

10/1/2021

# Community Wellbeing Focus Groups

Summary and Recommendations  
Summer 2021

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*“Community well-being to me is both physical wellness (which we see a lot of with the kids who are playing sports) and also mental health. It is also a solidarity withing the community. Socially, families, spending time together, building bonds, helping each other out.”*

*“It is important to provide young people with non-biased support instead of being shamed for it.”*

*“Resilient and adaptive to change.”*

*“Happiness, health and safety.”*

*“It feels like my mental health only counts if it affects my education.”*

*“A level of community engagement, mutual respect, access, and diversity.”*

*“Honestly, the only real - or main- support of students is other students.”*

*“Community well-being is a community’s ability to continually renew itself with an overall sense of joy.”*

*“The only time adults have talked about my drug abuse was to punish me for it.”*

*“Respect, love, trust and caring.”*

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## Chittenden East Wellbeing Community Conversations

Community members shared their concerns, hopes, and visions for the future of their communities. They stated that they were drawn to participate out of a commitment and investment in the community's well-being.

- **6 open "Community Conversations"**
  - 3 adult-only
  - 3 youth-only; with youth facilitator
- **Distribution by Towns:**
  - **Adults:** 54% Richmond, 27% Bolton, 18% Huntington
  - **Youth:** represented all 5 towns in MMUUSD district.
- **Age and Race Distributions:**

Participant Ages		
25-44	16%	21 youth in grades 9-12
45-64	24%	
65+	60%	

Participant Race		
Youth Race		Adult Race
White	85%	100%
BIPOC	15%	0%

## Key Themes

### Adults:

- Residents report that their community is a special place where people care about their neighbors
- There is a strong message that residents do not want another suicide in the community
- There is an urgent call to action for implementation

### Youth:

- Young people feel generally disconnected from the community, and there are concerns that disconnect will make young people hesitant to engage with community resources or programs.
- Youth are unaware of current community support systems, but think the formation of such resources would improve their overall wellbeing.
- Students feel as though their mental and emotional wellbeing is too often only considered because it effects their academics.
- Youth who struggle with substance abuse avoid seeking support because they expect punishment and shade from the school and larger community.
- Despite attempts by the school and community to increase support throughout the pandemic, youth feel as though they are less supported than they were before the pandemic began. Young people are struggling, as they feel the empathy and accommodations created during lockdown have been revoked.

## Recommendations

### Adults:

1. Increased recreational opportunities for youth
2. Creation of a “3<sup>rd</sup> space”
3. Increased opportunities for community connection through events and learning opportunities
4. We're experiencing a significant increase of parents and students reaching out to get support around gender identity and I think there's a lot we can do to increase safety, connection and resources for marginalized youth.

### Youth:

5. Within school: Increase in guidance counselors/separation of roles of academic advisor and counselor and another position specifically catered to helping kids address substance use issues.
6. Within community:
  - a. Communal youth spaces—and/or “dry” spaces (drug and alcohol free)
  - b. Anonymous substance abuse youth groups (in person and virtual)
  - c. \*\*\*Note: in order to get youth to take advantage of any resources, the **community must work to build trust and connection with students!**
7. Generally, just more open conversation and de-stigmatization of drug use and other coping mechanisms.

### Adults: Hopes for the longer-term future of our community?

- A community center, accessible to everyone, multigenerational
- Indoor recreation opportunities, availability of equipment
- Array of options and equipment that are easily assessable (e.g. ice skates and ski equipment)
- More intramural “club” sports and athletic opportunities at the middle school and high school level
- Youth and teens establishing positive relationships with other adults / informal community supports
- Funding for programming
- More recreational opportunities, even a mobile-rec program or virtual programming

### Adults: Concerns for the longer-term future of our community?

- What is available to the youth who quit sports (where do they go and what do they do?)
- Youth feeling stressed and overwhelmed and turning toward substances to cope
- Youth’s mental health (before, during, and after COVID)
- Community members that do not have access and transportation
- The youth we have lost to suicide
- Marginalized populations not be reached
- Accessibility of substances
- Substance use
- Access and proximity to mental health professionals
- Lack of activities for youth who do not participate in sports
- How youth can stay connected if they don’t play sports