



2024 Core Measures Student Survey

Mt. Anthony Union Middle School, Southwest Vermont Supervisory Union | Bennington, VT

Introduction

The Drug-Free Communities Core Measures Student Survey is an annual survey organized by ACT Bennington that gathers information from students in grades 6-12 about health behaviors. Questions are asked about student use of substances as well as their perceptions of risk associated with those substances. Additionally, questions are asked about mental health, assets and resiliency, and life at home. Schools, communities, and state agencies use the results of the survey to evaluate and improve programs, plan new initiatives, and secure funding. The Core Measures Survey is a supplement to the [Youth Risk Behavior Survey](#), administered every two years. **This report serves as a summary of the 2024 results and highlights areas of concern as well as protective factors in students' responses. To view the full results from the 2024 survey, [click here](#). To view past survey results, [click here](#).**

Method

The survey was taken by Mt. Anthony Union Middle School (MAUMS) students in May 2024. The survey was voluntary and anonymous; students' responses were not linked to their individual identity. 323 students responded to the survey. 5 responses were removed.

What's Inside

Click the topic link to jump to that section:



[Substance Use \(SU\)](#)



[Perceptions of Risk & Disapproval](#)



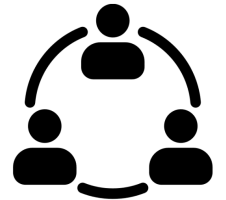
[Mental Health](#)



[Resilience & Assets](#)



[Life at Home](#)



[School & Community](#)

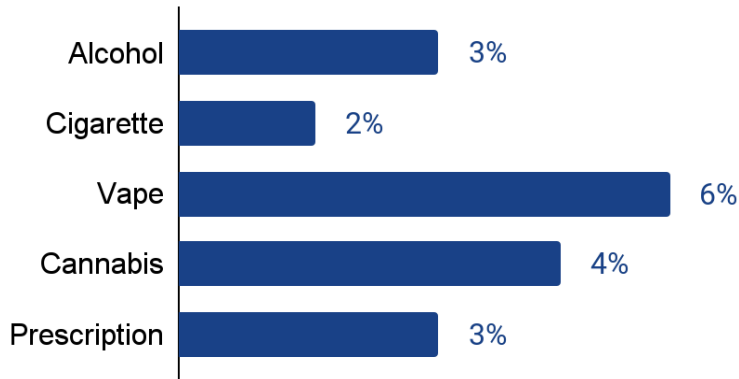
Who We Are

ACT is a prevention coalition supporting Bennington-area youth in making healthy choices. ACT provides substance use prevention education, empowers youth through leadership and afterschool programming, and collaborates with the community to promote youth wellness and healthy youth development. We encourage changes to the physical environment that reduce risk factors for youth substance use and that increase safety, as well as provide basic needs to address health inequities amongst priority populations. Learn more at actbennington.org.

Substance Use

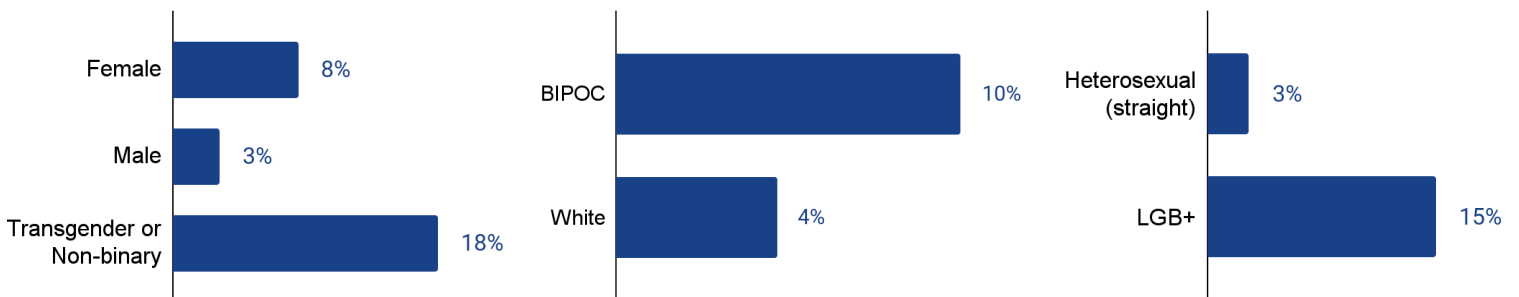
This section asked students about their past 30-day use of substances including: alcohol, cigarettes, vape products, cannabis, and prescription drugs not prescribed to the student (for example: Vicodin, Adderall, etc).

Past 30-Day Use of Substances

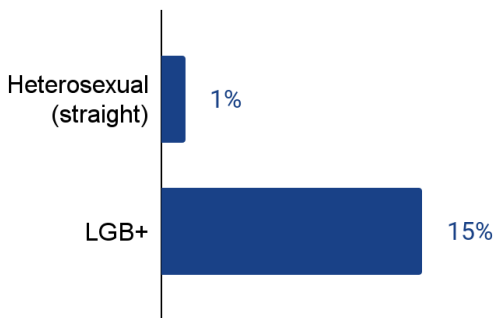


Areas of Concern: Substance Use by Students with Marginalized Identities

Past 30-Day Use of Vape Products



Past 30-Day Use of Cannabis



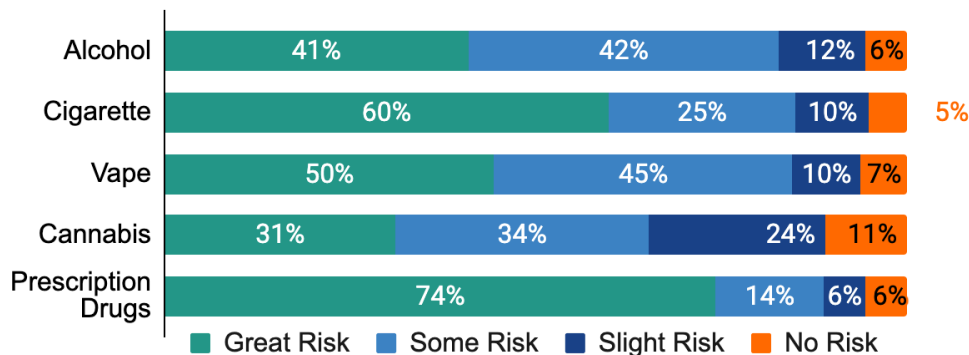
Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ+) adolescents are at heightened risk for many health outcomes, including misuse of substances. LGBTQ+ identity itself does not increase the likelihood of substance use among young people. Research shows that experiencing minority stress (also known as oppression-based stress)—chronic stress that comes from facing discrimination, harassment, and social stigma—can lead LGBTQ+ youth to use substances as a coping mechanism at higher rates than their cisgender, heterosexual peers. This stress creates unique mental health challenges, often compounded by feelings of isolation or rejection, which can increase the risk of using substances to manage emotional distress. Understanding this distinction is essential to building supportive, inclusive environments that address the root causes of oppression-based stress and help LGBTQ+ youth thrive without turning to substances.

Perceptions of Risk and Disapproval

This section asked students about how much they think people risk harming themselves physically or in other ways when they consume substances, and how much their friends and parents/caregivers would disapprove of them using substances.

Adolescent brains are still developing through the age of 25, making them especially vulnerable to the harms of substance use. Nicotine, cannabis, and other drugs can disrupt normal brain growth, affecting memory, decision-making, and mental health well into adulthood. Early use of substances also increases the likelihood of dependence and addiction.

Perception of Risk of Physical or Other Harm



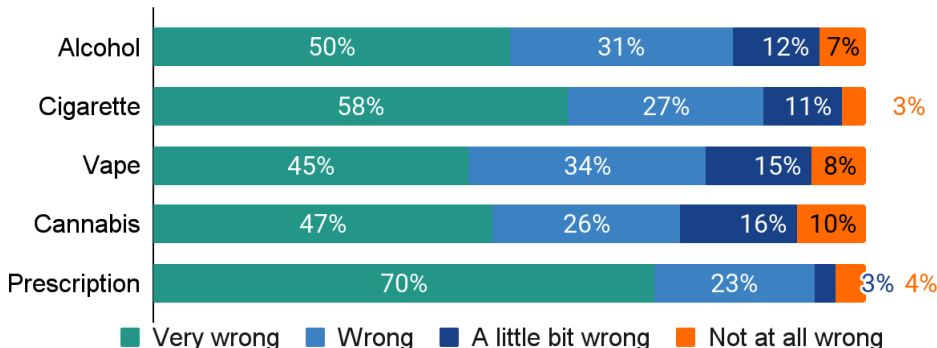
Perception of risk of harm and disapproval significantly influences middle school students' decisions about substance use.

When young people understand potential risks of youth substance use and view alcohol, nicotine, or cannabis as dangerous, they are less likely to experiment or engage in use.

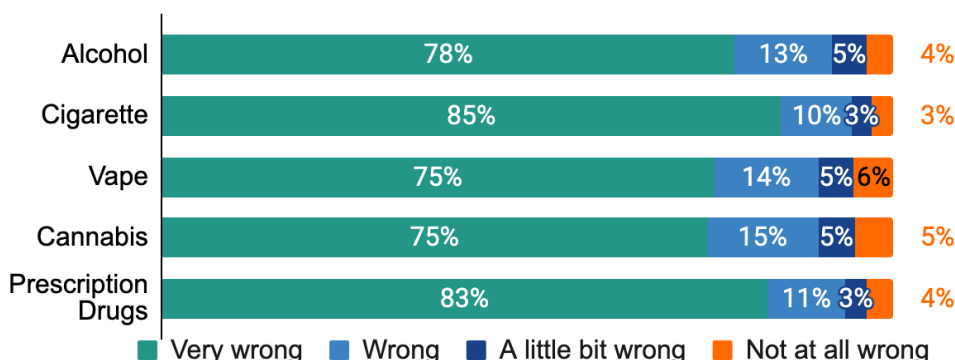
Similarly, when young people believe that their friends and family strongly disapprove of using substances, they are less likely to engage in these behaviors. Research shows that when parents talk openly about the risks of youth substance use, their messages make a real impact.

Understanding perceptions guides prevention efforts, helping address misperceptions and strengthen protective factors that reduce early substance use.

Perception of Peer Disapproval

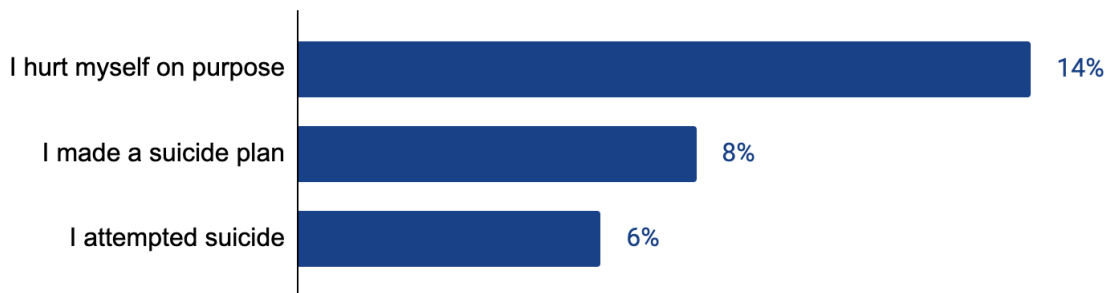
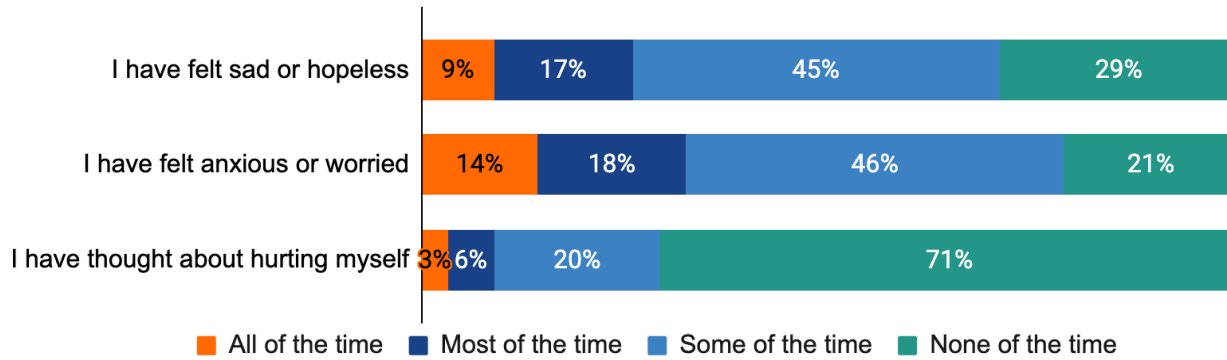


Perception of Parent/Caregiver Disapproval



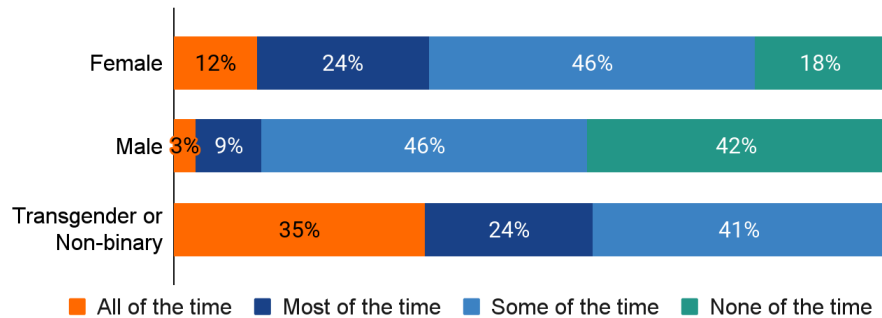
Mental Health

This section asked students about their mental health in the past year, including self-harm and suicidal ideation.



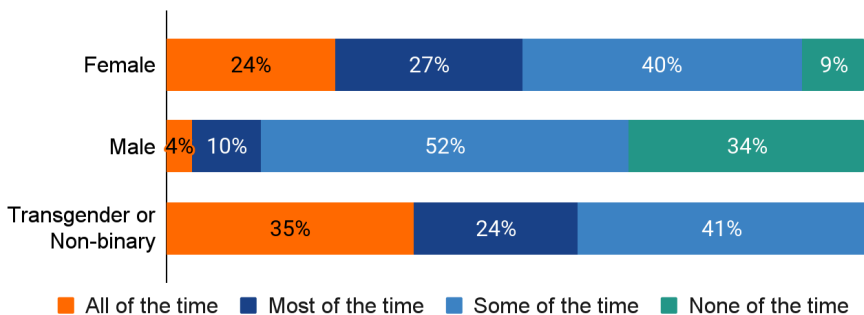
Areas of Concern: Mental Health of Female and Transgender Students

Responses to: “In the past year, I have felt sad or hopeless.”

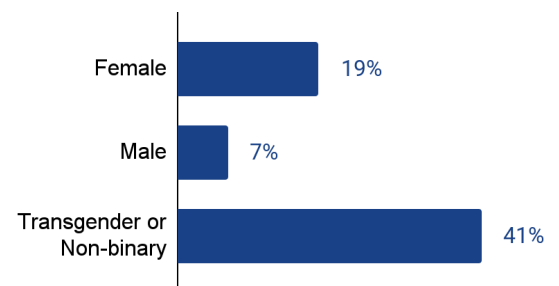


Reflecting national trends, female and LGBTQ+ students at MAUMS reported higher rates of experiencing feelings of sadness or hopelessness, poor mental health, and suicidal thoughts and behaviors.

Responses to: “In the past year, I have felt anxious or worried.”



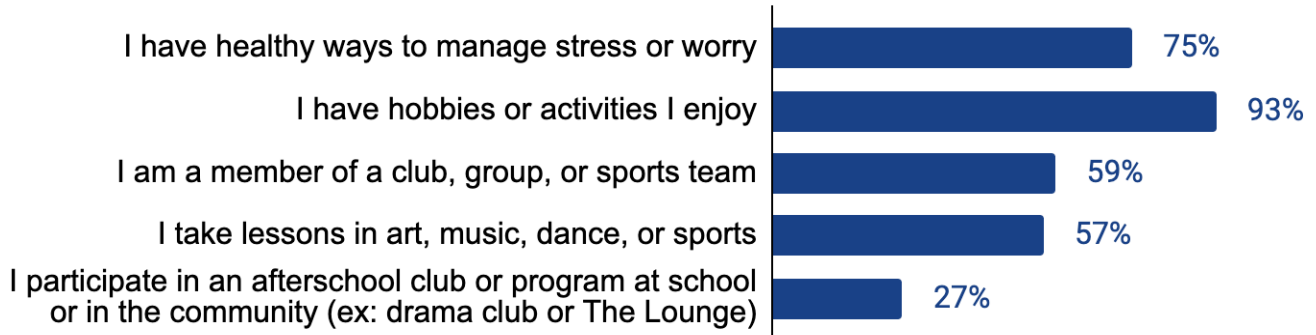
“I hurt myself on purpose.”



Resilience and Assets

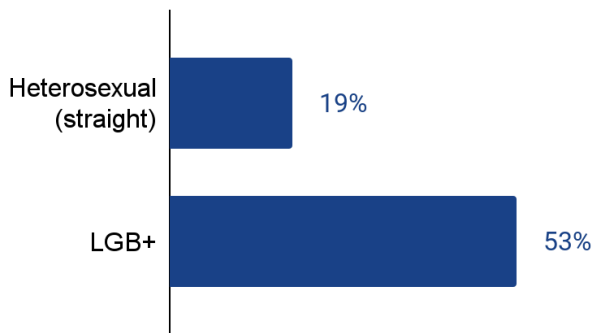
This section explores students' involvement in hobbies, clubs, teams, and support systems that contribute to their overall well-being and ability to cope with challenges.

Engagement in Healthy Activities



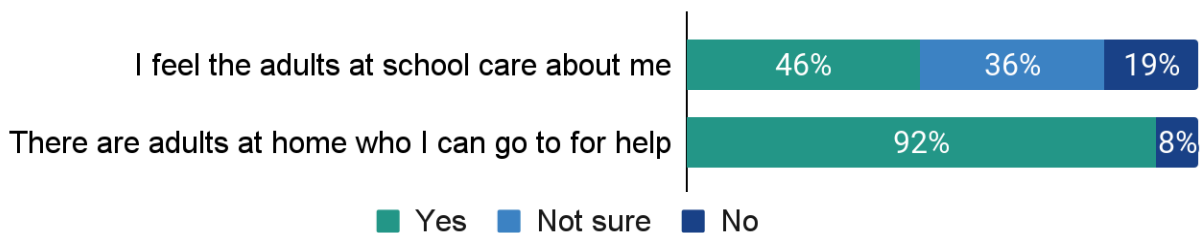
Protective Factor: Afterschool Programming

Responses to: “I participate in an afterschool club or program at school or in the community.”



Afterschool programming is a key protective factor for youth, offering safe, supportive environments and meaningful relationships with caring adults, which help reduce risky behaviors and boost well-being. High LGBTQ+ student participation in these programs is encouraging, as it indicates increased access to inclusive spaces where they can connect, feel valued, and build resilience. Afterschool activities and programs foster belonging, mentorship, and positive social connections, including connecting students and families to services and systems of support.

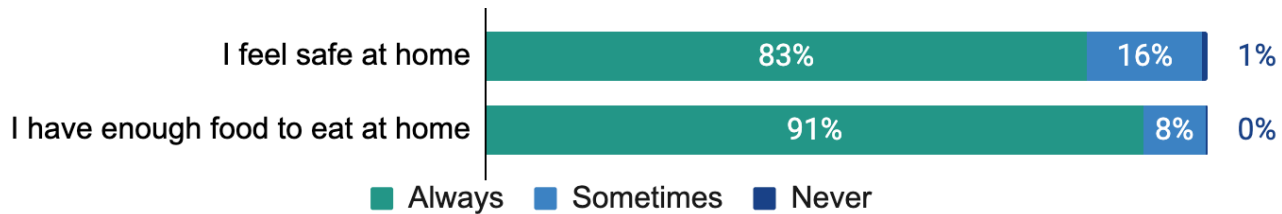
Support Systems



Non-parental adults, such as mentors, coaches, teachers, and community members, play a vital role in positive youth development, offering support that strengthens mental health, social-emotional skills, and resilience. Research indicates that having at least one consistent, caring adult outside of the family improves outcomes for young people, including enhanced social skills, stronger community connections, academic achievement, and more positive health behaviors.

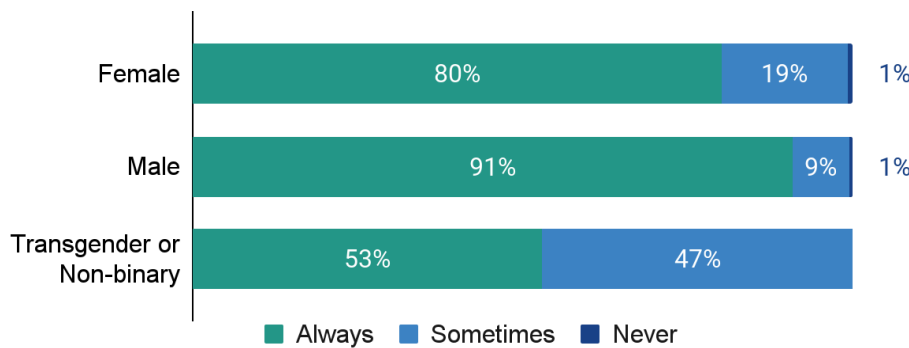
Life at Home

This section examines students' sense of safety, food security, and access to basic necessities at home.



Area of Concern: Transgender Students' Felt Sense of Safety at Home

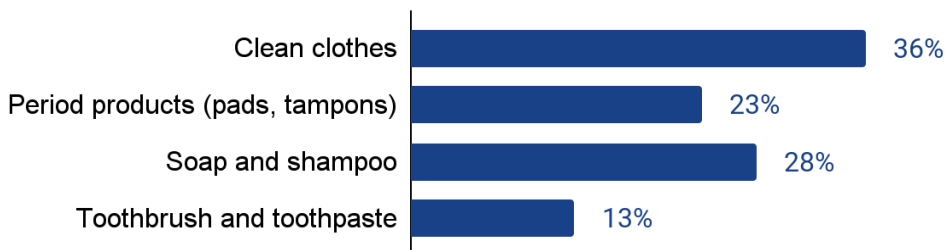
Responses to: "I feel safe at home."



The chart highlights a significant disparity in feelings of safety at home among transgender students compared to their cisgender peers. This gap underscores the **unique challenges trans students may face in their home environments**, due to factors such as family acceptance. These results point to a critical need for resources and support systems that help ensure gender diverse students have safe and affirming spaces beyond the home.

Access to Basic Necessities

15% of students reported* not always having access to basic necessities including menstrual products, clean clothes, soap and shampoo, or oral care. These students reported needing:



**Note: Responses about access to basic needs may be subject to under-reporting due to social stigma and embarrassment, which can prevent students from fully disclosing needs related to personal hygiene and essential items.*

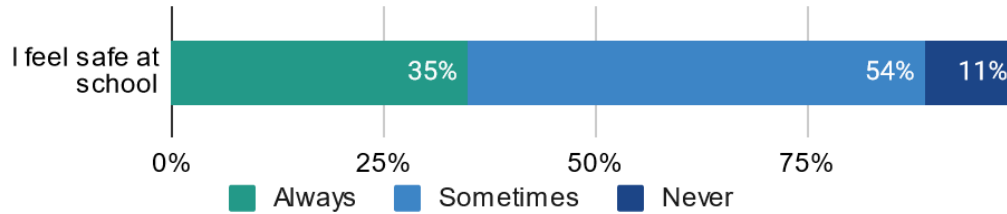
When young people have their basic needs met, it communicates to them that they are worthy of care and that the community is invested in their success. **Bennington has many resources to support youth and their families:**

- MAUMS Family Engagement Specialist Debra Mahar: debra.mahar@svsu.org
- [Take Care Project](#): Community partners providing free period and hygiene products
- [Food Resource Calendar](#): Free prepared foods, food pantries, and produce distribution

School & Community

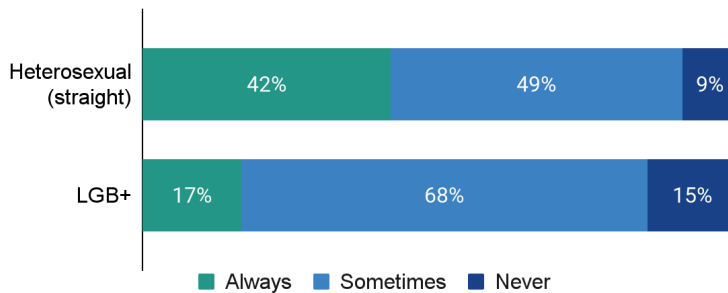
This section explores students' sense of safety at school, feelings of mattering in the community, and suggestions for making Bennington more youth-friendly.

School Safety



Area of Concern: Safety at School

Responses to: "I feel safe at school."



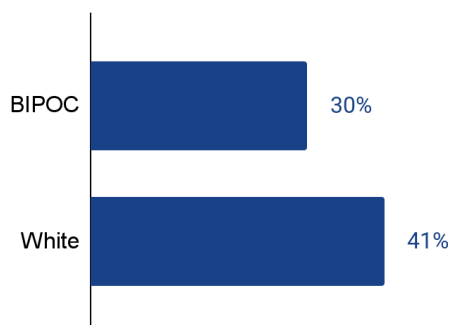
Creating a safe and inclusive school environment benefits everyone. Research shows that trained and supportive school staff, the presence of Gender & Sexuality Alliances (GSAs), anti-bullying/harassment policies, comprehensive sex education, and LGBTQ+-inclusive curricula increases academic performance, reduces health risks, and improves school climate for *all* students.

Youth Mattering



Area of Concern: BIPOC Youth Feelings of Mattering

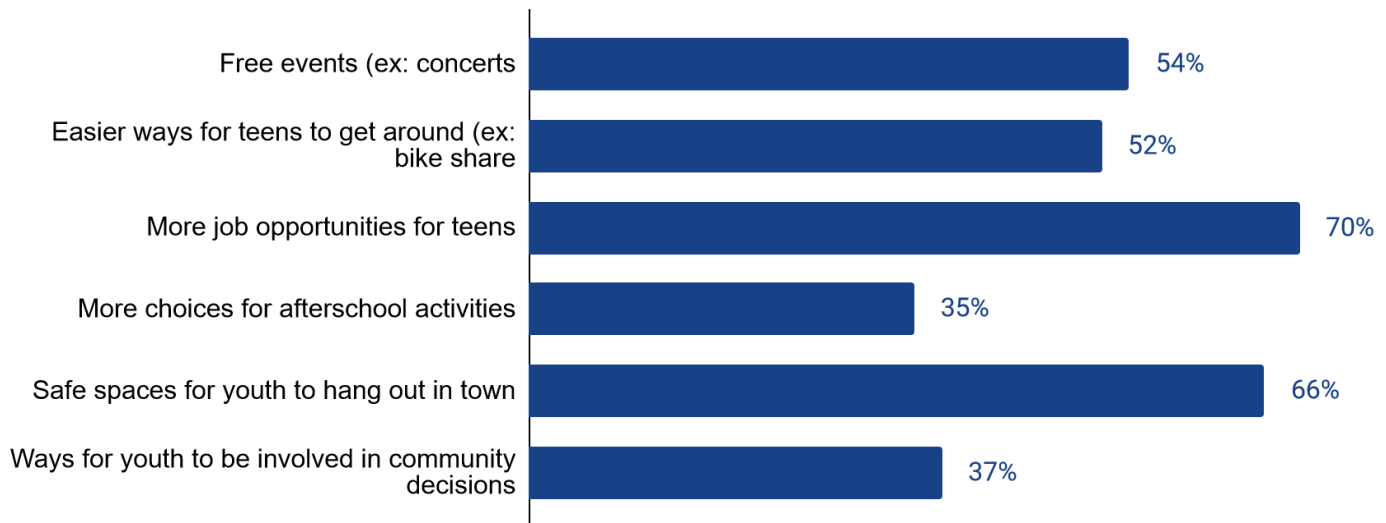
Responses to: "I feel I matter to the community."



Feelings of mattering are important. According to the Study of Adolescent Health in the U.S., teens who reported a sense belonging, connectedness, and mattering at home, school, and in the community were as much as 66% less likely to experience health risk behaviors related to sexual health, substance use, and violence, and these youth had better mental health in adulthood.

Supporting Bennington Youth

In response to ***What would make Bennington more teen-friendly?*** students provided insights on improvements and additions that could make Bennington a more engaging, accessible, and supportive place for young people.



Conclusion

The results of the 2024 Core Measures Student Survey at MAUMS reveal both areas of concern and opportunities for growth. Of particular note are the higher rates of substance use among students with marginalized identities, along with worsening mental health trends, especially among female and transgender youth. The results also reflect new pressures, including the increasing normalization of and access to substances like cannabis, which adds complexity to the choices young people face today.

Strengths: This survey highlights the positive impacts of the many prevention efforts already in place, driven by a dedicated school community committed to promoting well-being and resilience. Teachers, support staff, and community partners are working to create environments within and after school where youth feel safe, valued, and empowered.

Opportunities: To build on these strengths, we encourage continued collaboration with community prevention partners and taking advantage of professional development addressing:

- Bullying prevention
- Gender identity
- Health disparities impacting the lives of SVSU students

Together, we can foster a community where every young person has the support, resources, and opportunities to thrive and make positive, informed choices throughout adolescence and into adulthood.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to the SVSU and MAUMS Principal Chris Maguire for continued support and partnership with ACT, and to all of the teachers and staff for participating; we are especially grateful to Prevention Coordinator Glauke Cooijmans for all of her efforts organizing survey administration. Many thanks to Samantha Pearce, Community Epidemiologist at The Collaborative, for compiling the data and producing the accompanying graphs.