

Elevating Youth Voice in School Safety

Engaging Vermont youth in conversations
about school safety and security



Unleashing the Power of Partnership for Learning



Presenter introductions



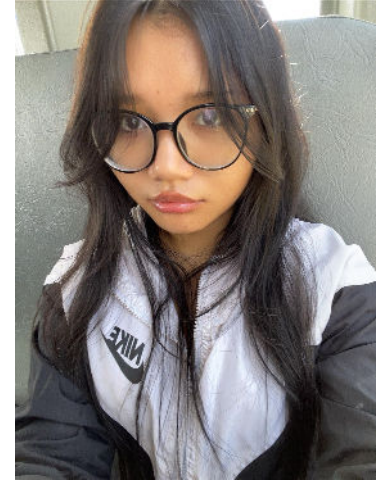
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Unleashing the Power of Partnership for Learning

Mission Empowering youth
and adults to reimagine and
transform education *together*

Overview of the project:



Youth School Safety Dialogues

122 Participants in
8 dialogues



School Safety Youth Survey

1456 responses with high
participation at 8 schools

Dialogue and Survey Sites

Dialogues held in:

Burlington, Fair Haven, Hyde Park, Lyndon, Montpelier, Rutland, St. Albans, and online.

Strong survey participation at:

Burr and Burton, Colchester, Leland and Gray, Mt. Abraham, North Country, Otter Valley, South Burlington, and Vergennes Union.

Project Timeline

**June,
2024**

UP Program Specialists from UP met to generate questions and develop agenda.

Questions and agenda shared for feedback with AOE, DPS, and School Crisis Planning Team.



June & July

Youth and adults from UP hold 4 regional dialogues.



August

Youth-adult team codes and analyzes initial outcomes from dialogues.

UP team collaborates with AOE, DPS, and Vermont Center for Rural Studies on survey development.



September

Youth and adults from UP hold 4 school-based dialogues.

Survey window open.

Initial analysis of survey results and dialogue data shared at Governor's School Safety Conference!

What questions did we want to ask?

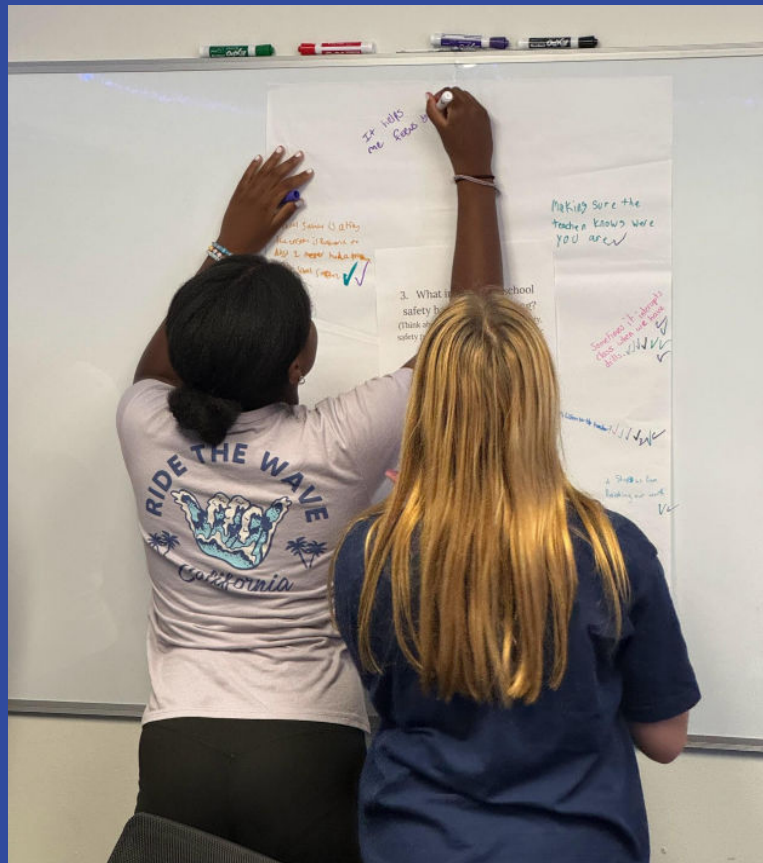
1. What could your school do to make you or your peers feel more likely to report something to a trusted adult?
2. Would you share a story about a time where you did not feel safe at school? And what got you through it?
3. As students, you have experienced restricted access, safety drills, and other precautions throughout your life at school. How do these measures play into your sense of safety in school?
4. What does it mean to you to feel safe at school? What are the conditions at school that create a safe environment?
5. What is a student's role to play in fostering a safe and secure school? What specific things can you do to make your school safer?
6. What types of communication or actions would you like to see from your school following a threat or safety incident?
7. Has something ever happened at your school that has impacted your perception of safety? What was that experience and how has it impacted your feelings of safety in school?
8. What do adults not know or what are they not seeing when it comes to school safety?

How were the dialogues structured?

Dialogues lasted ~90 - 120 minutes

Agenda:

- Welcome, introductions, and norm setting
- Chalk-talk (silent writing / drawing activity)
- Circle conversations (structured rounds of questions with adult notetaker)
- Community-building and connection activities throughout.



What were the dialogues like?

"It was great to see so many people from so many different backgrounds come together to talk about school safety. And for them to all agree that we need safety to be taken more seriously."

"We need to do this more. Not just once a year but once a quarter with administrators and local law enforcement."





**Talk with a
group of 3 or 4...**

**What resonated with you?
What surprised you?**



Vermont Youth Survey on School Safety

- 30 question survey for Vermont public high school students
- Developed in partnership between youth and adults at UP for Learning, AOE, DPS, and the Vermont Center for Rural Studies.
- Questions drawn from prior peer-reviewed research.
- Topics including youth perceptions of and experiences with:
 - safety and security
 - emergency drills
 - trusted adults
 - incident reporting
- 1456 participants with high participation at 8 schools.

Initial Takeaways from the Dialogues and Survey



On feeling safe at school:

Being safe at school means:

- Being connected with a caring, trusted adult.
- Being connected with friends.
- Being able to show up as your authentic self.
- Not having to worry about threats, violence, bullying or harassment.



79% of students said that they generally feel safe at school.



On Trusted Adults:

Participants noted that being safe at school means being connected with a caring, trusted adult.

If they heard about a potential act of violence in schools, most participants would tell a trusted adult.

“Trusted adults” take many forms in schools.



89% of students said they had at least one adult they could talk to.

measures on learning:

Participants said that feeling safe at school is important to ability to learn.

Many participants noted that surprise drills are disruptive to their learning.

“I find it hard to focus or thoughtfully contribute when I have concerns about my safety because it feels more pressing.”

On Safety Drills:

Students experiences with drills were mixed:

- Drills made some people feel anxious
- Some said they don't address the full situation
- Drills made some feel safer and more prepared



80% of students said they are familiar with their school's emergency plans and procedures.



30% of students said they would **definitely** know what to do if there was a safety threat after school, during transitions, or during lunch.

On school communication:

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

Students look to their teachers and peers first when seeking more information on safety incidents.

“Sometimes our teachers don’t know what is going on, and that makes us more scared.”

“Tell us what happened, without hiding details.”

On safety for *all* students

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

Specific things that students noted in our dialogues 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.

“Students of color feel unsafe when they are just talking about their experiences.”

Additional data from the survey:

- **94%** said it would be very easy or somewhat easy to reach out to adults if they had a safety concern.
- **93%** said they are very or somewhat confident that the adult would follow up with them afterward.
- **20%** said they were aware of the anonymous school safety tip line.
- **18%** said they have ideas on how to make their school safer.
- **44%** said they are given the chance to express feedback on safety plans and procedures.

10 Suggestions from Dialogue Participants

1. Engage in schoolwide and classroom practices to build strong student-teacher relationships, including:
 - Regularly checking in with students to see how they are doing
 - Providing opportunities for students to share their perspectives on school issues
 - Letting students know you are someone they can share concerns with
2. During or after a drill or incident:
 - Communicate clearly and consistently
 - Check in with students to ask if they are OK and see what they need.
 - Ask for feedback about what could be done differently next time.
3. Recognize that not all students are impacted by school safety measures or incidents in the same ways:
 - Examine safety policies with an equity lens, asking how different groups of students may be impacted differently.

10 Suggestions from Dialogue Participants

4. Share clear information about what the process is when students report concerns.
5. Publicize the anonymous reporting hotline and consider options for anonymous school-level reporting.
6. Make sure all staff (including special educators, coaches, substitute teachers, etc.) are familiar with school safety procedures.
7. Be as open and transparent about incidents as possible.
8. Encourage adult presence in hallways between classes.
9. As possible, notify students and staff in advance of emergency drills.
10. Continue to engage youth in conversations about school safety, asking *“What is it that adults don’t see?”*

What are *your* next steps based on what you've just heard?

How can you carry on the conversation with young people about school safety and security measures?



Thank you!



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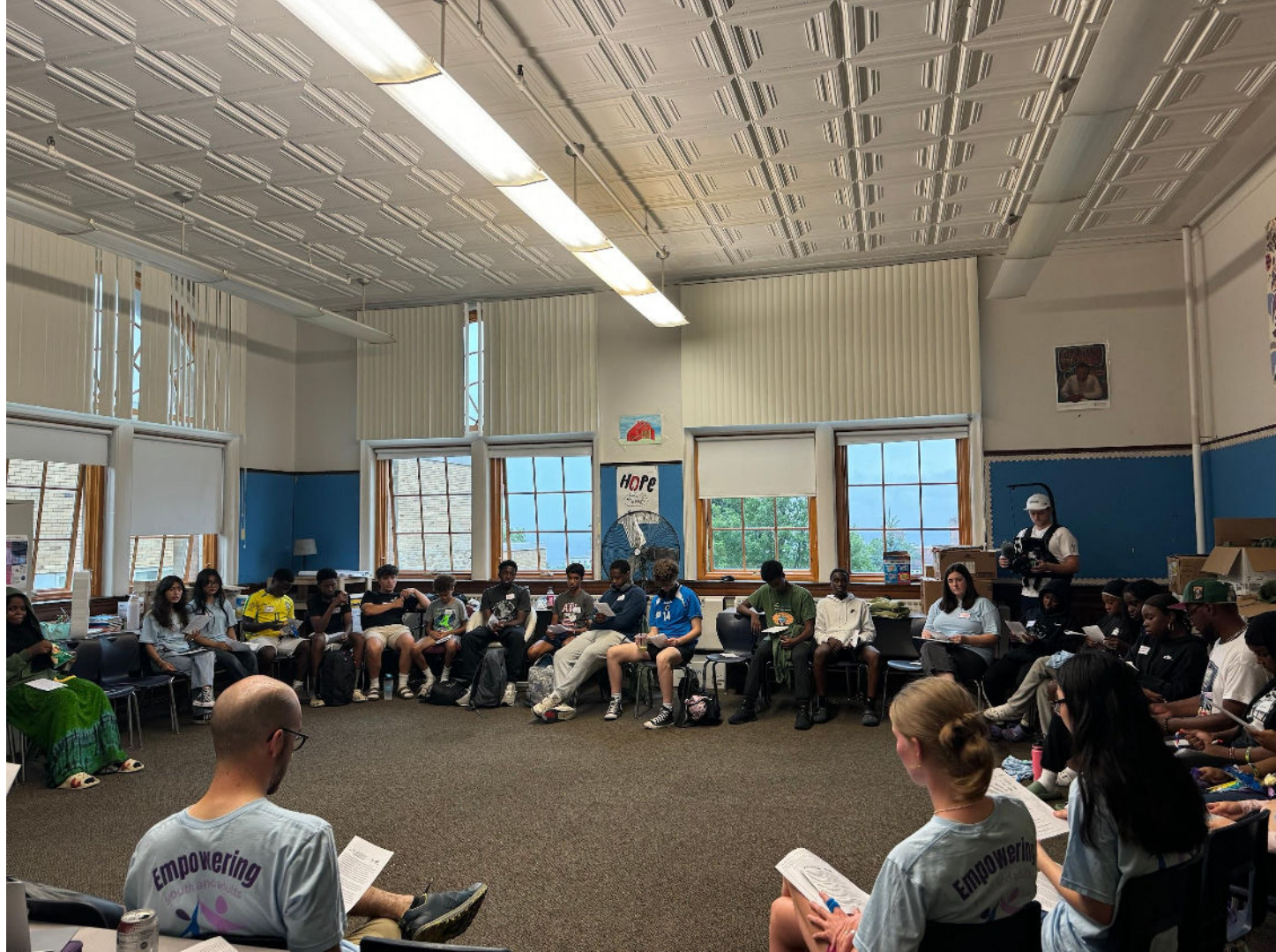


















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1 BUILD RELATIONSHIPS

Take time to build mutual respect, trust and equal partnership through team building, shared traditions and personal relationships.



2 DEVELOP CRITICAL AWARENESS

Research current and historical oppression and discrimination. This awareness will help you uncover the root cause of systemic inequities in your community.



3 IDENTIFY ISSUES & DEVELOP QUESTIONS

Identify issues important to you and your community and ask important questions.



4 CREATE A RESEARCH DESIGN

Decide what data is necessary to collect and how you will collect it.



5 CONDUCT RESEARCH & ENGAGE COMMUNITY

Use your research design plan to go into the community and collect the data.



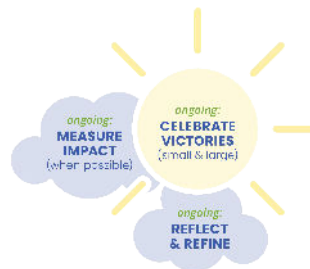
6 ANALYZE DATA & SHARE WITH COMMUNITY

Analyze your data, share your findings with the community and discuss possible solutions.



7 IMPLEMENT ACTION FOR CHANGE

Implement a plan of action based on your findings.



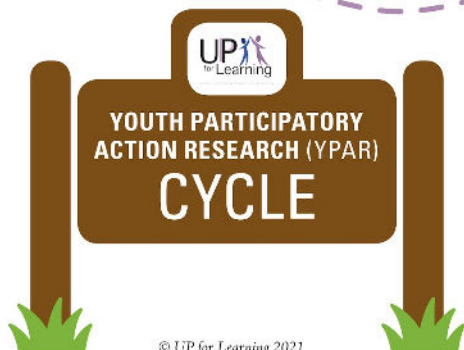
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ongoing:
MEASURE
IMPACT
(when possible)

ongoing:
CELEBRATE
VICTORIES
(small and large)

ongoing:
REFLECT &
REFINE

3 IDENTIFY ISSUES & DEVELOP QUESTIONS

Identify issues important to you and your community and ask important questions.



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YOUTH VOICE & AGENCY

Adults inform and/or direct youth. Ideally, adults support expression and actively listen to youth.

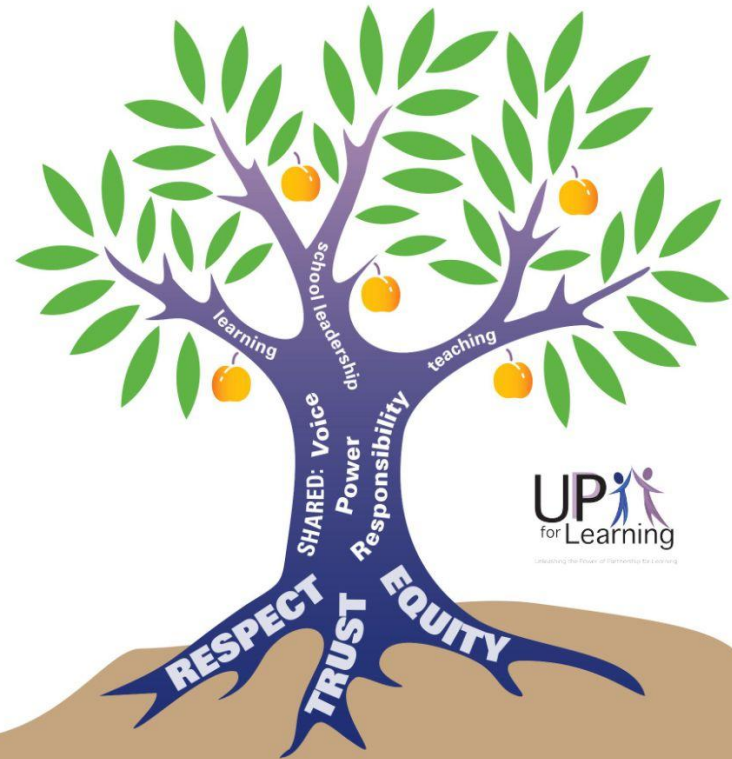
YOUTH AS RECIPIENTS

Adults actively seek and consider opinions of youth in learning and decision-making.

YOUTH AS CONSULTANTS

Youth actively participate in decision-making about learning and school matters in a process that is initiated and guided by adults.

YOUTH & ADULTS AS EMERGING PARTNERS



YOUTH & ADULTS AS FULL PARTNERS

Learning, teaching, and school leadership are founded on equitable, respectful, trusting, cross-generational relationships characterized by shared power, voice, and responsibility.

Adults inform and/or direct youth.
Ideally, adults support expression and actively listen to youth.



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Youth actively participate in decision-making about learning and school matters in a process that is initiated and guided by adults.

