

VOX ATL created a regional survey in 2015 to fill an information gap and help adults who work with youth know more about teens' needs from their own perspectives. This statewide, strengths-based survey shares young people's insights around:

- Afterschool:** How do teens currently spend time outside of school? What influences how teens spend their time? How do teens wish to spend their time outside of school? What makes a quality after-school program? Where do they feel valued?
- Mental Health and Well-being:** What do teens say are the main causes of stress today? How do they access mental-health resources, and what are the barriers we can overcome?
- Communications:** Where do teens get their information, and how do they like to communicate, so we can reach them more effectively?

METHODOLOGY

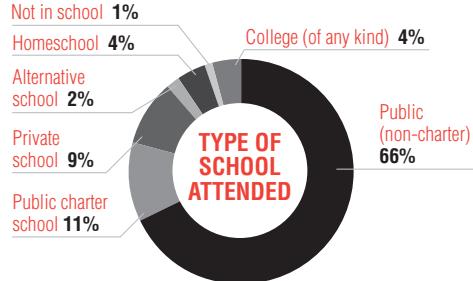
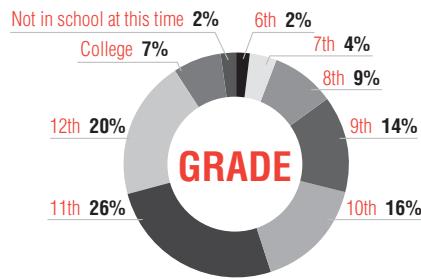
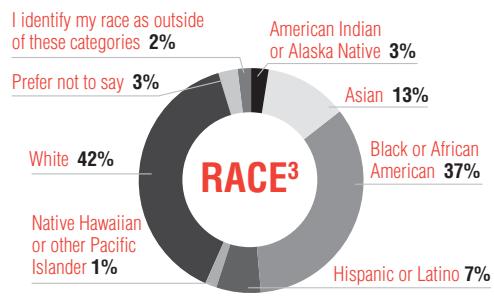
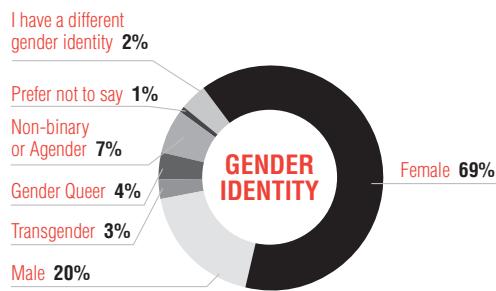
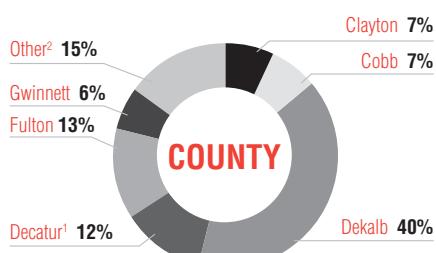
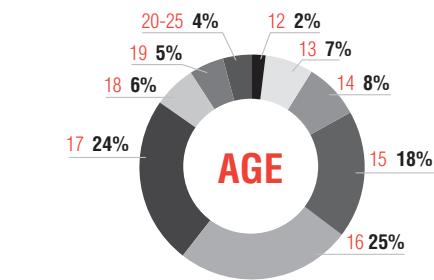
This seventh annual Teen Survey was expanded statewide and updated to respond to the COVID-19 environment. The survey was designed with input from 13 partner organizations, teen leaders and staff from VOX ATL, and Georgia State University MACIE educators, MA candidate Tram Nguyen and graduate A. Posey.

After two focus groups and a brief survey, we updated the questions to include insights that service providers wanted to inform their work. We also updated the design, while maintaining the mobile-responsive Survey Monkey platform and the opportunity for participants to enter into drawings to win a gift card.

We promoted the survey through peer-to-peer communications, on VOX ATL social media, and to schools and youth-serving organizations, as well as the Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities, which supports the mental health component. We published teens' promotional graphics and the survey link via paid advertising on Instagram. And we encouraged teens in our programs to take the survey and share it with their peers.

WHO TOOK THE SURVEY?

This survey had 2009 entries, with a 90% completion rate, though a large number of entries appeared to be fraudulent, which were removed from the analysis*. The data results below focus on 377 entries. Respondents ranged in age from 12-25 years old, with an average age of 16. The majority of respondents identified as female (69%); and 62% identified as people of color, while 42% identified as white. The vast majority are in school (98%), and most of those youth (66%) attend a non-charter public school.

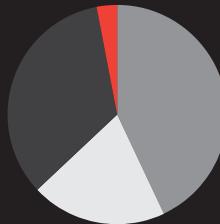


1. Decatur is assumed to mean city / town by respondents' interpretation

2. Other counties include Cherokee, Dooly, Douglas, Fannin, Fayette, Forsyth, Henry, Newton, Paulding, Rockdale, Spalding, Wayne, White

3. Participants could choose more than one category for this question

HOW DID YOU ATTEND SCHOOL IN 2020-21?



- 43% - Virtually
- 19% - In-person
- 34% - A mix of virtual and in-person
- 2% - I'm not in school

*Not all survey participants answered every question, so percentages do not always add up to 100%.

WHAT TEENS HAVE TO SAY IN 2021

TOPICS OF MOST IMPORTANCE

The top three topics that teens selected as most important to them in 2021 are:

Life After High School (college & career)	50%
Social Justice (including your rights, interaction with law enforcement)	47%
Mental Health & Wellness	43%
Arts & Culture (movies, music, art exhibits, performing arts, etc.)	42%
Discrimination (-isms like racism, sexism, agism, bullying, etc.)	41%
Environment	37%
Education (during the high school years)	34%
Sex & Sexuality (including sex education)	34%
Social Media and/or Games	28%
My Community/My Neighborhood (my ATL - the good, the bad and the ugly)	23%
Physical Health & Wellness	23%
Faith/Religion	16%
Drug & Alcohol Use	10%
High School Sports	9%
A different topic	2%

*Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.

AFTER-SCHOOL HABITS, NEEDS & INFLUENCES

Teens were asked to consider this past year specifically, even if the answer differs from previous / non-COVID years, and shared their experiences and needs for out-of-school time, answering the following questions:

WHAT MAKES AN AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAM A QUALITY EXPERIENCE IN YOUR OPINION?

The community / a feeling of belonging	60%
No-judgment zone (a space that is free of judgment)	50%
Opportunities to expand my skills	50%
Opportunities to meet new people	46%

DURING A TYPICAL SCHOOL WEEK, WHAT DO YOU DO AFTER SCHOOL?

	Often	Sometimes	Never
I go/stay home	60%	30%	3%
I go to/stay at a friend's house	12%	42%	38%
I go to/stay at a guardian/relative's house	20%	27%	44%
I hang out outdoors (alone or with friends)	18%	53%	22%
I stay at my school for after-school activities (clubs or sports)	25%	42%	27%
I go to an after-school program that is NOT at my school (virtual or in-person)	19%	28%	46%
I go to my job	12%	25%	54%
I go to my internship or work-study program (virtual or in-person)	9%	17%	66%

OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME HOME ALONE

Teens share how often they were home alone after school in 2020-21. These percentages are lower than the rates of self-report in 2019 and 2020 before COVID-19.

0-1 day	1-2 days	2-3 days	3-4 days	4-5 days
27.85%	19.89%	14.06%	6.90%	12.73%

WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO DO AFTER SCHOOL, IF YOU COULD?

The top four responses were:

Hang out outdoors*	44%
(New top answer in 2021)	
Hang out in a relaxing space just for teens	42%
(2020 and 2019's top answer)	
Stay home / personal time	40%
(This did not make the top 4 in 2020 or 2019.)	
Work a part-time job:	36%
(This was the #2 choice in 2020 at 64% and in 2019 at 61%.)	

Respondents could select more than one answer, so the percentages do not add up to 100%.

*Even though most teens said they want to spend time outside, only 18% said they often do.



TEENS & MENTAL HEALTH

STRESS LEVELS

It may be no surprise to hear that teens say they are more stressed than they were in the last two years.

What is your average daily level of stress?	2021	2020	2019
Low	10	16	27
Moderate	35.5	45	50
High	37	30	23
Extremely High	17	9	N/A

What causes the most stress?

The top three answers for 2021 were:

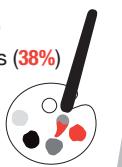
- Mental health (42%)
- School (36%)
- Body/appearance (33%)



In comparison, the top causes of stress in 2020 were school (74%), preparing for life after high school (51%), body issues (51%), and family challenges (50%).

What helps you alleviate stress?

- Making something creative (38%)
- Having a space away from others (38%)
- Talking it out with peers (33%)
- Reading (31%)



BARRIERS BARRIERS BARRIERS BARRIERS BARRIERS BARRIERS

BARRIERS TO GETTING HELP:

- “I don’t feel ok asking for help” is still the #1 response (25%)
- Cost (23%) is next
- “I don’t connect with the mental health provider” and “don’t know where to go” are third.



HEAR MORE FROM TEENS

- “Teens & the Language of Suicide” bit.ly/languageofsuicide
- “Teens Speak Up about Health — and It’s All about Mental Health” bit.ly/voxteenshealth
- “Free Your Feels” Kick-off: bit.ly/VOXFreeYourFeels

What influenced how you spent your time after school this year (2020-21)?



Covid-19 Quarantine 57% said lots of influence

Opportunities that interest me 37% said lots of influence (#1 influence in 2020)

Opportunities that might help my future 29% said lots of influence (#2 in 2020)

Parent/guardian's influence 24% said lots of influence (#4 influence in 2020)

What do you need to help you feel prepared for life after high school? Who (people or groups) is helping you prepare?

Most commonly named supports include mom/family member; community organization; counselor. More respondents named more “needs” than supports, however.

Teens said they need:

- College and career guidance and “practical” life skills
- Encouragement and confidence
- Work experience
- A “stable and supportive peer group.”

“Guidance and information about colleges and other opportunities after high school — I am getting this from everyone besides my high school.”

PREVENTING SUICIDE

Do you know anyone who has had suicidal thoughts?
Yes (49%); No (25%)

Have you ever had suicidal thoughts?

Yes (34%); No (39%)



“...We know a huge amount of the stressors that affect most teens and the largest one is ridiculously high work loads from schools. We have known for decades that more than an hour of homework a night total does more academic harm than good via harming mental health yet no school has made adjustments to account for this scientific fact. Focusing on treating existing problems is turning a blind eye to the root of the problem.”

COMMUNICATING ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH



STIGMA: DO YOU KNOW TEENS WHO TALK OPENLY ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH?

- 2021 stat = 59% (only 14% said no.)
- 2020 stat = 67%

WHERE DO YOU GET INFORMATION ON HEALTH (MENTAL HEALTH, PHYSICAL HEALTH, SEXUAL HEALTH, ETC.)?

- I look it up myself online (44%)
- Friends (34%)
- Family (33%)
- School counselor (15%) or resource center (13%)
- Community organization (11%)



“I think it’s important for parents to check on the mental health and wellness of their children because a lot of kids suffer in silence because they don’t feel like they can talk to their parents without being judged or simply because they don’t understand.”

“I think a big hurdle for some teens is the stigma of parents. Many want to seek care and have done their research, yet the ones who would give them a ride, pay for the fees, or even book an appointment are unwilling to give them access to care.”

“It’s really important that we show love to one another. It’s the most empowering thing our world has and will ever need.”



FEELING VALUED

WHERE DO TEENS FEEL VALUED?

When asked where teens felt valued, the most common answer was with their peers (**53%**, down from **80% in 2020**). Only **7%** said they feel valued in an afterschool program* (**down from 26%**), though **26%** said in an after-school club. Very few said they feel valued in their faith-based organizations (**17%**). Less than **10%** said they do not feel valued at all (**down from 16% last year**).

* This could be because most are not in an afterschool program, as national data shows most teens are not enrolled in an afterschool program.

WHO MAKES YOU FEEL VALUED?

Friends (**59%**)
Parent/guardian (**48%**)
Teachers (**37%**)
Club leader(s) (**15%**)

WHEN DO YOU FEEL VALUED?

I feel like I can make a difference (**48%**)
My peers ask for my ideas or opinions (**47%**)
Adults ask for my ideas or opinions (**44%**)
I can earn my own money or work at an internship (**40%**)



COMMUNICATIONS

SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS OR APPS

Most commonly used include:

YouTube (**46%** said often)
Instagram (**43%** said often)
TikTok (**36%** said often)

Least commonly used apps were:

Tumblr (**55%** said never)
Slack (**53%** said never)
Facebook (**52%** said never)

WHAT IS THE MOST COMMON WAY YOU COMMUNICATE WITH YOUR PEERS?

Texting is still #1 (**36%**)
Followed by messaging platforms like GroupMe, WhatsApp or Discord (**16%**)

WHERE DO YOU GET THE MAJORITY OF YOUR NEWS?

Social media: **43%**
Discussions with family: **39%**
Digital news websites: **38%**



HOW DO YOU CONNECT WITH YOUR COMMUNITY? OR HOW WOULD YOU LIKE TO CONNECT WITH YOUR COMMUNITY?

Volunteerism / community service

Events & protests

& social media were most common answers.

40% of youth who answered this question said
“I don’t connect with
my community”

“COVID changed everything, but
I am getting involved again slowly.”

“I connect with my community
by being a part of many
organizations and clubs. That
way, I keep myself busy while
providing positive change to the
environment around me.”

“It really depends on what you mean
by community. If you mean my friends
and family, I talk with them and hang
out with them. If you mean my peers
and teachers, I share my ideas.”

CONCLUSIONS

Knowing what helps youth feel valued, along with what they value in life, what they say they need, and how they communicate provides plenty of implications for adults wanting to provide quality opportunities for youth! Join VOX ATL for Lights on Afterschool and in various forums throughout the year to discuss these findings and conclusions that support youth today.



Thanks to the Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities for supporting this annual survey and seeking youth voices to reduce stigma and strengthen Georgia's quality system of care.

VOX ATL



Join the conversation online:

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PODCAST: Spotify/Soundcloud: Linktr.ee/voxcast
www.voxatl.org