

# Elevating Youth Voice in School Safety



Unleashing the Power of Partnership for Learning



In 2024, UP for Learning worked with the Vermont Agency of Education and Department of Public Safety to bring the voices, experiences, and perspectives of Vermont youth into policy conversations about school safety and security. This project consisted of eight youth-led dialogue events for youth in grades 6–12, as well as a survey taken by students in grades 9–12 across Vermont.



## Participation Overview



**122**  
dialogue  
participants



**1,456**  
survey  
respondents



Representing  
**27 Vermont**  
schools in  
**10 different**  
counties

## About the Dialogues

The dialogues were designed and facilitated by youth and adults working with UP for Learning. The dialogue events included several small-group structured activities to support participants in exploring the topics and expressing their thoughts. Participants' responses during the dialogue were recorded as a form of data collection to inform policy conversations.

### Example Dialogue Questions:

The dialogue questions were generated by the youth facilitators, and refined with feedback from the AOE, DPS, and School Crisis Planning team. The questions asked during the dialogues included:

- What do adults not know or what are they not seeing when it comes to school safety?
- What impacts have school safety had on your learning?
- What are the conditions at school that create a safe environment?



- What are things that would help you to or prevent you from reporting something to a trusted adult?
- Has something ever happened at your school that has impacted your perception of safety?
- As students, you have experienced restricted access, safety drills, and other precautions throughout your life at school. How do these measures play into your sense of safety in school?

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## About the Vermont Youth Survey on School Safety

The Vermont Youth Survey on School Safety was designed in partnership between UP for Learning's facilitation team, the project partners at the Vermont Agency of Education and Department of Public Safety, and the Vermont Center for Rural Studies at UVM.

The survey covers topics including youth perceptions and experiences with safety, emergency drills, trusted adults, and incident reporting. It also asks students to reflect on and provide suggestions for the implementation of school safety measures.

### Survey responses at a glance

Of the 1,456 respondents...

- **79%** said that they generally **feel safe** at school.
- **18%** said they have **ideas** about how to make their school safer.
- **89%** said they have an **adult that they would feel comfortable talking to** if they had a problem.
- **20%** said they are aware of Vermont's anonymous **school safety tipline**.
- **80%** said they are familiar with their school's **emergency plans and procedures**.
- **44%** said they are given the chance to **express feedback** on safety plans and procedures.



## Themes and takeaways

Youth and adults from UP for Learning analyzed the data from the dialogues, identifying themes including the following:

### 1. Being safe at school means feeling connected:

- With caring, trusted adults
- With friends/peers
- With community — feeling valued for who you are

### 2. Experiences with safety drills was mixed.

- Drills made some people feel anxious and that they feel like they don't address the full situation
- Drills made others feel safer and more prepared

### 3. Students appreciate timely and consistent communication when there is an incident related to school safety.

- Students look to their teachers first for information about school safety concerns.

### 4. Students with historically marginalized identities may feel the impact of school safety more acutely.

Specific things that students noted were:

- The importance of safety plans that accommodate students with disabilities.
- An equitable approach to school discipline (which supports students in bringing forward concerns when they have them).
- Quick response to bullying, hazing and harassment concerns (which supports a feeling of safety for all).
- Space for conversations around state and national safety issues facing people of different identities.

## Next Steps: Continuing the Conversation

We invite you to share this video as a starting point to invite youth into conversations about school safety in your own school and community: [vimeo.com/1012507432](https://vimeo.com/1012507432) or scan the code at right.



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