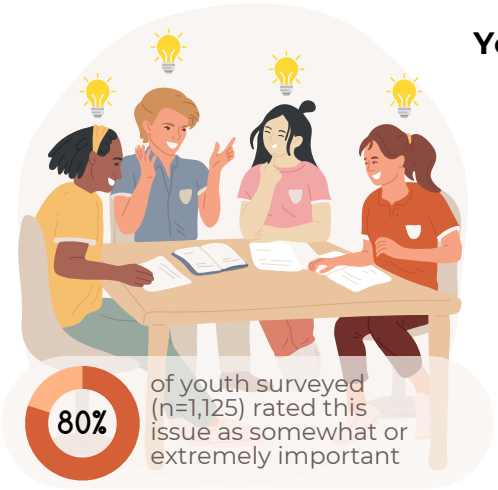


80%

of youth surveyed (n=1,125) rated this issue as somewhat or extremely important

Youth Perspectives on:

School Leadership & Student Engagement

Overview

This subtheme, emerging 175+ times during 94 Listening Sessions, explores how students experience school leadership, communication, and decision-making processes, as well as the policies and climate that shape daily life. Students express a clear desire to be seen, heard, and respected in school spaces. Their feedback highlights both positive relationships and areas where school culture could be more inclusive, responsive, and transparent.

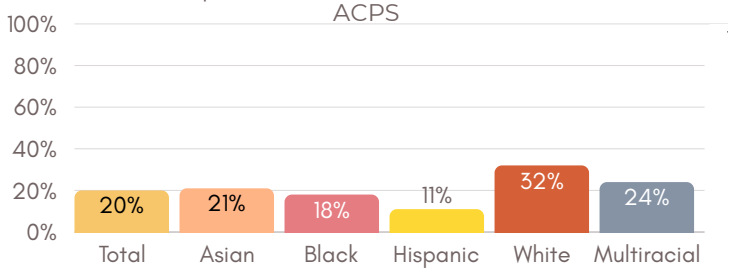
WHY IT MATTERS

Leadership sets the tone for the entire school environment. When students feel that their voices matter, that rules are applied fairly, and that adults in power are listening and collaborating with them, a stronger sense of trust, engagement, and school belonging is built. Conversely, inconsistent policies and one-way communication can erode students' confidence in school systems.

WHAT THE DATA SAY

Community Values Youth by Race/Ethnicity

Source: Developmental Assets: A Profile of Your Youth for ACPS



WHAT YOUTH WANT

40+ mentions

"School admin listens to students."

"More access points for student input."

"Better communication between school board and students and teachers."

Communication & Shared Decision-Making

- Communication is transparent and two-way between students, staff, and administrators
- Leadership values student voice
- Student input is actively sought and meaningfully included in decision-making

35+ mentions

"Transparency around changes in procedures/rules (lunch)."

Digital Access Policies & General Policy Clarity

School policies are fair, clearly explained, and consistently applied

WHAT YOUTH EXPERIENCE

60+ mentions

"School doesn't listen to students' concerns."

Communication & Decision-Making

Feeling unheard, ignored, and dismissed by school leadership

40+ mentions

"Alexandria City High School only lets us go to lunch through one door. When I'm running late, I don't even get to get lunch because I have to walk all the way around and then it's over."

School Policies

- Frustration with restrictions around phone use and internet access.
- Policies that feel contradictory, inconsistently applied, or frequently changed without clear explanation.

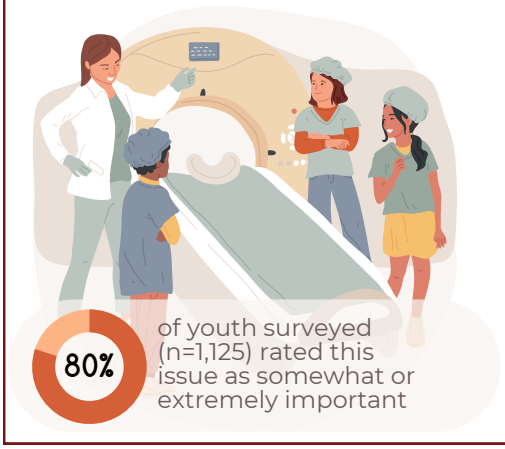
35+ mentions

"In my school, being a part of LGBTQIA is looked down upon."

"Some teachers straight up discriminate certain students"

School Climate

Feeling disrespected by their peers or school staff. While others noted friendly interactions, concerns about favoritism, discrimination, and lack of student-adult trust were also raised.



80%

of youth surveyed (n=1,125) rated this issue as somewhat or extremely important

Youth Perspectives on:

Academic Success & Environments

Overview

Alexandria students expressed a strong desire for school environments that are equitable, engaging, and responsive to their individual needs. It came up roughly 230 times during the 94 Listening Sessions. While many youth noted positive experiences, such as access to tutoring and passionate teachers, they also identified persistent challenges like rigid instruction, inequitable opportunities, inconsistent grading, and high teacher turnover.

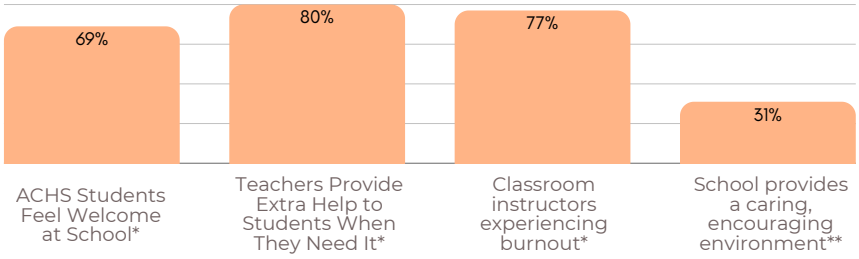
WHY IT MATTERS

Students' academic confidence and future success are directly shaped by how supported and engaged they feel at school. When learning environments are responsive, hands-on, and inclusive, youth are more likely to thrive. Their feedback highlights the importance of equity, relationships, and real-world relevance in academic settings.

WHAT THE DATA SAY

Academic Environment

Source: ACPS Climate Survey (2024)* & Developmental Assets Survey (2025)**



WHAT YOUTH WANT

40+ mentions

"More field trips that actually help students understand more."

Student-Centered Learning & Engagement

More hands-on, experiential learning (e.g., field trips, life skills, group projects)

60+ mentions

"An ideal school looks like everyone getting the help that they need for learning."

Supportive Relationships & Academic Encouragement

- Personalized support through tutoring and meaningful teacher-student relationships
- Passionate, well-supported educators who care about student success

25+ mentions

"Different ways of evaluating knowledge."

Fair and Growth-Oriented Assessment

Fair, flexible assessment systems that prioritize growth over test scores

10+ mentions

"Encouraging more minority students in college level/AP classes."

Equity in Access & Opportunity

Equitable access to academic opportunities, including support for students with different learning needs

WHAT YOUTH EXPERIENCE

60+ mentions

"Great variety of classes."

"Haven't been on a field trip since 9th grade."

Learning & Engagement

While many appreciate access to diverse classes and caring teachers, they also described instruction as overly rigid, disconnected from real life, and lacking in interactive opportunities.

40+ mentions

"They give up on kids easy."

Relationships & Academic Encouragement

Teacher turnover and lack of one-on-one support were common concerns.

5+ mentions

"Too many tests."

Assessment

Frustration over inconsistent grading and overreliance on testing.

15+ mentions

"Educational equity...not really fulfilled.."

Access & Opportunity

Disparities in support and opportunities, particularly for students in special education or youth of color in advanced courses