subcommittee and other community volunteers were trained in best practices and acted as moderators to guide student conversations and generate discussion.

The 2025 Youth Summit was held in-person at a local center’s meeting space. In total, approximately 78 students, ranging from freshmen to seniors, attended from schools across the county. These students were placed into 18 total groups. Student groups answered nine *sets* of questions totaling 21 *individual* questions.

Of the 54 students who attended the Youth Summit and completed an evaluation, 51 (94%) indicated that they would be willing to participate in an event like this again.

Methodology

The Tippecanoe County 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 choose students from all demographic areas.

The 2025 Youth Summit was held in-person at a local center’s meeting space on March 12, 2025. 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 and there were two tables asking the same questions. 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 nine sets of questions totaling exactly 21 individual questions. These questions included:

1. *What is the biggest positive impact of social media for youth? What is the biggest negative impact of social media for youth?*
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. *What do you like about living in Tippecanoe County? What do you think could be better? What resources do you know about in this community?*
8. *How safe do you generally feel in the community? How safe do you generally feel in school? Are there any specific areas or situations where you feel less safe?*
9. *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).*
 1. *I felt heard when I shared my ideas in today’s event.*
 2. *I learned new things from other students in today’s event.*
 3. *I believe positive change will come from my responses.*
 4. *I enjoyed participating in this event.*
 5. *I am inspired to make a change from today’s event.*
 6. *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 working on the content analysis from the event. Six members of the subcommittee coded all 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 expressed an idea, and not all groups agree on each idea that was expressed. The reader should remember that the answers given by the students are their perceptions. It is important to remember that students' perceptions are their reality.

The members met several times throughout a three-month period to determine the steps in creating this content analysis and begin coding uniformly. These members completed rounds of intercoder reliability on the same question. Then, questions were divided evenly among the group to code in pairs of two. After all the questions and responses were coded and the content was analyzed, the members began writing this report. Below are the findings from the 2025 Youth Summit.

Thank you especially to the following members for their contribution: *Rachel Cheeseman; Bonnie Crawford; Laura Kooiman-Cox; Beth Jones; Jenni Murtaugh; Chuck Newton; Amy O'Shea; and Stafka Poweleit.*

Findings

Impacts of Social Media

Positive Impacts of Social Media

In 2024, the subcommittee added a new question to the summit regarding social media. The question was, "What impact do you think social media has on youth today?" In analyzing the data, it was determined the question was too broad and that it needed to be changed for the 2025 summit. Instead of one question, two questions were asked regarding the positive and negative impacts of social media on youth.

The first question we asked was "*What is the biggest positive impact of social media for youth?*" All participating student groups (18 of 18) responded to this question. Students shared a wide range of insights, from how social media shapes their relationships and friendships to the ways it influences their identity, school performance, and access to information. The responses varied in depth and focus but also offered clear patterns in how youth perceive the role social media plays in their daily lives.

The subcommittee categorized these responses into 10 themes, listed below from most discussed to least discussed:

- **Friendships/Social Connection (89% of groups):** Sixteen student groups discussed how social media affects friendships and social connection. Students shared that it helps them stay connected with friends, maintain relationships across distance, and feel more socially included.
- **Education and Resources (83% of groups):** Fifteen student groups described social media as a source of information, news, and learning. Students noted that it is an easy way to look up information, learn new skills, stay current on events, and discover opportunities.
- **Bringing People Together (56% of groups)** Ten student groups said social media helps bring people together through shared interests, community events, or group chats that help maintain communication.
- **Positive Outlet for Self-Expression (50% of groups):** Nine student groups shared that social media provides space for creativity, expression, and sharing personal interests or achievements.
- **Finding Community and “Your People” (50% of groups):** Nine student groups talked about how social media helps them find supportive communities, niche interests, or others with similar identities or hobbies that they might not easily find in person.
- **Family Life (44% of groups)** Eight student groups said social media can influence family life in both positive and negative ways. Some described sharing updates or content with family members, while others noted that the use of devices at home can sometimes create distance between family members.
- **Mental Well Being (39% of groups)** Seven student groups shared that social media helps in developing mental wellbeing by strengthening social connections and relationships. Students can express themselves and find their voice.
- **Find a Job / Job Opportunities (39% of groups):** Seven student groups noted that social media can be useful for exploring careers, finding job postings, or connecting with employment-related resources.
- **Fun and Entertainment (33% of groups)** Six student groups described social media as a source of fun, humor, relaxation, or entertainment, although some noted it can also become a distraction.
- **Academics and Grades (22% of groups)** Five student groups shared that social media can negatively impact academic performance, particularly related to distractions and time management challenges.
- **Other (5.5% or 11% of the groups)** Two student groups mentioned questioning the reliability of the information while one student group mentioned influence and physical health.

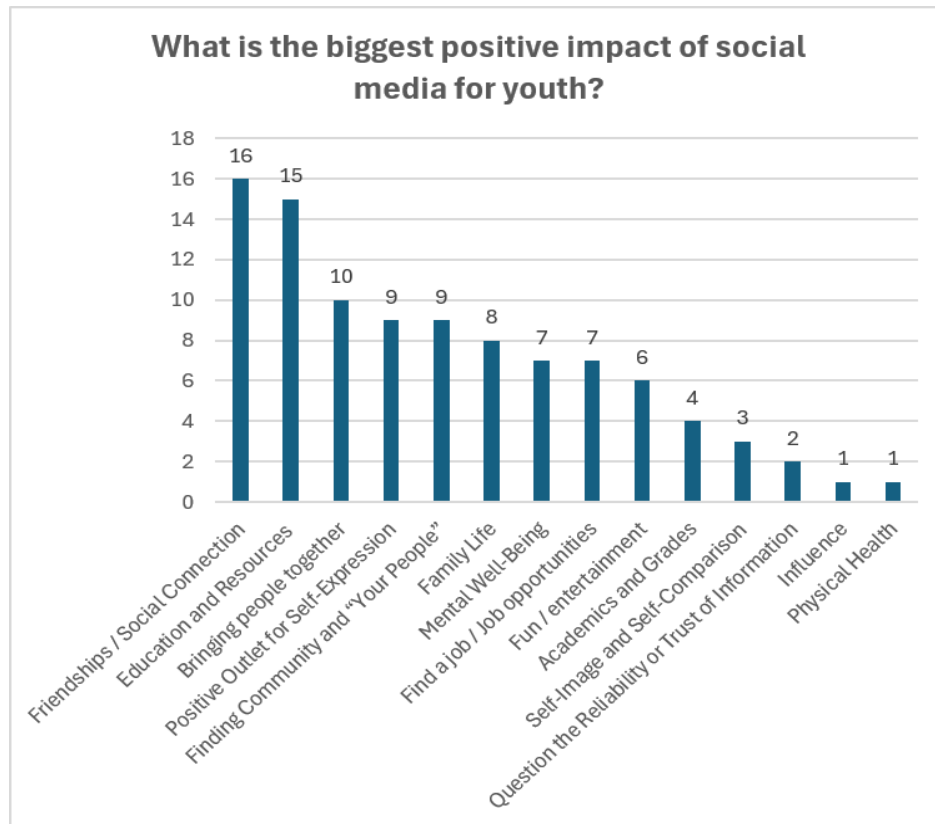


Figure 1

Negative Impacts of Social Media

This year, the subcommittee asked students the question, *“What is the biggest negative impact of social media for youth?”* All 18 student groups responded to this question.

Students shared a wide range of insights about how social media influences their daily lives—how it affects their relationships, their self-image, their stress levels, and their ability to focus. Students described significant concerns regarding social media in their lives.

The subcommittee categorized their responses into 12 themes, listed from most discussed to least discussed below.

- Self-Image and Self-Comparison (83% of groups)** Fifteen student groups said social media significantly affects how they view themselves. Students discussed comparing their appearance, accomplishments, or lifestyle to what they see online, and many noted that social media can create unrealistic expectations for how they “should” look or live. One student mentioned the “toxic mindset to always be attractive leads to eating disorders and other mental health disorders.”

- **Bullying and Meanness (83% of groups)** Fifteen student groups said social media has amplified bullying or unkind behavior. Students described online spaces as places where negative comments spread quickly, criticism becomes normalized, and cyberbullying can be difficult to escape. One student responded, “I have never been called that many slurs before.”
- **Mental Well-Being (83% of groups)** Fifteen student groups said social media negatively impacts mental health. Students reported increased anxiety, stress, sadness, and pressure associated with online interactions, content, and expectations. Students talked about how much suicide and depression rates have increased as well as addiction to social media.
- **Question the Reliability or Trust of Information (50% of groups)** Nine student groups expressed concerns about misinformation. Students shared that it is difficult to know what is real or trustworthy online, and that misleading posts or false information spread quickly. Student comments include, “It is hard to trust any of it.” “What is real and what’s not?”
- **Distraction, Time, and Attention Management (44% of groups)** Eight student groups said social media takes up significant time and distracts them from schoolwork, responsibilities, or moments when they want to focus. Students noted how quickly time passes when scrolling and how hard it is to limit screen time. As one student mentioned, you “spend three hours on it and realize you got nothing of value.” Social media “takes time away from friends, family, homework and work.”
- **Concern for Safety (44% of groups)** Eight student groups expressed worry about safety on social media. Students mentioned risks like predators, unsafe contact from strangers, and being exposed to harmful or inappropriate content. There were some alarming comments from the students including, it is “easier to get away with saying something creepy if someone is older and preying on a younger person.” “Exposure to pedos (pedophiles) pretending to be kids” is a problem.
- **Question the Authenticity of Others (39% of groups)** Seven student groups shared that social media makes it difficult to know when people are being authentic. Students mentioned that people often show the “best parts” of their lives, creating an environment where true identity can feel masked. One student mentioned, “You don’t know what is on the other side of the screen.”
- **Physical Health (28% of groups)** Five student groups said social media can negatively affect their physical health. Some mentioned staying up late scrolling or being less active because time online replaced physical activity. One student’s comment seemed to sum it up: the “amount of use can affect sleep, can affect both mental and physical health with blue light fatigue and the stress it puts on the brain.”
- **Friendships / Social Communication (28% of groups)** Five student groups discussed how social media affects their friendships. While some said it helps them stay connected, many noted that communication online can create misunderstandings or shape social

groups in sometimes harmful ways. Students noted that there is less personal interaction between people and there is misinformation everywhere all the time.

- **Becomes Addictive (28% of groups)** Five student groups described social media as addictive. Students talked about feeling compelled to keep scrolling, difficulty taking breaks, and habits that feel hard to control. Students noted that it can become addictive if not limited, and it can cause behavioral and cognitive issues, especially among younger children during developing years.”
- **Scams / Financial Concerns (17% of groups)** Three student groups brought up concerns about scams and financial risks online, noting that deceptive ads, suspicious links, and identity theft are increasing.
- **Other (5.5% or 11% of groups)** Eleven percent of the groups (two groups) mentioned the following negative impacts of social media: Academics and Grades, Influence, Digital Footprint or Forever Record and Division of the Country while 5.5% or one group mentioned Sleep, Education and Resources, Work, Family Life, and Increased Fear of Missing Out (FOMO). While not a high percentage, these things are certainly a negative impact of social media for some students.

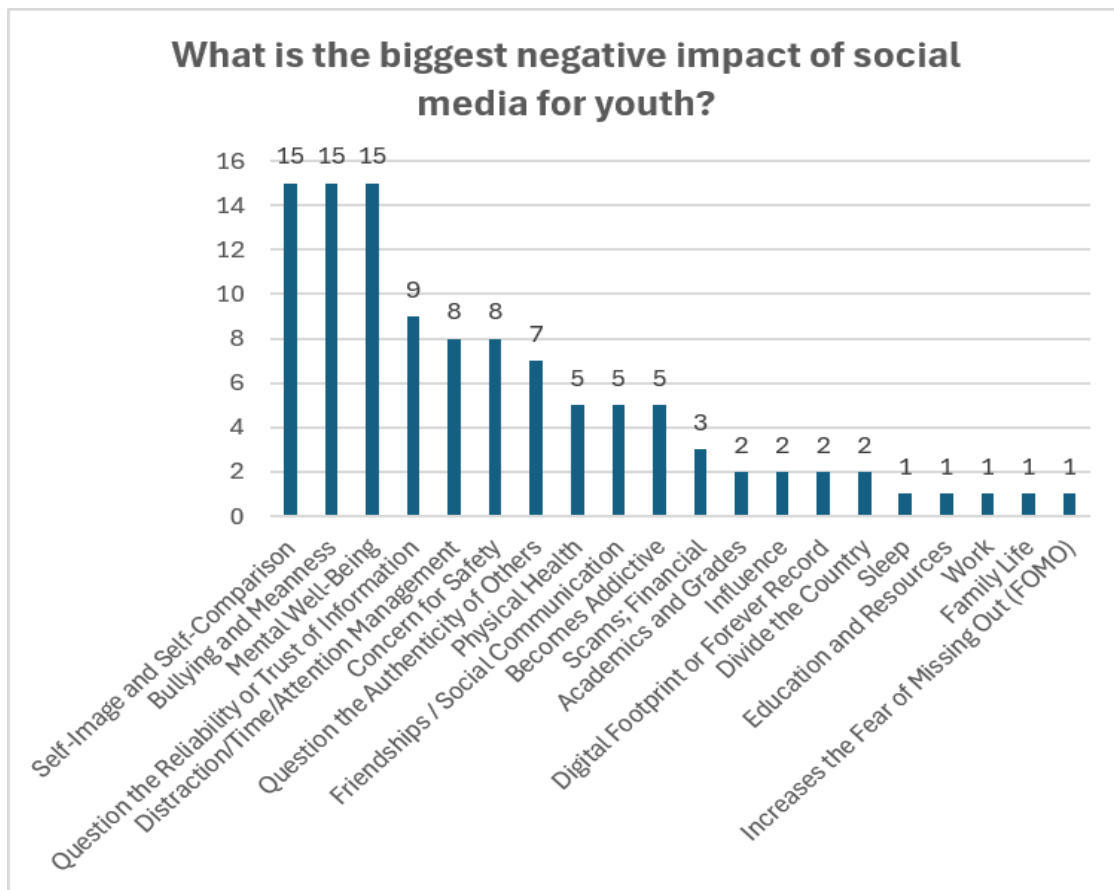


Figure 2

Biggest Stressors Faced by High School Students Today

The subcommittee then asked students the question, “*What do you think are the biggest stressors high school students face today?*” and has received varied but consistent responses. This question has been asked at seven previous youth summit events. Eighteen student groups answered this question.

Students gave a variety of answers ranging from the stressors of school and social life, pressures from parents or other people, and internal stressors perpetuated by social media. The subcommittee categorized their responses into 10 themes and a varied “other” category, based on responses from the student groups, which include (from most discussed to least discussed):

- **School and Academics (100% of groups)** All student groups said that school and academics are stressors in their lives, especially when discussing the rigor of coursework and the workload associated with maintaining good grades.
- **Family, Home, and Financial Stressors (94% of groups)** Seventeen student groups described stress connected to home life, family relationships, or financial instability.
- **Balance of Priorities (83% of groups):** Fifteen student groups said that balancing school, work, social, and home responsibilities is a major stressor, often describing the pressure to uphold all parts of their lives simultaneously.
- **College and Future Planning (83% of groups)** Fifteen student groups said that preparing for the future—including college or career goals—creates significant stress.
- **Social Pressure and Perceptions from Peers (77% of groups)** Fourteen student groups mentioned the stress of social pressure and concerns about how peers perceive them.
- **Expectations from Adults (66% of groups)** Twelve student groups said that expectations from adults, especially parents and teachers, are a major stressor.
- **Social Life and Relationships (61% of groups)** Eleven student groups said that maintaining friendships and relationships causes stress due to the complexities of communication and time management.
- **Safety, Violence, and Discrimination (50% of groups)** Nine student groups shared concerns about feeling unsafe or facing discrimination within school or community settings.
- **Social Media (28% of groups)** Five student groups said that social media contributes to stress, often mentioning pressure to present an idealized version of themselves online.
- **Mental Health and Emotional Struggles (22% of groups)** Four student groups identified mental health challenges as a key stressor in their daily lives.

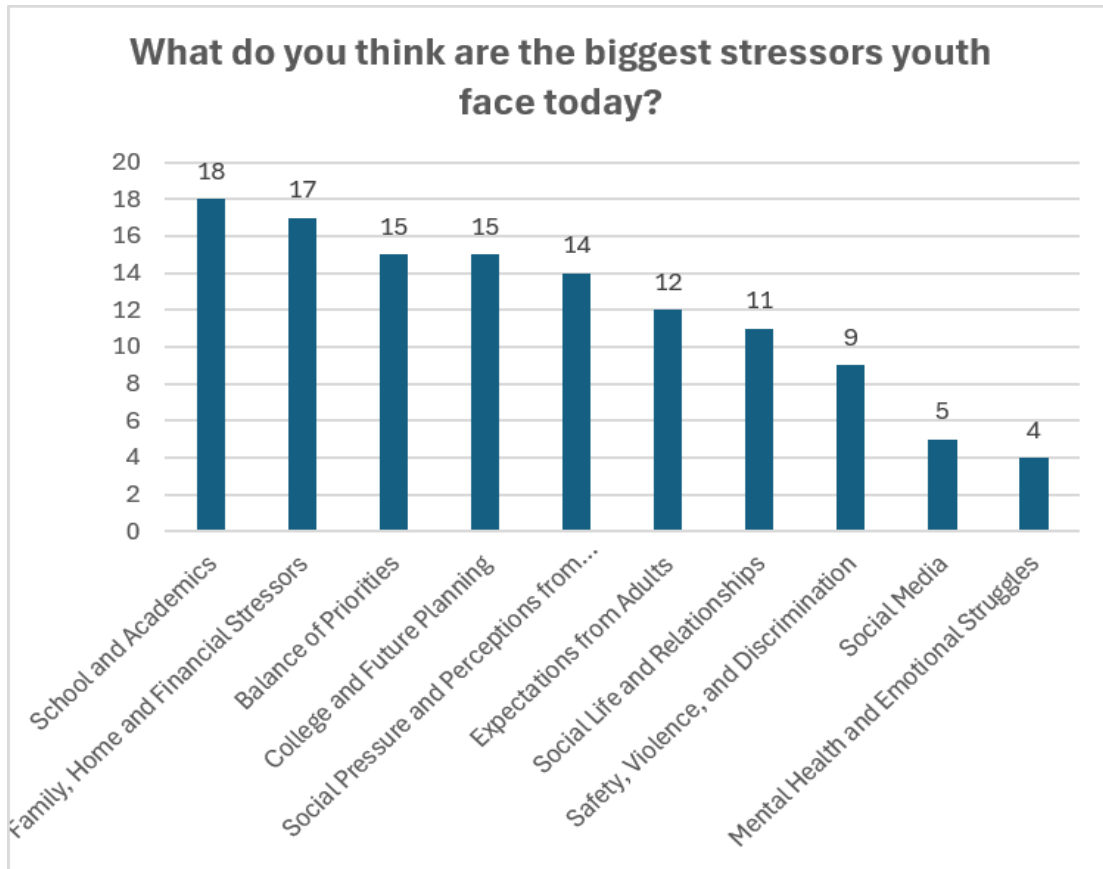


Figure 3

Substance Use

Substances Youth are Using

This year, the subcommittee once again asked students about their experiences with substance use, what substances youth are using most, what substances are believed to be high risk and how youth define high risk.

All 18 student groups responded to the prompt: “*What substances do you think youth are using the most?*” This question has been asked at the five previous summits.

As in previous years, students were candid, thoughtful, and often emotional in their responses. The question was posed in a way so students could speak to their observations and experiences with peers who use substances to provide an added layer of anonymity and encourage open discussion. The reader should remember that the answers given by the students are their perceptions. It is important to remember that *students’ perceptions are their reality*. The subcommittee categorized the student responses into 13

different substances. These substances are shown below from those most frequently used to those least frequently used.

- **THC/marijuana (100% of groups)** Every group identified THC or marijuana as a substance used by youth. Students described it as highly accessible and often used socially.
- **Nicotine (89% of groups)** Sixteen student groups noted nicotine use—primarily through vaping—though this represents a small drop compared with prior years’ “top three,” suggesting slight shifts in relative emphasis.
- **Alcohol (61% of groups)** Eleven student groups named alcohol as a commonly used substance, particularly in social settings like parties or home gatherings.
- **Vapes (50% of groups)** Nine student groups specifically called out vaping (distinct from general nicotine use), indicating that vaping remains a distinct and prevalent mode of substance use among youth.
- **Stimulants: ecstasy, molly, Adderall, meth (28% of groups)** Five student groups reported use of stimulants, reflecting concerns about performance-related or recreational use of prescription and illicit stimulants.
- **Generic Pills (28% of groups)** Five student groups identified the use of over the counter or easily obtained pills (e.g., cough syrup “lean,” Benadryl, common OTC meds) or misuse of prescription medications.
- **Psychedelics (28% of groups)** Five student groups also mentioned psychedelics (such as mushrooms, LSD, ketamine), pointing to continued—but more niche—use among some youth.
- **Pain Killer (22% of groups)** Use of non-specified pain killers was mentioned by four student groups, suggesting emerging awareness of pain-killer misuse (distinct from opioids).
- **Caffeine (17% of groups)** Interestingly, three student groups cited caffeine—likely referencing energy drinks or high-caffeine products—as a widely used substance, perhaps reflecting its normalization and easy accessibility.
- **Other: (5.5% or 11% of groups)** Either one or two groups also mentioned opioids, inhalants and spice as substances youth are using. While these substances were mentioned less frequently, they remain part of the local youth substance-use landscape.

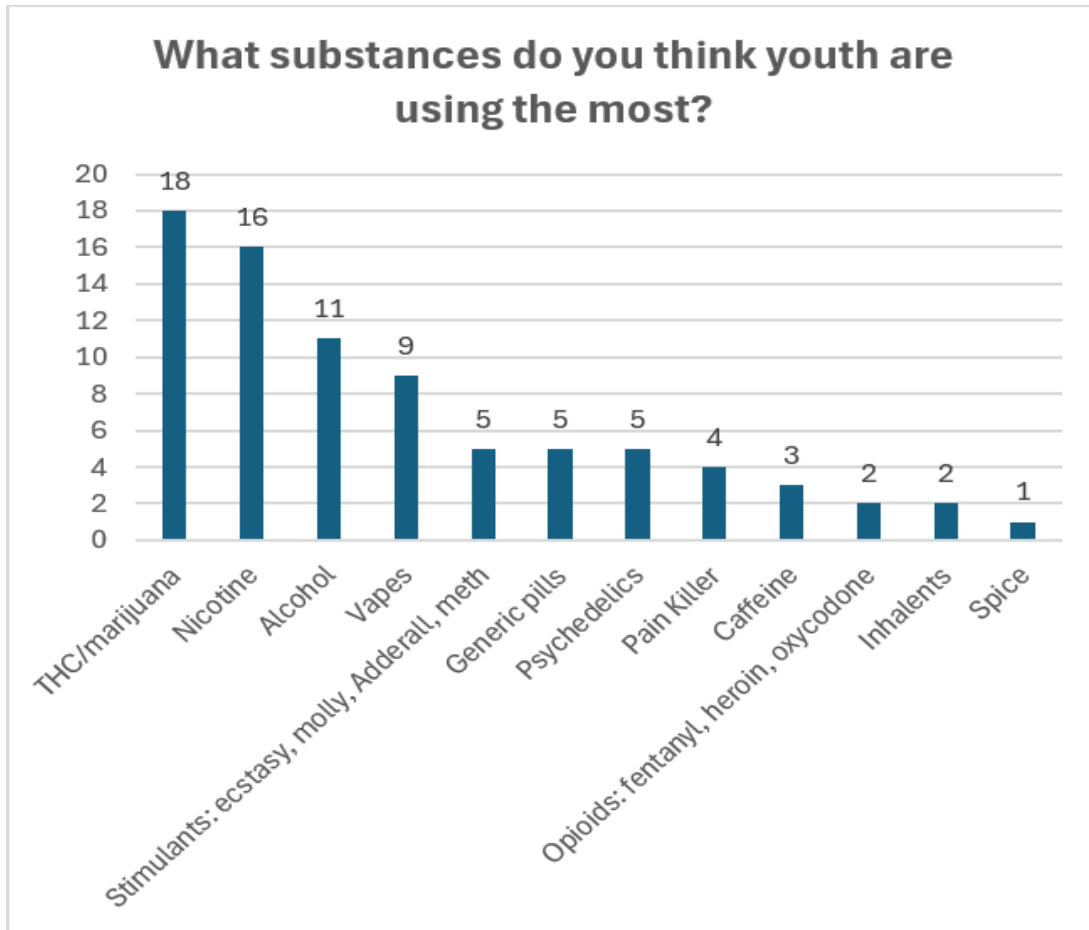


Figure 4

Substances Considered High Risk

The subcommittee then asked the students “*What substances do you think are high risk?*”. This question has been asked at the six previous summits. **Due to challenges with collecting the data, responses from only nine groups were recorded for this question.** We realize that our results might have been different if we had data from all 18 groups instead of just nine. Four new substances were mentioned this year: Cocaine, Nicotine Chew, Hand Sanitizer and Crack. As a reminder to the reader, this question focuses on what youth *perceive as “High Risk”* and although it can be suggestive of use, the student responses did not identify youth as using “Cocaine or Crack” in Question 3a. Previous summit data suggests that youth talking about substances is suggestive of current access to the substances in the community. The substances identified as “High Risk” are shown below starting with the most frequently mentioned first.

- Cocaine (67% of groups)** Six of nine student groups identified cocaine as a high-risk substance. Students emphasized the dangerous physical effects, the high potential for addiction, and the perception that it is a “hard drug” with severe consequences even with limited use.

- **Opioids: fentanyl, heroin, oxycodone (56% of groups)** Five of nine student groups referenced opioids as extremely risky, often citing overdose concerns, fentanyl contamination, and fatal outcomes associated with misuse.
- **Stimulants: ecstasy, molly, Adderall, meth (56% of groups)** Five of nine student groups also named stimulant substances as high risk. Students associated these with unpredictable side effects, long-term health damage, and dangers related to misuse of prescription stimulants.
- **Nicotine (44% of groups)** Four of nine student groups mentioned nicotine as high risk, noting its addictive nature, its prevalence among youth, and concerns around long-term impacts—especially related to vaping and flavored products.
- **Alcohol (33% of groups)** Three of nine student groups discussed alcohol as high risk, particularly in situations involving binge drinking, impaired driving, or patterns of habitual use.
- **Acid (33% of groups)** Three of nine student groups identified acid (LSD) as a risky substance due to its hallucinogenic effects, unpredictability, and potential mental health impacts.
- **Vapes (33% of groups)** Three of nine student groups raised concerns about vaping as high risk. Students described health uncertainties, nicotine dependence, and accessibility as ongoing issues.
- **Tobacco (22% of groups)** Two of nine student groups viewed traditional tobacco products as high risk, emphasizing long-term health consequences and addiction.
- **All drugs are high risk (22% of groups)** Two of nine student groups expressed that any substance has the potential to be high risk depending on frequency, dosage, and individual vulnerability. This broad concern highlights a growing awareness of general substance-related harms.
- **Spice (22% of groups)** Two of nine student groups identified synthetic cannabinoids (Spice/K2) as high risk due to their unpredictable chemical makeup and dangerous side effects.
- **Pills (22% of groups)** Two of nine student groups mentioned pills—whether prescription or over-the-counter—as high risk, especially when misused or taken without proper medical guidance.
- **THC/Marijuana (22% of groups)** Only two of nine student groups mentioned THC/marijuana, with comments ranging from concerns about potency to emotional and cognitive impacts, even though students recognized that use is common and often perceived as less severe than other substances.
- **Other: (11% of groups)** One out of nine students mentioned each of the following substances as being high risk: *Nicotine Chew*, caffeine, *Hand Sanitizer*, Inhalants and *Crack*.

Items in *Italics* are substances not mentioned in Question 3a, “*What substances do you think youth are using most?*” However, they are identified as “*High Risk*” in this question. The subcommittee

recommends more exploration into these substances to gain a better understanding of where preventive interventions can be initiated so they do not end up in Question 3a in future summits.

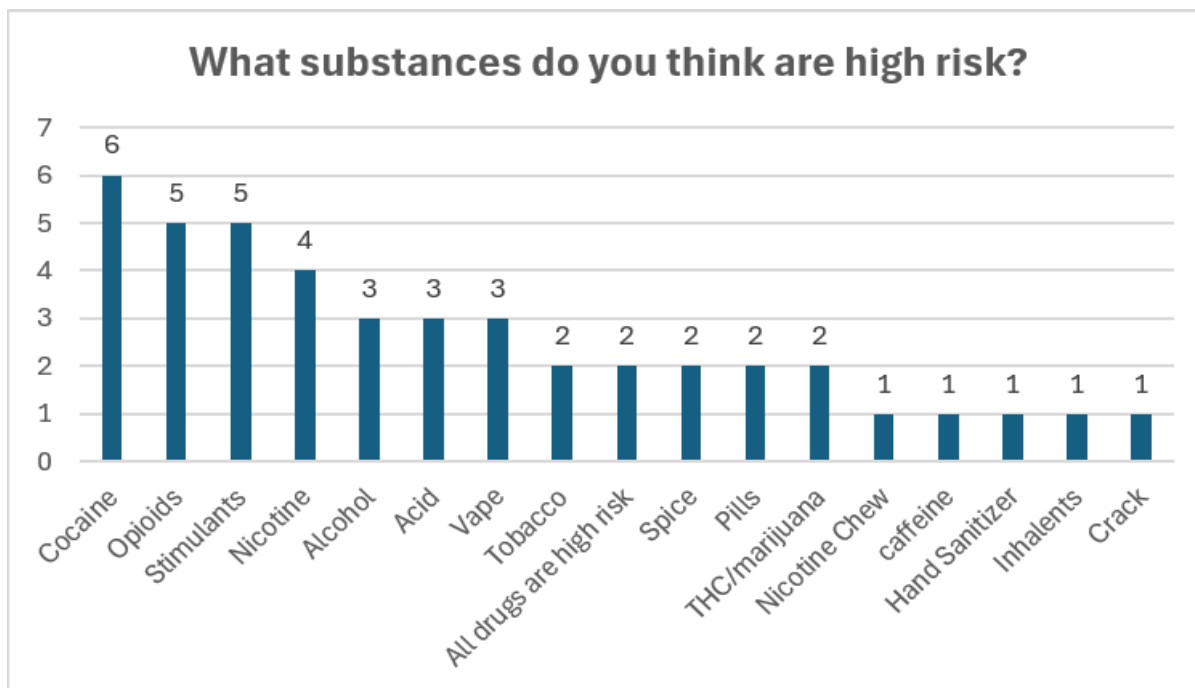


Figure 5

Definition of High Risk

The final sub-part of question 3 was “*How would you define High Risk?*”. This question was asked to better understand how youth define risk. This question has been asked in six previous summits. **Due to challenges with collecting the data, responses from only nine groups were recorded for this question.** The following 13 themes were identified in this question with the highest risk listed first.

- **Affects physical health (89% of groups)** Eight of nine student groups defined high risk as substances that negatively impact physical health. Groups described damage to the brain and body, both short-term and long-term, and emphasized that substances can cause lasting harm to overall health.
- **Causes death or harm (67% of groups)** Six of nine student groups stated that high risk substances are those that can cause serious harm or death. Students referenced overdose, impaired driving, and other life-threatening situations as key indicators of high risk.
- **Addictive qualities (67% of groups)** Six of nine student groups identified addictive properties as a major factor in defining high risk. They noted that substances that lead to dependence make it difficult to stop using and can quickly escalate into more serious issues.
- **Substance use is acceptable (56% of groups)** Five of nine student groups discussed substances that are often considered socially acceptable—such as alcohol or nicotine—as

still being high risk. Students emphasized that normalization could increase use and reduce awareness of potential dangers.

- **Affects mental health (33% of groups)** Three of nine student groups described high risk substances as those that negatively impact mental health. Groups noted that substances can worsen anxiety, depression, or emotional regulation and may be used to numb or avoid difficult feelings.
- **Lack of knowledge about what's being used (33% of groups)** Three of nine student groups defined high risk as using substances without fully knowing what they are, how they work, or their potential effects. Students expressed concern about misinformation and misunderstanding of substances.
- **Withdrawal (22% of groups)** Two of nine student groups discussed withdrawal symptoms as a defining factor of high risk. They noted that physical or emotional withdrawal makes quitting difficult and can keep individuals using substances longer than intended.
- **Overdose (22% of groups)** Two of nine student groups defined high risk substances as those that carry a significant risk of overdose, especially when dosage is unclear or tolerance changes.
- **Other (5.5%)** One of nine student groups listed the following as examples of risk from substance use: the substance impacts how one functions or makes decisions, it impacts one's future, it can be laced with other substances, and it can damage or cause harm to others.

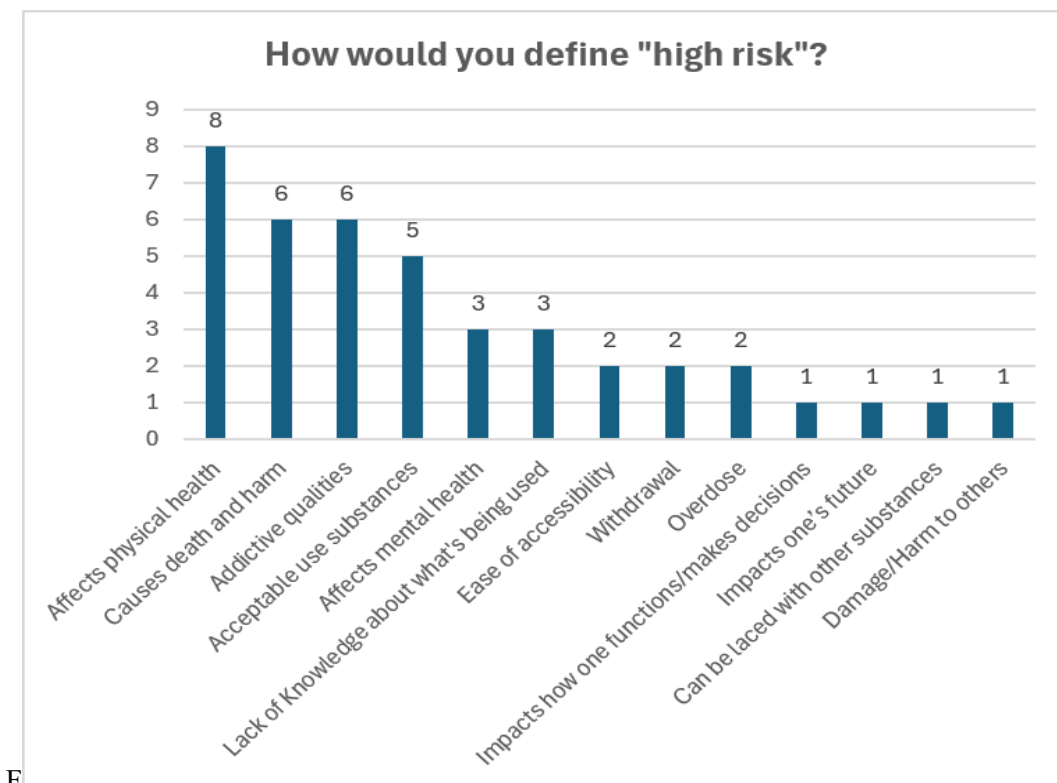


Figure 6

Recommendations for Schools

Issues Youth are Dealing With that Schools Should be Paying Attention to

This year, the subcommittee once again asked students about their school experiences, what they believe schools should be paying closer attention to and their suggestions for improving their school experience.

All 18 student groups responded to the prompt: “*What issues do you think youth are dealing with that schools need to be paying more attention to?*” This question has been asked at the four previous summits.

As in previous years, students were candid, thoughtful, and often emotional in their responses. Their answers reflect their personal experiences. The reader should remember that the answers given by the students are their perceptions. It is important to remember that *students’ perceptions are their reality*. The subcommittee categorized the student responses into 18 different themes. These themes are shown below from those most frequently mentioned to those least frequently mentioned.

- **Teacher Awareness (61% of groups)** Eleven student groups expressed a desire for teachers to better understand students’ emotional states and how educator actions impact learning. Students want teachers to recognize when they are struggling, feeling overwhelmed, or are distracted, and to respond with empathy and flexibility.
- **Mental Health/Substance Use or Misuse (56% of groups):** Ten student groups said schools need stronger awareness and understanding of mental health concerns and substance misuse issues. Students noted that many peers are dealing with stress, anxiety, or depression, and that substance misuse is often a coping mechanism rather than an isolated issue.
- **Building Relationships with Students (56% of groups):** Ten groups emphasized the importance of meaningful connections with adults in school. As in the past, students want teachers and staff to ask about their lives, show interest in them, and build trust through consistent, caring interactions. Students indicate they value relationships with adults in their buildings.
- **Mental Health Awareness (50% of groups)** Nine student groups specifically noted that staff need a deeper understanding of how mental health challenges affect student behavior and academic performance. Students want adults to recognize signs of emotional distress and respond proactively. This percentage has increased from 14% from the 2024 Youth Summit to 50% this year.
- **Balance of Life (athletics, extra-curriculars, work, home) (44% of groups)** Eight student groups shared that balancing academics, extracurricular activities, athletics, jobs, social life and home responsibilities is overwhelming. Students want schools to acknowledge these pressures and consider them when assigning workload or scheduling activities. Students want to be able to enjoy all facets of their lives without feeling the pressures and stress associated with feeling overwhelmed.
- **School Environment/Discipline Concerns (39% of groups)** Seven groups expressed concern about the school environment—both emotionally and physically—and the consistency of discipline. Students want clearer expectations, fair enforcement of rules, and school climates that

feel welcoming and safe. This is a dramatic improvement from the results presented from the 2024 report. Ninety percent of the groups in 2024 mentioned this as a concern.

- **Student Expectations of Counselors (39% of groups)** Seven groups shared frustrations with limited access to school counselors. Students feel counselors are overextended, making it difficult to get timely or effective support, especially related to mental health. One student mentioned “counselors focus more on schedules and prioritized schedules more than the kids who actually need to talk to them about mental health and harm.”
- **Academic Overload (39% of groups)** Seven groups reported feeling overwhelmed by the amount of schoolwork assigned. Students want reasonable workloads and better coordination among teachers regarding tests, projects, and deadlines. One student summarized this with the following statement: “ You spend 7 hours at school and then have hours of homework at home that doesn't allow time to be kids and enjoy life.”
- **Family Issues/Physical and Financial Concerns (33% of groups)** Six groups noted that family circumstances—including financial stress, lack of support at home, or caregiving responsibilities—affect academic performance. Students want teachers to understand that students are experiencing these pressures rather than assuming there is a lack of effort when work is not completed or grades are poor.
- **Teacher Accountability (33% of groups)** Six groups raised concerns about inconsistent instructional quality. Some students shared that certain teachers rely heavily on assignments rather than teaching, leaving students unprepared and frustrated. They would like to see the administration intervene when teachers are not doing their jobs appropriately. *This number jumped from 5% in the 2024 report to 33% in this report.*
- **Bullying (28% of groups)** Five groups said bullying—both in person and online—remains a major concern. Students want schools to take reports seriously, address peer conflicts quickly, and intervene when adults (teachers) contribute to hostile environments. One student commented: “Teachers are bullies; some teachers have a big ego and take it out on the students.”
- **Learning Life Skills and Preparing for the Future (28% of groups)** Five student groups said they want more instruction in practical life skills and clearer preparation for college or career pathways. They believe it is important for schools to help them prepare for their futures whether it be college or employment.
- **Expectations and Pressures (Internal and External) (17% of groups)** Three groups mentioned the intense internal and external pressures they face. Students described the emotional strain from academic expectations, athletics, family demands, and social comparisons impacts their stress and anxiety levels. Students have internal pressures they place on themselves, while they also have external pressures placed on them by others. Not meeting those pressures make them feel judged which in turn causes anxiety.
- **Students Want to Express Their Opinions (17% of groups)** Three groups emphasized the need for more student voice in school decision-making. Students said they want to be asked—and listened to—regarding school policies, climate, and curriculum.
- **Schools Should Be a Safe Place (17% of groups)** Three groups emphasized their desire for school to feel physically safe. Concerns included fighting, threats, rumors, and peer conflict. Some students have concerns for their physical safety while in school.
- **Social Media Concerns (17% of groups)** Three groups noted that social media has a significant impact on student stress, relationships, and self-image. They want schools to recognize its

influence on mental health and peer conflict. The specific question regarding social media gives more detailed information.

- **Peer Pressure (17% of groups)** Three student groups noted that pressure from friends—including social, academic, and behavioral expectations—affect decision-making and contributes to stress.
- **Other (5.5 % or 11% of groups)** Either one or two groups mentioned additional things that they believe schools should be paying attention to. These suggestions include Availability of Resources, Parking Lot Issues and Fights at School.

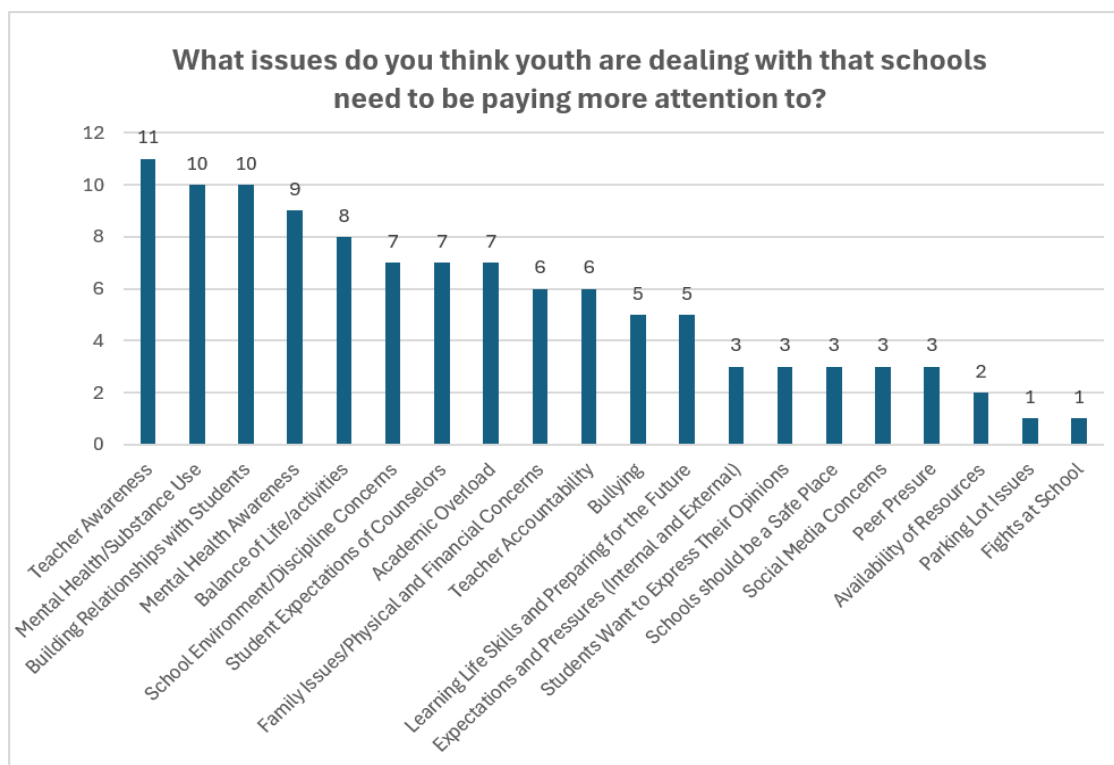


Figure 7

What Can School Staff Do to Help?

The subcommittee then asked each student group the question, “*What can school staff do to help?*” This question has been asked at multiple previous Youth Summit events. Eighteen student groups responded to this question in 2025.

Students again provided a wide variety of responses. Many were consistent with themes raised in previous years, while several new ideas also emerged. Overall, student responses demonstrate that youth continue to think critically about how schools can better support student well-being, learning, and relationships. The subcommittee categorized the responses into 8 themes, based on feedback from 18 student groups. The themes are listed below from most discussed to least discussed.

- **Improve Staff Empathy in Dealing with Mental Health Issues (39% of groups)** Seven groups emphasized the importance of school staff demonstrating empathy and understanding toward students experiencing mental health challenges. Students shared that when staff approach mental health concerns with compassion, students feel more supported and are more likely to seek help.
- **Encourage Positive Relationships with Students (33% of groups)** Six student groups stressed the importance of teachers building positive, personal relationships with students. Students want teachers to check in, ask how they are doing, and show genuine interest in their lives beyond academics. Strong relationships were linked to increased engagement and academic success. *It appears there has been an improvement in this area as 67% of the groups mentioned this in the 2024 report compared to 33% in this report.*
- **Provide Non-Judgmental Mental and Physical Health Resources (22% of groups)** Four student groups expressed a desire for accessible mental and physical health resources that do not feel judgmental. Suggestions included stress management support, coping skills education, and increased access to individual or group counseling.
- **Help Counselors Understand What Students Need from Them (22% of groups)** Four student groups noted the importance of counselors being accessible and responsive to both academic and mental health needs. Some groups mentioned that counselors are often overwhelmed and suggested additional counselors be added to help with the need. One group suggested implementing or adding a school therapist for students and staff in addition to counselors.
- **Help School Staff Understand Their Impact on Students (17% of groups)** Three student groups indicated that school staff should be more aware of how their words, tone, and behaviors affect students. Increased self-awareness among staff could help reduce unintended stress and improve classroom environments. Teachers seem to have no idea that the stresses they have in their own lives impacts how they react in the classroom.
- **Provide Resources/Preparation for the Future/Life Skills (17% of groups)** Three student groups shared a desire for more preparation for life after graduation, including life skills education, career exploration, and future planning. Some students reported feeling underprepared for adulthood. As they get closer to graduation, students begin to realize that they are not as prepared for their future as they would like to be.
- **Other (5.5 % or 11% of groups)** Either one or two groups mentioned other things that schools can do to make things better for students. Their suggestions include: Re-evaluate Discipline Policies and Procedures; Investigate the Impact of Additional Staff/Staff Resources for Students; Hold Teachers Accountable for Teaching and Classroom Activities; Acknowledge Bullying and Deal With It Appropriately; Assign Homework that Is Essential for Learning; Provide More Time for Homework and In-Class Questions; Improve the School Environment; Train School Staff on Things That Impact Today's Youth; Investigate Parking Lot Concerns; Solicit Student Opinions and Improve Relations Between Teachers and Parents.

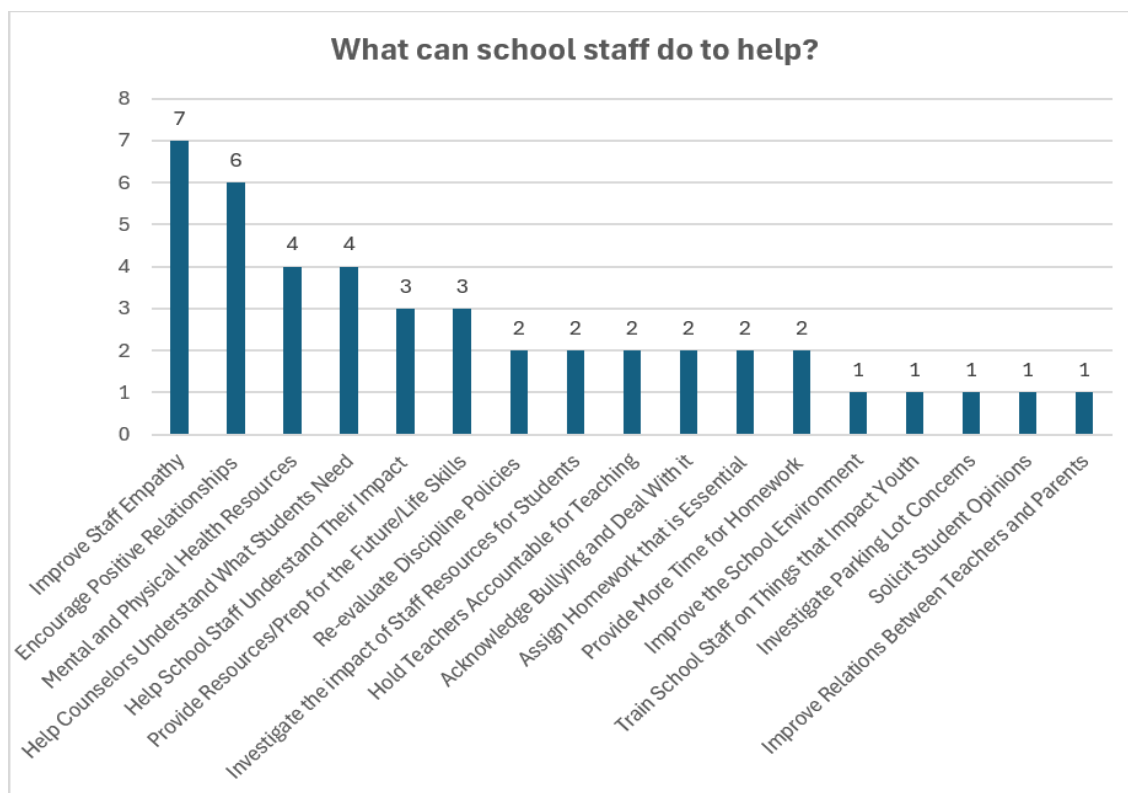


Figure 8

Connection with an Adult at School

Next the subcommittee asked each student the question, “*Can you identify one adult who has made a connection with you at school?*” This question was introduced in the 2022 Summit and has been repeated in following Summits because past reports indicated that students desperately wish to build and cultivate relationships with school staff. Of the 78 students who participated in the 2025 Youth Summit, 62 or 79% of the students indicated they had made a connection with at least one adult at school. This is a slight decrease from the 82% reported in the 2024 report. Most of the students actually had more than one trusting adult they could go to mentioning teachers, counselors, coaches and extra-curricular advisors. It is important school personnel reach out to students so that 100% of those questioned can respond that they have a connection with an adult in their schools.

Mental Health Concerns Impacting Youth

Mental Health Issues Impacting Youth

The subcommittee asked each student group the question, “*What mental health issues do you think impact youth the most?*” This question has been included in previous Youth Summit events. All 18 student groups responded in 2025.

Students provided a range of answers, identifying both specific mental health conditions and broader emotional or social challenges. Some described personal symptoms or internal experiences, while others focused on external factors such as relationships, stigma, and access to care.

The subcommittee categorized the 2025 responses into nine themes, listed from most discussed to least discussed:

- **Anxiety (100% of groups)** Every student group identified anxiety as a major mental health concern for youth. Students described anxiety through both emotional (e.g., “constant worry,” “fear of failing”) and physical (e.g., “heart racing,” “shaking,” “restlessness”) symptoms.
- **Depression (100% of groups)** All student groups also cited depression as a significant issue. Students described depression as “feeling empty or numb,” “a lack of motivation,” and “exhaustion that doesn’t go away.”
- **General Stress (44% of groups)** Nine student groups discussed general stress, often linking it to school, social pressures, or uncertainty about the future. Students mentioned “feeling overwhelmed” and “having too much to manage.”
- **Attention Disorders (44% of groups)** Nine student groups identified attention-related conditions such as ADHD as impactful on youth mental health. Students described challenges like “difficulty focusing,” “being easily distracted,” and “feeling restless.”
- **Eating Disorders and Body Image (22% of groups)** Four student groups discussed eating disorders or negative body image. Some mentioned comparisons to unrealistic standards, particularly through social media.
- **Anger (17% of groups)** Three student groups mentioned anger as an emerging mental health concern, often linked to frustration, stress, or difficulty managing emotions.
- **Other (11% of groups)** Two groups mentioned additional mental health concerns that impact youth today. These include Interpersonal Relationships and/or Communication (11% of groups), Bipolar Disorder (11% of groups), and Suicidal Ideation (11% of groups)

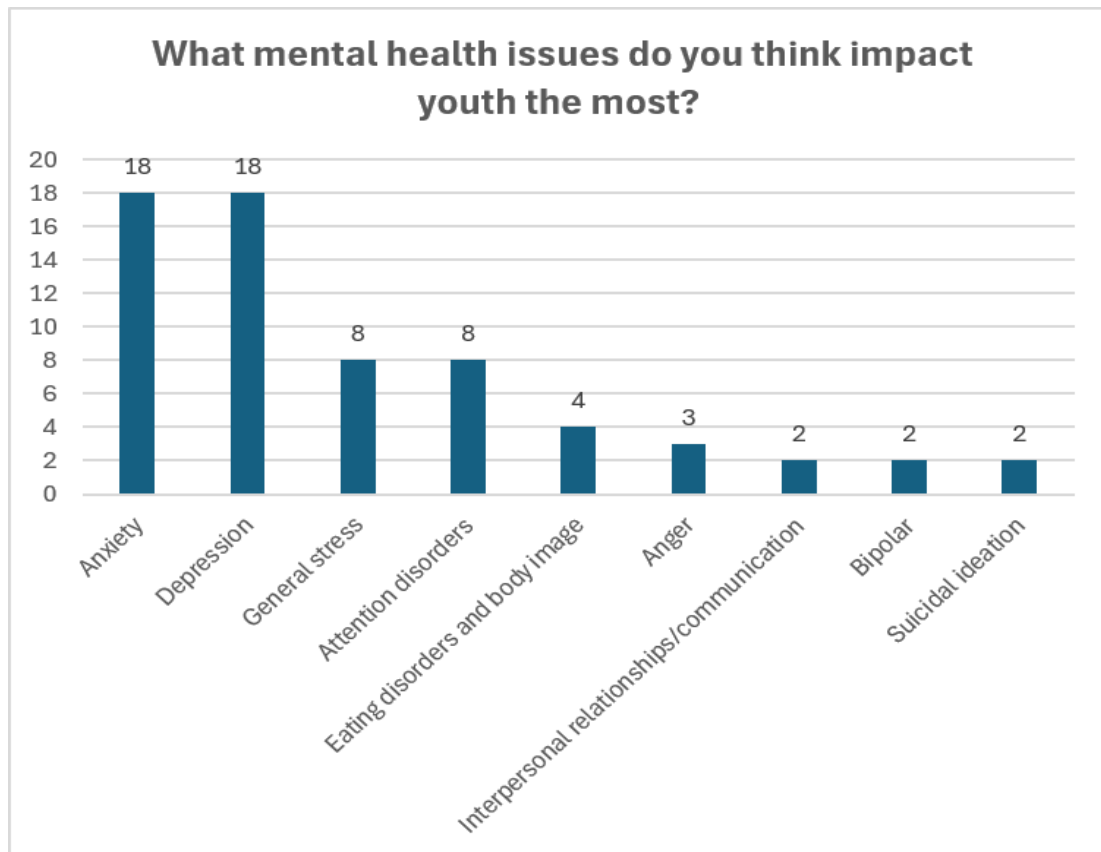


Figure 9

How would you define/describe the specific issues you mentioned? (Anxiety and depression)

Anxiety	Depression
Anxiety is described as worrying about being good enough	Being stuck in your situation, you feel helpless
Anxiety is described as overthinking, thinking "everyone's eyes are on you"	"You feel like there is no light at the end of the tunnel"
Social anxiety is described as anxious about being in a class or a group of people or just speaking in a social environment	Feeling of loneliness, they try to suppress it, people don't want to talk about it or people don't have anyone to talk to about it,
Anxiety is described as caring too much about what other people think, very adverse to doing something	Depression is described as lack of motivation, not enjoying the things you used to enjoy, a period of being lower down or sad for a period of time;
Intentionally distancing self; lack of self-esteem; adding more stress for no reason	Depression makes you lose a lot of motivation, "you know you need to do things but you just can't", brings you deeper into depression;
Anxiety is like a fishing rod pulling on the heart and the worse the anxiety is the harder the rod is pulling at the heart	Depression is described as lack of motivation, ongoing feeling of hopelessness
Feeling trapped in a hole and there is a bar to grab but they do everything they can do to touch the bar but they cannot grab the bar to pull themselves out	"Imagine you've never swam in the ocean, getting dragged out into the waves, struggling to stay afloat, you feel like you are being suffocated, awful feelings of pressure and hopelessness;"
Worrying about everything even if it isn't going to happen; catastrophize;	Depression can be described as feeling sad; not liking who he/she is; an endless cycle
Having a hard time conversing with people and connecting with people, face getting really red; inability to talk with strangers; unable to advocate for self; very nervous to get called on in class	Depression can be described as something that comes in a lot of forms; mood swings; not being able to get out of bed; not feeling like doing anything; personality change; isolation;
Anxiety can be described as feeling like you can't breathe; feel like you have to get so many things done; trying to sort through anxiety can lead to depression;	Depression is described as isolating self from others; wants to be alone and doesn't want to talk;

Figure 10

How would you define/describe the specific issues you mentioned? (Other mental health issues mentioned)

General Stress	ADHD	Eating Disorder/Body Image	Anger	Suicidal Ideation
All the pressure from parents and schools; struggling to define who you are is described as struggling to find what you want to do with your life, and spiraling with the unknown	ADHD is described as trouble focusing, having triggers, short attention span, overthinking;	Eating Disorders are described as caused by social media; the editing of pictures; being the "prettiest" or being the "best,"	Anger Issues can be described as an iceberg of anger and it's a lot deeper than what can be seen on the surface; sadness; jealousy; guilt; expectations; anxiety; depression;	Suicidal ideation is described as feeling like they would be better off dead, lack of self-worth

Figure 11

Barriers that Keep Youth from Seeking Help

Barriers that Stop Youth from Asking for help for themselves

This year, the subcommittee once again asked students about barriers to seeking help for themselves and someone else. This question was initially added by the subcommittee after learning youth were not sure how to help themselves or others.

All 18 student groups responded to the prompt: *“What barriers stop youth from asking for help for themselves?”* This question has been asked in this way at the four previous summits.

As in previous years, students were candid, thoughtful, and often emotional in their responses. Their answers reflect their personal experiences. The reader should remember that the answers given by the students are their perceptions. It is important to remember that *students’ perceptions are their reality*. The subcommittee categorized the student responses into 14 different themes. These themes are shown below from those most frequently mentioned to those least frequently mentioned.

- **Internal stigma/self-expectation (83% of groups)** Fifteen student groups mentioned the stigma associated with vulnerability and mental health. They have concerns that peers will gossip, make

fun of them, or ostracize them for needing help. Students also mentioned there is a fear that asking for help will damage their reputation, friendships, or confidence.

- **Fear of Consequences & Aftermath (72% of groups)** Thirteen student groups indicated they are concerned about potential consequences if they ask for help. Students are concerned about negative responses from their parents. They also worry about punishment for illegal behavior, substance use or family issues. Students are worried that adults will push unwanted solutions or not listen to what's actually needed.
- **External stigma from others (56% of groups)** Ten student groups mentioned that external stigma kept them from seeking help. Specifically, they mentioned fear of being judged, being looked at differently or being embarrassed. They worry about being seen as "weak," "soft," or "stupid." when they ask for help for mental health concerns.
- **Parent or family member dynamics (53% of groups)** Nine student groups indicated that parent and family dynamics are instrumental in them not asking for help. They have a fear of their parents finding out and overreacting or dismissing their concerns. They believe that generational differences may cause their parents to dismiss their concerns or not believe that mental health issues are real. Racial stereotypes also make it difficult for some students to get help because their families do not believe that members of their culture could have mental health issues and need help. Traditional or conservative family values discourage openness. so students don't say anything.
- **Fear of feeling invalidated or misunderstood (not by parents or family) (33% of groups)** Six student groups felt that young people may not ask for openness because they are concerned that their issues will be dismissed, not validated or even misunderstood. They worry that they will share their problems and others will not take them seriously and they won't get the help they hoped for.
- **Teacher/Counselor Relationship (26% of groups)** Five student groups mentioned they are reluctant to talk with counselors and teachers because they are busy, and they don't want to bother them. They also stated that they worry that what they say may not be held in confidence. They worry that as mandatory reporters these adults will contact their parents and/or other authorities as required by law.
- **Fear of burdening others (28% of groups)** Five student groups indicated they do not want to burden others with their problems and become a drain or a worry to their parents, friends or adults at school.
- **Stress or Anxiety (22% of groups)** Four student groups mentioned they have stress, anxiety and nervousness with the idea of going to someone and asking for help. They report having feelings of worthlessness, hopelessness and being a "lost cause."
- **Not sure if when they ask for help, it will help (22% of groups)** Four student groups feel like when they do ask for help, nothing changes or improves. They have experienced a lack of follow-up and/or a "one-size-fits-all" approach that makes asking for help seem pointless.
- **Don't know they need help or when to get help. (17% of groups)** Three student groups state that there are times when they don't know if they need help or if how they are feeling is "normal." Some students indicate there is confusion on when a problem is "big enough" to ask for help so they don't know when to reach out.
- **Can't afford it (17% of groups)** Three student groups indicated that with rising medical costs many do not ask for help because they know their families cannot afford the cost of treatment.

Rising cost, financial constraints within the family and lack of medical insurance make healthcare out of reach for them.

- **Lack of knowledge or access to resources (17% of groups)** Three student groups mentioned they do not feel they know what resources are available to them both within their schools and within the community. They also stated that they do not always feel comfortable with the resources available to them. For example, a female student would feel better seeing a female counselor rather than a male counselor, or they may not have established a trusting relationship with their assigned counselor.
- **They want to deal with the problem themselves (17% of groups)** Three student groups said they don't ask for help because they want to deal with their problems on their own. Their pride and independence make them believe they can "figure it out themselves."
- **Other (5.5% or 11% of groups)** One or two groups mentioned peer pressure not to ask for help, previous negative experiences, and various aspects of culture as reasons why they would not ask for help for themselves.

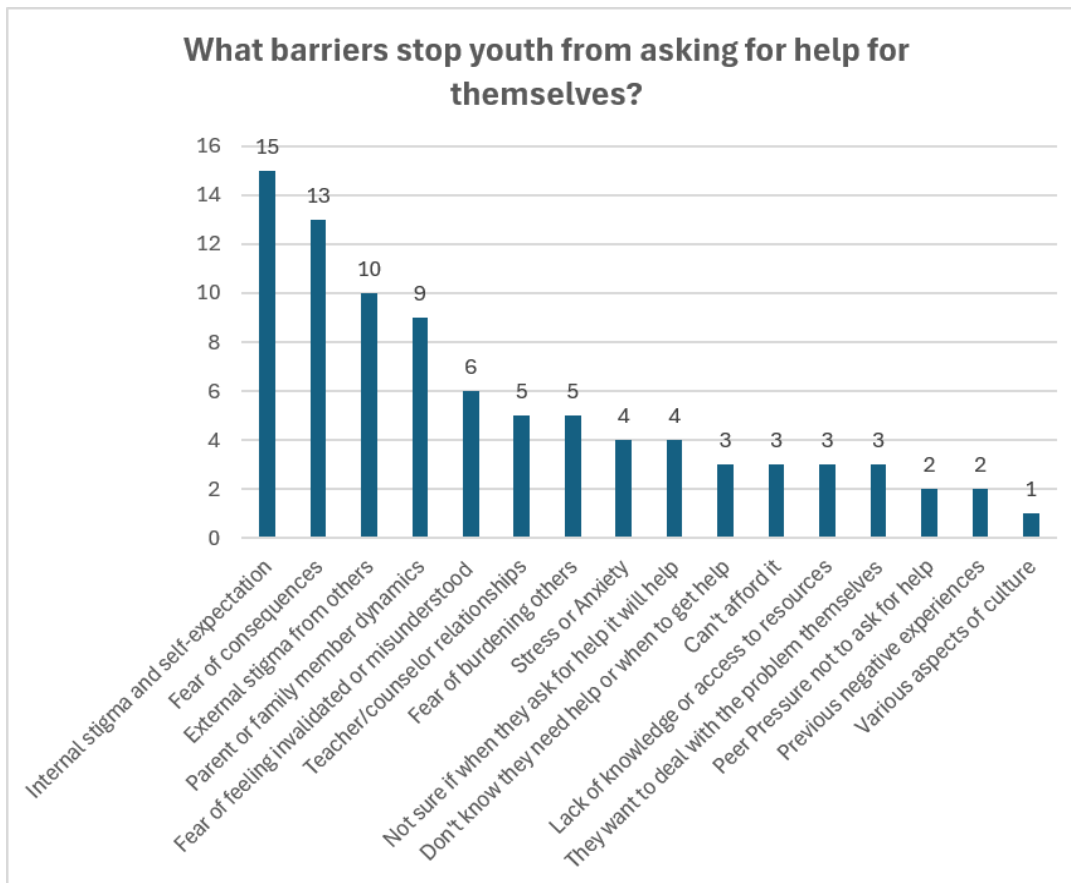


Figure 12

Barriers that Stop Youth from Asking for help for Others

Then the subcommittee asked youth the question, “*What barriers stop youth from asking for help for someone else?*”. All 18 student groups responded to this question. This question has been asked this way

in the four previous summits. Nine themes were identified. They are listed from the most mentioned to the least mentioned.

- **Negative or Strained Relationships (83% of the groups)** Fifteen student groups indicated that they would not ask for help for someone else because they did not want to impact their friendship/relationship in a negative way. They were afraid that the person would be angry at them and not forgive them.
- **Not my Role to Help Someone Else (72% of student groups)** Thirteen student groups felt that it should not be their responsibility to ask for help from someone else. They believe the person needing help should take responsibility for themselves.
- **Fear of Consequences or Making It Worse (39% of groups)** Seven student groups are concerned that if they become involved with another student's situation, they may make things worse for that person. They are also concerned that the person might get in trouble with their parents or the school or it may impact their social standing.
- **Knowledge and Access to Resources (39% of groups)** Seven student groups indicated that they do not always know appropriate resources that are available. They also worry about financial constraints and the cost of accessing services.
- **Fear of Adults and Counselors (22% of groups)** Four student groups mentioned that when they share information with adults, they worry about how that information will be shared with the student and parents and whether the adults will keep the information confidential. In addition, mandated reporters are a concern. They don't want to share something and then have that person report because they are mandated to do so.
- **Should be able to Figure it Out for Themselves (17% of groups)** Three student groups believe the person needing help should be able to determine what they need to do and, if necessary, who they need to talk to to get the assistance they need.
- **Respect for Privacy (17% of groups)** Three student groups believe that asking for assistance should be a personal decision that the person makes for themselves. Their privacy should be respected and not interfered with.
- **Social pressure and Stigma (17% of groups)** Three student groups believe that social pressure and stigma stops them from intervening for another student. They don't want to be considered a snitch, and they worry about judgement from teachers, peers and social media. Toxic masculinity makes it hard to ask for help for males
- **Other (5.5% or 11% of groups)** Either one or two student groups indicated they would not want to ask for help for someone else because the person may not want help, they might not know the full issue and they prefer to encourage the person to seek help rather than finding help for them.

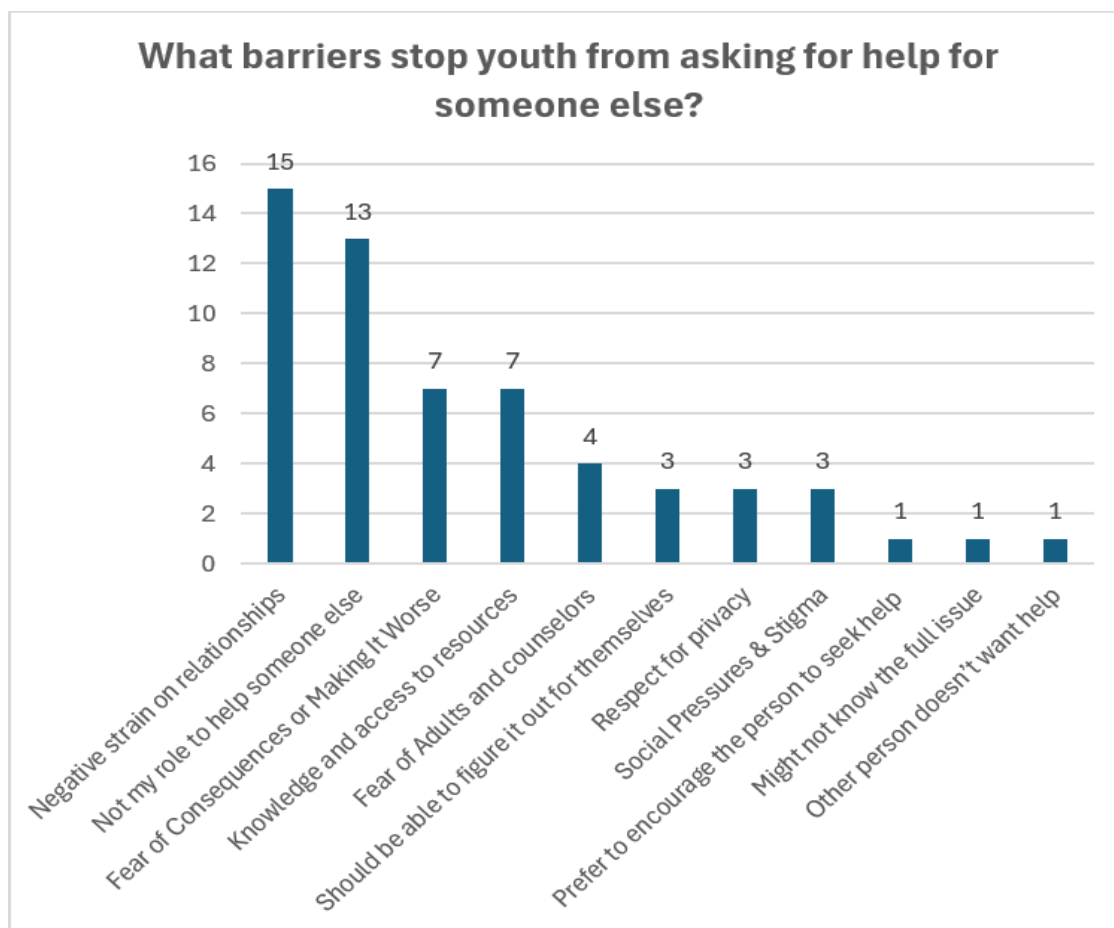


Figure 13

Living in Tippecanoe County

What Students Like About Living in Tippecanoe County

Students gave a variety of answers to the question, “*What do you like about living in Tippecanoe County?*” ranging from Purdue influence/college town, small town environment, educational opportunities, friends/family/community connections, and others. All 18 student groups answered the question about what they like about living in the county. Their responses were categorized into 13 themes, listed below from most discussed to least discussed.

- **Places to Hang Out/Things to do (67% of groups)** Twelve student groups highlighted the activities, events, and entertainment options available in the community. Students mentioned that they appreciate having places to go with friends, opportunities for recreation, and local events that bring people together.
- **Small Town Environment (67% of groups)** Twelve student groups described Tippecanoe County as a friendly, welcoming, and close-knit community. Students shared that the size of the community helps them meet new people without feeling

overwhelmed and that there is a sense of familiarity and comfort in knowing one another. “Everyone knows everybody else; everyone feels connected.”

- **Diversity/Inclusion (50% of groups)** Nine groups noted the community’s diversity and cultural representation. They shared that exposure to a variety of cultures helps broaden understanding and allows them to interact with people from different backgrounds. Students said they liked “diversity from Purdue” and “diversity and seeing how cultures are doing things is great.”
- **Purdue Influence/College Town (50% of groups)** Nine groups appreciated the benefits of living near Purdue University. Students cited increased diversity, access to events and activities, and the overall energy of being near a college campus.
- **Friends/Family/Community Connections (39% of groups)** Seven groups emphasized strong personal connections, family ties, and the ease of forming friendships within the community. Students reported feeling welcomed and supported by those around them. Students said, “family close; parents live here.”
- **Educational Opportunities (39% of groups)** Seven groups commented on the quality and range of educational options available in the area. Students mentioned that the school systems provide strong opportunities for learning and growth. Students mentioned “good schools” and “close to big universities.”
- **Community Resources (39% of groups)** Seven groups spoke positively about local resources, including access to community leaders and supportive services. Students cited examples such as the mayor’s involvement and availability of financial and other support resources.
- **Food (Variety and Restaurants) (28% of groups)** Five groups highlighted the availability of restaurants and food options in the county. Students noted that there are enjoyable places to eat and a variety of choices across the community. Students commented about “a lot of food places” and “good restaurants.”
- **Safety/Resource Officers (22% of groups)** Four groups mentioned that they feel safe in the community and at school. They noted that strong safety measures and the presence of resource officers contribute to a secure environment. Students noted a “low crime rate” and “feel safest, like I belong versus other places I have lived.”
- **Job opportunities (17% of groups):** Three groups identified the availability of jobs for young people as something they appreciate. For some, access to part-time work or local employment options is seen as a benefit of living in the area.
- **Other (5.5 % or 11% of groups)** Either one or two groups mentioned additional things that they liked about living in Tippecanoe County. They included Transportation and Opportunities for Youth to Speak Up. One group stated There is Nothing I like about the Community/Boring.

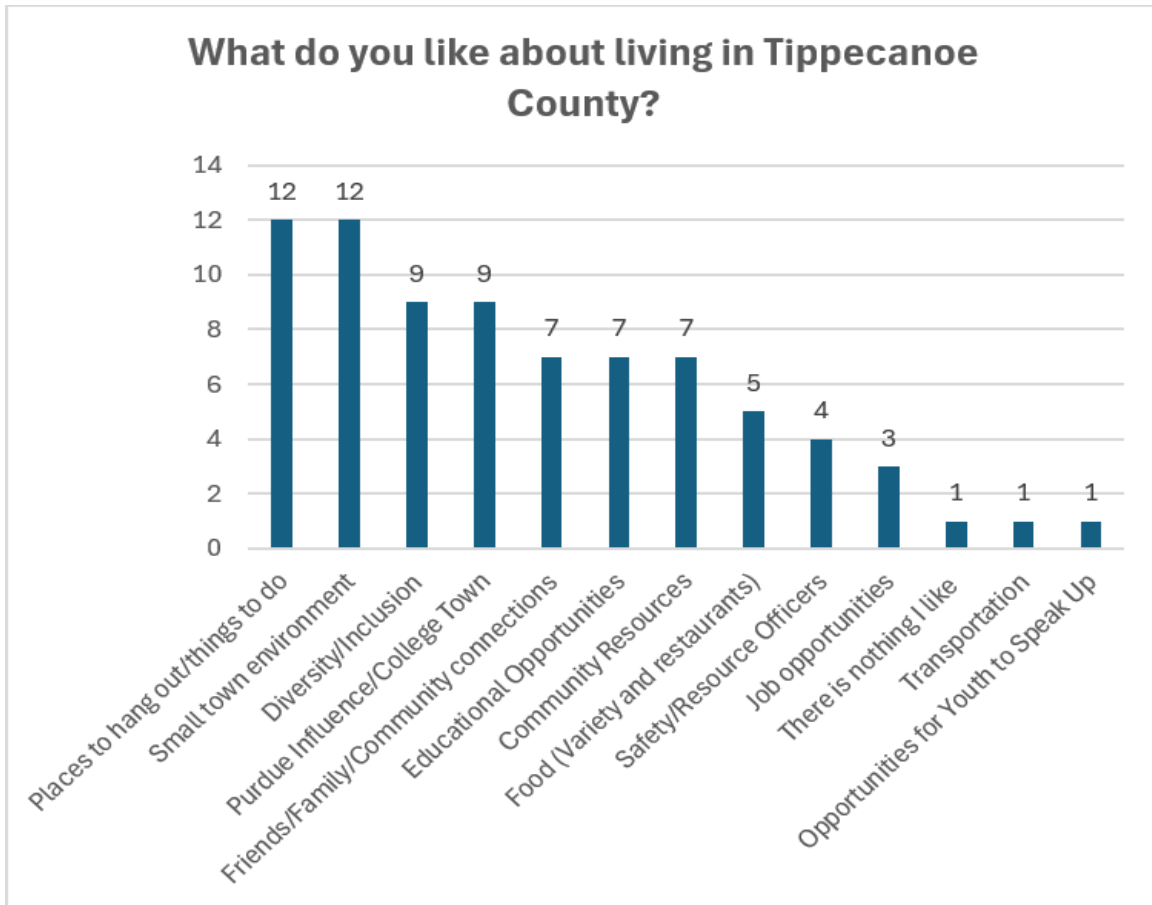


Figure 14

Things That Could Be Better for Youth in Tippecanoe County

All eighteen student groups responded to the question, “*What do you think could be better?*” Student groups provided a wide range of suggestions. As in past years, students expressed interest in improvements related to activities, safety, school environments, and community connection. The subcommittee categorized the responses into 13 themes, listed from most discussed to least discussed.

- More activities and things to do (56% of groups)** Ten student groups shared that they would like more activities available for youth. Students expressed interest in more events and hangout spaces designed for teenagers, as well as more recreational activities and community events to give them places to gather, socialize, and have fun. Among others, students mentioned “need more stores in the mall,” “welcoming places for teens to hang out,” and “more free things to do.”

- **Safety (56% of groups)** Ten student groups said safety continues to be an area needing improvement. Students mentioned feeling unsafe in certain areas of the community or at night and suggested increasing safety personnel and improving the overall sense of security in public spaces and youth activities. There were comments such as, “youth crime is getting bad, crime is bad especially at the mall” and “would like the mall to get better so we can go there and be safe.” (See also Question 8: Safety).
- **Stronger Connections Between Youth and Community (39% of groups)** Seven student groups expressed a desire for better connections with the broader community. Students described wanting more youth-centered opportunities, less stereotyping of young people, and more genuine efforts by adults and organizations to value and understand youth perspectives. Students commented “we can grow our connection with our youth” and “bringing our schools together to be more community minded and closer like this summit.”
- **School Issues (33% of groups)** Six student groups noted that several school-related issues could be improved. Students mentioned access to trusted adults, safety concerns, mental health resources, and general school culture. They also identified the need for more support in lower-income schools and improved communication and awareness around bullying, equity, and overall student well-being. Some of what we heard; “school is more interested in stopping vaping than the real important issues like bullying and someone sexually harassing you.” (See also question 4: Schools).
- **Diversity/More Inclusive Resources (33% of groups)** Six student groups said they would like to see more inclusive and accessible resources throughout the community. Comments focused on reducing stereotyping, expanding support for students with disabilities, promoting outreach for help-seeking, and increasing education about available resources.
- **Affordability/Free Activities (33% of groups)** Six student groups emphasized the need for more cost-free or low-cost activities. Students highlighted that limited finances could prevent youth from participating in community events, extracurriculars, or recreation, and requested more accessible options for all families.
- **Increase Resources for Housing (28% of groups)** Five student groups mentioned concerns about housing in the community. Students pointed out the need for additional support for unhoused individuals and expressed that more stable, affordable housing options are needed for families and young people. Students commented that “housing is crazy” and “a lot of people are seen living out of shopping carts or their cars; more help/aid towards getting the homeless population roofs over their heads.”
- **Improve Mall (28% of groups)** Five student groups stated that the mall could still be improved. They requested more stores, better shopping options, more food choices, and additional indoor entertainment. Students noted that mall enhancements would give youth more safe and enjoyable places to spend time. Some comments include “need a new mall” and “would like better stores, clean at mall.”

- **Transportation/Construction Issues/Improve Roads/Fix Potholes (22% of groups)**
Five student groups said transportation and road conditions remain an issue. Students commented on the inconvenience caused by construction, the difficulty of getting around without reliable transportation, and the need for smoother roads and safer sidewalks. Concerns include “a lot of pedestrian walking signals don’t work” and construction blocking sidewalks or no sidewalks”
- **Increase Mental and Physical Health Supports (17% of groups)** Three student groups expressed the need for more mental and physical health support in the community. Suggestions included expanding therapy resources, supporting substance use recovery services, and increasing awareness of mental health challenges among youth.
- **Other (5.5 % or 11% of groups)** Either one or two groups mentioned additional things that could be better for youth in Tippecanoe County. These things include Cleaner Areas/Environmental Issues; More Green Spaces, and Career Exploration Opportunities.

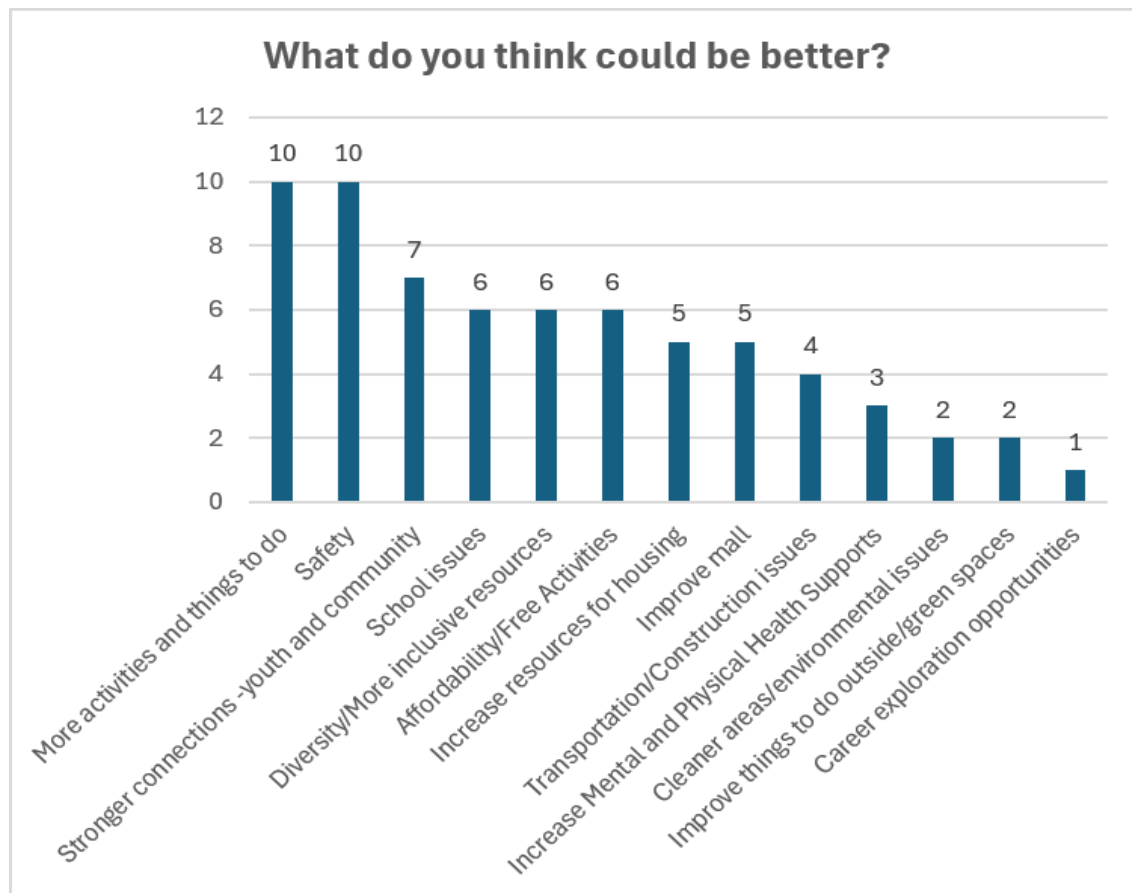


Figure 15

What resources do you know about in the community?

The students were asked a third question regarding the community, “*What resources do you know about in the community?*” 2025 is the second year that the subcommittee has asked this question. We were amazed at the number of responses and the awareness of community resources this year. It is a dramatic increase in the number of resources listed. (Responses are presented based on general categories). Several students mentioned that they were not aware of any resources available in Tippecanoe County. Does this mean that they are in a good place and do not need resources? Are they not aware of how to access resources? Or are they not interested in accessing resources? These are questions that cannot be answered based on the information given. *The number following each resource is the number of students who mentioned that resource.*

School Related Resources:

Classes, Clubs – 4
College Fairs – 1
Counselors – 4
Field Trips – 2
GED Education Programs -1
Greater Lafayette Career Academy – 5
Lafayette Adult Resource Academy – 1
IVY Tech Free Summer Courses – 1
Purdue Speakers/Free Application for Federal Student Aid – 1
Purdue University – 2

Mental Health Related Resources:

Changes program – 4
Halfway Houses – 1
Hendricks Therapy – 1
Mental Health America – 1
Modern Mental Health – 1
Peer Recovery Support – 1
Phoenix Paramedic Solutions – 1
Rehab Centers – 1
Sycamore Springs – 4
Valley Oaks - 2

Public Safety and Government Related Resources:

911 Services – 1
City Bus – 1

Libraries – 2
Police and Fire Departments – 3
Post Office - 1
Veteran Resources – 1
Community Centers/Services Related Resources:
Banks – 1
Bauer – 1
Grant’s House – 1
Hannah Community Center – 1
Hartford House – 1
Lafayette Urban Ministry – 4
Northend Community Center – 1 Recovery Café – 1
Relay for Life – 1
River City Community Center – 1 Salvation Army – 1
Senior Center – 1
Wabash Center – 2
YMCA – 2
YWCA – 2

Housing Related Resources:

Home of Hope – 1
Housing Resources – 1
Lafayette Transitional Housing Center – 2
Shelters -3
Women’s Shelter – 1

Food Related Resources:

Farmer’s Market – 1
Food Banks – 3
Food Finders/Food pantries – 4

General Health Care Related Resources:

Arnett -1
Bravely Women’s Health – 1
Franciscan – 1
Healthcare Facilities – 1
IU Health – 1
Long-Term Care Facilities – 1
Riggs Community Health Center – 1

Feelings of Safety for Youth in the Community and School

How Safe Youth Feel in the Community

For the first time, the subcommittee asked student groups the question, “*How safe do you feel in your community?*” All 18 student groups responded to this question and shared a wide range of experiences and perceptions. While many students expressed that they generally feel safe, others emphasized concerns related to specific locations, times of day, and situational factors. The subcommittee categorized their responses into 13 themes, ranked from most to least frequently discussed.

- **Feel Safe — Generally Feel Safe (100% of groups)** All eighteen student groups had at least one student who stated that they generally feel safe in their community. Students described Tippecanoe County as a place where they can go about their daily routines without significant fear and expressed appreciation for familiar neighborhoods, supportive adults, and predictable environments. As one student stated, “I feel so much safer there than where I used to live.”
- **Feel Unsafe — Feel Unsafe in Certain Areas of the Community (56% of groups)** Ten student groups shared that while they may feel safe overall, there are specific areas within the community where they feel uncomfortable or at risk. Students noted that these locations often involve unfamiliar surroundings, limited lighting, or places known for higher levels of conflict or crime. Several students specifically mentioned walking near liquor stores, Wal-Mart parking lots and the area near Salvation Army as areas of concern.
- **Feel Unsafe — Generally Feel Unsafe (50% of groups)** Nine student groups said they often feel unsafe across multiple settings. These students described concern for their safety in some public spaces and expressed concerns about unpredictable behavior (those under the influence or suffering from mental health issues) from others. They also mentioned specific community incidents (shooting at the mall), or broader safety challenges (drug exchanges) they have witnessed in the area. One student summed it up by stating, “You have to defend yourself. The real world is dangerous.”
- **Feel Unsafe in Certain Areas at Nighttime (33% of groups)** Six student groups emphasized that nighttime significantly increases their sense of feeling unsafe. Poor lighting, fewer people around, and a general uncertainty about who may be present contributed to feeling unsafe after dark. One student stated, “There are many places you just should not go after 6 p.m.” or “If it is light out and there are people around, I feel pretty safe; if it is dark, I feel less safe.”
- **Situational Awareness/Avoid Trouble/Self-Protection Skills (33% of groups)** Six student groups discussed how their awareness of their surroundings affect how safe they feel. Students described strategies such as avoiding certain places, being hyperaware of

surroundings, traveling in groups, and trusting their instincts to prevent potential danger. Students mentioned that it is important to use “street smarts” to avoid problems. They walk with one headphone off to be aware and when leaving downtown, they put their money in secure, out-of-sight locations.

- **Inappropriate Comments or Harassment (28% of groups)** Five student groups shared that inappropriate comments, harassment, or unwanted attention—often related to identity, appearance, or gender—impact their sense of safety. These experiences made some students more cautious in certain areas or around particular individuals. One student indicated, “Because I am black, I feel like I get approached by drug dealers. Other students described getting called names, being asked for money or being asked for their phone numbers. Although they were not harmed in these instances, they felt very uncomfortable.
- **Illegal Activities/Crime (28% of groups)** Five student groups mentioned that crime or illegal activities in the area affect their perception of safety. Drug use, theft, or other behaviors that create an environment of not feeling safe were mentioned. Several students specifically described witnessing drug runs and exchanges and experiencing theft.
- **50/50 — Safety Depends on Context (22% of groups)** Four student groups expressed mixed feelings about safety, explaining that their level of safety depends heavily on where they are, the time of day, who they are with, and what is happening around them. These students reported feeling safe in some environments but uncomfortable in others.
- **Certain People Make Me Feel Unsafe (22% of groups)** Four student groups said that specific individuals—often peers or adults known for aggressive, unpredictable, intimidating behavior—directly impact their feelings of safety. One group mentioned that a lot of drugs can cause “erratic behavior in people.” “We have to worry about some “crazy person” when walking around, and it is uncomfortable when “strange people” stare.” Although some of these instances might be innocent, student perceptions cause fear and concern.
- **Police — Positive and Negative Experiences (22% of groups)** Four student groups shared mixed experiences with law enforcement. Some students reported feeling safer because of police presence while others expressed distrust or discomfort based on officer responses. These opposite views certainly shape student feelings regarding police presence.
- **Social Media/News Impacts Feelings of Safety (17% of groups)** Three student groups mentioned that exposure to news stories, online videos, and social media posts shape their perception of safety. Students explained that even incidents occurring outside their community can increase their fear and worry. One student indicated that they feel safe, but they are updated on the news so they know when bad things occur. This knowledge increases feelings of unsafety.

- **Certain People Make Me Feel Safe (17% of groups)** Three student groups identified individuals who help them feel safer—such as trusted adults, friends, or school staff. These supportive relationships make certain environments feel more comfortable.
- **Other (5.5 % or 11% of groups)** Either one or two groups mentioned additional things that impact their perceptions of safety in the community. These include Overprotective Parents; Carrying Weapons for Self-Protection; Feeling Safe in Certain Areas of the Community and Weapons in the Community are a Threat to Safety.

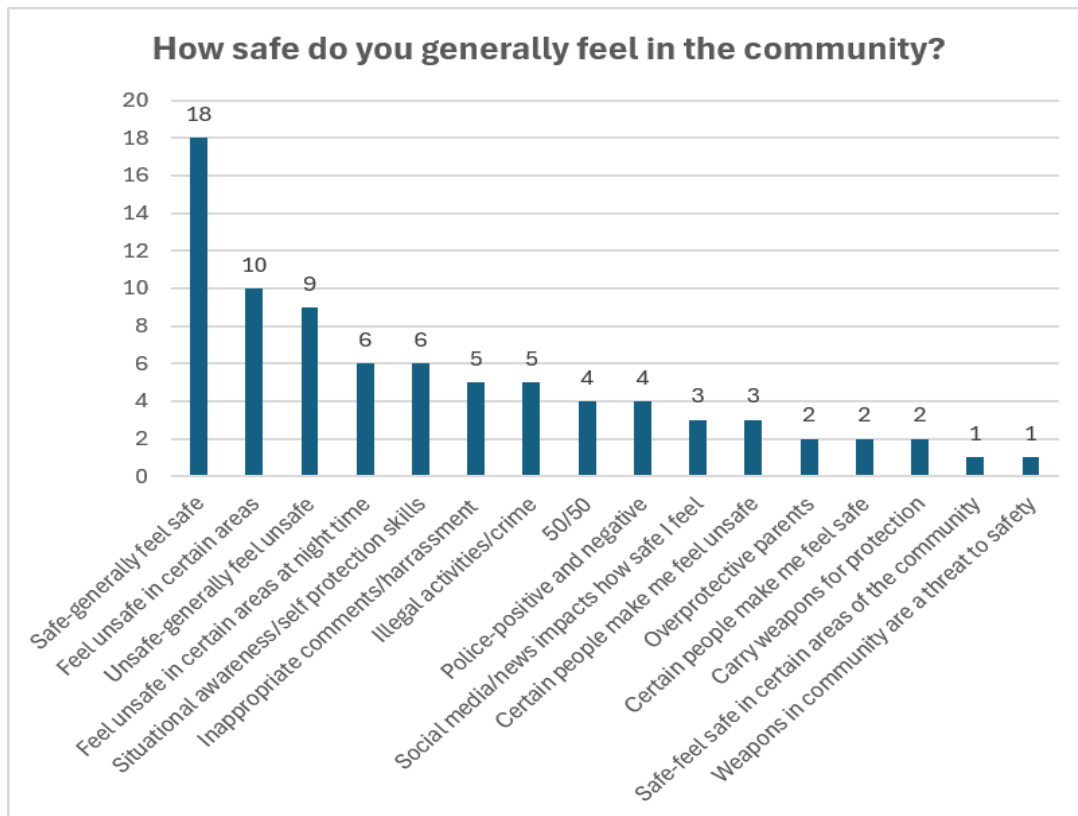


Figure 16

How Safe Youth Feel in Their Schools

Student groups were asked to share their perspectives on school safety and factors that influence whether students feel safe or unsafe in their school environments. The students were asked specifically “*How safe do you generally feel in school?*” All 18 student groups responded to this question and shared a wide range of experiences and perceptions. Student responses to this question were categorized into nine themes reflecting both concerns and protective factors related to school climate. The themes are listed from the ones mentioned the most to those mentioned the least.

- **Other Students' Behaviors Make Me Feel Uncomfortable/Unsafe (72% of groups)**
Thirteen student groups indicated that the appearance and behaviors of some of their peers create feelings of anxiety and concern. Some students mentioned that special needs students cause them to feel unsafe. They also mentioned students who are like the “exiles” of the school. One student’s comment is an example of how some students feel, “This girl in my class makes me feel unsafe.”
- **Illegal/Threatening Behavior and Substances/Weapons (67% of groups)** Twelve student groups mentioned illegal activity and threatening behavior as significant contributors to feeling unsafe at school. Students frequently referenced concerns about drugs, fighting, and the potential presence of weapons on campus. Comments included “They have a lot of people bring guns so with the fights it can get dangerous.” “A student brought knives to their school,” and “At the beginning of the school year there is more violent behavior because all the kids that were expelled the prior year are now back”
- **Students Feel Somewhat Safe in School (67% of groups)** Twelve student groups indicated a mixed sense of security rather than a strong feeling of safety. Students mentioned that some schools (usually smaller schools) feel safer than others.
- **Negative Responses from Administration/School Resource Officers (56% of groups)**
Ten student groups cited negative or inappropriate responses or behaviors from administration and school resource officers as a factor that contributes to feeling unsafe or unsupported. They feel unsafe when incidents are perceived as being dismissed, mishandled, or met with disciplinary responses that lack understanding or follow-up. Comments include “administration ‘brushes things under the rug’ especially about threats and safety” and “the security [officer] at school like[s] to talk to girls suggestively (about my body and that I could be a model), I reported him, and he’s still there and still talks to girls.”
- **Inadequate Security/Safety Drills (unlocked doors, no one in hallways, etc.) (56% of groups)** Ten student groups mentioned a lack of security and safety drills that are not effective. Examples included unlocked doors, limited adult presence in hallways, a lack of cameras, and inconsistent or unclear emergency procedures. Comments included “Anyone can just walk in.” and “I feel like the drills are particularly unhelpful.” One student commented, “School shooter drills are pointless because more often than not the shooter is a peer and knows what the drill is [and] where everyone will be at.”
- **Positive Responses from Administration/School Resource Officers (44% of groups)**
Eight student groups noted that the presence of School Resource Officers as contributing to a sense of safety and that the school administration handles most situations appropriately suggesting that supportive, communicative, and visible adult leadership can play a protective role in school environments. Comments include “Feel threats at school but security and administration do a good job.”

- **Inappropriate Adult/Student Relationships (28% of groups)** Five student groups underscored the importance of clear boundaries, accountability, and trust with the adults entrusted with their care. There were several alarming comments about inappropriate relationships between teachers or other adults and students. Examples include “Choir teacher who molested children at my school, they had a meeting on how to spot it but its like you are preparing the monster on how to get away with it” and “A teacher was seeing an underaged student in their classroom.” “Someone is sleeping with children as an adult and should be kicked out of school.”
- **Students Feel Like They Need to be Constantly on Alert (28% of groups)** Five student groups indicated that they are constantly in a heightened state of vigilance that can affect their sense of well-being and ability to focus on learning. They are especially concerned about school shootings and being drawn into fights. One student shared this comment: “I'm okay at school, but it's like there is always an escape plan in the back of my head if we had a school shooter, a crazy person just comes in.”
- **Adults/Teachers/Coaches Make me Feel Uncomfortable/Unsafe (28% of groups)** Five student groups stated that they don't feel safe when coaches touch them on their shoulders, when teachers are unsympathetic to things like a panic attack, or when they yell at students when they ask for help. They also commented that teachers don't seem to be aware of the drug problems in the bathrooms. One student commented: “One teacher just makes it so hostile, we are very triggered kids, and she just does not care.”

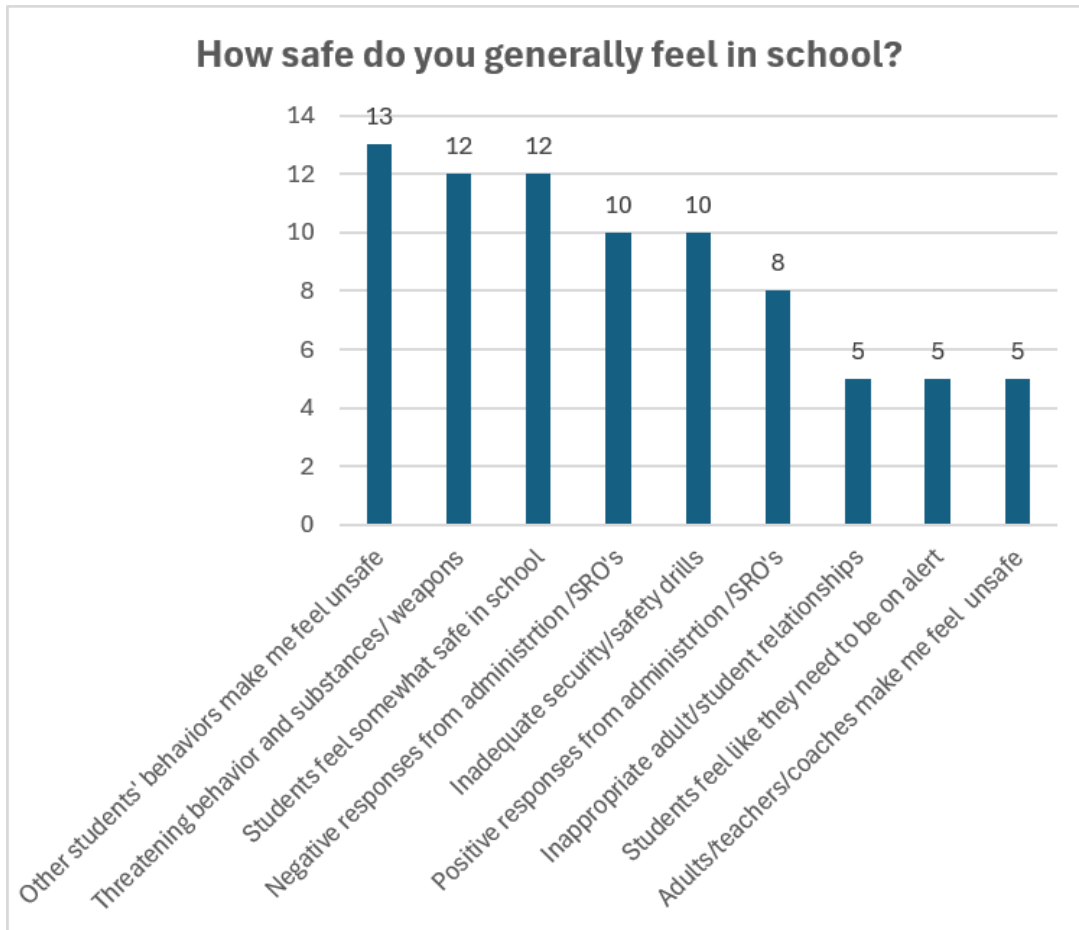


Figure 17

Places and Situations Where Students Feel Unsafe

The students were asked to identify specific places, situations, or conditions in which they feel unsafe, either at school or in the broader community. The specific question asked was “*Are there any specific areas or situations where you feel less safe?*” All 18 student groups responded to this question. Student responses were categorized into 13 themes that reflect environmental, social, and personal safety concerns. The themes are listed from the most mentioned to the least mentioned.

- Mental Health Behaviors/Appearances of Those Encountered in School (78% of groups)** Fourteen student groups had at least one student who commented that there are certain groups within their schools that make them feel unsafe. These groups include those students with mental health issues, some special needs students or those that dress or act in a way that is outside of the normal expected realm of behaviors. Anticipated behaviors from these groups of students might be bullying, shootings, fighting, or non-

provoked attacks. They are concerned about a lack of safety when it comes to other students acting in ways that put others at risk.

- **Certain Locations Within the Community (78% of groups)** Fourteen student groups described feeling unsafe in specific neighborhoods, public spaces, or community settings, particularly when these areas are poorly lit, unfamiliar, or associated with previous incidents. They are particularly scared of certain locations at night including alleys, some parks, and the Purdue campus. Other locations students mentioned within the community where they feel unsafe include under bridges at a park, the mall, gun stores, in front of liquor stores, gas stations, apartments and downtown.
- **School Bathrooms (56% of groups)** Ten student groups mentioned school bathrooms as spaces where they often feel unsafe. Students cited a lack of adult supervision, inappropriate student behavior, or fear of confrontation in these areas. They are afraid to go into certain bathrooms where the “bad kids” hang out. Bathrooms were cited as areas where vaping, drug sales, fights and bullying take place. The students are also afraid they will be unfairly disciplined if they are in the bathroom where other students are vaping and an adult comes into the bathroom.
- **Mental Health Behaviors/Appearances of Those Encountered in the Community (50% of groups)** Nine student groups indicated that the behavior and appearance of people in the community can make them feel unsafe. Students are concerned with behaviors of the homeless population, certain customers at work, people under the influence of drugs, people with obvious mental health issues, and men following women and/or making inappropriate comments. Students try to be extra cautious around these groups, so they do not become victims.
- **Threats From Passing Cars, at Intersections and Crosswalks, in Parking Lots and While Driving (44% of groups)** Eight student groups mentioned areas or situations related to cars, traffic and infrastructure as concerns related to their safety. Specifically, they mentioned cars following them, people following them to their cars, walking across intersections and traffic not slowing down, walking around outside of schools with the high level of traffic, and walking alone to their cars from work at night. These scenarios make them feel unsafe. They also expressed concern that cameras don’t work in the school parking lots.
- **Walking/Being Alone at Night (44% of groups)** Eight student groups expressed vulnerability while walking or being alone at night. Several specifically mentioned being in alleys after dark. In addition, being alone at night as a woman, walking on campus at night, and walking to their car were also mentioned as situations that cause feelings of not being safe. Quotes include “Being alone as a woman feels not safe especially at night.” and “Alleyways in downtown Lafayette at night are unsafe.”
- **Certain Locations Within the School Building/Property (39% of groups)** Seven student groups mentioned there are specific areas within their school buildings where they do not always feel safe. These areas include stairwells, locker rooms, lunchrooms,

common areas or less-monitored hallways. These areas are in addition to bathrooms that were specifically mentioned in a previous theme. Student groups also mentioned feeling unsafe at certain school events such as football games and pep rallies.

- **Inadequate Security (unlocked doors, no one in hallways, etc.) and Inadequate Emergency Procedures in Schools (39% of groups)** Seven student groups expressed concerns about a lack of strong or enforced security within the schools. Students mentioned unlocked doors, limited adult presence in hallways, and unclear or inconsistent emergency response practices. Student comments make it very evident that they are very concerned about the possibility of a school shooting within their buildings. They want schools to take this possibility seriously and prepare students with strong emergency procedures and practice. As one student stated, “Schools don't teach you what to do if there is a school shooting in the lunchroom, passing periods, dismissal, or during fire alarms.” In one student group we heard the following comments “Doors may not be locked at all times, and it is a safety risk” and “Someone can just put on a backpack and pretend to be a student and come into school.”
- **Being Alert to Surroundings (33% of groups)** Six student groups suggested that students are in a heightened state of vigilance that can contribute to stress or anxiety. When they feel unsafe in their environment, they constantly survey their surrounds to make sure they are safe. Because of their feelings of not feeling safe and often their own mental health issues, many students are in a constant state of alert. As one student stated, “If you know what you’re doing and you’re paying attention, you will be alright”
- **Inappropriate Behavior by Adults/Teachers/Coaches (28% of groups)** Five student groups underscored the importance of maintaining appropriate boundaries between adults associated with the school and students or teachers and students and to ensure safe reporting mechanisms for students. In some instances, students mentioned that school security guards make them feel uncomfortable. Some mention that when teachers and coaches touch them, it makes them feel uncomfortable. Basically, students indicate that they do not like to be touched by adults they encounter even when the adult does not intend for the touch to be inappropriate. One student stated, “Teachers touching us without our consent (grabbing our shoulders)” [makes us feel uncomfortable.]
- **Being a Young Woman (22% of groups)** Four student groups listed being a young woman as a factor influencing feelings of safety, particularly in public or unsupervised spaces. They feel uncomfortable walking alone, especially at night. They also feel uncomfortable because they have been targets of inappropriate comments or inappropriate looks when they wear certain outfits. As one student said, “Being a young girl makes people feel more unsafe.”
- **Schools Not Taking Things Seriously (22% of groups)** Four student groups mentioned they feel uncomfortable in certain situations because they do not believe their schools take things as seriously as they would like. One student said, “My school had a shooting threat, our administration tried to keep it quiet.”

- **Other (5.5 % or 11% of groups)** Either one or two groups mentioned additional areas or situations where they felt unsafe. These areas or situations include Social Media Feels Unsafe; Emergency Services Not Listening to Minors and Unsafe in Weights Class if not Spotted.

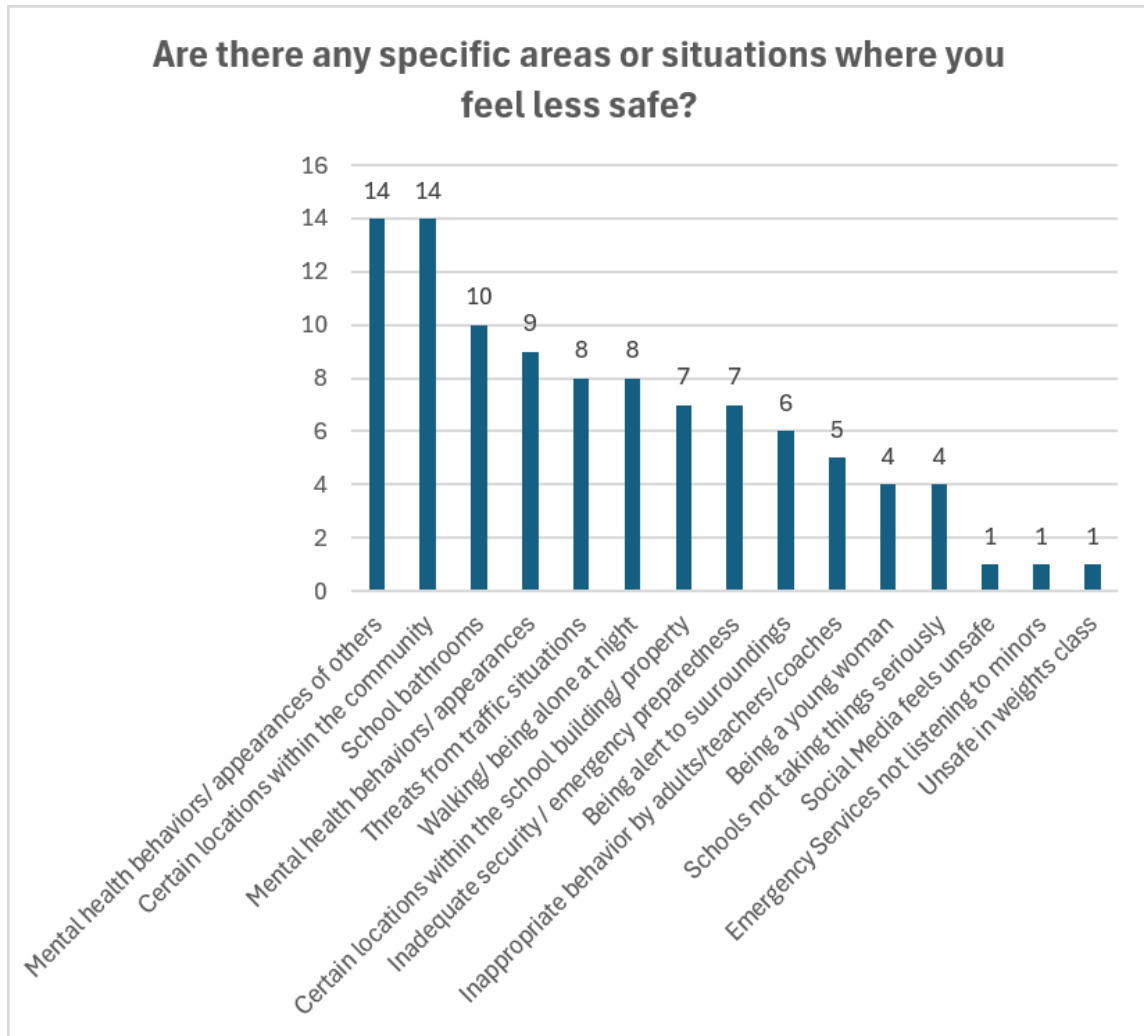


Figure 18

Youth Coping Mechanisms

Positive Ways Youth Cope with Stress

The subcommittee asked each student group the question, “*How do youth cope with stress in a good way?*” As in previous Youth Summit events, this question generated a wide variety of responses. All 18 student groups responded, and their answers reflect a continued focus on healthy strategies youth use to manage stress.

The subcommittee categorized the responses into 12 themes, listed below from most discussed to least discussed.

- **Sports, extracurriculars, and exercise (83% of groups)** Fifteen student groups identified physical activity and structured involvement—such as sports teams, clubs, gym workouts, choir, band, and theater—as their most common healthy coping strategies. Students described these activities as effective ways to release stress, anger, or excess energy while providing a break from academic pressures and time spent in the classroom. Many emphasized that extracurriculars offer a sense of belonging, routine, and shared experience. While some students acknowledged that sports could add stress due to time demands, most agreed that being physically active or involved in something they enjoy ultimately improves their coping skills, mood, and ability to manage stress.
- **Music (78% of groups)** Fourteen groups identified music as a powerful emotional and cognitive coping tool. Students described listening to music to regulate mood, calm their minds, focus during schoolwork, or temporarily tune out stressful environments. Others shared that playing music, singing in choir, or participating in band allows for emotional expression and connection with others who share similar interests. Music was often described as helping students feel understood, validated, or motivated—particularly when lyrics reflect their own thoughts or experiences. Some students noted that music can support learning when allowed during class, especially for focus or self-regulation.
- **Talking or spending time with others (non-family) (72% of groups)** Thirteen groups emphasized the importance of peer connection as a primary coping strategy. Students shared that talking with friends, spending time together, or simply knowing someone is there to listen helps reduce feelings of isolation and overwhelm. Peers were often described as especially supportive when they are experiencing similar stressors, such as academic pressure or extracurricular demands. Students noted that validation matters—even when friends do not have solutions, their presence provides comfort. Many also highlighted clubs, after-school activities, and informal hangouts as key spaces for building these supportive relationships.
- **Hobbies and the arts (67% of groups)** Twelve groups identified hobbies and creative outlets—such as drawing, painting, coloring, writing stories, crafting, crocheting, gaming, and video games—as important coping strategies. Students described these activities as offering distraction, emotional release, and a sense of accomplishment. Creative expression was especially valued when it was ungraded and not competitive, allowing students to engage freely without pressure. Several students noted that working with their hands or engaging in fidget-like activities helps calm their minds and manage anxiety, particularly during stressful academic periods.
- **Meditation and mental health activities (67% of groups)** Twelve groups discussed intentional mental health practices, including meditation, journaling, breathwork, yoga, prayer, mindfulness exercises, and grounding techniques. Students described these strategies as helping them pause, reset, and regain emotional balance during

overwhelming moments. Some referenced structured supports such as meditation or yoga classes, therapy, counseling services, or designated calming spaces (e.g., “zen dens,” quiet rooms, or brain breaks in class). Others noted simple techniques like sitting in silence, using fidget devices, dunking their face in cold water, or taking intentional breaks to regulate emotions and refocus.

- **Proactive coping (addressing the stressor or the overwhelming concern) (39% of groups)** Seven groups described coping strategies centered on directly addressing sources of stress, particularly academic overwhelm. Students shared that studying, organizing tasks, setting designated work times, breaking problems into smaller steps, and planning ahead helps reduce anxiety by restoring a sense of control. Several students emphasized the importance of advocating for themselves—such as asking teachers for deadline extensions, tutoring, or clarification when struggling. Others noted that separating work time from rest time helps them mentally disengage once tasks are complete, preventing stress from lingering.
- **Cleaning or work (33% of groups)** Six groups identified cleaning, chores, or having a job as effective coping strategies. Students described these activities as productive, providing a sense of accomplishment and structure when emotions feel overwhelming. Cleaning personal spaces, making beds, or organizing environments helped students regain control and calm their minds. Those with jobs noted that work offers healthy distraction, physical movement, and, for some, a preferred social dynamic such as interacting with adults rather than peers, creating emotional distance from school-related stress.
- **Sleeping (28% of groups)** Five groups identified sleep and rest as important tools for managing stress. Students described sleeping, napping, or intentionally resting as ways to escape overwhelming situations, reset emotionally, and restore energy. Some students acknowledged that sleeping in class may reflect unmet needs at home or chronic stress rather than disengagement. Others emphasized the importance of proper sleep schedules and allowing themselves breaks after periods of intense focus, particularly during finals or heavy workload periods.
- **Nature and animals (28% of groups)** Five groups shared that spending time outdoors or around animals supports their mental well-being. Students described going for walks, running or biking outside, being in nature, or spending time with pets and emotional support animals as calming and restorative. These experiences were noted to help clear the mind and provide comfort through physical presence or companionship. Some students specifically mentioned therapy dogs or the benefit of simply changing environments—such as going for a drive or stepping outside—to regulate stress.
- **Other (11% of groups)** Two student groups mentioned the following positive coping skills: having alone time, spending time with family and prayer/religious involvement/spiritual grounding.

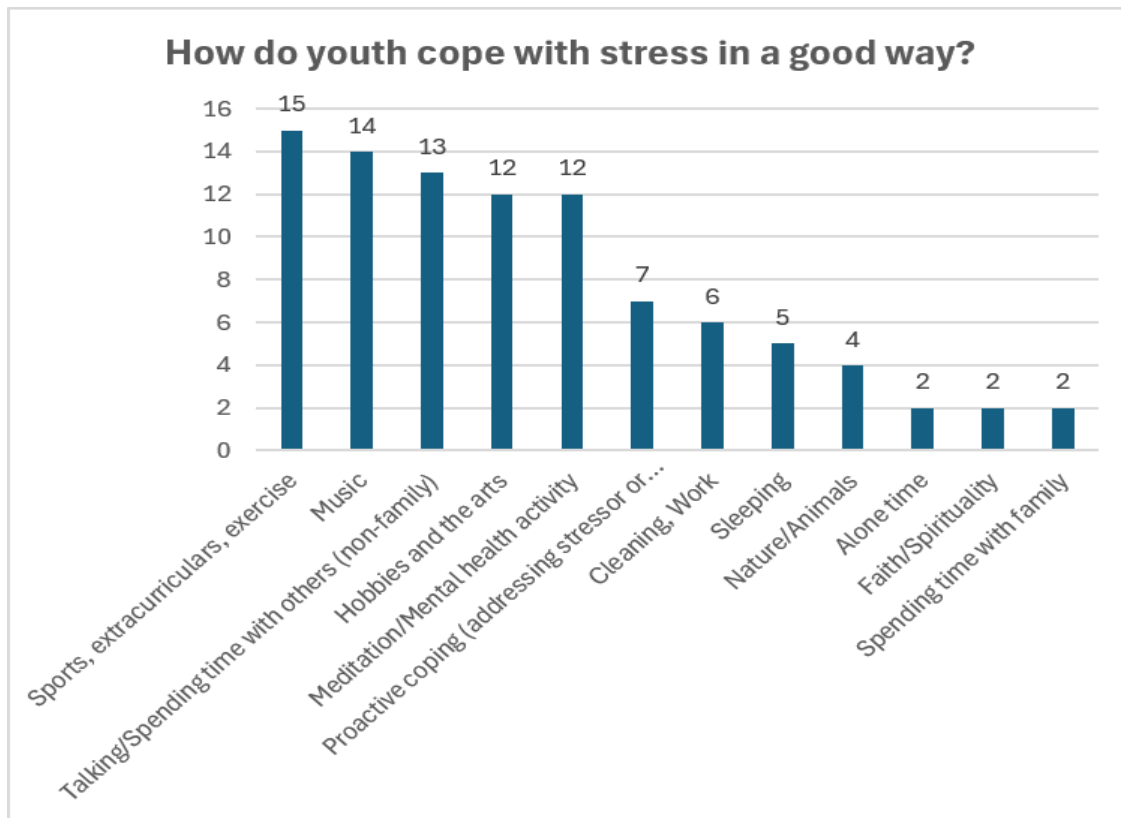


Figure 19

Negative Ways Youth Cope with Stress

The subcommittee asked each student group the question, “*How do youth cope with stress in a bad way?*” This question has been asked in previous Youth Summit events. Eighteen of the 18 student groups responded to this question.

The subcommittee categorized their responses into themes based on responses from the 18 student groups, which include the following:

- **Substance Use – General (72% of groups)** Fourteen student groups shared that teens often turn to substance use in general when experiencing stress, sometimes without distinguishing between specific substances. Students described substance use as an easily accessible, immediate way to escape overwhelming emotions, numb stress, or feel a sense of control. Many noted that substance use is often normalized within peer groups and can begin as early as middle school or freshman year, particularly when students feel unsupported, afraid to ask for help, or disconnected from adults at school or home.
- **Aggression (or Physical Aggression) (67% of groups)** Twelve student groups reported that stress can lead teens to express emotions through physical aggression or confrontational behavior. Students described picking fights, hitting objects, throwing

belongings, or engaging in hallway altercations as ways to release bottled-up stress or anger. These behaviors were often linked to feeling unheard, embarrassed, overwhelmed academically, or punished rather than supported. Several students noted that aggression frequently escalates when stress accumulates without healthy outlets.

- **Procrastination or Avoidance of Stressor (67% of groups)** Twelve student groups shared that teens commonly avoid or delay tasks when stress becomes overwhelming. Students described skipping class, ignoring assignments, zoning out on phones, or mentally “shutting down” as ways to temporarily escape pressure. Many noted that avoidance often begins when students fall behind and feel lost or unsupported, leading to fear of asking for help and a cycle where procrastination increases stress rather than relieving it.
- **Substance Use – Alcohol (61% of groups)** Eleven student groups identified alcohol use as a prevalent stress response among teens. Students described drinking as socially normalized, relatively easy to access (often through parents or parties), and commonly used to cope with academic pressure, relationship stress, or burnout. Several noted that while alcohol may provide short-term relief, it frequently worsens mental health, contributing to depressive feelings, risky behavior, and impaired decision-making.
- **Keeping Things Inside or Isolating from Others (61% of groups)** Eleven student groups reported that teens often internalize stress rather than expressing it. Students described isolating in their rooms, withdrawing from friends, suppressing emotions, or disengaging from schoolwork. Many shared that stigma around vulnerability, fear of being judged as “weak,” or concern about becoming a burden prevents teens from opening up, allowing stress to build until it manifests in more harmful behaviors.
- **Self-Harm (56% of groups)** Ten student groups reported that some teens engage in self-harm behaviors, such as cutting, in response to overwhelming stress. Students described self-harm as a way to regain control, redirect emotional pain into physical sensation, or feel something when experiencing numbness. Several emphasized that these behaviors are often hidden, associated with shame or regret afterward, and do not address the underlying stressors driving the behavior.
- **Substance Use – Nicotine or Vaping (50% of groups)** Nine student groups identified vaping or nicotine use as one of the most common stress-related habits among teens. Students described vaping as widespread, frequent throughout the school day, and often used to calm anxiety or regulate emotions. Some noted strong dependency, withdrawal symptoms, and negative impacts on mood, appetite, and concentration, while also describing how discreet use and peer normalization make it difficult to address.
- **Other Reckless and/or Impulsive Behaviors (44% of groups)** Eight groups shared that stress can lead teens to engage in reckless or impulsive behaviors, such as speeding while driving, overspending, unsafe activities, or running away. Students described these actions as attempts to regain freedom, control, or adrenaline when feeling trapped or

overwhelmed. These behaviors were often framed as short-term relief with long-term consequences.

- **Lashing Out on Others or Bullying (44% of groups)** Eight groups reported that teens may cope with stress by lashing out verbally or emotionally at others, including peers, parents, teachers, or partners. Students described bullying, spreading rumors, projecting frustration, or humiliating others—both in person and on social media—as ways to release stress or boost self-esteem. Several noted that bringing others down can temporarily make someone feel more powerful or less alone in their distress.
- **Disordered Eating (39% of groups)** Seven groups identified disordered eating behaviors as a response to stress, including overeating, restricting food, purging, or stress-related appetite changes. Students described eating behaviors as one of the few areas they feel able to control during overwhelming situations. Breakups, academic pressure, and body image concerns were commonly cited stressors contributing to these patterns.
- **Negative Relationships or Toxicity (33% of groups)** Six groups reported that stress can push teens toward unhealthy or toxic relationships. Students described staying in or seeking out damaging friendships or romantic relationships as distractions from stress or sources of validation. Some noted patterns of manipulation, peer pressure, or fear of being alone, particularly after breakups or during periods of low self-worth.
- **Sleeping (Over or Under Sleeping) (28% of groups)** Five groups shared that stress significantly disrupts sleep patterns. Students described oversleeping, “bed rotting,” or sleeping during class as ways to escape stress, while others reported insomnia due to anxiety and overthinking. Many noted that poor sleep often worsens academic stress and emotional regulation, creating a cycle that is difficult to break.
- **Social Media Scrolling (28% of groups)** Five groups identified excessive social media use as a common coping strategy. Students described scrolling for hours as an easy, immediate distraction that provides quick dopamine but often leads to comparison, addiction, irritability, and increased stress. Social media was also described as a space where teens lash out, seek validation, or unintentionally escalate conflict.
- **Substance Use – Other Drugs Than Those Listed (17% of groups):** Three student groups shared that teens engage in substance use involving drugs other than alcohol, nicotine, or marijuana as a negative way to deal with stress. Students noted these behaviors were often tied to peer pressure, party culture, or attempts to escape intense emotional pain. While less frequently reported, students expressed concern about normalization and lack of awareness around risks.
- **Sex (17% of groups):** Three student groups reported that teens engage in sexual behaviors or view pornography as a response to stress. Students described pressure from hookup culture, fear of being left out, or using sex to feel validated, distracted, or in control—particularly after breakups or during periods of low self-esteem.

- **Substance Use – Marijuana (17% of groups):** Three student groups shared that teens use marijuana or “weed” to cope with stress. Students described using marijuana to calm down, detach from stressors, or manage emotions. Some acknowledged short-term relief but also noted longer-term effects such as decreased motivation, worsening depression, or increased avoidance of problems.
- **Other (5.5% of groups)** One student group mentioned overthinking as a negative way that teens cope with stress.

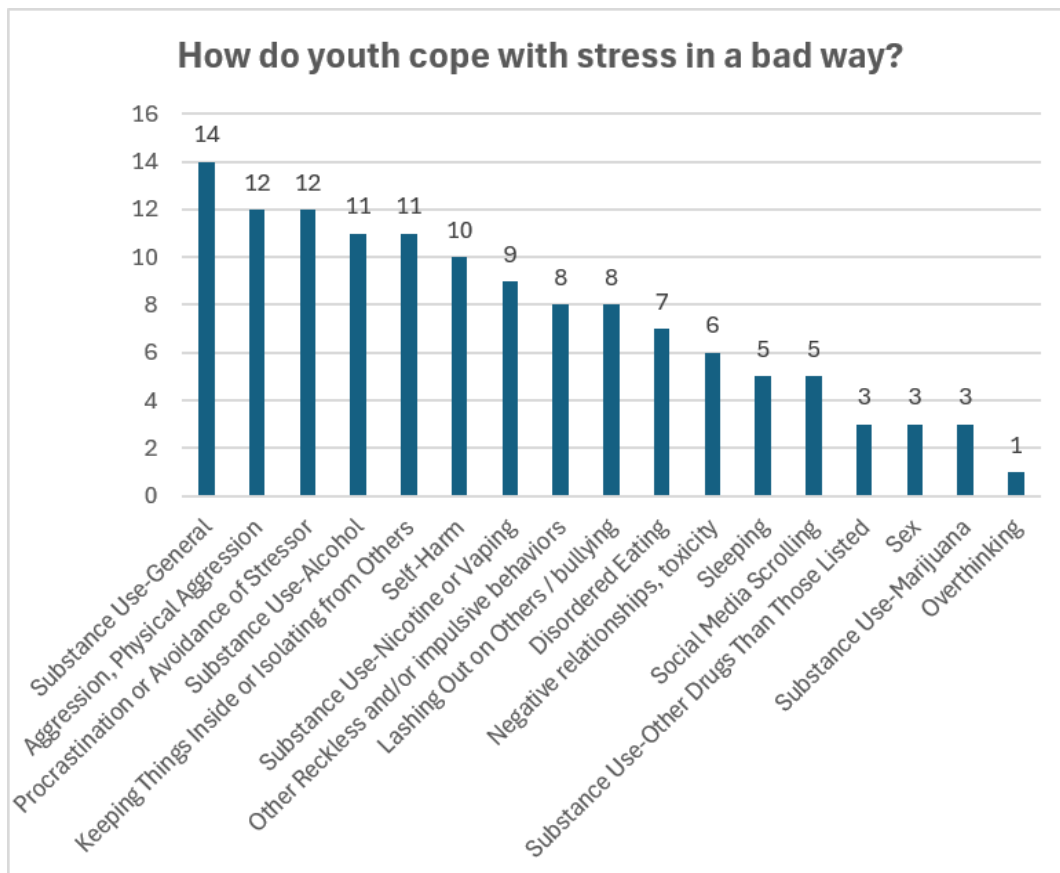


Figure 20

Conclusion

The 2025 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 nine *sets* of questions, totaling 17 *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 five major takeaways from the conversations.

1. Students continue to experience 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. The past two years the top two substances (nicotine and alcohol) were identified as being used the most by youth and were also the substances the students mentioned as having the highest risk. This year, that dynamic has changed. While THC/marijuana, nicotine and alcohol were still identified as the most used substances, none of these substances were identified as having the highest risk. This year, cocaine, opioids and stimulants were the top three substances identified for high risk. Nicotine and alcohol came in as the 4th and 5th highest substances for risk while THC/marijuana was very low on the list indicating that the vast majority of students do not see THC/marijuana as being risky. These substances were 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. Social media continues to have a huge impact on the lives of our community youth in both positive and negative ways. When asked about the positive impacts, students were quick to mention social media's ability to nurture friendships, bring like-minded communities together and help with education and resources. While they talked about the benefits of social connection and education/resources, they described ways that social media can also impact them negatively. Things that impact them personally include comparing themselves to others, bullying and increased mental health concerns such as depression, anxiety and suicide. Students are also concerned with the authenticity of those on the other end of the screen and how it impacts their personal safety. Social media continues to be a large part of the daily lives of our youth. It is important that we teach them how to use social media wisely.

4. While approximately 79.5% of students at the 2025 Youth Summit could identify at least one supportive adult at school, they want and need more. Students want teachers and staff members to have a better understanding of students' emotional states and how educator actions impact learning. Students need teachers to be more cognizant when they are struggling, are overwhelmed or when their mental health is impacting their ability to be the best they can be in the classroom. They want teachers to understand that during these vulnerable times, teacher actions and interactions can either positively or negatively impact their academic performance.

5. Students responded to a group of new questions this year related to feelings of safety. Students generally feel safe in the community and in their schools. However, there are also times, places and situations where their safety feels threatened including certain areas of town after dark and school bathrooms. Various locations within the community and their schools during various times of the day cause concerns for safety. Students feel unsafe around others who they perceive as different from themselves. They also feel unsafe around others who are engaging in illegal activities. Youth try to engage in situational awareness so they will remain safe.

Student Evaluation

Approximately 78 students attended the 2025 Youth Summit. A total of 54 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).*
 1. *I felt heard when I shared my ideas in today's event.*
 2. *I learned new things from other students at today's event.*
 3. *I believe positive change will come from my responses.*
 4. *I enjoyed participating in this event.*
 5. *I am inspired to make a change from today's event.*
 6. *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.

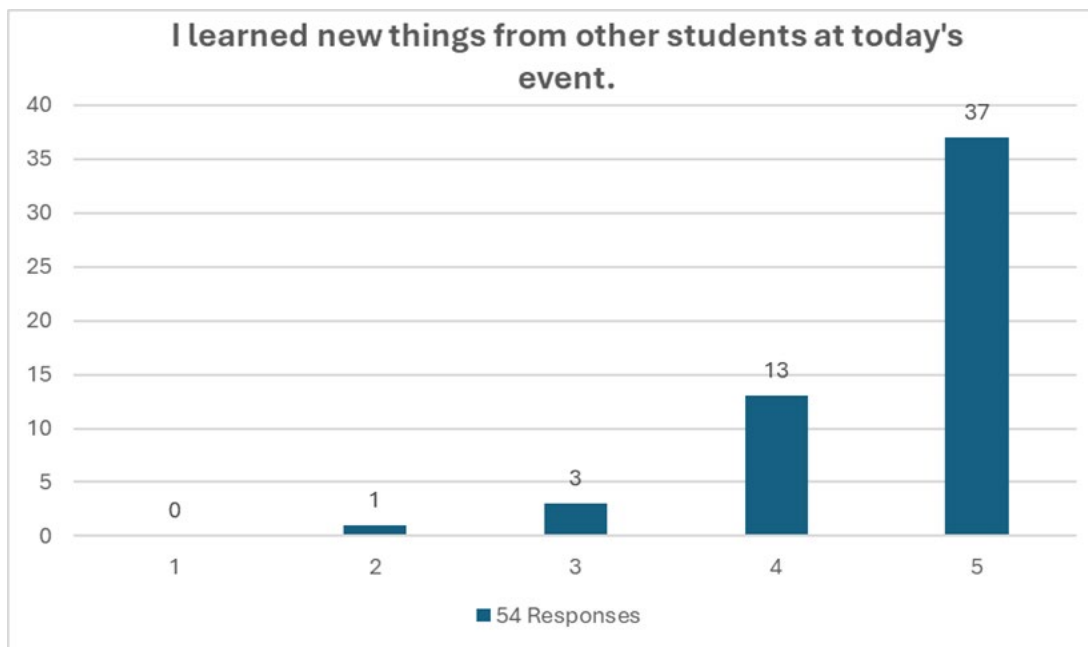
Year in School. Of the 54 students who responded to the student evaluation, two identify as freshmen students; 19 identify as sophomore students; 13 identify as junior students; and 20 identify as senior students. Therefore, about 61% of the students who responded to the survey identify as upperclassmen students (juniors and seniors).

Rating the Youth Summit Event.

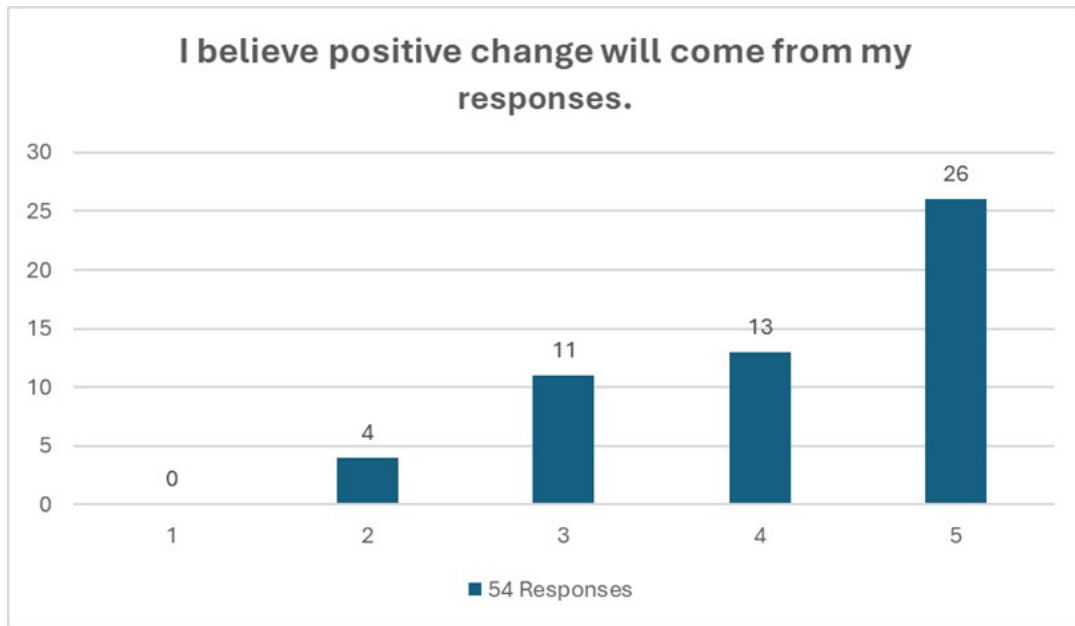
Of the 54 students who responded to the student evaluation, 94% of the students (51 out of 54 students) indicated that they agree or strongly agree with the statement, "I felt heard when I shared my ideas at today's event."



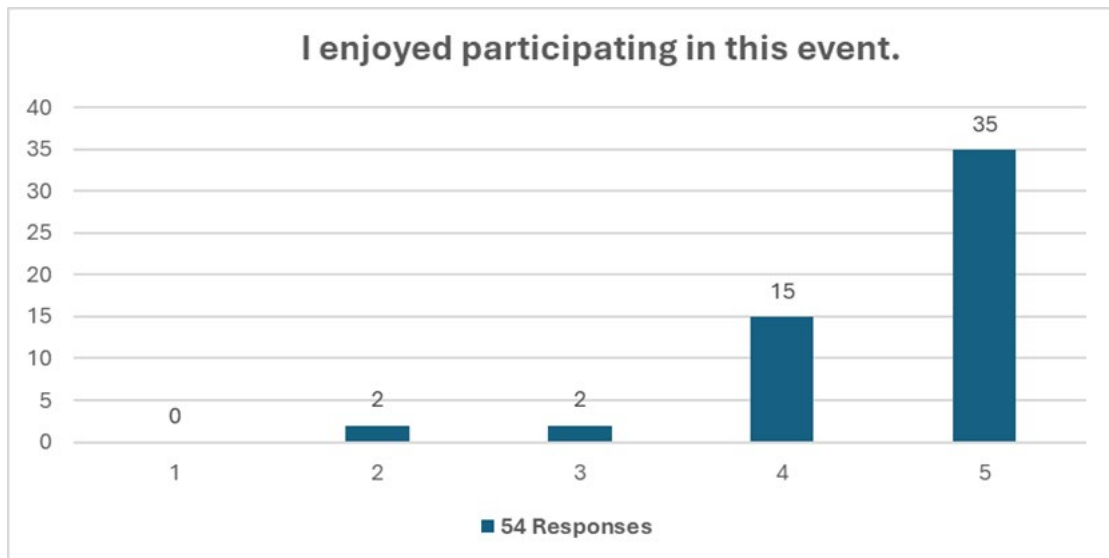
Next, 50 out of 54 (92.5%) students indicated that they agree or strongly agree with the statement, “I learned new things from other students in today’s event.”



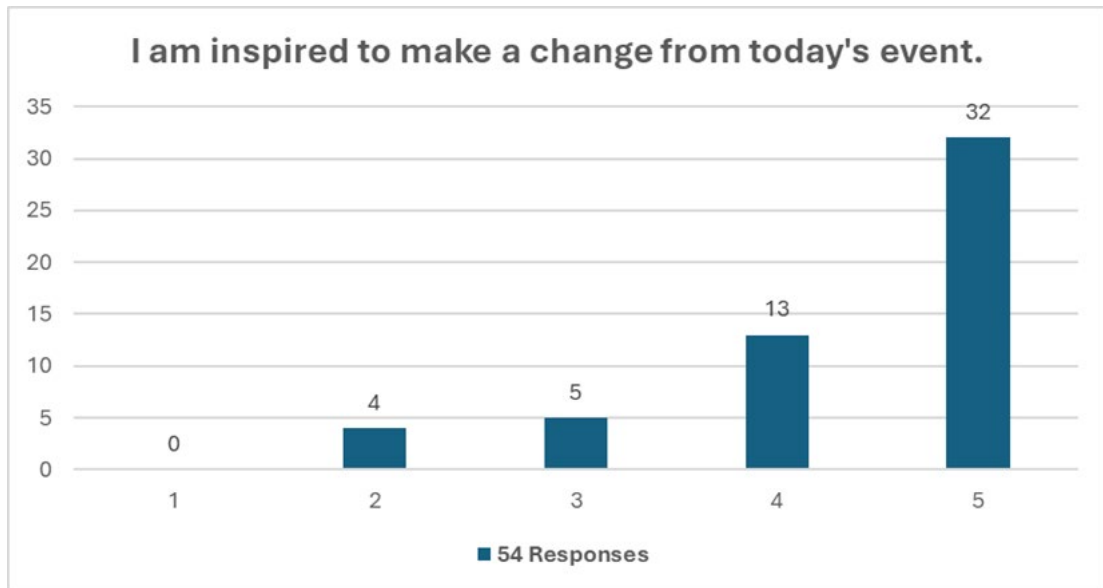
Third, 39 out of 54 (72%) students indicated that they agree or strongly agree with the statement, “I believe positive change will come from my responses.”



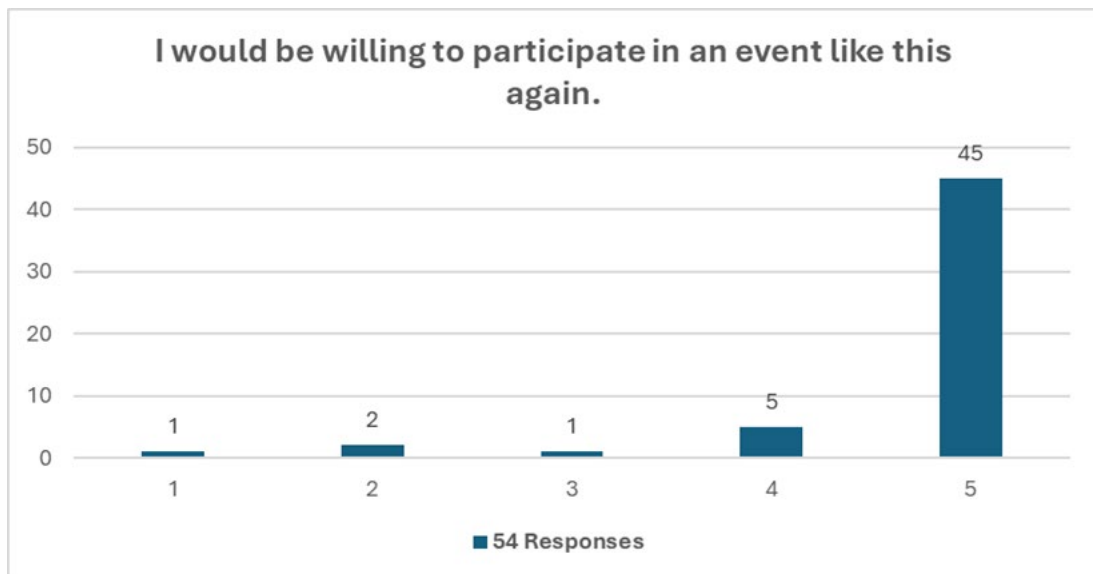
Fourth, 50 out of 54 (92.5%) students indicated that they agree or strongly agree with the statement, “I enjoyed participating in this event.”



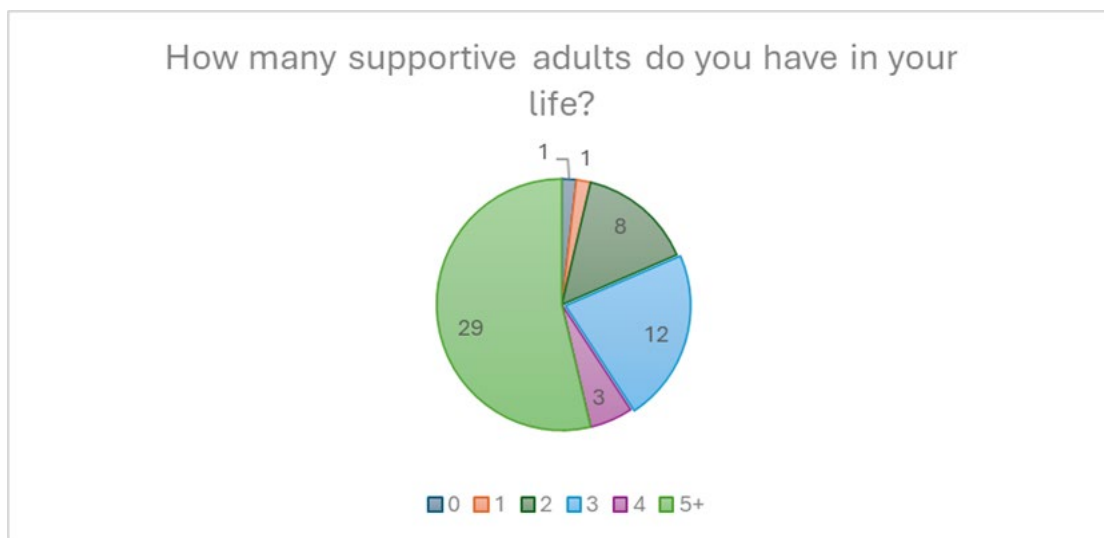
Also, 45 out of 54 (83%) students indicated that they agree or strongly agree with the statement, “I am inspired to make a change from today’s event.”



Lastly, 50 out of 54 (92.5%) students indicated that they agree or strongly agree with the statement, “I would be willing to participate in an event like this again.”



Students were also asked the question, “How many supportive adults do you have in your life?” Twenty-nine out of 54 students (54%) responded that they can identify five or more supportive adults in their life.



Something Learned. Students were asked to share something specific that they learned from or during the 2025 Youth Summit. Eight of the students indicated that they learned that regardless of the school or the demographics, everyone experiences similar things. Students from both large schools and small schools and private and public schools experience the same types of situations. Eight students mentioned they found that different students have different perspectives on their struggles. Students look at their struggles and how they should approach those struggles in different ways. Some students expressed surprise at how open their peers were regarding using substances. Mental health impacts more students than they expected. Students believe that their voices matter and they should work to be happy with themselves.

Moving Forward

Each year, the Youth Summit serves as a powerful reminder that young people want to be heard, valued, and included in conversations that impact their lives and well-being. The hope of the Tippecanoe Resilience and Recovery – Prevention Subcommittee, as well as the students who participate, is that the perspectives shared during the Summit continue to spark meaningful dialogue, collaboration, and action throughout the community.

First, it is essential that the findings from this report—and the voices behind them—are shared broadly with community leaders, organizations, and stakeholders across Tippecanoe County and beyond. This includes elected officials, school administrators and educators, mental health professionals, healthcare providers, public health leaders, youth-serving organizations, parents and caregivers, researchers, and other community partners who play a role in supporting youth.

The experiences and insights shared by students provide valuable guidance for shaping policies, programs, and environments that better meet the needs of young people.

Second, the Youth Summit findings present an opportunity for continued action. Year after year, students consistently identify areas where they want to see change, support, and connection. One example that continues to emerge is the importance of authentic, trusting relationships with adults—particularly within schools. Students want to feel respected, understood, and supported by the adults around them. These conversations challenge communities to not only listen, but also to respond with intentional efforts that strengthen relationships, improve systems of support, and create environments where youth feel safe and connected.

Finally, it is the hope of the Prevention Subcommittee that the Youth Summit continues to grow and evolve in the years ahead. Students consistently express appreciation for having a space where their opinions matter and where they can openly discuss the challenges facing their generation. The information gathered through the Summit has helped inform programs, initiatives, and prevention efforts focused on mental health, substance use, suicide prevention, and healthy coping strategies. Most importantly, the event continues to demonstrate that youth voices are not only valuable—they are essential in building a healthier, more resilient community for the future.