



Safety & Belonging Work Group Meeting #7

A Children & Youth
Community Plan Initiative

September 24, 2026





Agenda

Welcome, purpose & where we are	5 min
Review data, root causes, partners, & what works	20 min
Action Planning	
• Brainstorm realistic Year-One Actions	10 min
• Discuss and prioritize 1-2 Year-One actions	25 min
Transform Strategic Direction into a Strategy	15 min
Next steps, Announcements, & Close	5 min



Today's Purpose

Begin building our Year-One Action Plan for expanding youth leadership and peer-led opportunities. By the end of today, we hope to identify 1 - 2 promising actions for our work group to explore further.



Where are we?

Meeting #1 (March)
Launched Work Group

Meeting #2 (March)
Developed Shared
Understanding

Meeting #3 (April)
Mapped our Efforts

Meeting #4 (May)
Synthesized Map

Meeting #5 (July)
Identified Strategic
Directions



Meeting #6 (August)
Action Planning
Strategic Direction #1



Meeting #7 (September)
Action Planning
Strategic Direction #2



Meeting #8 (October)
Finalize & Commit

Implementation!



Start with the Result

The condition of wellbeing we want for children, youth, and families.



Result

All youth feel valued, supported, and safe in the school and community

Strategic Direction

Expanding youth leadership and peer-led opportunities



What the data say about how we are doing



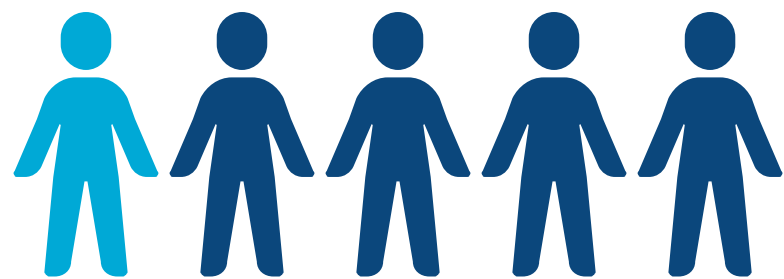
How We are Doing?

All youth feel valued, supported, and safe in the school and community

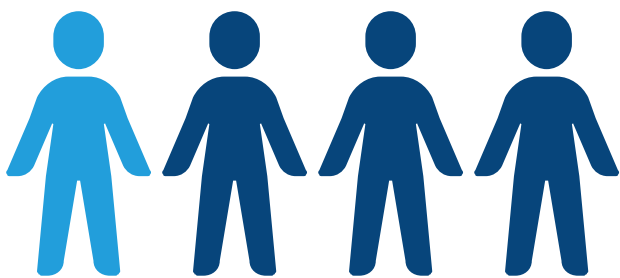


Community Values Youth: **Stalled**

Youth as Resources: **Stalled**



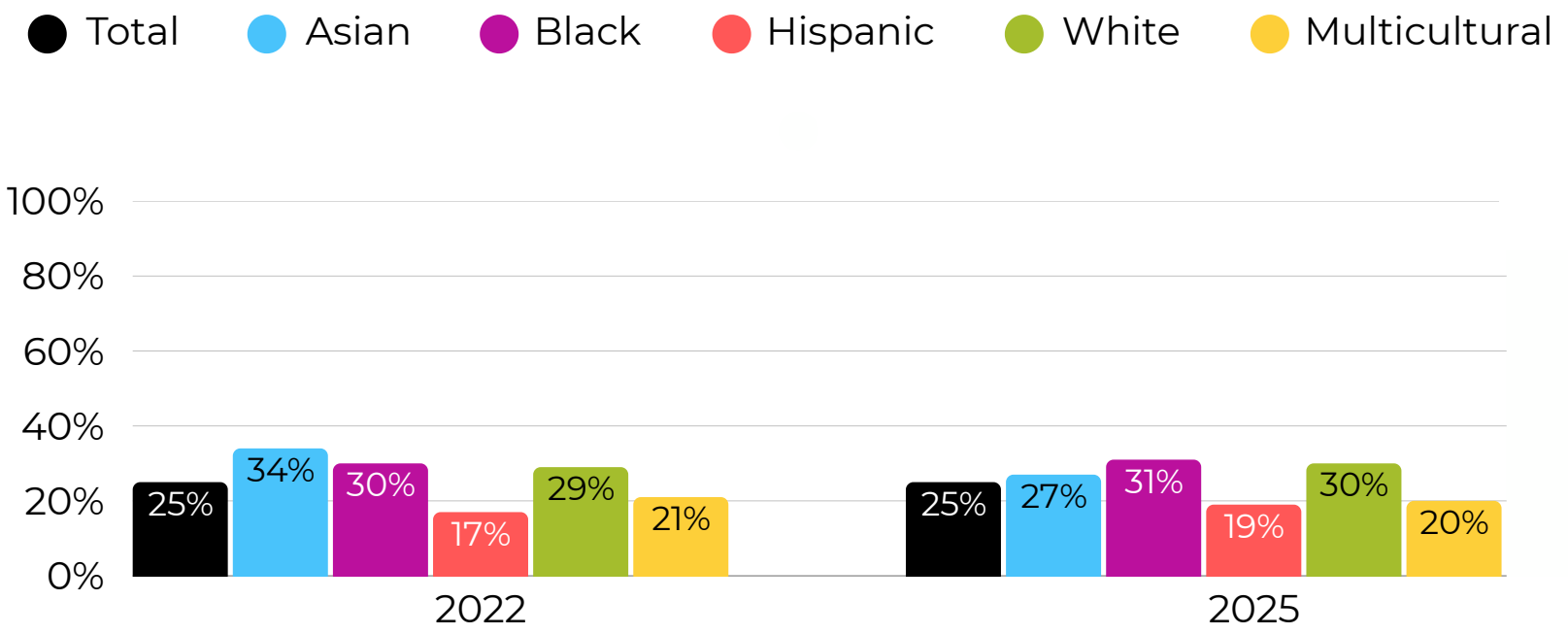
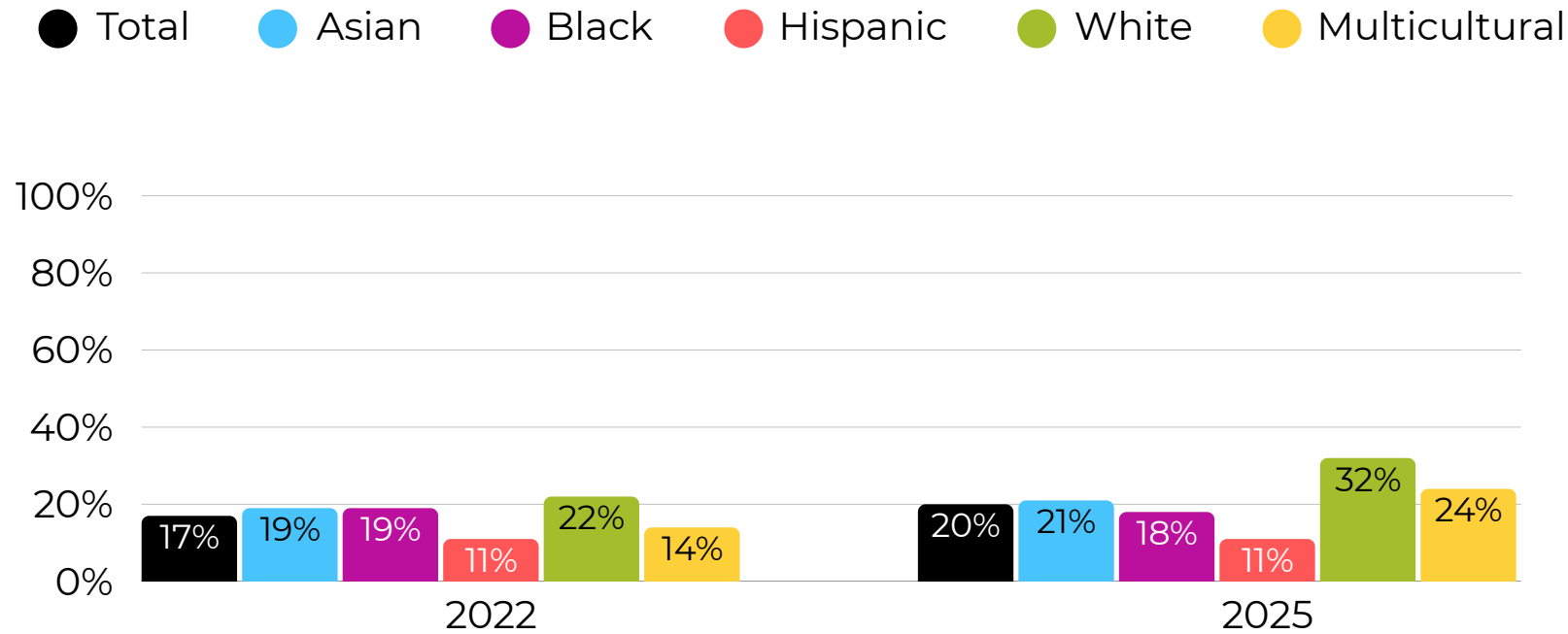
1 in 5 youth (20%) report **feeling valued by their community**, a rate that hasn't changed much since 2010



1 in 4 youth (25%) currently **feel that they are considered a resource to their family, school, or community**, a number that has remained consistently low over the past 15 years.

As of 2025, **White youth** are nearly **3x** as likely as **Latino youth** to report a feeling valued by their community.

Overall perception of youth as resources remains low across all racial/ethnic groups, with **Latino and Multiracial youth reporting the lowest levels** both years



Source: Developmental Assets: A Profile of Your Youth for ACPS© 2013-2025 by Search Institute, Minneapolis, MN.



What's the Story Behind the Curve?

What's driving current conditions?





What's the story behind the curve?

Root causes related to expanding youth leadership & peer-led solutions



Youth experience:

- Not feeling heard, valued, or taken seriously, particularly at school.
- Feeling excluded from decisions that directly affect them.
- Frustration with the adult-centric systems that silence them.

"Many students don't want to come to school at all. Administrators don't treat students with respect. Not feeling treated as a human being."

"We don't have enough power." / "Youth don't feel like they matter."

"We are looked down on."

"I have a friend that doesn't want to go to class because a teacher is calling students names and calling them dumb."

"There's lots of violence in many schools. Violence doesn't make ACHS unique. But the administration is not helpful. They like to treat us like children, so when we act like children, they get mad and ask us to behave like adults."

"Some students don't feel they have a say or that anything will change. Ideal community is impossible."

"Don't feel heard, teachers don't hear you out or let you speak. We're spoken at instead of with."

"I wish there was more channels for youth to speak about their opinions."



Partners

Who has a role to play?





Who has a role to play in expanding youth leadership & peer-led solutions?



Youth want adults to know how to share power with them and meaningful opportunities to help prevent conflict, support their peers, shape safety decisions, and hold systems accountable for whether changes are actually making things better.

The places where youth leadership already happens & where we can learn from or build upon existing models:

- Youth Ambassadors Peer Advocates/Young Adult Peer Advocates,
- Library Teen Advisory Group,
- Student Government,
- PBIS Club (student club that supports positive school climate initiatives through student leadership), &
- Multicultural Student Achievement Network (MSAN) (Supports student leadership focused on equity and inclusive school practices).

The systems/institutions that can create opportunities, share power, recruit youth, & incorporate youth voice into decisions:

- ACPS,
- Alexandria Library, &
- the City agencies that serve youth, such as DCHS, RPCA, CSU, & APD

The bodies that can help coordinate and connect opportunities:

- Youth Services Coordinating Council,
- City-School Staff Group,
- Gang Prevention Community Task Force,
- ALX Beyond/OST infrastructure

The places where youth can influence decisions & shape priorities:

- City boards & commissions with youth seats,
- Civic Action Projects/Project Citizen
- School advisory/decision-making structures



What Works

What could help
improve conditions?





What works to expand youth leadership & peer-led solutions?

Youth want adults to know how to share power with them and meaningful opportunities to help prevent conflict, support their peers, shape safety decisions, and hold systems accountable for whether changes are actually making things better.

Youth recommendations for what could help improve conditions:

- **Give youth a meaningful role in making decisions that involve their safety.** Students proposed creating ongoing ways for them to share their experiences, participate in safety assessments, influence policies and decisions affecting them, and hear back about how their input was used.
- **Expand youth-led approaches to preventing conflict and supporting peers.** Students recommended peer mediation, peer-support programs, youth safety ambassadors, conflict-resolution efforts, kindness initiatives, and other opportunities for students to help create safer school environments.
- **Make leadership opportunities more accessible and representative.** Expand leadership roles and supports for youth who may be underrepresented, particularly Latino students, and address barriers through approaches such as bilingual leadership development and culturally responsive opportunities.
- **Expand peer-led mental-health support and awareness.** Youth recommended trained peer supporters and mediators, culturally responsive peer leaders, student-led support groups, and youth-led mental-health outreach with guidance for how to get professional help when needed.
- **What we learned from our mapping:** We don't have to start from scratch. Alexandria already has youth leadership programs, peer-led efforts, advisory structures, and cross-system partnerships. Our opportunity may be to connect, strengthen, expand, or make more equitable what already exists.



"Mandate that all ACPS decision making committees include at least 10% student representation."
~ Roger Sierra



"Encourage students to help lead peer safety and kindness programs."
~ Fatima Mishaal

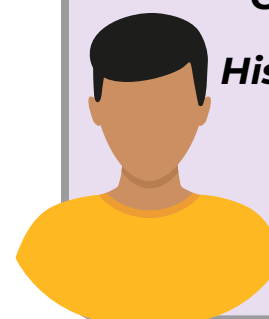
"Create an anonymous peer mediation program at ACHS where students can confidentially request help when dealing with anger, conflict, or emotional stress. Trained peer mediators would meet with struggling students and connect them to school counselors for proper support."

~ Maryamawit



"The main way that ACPS can thrive is by encouraging students to speak up about the issues they face. Often times, students may feel threatened or scared to speak up on issues regarding school, a place in which they feel small and looked down upon. It is the job of our leaders to encourage students to criticize when necessary."

~ Almaz Yohannes, Emily Lemus, & Layla Benitez



"Create more leadership roles and support for Hispanic students across schools." / "Launch a Latinx Student Leadership in some schools Council."
~ Author Unknown



"Programs such as Teen Wellness's Center, Peer Advocates, and Alexandria Youth Ambassadors work to better students in the community Alexandria by directly speaking with them and bringing it to the board. Every student should have a voice when it comes to mental health issues."

~ Isis Jones



What do you think would work? What could we do together in the first year?

Youth want adults to know how to share power with them and meaningful opportunities to help prevent conflict, support their peers, shape safety decisions, and hold systems accountable for whether changes are actually making things better.



Directions:

1. **Brainstorm! (5 minutes)** On your own: Write down as many possible Year-One actions as you can. Brainstorm actions we could take together over the next year to expand meaningful, accessible, and representative opportunities for youth to lead, support their peers, and influence decisions that affect them. One idea/sticky note.
2. **Share! (10 minutes)** Share your ideas with the group. Together we will group & combine similar ideas.
3. **Prioritize! (25 minutes)** Which 1-2 ideas should we pursue in Year One?

Link to Whiteboard: canva.link/4xnqn522lcv8bjw



Let's make our Strategic Direction sound more like a strategy

Youth want adults to know how to share power with them and meaningful opportunities to help prevent conflict, support their peers, shape safety decisions, and hold systems accountable for whether changes are actually making things better.



Strategic Direction

Expand youth leadership & peer-led solutions

Drafted Strategy:

We will expand youth leadership and peer-led opportunities by creating spaces and opportunities for shaping decisions through advocacy...providing trainings and ongoing support to both youth and adults in sharpening their advocacy skills...peer mediation programming...scale up the peer-led model...using an equity lens and culturally sensitive (include in a multicultural training for adults)

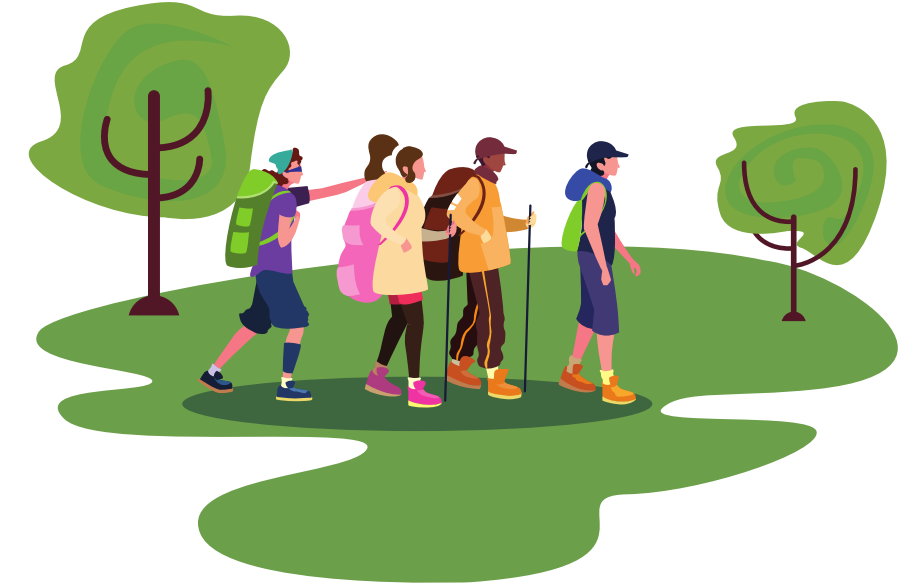


Next Steps





Next Steps



August Strategic Direction #1

- Identify Year-One actions for one strategic direction

September Strategic Direction #2

- Identify Year-One actions for 2nd strategic direction
- Confirm the group is comfortable with staff drafting the remaining details

In Between Meetings Draft Action Plans

- Using the data, youth recommendations, and existing efforts we've already reviewed, flesh out the actions the group prioritized
- Identify potential partners and roles
- Draft performance measurements

October Finalize & Commit

- Review drafted plans together
- Make revisions
- Confirm roles and commitments
- Approve the Year-One Action Plans

November Celebrate & Launch Implementation!

- Celebrate in person over lunch?!