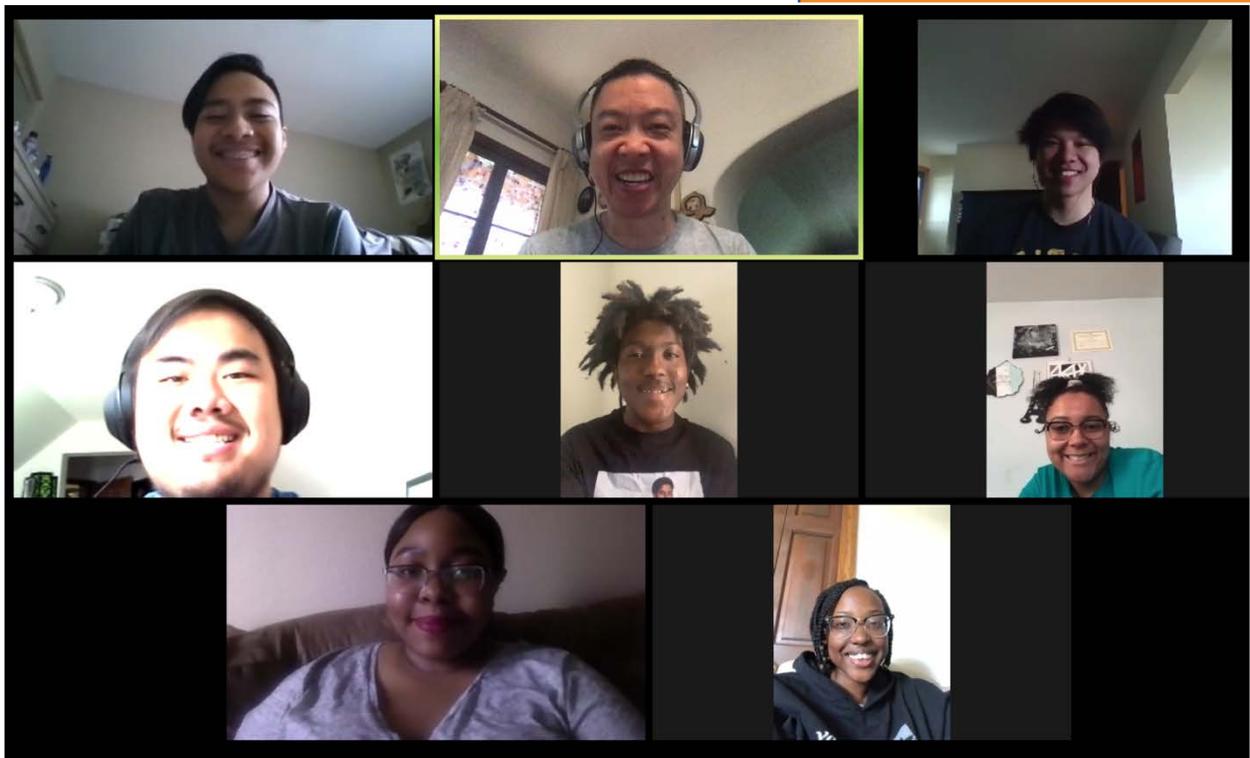




Brooklyn Bridge  
**ALLIANCE**  
FOR  
YOUTH

2020

# Youth to Youth Survey



**Contributors:**

- Yvon Abellard—Youth Researcher
- Alex Garduno Garcia—Youth Researcher
- Egan Moua—Youth Researcher
- Tiffany Nyamao—Youth Researcher
- Angel Young—Youth Researcher
- Rebecca Gilgen—Executive Director
- Ivan Lui—Data Coordinator
- Andrew Mua—Youth Engagement Americorps VISTA
- Dan-neya Yancey—Special Projects Support Coordinator

## Executive Summary

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In the summer of 2020, the Youth Data Squad planned and initiated a data-gathering project to understand issues that are affecting youth and what helps accelerate their success. This is the sixth iteration of the biennial survey, including 2008, 2012, 2014, 2016, and 2018. This year, two seismic events occurred which have changed the landscape of youth development work: the COVID-19 pandemic and the killing of George Floyd by law enforcement officers in Minneapolis, which has brought to light again the structural racism our Black American citizens have faced for centuries. Therefore, the research shifted from focusing on participation in OST to diving more deeply into how these two public health crises affect the lives of youth in our communities.

The research was based on a *Youth-led Participatory Action Research (YPAR)* approach that realizes the potential of youth and equips them to collect and evaluate data as they engage their community. Furthermore, a multilevel triangulation mixed method design was used to incorporate both quantitative and qualitative methods to address different levels within a system. The Youth Data Squad (YDS) participated in an Appreciative Inquiry focus group to help confirm the research questions they felt were important. From the focus group results, the YDS created an interview guide and conducted interviews with 23 of their peers. The YDS also interviewed 15 adult staff from Alliance member organizations. This culminated in the creation of the Youth to Youth Survey, which was implemented online and surveyed a statistically significant sample<sup>1</sup> of youth ages 10-19 (N=766).

## Key Findings

- 1. Youth-Led Research and Youth Engagement.** We believe that engaging youth in research at such a significant level leads to more valid, realistic, and reliable data that is actionable for the Alliance and its members. The adult staff interviewed also identified youth engagement as an important asset for their organizations to provide. And ultimately the skill-building, literacy, and agency we invest in our young adults to be the future leaders of our community is perhaps more important than anything else we do.
- 2. Youth-Centered Education and Programs.** Only about half of youth felt that they learned about their identities and cultures in school or programming (46%), had teachers who understood the challenges in their personal lives and made adjustments (47%), had enough time to learn and do schoolwork (48%), and had teachers who accommodated for their learning styles (50%). Youth wanted connections to teachers who took the time to know who they were as individuals and who would help them succeed in school.
- 3. Belonging.** We know that a sense of belonging is an important protective factor for continued engagement and is linked to increased academic success. However, only 48% of youth felt a sense of belonging at school or in school activities. And 20% of youth said that there was no space or group where they felt a sense of belonging. Youth affirmed a list of measures they believe creates a sense of belonging.
  - I feel accepted for who I am and not judged.

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<sup>1</sup> For a population of 6,000 youth (ages 14-19) in the Brooklyn, a sample size that would give us a 95% confidence level that our data is statistically significant and a 5% margin of error, would be 368 youth.

- I am with people like myself who I can relate to and who understand me.
- People are available to support and encourage me anytime.
- They help me to succeed: teaching me, challenging me to do more, providing me with leadership opportunities, etc.
- Everyone has the same goal and focus.
- We have shared experiences.
- It provides a safe space for me to talk about myself, my feelings, or things I'm experiencing.

**4. Preparing for Young Adulthood.** Only 49% of youth understood the relationship between what they are learning at school and their current lives and futures. And only 55% of youth felt they had the help they needed to plan for their futures. Youth responded that they wanted these additional skills and classes to support their transition to young adulthood.

- Financial literacy
- College readiness
- Employment skills

**5. Mental Health.** Youth shared that social isolation due to pandemic restrictions is having serious effects on their mental health. However, only 40% of youth felt that they learned about what mental health is and how to maintain it, and 53% of youth said that mental health classes would help them. Youth need education about what mental health is (vs. mental illness or crisis), and skills to be able to maintain positive emotions, and psychological and social functioning.

**6. Systemic Racism.** Only 47% of youth felt they learned about their identity and culture (or the cultures of their peers) at school. Our youth researchers and youth interviewees shared that they had few opportunities to learn about systemic racism and the history of oppression in our country, and asked for more education on those topics. All the adult staff interviewees of our Alliance members identified systemic racism in their organizations. This shows up in the following ways:

- Policies and procedures (hiring, discipline, funding, membership, etc.)
- Mindsets of staff (biases, stereotypes, lack of racial consciousness)
- Lack of diverse representation in positions of power
- Inequitable distribution of services to BIPOC students or communities
- Institutions were built on white supremacist policies from the beginning

## ***Recommendations***

- We need to take action to allow youth to lead research about themselves and engage them in making decisions that affect themselves and others.
- We need to take action to create student/youth-centered education and programs that meet the needs of each youth. Each person has a unique identity, personality, learning style, and set of gifts and challenges.
- We need to take action to ensure that youth are prepared with the skills they need to transition to young adulthood, including post-secondary education and/or career.
- We need to take action to ensure that youth feel a sense of belonging and support in the spaces where they learn and grow.

- We need to take action to ensure that youth have a good understanding of what mental health is (vs. mental illness or crisis), and are given education and skills around how to be healthy mentally.
- We need to take action against the different forms of systemic racism that are present in our public institutions and that affect our youth. We can start by teaching youth about the history of oppression in our country, and provide them with the right tools and language to identify systemic racism and see how it affects their lives.

### ***Next Steps***

- Share this report with Alliance partners, youth, and community.
- Discuss the implications of this new information and identify immediate action items that expand participation and engagement for youth.
- Use the results of this survey to inform the Alliance's Strategic Plan.
- Use the results of this survey to inform the work of the Brooklyns Youth Council this coming year.

## **INTRODUCTION**

In the summer of 2020, the Youth Data Squad planned and initiated a data-gathering project to understand issues that are affecting their lives and what helps accelerate success. This is the sixth iteration of the biennial survey, including 2008, 2012, 2014, 2016, and 2018. The Youth to Youth Survey is central to all aspects of our work at the Brooklyn Bridge Alliance for Youth.

Previous surveys were focused on identifying out-of-school (OST) time participation, barriers to accessing OST opportunities, motivations for participation in OST, and a variety of other research questions identified by youth and adult partners (e.g., trust with the police, interest in youth engagement). This data has been used to launch community initiatives that have shifted youth participation and access, including the Rec on the Go Mobile Recreation Program, the BrookLynk Youth Employment Program, and the Youth Sports Initiative.

In 2020, two seismic events occurred which changed the landscape of youth development work: the COVID-19 pandemic and the killing of George Floyd by law enforcement officers in Minneapolis, which brought to light again the structural racism our Black American citizens have faced for centuries. Therefore, the research shifted from focusing on participation in OST to diving more deeply into these two public health crises, which negatively affect the lives of youth in our communities. Understanding this impact in real time, exploring what the short, intermediate, and long-term impacts are for youth, and succinctly identifying the policies, practices, and approaches that are tied to these experienced inequalities, will enable us to respond more effectively.

## **PROJECT PURPOSE**

The purpose of this research project is to build on the data we already have about the short-term effects of COVID-19 on youth in the Brooklyns to understand longer-term effects. We need to dig deeper into areas that are directly related to the personal lives and actions of students, as well as the institutional and systemic barriers that are exacerbated by this pandemic and by systemic racism—especially for our youth of color and low-income youth.

This year, we were able to partner with the Forum for Youth Investment to provide national context and connectivity to others doing this type of research, and where appropriate, disseminate findings.

Similar to the research the Alliance did with community college student persistence that balanced student voice with faculty and staff voice, we added a component with our public partners (city, county, K-12, higher-ed) to understand how adult staff saw these issues. It helps us to understand some of the mental models and worldview problems that hold these system inequities in place.

Finally, the Alliance wanted to understand how we can incorporate youth as equal partners in the research to understand both the youth point of view and the systems point of view in order to shine a light on the root causes as well as begin to identify systems change solutions.

## **Research Questions**

- What has changed for youth because of the COVID-19 pandemic?

- What are the policies, practices, resources, relationships, power dynamics and underlying mindsets that continue to sustain systemic racism and selective privileges in place in the public institutions with which youth interact?
- What “works” in youths’ lives that create safe, nurturing spaces for them, and empower them to achieve their goals?

## METHODS

The Alliance is committed to putting youth at the forefront of addressing community issues that impact them most. *Youth-led Participatory Action Research (YPAR)* is a research approach that realizes the potential of youth and equips them to collect and evaluate data as they engage their community. They are involved in every step of the project as it relates to research design, collection, evaluation, and advocacy. This work is used to inform and affect social policy and procedures. It uses their lens and lived experiences to inform research questions and collection methods, which allows the project to minimize systemic biases. It is important to acknowledge that this project is committed to identifying and unraveling systems of oppression that have historically disenfranchised young people of color and how these systems affect young people now as related to the COVID-19 pandemic. The research that we put forward will be rooted in anti-racist practices. The intent of employing YPAR and partnering with young people is multifaceted.

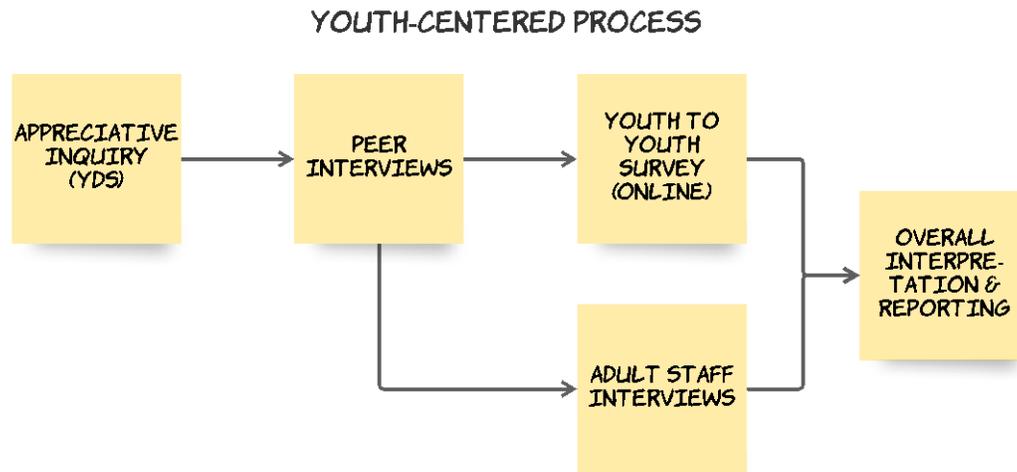
*Appreciative Inquiry (AI)*, pioneered in the 1980s by David Cooperrider and Suresh Srivastva at Case Western Reserve University, is an asset-based approach to facilitating systems change. Instead of focusing on deficits and programs, the AI process involves study participants sharing from their own lives and their own positive experiences on a specific topic. It can then lead to developing a common vision around these experiences, and designing action and organizational change that embodies the community at its best.

The problems and challenges that have caused and exacerbated systemic barriers to youth of color and youth from low-income households have existed for generations. To ask youth to identify deficits in those systems is ineffective and unfair. AI allows the youth to speak about something they, and only they, are the experts in: their own lives and what works to bring about success for them. Exploring “what works”, what is empowering, and what is life-giving, will spur youth and adults to generate innovative and hopeful ideas in partnership. The common vision that is developed from these narratives can then be used for program and service redesign to guide the systems change.

A team of high-school-aged youth were trained as researchers to create and implement the methods to collect the data used for the research, with the support of staff from the Brooklyn Bridge Alliance for Youth. The YDS also assist in analyzing the data to provide their experiences and expertise in formulating the final reporting of results and recommendations.

A multilevel triangulation mixed method design was used for this research project. In a multilevel design, both quantitative and qualitative design are used to address different levels within a system. The findings from each level are merged together into one overall interpretation. The purpose of a triangulation design study is to obtain different viewpoints on the same topic to best understand the research questions. The intent in using this design is to bring together the differing aspects of quantitative methods (large sample size, trends, generalization) with those of qualitative methods (small sample size, details, in depth).

# 2020 YOUTH TO YOUTH RESEARCH



MULTILEVEL TRIANGULATION  
MIXED METHOD DESIGN

*Method 1: Appreciative Inquiry Focus Group.* The Youth Data Squad (YDS) was led through an Appreciative Inquiry process to help confirm the research questions they felt were important.

*Method 2: Youth Interviews.* From the focus group results, the YDS created an interview guide and was trained to conduct interviews with youth using Appreciative Inquiry. The goal was for the YDS to interview 25 youth, representing the race/ethnicity, geographic, gender, and ages in our community who disproportionately experience the effects of COVID-19 and structural racism.

*Method 3: Youth and Public Organization Staff Surveys.* Based on initial results from the Youth and Staff Interviews, an online survey was created for youth in the community to confirm our earlier findings. Working with Youth Survey Partners (see below) and our Executive Leadership Team, the YDS reached out to youth and staff in the community to respond to the surveys. The goal was for 600 youth to complete these surveys.

*Method 4: Public Organization Staff Interviews.* Staff in our public organizations were identified who were knowledgeable about institutional policy, practice, resources, relationships, power dynamics and underlying mindsets (and as much as possible, who were also disproportionately affected by COVID-19 and structural racism). The goal was for the YDS to interview 20 staff in public institutions (member organizations of the Brooklyn Bridge Alliance for Youth). The YDS created an interview guide and were trained to conduct interviews with adult staff.

## Key Stakeholders

Stakeholders were identified as a group or organization affected by the problem, involved in the problem-solving, and/or has a stake in the solution.

- *Youth who live in or attend school in Brooklyn Center and Brooklyn Park:* ages 14-19 years old, Low income / working class, Hispanic or Latinx, Black American, African, Southeast Asian
- *Anoka-Hennepin Schools:* Community Education, Champlin Park HS
- *Brooklyn Center Community Schools:* Administration, Community Education, Brooklyn Center HS
- *City of Brooklyn Park:* Council, Administration, Parks and Recreation, Police
- *City of Brooklyn Center:* Council, Administration, Parks and Recreation, Police
- *Hennepin County:* Commissioner, Public Health, Human Services, Library
- *Hennepin Technical College*
- *North Hennepin Community College*
- *Osseo Area Schools:* Administration, Community Education, Osseo HS, Park Center HS
- *Robbinsdale Area Schools:* Community Education, Robbinsdale Cooper HS

## PROCESS REFLECTIONS

In preparing to implement the research, the Alliance staff identified several challenges that the team would have to overcome for the project to be successful. After the completion of the research process, the YDS and staff reflected on the lessons learned. Both these challenges and lessons learned are discussed below.

### Process Challenges

**Increasing the youth leadership and engagement components required additional staff support, and trust and flexibility in the process.** With the partnership and generous funding of the Forum for Youth Investment, we were able to increase the amount of youth leadership and engagement in our research project this year with the addition of more staff to help us facilitate the process. During the normal process, because of the limited time during the summer, the survey topics would already be selected by Alliance staff and partners by the time the youth researchers started. They were then only responsible for designing the questions, implementing the survey, some analysis and presentation. This year, we started the process by allowing the YDS to begin with the more general research questions and decide what topics they felt were important to them. The challenge is that this process required Alliance staff to be highly flexible to help support and facilitate the implementation.

**The increased scope of the project added more work to complete the research than in previous years.** In order to accomplish those goals mentioned above, additional methods were added to the research. An appreciative inquiry focus group, peer interviews, and adult staff interviews were included. The challenge was designing and implementing those new methods in addition to the youth survey. This included creating the focus group and interview question guides for both the peer and adult interviews, scheduling and facilitating the focus group and interviews, and finally transcribing and analyzing the results. Implementing all of the research and subsequent analysis during one summer was a daunting challenge.

**The youth researchers had to be trained on the research topics and research methods.** Another challenge was finding youth researchers who would be able to take on the responsibility and scope of the work. Although we believe that youth are capable of amazing work, there was not a lot of time to equip and train the YDS on the research topics and research methods, while still having enough time to actually do the research.

**COVID-19 restrictions moved the entire project online.** Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Alliance and its partner institutions moved all non-essential work online. Normally, the Youth Data Squad would meet every day for training and orientation, and to do the research. However, this year, we knew that all meetings would be held on the Zoom video conferencing platform. The challenge was how to make sure the YDS could access, be trained on, and implement the research effectively through online meetings only. Also, in the past, the surveys were administered in-person by our youth researchers going out in the community. This year, we knew that surveying in-person would not be safe for our youth researchers or our community. The challenge was to consider an online alternative to reach a statistically significant number of youth to participate in our youth survey.

## **Process Lessons Learned**

### **Valid, realistic, and reliable research about youth needs to use a youth-centered process.**

The quality of data gathered would not have been possible without the Youth-led Participatory Action Research (YPAR) process. Any research about youth should involve youth in the entire process, so they not only can have a voice in informing how we understand the data, but also have a say from the beginning in determining what data to collect that is valid and credible. It also keeps adults accountable and honest. Too often adults force the data to fit their own narrative. The YDS would check the adult staff periodically to make sure that the data collected was being interpreted from a youth frame instead of just an adult frame. The Appreciative Inquiry Process was also helpful, because it makes youth the expert of their own lives and trying to understand what works for them, instead of asking them to figure out what is wrong with a system that they didn't create in the first place. At the end of the day, engaging youth at this deep level leads to better data that is actionable for the Alliance and its members. Because a leadership role is given to the very group who are most affected by the use of this research, the data will be more valid, it will be more realistic, and it will be more reliable.

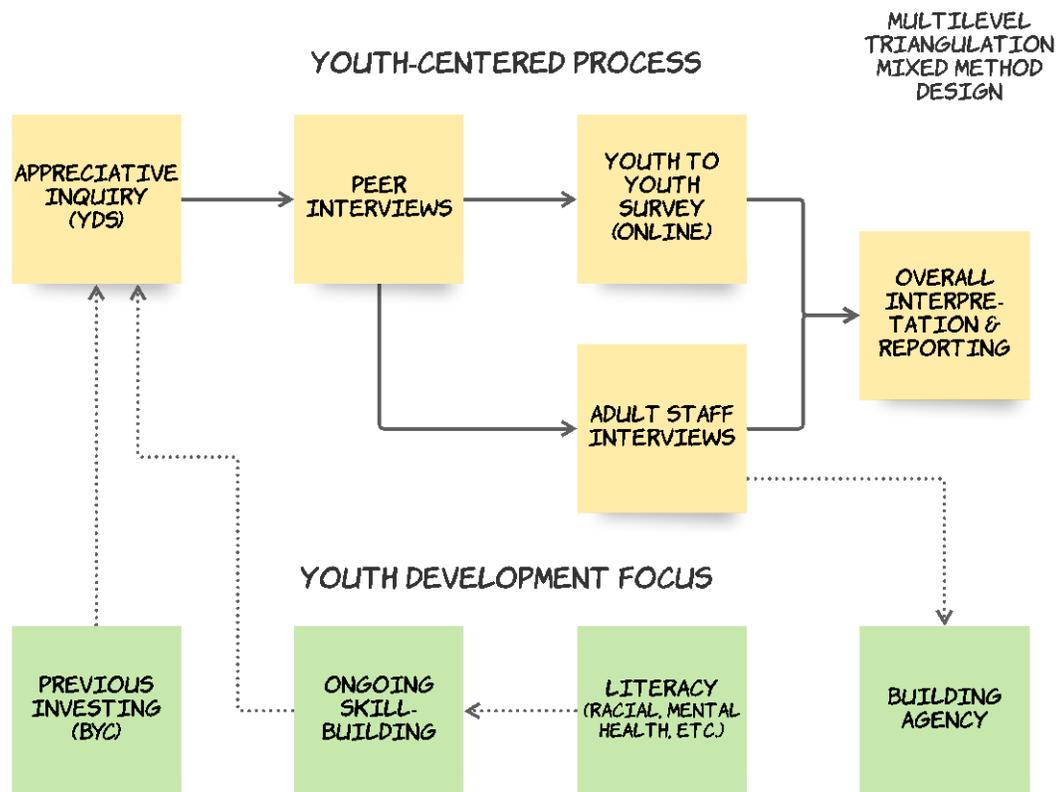
**Youth researchers should be equipped with the research skills to be successful.** If youth are expected to lead the research, they have to have the skills necessary to implement a sound research process. Otherwise, they are being tokenized or used for decoration. The Alliance was able to recruit 4 members of the Brooklyns Youth Council (BYC) to participate in the Youth Data Squad. The BYC is a group of high school aged youth who meet weekly throughout the school year to help provide a voice in collaboration with the community and local government in order to positively raise awareness of problems facing youth. They are trained to think critically, engage other youth and adults in the community, and take action. The 5<sup>th</sup> member of the YDS had experience serving on the advisory committee of the BrookLynk Summer Youth Employment Program. We were fortunate to be able to recruit 5 youth who had extensive experience with critical thinking and engagement. Alliance staff also provided ongoing skills development in how to learn about topics such as COVID-19 and systemic racism, and their effects on our community, as well as skills related to our research including interview and survey question design, how to interview, transcription, how to present, etc.

**Youth need to be made conscious of issues that affect them.** After the peer interviews and discussions with our YDS, it was clear that youth are not always educated about topics that affect them. In our study, we found that youth lacked information about what mental health was, and how to maintain it, and about systemic racism. It's possible that there is a gap in our education system in teaching about those issues, or that we underestimate the ability of youth to understand those topics. It's can also be seen as form of oppression that adds to the inequity, since youth can't speak truth to power if they aren't aware of the truth.

**As a result of this research process, the youth researchers gained a sense of agency.** These opportunities also build our youth researchers' confidence and agency to be better researchers and evaluators, as well as better students and citizens. The YDS reflected that there are not many other opportunities in their lives to learn the skills they learned and to be involved in the type of project like the Youth to Youth Survey. The adult staff interviews allowed them to build the confidence and agency to learn how to talk to adults. Our youth researchers were able to speak as equals to adults in systems they were a part of. And as youth of color, they were able to see and speak to staff of color who held positions of leadership. Our youth researchers called this experience empowering and changed how they saw themselves.

**All of our Alliance partners played a key role in this research project.** Our partnerships were key to reaching students for the online survey. We worked through our Alliance partners, including city park and recreation departments, the county libraries, the school districts and schools, and the college TRiO programs. However, it was difficult to reach students during the summer and the beginning of the school year. It was not until late October and early November that school administrations had enough capacity to push out the survey request to their students. Students were then able to respond in sufficient numbers to get a statistically significant response. It was through the continued and willing efforts of all of our partners to engage the voices of youth in our community that this survey was able to reach the number of youth that it did.

## 2020 YOUTH TO YOUTH RESEARCH



## APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY FOCUS GROUP RESULTS

The Appreciative Inquiry process began with the Research Questions listed previously. The staff prepared articles, documentaries, and other prep work for the YDS to read and watch ahead of time related to the COVID-19 pandemic and systemic racism. Over the course of several days, staff led the YDS through a series of focus group discussions using the research questions. The result of the questions are listed below.

**Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the combination of schools shutting down and the stay at home order was most challenging to the academic success and mental health for members of the Youth Data Squad.**

- *The YDS shared their concerns about getting sick from COVID-19.* Youth talked about being worried about family members who were healthcare workers and whether it was safe for them to go to work. For some, they directly felt the dangers of COVID-19 as family members tested positive and others died.
- *The YDS shared their concerns about employment and meeting basic needs.* Youth, their family members, and significant others had lost their jobs, which in turn led to concerns about how they would pay their bills. Many internships were canceled this summer and it was difficult to find jobs that weren't canceled by the pandemic. Some had received stimulus checks, but for larger families, it wasn't enough.
- *The YDS shared their concerns about being stuck in their houses with their families.* Youth talked about how increased time spent with their families made it difficult for everyone to get along. Even for youth who had their own spaces in the house, tensions still ran high.
- *The YDS shared their concerns about not being as active as they used to be.* Youth talked about how difficult it was not being able to go outside and play sports with friends, especially for those that like to be active. Summer plans were canceled, so youth felt there wasn't much stuff to do locally in their community. What they had originally looked forward to (i.e., vacations) was no longer available. Some students realized that even though they hated school normally, they usually experienced something new or different each day, or at least it forced them into a routine that helped them maintain a schedule.
- *The YDS shared their concerns about being socially isolated from their friends.* Social isolation from peers was really difficult. Youth researchers discussed how being isolated affected how they related to friends. The socially distanced relationships led to some relationships ending. Youth had to navigate new ways to keep up their social relationships. They were used to being surrounded by and interacting with other people than the ones they lived with, at school and in the community. A lot of their socialization happened at school, and they missed a lot of junior and senior year events and activities (i.e., prom, graduation, etc.). The new school schedule also prevented some youth from being able to do things with their family and friends.
- *The YDS shared their concerns about maintaining positive mental health.* Staying in the same environment all the time and being on the computer made them feel depressed. It was a challenge to find new things to do so they weren't stuck inside all of the time.
- *The YDS shared their challenges with online learning.* The youth researchers felt that the biggest changes to their lives due to the COVID-19 pandemic were related to school. The transition from in-person school to online school was difficult. At first, they were happy that school was shut down for 8 days, but when it was extended for another month, they realized that things would be different. This was made more difficult due to a lack of communication from teachers and schools.

- *Not every student had access to the proper technology and internet.* Some students had to scramble to get access to laptops and Internet to be able to access online schooling.
- *Students were less motivated to learn because they were separated from their teachers and classmates.* Some of the YDS found it difficult to be motivated to do online learning. For example, timed English essays didn't seem as relevant. Some mentioned that they missed their teachers and peers, who were the ones who provided encouragement and structure for in-person learning. It was especially difficult to be motivated in classes that never met synchronously. Therefore, students had to motivate themselves.
- *The way online learning was implemented was not effective.* Some of the platforms used to teach were not very effective. Youth mentioned that it was hard to get their questions answered. And it was especially difficult for some classes, like culinary arts, where you have to be in the classroom.
- *Youth had difficulty managing the amount of work.* The YDS said that at first, the transition to online was smooth, but so much work came in, it was hard to manage all of their work. In-person school provided a stricter schedule to keep students on track and there was more intentionality about lessons compared to online learning.
- *The YDS shared what they thought were the positive aspects of online learning.* Not all aspects of online learning were challenging. The youth researchers talked about the parts that they liked.
- *The YDS had more control over how and when they learned.* Gaining more autonomy and control over their learning was beneficial for some students who relished the opportunity to learn more at their pace and learning style. Youth could choose the time of day they wanted to do their schoolwork that suited them the best: they didn't have to worry about getting dressed a certain way, could work with any of their friends, and could take breaks when they needed it. For some subjects like math, they could watch the videos and do the work on their own easily.
- *The YDS felt that they had more time to complete the work.* The youth said they could take the time to do things the way they like it, which allowed them to focus better and feel more independent. There was less of a time crunch, so they could do things online at own their pace. They said that they learned that school doesn't have to happen in an 8 hour strict time period and could be adjusted to students' schedules and learning styles.
- *The YDS said that teachers were providing clearer instructions about how to do the work.* Since so much of the learning was done by the students alone, they felt that it forced teachers to structure the work to be more clear about how to do it and when it needed to be done, so it wasn't a mess thrown at them like it was in the past. This made students feel less anxious.
- *The YDS shared their concerns about the effect of the COVID-19 on their futures.* The youth researchers who were juniors didn't get to take the ACT in April and will have to spend their senior years catching up on everything they missed. For PSEO students, the Accuplacer test in March for PSEO was postponed. Grades were switched to Pass/Fail which will affect some students' GPAs. They were worried about what colleges would consider for admission instead of grades, such as essay or extracurricular activities.

**When asked about the effects of systemic racism in their lives, the Youth Data Squad talked about the importance of their own racial consciousness to understand the history of oppression in our country.**

- *The YDS felt they had a lack of racial consciousness or literacy.* Youth researchers talked about how they never learned about the historical oppression of BIPOC in our country (e.g., mass incarceration, the Tulsa massacre, etc.). They felt that what they did learn at school was skewed towards the white dominant culture.
- *The YDS felt that immigrant communities have a similar experience of systemic racism as those peoples who have been affected in our country's history.* Similar to how our country was built upon slavery, youth researchers felt that today, it is built on the backs of the more recent immigrants. Many of our youth highlighted the struggles that their parents faced in order to provide a better life for their families. However, some youth researchers also talked about how they struggled with their immigrant parents views on systemic racism because it ends up being an "Oppression Olympics" where the historical struggles of oppressions are always compared to their own family's or people's struggles.
- *The YDS had some difficulty thinking of concrete examples of systemic racism in their lives.* They could point to a few instances (e.g., difficulty getting a job, parents not being promoted as often as they should have been, friend not getting placed on sports team, differences in educational opportunities, etc.) but also weren't sure if the reasons were related to systemic racism or not. Another example shared was that when their high school was considering making African American History class required, there was a lot of push-back from white students and staff who didn't want to learn history they felt wasn't their own. Also, some youth talked about how they had begun to internalize their racism, by believing that the biases they experienced compared to their white peers were instead due to the fact that they weren't working hard enough.
- *The YDS shared the importance of being educated about and having spaces to talk about race, culture, and identity.* Some of the local high schools have events and programs that promote conversations around race and history. Students have opportunities to lead and learn about themselves, as people of color. The youth researchers also talked about how ethnic classes (e.g., African American History, Arabic language class, Multicultural Perspectives) helped them to gain a new perspective on the world and added a sense of belonging and identity. One of our staff shared that a college history class about race and race wars in America opened up opportunities for the first time to be in an academic setting where the majority of students were students of color, and where he was able to be himself as a person of color.

**The Youth Data Squad talked about what characteristics they felt created safe and empowering spaces, and life skills that they needed to help them transition to young adulthood and reach their goals.**

- *The YDS shared about the types of spaces and programs they felt safe in and contributed to the successes in their lives.* The youth researchers talked about programs they were a part of that they felt were important to their well-being and success, including: sports teams, Brooklyns Youth Council, Upward Bound, and church groups. Quality measures that contributed to a sense of belonging included: being surrounded by peers and adults that looked like them, having shared purposes, experiences, and interests (e.g., sports), feeling comfortable, not being in competition with others, having others that support their growth.

- *The YDS shared about how safe spaces can impact positive mental health.* For youth who struggle with depression, it can be extremely important to have someone you can talk to who looks like you and can understand your challenges. Some schools have break rooms where you can spend 5-10 minutes or even a whole class period, and speak with a counselor.
- *The YDS shared about the life skills they would like to learn as they transitioned into young adulthood.* Youth researchers talked about classes they wished they could take or that were important for them. Even if the classes were offered at their schools, they didn't always have time on their schedules or the financial resources to take them.
  - *Financial literacy.* Math is important, but understanding how to take care of personal finances was more practical in the real world. This also included: credit and credit cards, how to save effectively, how to pay off debt (or not get into debt), investments, etc. However, this wasn't a priority in schools (i.e., elective class, offered as a before-school option, etc.). Some youth said that they did not discuss anything about money with their families, and some families don't know how to navigate the financial system.
  - *General "adulting" skills.* Youth researchers also mentioned skills they needed like how to rent or buy a place, employment skills, how to make money, cooking skills, how to maintain a car, etc. One of the local high schools offered a Skills for Living class, but the youth researcher said that not everyone knows about it, and there was no curriculum since the instructor was new.
  - *Driver's education.* Many schools did not offer drivers' education free of charge. Many students would wait until they were 18 so they didn't have to take the course to get their license. However, this meant that they didn't have access the personal transportation for jobs, sports, and school activities until they turned 18.
  - *College readiness courses.* For many schools, the advisory period is where preparing for college is supposed to occur, but our youth researchers said that teachers are not equipped to help students prepare. Programs such as AVID are helpful but not everyone knows about it and there is only limited space in the program. Our youth researchers wondered, if high school is supposed to get students ready for college, why isn't AVID (or any other college prep program) required for all students?

## Summary of Results

- **The Youth Data Squad shared their concerns about getting sick from COVID-19, employment, and not being active as they used to be.** Youth talked the direct impact of family members testing positive for COVID-19, losing jobs, and not being able to do the activities they were used to doing.
- **The Youth Data Squad shared their concerns about maintaining their mental health.** Being stuck in their houses with their families and socially isolated from their school and friends, made it challenging to find new ways to maintain positive mental health.
- **The Youth Data Squad shared their challenges with and positive aspects of online learning.** The youth researchers felt that the biggest changes to their lives due to the COVID-19 pandemic were related to school and the transition to online learning. This included accessing technology and internet, finding motivation to learn, difficulties with how the curriculum was ported online, and time management. However, they also had more control over how and when they learned, and they felt that they had more time to

complete the work. Youth researchers also felt that teachers provided clearer instructions about their schoolwork.

- **The Youth Data Squad shared their concerns about the effect of the COVID-19 on their futures.** The youth researchers missed college admission and placement tests, and were concerned about the effect of Pass/Fail grades on their GPAs.
- **The Youth Data Squad talked about the importance of their own racial consciousness to understand the history of systemic racism in our country.** Youth researchers talked about how they never learned about the historical oppression of BIPOC in our country. Having the opportunities to lead and learn about themselves in school would help them to gain a new perspective on the world and a sense of belonging and identity.
- **The Youth Data Squad shared about the characteristics they felt created safe and empowering spaces.** Quality measures that contributed to a sense of belonging included: being surrounded by peers and adults that looked like them, having shared interests (e.g., sports), purposes, and experiences, feeling accepted, having others that would help you grow.
- **The Youth Data Squad shared about the life skills they would like to learn as they transitioned into young adulthood.** Youth researchers discussed wanting classes on financial literacy, general “adulting” skills, driver’s education, and college readiness programs.

## PEER INTERVIEW RESULTS

The next step was to see if a larger sample (N=24) of the YDS’ peers could confirm the validity of the results from the Appreciative Inquiry Focus Group. The YDS received training on interview question design, and then took the results of the focus group and created an Interview Guide (Appendix A). The YDS then received further training on how to conduct interviews.

Youth were recruited by the YDS to represent the diverse Brooklyn community. Interviews were set up on a video conference call with a youth researcher interviewing and an Alliance staff for support. Before each interview, the purpose of the interview and how the interview results would be used were explained, along with promises of compensation for participating and confidentiality. Consent to participate and to be recorded was asked for (and received) before the interviews were begun.

After the interviews were completed, they were transcribed by the YDS. Demographic data was also collected to ensure a diverse sample. The interview answers were thematically analyzed and reported below.

### Demographics

The demographics of the 24 interviewees are listed below. There was a broad mix of students from ages 14-18 years old, race/ethnicity, and schools represented. Note that the race/ethnicity question was open-ended, so youth were free to indicate all races or ethnicities they identified with.

Demographic Category	%
<b>Age</b>	
14	21%
15	8%
16	25%
17	29%
18	17%
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	
Black American	29%
White / European American	29%
African	25%
Asian	25%

Demographic Category	%
<b>Race/Ethnicity (cont.)</b>	
Multiple race/ethnicities	21%
Hispanic or Latino/a	8%
Caribbean	4%
<b>School</b>	
Brooklyn Center HS	17%
Champlin Park HS	33%
Osseo Senior HS	25%
Park Center HS	17%
Robbinsdale Cooper HS	8%

## Results

The interview guide included a few warm-up questions; only findings from the main research questions will be reported on below. For each question, general themes were collected from the interview transcriptions and listed below in order of most to least mentioned. Quotes from the transcripts are also presented below as an example of how the youth talked about each item.

### 1. *What are the things at school that help you to be successful?*

- A. Teachers who teach (42%).** Youth were clear that not all teachers teach well. However, teachers who took the extra time to make sure their students understand the subject were a key to student success.

*Okay, so something that works really well for me is I like when teachers, you know how sometimes they could just like give you the assignment and put you off on your own? I like when they walk through it with us or give us an example.*

*Some things that helped me be successful are when my teachers answer my questions, or they help me out and stuff. It helps me be successful because it helps me understand the work that I'm doing and what I need to do for school.*

- B. Having a connection or relationship with teachers (42%).** Youth felt that having a connection with teacher at school made it easier to ask for help, especially help adapted to their learning styles and life challenges.

*One thing that helps me to be successful at school is having a good relationship with the staff because it is helpful because they are easy to talk to when you need help.*

*So, when I'm in classes I like to create this connection or bond with my teachers, therefore I could have them help me better or communicate with them better. So, when I communicate better they understand me better as well I get the help I need to be successful. (It makes it easier to be successful because) Yes, because they will know the areas I'm weak in and what are my strengths.*

*I guess some teachers are really good with understanding your social life and how you have a lot of things going on. I think teachers that understand, really help.*

- C. Friends (29%).** Having classmates who they could learn together with was mentioned in about a third of the interviews as important to their success.

*And also classmates. Like doing stuff with your friends and combining ideas and working together to make it through.*

- D. Programs and resources that help with college, career, future planning (25%).** Examples given by interviewees included AVID, Upward Bound, and College and Career Readiness Centers, etc.

*I really like the CRC program thing, basically how they have people from different professions come in and speak to us and also they give us different resources for finding a college and helping us out with that stuff. It makes it a lot easier for students who parents haven't attended college and don't really know what they're getting themselves into, or know how to sign up for stuff.*

- E. Sports, clubs, and afterschool activities (21%).** Extracurricular activities were not only enjoyable, but helped youth to feel connected to their schools.

*I'm in the girls tennis team and ever since I joined tennis I've felt more connected to the school just because I get to do things that will help my school, my teammates, and the program.*

- F. Other:** Academic supports (tutoring, study hall, etc.), academic and life skills (time-management, problem-solving, and note-taking), and allowing enough time to learn and complete work

## **2. What parts of school are challenging?**

- A. Scheduling and time-management (33%).** Interviewees talked about having to balance all the work in their different classes, and also with other parts of their lives.

*Definitely time management. Because you have to do school and games. You have to do your sports, activities, volunteering and a job. So that's challenging. I've been using a planner for the past two years, so that really helped.*

- B. Not understanding difficult school subjects (25%).** For some youth interviewed, they named at least one school subject that was challenging for them.

*I think math has been the most challenging subject. I mean, I understand it but some units I really get lost. Like if you get lost in the beginning then you're struggling the whole time.*

- C. Teachers who aren't engaged, not understanding, and/or don't adapt to students' learning styles (17%).** A few youth talked about having teachers who only lectured and didn't spend any effort engaging with students or understanding their specific needs or learning styles.

*I think the classes for sure. Some of the teachers aren't as engaged with the students. The whole point of school is to learn but I think at the same time teachers should engage with their students so that the students have more understanding and stronger relationships with that teacher to ask them more about the lesson.*

- D. Test-taking (17%).** Taking tests was mentioned by some students as being an especially stressful part of school. Not every student best shows how much they have learned by taking tests.

*Sometimes I still don't get it and do bad on the tests. But I just have to keep retaking it sometimes and that's a lot extra stress. I had to stay after school to get extra help to retake the test and then get my grade up and do better.*

- E. Stress, both due to school and life outside of school (13%).** Some youth talked about how stress, both in school and in their lives, make school more challenging. They didn't have the skills to manage that stress well.

*Not getting overwhelmed by school and outside of school. Like, trying to keep focus on school really when everything that's gone crazy.*

- F. School doesn't interest or engage my interests (8%).** Some interviewees said that what they learned in school did not match their interests. They weren't able to connect what they were learning with their future life goals.

*I would rather go to work and make money, or do other activities. School isn't engaging, at least how they set it up to be. I guess it depends on your classes. Math? No. You will not catch me doing math outside of school. I think the whole structure of school is, I don't know, boring, and it does not engage me.*

- G. Other:** Inequitable educational opportunities, difficulties with peer relationships, navigating which classes to choose, and waking up early.

### **3. What parts of online learning have worked for you?**

- A. Flexible to my schedule (68%).** Interviewees talked the most about how online learning provided more flexibility for them to do school on a schedule that worked for their lives and learning style.

*I liked the freedom of online learning just to have your own time to do things instead of having somebody watching me all the time and making sure that I'm doing it at a certain time. I didn't like that during school. I also spread my work out a little bit so I wouldn't stress during the day because I was already mentally struggling. It gave me a lot of anxiety but it helped to spread stuff out, so I wasn't stressing myself out throughout the day.*

- B. Working at my own pace allows more time to finish work (45%).** Along with the flexibility in their school schedule, youth mentioned that online learning allowed them to spend more time to finish their work.

*I thought that it was nice to have everything self-paced. I didn't feel rushed or feel like I wouldn't have enough time to do something and it made it a lot easier for me to get everything done and do it a way that felt sufficient for me, but yeah, I really liked that it was self-paced.*

- C. Easier to manage time (18%).** Youth interviewees mentioned that teachers were posting their class and homework schedules for a few weeks at a time which helped with their time management skills.

*When teachers put out the schedule for the next few weeks, you would know what you needed to do from all your classes and know how to space it out evenly. You could always see what was coming up for the next few days. Some classes are harder and they take more time than others, so I could put the harder classes in front and the easier classes later.*

- D. Questions get answered during teacher's office hours (18%).** Since most teachers have been posting their office hours, interviewees said that they knew when they could get their questions answered.

*They had open office hours for us to have questions. I think that part really helped because before I was having so much trouble because at home I really don't have anyone to ask questions to, so I guess having those open office hours helped me a lot.*

- E. Instructions for my schoolwork are clear (9%).** Youth mentioned that instructions for online learning were clearer than when they were doing in-person school.

*I liked how the instructions to assignments were super easy to understand and I was not confused at all during the whole process. All the teachers were very clear with their instructions and what they wanted from us.*

- F. Other:** More comfortable being at home, Zoom video chats, online learning is easier, and less social anxiety being alone.

#### **4. What parts of online learning have been challenging for you?**

- A. Difficult to ask teachers questions (41%).** Interactions between teachers and students are now much more difficult with classes being online, and students felt that questions they had were not getting answered, which impacted their learning.

*For my class, it was hard for me to ask a question because the teacher would just be teaching and he wouldn't be able to see the comment in the Zoom chat. Yeh, cause usually you just walk up to them but now he has to finish the lesson before he actually sees what you're texting so that's the hardest thing.*

- B. No motivation or encouragement from teachers (32%).** Interviewees mentioned that an important part of in-person learning was how teachers could help provide

motivation and encouragement to learn, which was now missing that they were not physically at school. Many students did not have daily or even weekly video check-ins with their teachers.

*It was the motivation part, like wanting to actually get up and do work. And that is also where friends and having people and teachers at school come in, because they motivate me to get things done. But, at home, it is the comfort of my home, so I sometimes don't want to do it.*

- C. Lack of connection with teachers (23%).** Youth said that distance learning made it difficult for them to build relationships with their teachers, which they felt affected how well they learned.

*Since we just started a new trimester I didn't really get the chance to know my teachers and I was hesitant to communicate with them.*

- D. Struggled with time management (23%).** Some youth struggled with procrastination and the lack of structure that they had when school was in-person.

*Thinking that I have enough time to chill for too long. I think during finals week, I have time, I can do 200 words in a day. The day went by and I kind of just sat there and I didn't do anything. The next day I had to stay up until 2 in the morning doing homework which kind of messed up my sleeping schedule and it's still messed up today. I think I procrastinate more, which I'm already bad at.*

- E. Lack of interaction with classmates (18%).** Students not only benefit from the social support from friends during school, but also peers help in the learning process.

*I really don't like not being away from everybody. It gets a little lonely sometimes but that's pretty hard. It can be hard to learn a whole course online just cause you're not in the classroom.*

- F. Teachers are not able to translate learning to online environment (18%).** Not every teacher managed the transition to distance learning well. Some interviewees felt that the way their classes were taught online made it more difficult to learn.

*I had an AP government class. I did not know what they were talking about. I am pretty sure I failed the AP test. I don't want to blame the teacher because she did all she could, but some teachers did an absolute horrific job of relating the curriculum to online because, wow, I did not learn anything and I can say that for a fact.*

- G. Other:** Technology problems.

**5. In addition to your family and friends, what spaces or groups do you feel a sense of belonging, and support you to succeed in life and overcome barriers? How do these spaces or groups create a sense of belonging?**

Starting with a question to ask youth interviewees about a space or group where they felt a sense of belonging was a great warm-up question to better understand what makes a space one they feel connected to since they already had a real-life example in their minds. Note that only the results of the follow-up question are presented below.

- A. Safe and trusting space to share (42%).** The youth we spoke to talked about the importance of a space they felt safe enough to share about the issues they were concerned about. This was directly related to the level of trust they had with the other people in the space or group.

*I go to youth group at my church. It's just a safe place to talk about myself, my religion and how I feel. We talk about mental health and all those other things. I guess them understanding and knowing that nothing really leaves the room that we're talking in. We talk about things that are going on with our life and we just engage with each other because we're all going through the same experiences.*

- B. Have the same goal (38%).** Interviewees mentioned that sharing the same goal as others in the group helped them feel connected with everyone else.

*I think it's because everyone has the same goal as (the leaders) would say. We're kind of aiming to do the same thing so there's always a baseline similarity so you get along with most people and you feel at home because everybody is the same as you.*

- C. Helps you reach your goals (38%).** Youth shared that having people help you succeed, challenge you, and provide leadership opportunities was important.

*Like the risk that I would never take like dissecting a pig, now I have a pig in my house. I probably would have never done that if it wasn't for them to push me a little bit more to do that. They also just push me to get my work done, which I'm good with but I like to push it off but they help me with pushing me more and telling me "this is where you want to go and we'll get you there."*

- D. Feel supported and encouraged (33%).** Knowing that there were people you could turn to who would support you whenever you needed was very important.

*So anytime someone was feeling left out or sad, we used to do this thing called "The Love Seat". For example, I'd sit on a chair in front of the rest of the team, and then every single person would say something that they liked about me or that they appreciated—why they liked having me on the team. And that made me feel so good.*

- E. Feel accepted and that you are being treated fairly (21%).** The youth talked about spaces they felt a sense of belonging to accepted them for who they were and not excluding anyone.

*In our youth group I feel a sense of belonging because everybody's treated the same. It's a good setting because it's fun and everyone is nice to each other. By not excluding other people and they just accept everybody.*

- F. Having sharing experiences (21%).** Having a shared experience provided a point of connection for classmates, teammates, or co-workers.

*Work would be the closest. We are all there for the same reason: money. And we all do the same things, like handle money, give food to customers. We can relate to that*

*particular job and criteria. We can relate to everything, the managers, customers, the work itself. That's what kind of bonds everyone together.*

- G. Being with people like yourself (17%).** Especially for our BIPOC youth, having a space where other people had the same shared culture, gender, etc. helped them feel more connected.

*The Hmong women's circle group helps me a lot. We would talk about our feelings a lot and it really helped me open up to more people and it helped me talk more. We talked a lot about our culture and what it was like being a Hmong woman in our culture. I guess I could really relate to every topic we'd talk about.*

- 6. We normally only talk about mental health when there is a crisis, but just like our physical health, we should be working on maintaining good mental health. What are ways or resources that help to maintain your mental health?**

- A. Talking to friends (61%).** Talking to friends about their problems was the most mentioned way by youth to maintain mental health.

*Definitely talking to friends, I have a group of friends I could talk to about anything. So, if I'm struggling with something like COVID and George Floyd sadly, I can just talk to them about what's going down to get stuff off my chest. Which helps just rant out.*

- B. Talking to family (39%).** Interviewees also said that talking to family was an important way to maintain mental health.

*My family, since they know me so well, they know how to help me calm down and they know how to make me feel happy and less stressed.*

- C. Seeing a therapist or counselor (26%).** About a quarter of the youth mentioned that it was helpful to see a therapist or other type of counselor.

*I talked to my counselor a little bit, not too much. If I had my own problem at school, like I wanted to ask about a college, or change my schedule, or something wasn't right with a class, the counselor was always there. And they were only focused on me and or just helping me out; good listeners and people to talk to.*

- D. Staying busy (26%).** Youth shared about different hobbies or activities they did to keep their minds off of their stress, such as music, video games, cheerleading, volunteering, or hobbies.

*I think my sport... like cheering, really helps. I love being around my team and like making other people happy. Volunteering really helps too. I like seeing a change in my community. Helping with food drives or just helping at the hospitals I volunteer at, it really helps.*

- E. Mindfulness techniques (13%).** Some youth have learned about and practice different mindfulness techniques such as calming and meditation.

*Meditating has really helped me, even when I didn't understand it fully. I was calming myself down and I think it's really helped me along my path. I usually meditate when*

*I need to, when I get super overwhelmed and stressed. I feel a lot more at peace. I feel connected with my present self and the surroundings around me.*

**F. Other:** Working out or going for a walk and writing or journaling.

Aside from what the youth interviewees said about how they tried to maintain their mental health, there was also a theme throughout the interviews of it being a difficult subject to broach personally or in their families. A few examples from the transcripts are listed below.

*For me, mental health is a really touchy subject, I don't really know a better word for that.*

*I don't think my mom really cared that I was in school that much. She didn't really ask what I was doing or if I was okay. There wasn't much in support for mental health during online learning. Yeah, kind of like she didn't acknowledge almost. I was kind of sad. I was like, why am I doing if nobody is going to notice it. I kind of lost motivation but I'm like, when I think back to myself, the reason I'm doing this is for myself and for some people but mostly for myself to better my future. I didn't really deal with (the emotions). I just shoved them in the corner and kept moving. I do think it is important to have someone to talk to about your emotions or something because just bottling it up is not the best thing to do. It builds it up until it explodes. You bottle up all the emotions and eventually you release it and everything goes haywire, after that there is no control. Even if they're not listening to you I think it's important to get all your emotions off your chest, like saying them out loud.*

As the YDS discussed these underlying themes, their reflections added two other issues to consider about mental health.

**G. Stigma in families to discuss mental health.** Many of our youth researchers talked about how in the personal experience, there was a stigma about talking about mental health issues because of their cultural or immigrant backgrounds.

**H. Lack of understanding about what mental health is and how to maintain it.**

Another important understanding was that reading through the answers to this question, it seemed to the YDS that the youth they interviewed were mostly discussing how they handled situations that had evolved into more serious mental health crises, not necessarily how they maintained positive mental health. Also, many of the YDS also admitted that they actually didn't know much about what mental health was. They had associated it with *mental health crisis or mental illness* only, but never thought about mental health as something to maintain.

**7. Have you ever felt discrimination or were treated differently because of your race or culture, in your school, sports, workplace, city services, or communities?**

**A. In my community (38%).** This includes incidents in the neighborhoods, work, stores, DMV, and at church.

*Me and my sister wanted to be in this musical. I wanted to play this girl with red hair and glasses. So, I memorized all the lines, all the songs. Then, I killed the audition, but the choir teacher said, "you can't be her". It was because I wasn't white that I couldn't be her even though I was the only one with the lines memorized.*

- B. No, I have never felt discrimination (33%).** A third of our youth interviewees said that they had never felt discriminated against or treated differently.

*No, I guess it's just that I grew up in a very diverse community and neighborhood that I think I never experienced any of that.*

- C. In my school (29%).** Almost a third of students felt that they were discriminated against in school.

*I've seen discrimination in school mostly because I'm a Muslim, and the fact that I'm Somali they would think I don't know why she's wearing a hijab half the time. When they think of a Somali kid they think that we are really crazy, sort of dangerous, and all of that. That's why it's a hard time for me to fit in because they don't mind bothering with a little Somali girl like me.*

- D. Microaggressions (29%).** Almost a third of youth interviewees said that microaggressions were how they felt bias in their lives.

*It's not full discrimination but it's more like subtle things, like subtle jokes. That really gets to me. For example, one person comes and talks to me differently then he talks to his white friend. He tries to use more slang and assumes I do more "black things" like playing basketball and stuff like that.*

- E. Online/gaming (8%).** A few of the youth mentioned social media and gaming as places where they experienced racism.

*I think the only time I experienced it is online. I guess it's a gaming thing because whenever people get very mad they let out racial slurs.*

**8. What skills or classes would you need to be successful in your transition to young adulthood?**

- A. Financial literacy (83%).** Almost all of our youth interviewees said that they needed financial literacy classes to help them learn about how to manage their money well.

*Probably classes to teach you money management, how to buy a house and how to have good credit. Like stuff you need to know about money because if you can't handle your money good, how are you going to buy your own things?*

- B. General adulting skills (35%).** Youth were concerned about knowing how to do things such as pay taxes, renting an apartment, taking care of your health, or paying bills as they looked forward to living on their own.

*I also think school should teach us how to do our taxes, and teach us how to do simple things like writing a check, or stuff having to do with money and just paying bills, anything like that. They rely on our parents to teach us and a lot of kids either don't have parents, don't have reliable parents, don't have parents that could help them with that stuff. And I feel like they should be teaching us life skills, rather than just academics.*

- C. College-readiness programs (22%).** All schools have college readiness programs but they either opt-in or available for only a limited number of students.

*My parents, they went to colleges in different countries and it was different back then than it is now and they definitely do not know how to work FASFA and all these other things that I need to apply for, and how to get money and how much college actually costs. So, I feel like if they could teach us how to do all those things in school, it would be easier not only on us, but on our parents. And I could help teach my younger siblings as well, when they get to that point.*

- D. Employment / career (17%).** Some youth interviewees asked for support in finding, applying for, and getting hired for jobs.

*Anything that has to do with work is really important because a lot of schools don't actually have that. Things like, what builds a strong resume and things that would help you with interviews. Some people don't have that many resources and don't have the connections either so if there were classes about it, it would help them. It would definitely help me understand the process of applying for a job. And when you get one, the papers you are signing, you want to understand exactly what you're signing and what you're agreeing to.*

- E. Cooking (13%).** Interviewees mentioned wanting cooking and food classes. There are many offered in high school, but they are all elective courses. Students needing to take core classes don't have opportunities to take these classes.

*I know they have food classes, I should probably take more of those so I know how to make my own food at home. And be healthy about it in ways like that. I don't think I ever took it because I had other classes that were more important than food classes at the time.*

- F. Driver's education (13%).** For youth under 18 years of age, in order to receive their driver's license, they need to take a driver's education course. These courses are cost several hundred dollars. Youth see getting their license and the access to transportation as an important part of preparing for young adulthood.

*I want to start driving by the time I am 16 and start everything as early as possible and get a job and start saving to go to college.*

- G. Mental health (9%).** Youth discussed the need to learn about care for their mental health, especially in handling the stress of school.

*I feel like we should have a class that people can just relax and everything, more like a support group than anything. We should have a class that we can take a break in the day, you know?*

- H. Other skills or classes mentioned.** Social-emotional learning, public speaking, reading, foreign language, math, vocational trade, self-defense, and African-American history.

## Summary of Findings

- **Youth interviewed felt that teachers who taught well and who were engaged were important to their school success.** These teachers provided clear instruction, answered questions promptly, and were able to translate learning especially into an online environment. Not all of their teachers taught this way: some teachers did not do anything more than provide minimal instruction with no engagement.
- **Youth interviewed felt that connections with their teachers also made learning easier.** Students said that it made it easier to ask for help and also allowed teachers to better understand their specific needs or learning styles. They especially appreciated teachers who made efforts to get to know each of the students individually. Youth who struggle in school don't always feel comfortable to approach their teachers when they need help, which exacerbates the situation. Distance learning revealed to many students how much motivation and encouragement teachers provided when they were at school.
- **Youth interviewed liked or disliked aspects of distance learning depending on their preferred learning style.** Students who needed more flexibility in their schedules or to work at their own pace liked those parts of online learning. However, other students preferred the structure of "regular" in-person school because it provided help managing their time and they needed more support from teachers and classmates. The YDS discussed how teachers tend to only teach one way, which does not cater to students with different learning styles.
- **Youth interviewed talked the importance of spaces where they felt a sense of belonging.** Connection to school through participation in sports or clubs helped them succeed in school. For some youth, academic learning was closely connected to how well they interacted with classmates. The top characteristics these spaces created belonging were: having a safe and trusting space to share, having the same goal as others, people there help you reach your goals, and feeling supported and encouraged.
- **Youth interviewed talked about how they dealt with mental health crises, discussed the stigma around talking about it in their families, and revealed a lack of understanding about what mental health is (vs. a mental health crisis or mental illness).** Interviewees talked about the different types of mental stress they had to endure in and out of school, which was especially difficult because they were isolated from their friends and extended family. There were many comments about how this was a difficult topic to talk about. Also, the answers collected addressed more how to handle a mental health crisis, instead of maintaining mental health. While analyzing the results, the YDS admitted that this lack of knowledge of mental health as a topic and how to maintain it was true for them as well.
- **Youth interviewed did not seem to have the right tools and language to identify systemic racism, or see how it affected their lives.** Interviewees named some situations of personal racism but did not talk about more systemic forms of racism they experienced. Similar to what the YDS talked about in the Appreciative Inquiry Focus Group, it seems that youth in general have a lack of understanding of systemic racism. It wasn't a topic that they learned in school or any other parts of their lives
- **Youth interviewed felt they were lacking many skills that would help them after high school, whether that be college, career, or life in general.** Financial literacy, general adulting skills, and college readiness programs were the top 3 topics

requested. Most of these were not offered as classes in their schools, or were offered, but did not provide enough depth, were only offered as electives they had no time for, or were only available to a limited number of students. The YDS postulated that many youth did not see the connection between what they were learning in school and what they needed to reach their goals in life.

## **YOUTH TO YOUTH SURVEY RESULTS**

From the initial results of the Appreciative Inquiry Focus Group and the Peer Interviews, an online survey was created for youth in the Brooklyns community to validate some of the findings. The YDS was trained in creating quantitative and qualitative survey questions. The survey questions are included in Appendix B.

For previous surveys, youth researchers went out into the community to find youth to participate. However, due to safety restrictions because of the COVID-19 pandemic, this method was not possible this summer. An online survey was created in Survey Monkey. Working with our Alliance partners, the YDS reached out to youth to respond to the surveys online. The survey targeted youth ages 14-19.

The goal was for 600 youth to complete these surveys. For a population of 15,000 youth (ages 10-19) in the Brooklyns, a sample size that would give us a 95% confidence level that our data is statistically significant and a 5% margin of error, would be 368 youth. Initially, there was a slow response in the summer. After the school year started, our school, college, park and recreation, and library partners again promoted the survey through social media, email, online education platforms, and by word of mouth, and we were able to achieve our goals. A total of 766 responses were received.

The data was analyzed and the results are shown below. From the demographic analysis, some schools were overrepresented and others under-represented compared to student residence data we received from the school districts. The data from two schools was weighted to better align the percentages to ensure more balanced results.

### **Demographics**

The demographics of the respondents are listed below. There was a broad mix of students from ages, gender, race/ethnicity, schools, and residence represented. Note that the race/ethnicity question was open-ended, so youth were free to indicate all races or ethnicities they identified with.

From student residence data received from schools, the expected school attendance percentages of Brooklyns students and/or residents are: Brooklyn Center HS (8%), Champlin Park HS (40%), Osseo Senior HS (17%), Park Center HS (30%), and Robbinsdale Cooper HS (5%).

Demographic Category	%
<b>Age</b>	
13 and under	1%
14	16%
15	23%
16	24%
17	24%
18	8%
19	1%
20 and above	1%
Prefer Not To Answer	3%
<b>Gender</b>	
Female	59%
Male	36%
Non-binary / Third gender	1%
Prefer not to say	2%
Prefer to self-describe	2%
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	
	<b>%</b>
White / European American	31%
African	22%
Asian	17%
Black American	10%
Hispanic or Latino/a	11%
Native American / American Indian	2%
Prefer not to say	3%
Another race or ethnicity	3%

Demographic Category	%
<b>School</b>	
Park Center HS	27%
Osseo Senior HS	22%
Champlin Park HS	19%
Brooklyn Center HS	15%
Robbinsdale Cooper HS	5%
Graduated	4%
Post-Secondary	1%
Other	5%
<b>Residence</b>	
North Brooklyn Park	23%
Brooklyn Center	22%
East Brooklyn Park	12%
West Brooklyn Park	10%
Maple Grove	7%
Champlin	8%
Minneapolis	4%
Crystal	3%
Osseo	2%
Robbinsdale	1%
New Hope	1%
Other	8%

A residence demographic question was added this year so that we could ensure a more representative sampling from all parts of Brooklyn Center and Brooklyn Park. Census tracts were examined for youth population and the cities were divided into four geographic segments. The expected percentages if only considering resident youth are: Brooklyn Center (24%), East Brooklyn Park (24%), North Brooklyn Park (29%), and West Brooklyn Park (23%). The question on the Youth to Youth Survey asked respondents where they lived including these segments as well as surrounding cities. The map and a descriptor of the boundaries of these segments are included below.

- Brooklyn Center
- East Brooklyn Park (south of 85<sup>th</sup> Ave and east of Zane Ave)
- North Brooklyn Park (north of 85<sup>th</sup> Ave)
- West Brooklyn Park (south of 85<sup>th</sup> Ave and west of Zane Ave or Brooklyn Blvd)



## RESULTS

In addition to the overall data displayed below, using the demographic data, we were able to disaggregate data based on race and ethnicity, age, and gender. The term Younger means youth ages 15 and below, and Older means youth ages 16 and above. Where there are significant (>10%) differences, that data is shown below. We use the term BIPOC, which stands for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color to identify students of color. White signifies the group of youth who only selected white as their race/ethnicity category.

The data is disaggregated because we know that combined data sometimes masks patterns that point to root issues. Many of our systems benefit certain groups over others. So, it's important that we understand the point of separating out this data is not to point out deficits in any particular group of youth, but to better understand the challenges youth face in life and to come up with better targeted solutions.

### School (General)

The initial Appreciative Inquiry discussion with the Youth Data Squad asked the youth researchers about the effect of COVID-19. After probing at all the challenges in the literature (social isolation, family unemployment, etc.), the YDS thought that they all stemmed from a singular source that they spent most of their time and energy on: school.

With the results from the Peer Interview, the YDS realized the core issues were about how youth experienced the academic and social aspects of school in general, whether online or in-person. This first question is a list of quality measures that the YDS felt were important for youth

success in life and school. The YDS wanted to understand how many youth in the community experienced these measures at school.

The survey found that for the first 4 of these important measures listed above, 50% or less of students told us that they experience these at school.

<i>Which of the following do you experience at school?</i>	Overall %
I learn about my identity and culture, and all the other cultures represented in my school	46%
I have teachers who understand challenges in my personal life and make adjustments when necessary	47%
I have enough time to learn and do schoolwork at school	48%
I have teachers who accommodate for different learning styles and paces	50%
I learn academic and life skills (note-taking, time management, social skills, leadership, etc.)	58%
I have good relationships and connections with teachers and counselors at school	59%
I have friends who help support me and work together with me on schoolwork	64%
I have a choice in which classes I am interested in taking	68%
I have teachers who take time to explain concepts to me and answer my questions	73%

<i>[Looking at the data by race/ethnicity, gender, and age]</i>	BIPOC %	White %	Female %	Male %	Younger %	Older %
I learn about my identity and culture, and others' cultures			43%	53%	53%	42%
I have teachers who understand challenges in my personal life	43%	57%			39%	52%
I have enough time to learn and do schoolwork at school			44%	57%		
I have friends who help support me and work together with me	61%	73%				
I have a choice in which classes I am interested in taking	63%	79%				

When the data was disaggregated:

- Female youth felt that they learned less (compared to Male youth) about identity and culture, and did not have enough time to learn and do schoolwork.
- Older youth felt that they learned less (compared to Younger youth) about identity and culture.
- Younger youth felt that they had fewer teachers (compared to Older youth) who understood the challenges in their lives and made adjustments.
- BIPOC students felt that their teachers made adjustments for challenges in their lives less often than their white peers, felt they had fewer friends who helped support them, and had less choice in which classes they could take.

## School (Online)

From our initial discussions with the YDS and from the results of the peer interviews, we knew that some aspects of online learning were attractive and other aspects were challenging. The next set of data explored youth’s experience of online learning.

Ninety-two percent (92%) of youth answered that at least one part of online learning that worked for them and 98% of youth answered that at least one part of online learning that was challenging for them. The top aspects of online learning that youth felt worked for them were the ability to do schoolwork when they wanted to on their schedule and the ability to have more time to complete assignments.

<i>What are the parts of online learning that work for you?</i>	Overall %
Able to do schoolwork when I want to on my schedule (ex. don't need to get up early to go to school)	67%
Able to have more time to complete assignments (compared to in-person schooling)	59%
Having the schedule ahead of time helps with time management	53%
Open office hours so I can ask my teachers questions	51%
Being at home: more comfortable and/or I'm able to focus better on learning	50%
In control of the type and style of learning that fits me	46%
Weekly video chats that are interactive with teachers and classmates (vs. only watching videos or reading)	39%
No answer or “Nothing”	8%
Other	3%

The most challenging aspects of online learning for youth were having to motivate themselves to do the work, struggling with time management, and not being able to participate in school and social activities.

<i>What are the parts of online learning that are challenging for you?</i>	Overall %
Have to motivate myself to actually do the work since teachers are not there to encourage you	70%
Struggled with time management and procrastination because there is no daily schedule	58%
Not being able to participate in the normal school or social activities	57%
No classmates there to ask for help or work together with you	52%
Some school classes and/or curriculum do not fit with online learning	47%
No connection (or relationship) with teachers	41%
No opportunity for teachers to further explain or to answer questions about assignments	37%
Teachers don't respond to questions in a timely or complete manner	34%
Wi-Fi or Internet connection was spotty or too slow, causing problems with online learning	31%
Problems with technology: using online apps (example: Schoology) or computers / tablets / cell phones	28%
Other	6%

One interesting finding is that some of our YDS and peer interviewees liked certain aspects of online learning that others found challenging. Youth who wanted more autonomy in their learning enjoyed that aspect of online learning. On the other hand, youth who needed more structure and help with time management thought that aspect was challenging.

One way to understand these findings is that not every youth has the same learning style. Some have flourished in the typical in-person school setting pre-pandemic that have struggled as it has transitioned to online. Others have struggled with the in-person, more structured setting, but have flourished when given more flexibility and freedom. Possibly, the lesson here is that students would be more successful academically if teachers and schools understood and adapted to their learning styles better. That would require getting to know students and their learning styles, and then different options for learning.

## BELONGING

Similar to the Peer Interviews, the YDS included questions about belonging to understand what quality measures help create connectedness. The Center for Disease Control & Prevention, on their website on School Connectedness, finds that a sense of belonging is an important protective factor. “Research has shown that young people who feel connected are less likely to engage in many risk behaviors, and more likely to have higher grades and test scores, have better school attendance, and stay in school longer.”

<i>Besides your family and friends, what spaces or groups do you feel a sense of belonging, and support you to succeed in life and overcome barriers? [Open-ended]</i>	Overall %
Sports team	22%
Nothing, none, or I don't know	20%
Afterschool, clubs, school activities, college preparedness and work readiness activities	13%
School, including class, teachers, and counselors	12%
Faith or faith community	8%
Family or friends	7%
Visual or performing arts	6%
Work	5%
Online groups (gaming, Discord, social media, etc.)	4%
Affinity group (cultural community, LGBTQ+, etc.)	2%
Other	11%

A noteworthy finding is that 1 out of 5 (20%) respondents told us that they didn't have a space that they felt a sense of belonging or support.

<i>[Looking at the data by race/ethnicity, and age]</i>	BIPOC %	White %	Younger %	Older %
Sports team	15%	40%		
Afterschool, clubs, school activities, college preparedness and work readiness activities			6%	18%
Visual or performing arts	3%	14%		

When the data was disaggregated:

- BIPOC youth felt less a sense of belonging in sports teams and visual or performing arts than their white peers.
- Younger youth felt less a sense of belonging (compared to Older youth) in school day or afterschool activities.

The finding about the disparity in sense of belonging in sports teams was interesting, since our previous Youth to Youth Survey (2018) found that 73% of all youth were interested in participating in sports. Why would only 15% of BIPOC youth report that sports teams are where they feel a sense of belonging? Is it because BIPOC youth have less opportunity to participate in organized sports? Or is it because when they do participate in sports teams, they don't feel the same sense of belonging as their white peers?

<i>Which of the following do you experience at school? [Looking at the data by race/ethnicity]</i>	Overall %	BIPOC %	White %
I feel a sense of belonging at school or in school activities (clubs, sports teams, etc.)	48%	44%	61%

The follow-up question was aimed to help understand what important measures create a sense of belonging, based on the results from the Peer Interviews.

<i>When you are in these spaces or with these groups, how do they create a sense of belonging? [Check all that apply.]</i>	Overall %
I feel accepted for who I am and not judged	63%
I am with people like myself (i.e., age, gender, race, culture, etc.) who I can relate to and who understand me	60%
People are available to support and encourage me anytime	53%
They help me to succeed: teaching me, challenging me to do more, give me leadership opportunities, etc.	53%
Everyone has the same goal and focus (i.e., winning, graduation, going to college, working, etc.)	50%
We have shared experiences	49%
It provides a safe space for me to talk about myself, my feelings, or things I'm experiencing	48%
Other	5%

Youth respondents affirmed that these were all important aspects of what creates a sense of belonging.

## PREPARING FOR YOUNG ADULTHOOD

Youth are on the cusp of young adulthood, and the conversations with the Youth Data Squad uncovered a gap in their readiness for this important transition. Many of the youth researchers felt that school, and other parts of their lives were not adequately preparing them for what is colloquially known as “adulting skills”. We asked their peers in the interviews to expand on what areas they would like to grow in their skills in, and we took those results for the survey.

Only around half of youth responded that they feel that they receive the help they need to plan for the future (55%), and that they understand how what they are learning relates to their lives and future.

<i>Which of the following do you experience at school? [Looking at the data by race/ethnicity]</i>	Overall %	BIPOC %	White %
I have help planning for my future	55%	52%	64%
I understand how what I'm learning relates to my life and future	49%		

Furthermore, when the data was disaggregated, BIPOC students felt even less that they had help planning for their future than white students. This finding was echoed below in their request for college readiness classes at a higher rate than white students.

From the answers received in the Peer Interviews, the YDS created a question on the online survey to understand from youth in the community, which skills or classes they felt they needed.

<i>What skills or classes would you need to be successful in your transition to young adulthood? (Check all that apply.)</i>	Overall %
Financial literacy classes: personal money management, credit, paying bills, taxes, etc.	78%
College readiness classes: financial aid, applying, college visits, etc.	71%
Employment skills: filling out an application, creating a resume, how to interview, etc.	71%
Social-emotional learning skills: persistence, time management, etc.	62%
Driver's education	60%
Mental health classes: mindfulness, yoga, relaxation, etc.	53%
Health and fitness classes	41%
Cooking classes	39%
Other	4%

As noted in the Peer Interviews section, many of these classes are already offered in high schools, but not every student knows they are available, has the option to take them, or space is limited.

<i>[Looking at the data by race/ethnicity, gender, and age]</i>	BIPOC %	White %	Female %	Male %	Younger %	Older %
College readiness classes: financial aid, applying, college visits, etc.	76%	61%	77%	63%	71%	72%
Social-emotional learning skills: persistence, time management, etc.	62%	65%	68%	55%	61%	63%
Driver's education	64%	48%	57%	64%	76%	48%
Mental health classes: mindfulness, yoga, relaxation, etc.	54%	53%	64%	37%	46%	59%

When the data was disaggregated:

- BIPOC youth answered that they needed college readiness classes and driver's education at a higher percentage than their white peers.
- Female youth said they needed college readiness classes, social-emotional learning skills, and mental health classes at a higher percentage than their Male peers.
- Older youth responded that they needed driver's education and mental health classes more than their Younger peers.

Also knowing that Male youth (especially Black American Male youth) are not accessing college at the same rates as their peers, there may be another reason why Female youth said they needed college readiness classes more than their Male peers: Male youth had less interest in attending college. Therefore, further research is recommended on this issue.

## MENTAL HEALTH

Mental health was an important topic, especially with the restrictions by the county, the cities, the colleges, and the schools due to COVID-19 limiting social interaction and the ability to access safe spaces.

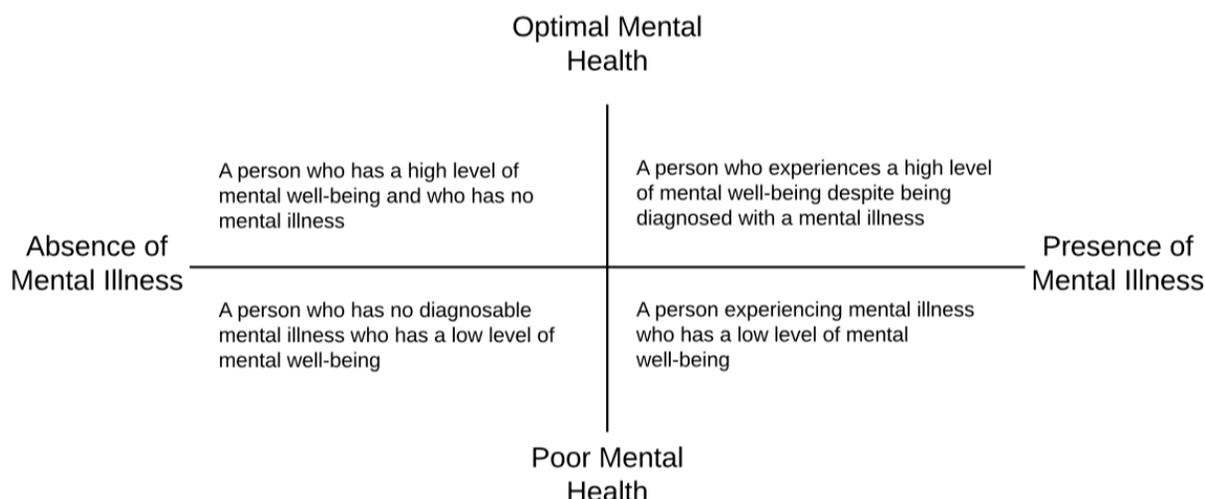
However, we learned from our discussions with the Youth Data Squad, and which was confirmed with our Peer Interviews, that many youth do not actually learn about mental health in school or other parts of their lives. The following are excerpts from an Alliance white paper on mental health that details some of the important aspects of mental health that the YDS felt were important to understand.

**Mental health is not just the absence of mental illness, but includes positive emotions, and psychological and social functioning.**

First, we must define what mental health is and is not. An Emory University professor of social psychology defines mental health as not just the absence of mental illness, but being filled with positive emotion, and functioning well psychologically and socially (Keyes, 2002).

**Mental health and mental illness are interrelated, but are on separate dimensions.**

At the same time, mental health and mental illness are not simply at opposite ends of a single spectrum. Young people diagnosed with a mental illness can still have high levels of general mental well-being, while those without a diagnosed mental illness can show low levels of mental well-being. Mental health is best understood as a matrix, where people can move among states of mental well-being regardless of mental illness. They can flourish or languish, depending on individual functioning, social well-being and mental health issues. This model again emphasizes that mental health is not simply the absence of mental illness. This means that it's possible to have good mental health while living with mental illness, or to have poor mental health even without a mental illness.



With this idea of mental health literacy or consciousness in mind, we included a few questions on the Youth to Youth Survey to ask about youth’s experience learning about mental health at school, and whether they felt they needed more education on this topic.

<i>Which of the following do you experience at school?</i>	Overall %
I learn about what mental health is and how to maintain it	40%

Youth reported that only 40% felt that they learn at school about what mental health is and how to maintain it.

<i>What skills or classes would you need to be successful in your transition to young adulthood?</i>	Overall %
Mental health classes: mindfulness, yoga, relaxation, etc.	53%

When asked about skills or classes they need as they transition to young adulthood, almost half (53%) of youth responded with mental health classes.

<i>[Looking at the data by gender and age]</i>	Female %	Male %	Younger %	Older %
Mental health classes: mindfulness, yoga, relaxation, etc.	64%	37%	46%	59%

And when the data was disaggregated:

- Female youth (64%) and Older youth (59%) named mental health classes at an even higher percentage than Male youth (37%) and Younger youth (46%).

The next question explored what youth thought would help them to maintain their mental health.

<i>What would help you maintain your mental health? [Check all that apply.]</i>	Overall %
Hobbies	70%
Talking with friends or family about things that stress you out	60%
Exercise / going for a walk or hike	58%
Practicing mindfulness techniques: meditation, slowing down to focus on the present, being aware of your feelings, etc.	49%
Learning about mental health and mental illness (what they are, how to maintain mental health, how to recognize mental illness, etc.)	46%
Knowing what resources are available to help me maintain my mental health	46%
Decreasing the stigma in my family and community of talking about mental health	29%
Journaling	27%
Other	4%

The top answers were hobbies, talking with friends or family, and exercise or going for a walk or hike.

<i>[Looking at the data by race/ethnicity, gender, and age]</i>	BIPOC %	White %	Female %	Male %	Younger %	Older %
Exercise / going for a walk or hike	54%	70%	59%	60%	56%	60%
Practicing mindfulness techniques: meditation, slowing down to focus on the present, being aware of your feelings, etc.	50%	49%	55%	42%	43%	55%
Journaling	28%	26%	38%	11%	18%	33%

When the data was disaggregated:

- White youth answered that they exercised or went for a walk or hike to help maintain their mental health at a higher percentage than their BIPOC peers.
- Female youth said they practiced mindfulness techniques and journaled less than their Male peers.
- Older youth said they practiced mindfulness techniques and journaled less than their Younger peers.

**SYSTEMIC RACISM**

When the peer interviews were transcribed and analyzed, we found that similar to the YDS, there were examples of individual bias and discrimination, but there were few examples of systemic racism that interviewees noticed, even when the interviewees probed with follow-up questions.

From these results, and the experience of the YDS in how long it took to learn about systemic racism, it was decided that questions directly about systemic racism would not be possible on the Youth to Youth Survey. Instead, we included a question about whether students felt that they were treated fairly at school, and whether they had the opportunity to learn about their own identity and culture, as well as the identity and culture of other students in their school.

<i>Which of the following do you experience at school?</i>	Overall %
I'm treated fairly at school	70%
I learn about my identity and culture, and all the other cultures represented in my school	46%

Students overall responded that 70% felt they were treated fairly at school. Only 46% of students overall felt that they had the opportunity to learn about identity and culture at their schools.

<i>[Looking at the data by race/ethnicity, gender, and age]</i>	BIPOC %	White %	Female %	Male %	Younger %	Older %
I'm treated fairly at school	68%	79%				
I learn about my identity and culture, and all the other cultures represented in my school			43%	53%	53%	42%

When the data was disaggregated:

- BIPOC youth felt they were treated fairly less when compared to 79% of white students.
- Female youth and males (53%), and younger (53%) and older (42%). Female students and older students felt that they had less opportunities to learn about their own cultures and the culture of others.

**Summary of Findings**

- **Youth surveyed told us out of a list of school quality measures, less than half experienced these four.**
  - Learning about their identity and culture, and all of the other cultures represented in their schools.
  - Have teachers who understand challenges in their personal lives and make adjustments when necessary.
  - Have enough time to learn and do schoolwork at school.
  - Have teachers who accommodate for different learning styles and paces.
- **Youth surveyed identified some aspects of online learning that worked for them and some that were challenging.** Students have different learning styles and our education system doesn't necessarily understand or adjust to those styles. Youth wanted connections to teachers who took the time to know who they were as individuals and could help them succeed in school.
- **Youth surveyed reported that less than half (48%) felt a sense of belonging at school or in school activities, and less for BIPOC students.** We know that a sense of belonging is an important protective factor and is linked to increase academic success. Youth affirmed a list of quality measures that help create a sense of belonging.
- **Youth surveyed answered that only about half had help planning for their future (55%) and felt that what they were learning in school relates to their lives and futures (49%).** BIPOC students felt even less so about receiving help planning for their future, compared to their white peers. The top classes or skills requested were financial literacy, college readiness, and employment skills. BIPOC and Female youth requested college readiness classes at a higher level.
- **Youth surveyed said that only 40% felt they learned about what mental health is and how to maintain it.** Fifty-three percent (53%) of students requested mental health classes, especially Female and Older youth.
- **Youth surveyed responded that less than half (47%) felt they learned about their identity and culture (or the cultures of their classmates) at school.** Female youth and Older youth felt that they learned less about their identities than their Male and Younger peers.

## ADULT STAFF INTERVIEWS

The last step in this summer's research was to triangulate the data gathered from the peer interviews and Youth to Youth Survey with information from adults directing and/or employed by our Alliance public sector partners. From the results of the Appreciative Inquiry Focus Group and the Peer Interviews, the YDS created an Interview Guide (Appendix C). The guide specifically included questions about responses to COVID-19 and systemic racism to better understand how our public institutions were responding to the two public health crises.

Twenty-one (21) potential adult interviewees were identified by Alliance staff and YDS members, or recommended by our public sector partners. Due to the nature of the interview questions, BIPOC staff and parents were prioritized. Emails were sent out requesting their participation in the study. Fifteen (15) of the potential interviewees agreed to the interviews.

Hour-long interviews were set up on a video conference call with a pair of youth researcher interviewing and an Alliance staff for support. Before each interview, the purpose of the interview and how the interview results would be used were explained, along with promises of confidentiality. Consent to participate and to be recorded was asked for (and received) before the interviews were begun.

After the interviews were completed, they were transcribed by the YDS and by using Otter.ai. The interview answers were thematically analyzed and reported below. Since the sample size is small (N=15) and the interviews limited to an hour, we present the themes that were mentioned the most by interviewees without the percentage.

### Demographics

All 15 adult interviewees were elected officials or employees of the 9 Alliance partner public institutions listed below. The number of interviewees at each institution is displayed in parentheses.

- Anoka Hennepin School District (1)
- Brooklyn Center Community Schools (2)
- City of Brooklyn Center (1)
- City of Brooklyn Park (2)
- Hennepin County (4)
- Hennepin Technical College (1)
- North Hennepin Community College (1)
- Osseo Area School District (2)
- Robbinsdale Area Schools (1)

Eight (8) of the interviewees were senior director level at their organizations or schools. As mentioned above, all the interviewees were BIPOC and parents.

### Results

The first several questions were introductory, allowed the YDS to learn more about the adult interviewees for their own career awareness, and provided context to how the organizations served youth in our community.

**1. What do you believe is important for your organization to provide for youth in order for them to be successful?**

- A. Spaces for youth voices to be heard and engaged.** Interviewees said that ensuring opportunities for youth to be engaged was important, particularly the youth who aren't viewed as successful.

*I think you should provide space for students to have a conversation. Don't send me your straight A's students; send me that student that's disconnected from school. I want to know why. I think students need a space and they need an opportunity to be heard because only through connection will you see students rise to the challenge. I've seen students turn around just because somebody believed in them and somebody listened to them.*

- B. Opportunities, resources, and skills for success.** Interviewees indicated especially for youth who are from low-wealth and first generation college families, additional supports are necessary to provide an equitable playing field for success.

*We know that education is key. They are trying to offer them incentives. Okay now once they are graduated, they need a job. What can we do to get them a job? They are going to need housing. They got to support themselves. We are doing one step at a time, but the county is now recognizing that we have work to do.*

- C. A safe space for each youth.** All youth need to feel safe in order to thrive, especially for institutions that historically have benefitted predominantly white peoples. The Brooklyns are the most racially and ethnically diverse community in Minnesota, so there will be special challenges to create safe spaces for everyone.

*We should be creating an inclusive environment that every single student, regardless of their race, regardless of their gender, regardless of their sexual orientation, feels that they can be a part of. And I think that the number one thing that we need to continue to do is make sure every single student feel like this is a space that they can learn and succeed. And that no matter what's happening in the outside world, can come here and be seen.*

- D. An education as a pathway to youth's dreams and goals.** Some interviewees discussed education as the best way to help youth reach their dreams and goals as they transition to adulthood.

*The other biggest thing is to be able to emphasize is the importance of academics. Start respecting it, not just thinking that school is a place to come and hang out with friends every day, but to understand that you got to grasp the education and be able to move ahead. Education, graduating from college, will move your families from here to there.*

- E. Culturally responsive staff and faculty.** Interviewees said that it was important for adults who interact with youth to understand their cultures, know how to help them develop their identities, and create safe multi-cultural spaces.

*Institutions can provide more racial equity training where we can talk about some of these deep things that don't get talked about, provide teachers with tools, vocabulary*

*to utilize, because this discussion around race is not easy. It is very intense, very difficult. And if you haven't been trained, you probably might not want to have that conversation, because it is very tough.*

- F. **Other:** Social-emotional learning skills, partnerships with other youth-serving organizations, keeping youth out of the criminal justice system, and mental health services.

**2. What are some of your organization's institutional challenges that create barriers to the success of every youth?**

- A. **Systemic racism and biased mindsets.** Most interviewees said that biased mindsets and complacency were the biggest institutional barriers for youth success, and contributed to overall systemic racism in their organizations.

*If our folks don't have the mindset in order to accept their responsibility, to talk about privilege, to talk about systemic racism, and how their day to day activities and their own roles perpetuate that inequity. That's a huge hurdle to move past on. So, moving from safe spaces to brave spaces. Not only being comfortable enough to have those uncomfortable conversations but brave enough to really push the envelope I think is a big piece of it.*

- B. **An oppressive culture that does not consider BIPOC or youth voices.** Many interviewees also talked about organizational cultures that focused on the people who historically have been in power, which often does not include BIPOC or youth.

*The demographics of our students is changing, but our teacher demographics is not changing. And you have this old belief system and there is not a citizenship in the classroom. It is a dictatorship. And it is not considering the varying cultural differences and values systems that students have. Looking at those and really trying to look at cultural humility. And coming from the standpoint of I don't have to know everything about your culture to understand that you have a different culture and that we are going to work together.*

- C. **Lack of trust and engagement with community.** Another challenge mentioned was in many communities, the lack of trust and engagement in our public institutions.

*Especially in the minority communities the support may look different. They don't want you knocking on their door. They don't want to be bothered with you. It is hard to get involved with those kids. There is a program over in north Minneapolis that helps with going into the community. The Northside Achievement Zone has specialists that come to the community to say, "We have people here in this department that want to help you, let them help you". They are kind of like the buffer because some communities just don't want to hear us, so that is the unfortunate part.*

- D. **Not enough staff of color to reflect the demographics of our youth.** Interviewees mentioned that their organizations did not employ staff of color at the same percentage as the youth they served, especially at the leadership and director levels.

*Less than 3 to 5% of leaders are held by BIPOC individuals and in order for us to have equity in the workforce and in the labor force, we need to start seeing that gap*

close. Until we have 10% of leadership positions held by individuals of color, we'll continue to have this equity gap around jobs and leadership.

- E. **Other:** curriculum doesn't reflect all cultures, inequitable access to education, teachers' unions

**3. How is your organization adapting how it serves youth in response to the COVID-19 pandemic?**

- A. **Ensuring all youth and families have access to technology and internet for online learning.** With the shift to social distancing and distance learning, it was important for all of our public partners to make sure students and families had access to the tools they needed to engage virtually.

*We had students that did not have reliable internet services. Because sometimes (apartment complexes) provide internet but it is just the basic internet and so with all the kids being online it just was not enough and so it would go out. We had to go and advocate and say, "You need to up your bandwidth so that more of these kids can use it. We need you to increase the amount or open up your clubhouse, so that a person can come in there and do their work because there is better internet connection."*

- B. **More adaptive to student or resident needs.** Since online learning fundamental changed how people interacted with schools, colleges, cities, and the county, public institutions had to reimagine how they provided education and services to meet their constituents' needs.

*To reimagine education, what does this look like? But what I've seen more often than not is people trying to retrofit the brick and mortar experience into teaching and learning. We have a program for our scholars who missed out on some of their credits. What we have tried to do is ramp up that social-emotional aspect and be in really close relation with our scholars: check-in every morning, make sure we partner with them for their credit, and then check on them that evening because what we heard was that there is a profound feeling of isolation.*

- C. **Providing essential basic needs.** The pandemic restrictions created loss of employment during this period, which increased the number of those in the community who already struggled with food, housing, and other basic needs.

*We're looking at doing some things around food and the sustainability of food in these very challenging times. We were very intentional about ensuring that we have our Rec on the Go services out delivering food and providing food. We're paying attention food, working with families around rent. Food, housing has been something that I think has a direct impact on young people.*

- D. **More communication to and engagement with families.** The school district interviewees talked about how the switch to distance learning also came with opportunities to be more engaged with families.

*I think our attempts to work with our families were strengthened. I think we had a lot of parents that were just appreciative of the information, but also when we called to*

*say you know your student has not turned in any work or they haven't done this and could you help us with this. For the first time some of our teachers were making contact with parents, and parents even told our team members that this teacher has never called me all year and now they are calling.*

- E. Improving distance learning and online services.** The sudden switch to virtual services in the spring was not as effective as many interviewees would have liked, and efforts have been taken to improve those services.

*Everyone was kind of new in this distance learning in the spring. I know as a teacher, I'm always very reflective of what I do. If it worked, keep it. If it doesn't work, throw it out, try something new. And I think this time around, I'm very hopeful that things will be a lot smoother and a lot better this fall.*

- F. Other:** *Providing one-on-one tutoring and support, providing healthcare and mental health services, and waving application fees.*

**4. How is your organization changing how it serves youth in response to the murder of George Floyd and the history of oppression and structural racism in our country?**

- A. Holding events to help youth and staff process.** Most organizations hosted events such as conversations, social justice events, marches, and art projects to allow youth and staff to learn, reflect, and activate after the murder of George Floyd.

*After the death of George Floyd, we did our annual Social Justice Day. This year we did a virtual Social Justice Day and Calvin Terrell came again virtually and he healed our community. We invited Minneapolis students and it was wonderful. He talked about the murder and the students got a chance to ask questions. It was a really uplifting time, there were tears, there were students saying they wanted to advocate and become advocates.*

- B. Increased political advocacy.** Interviewees talked about students and staff becoming more politically active, including influencing policy and local elections.

*The students have been working with our alumni association. These students are recent grads of (our) schools and they're at the U, Augsburg, and local colleges. They've been working with students to start a resolution that's going to go to the school board asking the SRO's to be removed from our buildings. They've been having conversations with the students. It's been a beautiful process to see in the wake of this tragedy.*

- C. Increased consciousness about systemic racism.** In some organizations, the murder of George Floyd created more openness for youth and staff to talk about and address systemic racism.

*I never have so openly talked about race even though we have been doing this work for 40 years now. There were a lot of conversations, open, candid, vulnerable, which I never have seen before. I have seen a lot of study groups that have started about white fragility by white people themselves, that they decided to start working to check into their own biases and privileges. I think it has been just amazing to see the amount of conversation and interest and eye opening this created.*

- D. Overall, nothing.** A few interviewees noted that their organization had not made any changes in how the served youth (or residents) in response to the killing of George Floyd.

*It goes back to the challenges of this historical script and mindset or behavior of government. There's been literally no thought about young people and George Floyd from the institutional perspective, because the relationship was never there. There's some projects with partners, but our organization, at large, is not necessarily having this broad conversation or there's not this buzz in the air where everybody is figuring out, "What do we got to do? How do we deal with this?" I'm sad to say that's it, but we're working. There are a few of us working to push but, I'm pretty sure a fair amount of our staff goes home. They just go home. Their day is done.*

- E. More inclusive education for students and staff.** Some of the interviewees from our school district partners talked about how the curriculum for students and staff has begun to change to reflect people of all cultures.

*We are talking about throwing out the old ways of learning things and bringing in opportunities to learn a little bit differently. If we teach history, it's going to have Asian American history and Black history mixed in there, and the truth telling stuff, not just passing over a few things, and talking about Martin Luther King and Rosa Parks. We're going to deeper so that you are aware of those things in high school.*

- F. Increasing internal equity work.** Equity work that was already begun in some organizations received a boost after the murder of George Floyd and the increased focus on racial injustice.

*Our superintendent sent a message to all students and to all staff that we are completely reforming our school so that we can be creating anti-racist policies. There were a number of different committees that were formed and staff members signed up for different groups. We're doing things on the ground to make students feel welcome and for overall policies to change. I'm actually really proud of our district for holding firm in what we believe in and starting this summer to create change.*

- G. Other:** Providing more supportive services, affinity groups, more community outreach, and creating anti-racist policies.

**5. Do you see structural racism issues in your organization? Can you explain?**

<i>Do you see systemic racism in your organization?</i>	<i>%</i>
Yes	100%

**Can you explain?**

- A. It is present in organizational policies and procedures.** Interviewees specifically mentioned how systemic racism is evident in their organization's hiring, disciplinary, funding, and membership practices.

*I had a meeting yesterday with our Human Resources Director. We asked him, "How many people of color do we have at our different levels of employment?" And his words were, "Directors, which are the highest paid, we have 17% people of color. At the supervisor level, 14%." Those are weak numbers. So, the structural racism is they're not allowing people to promote. They're not hiring. They are shutting people out. The questions that we had on our applications were biased. There were some questions that were meant to shut people of color out.*

- B. Biased mindsets of staff.** Interviewees talked about how biases, stereotypes, and lack of racial consciousness perpetuated by staff in their organization against were evidence of systemic racism.

*I know in my organization, the youth aren't seen as youth, they're seen as potential criminals or bad kids and things like that. We sometimes forget at the end of the day they are kids and they are kids of color. These are kids that come from struggles or they deal with crises on a regular basis. They see crime, they are victims of crime, and just because they look a certain way they get picked on.*

- C. Lack of diverse representation in positions of power.** Interviewees talked about how their organization's leadership did not reflect the racial and ethnic diversity of the population they served, which contributed to the persistence of inequitable policies and procedures.

*If you've got a bunch of students of color, from the top it has to be reflective in that. You have to have some teachers of color, principals of color or principals that have a better understanding of students of color. I can't make decisions for you and know everything that you need if I don't look like some of the people here and I don't have an understanding.*

- D. Services are not provided equitably to BIPOC students or communities.** Interviewees gave examples of how racist policies and procedures negatively affects our BIPOC communities by giving them less access to resources and programs they need.

*Some of our more specialized programs like our nursing programs have traditionally had a very biased enrollment process and admission process. We found that after doing research on all of our student conduct incidents that African American males were disproportionately reported on at a higher rate than any other cultural affinity groups. Our developmental courses are traditionally percentage-wise predominantly students of color. Those courses have significantly higher attrition rates, there's something systematically going on there, it's impacting a specific population at an inordinately large percentage compared to other groups on our campus.*

- E. Institutions were built on white supremacist policies from the beginning.** Interviewees mentioned that the root of racist policies in their organizations goes back historically to the framework of how many of those systems are designed.

*We know that American public schools are built on white supremacy. It's a white supremacist system and it was not created for the students that sit in the seats today. I heard a speaker saying that the American school system is doing exactly what it was designed to do. Just let that sink in. If you look at the history of schools and what*

*they were created to do it was pathways. That's what it's doing, it's discarding who they don't feel are important, those are those structural racist systems that we have to break down.*

## **6. What suggestions do you have to change this in your organization?**

- A. Continue to elevate conversations about rooting out systemic racism in our organization.** Interviewees talked about building on the new openness to discuss systemic racism, to engage staff to make this a priority, and to not let the opportunity fall away.

*Anytime I hear something related to race, and if it's not right, I do say something. And one of my peers says to me, "Why do you always feel like you got to say something or respond to stuff like that?" And I told him nice and politely, "Because a closed mouth don't get fed. And so, if I hear something that's not right, yes, I speak up." I'm done being uncomfortable, it's time for you to be uncomfortable. It's important for us to say what our experiences are. And we, as people of color, have to remember that our experiences aren't other people's experiences. And that's why we need to take every chance we can to educate people to what our experiences are.*

- B. Take action to change policies and programs through assessment and innovation.** Some interviewees mentioned that along with conversations, action needs to be taken, beginning with assessing policies and programs, and suggesting new ways of doing things that are equitable for all.

*When you have a group of people that will be assessing people to know how much they know and how much awareness that is there about inequities, also assessing your problems, what is that you are doing, and they're perpetuating inequalities or not? So that would require assessing also all your programs, assessing your budget, we did that our last year when we took all our budget and we analyzed every aspect of how much we are really putting towards working on equity and in the community that require more, right, in order to decrease the gaps and it requires training.*

- C. Establish an organizational lead(s) to focus on strategic equity work.** Unless staff are assigned with the responsibility and authority to plan how equity work will happen for the organization, it may just be another idea with good intentions that goes nowhere.

*I think that number one you have to create a committee or a dedicated group of people that are going to truly work on these. It's just not one training here, one training there, and then you think the system is going to change. I think it has to be a much more strategic approach. If you really want to see change, the institution has to be committed to that level.*

- D. Position allies and BIPOC staff at all levels of the organization, especially at the decision-making levels.** Interviewees mentioned that having staff diversity, especially at the leadership levels was important if systemic and sustainable change was going to happen.

*How do we break the rules? It really is to think about who's in leadership and to build those relationships and start having candid conversations. I believe strongly that if*

*we don't start at the top, what we fall short of then in equity work is having people who are directly impacted constantly trying to make change without the support of those in power. Trying to position organizations with allies at all levels is really essential. I would also add that the power talking to power, holding people accountable.*

**E. Professional development to train staff on how to eliminate systemic racism.**

Some interviewees talked about how more training is necessary to provide staff with the tools they need to understand how systemic racism shows up in their work, and how to create sustainable change that is equitable for all.

*I realized that I was supporting these racist policies because I was teaching students how to adapt to the whiteness instead of teaching them how to fight against it and I feel very fearful going back into the school year that I'm just going to fall back into that rhythm because it's so imbedded and it's not even intentioned like that and so I really think that the help of this director, maybe doing coaching with each of us individually, will help us collectively understand our role in creating change.*

## Summary of Findings

- **Adults interviewed believed that safe, culturally responsive, youth-centered spaces, along with opportunities and support to reach their goals, were important elements for their organizations to provide.** Interviewees said that it was important to provide safe spaces for youth voices to be heard and engaged, culturally responsive staff and faculty, and opportunities, resources, skills, and an education to reach their dreams and goals.
- **Adults interviewed identified institutional challenges that created barriers to the success of every youth.** Specifically, interviewees mentioned systemic racism and biased mindsets, oppressive cultures that minimized BIPOC and youth voices, a lack of trust and engagement with the community, and not enough staff of color.
- **Adults interviewed discussed how the COVID-19 pandemic created opportunities to be innovative and adaptive to meet student and resident needs.** Our public institutions pivoted quickly in the spring to provide essential basic needs and ensure access to technology and internet, improve how they provided online services, and focus more on engaging families.
- **Adults interviewed discussed how their organizations were responding to the murder of George Floyd and the history of oppression and structural racism in our country.** Organizations held events to help youth and staff process the trauma, students and staff were more active in political advocacy, there was increased consciousness about systemic racism, more inclusive school curriculum and staff training was developed, and existing equity work was given a boost. A few interviewees did not perceive their organizations had any overall response.
- **Adults interviewed identified systemic racism in all of their organizations.** Systemic racism showed up in policies and procedures (hiring, discipline, funding, membership, etc.), mindsets of staff (biases, stereotypes, lack of racial consciousness), lack of diverse representation in positions of power, services not being provided equitably to BIPOC students or communities, and how institutions were built on white supremacist policies from the beginning.
- **Adults interviewed offered the following suggestions for identifying and eliminating systemic racism in their organizations:**

- Continue to elevate conversations about rooting out systemic racism in our organization
- Take action to change policies and programs through assessment and innovation
- Establish an organizational lead(s) to focus on strategic equity work
- Position allies and BIPOC staff at all levels of the organization, especially at the decision-making levels
- Professional development to train staff on how to eliminate systemic racism

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were summarized from the key findings identified in the report.

**We need to take action to allow youth to lead research about themselves and engage them in making decisions that affect themselves and others.** We believe that engaging youth at this deep level leads to more valid, realistic, and reliable data that is actionable for the Alliance and its members. Adult staff interviewed also identified youth engagement as important for their organizations to provide. And ultimately the skill-building, literacy, and agency we invest in our young adults to be the future leaders of our community is maybe more important than anything else we do.

**We need to take action to create student/youth-centered education and programs that meet the needs of each youth. Each person has a unique identity, personality, learning style, and set of gifts and challenges.** Only about half of youth felt that they learned about their identities and cultures (46%), had teachers understood the challenges in their personal lives and make adjustments (47%), had enough time to learn and do schoolwork (48%), and had teachers for accommodated for their learning styles (50%). Youth wanted connections to teachers who took the time to know who they were as individuals and could help them succeed in school.

**We need to take action to ensure that youth are prepared with the skills they need to transition to young adulthood, including post-secondary education and/or career.** Only 49% of youth understood how what they are learning at school relates to their lives and futures, and only 55% of youth felt they had the help they needed to plan for their futures. Youth responded that they wanted classes in financial literacy, college readiness, and employment skills.

**We need to take action to ensure that youth feel a sense of belonging and support in the spaces where they learn and grow.** We know that a sense of belonging is an important protective factor and is linked to increase academic success. However, only 48% of youth felt a sense of belonging at school or in school activities, and 20% of youth said that there was no space or group where they felt a sense of belonging. Youth affirmed a list of measures they believed creates a sense of belonging.

**We need to take action to ensure that youth have a good understanding of what mental health is (vs. mental illness or crisis), and are given education and skills around how to be healthy mentally.** Mental health and mental illness are interrelated, but are on separate dimensions. Mental health is not just the absence of mental illness, but includes positive emotions, and psychological and social functioning. Only 40% of youth felt that they learned about what mental health is and how to maintain it, and 53% of youth said that mental health classes would help them.

**We need to take action against the different forms of systemic racism that are present in our public institutions and that affect our youth. We can start by teaching youth about the history of oppression in our country, to provide them with the right tools and language to identify systemic racism, and see how it affects their lives.** All the adult staff interviewees of our Alliance members identified systemic racism in their organizations as showing up in policies and procedures, mindsets of staff, lack of diverse representation in positions of power, services not being provided equitably, and how institutions were built on white supremacist policies from the beginning. Only 47% of youth felt they learned about their identity and culture (or the cultures of their peers) at school. Our youth researchers and youth interviewees shared that they had few opportunities to learn about systemic racism and the about the history of oppression in our country, and asked for more education on those topics.

## APPENDIX A: 2020 PEER INTERVIEW GUIDE

### Introduction

*Hi. Thanks for participating in this interview. My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I'm part of the Youth Data Squad from the Brooklyn Bridge Alliance for Youth.*

*(How are you doing today?)*

### Purpose of the Research

*Two events have recently affected the lives of everyone in our community. First, the COVID-19 pandemic has shut down schools and made it more difficult for us to see friends and participate in activities. Second, the murder of George Floyd has again revealed the structural racism in our country, a system of oppression and privilege that affects our political, economic, and social structures and make it difficult for each person, no matter what race they are, to succeed. This interview is part of a bigger research project to hear from young adults about the effects of those two events on their lives, and how to improve our cities, county, libraries, schools, and colleges to help them to succeed.*

### Procedures

*This interview will take somewhere between 30-60 minutes and be recorded so we make sure we remember all the details you provide. You will be compensated for your time with a gift card of \$20.*

### Confidentiality

*The information you provide will be used by our team to write a report for our public partners. However, your name and any identifying information will be kept confidential. The recordings will be deleted when we are done with the project.*

### Consent

*Do you have any questions? Do you consent to participating in this interview? Do you agree to be recorded? If so, I am going to start recording. Can you state your name and that you agree to participate and be recorded?*

### Interview

- 1. What is your favorite activity? Why?**
- 2. What are the things at school that help you to be successful? Why is it helpful?**  
Which part of it is helpful?

**What parts of school are challenging?**

**What parts of online learning have worked for you?**

**What parts have been challenging?**

- 3. In addition to your family and friends, what spaces or groups do you feel a sense of belonging, and support you to succeed in life and overcome barriers? How do these spaces or groups create a sense of belonging?**

4. *We normally only talk about mental health when there is a crisis, but just like our physical health, we should be working on maintaining good mental health. **What are ways or resources that help to maintain your mental health?***
5. **Have you ever felt discrimination or were treated differently because of your race or culture, in your school, sports, workplace, city services, or communities?**
6. **What skills or classes would you need to be successful in your transition to young adulthood?**
7. **Is there anything else that we haven't discussed already that needs to change or to be created/added that would help young adults succeed?**
8. **Is there anything else you think is important to tell us?**

### **Demographic Questions**

*Help us understand if we're reaching all the young people represented in our community.*

- A. **What high school do you go to?**
- B. **How old are you?**
- C. **How do you describe yourself? (choose all that apply)**
  - African (Liberian, Oromo, Somali, etc.)
  - Asian (Hmong, Lao, Vietnamese, etc.)
  - Black American
  - Hispanic or Latino/a (Mexican, etc.)
  - American Indian or Native American
  - White
  - Would rather not say
  - Another race/ethnicity (please specify)

### **Closing**

*That completes our interview. Thanks again for your participation. Can you provide me your address so we can send you the gift card, or would you like to pick it up from our offices?*

# APPENDIX B: 2020 YOUTH TO YOUTH SURVEY



Hi, we're with the Youth Data Squad and we're collecting information to help the Brooklyns be a great place for youth. Would you be able to take a 10-minute survey?

1. How old are you? \_\_\_\_\_

2. What school will you go to this fall? (Check one.)

- |   |  |   |
|---|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Brooklyn Middle        | <input type="checkbox"/> North View Middle     | <input type="checkbox"/> Robbinsdale Middle       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Brooklyn Center Middle | <input type="checkbox"/> Osseo Middle          | <input type="checkbox"/> Quit/No longer attending |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Brooklyn Center HS     | <input type="checkbox"/> Osseo Senior HS       | <input type="checkbox"/> Graduated                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Champlin Park HS       | <input type="checkbox"/> Park Center HS        | <input type="checkbox"/> Online School            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Jackson Middle         | <input type="checkbox"/> Robbinsdale Cooper HS | <input type="checkbox"/> Homeschool               |

Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

3. Where do you live? (Check one.)

- Brooklyn Center
- East Brooklyn Park (south of 85<sup>th</sup> Ave and east of Zane Ave)
- North Brooklyn Park (north of 85<sup>th</sup> Ave)
- West Brooklyn Park (south of 85<sup>th</sup> Ave and west of Zane Ave or Brooklyn Blvd)
- Minneapolis
- Champlin
- Osseo
- Maple Grove
- Robbinsdale
- New Hope
- Crystal
- Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_



**4. Which of the following do you experience at school? (Check all that apply.)**

- I have good relationships and connections with teachers and counselors at school
- I have teachers who take time to explain concepts to me and answer my questions
- I have teachers who understand challenges in my personal life and make adjustments when necessary
- I have teachers who accommodate for different learning styles and paces
- I understand how what I'm learning relates to my life and future
- I have friends who help support me and work together with me on schoolwork
- I have help planning for my future
- I learn academic and life skills (note-taking, time management, social skills, leadership, etc.)
- I feel a sense of belonging at school or in school activities (clubs, sports teams, etc.)
- I have enough time to learn and do schoolwork at school
- I have a choice in which classes I am interested in taking
- I'm treated fairly at school
- I learn about what mental health is and how to maintain it
- I learn about my identity and culture, and all the other cultures represented in my school

**5. What are the parts of online learning that work for you? (Check all that apply.)**

- Able to do schoolwork when I want to on my schedule (ex. don't need to get up early to go to school)
- Able to have more time to complete assignments (compared to in-person schooling)
- In control of the type and style of learning that fits me
- Weekly video chats that are interactive with teachers and classmates (vs. only watching videos or reading)
- Being at home: more comfortable and/or I'm able to focus better on learning
- Having the schedule ahead of time helps with time management
- Having clear instructions on my schoolwork spelled out so I know what is expected of me
- Open office hours so I can ask my teachers questions
- Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

**6. What are the challenges of online learning? (Check all that apply.)**

- Have to motivate myself to actually do the work since teachers are not there to encourage you
- Struggled with time management and procrastination because there is no daily schedule
- No classmates there to ask for help or work together with you
- No connection (or relationship) with teachers
- Not being able to participate in the normal school or social activities

- Teachers don't respond to questions in a timely or complete manner
- No opportunity for teachers to further explain or to answer questions about assignments
- Wi-Fi or Internet connection was spotty or too slow, causing problems with online learning
- Problems with technology: using online apps (example: Schoology) or computers / tablets / cell phones
- Some school classes and/or curriculum do not fit with online learning
- Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

**7. Besides your family and friends, what spaces or groups do you feel a sense of belonging, and support you to succeed in life and overcome barriers?**

**8. When you are in these spaces or with these groups, how do they create a sense of belonging?**

- I feel accepted for who I am and not judged
- I am with people like myself (i.e., age, gender, race, culture, etc.) who I can relate to and who understand me
- Everyone has the same goal and focus (i.e., winning, graduation, going to college, working, etc.)
- People are available to support and encourage me anytime
- It provides a safe space for me to talk about myself, my feelings, or things I'm experiencing
- We have shared experiences
- They help me to succeed: teaching me, challenging me to do more, give me leadership opportunities, etc.
- Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

**9. What skills or classes would you need to be successful in your transition to young adulthood?**

- Health and fitness classes
- Driver's education
- Cooking classes
- Financial literacy classes: personal money management, credit, paying bills, taxes, etc.
- College readiness classes: financial aid, applying, college visits, etc.
- Employment skills: filling out an application, creating a resume, how to interview, etc.
- Social-emotional learning skills: persistence, time management, etc.
- Mental health classes: mindfulness, yoga, relaxation, etc.
- Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

**10. What would help you to maintain your mental health?**

- Learning about mental health and mental illness (what they are, how to maintain mental health, how to recognize mental illness, etc.)
- Decreasing the stigma in my family and community of talking about mental health
- Knowing what resources are available to help me maintain my mental health
- Talking with friends or family about things that stress you out
- Practicing mindfulness techniques: meditation, slowing down to focus on the present, being aware of your feelings, etc.
- Exercise or going for a walk or hike
- Journaling
- Hobbies (arts, gaming, reading, photography, etc.)
- Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

**11. Is there anything else that we haven't asked about that needs to change or to be created/added that would help young adults succeed? (examples: in the schools, in our cities, housing, etc.)**

***Questions #12-13 are demographic questions. We are collecting this information to make sure that all groups of youth in our community are represented in our survey.***

**12. How do you describe yourself? (Check all that apply.)**

- African (Liberian, Oromo, Somali, etc.)
- Asian (Chinese, Hmong, Japanese, Korean, Laotian, Vietnamese, etc.)
- Black American
- Hispanic or Latino/a
- Native American or American Indian
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- White or European American
- Prefer not to say
- Another race or ethnicity (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

**13. What gender do you identify with? (Check one.)**

- Female
- Male
- Non-binary / Third gender
- Prefer not to say
- Prefer to self-describe: \_\_\_\_\_

## **APPENDIX C: 2020 STAFF INTERVIEW GUIDE**

### **Introduction**

*Hi. Thanks for participating in this interview. My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I'm part of the Youth Data Squad from the Brooklyn Bridge Alliance for Youth.*

*(Both interviewers introduce yourselves, what schools you go to, and what years you are.)*

*(How are you doing today?)*

### **Purpose of the Research**

*Two events have recently affected the lives of young adults in our community. First, the COVID-19 pandemic has shut down schools and made it more difficult for us to see friends and participate in activities. Second, the murder of George Floyd has again revealed the structural racism in our country, a system of oppression and privilege that affects our political, economic, and social structures and make it difficult for each person to succeed, no matter what race they are. This interview is part of a bigger research project to understand the effects of those two events on young adults' lives, and how to improve our cities, county, libraries, schools, and colleges to help them to succeed.*

### **Procedures**

*This interview will take somewhere between 30-60 minutes and be recorded so we make sure we remember all the details you provide.*

### **Confidentiality**

*The information you provide will be used by our team to write a report for our public partners. However, your name and any identifying information will be kept confidential. The recordings will be deleted when we are done with the project.*

### **Consent**

*Do you have any questions? Do you consent to participating in this interview? Do you agree to be recorded? If so, I am going to start recording. Can you state your name and that you agree to participate and be recorded?*

## **Interview Questions**

### ***Introductory Questions***

*These questions will help you get to know your interviewee a little better, understand his or her role as it relates to youth, and allows the interviewee to answer some easy questions first.*

- 1. What is your job title?*
- 2. How did you get into job? What degree or previous work prepared you for this job?*
- 3. How does your work directly or indirectly impact youth?*

### ***Organizational Programs and Philosophy***

*These questions will help us understand how the organization serves youth, what they think is important, and what institutional barriers need to be overcome.*

4. What are the programs or services in your organization that help youth to be successful right now?
5. What do you believe is important for your organization to provide for youth in order for them to be successful?
6. What are some of your organization's institutional challenges that create barriers to the success of every youth?

**COVID-19 Question**

*This question will help us understand how organizations are adapting how they serve youth in response to COVID-19.*

7. How is your organization adapting how it serves youth in response to the COVID-19 pandemic? *(Follow-up: How have the changes been working? What still needs to be reworked?)*

**Structural Racism Question**

*This question will help us understand how organizations are adapting how they serve youth in response to the murder of George Floyd and structural racism, and where structural racism currently exists in their organization.*

8. How is your organization changing how it serves youth in response to the murder of George Floyd and the history of oppression and structural racism in our country? *(Follow-up: How have the changes been working? What still needs to be reworked?)*
9. Do you see structural racism issues in your organization? Can you explain?
10. What suggestions do you have to change this in your organization? What gives you hope that change is happening?

**Closing Question**

*This question gives the interviewee an opportunity to add anything else they think is important.*

11. Is there anything else you would like to tell us in addition to what we've talked about?

**Closing**

*That completes our interview. Thanks again for your participation.*