

# Long Island Student Forum

## Engagement Summary

February 28, 2025





## PARTICIPATION

### Breakdown of Participation



#### **Eastern Suffolk BOCES**

33 students

13 districts

2 CTE schools (districts not included)

#### **Nassau BOCES**

54 students

17 districts

3 CTE schools (districts not included)

#### **Western Suffolk BOCES**

22 students

9 districts

#### **Totals**

109 students

39 districts

5 CTE schools

# Table Topics





The responses highlight the importance of community and inclusivity in schools to support mental health. Students emphasize the need for more cultural events, career guidance, and mental health resources like wellness rooms and mental health days. They stress the detrimental impact of academic pressure and the need for better support systems, including staff training and open discussions about mental health. The responses also suggest promoting social relationships and providing clear guidance on academic and career paths. Overall, students feel their schools are making efforts but still have significant room for improvement, rating their schools' handling of mental health issues at an average of 7.2 out of 10.

A word cloud of terms related to mental health and academic pressure. The words are arranged in a circular pattern, with 'health' and 'mental' being the largest and most central. Other prominent words include 'pressure', 'stress', 'college', 'academically', 'counselors', 'feel', 'classes', 'important', 'system', 'one', 'grades', 'lack', 'better', 'social', 'career', 'advanced', 'applications', 'elective', 'activities', 'know', 'talk', 'cause', 'many', 'idea', 'guidance', 'discussed', 'environment', 'along', 'events', 'problem', 'future', 'order', 'excluded', and 'help'. The colors are varied, including shades of green, blue, purple, pink, and yellow.

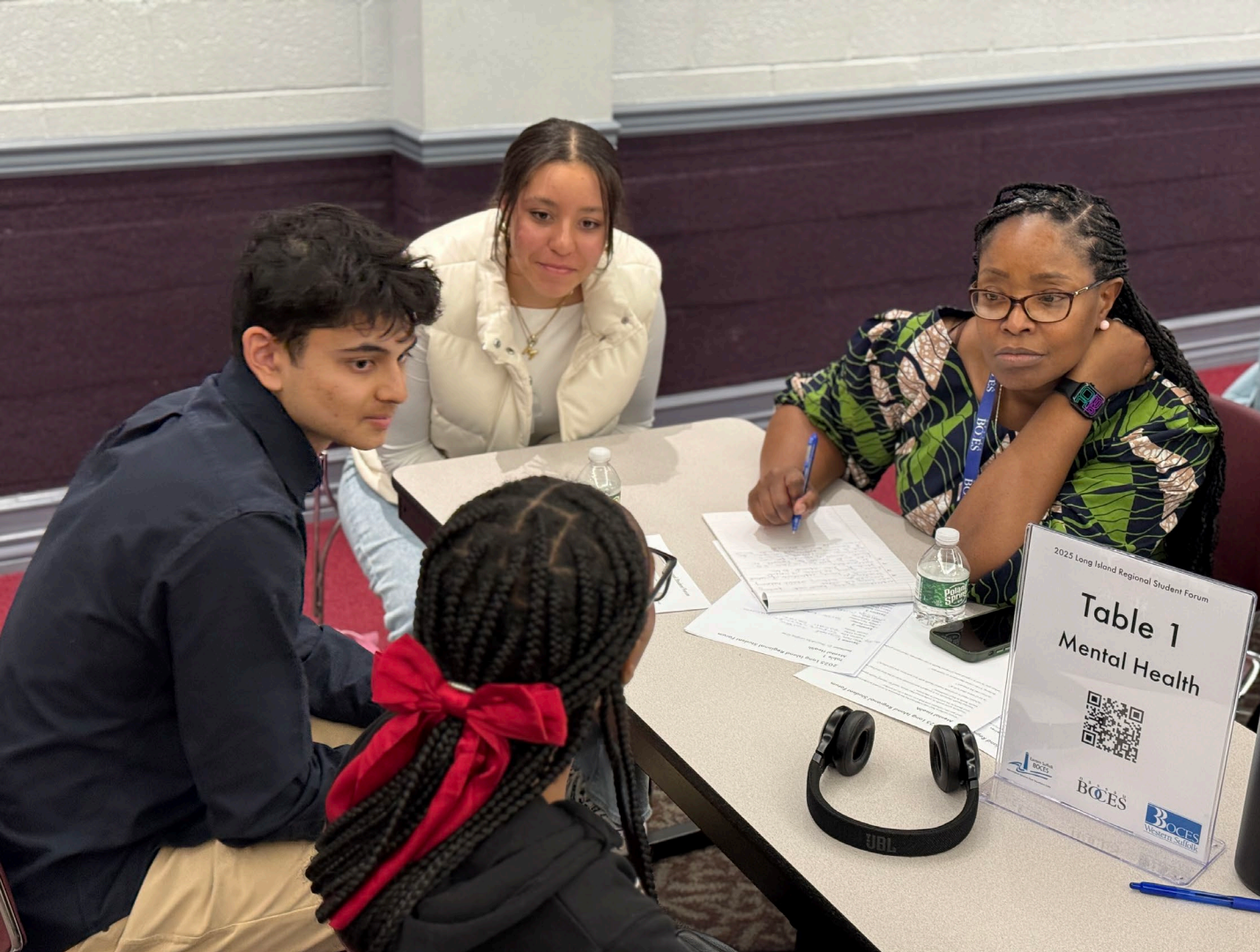
*"Mental health is just as important as physical health, yet it often gets overlooked in schools."*

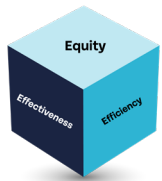
*"Mental health days off sound crucial and important."*

*"It is important that schools emphasize the importance of mental health and encourage students to reach out if they are struggling."*

# Mental Health







# MENTAL HEALTH

- **Community and Support Systems:** Emphasizing the importance of a supportive community within schools, including staff training to ensure students feel supported and understood.
- **Mental Health Resources:** Highlighting the need for more mental health resources such as wellness rooms, mental health days, and events that promote mental well-being.
- **Academic Pressure:** Addressing the significant stress and pressure students face due to academic expectations, college applications, and standardized testing.
- **Extracurricular and Career Guidance:** The necessity for better guidance in extracurricular activities and career planning, including more meaningful elective classes and career centers.
- **Open Discussions and Events:** Encouraging open discussions about mental health and organizing events that allow students to express their concerns and seek help.

## Balancing Resources and Pressure

Side A

### School Resources

Many responses highlighted the importance of having adequate mental health resources in schools, such as career centers, school psychologists, guidance counselors, and wellness rooms. These resources are seen as essential for providing students with the support they need to manage stress and mental health challenges.

Common ground

### Support Systems

Both sides agree on the necessity of having strong support systems in place for students. Whether through improved mental health resources or reducing academic pressure, the common goal is to ensure that students have access to the help they need to maintain their mental well-being.

Side B

### Academic Pressure

Several responses pointed out the significant stress and pressure placed on students to excel academically. This includes the pressure to take advanced classes, perform well on standardized tests, and meet high expectations, which can lead to chronic stress, anxiety, and burnout.





# ACADEMIC PRESSURE

Respondents highlighted the significant academic pressure faced by high school students, emphasizing the need for empathy and support from teachers, parents, and guidance counselors. They noted the stress from taking numerous high-level courses and the competitive nature of class rankings. Suggestions included normalizing breaks, focusing on personal interests, and providing better mental health support. The pressure affects students' well-being, particularly those balancing extracurricular activities or coming from disadvantaged backgrounds. Overall, there is a call for a more balanced approach to academics that prioritizes students' mental health and personal growth.



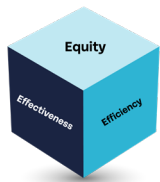
*"Academic pressure can lead to stress, anxiety, and burnout as students feel intense pressure to perform well. This focus on grades often overlooks personal growth, creativity, and emotional well-being."*

*"There is a lot of pressure placed on students to take high level honors, college, AP, and IB courses. These courses put unnecessary pressure on students to take the courses that 'look best' to colleges, peers, or parents, not to themselves."*

*"Students don't get the support system that will help relieve pressure. Especially with managing sports and academics at the same time."*







# ACADEMIC PRESSURE

- Teacher and Parent Awareness:** Teachers and parents need to be more empathetic and supportive of the personal and academic stresses faced by students. Proper training and education for guidance counselors are also essential.
- Course Selection Pressure:** There is significant pressure on students to take high-level courses (AP, IB, honors) that may not align with their interests but are perceived to look better for college admissions.
- Impact on Mental Health:** Academic pressure can lead to stress, anxiety, and burnout, often at the expense of personal growth, creativity, and emotional well-being.
- Class Rank and Competition:** The focus on class rank fosters unhealthy competition among students, damaging relationships and self-esteem. Reducing emphasis on ranking could promote a more collaborative environment.
- Balancing Academics and Extracurriculars:** Students, especially athletes and those involved in extracurricular activities, struggle to balance their schedules. A more supportive system and realistic expectations are needed to help manage this balance.

## Balancing Academic Pressure and Rigor

Side A

### Reduce Academic Pressure

Many responses highlight the need to reduce academic pressure on students. They argue that the current system places unnecessary stress on students by emphasizing high-level courses, class rankings, and the need to look good for colleges. This pressure can lead to stress, anxiety, and burnout, and often overlooks personal growth and emotional well-being. Suggestions include focusing on courses based on interest, reducing the emphasis on class rank, and providing more mental health support.

Common ground

### Balanced Approach

Both sides agree on the importance of balancing academic goals with students' mental health and well-being. There is a consensus that while academic success is important, it should not come at the cost of students' emotional and personal growth. A balanced approach that includes appropriate breaks, mental health support, and realistic expectations can help create a healthier and more supportive academic environment.

Side B

### Maintain Academic Rigor

Some responses suggest that maintaining a high level of academic rigor is important for preparing students for college and future careers. They argue that challenging courses like AP and honors classes are necessary to push students to achieve their best and to stand out in college applications. The focus is on the importance of striving for academic excellence and the benefits of a competitive academic environment.





*"We need to put more emphasis on safety as well as encouraging club involvement."*

*“Social media can be damaging to school safety.”*

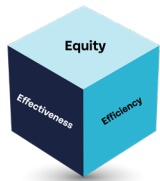
*“Having supportive teachers and Zen spaces in school would help with safety and a positive school environment.”*

*“Cliques can cause toxic environments for those who want to be out there and engage in diverse groups of people.”*

*"Timings and schedules for clubs, sports and afterschool activities need to be organized so that students can participate in multiple programs."*







# SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

- Safety:** Safety in schools is a major concern among participants. They emphasize the need for improved safety measures and solutions that effectively identify and address potential threats, including the impact of social media on school safety.
- School Spirit:** School spirit is highlighted through activities such as cultural fairs, club collaborations and in-school events. They are a way to boost school spirit, create a sense of community, and engage in diverse groups and activities.
- Mental Health:** Participants believe that addressing mental health, having counseling available and creating Zen spaces in schools can lead to a safer and more supportive school environment.
- Social Media:** Participants are concerned about how social media influences interactions and the overall school environment. They suggest that promoting kindness and supportive interactions can mitigate some of the negative effects.
- Inclusion:** Participants believe that inclusive practices are essential for a healthy school culture. More activities that allow students to interact with a variety of peers can lead to a more positive and engaging school environment.

## Balancing Activities and Safety

Side A

### School Spirit and Activities

Many responses highlighted the importance of school spirit and activities such as cultural fairs, club collaborations, and organized schedules for clubs and sports. These activities are seen as essential for fostering a sense of community and engagement among students.

Common ground

### Supportive Environment

Both sides agree on the need for a supportive environment, whether through engaging activities or enhanced safety measures. A supportive environment includes having kind interactions, mental health resources, and spaces where students feel safe and valued.

Side B

### School Safety

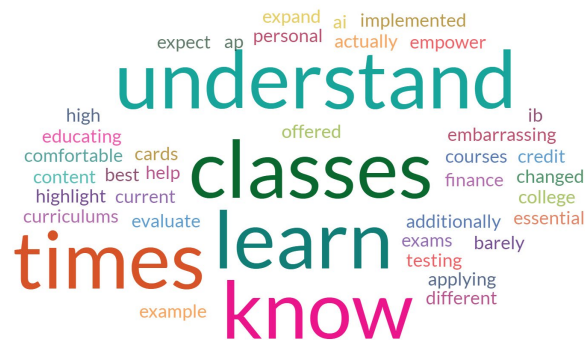
Concerns about school safety were prominent, with suggestions for improved safety precautions, better identification of objects, and the need for supportive teachers and counseling. Safety is seen as a critical factor for a positive school environment.





# WHAT AND HOW WE LEARN

Students are unique individuals, and their curriculum and assessments should reflect that. They would like more emphasis on subject matters they feel passionate about, and topics that would assist their transition to adulthood. They would also like more experiential learning and the opportunity to explore career pathways while in high school. Students feel there is a disparity in offerings and expressed the desire for increased access to AP and IB courses. Students also feel that standardized exams are memory-based and should be reevaluated. They would like more instruction on how to take exams and alternative procedures for taking them. They also feel that a focus on improving relationships and communications with teachers could enhance their academic performance.



*"Students need to learn how to take tests. Oftentimes help is offered, but it is not widely known about or is viewed as embarrassing to participate in."*

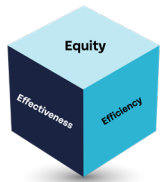
*"Introduce oral exams in addition to written exams, as a different way to evaluate student learning and understanding of content."*

*"Offer virtual AP and IB classes to expand these courses to schools that are not typically able to offer them."*

*"Classes such as personal finance and public speaking are essential to students because they highlight things that kids will use in college."*







# WHAT AND HOW WE LEARN

- Curriculum:** Students would like access to a variety of topics, more real-world learning experiences, internships and increased instruction on life skills. They feel that many of the subjects taught do not deal with real life experiences.
- Testing:** Participants believe standardized tests are stressful and often given priority over homework and projects. They feel they are not always accurate assessments of a student's knowledge.
- School/Life Balance:** Students often have difficulty balancing school workload with extracurricular activities and work or personal obligations. A schedule that accommodates a lunch or recess period with space for students to interact would positively impact school effectiveness.
- Student/Teacher Relationships:** Participants believe the pace of teacher instruction is driven by exams. They feel they cannot connect with teachers which hampers their learning. They also feel they would benefit from access to additional resources.

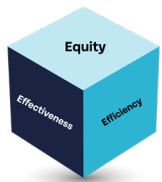
What and How We  
Learn



# Table Topics – Additional Notes







# MENTAL HEALTH

**Proactive Mental Health Support & Awareness** – Schools should focus on mental health **before** crises occur by consistently checking in, raising awareness, and offering coping strategies through classes, outreach, and peer support.

**Accessible & Visible Resources** – Schools have mental health resources but **don't always promote them well**. Support staff should engage students regularly, normalize help-seeking, and implement an **open-door policy** to ensure students feel comfortable reaching out.

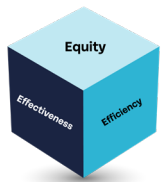
**Student & Staff Relationships Matter** – Strong **student-teacher and mentor relationships** foster trust and make students feel heard. Encouraging teacher and counselor presence in classrooms helps students understand who they can turn to.

**Dedicated Mental Health Spaces & Activities** – Creating **quiet rooms, wellness centers, and stress-relief spaces** in schools allows students to take breaks when needed. Incorporating **mindfulness activities, check-ins, and arts-based outlets** can also help students manage stress.

**A Culture of No Judgment & Daily Mental Health Practices** – Schools should **normalize conversations** around mental health, emphasize **"It's okay not to be okay,"** and provide ongoing opportunities for students to develop **self-care habits** through structured support.

## Mental Health





# MENTAL HEALTH

**Consistent Support & Mental Health Awareness** – Schools should not only listen but also follow up with students. Normalize seeking help, reduce stigma, and make resources more accessible through trusted advisors, teacher mentors, and peer connections.

**Balanced Academics & Student Well-being** – Address academic stress by improving scheduling (fewer overlapping exams and large assignments), offering lighter junior/senior year loads, and ensuring students aren't overburdened by guidance counselor pressure for advanced courses.

**Building Stronger Relationships** – Encourage deeper student-teacher relationships, smaller class sizes, and mentorship programs. Trust and connection with adults and peers help create a respectful and supportive school environment.

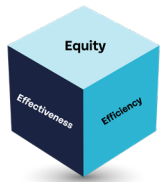
**More Inclusive & Equitable School Culture** – Reduce competitive pressures around grades, rankings, and course selection. Provide equal support for clubs and extracurriculars, not just sports, and ensure resources are fairly distributed.

**Life Skills & Mental Health Education** – Integrate life skills (sleep habits, hygiene, stress management) into the curriculum. Expand mindfulness initiatives, peer-support programs, and events like **Challenge Day** and **PS I Love You Day** to build emotional resilience.

## Mental Health







# ACADEMIC PRESSURE

**Increased Academic Pressure** – Students feel more pressure transitioning from middle school, trying to maintain grades, and making up for early struggles. **High expectations** lead to stress and burnout.

**College & Future Concerns** – The **competitive nature of college admissions** and job prospects adds stress, with students comparing themselves to peers and feeling the need to **be the best to be recognized**.

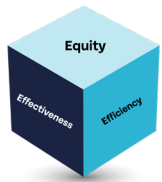
**Time Management Struggles** – Juggling **extracurriculars, sports, jobs, and academic work** is overwhelming. Students feel expected to prioritize everything equally, leading to exhaustion.

**Exam & Homework Overload** – **High-stakes testing (APs, finals)** and excessive homework feel more like **busywork** than meaningful learning, creating frustration and stress.

**Mental Health & Burnout** – The constant pressure to succeed causes **burnout and anxiety**, and students struggle to take breaks without feeling guilty. Many need **mandatory study halls and breaks**.

Academic Pressure





# ACADEMIC PRESSURE

**Need for Teacher Support & Understanding** – Enthusiastic and **accommodating teachers** make a difference. Some teachers **disregard student needs**, move too fast, or fail to check in.

**More Mental Health Resources** – Students need **school psychologists, social workers, and Zen Den spaces** for check-ins, stress relief, and **open conversations about mental health**.

**Parental & Cultural Expectations** – **Pressure from parents**, especially in **immigrant or first-generation families**, adds stress. Students struggle with **balancing expectations with social lives**.

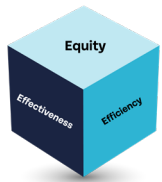
**School Competition & Stigma** – **Class rankings, college choices, and academic comparisons** create tension. There's stigma around which college students attend and a **pressure to be in the top percentiles**.

**Better Guidance & Balance Needed** – Schools should **help students make informed class choices, encourage balance, and reduce stigma around seeking help**. Learning should be **meaningful, not just about meeting standards**.

Academic Pressure







# WHAT & HOW WE LEARN

**Testing Anxiety & Overload** – Students feel overwhelmed by excessive testing, back-to-back exams, and high-stakes standardized tests that don't reflect their learning.

**Test-Taking Skills & Support** – Schools should offer **electives on test strategies**, including time management, process of elimination, and background knowledge application.

**Alternative Testing Methods** – **Oral exams and project-based assessments** should be encouraged as different students learn in different ways.

**Real-World Learning** – Students want **courses on financial literacy, taxes, networking, and life skills** to better prepare for adulthood.

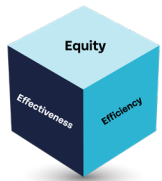
**More Hands-On & Experiential Learning** – Moving from study-quiz-test cycles to **project-based, interactive lessons and real-world experiences** is needed.

**Mental Health Support** – Schools need **more check-in opportunities, mandatory breaks, and spaces to talk about stress, burnout, and mental health struggles**.

**Stronger Teacher-Student Connections** – Students learn better from teachers they **respect and feel connected to**, but many feel their needs are disregarded.

What & How We  
Learn





# WHAT & HOW WE LEARN

**Guidance & Career Preparation** – More **career pathways, internships, and college prep courses** should be offered instead of just relying on the Naviance app.

**Stigma Around Vocational Paths** – The **negative perception of trade schools and non-college routes** discourages students from exploring alternative career options.

**Need for School Spirit & Community** – A **lack of school-wide events and camaraderie** contributes to a disengaged learning environment.

**Class Offerings & Electives** – Many students feel they **don't have enough say in course selection**, and seniors are often stuck in “filler classes.”

**Technology Use & Challenges** – Students prefer **pen and paper for learning**, find online tests difficult, and believe cell phone distractions should be managed.

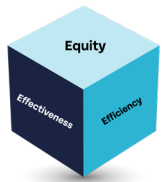
**Academic Pressure & Competition** – **High-level courses create unnecessary competition**, and students feel the pressure to perform at the expense of well-being.

**More Flexible Schedules** – Schools should **mandate lunch periods, reduce workload overload, and allow more student choice in scheduling**.

What & How We  
Learn







# SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

**Student Engagement & School Structure** – Some students are eager to learn while others are disengaged. Schools vary in fostering both academics and extracurriculars, with some reinforcing stereotypes about who can succeed in different areas.

**School Culture & Cliques** – Some schools have an inclusive culture, while others are divided into cliques, making it difficult for students to connect across different groups.

**Extracurricular Opportunities** – Schools with structured and accessible extracurricular activities (e.g., staggered club schedules) help students engage in multiple interests.

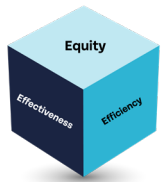
**School Spirit & Participation** – Many schools struggle with low school spirit, which must be actively cultivated through events, student-led initiatives, and inclusive activities.

**Bullying & Social Media** – Cyberbullying and in-person bullying remain major concerns. Solutions include awareness events, positive peer role models, and consistent counselor engagement.

**Safety Concerns** – School safety is impacted by bullying, student threats, and discipline policies. Strategies like random bag checks and stronger student-adult relationships can help.

## School Environment





# SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

**Student Voice & Leadership** – Many students feel their voices are limited to formal leadership groups. Schools should create more opportunities for all students to contribute.

**Mental Health Support** – Safe spaces, stress-free days, therapy dogs, and mindful breaks are needed to support student well-being. Teachers should recognize different student needs.

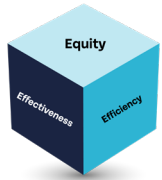
**Diversity & Inclusion** – Exposure to diverse cultures is crucial, but some schools reinforce segregation through lack of interaction between different identity groups.

**Respect & Open-mindedness** – Respect in schools includes open-mindedness, acknowledging others, and maintaining clean shared spaces. Relationship-building beyond academics is key.

**Rethinking Rigid School Schedules** – Students feel school routines are too monotonous. More flexibility, breaks, and diverse activities could improve engagement.

School  
Environment





# SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

**Competitiveness & Academic Pressure** – Academic rankings can lead to unhealthy competition and exclusion. Schools need alternative ways to recognize student success.

**Teacher-Student Relationships** – Students value teachers who build meaningful connections beyond academics and support them emotionally.

**Recognizing Student Achievements** – Schools should celebrate student accomplishments beyond academics, including extracurriculars and community involvement.

**Creating a Supportive Environment** – Schools should encourage mentoring, peer support, and teacher adaptability to students' evolving needs, ensuring all feel seen and valued.

School  
Environment





# Event Day Feedback | Exit Survey

*"I was honored to have been asked to attend today's conference. It was informative and I personally enjoyed meeting with other student leaders. Through the eyes of the students that attended many of us agreed that reform is needed in many areas. It is the youth of today that will help make way for the changes of tomorrow.*

*I look forward to other such brainstorming events to come and hope to attend next year's event as a graduating senior.*

*Thank you very much for putting this forum together. Your efforts are greatly appreciated."*







# Feedback

The responses highlight the importance of student voices being heard and supported during the event. Many students appreciated the opportunity to express their opinions and felt empowered by the inclusive environment. Key takeaways included the shared experiences of stress and the need for better mental health support, financial literacy, and civic engagement classes. Suggestions for future events included more time for discussions, incorporating more topics, and involving legislators and policymakers. Overall, the event was well-received, with students valuing the chance to connect, share ideas, and feel heard.

## Enhancing Student Event Experience

Side A

### Student Empowerment

Many responses highlighted the importance of student voices being heard and valued. Students appreciated the opportunity to express their opinions, share their experiences, and feel empowered. They felt that the event provided a platform for meaningful dialogue and allowed them to contribute to potential changes in the education system.

Common ground

### Need for Improvement

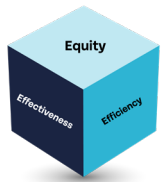
Both sides agree on the need for continuous improvement in future events. Whether it is enhancing student empowerment or refining the event structure, there is a shared understanding that feedback should be used to make the sessions more effective and inclusive. This common ground can help bridge the gap between different perspectives.

Side B

### Event Structure

Several responses focused on the structure and organization of the event. Suggestions included having more time for discussions, incorporating more topics, and involving more facilitators or decision-makers. Some participants felt that the event could be improved by allowing more interaction and ensuring that all voices are heard.





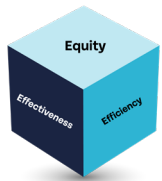
# Feedback

- Opportunity to Speak:** The event provided a platform for all students to share their thoughts, opinions, and concerns openly.
- Valued Opinions:** Participants felt that their opinions were valued and heard, contributing to a sense of importance and empowerment.
- Diverse Perspectives:** The event allowed students from various backgrounds to express their views, promoting inclusivity and understanding.
- Constructive Dialogue:** Students engaged in meaningful dialogues, which helped in deriving solutions and fostering a collaborative environment.



How Did This Event Support Student Voices?





# Feedback

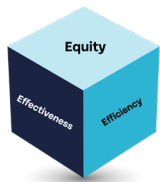
- **Shared Experiences:** Students from different backgrounds share similar struggles, especially with mental health and academic stress.
- **Support Systems:** Schools need better support systems, including personalized guidance and mental health resources.
- **Communication and Collaboration:** Open communication and collaboration with peers are valuable for positive change.
- **Mental Health Focus:** Schools should prioritize mental health to reduce stress and promote well-being.



What Was The Highlight Or Biggest Takeaway?







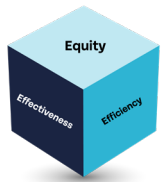
# Feedback

- **More Time and Sessions:** Longer and more sessions to allow everyone to share their insights and to cover more topics.
- **Presentation and Feedback:** Presenting ideas to stakeholders and decision-makers, and compiling suggestions for review and implementation.
- **Structured Interaction:** Introducing themselves to new group mates, limiting the number of speakers in the final round, and ensuring everyone visits all topic tables.
- **Direct Connection to Decision Makers:** Participants expressed the need for a more direct connection to state education departments or legislators to discuss issues and concerns.
- **Perfect as Is:** A number of participants felt that the event was perfect as it was and did not suggest any changes.



What Could We  
Have Done  
Differently?





# Feedback

Respondents suggested several improvements for future events, including more time for discussions, additional topics, and opportunities for networking. They recommended allowing students to choose seating for idea sharing, incorporating team-building activities, and involving younger students. Some proposed using the stage, having adult facilitators more active, and providing note-taking sheets. Suggestions also included having a safe space game, a guest speaker, and more frequent check-ins. Overall, many praised the event and encouraged its continuation.

"More time to discuss the issues at hand!"

"For future events the forum should allow all students the opportunity to network/ receive each others contact."

"To keep doing this, it was amazing!"

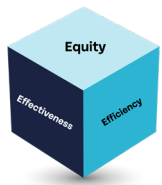
"Making the sessions longer and incorporating some team-building activities could be considered."

"Future events should give students a sheet to take notes and time to reflect on how they can help implement these ideas in their schools."

"As mentioned, incorporating more legislators and policy makers into the event and allowing students to interact directly with them to make a difference."

What Are Your  
Suggestions For  
Future Events?





# Feedback

"It's great to see kids from different backgrounds talk to each other in such an open way."

"My biggest takeaway from today is we as students need support systems that will help us get through hard times."

"We need to have more student check ins from this forum."

"I loved it, my biggest takeaway is that when students get together and all collaborate, we can create amazing ideas."

"My biggest takeaway was the need for community throughout school."

"Students of this generation are more aware of global problems than ever before due to the social media and news we consume on a daily basis."

"My biggest takeaway was that mental health really can be integrated and connected into everyone problem facing students today."

"My biggest takeaway from the event is that nobody is alone."

