

Promoting Positive Development in Youth Ages 10-15 in Genesee County

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I. Executive Summary

In 1935, Frank J. Manley, a Flint, Michigan physical education teacher, collaborated with philanthropist Charles Stewart Mott to develop a program to keep local school buildings open after school hours for a variety of health, recreation, and adult education programs for neighborhood residents. This “community education” concept evolved into the **National Center for Community Education (NCCE)**. People from across the country and around the world came to Flint for training and technical assistance in order to re-create similar programs in their own communities. When the NCCE dissolved in 2006, The National Center for Community Education (NCCE) Board of Trustees desired to leave a legacy to Genesee County. The NCCE supported the notion that community members were best positioned to address community needs. As a part of bringing community together to address problems, school and other community based public institutions were viewed as hubs for civic collaboration and springboards for community activism.

At the behest of the NCCE Board of Trustees, the Center for Collaboration and the Future of Schooling (CCFS) involved a **National Center for Community Education (NCCE) community discussion group** to:

1. Identify and “map” existing assets in Genesee County – e.g., community-based programs or organizations that would complement those services not provided in the formal educational system or that could address additional areas of need.
2. Better understand what community leaders and others thought and felt about the challenge of educating Genesee County children.
3. Begin to identify individuals and organizations who were interested in working collaboratively to address the needs of children.

A group of individuals and organizations representing the local public school system, higher education, mentoring organizations, counseling services, faith based organizations, churches, the local newspaper, businesses, community advocates, sports organizations, alternative education, the judicial system, and county organizations were invited to participate in a discussion that would address the needs of Genesee County children and become a legacy from the NCCE. These dedicated individuals met monthly for over a year and decided that the legacy would be a manifesto from the community pledging to support young people 10 to 15 years of age. The NCCE choose this age group because studies show that children between the ages of 10 and 15 are at a critical point in their lives. This window of time in their growth and development marks the last stage in which their life pathways are easily influenced. It is also widely accepted that youth are important to society as they represent our nation's future. Youth who are successful will lead their communities to be more vibrant and successful. Therefore, many researchers, practitioners, policy makers, and parents ask, "What will help our youth be successful?"

In order to gather the community's input to answer this question, the NCCE discussion group approached Community Challenge, a civic engagement initiative. Community Challenge is an initiative dedicated to building a better community by having citizens of all ages regularly come together to bring about positive change. In the Community Challenge approach, civic engagement is valued and incorporated as a regular part of decision-making, and non-profit organizations have the resources to encourage and support on-going civic engagement work that identifies and addresses community needs and issues. One of Community Challenge's approaches to civic engagement is to involve a broad cross section of the community in

identifying and prioritizing issues that lead to actions that promote Genesee County as a thriving community.

Next, Community Challenge convened a committee for the purpose of developing a road map of strategies to support local youth. The committee was given the title “The Critical Years: 10 to 15.” The Critical Years committee was composed of individuals and organizations representing the local public school systems, higher education, youth serving organizations, and philanthropy. The committee was commissioned to determine the status and needs of 10-15 year olds in the Genesee County community. Ultimately, the Critical Years committee wanted to provide the information, tools, and resources needed to promote the health of the community by investing in youth. Youth who are emotionally, mentally, and physically healthy will grow into successful, engaged adults who will bring vitality and economic success to their communities.

In order to accomplish that goal, the committee set out to:

- Receive input from 10 to 15 year olds across Genesee County about their status and needs
- Receive input from the community regarding the needs of 10-15 year olds in order to organize the community to support a Critical Years Community Pledge to 10-15 year olds
- Obtain commitment from the community to support 10 to 15 year olds in the county by fulfilling a Community Pledge
- Facilitate community and organization ownership of the Critical Years Community Pledge and their discovery of new ways to work collaboratively to meet the needs of 10 to 15 year olds
- Build accountability into the Critical Years Community Pledge

With an eye towards sustaining a commitment to organizational collaboration around youth ages 10 to 15, Priority Children was invited to participate in the Critical Years committee at the beginning of the process to provide their unique perspective as a child advocacy organization. Recognized as an informed and unbiased advocate, Priority Children has a strong history of working with community partners to improve the lives of children and families in Genesee County. In its unique role as a neutral convener, Priority Children will provide on-going leadership, coordination, and collaboration on the identified issues. They will bring key educators, parents, concerned citizens, business, faith and community leaders together with agencies and service providers to plan, identify, and implement strategies and actions to support existing services and to promote system changes that will make improvements for 10 to 15 year old youth and their families.

Project Description

Using an asset based or positive youth development approach, the Critical Years committee used the Community Challenge process to create a better understanding of youth needs and to organize the community's ability to respond to those needs. Prior research has clearly identified the importance for communities, especially those with high rates of poverty, residential mobility, and physical and social disorder, to identify what developmental assets they have available, or have the ability to create, that will promote positive development in their youth.

A multi-methods research strategy was used to ensure that the needs and assets were documented reliably in a way that would be grounded by the beliefs and opinions of youth and community members. The research strategies implemented included: 1) a comprehensive survey conducted in the spring of 2007 of more than 10,000 youth aged 10 to 15 in all 21 districts in

Genesee County to understand what promotes success in youth,¹ 2) focus groups of over 200 youth conducted in the spring of 2008 from a broad cross section of five communities to obtain an in-depth understanding of their perceptions of the supports they receive in their communities, and 3) a countywide Town Hall meeting conducted in the spring of 2008 that used the Deming process² to get input from approximately 400 community members and leaders regarding the ways Genesee County can support youth. Four focal points to promote the success of youth were clearly identified from this work:

1. Strengthen youth programs offered in the community
2. Promote more positive experiences for youth in the K-12 educational system
3. Provide supports for families
4. Promote safe environments for youth

It is important to note that for all four of these focal points, described in full below, the emphasis is on the primary tenet of Positive Youth Development (PYD): *positive relationships with committed and caring adults are essential to a young person's social and emotional development.*

Strengthen youth programs offered in the community. Both youth (survey and focus group participants) and Town Hall meeting participants identified the primary importance of having youth programs that provide direct services. Youth identified two very important program components:

1. Programs that help students develop positive relationships with peers:
 - a. Programs that incorporate teamwork and trust building
 - b. Welcoming committees at each school

¹ The Coordinated Community Student Survey (C²S²)

² A process to codify and tally input to identify top priorities

2. Programs that foster positive youth development, including activities that:
 - a. Promote leadership skill building
 - b. Provide positive new experiences for youth to broaden their horizons and increase their understanding of the world around them
 - c. Give students a voice in programming

Although there are a wide variety of programs available to 10 to 15 year old youth in Genesee County, Town Hall meeting participants and the focus group youth maintained that certain key elements of youth programs are not consistently provided across programs.

Programs need to consistently provide: fun activities, activities every day, and reliable and safe transportation. In order to offer programs that provide youth with these kinds of opportunities, it is important for the community to maintain highly skilled staff and secure funding for programs.

It is recommended that the community identify ways to support the following efforts:

1. Provide youth service program staff with multiple opportunities for professional development regarding the developmental needs of youth they are serving and how to build meaningful connections with youth and families
2. Ensure programs have stable sources of funding to ensure program consistency for youth

Promote more positive experiences for youth in the K-12 educational system. Town Hall meeting participants identified strengthening the support youth receive in the K-12 educational system as one of the major needs in the community. Youth data from focus groups and the survey also identified the relationships students develop with teachers in their schools as primary in their lives. In order to promote positive experiences for youth in the K-12 educational system, it is recommended that the community identify and implement strategies to:

1. Work with educational administrators to identify how the community can best support the development of a system that effectively addresses youth issues

- a. Convene an “Education System Support Committee” that includes members of the educational system and community agencies to better coordinate services provided to youth
2. Ensure that teachers and building staff are aware of the importance of the relationships they build with students and understand how to form meaningful connections
- a. Work with the aforementioned “Educational System Support Committee” to:
 - i. Develop a set of administrative best practices and policies that promote building positive relationships with students
 - ii. Provide teachers and building staff with professional development opportunities that focus on how to build relationships with students (i.e., Connected Schools)

Provide supports for families. The literature provides clear evidence of the importance for families to be supportive, nurturing, and responsive to the developmental needs of youth. The Town Hall meeting participant data and youth data from surveys and focus groups provide substantiation in Genesee County of the importance of appropriately supportive families. Therefore, it is recommended that the community identify and implement programs that promote parenting that is involved and supportive of youth, yet responsive to youth’s developmental needs. A starting point for this work would be to:

- 1. Promote family friendly environments in schools and programs
 - a. Convene school administrators and teachers known for being skilled at engaging families to develop and disseminate a set of best practices regarding building relationships with families
 - b. Involve the aforementioned “Educational System Support Committee” to identify a plan to provide professional development opportunities to teachers and staff regarding how to build connections with families (i.e., Connected Schools)
- 2. Provide services to help families understand and address the needs of youth
 - a. Convene family service workers and researchers from higher education to:

- i. Determine the effectiveness of family services offered throughout Genesee County
- ii. Identify best practices or effective programs for implementation in Genesee County

Promote safe environments for youth. Safety continues to be a critical issue for communities. Both the youth and adults in this study identified safety as a high priority. Town Hall meeting participants recognized a great need to promote community safety. Youth discussed the need to feel safe walking around in their neighborhoods and clearly articulated the lack of safety they experience every day because of neighborhood crime. In order to promote safe environments for youth, youth focus group and Town Hall meeting participants recommended:

1. Increasing positive police presence in communities
2. Creating a strong sense of community

In order to carry out both of these requests, the community must organize law enforcement and community members to work together to outline successful strategies.

Observations

This work has identified many system-wide actions that will assist Genesee County in moving toward more effectively supporting positive youth development. Primary in the system-wide work is the development of sub-committees to address each of the significant issues identified in our research. Just as the community identified what needs to be done to support youth, the community needs to collaborate to identify specific strategies to address these needs.

Also, it is important to not lose the nuances of the Town Hall meeting data that were obscured by aggregating the data, such as the community concern for the well-being of the historically underprivileged and silenced groups such as foster care youth and Lesbian, Gay,

Bisexual, or Transgendered youth who have elevated risk for depression, substance abuse, and suicide. While these concerns were not large in number, they do have far reaching implications. The work conducted as a follow-up to this report should include a community resolution to systematically build the supports for the issues identified in the aggregated data while carefully attending to those issues relevant to smaller, but equally important segments of the community.

Recommendations

In addition to the community resolution to be developed, there are things that every community member can do. Outlined on the following page are three things each community member can do to support positive youth development in Genesee County. The list identifies what can be done within the roles of community member, youth program or educator, and parent. Given the findings of this work, it is important for every community member to do their part in promoting positive youth development in Genesee County. Listed below are things you can do. The important thing is to make a commitment, join with others and take action!

As a Concerned Citizen (In Your Neighborhood)

- Look for ways to improve and promote a safe environment for young people. Become involved in or start a neighborhood watch or other crime prevention program.
- Create a strong sense of community:
 - Look out for young people in your neighborhood. Learn their names and say “hello” or “how was your day?” when you see them walking to/from school.
 - Help families in need.
 - Plan and participate in activities that help youth see their neighborhood in a positive way, like block parties, clean ups, etc.
 - Compliment young people when they engage in positive actions and behaviors.
- Support and encourage young people to stay in school. If you see youth not in school, encourage or help them to go back.

- Open your home or yard to neighborhood kids. Create a safe place for them to play, hang out and interact with each other.
- Work with local law enforcement to ensure a positive police presence in your neighborhood.
- Become a mentor.

As a Parent (In Your Home)

- Be engaged in the lives of your children, even when they don't want you to!
 - Know who their teachers are and regularly communicate with them in a mutually supportive manner.
 - Ask your children about their school day and their activities and lessons. This shows that "I care" and that "school is important."
 - Get to know your children's friends and their parents.
 - Monitor their use of technology, particularly the Internet. Know your child's passwords and guide them in safe on-line behavior.
- Balance the involvement, support and guidance you give to your 10 to 15 year old with age-appropriate freedoms in response to their growing need for independence.
- Use a parenting style that balances discipline with caring behaviors. Parenting that is responsive, accepting and child-centered, yet that incorporates age-appropriate expectations and demands accountability, helps young people navigate peer pressures that often lead to negative activities like drinking, drugs, etc.
- Create a reciprocal, respectful relationship with your 10 to 15 year old that is characterized by open, two-way communication: parent to child and child to parent.
- Encourage a home environment that is characterized by kindness, caring, compassion, and understanding.

As an Educator (In Your School)

- Promote and support teacher/student relationships that are marked by emotional connection. Students want to feel they can go to teachers for help with life issues, not just academics.
- Act as a safe sounding board for youth concerns; provide advice and guidance, and model positive thoughts and actions.
- Intervene with youth who are at-risk due to peer pressure.

- Organize and guide a student-run “Welcoming Committee” program to support and develop positive peer relationships.
- Be active and involved in multidisciplinary teams that focus on youth issues.
- Form an extracurricular student group and/or serve as an advisor or mentor.
- Provide and/or participate in professional development opportunities that focus on building supportive relationships between students, their families, and education staff.
- Promote a school environment that is characterized by kindness, caring, compassion, and understanding, and encourage the same as a code of conduct for treating co-workers, students, and families.

As a Leader/Member of the Business Community (In Your Work Place)

- Support after-school and youth development programs that help students connect with each other in a fun, safe and positive environment. Consider making financial or in-kind donations and/or supporting employee volunteer or mentoring time.
- Sponsor or provide safe, reliable transportation for young people to attend after-school and other youth activities.
- Sponsor youth empowerment programs, summer camps or other activities, like neighborhood clean ups, that help youth see their community in a positive way.
- Share knowledge of your business or career area with students:
 - Tell them what it’s like to work in your field, and what type of training or education they’ll need to be successful.
 - Implement a “student day” at your workplace. Allow students ages 10 to 15 to come in and observe or “shadow” workers for the day.
- Create “family-friendly” policies regarding childcare, sick-child time off, early dismissal/late arrival, etc.
- Provide parenting skills workshops and other parent supports specifically geared to employees who have children between ages 10 and 15.
- Promote a work environment that is characterized by kindness, caring, compassion, and understanding, and encourage the same as a code of conduct for treating co-workers and their families.

As a Leader/Member of the Faith Community (In Your House of Worship)

- Support and strengthen youth groups/youth programming and activities within your congregation by volunteering, making a donation, planning an outing or other activity, or sponsoring a speaker.
- Sponsor activities that help youth see themselves and their community in a positive way.
- Provide parenting skills workshops and other parent supports for those members of your congregation with children ages 10 to 15.
- Join or help create a “Welcoming Committee” for youth who are new to your congregation and make a special effort to engage them.

II. Profile of Genesee County, Michigan

As can be seen from Table 1, Flint City and Genesee County are significantly different from the rest of Michigan. Compared to the state, Genesee County has proportionally more youth aged 10 to 15, greater ethnic diversity, 10% more single parent families, and 6.6% more families with children living in poverty. The same is true for Flint, but more extreme.

Compared to the state, Flint has 33% more single-parent families and 29% more families living in poverty. Whereas the state unemployment rate was 9.5% in 2006, the rate in the same year was 10.6% for Genesee County and 13.6% for Flint.

Table 1. Community Demographics

Statistic	Flint City	Genesee County	State of Michigan
Population			
Total	112,524	436,141	10,095,643
Aged 10 – 15	11,131 (9.9%)	39,147 (9.0%)	872,258 (8.6%)
Race			
White	37.8%	75.8%	79.5%
Black	56.3%	19.9%	14.1%
Native American	<1%	< 1%	< 1%
Asian/Pacific Islander	<1%	< 1%	2.3%
Biracial	2.9%	1.9%	1.8%
Hispanic – Any Race	2.8%	2.4%	3.9%
Households			
With Children 18 or younger	45,676	116,789	2,579,201
Single Parent Families	64.4%	41.4%	31.4%
Male-Headed	9.2%	9.4%	7.2%
Female-Headed	55.2%	32.0%	24.2%
Family Poverty			
Median Family Income	\$31,493	\$52,105	\$57,996
Families Below Poverty Level	44.1%	21.8%	15.2%

Note. Statistics are from the 2006 American Community Survey (U.S. Census Bureau).

Additionally, according the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Flint has one of the highest crime rates in the country. In 2006, Flint had 54 murders, 143 rapes, 627 robberies, and 2,246 aggravated assaults. While the violent crime rate in Flint was 2,596 violent crimes per 100,000 people, the national average was 554. Similarly, the rate of property crimes, such as burglaries, larceny, and thefts, was 6,863.9 per 100,000 residents for Flint. For the rest of the nation, it was 44% lower, at 3,906.1 per 100,000 residents. From 2006 to 2007, violent and property crimes fell nationally. For Flint, while violent crimes followed the national trend, property crimes increased (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2007).

Taking into account the high levels of poverty and crime in the city of Flint and a struggling Michigan economy, it is important to consider the effects of home environment, neighborhood residence, and parent and teacher support on youth development when working to promote positive development in Genesee County and Flint. Not one of these contexts is single-handedly responsible for youth outcomes. What is most important for promoting positive youth development is the understanding of the configuration of these various influences over time (Bronfenbrenner, 2005).

III. Literature Review

A. Positive Youth Development

Prior conceptions of youth development were problem-based, following a deficit or medical model (Lerner, 2004). This approach emphasized fixing problems in youth or preventing problems before they arose (e.g., detention, therapy, medication). After decades of mixed results, and a steady increase in problem behaviors, scholars of youth development began to question this framework. It was becoming apparent that youth who were problem free were not necessarily fully prepared for adulthood (Pittman, 1996). Simply put, being problem free is not sufficient for success. Successful adults are characterized by, among other attributes, the presence of physical and emotional health, productive careers, and meaningful relationships across the contexts of home, work, and community.

This asset-based view of development sees young people not as problems to be managed but as resources to be developed (Benson, 2003; Damon, 1997; Lerner, Lerner, Almerigi, Theokas, Phelps, et al., 2005; Roth, Brooks-Gunn, Murray, & Foster, 1998). *Consequently, it is important for communities, especially those with high rates of poverty, residential mobility, and physical and social disorder, to identify what developmental assets they have available, or have the ability to create, that will promote positive development in their youth.*

Theory and research have conceptualized positive youth development along several dimensions, for example, internal and external assets (e.g., Benson, 2003) or the 5 C's of positive youth development (Character, Caring, Confidence, Competence, and Connection; e.g., Lerner et al., 2005). Across these models, the key feature of Positive Youth Development remains the same: *positive relationships with committed and caring adults are essential to a young person's social and emotional development.* For this reason, this report focuses on the three

major contexts in the lives of youth that involve the presence of adults: neighborhood, school, and family.

B. Neighborhood Context

The effects of neighborhood residence on youth development have been well documented over the past fifty years, with financial status, racial and ethnic diversity, and residential stability being the most well established (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000). When these dimensions present strengths in the community, such as a strong economy and sufficient level of public safety, adolescents are more likely to find relationships and opportunities that promote positive development (Kowaleski-Jones, 2000).

However, adolescents living in resource-poor and economically disadvantaged communities are at risk for failure of developing the skills necessary to succeed in school, stay out of trouble, avoid adolescent pregnancies, and mature into financially responsible adults (Kowaleski-Jones, 2000). They also are more likely to show behavioral and emotional problems, such as aggression, problem drinking, and drug use (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000).

Residential instability, likewise, relates to youth outcomes in three inter-connected ways. First, it is an indicator of home-based instability and family stress, which are related to lower levels of self-esteem and higher levels of depression (Gilman, Kawachi, Fitzmaurice, & Buka, 2003). Second, moving from home to home, especially when changing schools, disrupts friendships and peer group associations. Third, residential stability is related to a community's collective efficacy. That is, as residential turnover increases, community members feel less connected to and in control of their neighborhood. This loss of control is related to lower levels of neighborhood monitoring and upkeep. As a result, neighborhood adults are less likely to see

or intervene with youth risk-taking behaviors or criminal activities (Morenoff, Sampson, & Raudenbush, 2001).

C. School Context

The school context provides youth with numerous experiences that lead to the promotion of healthy development when that context is supportive. When the school context is unsafe, characterized by high levels of conflict and relationships that promote negative attitudes and behavior, time spent in school presents a barrier to positive development. It is important, therefore, to ensure the school context is positive. In examining what kinds of supports are needed in the school context for youth, two components of school context emerged: peer support and teacher/staff support.

Peer support. Peer relationships play an important role for youth development. Risky behavior is associated with not having close friends, changing friends often, and having friends who are a year or more older (Savin-Williams & Berndt, 1990). Additionally, research suggests that involvement in deviant peer groups promotes violence and criminal behavior in youth (Henry, Tolan, Gorman-Smith, 2001).

Peer pressure also impacts youth development and behavior. Peer pressure to use drugs, alcohol, and tobacco come in various forms, both directly and indirectly. Teens may be directly dared to try a drug or offered an alcoholic drink. They may also associate with friends who do not actually offer or pressure others to use such substances, but who provide accessibility and awareness of the drugs and alcohol that leads to an increase in self-pressure to experiment (Simons-Morton, Haynie, Crump, Eitel, & Saylor, 2001).

School/teacher support. Schools that have staff with the time, resources, interest, and skills to interact positively with youth can serve as important venues for promoting positive youth development. Not only are school staff important for promoting academic success, they also can intervene with youth who are at risk of peer pressure or serve as sounding boards for youth concerns, providing advice and modeling positive thoughts and actions (Kowaleski-Jones, 2000).

D. Home Context

One of the most important aspects of the home environment is parenting. Parents have a significant social influence on their children. Research shows that teens are more likely to smoke if their parents smoke. The same is true for other drugs. Parents model the behavior their children eventually imitate (Simons-Morton, Haynie, Crump, Eitel, & Saylor, 2001).

Lamborn and colleagues (Lamborn, Mounts, Steinberg, & Dornbusch, 1991) found that in addition to the importance of parents modeling of good behavior, adolescents are greatly affected by parenting style. The primary parenting styles are presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Parenting Styles

	<u>Responsive</u> Parent is accepting and child-centered	<u>Unresponsive</u> Parent is rejecting and parent-centered
<u>Demanding</u> Parent expects much of child	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Authoritative Parenting:</u> Parenting that is <u>Responsive</u> and <u>Demanding</u> Relationship is reciprocal, high in bidirectional communication</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Authoritarian Parenting:</u> Parenting that is <u>Unresponsive</u> and <u>Demanding</u> Relationship is controlling, power-assertive, high in unidirectional communication</p>
<u>Undemanding</u> Parent expects little of child	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Indulgent Parenting:</u> Parenting that is <u>Responsive</u> and <u>Undemanding</u> Relationship is permissive, low in control attempts</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Neglectful Parenting:</u> Parenting that is <u>Unresponsive</u> and <u>Undemanding</u> Relationship is indifferent, uninvolved</p>

Youth of authoritative parents, parents who balance discipline and caring behaviors, score highest on measures of psychosocial competence. The youth of these parents also score the lowest on measures of psychological and behavioral dysfunction. The opposite is true for adolescents of neglectful parents. Youth of parents with an authoritarian parent, or parents who are high in discipline but low in caring behaviors, score well on measures of obedience and conformity to the standards of adults, but score relatively low in self-conception measures. Adolescents from indulgent homes, parents who are low in discipline and high in caring

behaviors, showed a strong sense of self-confidence, but were most likely to engage in substance abuse and school misconduct, and less likely to be engaged in school (Lamborn, et al., 1991).

Making more complicated the delicate balance between caring behaviors and discipline is the changing needs of the adolescent as the child transitions from childhood to early adolescence to middle adolescence to late adolescence. During early and middle adolescence, parent-child conflicts increase, especially in relation to self-discipline and autonomy. Parents expect more self-regulation from the adolescents at the same time the early teenagers begin to experiment with risky behaviors (Barber, 2002).

The majority of the literature suggests that the optimal parenting style for promoting positive youth outcomes, such as better grades, less substance abuse, fewer behavior problems, and better mental health, is one that involves high levels of support and monitoring and the avoidance of harsh punishment (Amato & Fowler, 2002). Bronstein and colleagues (1996) summed up a wealth of literature on this topic of the home environment and parenting styles on youth development and concluded that the most consistent family characteristics related to positive youth outcomes are: support, attentiveness, responsiveness, receptivity to emotions, and guidance.

IV. Study Methods and Objectives

In order to understand how the home, school, and neighborhood environments contribute to promote positive youth development of 10 to 15 year olds in Genesee County, a multidisciplinary team was formed. This team included members from the Center for Collaboration and the Future of Schooling, the Community Foundation of Greater Flint, Flint Club, Michigan State University, Priority Children, the Resource Center, Flint Community Schools Bridges to the Future, and the University of Michigan. The team determined that a multi-methods approach would be used to ensure the needs and assets were documented reliably and in a way that would be grounded by the beliefs and opinions of youth and community members. The study methods implemented included a comprehensive survey of youth across Genesee County to understand what promotes success in youth, focus groups of youth to obtain an in-depth understanding of their perceptions of the supports they receive in their communities, and a Town Hall meeting to get input from community members and leaders regarding the ways Genesee County might support 10 to 15 year old youth. The following sources were used to gather the desired information:

1. Coordinated Community Student Survey (C²S²) data from youth 10 to 15 years of age
2. Focus group data of youth 10 to 15 years of age
3. Town hall meeting priorities

A. The Coordinated Community Student Survey

The Coordinated Community Student Survey (C²S²) is a research and evaluation tool used since the spring of 2005 to assess student outcomes related to health, safety, and nutrition programs and services provided by schools and districts to 4th through 12th grade students in all

districts in Genesee County (see Appendix A). It was conceived by a team of research staff from Michigan State University and program staff from representative schools, districts, and the Intermediate School District in Genesee County. The guiding questions underlying C²S² are:

1. What are student needs and strengths, and do these needs and strengths differ across communities?
2. What are the critical ages to begin prevention activities across different domains of student outcomes?
3. What are the differences in needs and strengths for males and females?
4. How does the home, school, and neighborhood environment influence student outcomes? How does this influence change as the student ages?
5. How does participation in support services offered at school influence student outcomes?

To address these questions, C²S² was based on established state and national surveys and is designed to track the same students over a number of years. The survey is a 208-item questionnaire designed to quantitatively assess self-reported student physical, social, and psychological functioning using reliable and valid, multi-items scales that were hand-selected from public and peer-reviewed sources that had known psychometric properties. The survey assesses twenty-four constructs that fit within eight broad domains of student functioning:

1. **Social Competence:** Caring for others, Aggression, Antisocial behavior, Social problem solving
2. **Emotional Competence:** Anxiety, Depression, Self-esteem, Dieting behaviors (6th grade and higher)
3. **School Engagement:** School preparation, Beliefs about school, Enjoyment of school work
4. **School Environment:** Lack of peer social support at school, Social support from teachers/staff at school, Peer hostility and bullying at school
5. **Neighborhood Environment:** Neighborhood safety, Adult support
6. **Home Environment:** Parent involvement, Parent emotional support and closeness

7. **Health Behaviors:** Dietary intake, Exercise, Media use
8. **Alcohol, Tobacco, and Drugs:** Beliefs about the harmfulness of alcohol, tobacco, and drugs, Use of alcohol, tobacco, and drugs (6th grade and higher)

C²S² was designed to track students over time to assess individual-level change. This offers the advantages of tracking high risk populations that move across districts and the opportunity for analyses that may provide stronger evidence in identifying causal links between services and outcomes. For this project, longitudinal data tracking youth from the 2005-2006 to the 2006-2007 academic year were used. Over 10,000 youth who were between the ages of 10 and 15 in the spring of the 2006-2007 academic year were included in the sample. Data for this project were analyzed and presented by Michigan State University.

B. Youth Focus Groups

To expand upon the survey data, Michigan State University developed 23 focus group questions to solicit the voices of the youth and understand what they feel is needed to be successful (See Appendix B). These questions focused on understanding the youth perspective on how their success can be supported in the three primary contexts in their life: home, school, and neighborhood. In the spring of 2008, The Flint Club conducted the focus groups with over 200 youth between the ages of 10 to 15 in five communities across Genesee County. Michigan State University transcribed and analyzed the focus group data.

C. Town Hall Meeting Priorities

Once the C²S² and focus group data were compiled, a Town Hall meeting was convened. A two-tiered approach was used to recruit participation in *The Critical Years: 10 to 15 Community Challenge Town Hall Meeting*. The first tier included the identification of and

invitation for participation provided to specific representatives of each of the major sectors in the community, including education, health and human services, business, local government, non-profit organizations, and faith-based organizations. The second tier involved the announcement of the Town Hall Meeting in the media, inviting all interested residents of Flint and Genesee County. Nearly 400 community members attended the Town Hall (See Appendix C for the list of organizations leading discussions). Attendees were provided with the results from the C²S² and focus group data from Michigan State University researchers and from students who participated in the focus groups. After hearing the data presentations, attendees engaged in roundtable discussions regarding the current strengths and needs of the community in addressing the needs of 10 to 15 year olds in Genesee County. Participants identified the programs and services that currently help and support children as well as the gaps in services and supports. They gave more than 1,300 responses about what they think the community does well, needs to do better, and is most important for 10 to 15 year olds. These responses were then coded and tallied to identify the top priorities identified by the attendees. To do this, Mott Community College engaged with Community Challenge a Deming process which codifies and tallies the input to identify the top priorities. Data compilation, coding, and analyzing were conducted by the project coordinator of Community Challenge.

V. Study Results

Study findings are presented in two parts. Part 1 summarizes the findings from the data obtained from youth—C²S² and the Youth Focus Groups. Part 2 summarizes the findings from the Town Hall Meeting priorities. The findings are presented in this way to represent two focal points of our work: 1) there was a strong emphasis on presenting information that could lead to decision making that would be based on youth voice; and 2) the Town Hall Meeting priorities were established in response to the youth data provided by C²S² and the Youth Focus Groups.

A. Part 1 - Youth Voice

Home environment. The survey data, corroborated by youth statements provided in the focus groups, indicate that youth value a stable, supportive home environment that provides a balance of nurturing and guidance. C²S² findings from statistical analyses indicate that higher levels of parent support and involvement are critical for positive outcomes for youth. Data analyses provide evidence that parental involvement³ and parental emotional support⁴ are related to increases in social problem solving skills and school preparation, while also being related to decreases in alcohol use (see Appendix D, Slides 35-41).

However, in response to the growing need for independence as youth progress through adolescence, both parental involvement and parental emotional support decrease significantly from age 10 to age 15. Evidence of this is provided in the analysis of our survey data (See Appendix D, Slides 15 and 16). While clear evidence does not exist as to why this occurs, the

³ **Parent involvement** is defined as the level of parent involvement in the academic and social life of the child as perceived by the child. It involves monitoring and providing guidance to the child. Please see Appendix D, Slide 12 for a listing of the individual items that comprise the Parent Involvement scale.

⁴ **Parent emotional support** is defined as the level of emotional support, comfort, and closeness the child perceives from his or her parent. It involves spending time with the child in ways that are meaningful and enjoyable. Please see Appendix D, Slide 15 for a listing of the individual items that comprise the Parent Emotional Support scale.

developmental stage of this age group would suggest a combination of students pulling away from their parents and vice versa. Interestingly, the students in the focus groups identified their growing need for balance between having support and guidance from their parents while gaining more independence (See Appendix D, Slides 17-19).

“They gotta spend time with you, but they can’t just be around you all the time, they gotta give you some space.”

“They help pull you back in when your friends are being a bad influence.”

--Youth comments during focus groups

School environment. The C²S² data also provide evidence for the importance of teacher support⁵ and peer support at school⁶. According to analysis of the survey data, when students perceive greater levels of teacher support at school, there are corresponding increases in social problem solving skills and school preparation and decreases in alcohol use (See Appendix D, Slides 35-41). As with parents, teacher support decreases as youth get older (See Appendix D, Slides 21-23). While it is natural for youth to begin emotionally separating from their teachers as they get older, it is important that support continue to be offered by teachers to youth. Youth who participated in the focus groups clearly articulated the importance of teacher support at their schools and of consistency in their relationships with their teachers. Youth reported needing teachers to be more than just academic support; they said they needed teachers to provide broader support, encouragement, and consistency (See Appendix D, Slide 24).

⁵ Teacher support is defined as the emotional support teachers provide by talking with students about their problems, being fair, and showing they care by listening to students and monitoring student behavior. Please see Appendix D, Slide 21 for a listing of the individual items that comprise the Teacher Support scale.

⁶ Peer support at school is defined as the connections students are able to make with peers in the school setting. Please see Appendix D, Slide 25 for a listing of the individual items that comprise the Teacher Support scale. Note that all negative worded items were reverse scored to create a positive scale score.

“She’ll take time out of her lunch period just to help you and stuff like that, and not only does she help you with that, if you got situations and stuff that’s going on at home, she’ll help you with that because most of the stuff that we’re going through she’s already been through so she’ll know how to respond.”

“[My teacher] encouraged me to do better.”

“[Teachers should not] change expectations so often. We had one teacher who as soon as we get used to doing something she’ll change it and then we never really know what we’re supposed to be doing.”

--Youth comments during focus groups

While parent and teacher support decrease as youth age, peer support remains stable over time (See Appendix D, Slides 25-27). While some level of decline in adult support is expected during this developmental stage due to the increasing importance of the peer group during middle and late adolescence, it is not known if this decrease in teacher support is student or adult initiated.

In addition to this difference, a mixed effect of peer support on positive youth development is shown from analysis of C²S² data. Data analysis suggests the presence of peer support at school provides both benefits and risks to youth. Reports of having more peer support at school is significantly related to reports of having higher levels of social problem solving skills and school preparation (See Appendix D, Slides 35-41). However, it is also related to an increase in alcohol use. During the focus groups, youth reported both the positive and negative influence of peers (See Appendix D, Slides 28 & 43).

“Kids that have friends are more calm because they have someone to talk to besides their parents and teachers, someone that understands them. People that don’t have friends don’t have that. They are always stressed because they don’t have someone to talk to.”

“They get pressured by some of their friends to do drugs.”

“You’re around people that do it [drinking and drugs]” and you do it “to fit in.”

--Youth comments during focus groups

In sum, the current study finds that while youth still need teacher support to provide guidance, they begin to pull away from teachers and develop stronger connections to peers who serve as both positive and negative role models. This fact highlights the importance for teachers to understand the unique developmental needs of youth and how to maintain meaningful connections with them.

Neighborhood environment. While feeling safe in their neighborhoods was significantly related to positive outcomes, support from adult neighbors was not important based on findings from the C²S² data (See Appendix D, Slides 35-41). According to survey data analyses, living in safe neighborhoods is related to higher social problem solving skills, better school preparation, and lower alcohol use.

During the focus groups, although students did not articulate why living in unsafe neighborhoods presents such a high risk for their development, they were quite vocal about the lack of safety they perceive in their neighborhoods and their discomfort with this lack of safety (See Appendix D, Slide 34). When asked to describe the people in their neighborhoods, they responded by saying they are: “not so nice,” “potheads,” “drug dealers,” “gang members,” “sex offenders.” Youth reported feeling confused by adult neighbors because of the mixed messages (some positive and others negative) they present. They also reported feeling confused about how to handle situations when different adults in the neighborhood provide different advice, stating “You don’t really know who to listen to.”

Another finding regarding neighborhood environment provided by the C²S² data is the change in youth perception of neighborhood safety. Although the neighborhoods are not actually changing, students begin to perceive their neighborhoods as safer as they get older (See Appendix D, Slides 30-33). This most likely represents a change in the way youth perceive the risk presented to them as a result of crime in their neighborhoods. Youth become more mature and perceive themselves as being more capable of taking care of any problems faced. Additionally, it has been well documented that consistent exposure to violence and crime lead to desensitization.⁷

B. Part 2 - Town Hall Meeting Priority Data Findings

While strengths were identified by the Town Hall participants, many areas were also identified as needing improvement. Originally, the responses, both strengths and needs, were coded into thirteen general focal areas. After numerous discussions with a sub-group of the multidisciplinary team, the thirteen focal areas were collapsed into six categories. To do this, the following focal areas were identified as youth programs: After-School Programs, Arts and Enrichment, Civic Engagement, Community Outreach Programs, Co-Op Opportunities, Faith Based Programs, Non Traditional Educational Opportunities, and Recreation and Sports. These focal areas were combined because they all incorporated some type of direct service with youth. The six remaining focal areas and the percentage of responses associated with each are displayed in Table 2.

⁷ Behaviors and actions that were previously not acceptable become acceptable after prolonged exposure to said behaviors and actions.

Table 2. Response Category Data

Category	Total Number of Responses	% of the Responses Identified as Strength	% of the Responses Identified as Need
1. Youth Programs	880	64% (n=563)	36% (n=317)
2. K-12 Educational System	180	33% (n=59)	67% (n=121)
3. Family Supports	111	17% (n=19)	83% (n=92)
4. Safety	50	34% (n=17)	66% (n=33)
5. Organizational Collaboration	46	28% (n=13)	72% (n=33)
6. Economic Development	29	31% (n=9)	69% (n=20)

Examination of the number of responses. As displayed in Table 1, the greatest number of responses given, indicating either strength or need, was regarding youth programs (N=880), indicating the level of importance that the community places on providing direct youth services. Rankings for the categories based on the number of responses in each category are: 1. Youth Programs, 2. K-12 Educational System, 3. Family Supports, 4. Safety, 5. Organizational Collaboration, and 6. Economic Development. Since direct services are the vehicle by which the community is able to provide support to youth, it is not surprising that the vast majority of responses were coded in youth programs. It is also not surprising that the K-12 Educational System and Family Supports were the second and third ranking categories given the importance of these contexts in lives of youth. Finally, the categories that are integral components of healthy communities were ranked at the bottom: Safety, Organizational Collaboration, and Economic Development. While these categories were identified as being critical for the promotion of healthy youth development, they were not ranked as highly as those categories that represent the contexts in which youth directly interact. This is likely due to the fact that it is much easier to attend to those aspects of the community that directly interact with youth. For example, youth

are physically in youth programs, in their schools, and in their homes. Because of the direct interactions with youth, these contexts often become a focal point for those interested in supporting youth. However, it is imperative to make more salient the importance of the categories that play supporting roles rather than primary roles. For instance, a supportive youth servicing organization, K-12 school, or home environment cannot exist without also being safe. Equally important are the organizational collaboration and health of the economy. Both lead to better availability and quality of programs and more positive environments at home, at school, and in the community. A legitimate concern resulting from this work is that community members do not focus on these supporting factors and will proceed without attending to their importance. In order to promote good youth programs, supportive schools, and healthy homes and neighborhoods, the community must promote safety, organizational collaboration, and the health of the economy.

Examination of strengths. Also displayed in Table 2 are the percent of responses indicating the community has a strength for each category. There are quite large differences in attendee perceptions of strength across the six categories. By far, one of the great strengths identified in Genesee County and Flint is youth programming. Approximately 64% of youth program responses were identified as strengths in the community. This indicates that community members have high regard for the programs that do exist in the community. The highest ranking individual program was the Bridges to the Future Program. Of the 16 comments that specifically mentioned Bridges to the Future, all identified the program as a strength in the community. The needs that were identified for youth programs were requests for extensions of current programs or for additional programs to meet specific needs. In contrast to youth programs, the other categories were much more likely to be identified as a need in the community. The need for

family supports emerged as the largest gap, with only 17% of the comments identifying it as a strength. The percentage of identified strengths for other categories ranged from 28% to 34%, indicating a strong need for each.

VI. Conclusions

This work has identified four clear focal points to promote the success of youth: 1. Strengthen youth programs offered in the community; 2. Promote more positive experiences for youth in the K-12 educational system; 3. Provide supports for families; and 4. Promote safe environments for youth.

Strengthen youth programs offered in the community. Both youth and Town Hall meeting participants identified the primary importance of having youth programs that provide direct services. This mirrors findings from research that indicate the importance of youth having regular contact with caring adults. The various types of programs important for youth development were identified by the youth. Specifically, youth discussed the need for programs that foster meaningful connections with other youth, provide positive youth development oriented activities, and keep youth safe by providing recreational activities every day. Youth also identified the importance of providing transportation to and from programs. The adults who participated in the Town Hall clearly believe that the community has many strong youth programs. However, Town Hall participants indicated that it is important for the community to strengthen these programs by supporting program improvement, stability, and expansion. It is also important to assess the availability and accessibility of youth programs to all youth in the community.

Promote more positive experiences for youth in the K-12 educational system. Town Hall meeting participants identified one of the major needs in the community as strengthening the support youth receive in the K-12 educational system. Youth also identified the relationships they develop with teachers in their schools as primary in their lives. Again, the literature reviewed points to the importance of positive primary relationships for youth to develop or

maintain a positive trajectory in life. Given the amount of time youth spend in school, it is of utmost importance that the relationships they develop with adults at school are positive and healthy. Given the high level of need in the community regarding the K-12 educational system identified by the Town Hall meeting participants, coupled with the dramatic decrease in teacher support reported by youth as they age, this is an area that the community believes needs improvement. It is necessary for teachers to understand the unique developmental needs of youth.

Provide supports for families. The literature provides clear evidence of the importance for families to be supportive, nurturing, and responsive to the developmental needs of youth. The reports of Town Hall meeting participant data and youth data from C²S² and the focus groups provide substantiation of the importance of appropriately supportive families at the local level. In fact, youth were able to identify the fact that they need supportive parenting that is characterized by a balance of guidance and discipline with caring and nurturing. Youth also identified their growing need for independence. Town Hall meeting participants identified a very strong need for the community to provide greater supports to help families meet the needs of youth. It is important to recognize that parents want what is best for their children, and they sometimes need support from the community in order to actualize their full potential.

Promote safe environments for youth. Safety continues to be a critical issue for communities. Both the youth and adults in this study identified safety as a high priority. Town Hall meeting participants recognized a great need to promote community safety. Youth discussed the need to feel safe walking around in their neighborhoods, and clearly articulated the lack of safety they experience every day because of neighborhood crime. In spite of the fact that youth, in focus group sessions, were able to describe the general lack of safety they experience

daily, decreases in youth concern regarding neighborhood safety as youth mature are evidenced in survey data. While the reasons regarding this discontinuity are not fully understood, it is likely due to the fact that as youth mature, they become more comfortable with the crime occurring in their neighborhoods. This increase in comfort may be the result of an increased confidence in their ability to handle difficult situations as well as desensitization to crime and violence. Because there is such strong evidence for the existence of desensitization to crime and violence, it is important to identify the ways in which the community can promote safety early, before youth become accustomed to neighborhood crime and violence.

VII. Recommendations

To recap the findings presented in this work, the four areas identified by the community (both youth and adults) as focal points for promoting youth success, as described above, are: 1. strengthen youth programs offered in the community; 2. Promote more positive experiences for youth in the K-12 educational system; 3. Provide supports for families; and 4. Promote safe environments for youth. Specific recommendations for each are outlined below.

Strengthen Youth Programs

It is important to strengthen youth programs offered in the community. This can be done by prioritizing the two types of programs that are most effective in promoting success in youth:

1. Programs that help students develop positive relationships with peers
 - a. Offer programs that incorporate teamwork and trust building
 - b. Have welcoming committees at each school
2. Programs that foster positive youth development
 - a. Include activities that allow for leadership skill building
 - b. Provide new experiences, opportunities to do things they would normally never have, for youth with the purpose of broadening their horizons and increasing their understanding of the world around them
 - c. Give students a voice in programming, which will provide them with opportunities to develop a sense of purpose and belonging

It is also important for youth programs in the community to fulfill certain “must haves.” These “must haves” are characteristics of successful programs and promote high attendance and engagement. Programs must be:

1. **Safe** – students need to feel safe going to and from their programs
2. **Fun** – programs need to provide activities that students enjoy

3. **Offered daily** – students need somewhere to go every day, not just Monday through Thursday from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m.
4. **Easily accessible** – students need transportation to programs that are not within walking distance or not in safe neighborhoods

Another critical component of providing successful youth programs is ensuring that program staff working with youth have the skills necessary for providing high quality programs. To achieve this, professional development opportunities should be offered to address the following topics:

1. The developmental needs of youth
2. The importance and understanding of how to build connections with youth and families

Finally, programs need to have stable sources of funding to ensure program consistency for youth. If programs are not consistent in being available to provide services to youth, the community will not be able to rely on youth program supports.

Promote a Positive K-12 Educational System

In order to promote positive experiences for youth in the K-12 educational system, it is recommended that an “Education System Support Committee” be convened that includes parents, members of agencies that provide families and youth with direct service, and members of the educational system to identify and implement strategies to:

1. Better coordinate services
2. Promote consistent, positive, and effective relationships in the school system by building the awareness of the importance of relationships and offering opportunities to develop the skills needed to form meaningful connections (i.e., Connected Schools)

Provide Supports for Families

Just as it is important to focus on positive youth development, it is necessary to not treat families as “broken.” The community must develop methods that provide supports to help

families be their best. With this in mind, it is recommended that family friendly environments in schools and programs be promoted by:

1. Convening school administrators and teachers known for being skilled at engaging families to develop and disseminate a set of best practices regarding building relationships with families for schools and districts to implement
2. Involving the aforementioned “Educational System Support Committee” to identify a plan to provide professional development opportunities to teachers and staff regarding how to build connections with families (i.e., Connected Schools)

It is also important to provide services to help families and caregivers understand and meet the needs of youth by convening family services workers and researchers from higher education to assist in program identification and development. These programs should be sensitive to the unique needs of each family and be strength based. Those working to identify and implement family services should collaborate to:

1. Determine the effectiveness of family services offered throughout Genesee County
2. Identify best practices or effective programs for implementation in Genesee County

Promote Safe Environments

To create safer neighborhoods, law enforcement and community members need to work together to develop and implement specific strategies to promote neighborhood safety. The focal points of this work should include:

1. A focus on increasing positive police presence in neighborhoods
2. Developing methods of creating a strong sense of neighborhood

VIII. Final Summary

There are many system-wide actions outlined above that will assist Genesee County in moving towards more effectively supporting positive youth development. Primary in the system-wide work is the development of sub-committees to address each of the significant issues identified in our research. Just as the community identified what needs to be done to support youth, the community needs to collaborate to identify specific strategies to address these needs. As a final step in the process of accomplishing this work, Priority Children has been asked to join the Critical Years committee to provide their unique perspective as a child advocacy organization. Recognized as an informed and unbiased advocate, Priority Children has a strong history of working with community partners to improve the lives of children and families in Genesee County. In its unique role as a neutral convener, Priority Children will provide on-going leadership, coordination, and collaboration on the identified issues and will bring key educators, parents, concerned citizens, business, faith and community leaders together with agencies and service providers to identify strategies and actions to plan and implement needed support, education and system changes that will make improvements for 10 to 15 year old youth and their families.

Also, it is important to not lose the nuances of the Town Hall meeting data that were obscured by aggregating the data, such as the community concern for the well-being of historically underprivileged and silenced groups such as foster care youth and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, or Transgendered youth who are at elevated risk for depression, substance abuse, and suicide. While these concerns were not large in number, they do have far reaching implications. The work conducted as a follow-up to this report should include a community resolution to

systematically build the supports for the issues identified in the aggregated data while carefully attending to those issues relevant to smaller, but equally important segments of the community.

In addition to the community resolution to be developed, there are things that every community member can do. Outlined below are things each community member can do to support positive youth development in Genesee County. The important thing is to make a commitment, join with others and take action!

As a Concerned Citizen (In Your Neighborhood)

- Look for ways to improve and promote a safe environment for young people. Become involved in or start a neighborhood watch or other crime prevention program.
- Create a strong sense of community:
 - Look out for young people in your neighborhood. Learn their names and say “hello” or “how was your day?” when you see them walking to/from school.
 - Help families in need.
 - Plan and participate in activities that help youth see their neighborhood in a positive way, like block parties, clean ups, etc.
 - Compliment young people when they engage in positive actions and behaviors.
- Support and encourage young people to stay in school. If you see youth not in school, encourage or help them to go back.
- Open your home or yard to neighborhood kids. Create a safe place for them to play, hang out and interact with each other.
- Work with local law enforcement to ensure a positive police presence in your neighborhood.
- Become a mentor.

As a Parent (In Your Home)

- Be engaged in the lives of your children, even when they don't want you to!
 - Know who their teachers are and regularly communicate with them in a mutually supportive manner.

- Ask your children about their school day and their activities and lessons. This shows that “I care” and that “school is important.”
 - Get to know your children’s friends and their parents.
 - Monitor their use of technology, particularly the Internet. Know your child’s passwords and guide them in safe on-line behavior.
- Balance the involvement, support and guidance you give to your 10 to 15 year old with age-appropriate freedoms in response to their growing need for independence.
- Use a parenting style that balances discipline with caring behaviors. Parenting that is responsive, accepting and child-centered, yet that incorporates age-appropriate expectations and demands accountability, helps young people navigate peer pressures that often lead to negative activities like drinking, drugs, etc.
- Create a reciprocal, respectful relationship with your 10 to 15 year old that is characterized by open, two-way communication: parent to child and child to parent.
- Encourage a home environment that is characterized by kindness, caring, compassion, and understanding.

As an Educator (In Your School)

- Promote and support teacher/student relationships that are marked by emotional connection. Students want to feel they can go to teachers for help with life issues, not just academics.
- Act as a safe sounding board for youth concerns; provide advice and guidance, and model positive thoughts and actions.
- Intervene with youth who are at-risk due to peer pressure.
- Organize and guide a student-run “Welcoming Committee” program to support and develop positive peer relationships.
- Be active and involved in multidisciplinary teams that focus on youth issues.
- Form an extracurricular student group and/or serve as an advisor or mentor.
- Provide and/or participate in professional development opportunities that focus on building supportive relationships between students, their families, and education staff.
- Promote a school environment that is characterized by kindness, caring, compassion, and understanding, and encourage the same as a code of conduct for treating co-workers, students, and families.

As a Leader/Member of the Business Community (In Your Work Place)

- Support after-school and youth development programs that help students connect with each other in a fun, safe and positive environment. Consider making financial or in-kind donations and/or supporting employee volunteer or mentoring time.
- Sponsor or provide safe, reliable transportation for young people to attend after-school and other youth activities.
- Sponsor youth empowerment programs, summer camps or other activities, like neighborhood clean ups, that help youth see their community in a positive way.
- Share knowledge of your business or career area with students:
 - Tell them what it's like to work in your field, and what type of training or education they'll need to be successful.
 - Implement a "student day" at your workplace. Allow students ages 10 to 15 to come in and observe or "shadow" workers for the day.
- Create "family-friendly" policies regarding childcare, sick-child time off, early dismissal/late arrival, etc.
- Provide parenting skills workshops and other parent supports specifically geared to employees who have children between ages 10 and 15.
- Promote a work environment that is characterized by kindness, caring, compassion, and understanding, and encourage the same as a code of conduct for treating co-workers and their families.

As a Leader/Member of the Faith Community (In Your House of Worship)

- Support and strengthen youth groups/youth programming and activities within your congregation by volunteering, making a donation, planning an outing or other activity, or sponsoring a speaker.
- Sponsor activities that help youth see themselves and their community in a positive way.
- Provide parenting skills workshops and other parent supports for those members of your congregation with children ages 10 to 15.
- Join or help create a "Welcoming Committee" for youth who are new to your congregation and make a special effort to engage them.

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Appendix A: Coordinated Community Student Survey

Example questions from the Coordinated Community Student Survey

Social-Emotional Health: Example Questions

- Anxiety
 - “I worried about making mistakes.”
- Depression
 - “I was sad.”
- Self-Esteem
 - “I like who I am.”
- Social Support
 - “How many friends do you have?”
- Physical Aggression
 - “I hit or punched someone when I was mad.”
- Verbal Aggression
 - “I yelled at other kids.”
- Relational Aggression
 - “I spread mean rumors or lies about another kid.”
- Social Problem Solving
 - “I try to solve problems in a positive way (for example, by talking about them with others or figuring out a plan).”
- Antisocial Behavior
 - “I lied to my parents about something important.”

Cognitive Behaviors: Example Questions

- School Attendance
 - “I skipped school without permission.”
- Antisocial Behavior at School
 - “My parents were asked to come to school about a problem I was having.”

- “I got sent to the office for doing something wrong.”
- School Engagement
 - “I follow directions in class.”
- Beliefs about School
 - “I believe school work is very important.”
- Reading Behaviors
 - “How much time do you usually spend reading for fun each day?”

Physical Health Behaviors: Example Questions

- Physical Activity
 - “How often do you play outside?”
- Nutrition
 - “How often do you drink soda pop?”
- ATOD
 - “How harmful do you think it is to use alcohol frequently?”

Home Environment: Example Questions

- Parent Involvement in School
 - “How often do your parents (or whoever takes care of you) see if your homework is correct?”
- Parent Relations with Child
 - “How often do your parents (or whoever takes care of you) do fun things with you?”
- Parent Discipline
 - “How often do your parents (or whoever takes care of you) limit the amount of time you can watch TV?”
- Stability
 - “How many places have you lived in the last year?”

Neighborhood Environment: Example Questions

- Neighborhood Safety
 - “I am scared of some of the people in my neighborhood.”
 - “I feel safe walking around my neighborhood.”

- Neighborhood Support
 - “In my neighborhood, there are adults who look out for me.”

School Environment: Example Questions

- School Support from Adults
 - “At my school, there is a teacher or some other adult who really cares about me.”
- School Support from Students
 - “Students at my school care about me.”
- School Connection
 - “I am happy to be at my school.”
- School Rules
 - “At my school, I will get into trouble if I break a rule.”
- Student/Teacher Relationships
 - “At my school, the teachers and students are nice to each other.”
- School Safety and Bullies
 - “I felt safe at school.”
 - “I was teased or made fun of by a kid at my school.”

Appendix B: Focus Group Questions

Hi! I am _____, and I work with _____. We are talking to you guys because we want to find out from you what you need to help you reach your goals. I am going to be asking you a bunch of questions, and I want you guys to tell me what you think. What you think about your life and what you need is VERY important. To start, we will go around the room and talk about what each of your goals are. But first, I will tell you a little bit about me. [Tell one work related fact and one personal fact about yourself. The work related fact helps the participants to feel comfortable looking to you as a professional, and the personal fact helps them to relate to you. The personal fact should be one that identifies a commonality between you and that particular group.]

Now, please tell me about what your goals are. What do you want to do when you grow up?

Okay, now I am going to start asking questions about your life.

First, we are going to talk about your neighborhood.

1. Describe your neighborhood and the people who live in your neighborhood.
 - a. Are the people in your neighborhood doing things that could get them in trouble?
 - b. Is your neighborhood safe? Describe.
2. How does the safety of your neighborhood matter to you?
 - a. If your neighborhood is not safe, have you gotten used to it as you have gotten older?
 - b. Would you be scared if you were doing bad things (things that could get you in trouble with your parents or the law)? Would you be scared to hang out with people who are doing bad things?
 - c. Do kids who do a lot of bad things still get scared that something bad will happen to them because of what they are doing?
3. Something that we have found from surveys that kids have taken is that high school kids who think their neighborhood is NOT safe also spend more time doing their school work. Why do you think this happens?

Related to neighborhood safety is neighborhood adult support.

4. Do you ever spend time with adults in your neighborhood? Can you go to them if you need help?
 - a. How does your relationship with your adult neighbors change as you get older?
 - b. How do these relationship change if you are in an unsafe neighborhood?
 - i. Do adults in your neighborhood act as good influence or a bad influence?

WRAP UP TIME – WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT NEIGHBORHOOD ENVIRONMENT?

5. What can be done to help kids who live in unsafe neighborhoods?
 - a. What can your schools do?
 - b. What can the police do?
 - c. What can parents/caregivers do?
 - d. What kinds of programs help keep kids safe and out of trouble?

Now, I want to talk to you about kids who feel lonely at school because they don't have friends to hang out with at school.

6. What does it mean to YOU to have a lot of friends at school?
7. Describe the kids who have lots of friends at school.
8. Describe the kids who do NOT have many friends at school.
9. Something we found was that kids who have lots of friends at school are more likely to get into fights. Why do you think this is?
 - a. Do kids get into more fights when they know they have friends to “back them up”?
 - b. Are the kids who don't have many friends at school more likely to focus on their school work because they don't have friends to hang out with at school?
10. We also found that kids who have a lot of friends are more likely to drink alcohol, smoke cigarettes, and use drugs like marijuana/pot. Why do you think this is?
 - a. Do kids use alcohol, cigarette, and marijuana because they feel pressure from friends?

WRAP UP TIME – WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT PEER INFLUENCE AT SCHOOL?

11. What can be done to help students who don't have friends at school?
 - a. Are there programs that can help?
 - b. How can teachers or your school help kids who don't have friends at school?
12. What can be done to make sure that kids are a good influence on each other?
 - a. Are there programs that can help?
 - b. How can teachers or your school help?

Switching gears, we now want to find out from you what kind of support you need from the adults in your life.

13. What does it mean to you for your parent/caregiver to be supportive of you? How do they help you?
 - a. With doing better in school?
 - b. With staying out of trouble?
 - c. With getting along better with other people?
 - d. With helping you with your feelings?
 - e. With feeling safe?
14. What does it mean to you for your teachers to be supportive of you? How do they help you?
 - a. With doing better in school?
 - b. With staying out of trouble?
 - c. With getting along better with other people?
 - d. With helping you with your feelings?
 - e. With feeling safe?
15. We have found that kids who are really scared and sad a lot of the time have parents and teachers are more involved (they talk to them more about their feelings what is going on in their lives). Why do you think this is?

WRAP UP TIME – HOW CAN TEACHERS AND PARENTS BEST HELP YOU?

16. Talk about how your parent/caregiver can best help you.
 - a. If you could tell parents what YOU need from them, what would you say?
 - b. What do you NOT need?
17. Talk about how your teachers can best help you.
 - a. If you could tell teachers what YOU need from them, what would you say?
 - b. What do you NOT need?

FINAL WRAP UP

- What do you do in your free-time?
- What fun activities would you like to do in your free-time?
- Are there programs around that help you with:
 - Doing better in school?
 - Staying out of trouble?
 - Getting along better with family, friends, and teachers?
 - Helping you with your feelings?
 - Feeling safe?
- What programs in your community help you THE MOST?
- Who in your community, home or school helps you the most?
- If you could set up your own program to help kids your age stay out of trouble and do good in school, what kind of program would it be?
 - How many days a week would it be open to kids?
 - How late would it be open?
 - Would it be in your school or somewhere else?

Appendix C: Organizations Leading Discussions

American GI Forum

Argentine Fit & Finish Health Club

Baker College of Flint

Center for Collaboration and Future of Schooling

City of Flushing

Cline, Cline & Griffin

Community Foundation Board of Trustees

Flint Area Churches Together (FACT)

Flint Board of Education

Flint Club

Flint Community Schools

Flint Public Library

Genesee District Library

Genesee County Superintendents Association

Genesee Intermediate School District

Genesee Regional Chamber of Commerce

Genesys Regional Medical Center

Greater Flint Health Coalition

Hurley Medical Center

Kappa Alpha Psi

LaSalle Bank

Lawrence E. Moon Funeral Home

Mott Children's Health Center

Mott Community College

Resource Center

Smart Teachers As Role Models (STAR)

Stephens Wealth Management Group

THA Architect Engineers

The Flint Journal

Unitarian Universalist Church of Flint

United Teachers of Flint

University of Michigan - Flint

Appendix D: Presentation Delivered at the Town Hall Meeting

Systemic View of Youth Health and Success

Jessica V. Barnes, Ph.D.

Associate Director

University Community Partnerships

University Outreach and Engagement

Rachel Frank, B.A.

Research Assistant

University Community Partnerships

University Outreach and Engagement

Presentation at the Youth 10-15 Town Hall Agenda

April 10, 2008



Student Presenters

Stan Page

Dylan Luna

Kenny Wilson Jr.



Recognition

- Students for participating in the surveys and the focus groups
- The parents of the participating students for completing and returning the consent form
- Flint Club staff for conducting the focus groups
- All school and district staff for their assistance in collecting consent forms and coordinated surveying
- All MSU & GISD staff and students for their assistance in the administration of the surveys and processing of the data, especially Melissa Cousino



Outline

- How Does Environment Make a Difference for Youth?
 - Contextual theories of human development
- The Importance of Home Environment
 - Assessing adult support
 - Student voice regarding parent/caregiver support
- The Importance of School Environment
 - Assessing peer support
 - Student voice regarding peer support
- The Importance of Neighborhood
 - Assessing neighborhood safety and support
 - Student voice regarding neighborhood
- How Do These Contexts Influence Youth Development in Genesee County
 - Social competence
 - Academic performance
 - Behavior
- Where Do We Go From Here?



How Does Environment Make a Difference for Youth?

Contextual Theories of Human Development



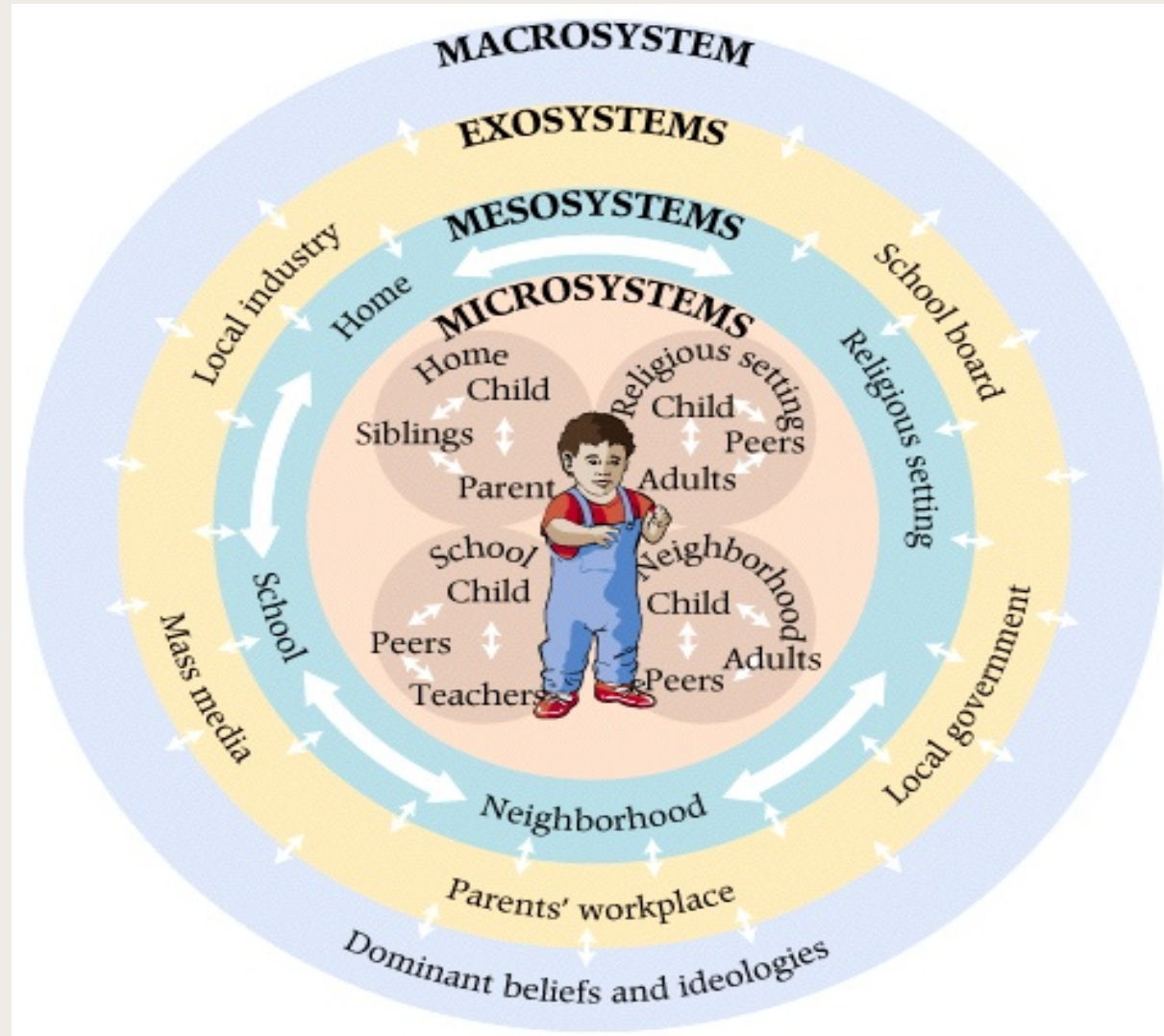
How Does the Environment Influence Student Development?

- To understand how different environments influence student development, we need to first understand how we grow and develop through relationships with others.
 - Theoretical models:
 - Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory
 - Transactional Theory



Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory

- Microsystems:
 - Most direct level of interaction
- Mesosystems:
 - Interactions of the Microsystems
- Exosystems:
 - External environments with indirect influence on the individual
- Macrosystems:
 - The larger cultural context



Transactional Models of Development

- **Trace the ways the characteristics of the child and characteristics of the environment interact across time (transact) to determine developmental outcomes**
 - Emphasize the changing child-environment relationship
 - Same experiences at one point in development will NOT have the same influence as it would at another point in development
 - Same experiences at same point in development for different children will NOT have the same influence
 - The role of the child is emphasized
 - Children and youth are active participants in their environments



Why Are These Theories Important for Understanding the Needs of Youth 10-15?

- Students are growing and learning within their environments
 - The quality of their environments influences:
 - Academic learning
 - Social competence
 - Behaviors
 - Youth who live in fear or do not have basic needs met will lose time for learning
 - Youth who have positive role models in their contexts learn how to interact effectively with others in a wide variety of circumstances



Youth Context: What Do We Think Influences Youth Development?

- Home Context
 - Parent Involvement
 - Parent Emotional Support
- School Context
 - Adult Support at School
 - Peer Support at School
- Neighborhood Context
 - Neighborhood Safety
 - Adult Neighborhood Support



Home Environment

Parent/Caregiver Involvement

Parent/Caregiver Emotional Support

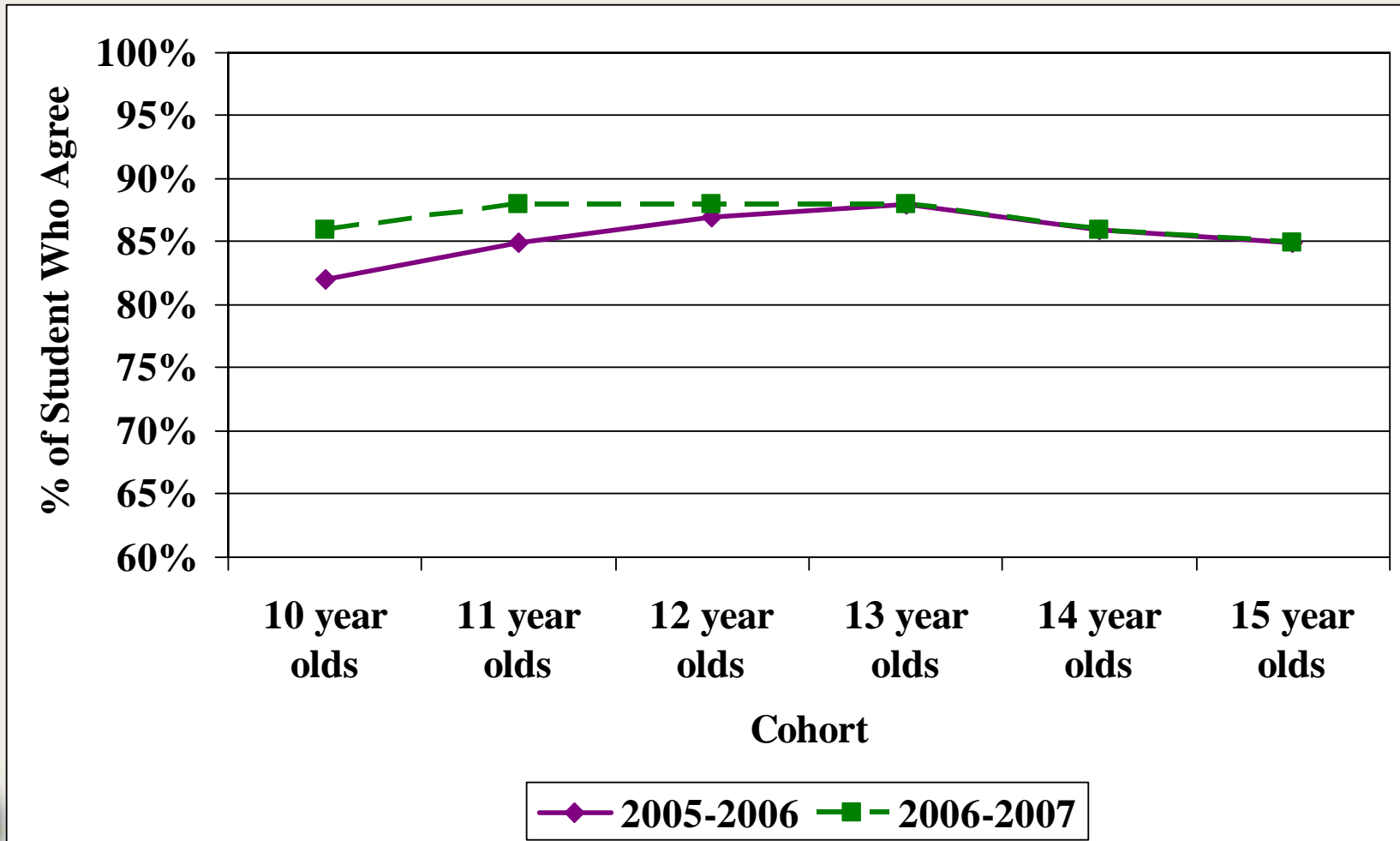


Home Environment: Parent Involvement

- How often do your parents/caregivers
 - ... **ask about what you've been doing in school?**
 - ... check whether you have done your homework?
 - ... see if your homework is correct?
 - ... come to school activities or help in the classroom?
 - ... talk to you about your problems?
 - ... limit the amount of time you can watch TV?
 - ... limit the amount of time you can play video games?
 - ... tell you that you shouldn't drink alcohol or use drugs?
 - ... let you stay home alone with no adults around?



Investigating Parent Involvement: “How often do your parents/caregivers ask about what you’ve been doing in school?”



Student Voices: How Should Parents Be Involved?

- “Be involved and help at school. Be involved with the teachers, know who they are, so when you get in trouble you can’t lie.”
- “Encourage me to do better.”

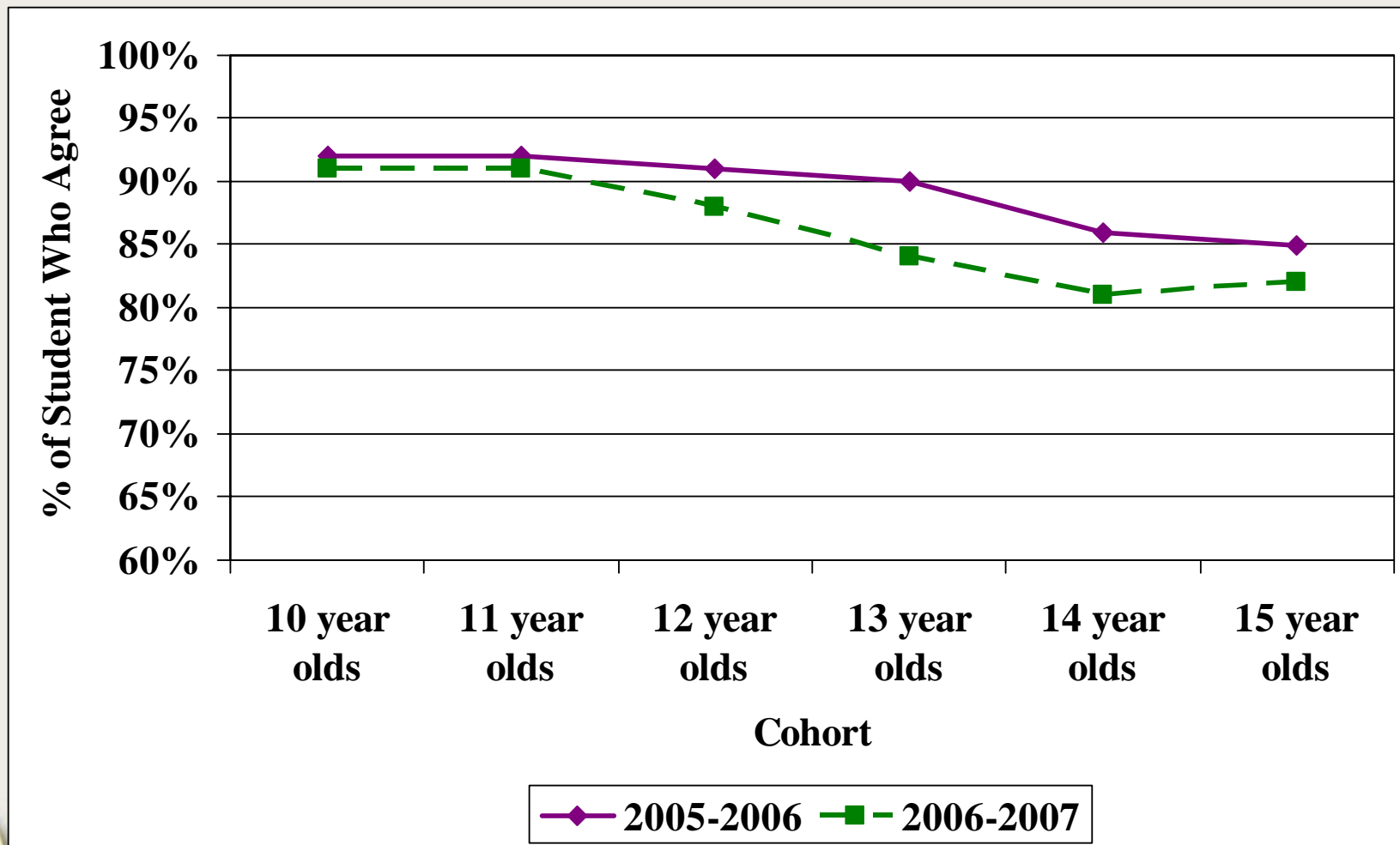


Home Environment: Parent Emotional Support

- Your parents/caregivers enjoy spending time with you.
- **Your parents/caregivers listen to you.**
- Your parents/caregivers spend time reading with you.
- Your parents/caregivers know your friends.
- Your parents/caregivers do fun things with you.
- I like to talk to my parents/caregivers.
- I like to spend time with my parents/caregivers.
- I try to make my parents/caregivers happy.



Investigating Parent Emotional Support: “How often do your parents/caregivers listen to you?”



Student Voices: How Should Parents Be Supportive?

- “Take time to listen.”
- “You can tell them something and they won’t yell at you.”
- “Spend more time with us.”
- “Take time to sit down together and talk...just about whatever’s happening in my life.”
- Many students stated they need “understanding” and “support and help” from parents/caregivers.



Parenting Patterns (North America)

	Responsive Parent is accepting and child-centered	Unresponsive Parent is rejecting and parent-centered
Demanding Parent expects much of child	Authoritative Parenting Relationship is reciprocal, high in bidirectional communication	Authoritarian Parenting Relationship is controlling, power-assertive, high in unidirectional communication
Undemanding Parent expects little of child	Indulgent Parenting Relationship is permissive, low in control attempts	Neglectful Parenting Relationship is indifferent, uninvolved



Student Voices:

What Kind of Parenting Do Students Want?

- “They ground me if I’m doing bad.”
- “If I miss a lay-up or something they’ll say ‘You still did a good job’ or ‘You improved’ or stuff like that, and that helps.”
- “They gotta spend time with you, but they can’t just be around you all the time, they gotta give you some space.”
- “They could just tell you why you in trouble instead, you know what I’m sayin’...because whooping ain’t gonna make it no better.”



School Environment

Adult Support at School (Teachers and Staff)

Peer Support at School

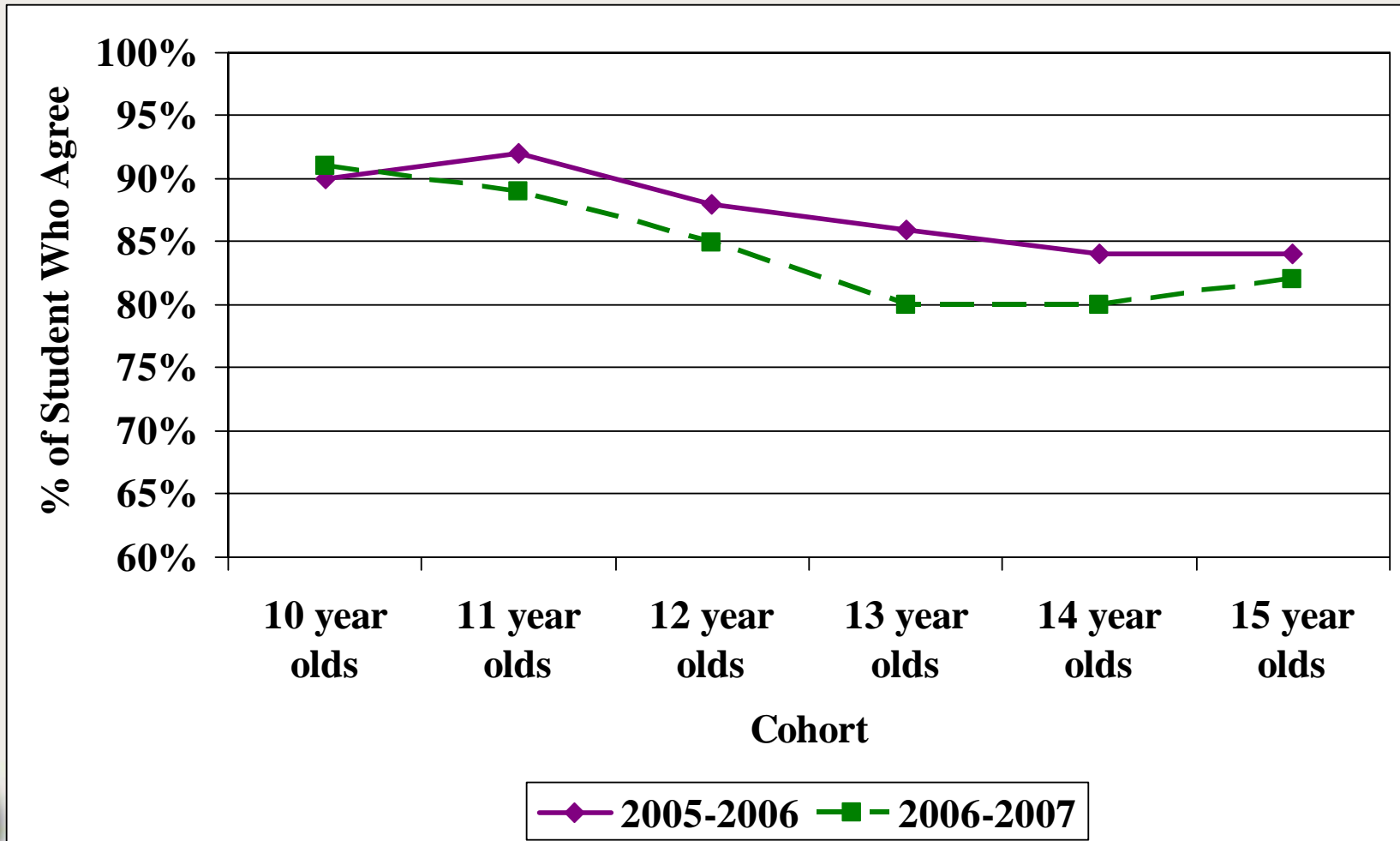


Adult Support at School: Student Report

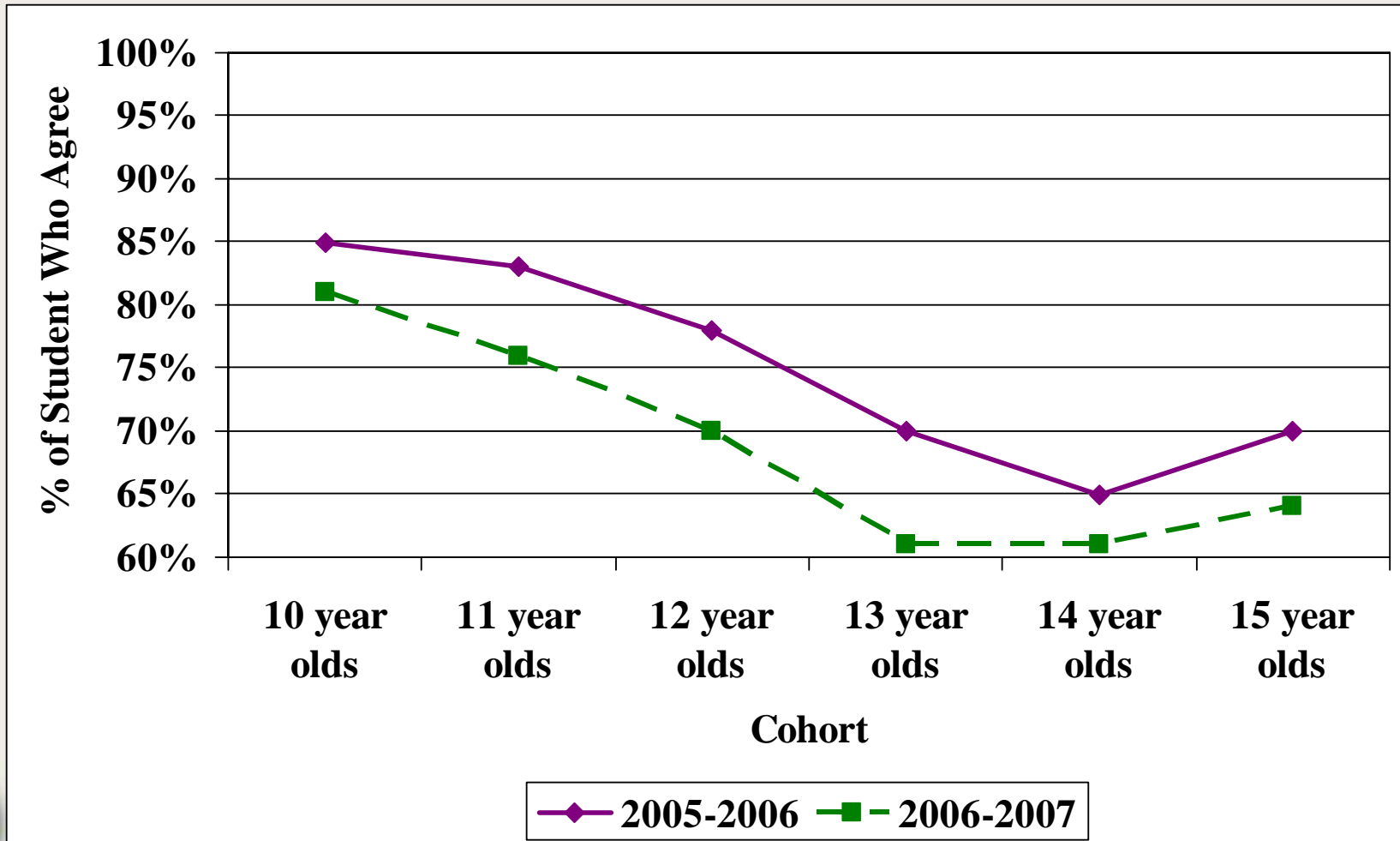
- Teachers and students are nice to each other at my school.
- **There is a teacher or some other adult who really cares about me at my school.**
- There is a teacher or some other adult who listens to me at my school.
- It is easy to talk with a teacher or counselor at my school.
- **The teachers are fair to students at my school.**
- I will get into trouble if I break a rule at my school.



Investigating Teacher/Student Relationships: “There is a teacher at my school who really cares about me.”



Investigating Teacher/Student Relationships: “Teachers are fair to students.”



Student Voices:

What is Adult Support at School?

- Support, encouragement, and consistency
 - “She helps not only in school, but helps in other situations that you need to talk about.”
 - “She’ll take time out of her lunch period just to help you and stuff like that, and not only does she help you with that, if you got situations and stuff that’s going on at home, she’ll help you with that because most of the stuff that we’re going through she’s already been through so she’ll know how to respond.”
 - “[My teacher] encouraged me to do better.”
 - “[Teachers should not] change expectations so often. We had one teacher who as soon as we get used to doing something she’ll change it and then we never really know what we’re supposed to be doing.”



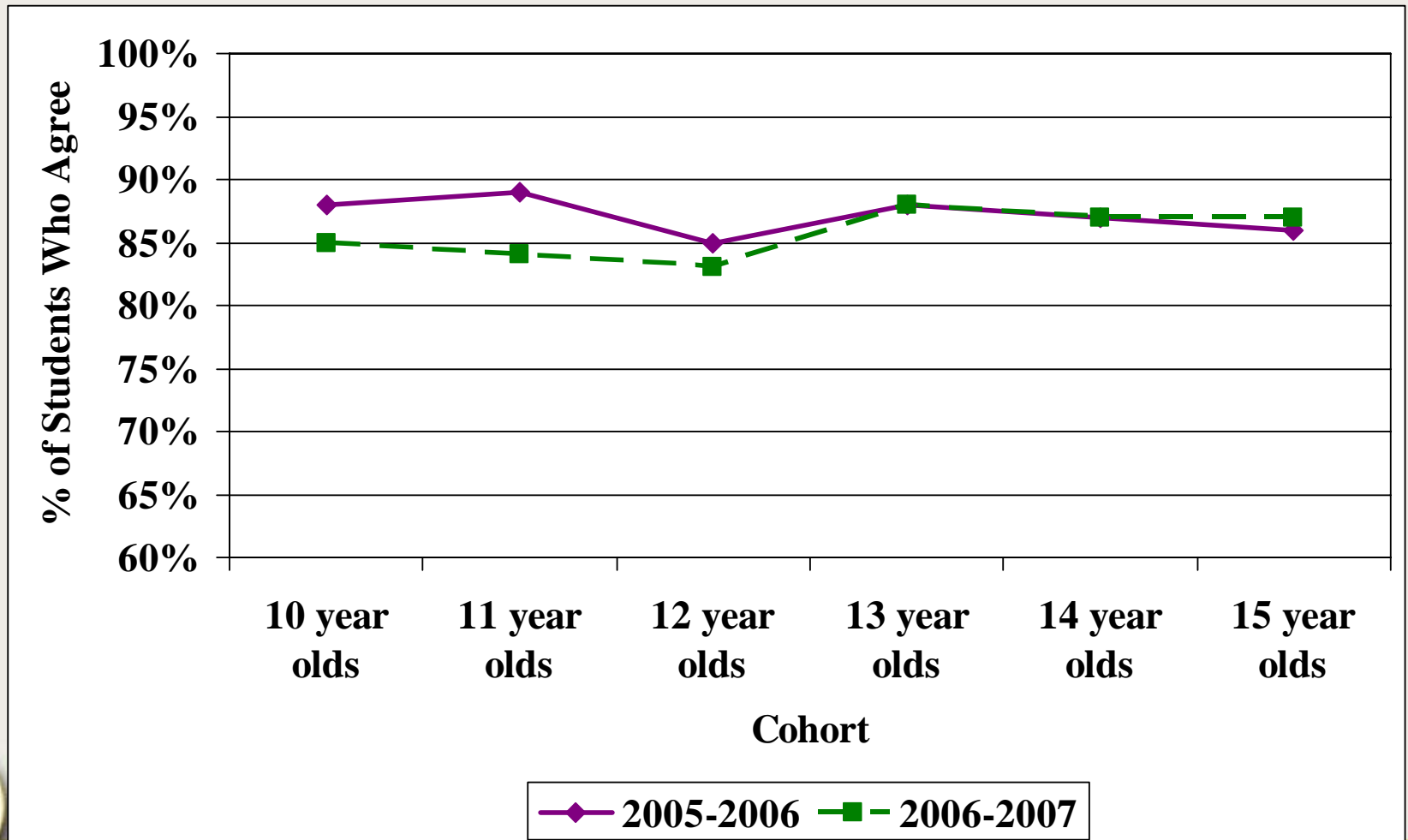
Peer Support at School: Student Report

- There are students at my school who really care about me.
- I feel alone when I'm at school.
- It is hard to make friends at my school.
- I usually spend lunch and/or recess time alone at my school.

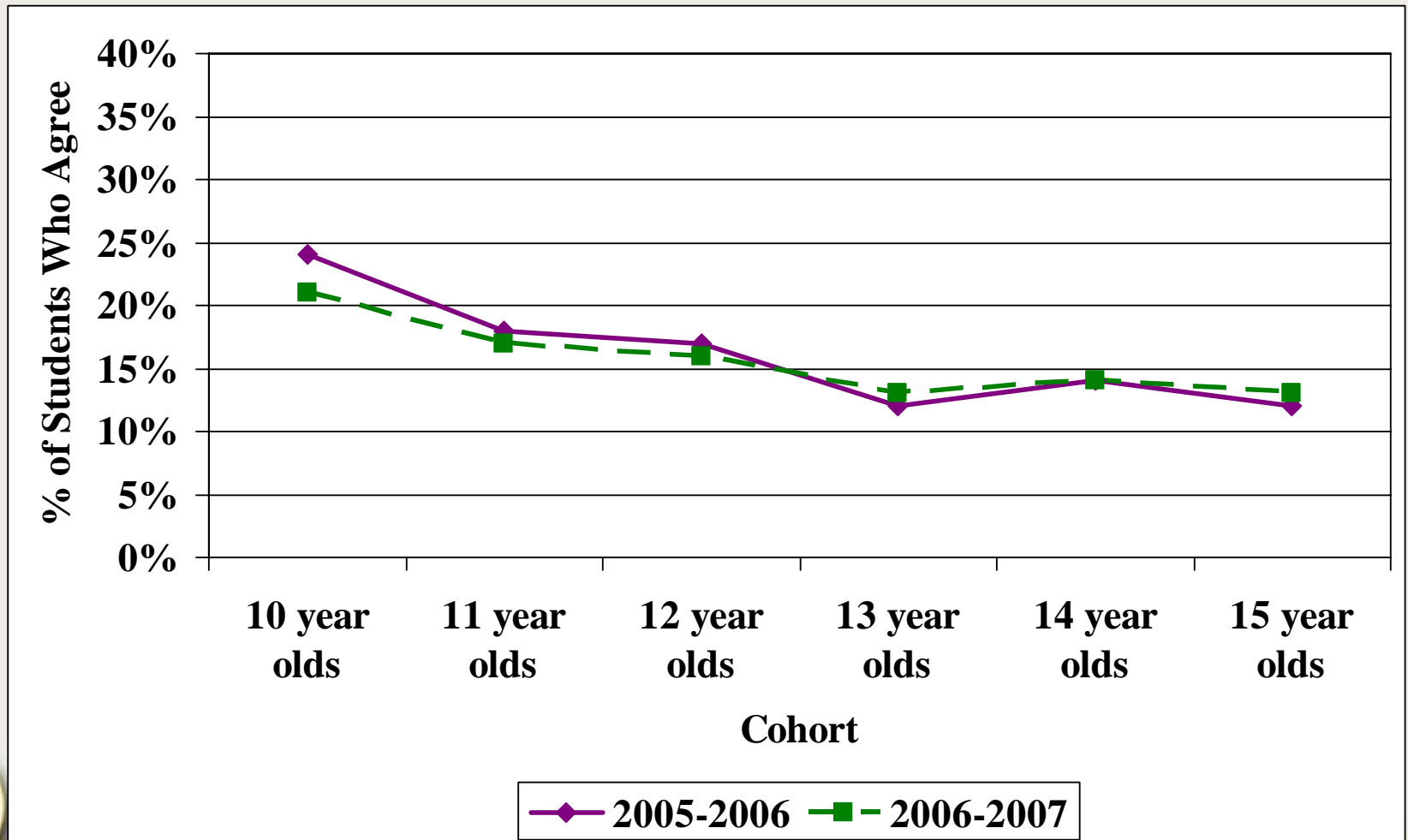


Investigating Peer Support:

“There are students at my school who really care about me.”



Investigating Peer Support: “I feel alone when I am at my school.”



Student Voices:

What Does it Mean to Have Support from Peers?

- “Having lots of friends means that I can hang out with people when I get lonely.”
- “[Friends are] people to joke around with.”
- “Friends talk about different things and things going on.”



Neighborhood Environment

Adult Support

Safety

Belonging and Engagement

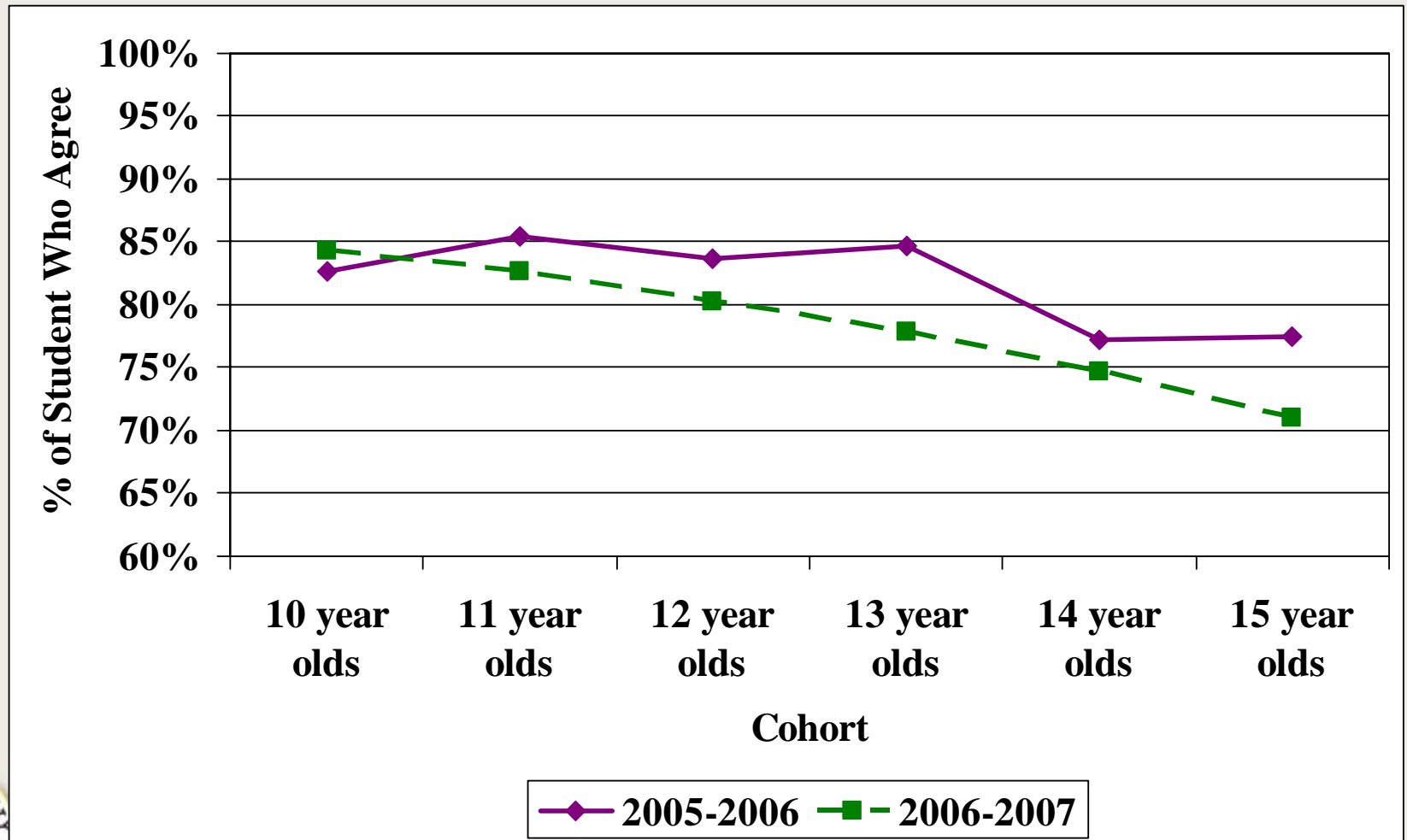


Neighborhood Safety: Student Report

- **Adult Support:**
 - There are adults who look out for me.
 - There are adults I can turn to for advice.
 - There are adults who are willing to help me with my problems.
- **Safety:**
 - I worry about people with guns and knives.
 - Drug dealers are a problem.
 - I am scared of some of the people.
 - There are people that might hurt me.
- **Sense of Belonging and Civic Engagement:**
 - I like my neighborhood.
 - I actively participate in my neighborhood's activities.
 - I do volunteer activities to help my neighborhood.
 - I am interested in talking about ways to help improve my neighborhood.
 - I encourage others to do things to help improve my neighborhood.
 - I try to help people in my neighborhood when they are in need.

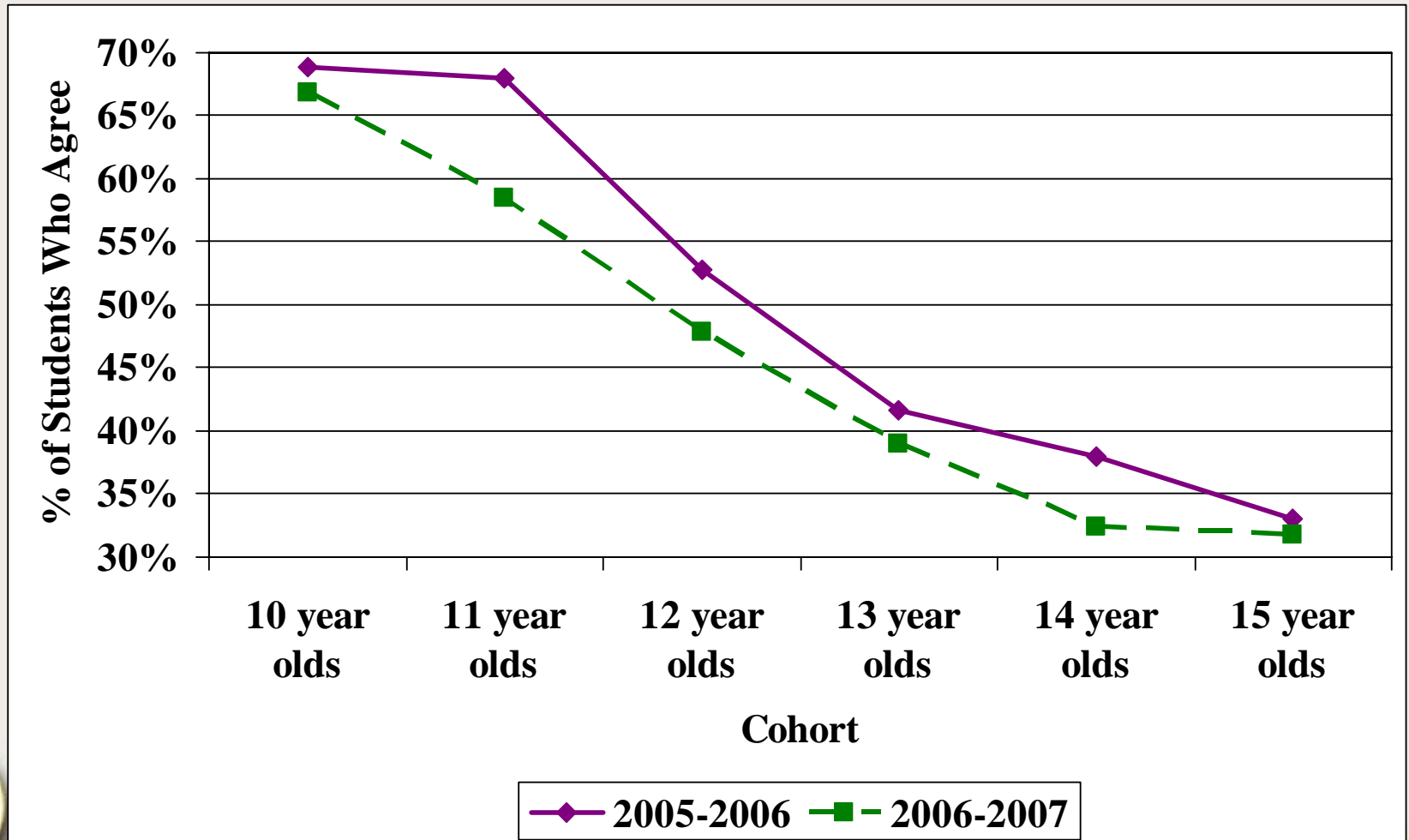


Investigating Neighborhood Safety: “Adults in my neighborhood look out for me.”



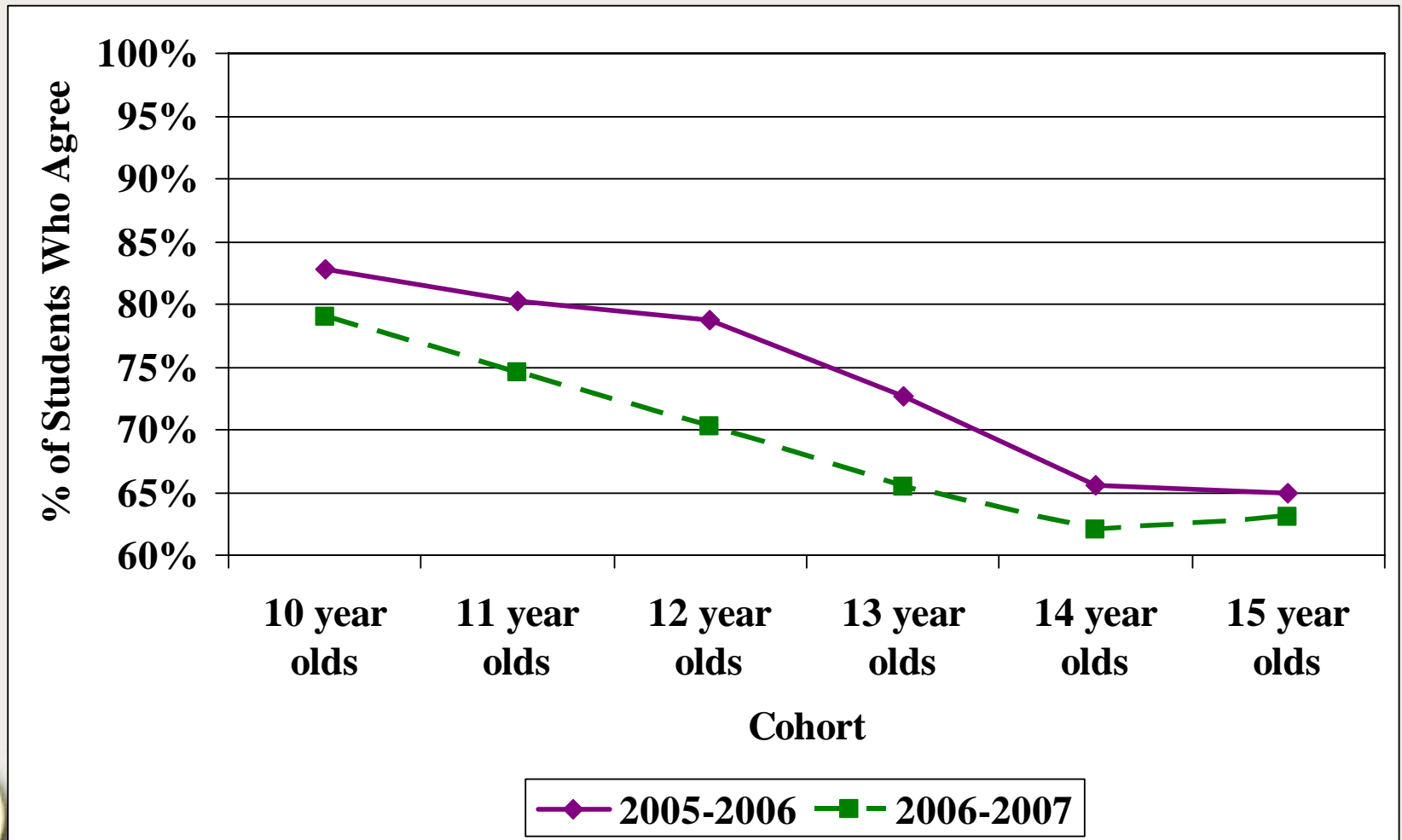
Investigating Neighborhood Safety:

“I worry about people with guns and knives in my neighborhood.”



Investigating Neighborhood Safety:

“I try to help people in my neighborhood when they are in need.”



Student Voices:

What is My Neighborhood Like?

- Students stated that adults are collectively and individually both good and bad influences.
 - “Most of the time in my neighborhood, everybody knows each other, so if anything was to happen you’d know where to go and who to talk to.”
 - “It’s kind of hard if you want to talk to them and you know that you can, but you don’t want them to judge you, so you just keep it to yourself.”
 - “You don’t really know who to listen to.”
 - Students described the people who live in their neighborhood as: “Not so nice”, older people, “potheads”, drug dealers, gangs, sex offenders



How Do These Contexts Influence Youth Development in Genesee County?

Social Competence

- Social problem solving skills

Academic Performance

- School preparation

Health Behaviors

- Alcohol use

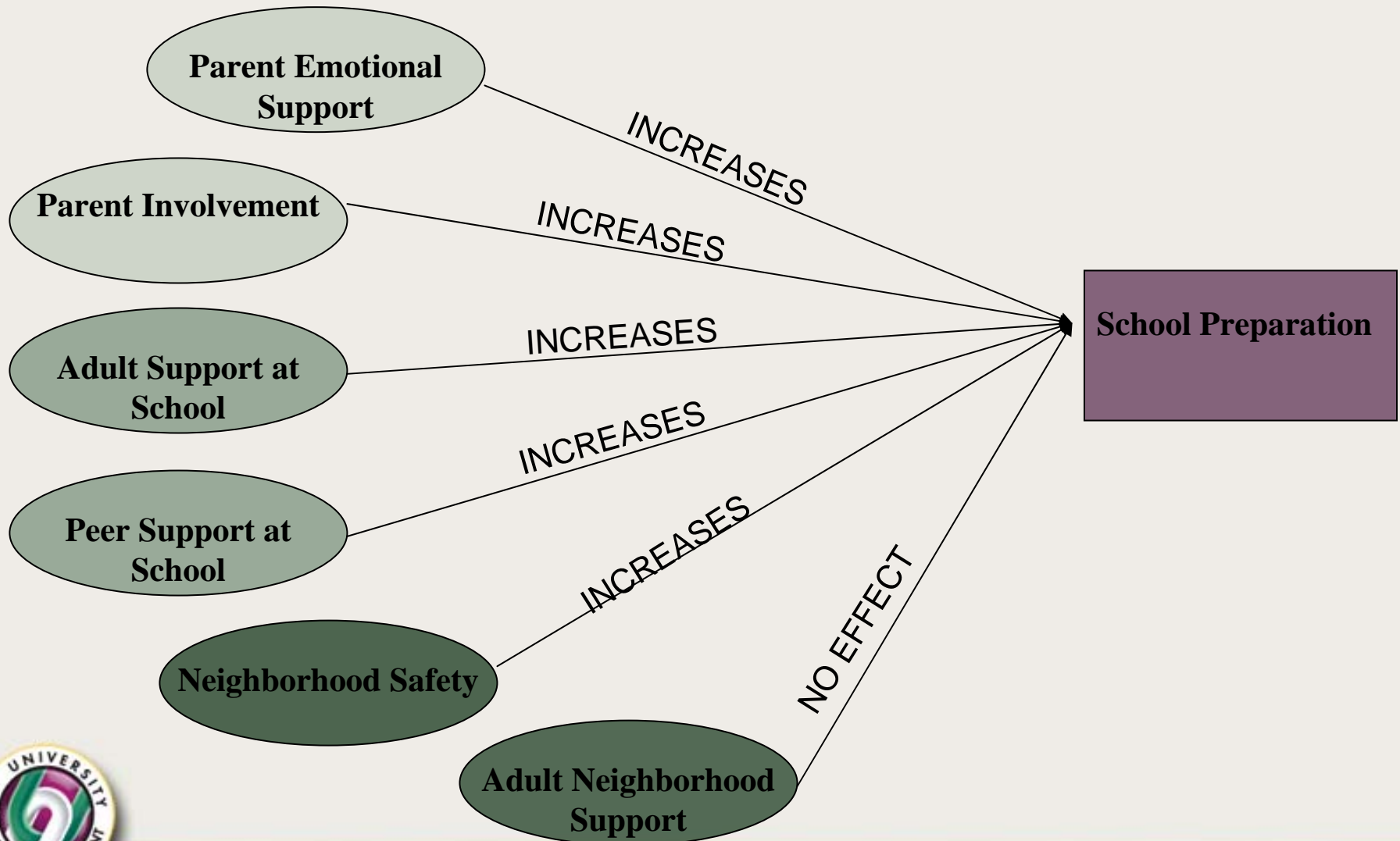


Investigating the Link Between School Preparation and Youth Context

- To measure “School Preparation,” students were asked questions regarding
 - Study habits
 - Class participation
 - Following directions in class
 - Time management
 - Organization of class materials and supplies
 - Academic effort



Predicting School Preparation

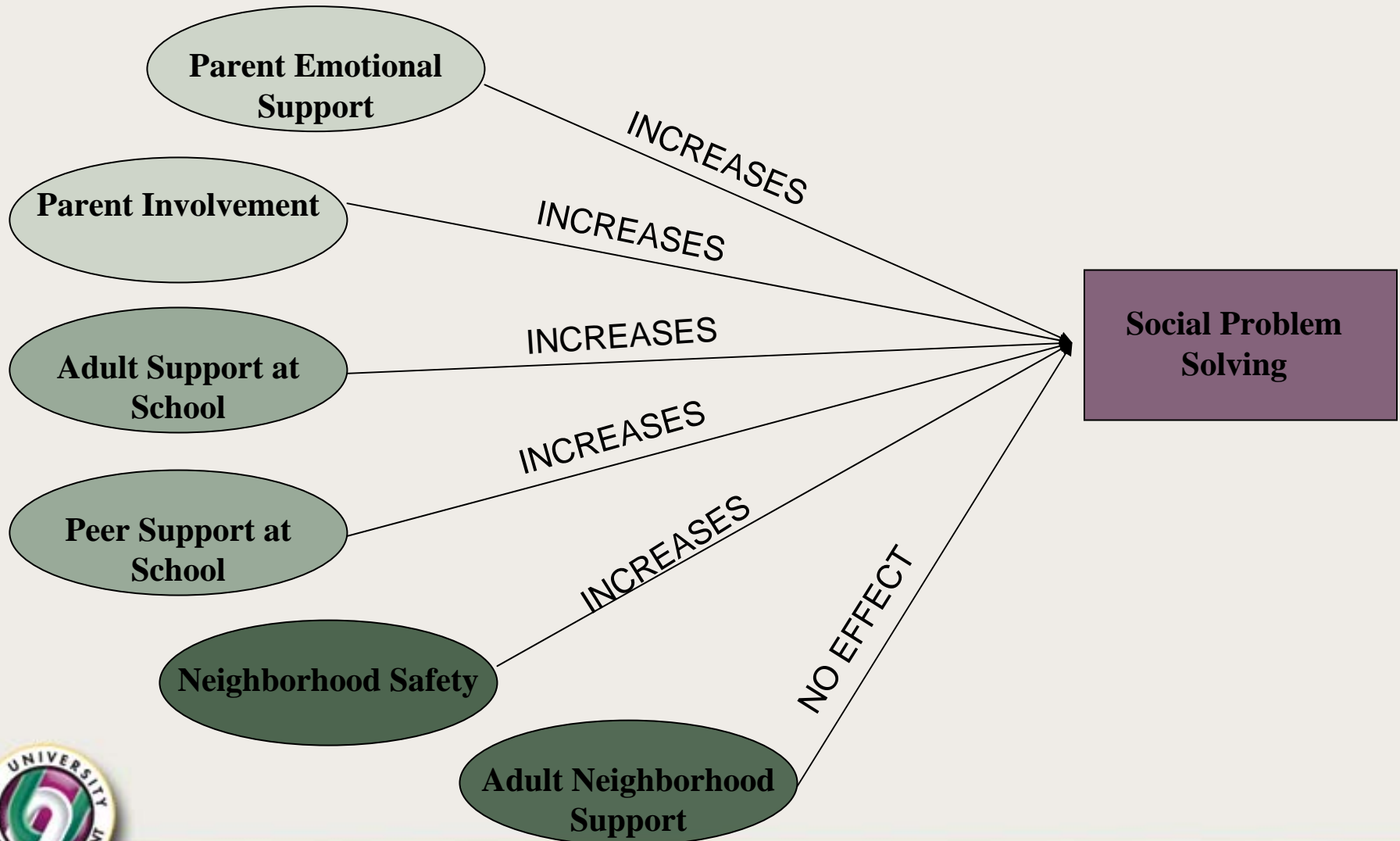


Investigating the Link Between Social Problem Solving and Youth Context

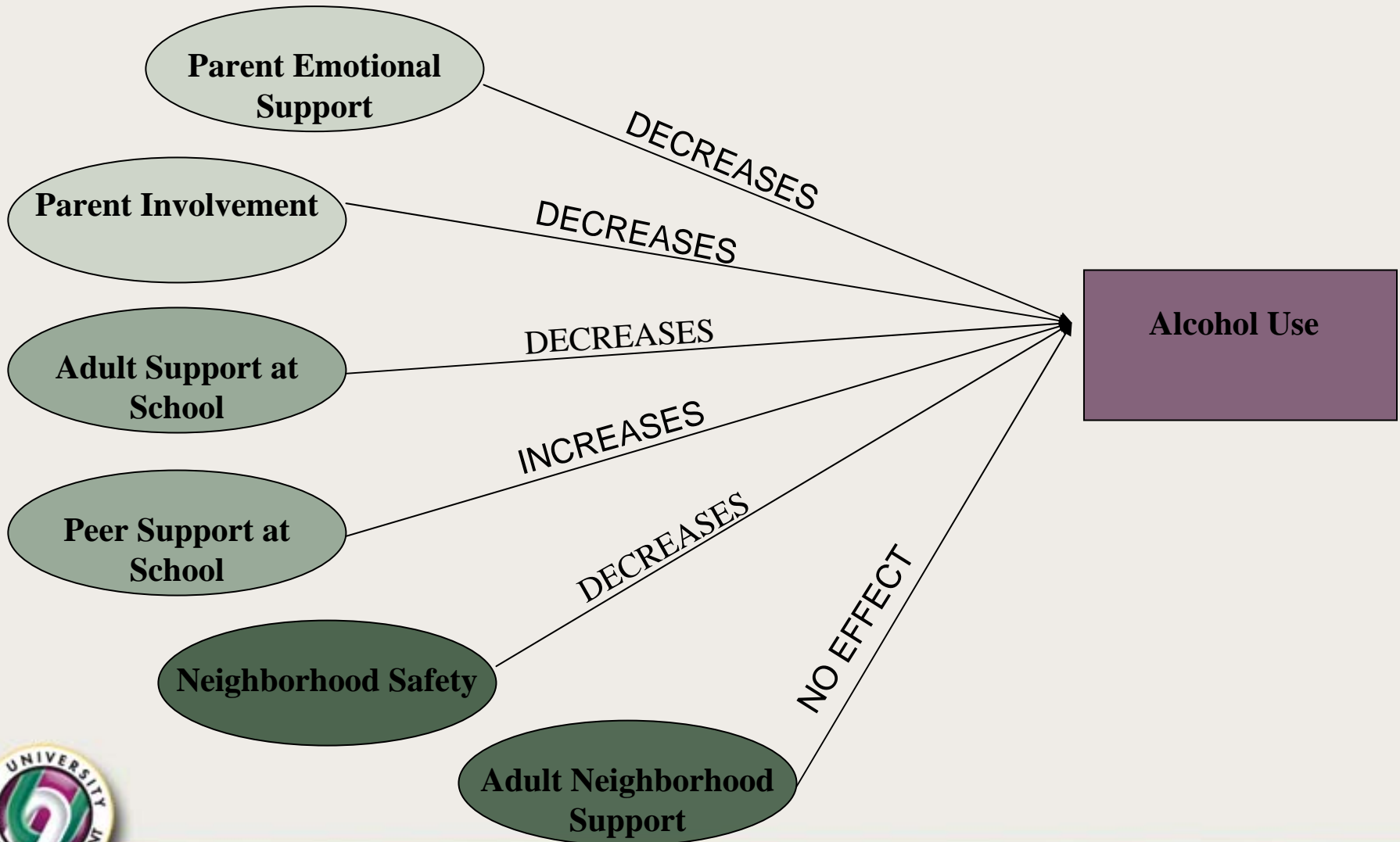
- To measure “Social Problem Solving,” students were asked questions regarding
 - I try to control my anger.
 - I try to solve problems in a positive way (for example, by talking about them with others or figuring out a plan).
 - I think that if someone hits me, it’s OK to hit back.
 - I can deal with problems that might come up in the future
 - I think that it is OK to hit to get someone to stop teasing me.
 - I settle arguments without fighting.



Predicting Social Problem Solving Skills



Predicting Alcohol Use in the Past 30 Days



So How Do We Interpret the Findings?

- Home Context
 - Both parent involvement and emotional support *increase* school preparedness and social problem solving schools
 - Both parent involvement and emotional support *decrease* alcohol use
- School Context
 - Both adult and peer support at school *increase* school preparedness and social problem solving skills
 - While adult support at school decreases alcohol use, peer support is the only factor that *increases* alcohol use
- Neighborhood Context
 - Neighborhood safety *increases* school preparedness and social problem solving skills, while neighborhood safety *decreases* alcohol use
 - Adult neighborhood support has *no effect* on school preparedness, social problem solving, or alcohol use



Where Do We Go From Here?

Student Voice



Student Voices: How Do Peers Help & Hinder?

- How peers help (social problem solving skills and school preparation):
 - “Kids that have friends are more calm because they have someone to talk to besides their parents and teachers, someone that understands them. People that don’t have friends don’t have that. They are always stressed because they don’t have someone to talk to.”
- How peers hinder (alcohol use):
 - “It’s peer pressure.”
 - “They get pressured by some of their friends to do drugs.”
 - “You’re around people that do it.”
 - “To fit in.”



Student Voices: How Do We Help to Create a Positive Neighborhood Environment?

- Increased police presence
- Neighborhood watch programs
- A place to go after school into the evening and on weekends
 - Not necessarily on school grounds
 - Safe, drug-free, keep kids out of trouble
 - Need transportation outside of city buses
- Programs to create positive view of the neighborhood
 - Clean-up projects



Student Voices: How Do We Help Those With No Peer Support?

- What can be done to help kids who do not have friends in school?
 - “They could go to the counselor and ask her to introduce them to people.”
 - “We can make a support group or something at school.”
 - “They [teachers, parents, and principals] can introduce you to another person who don’t have a lot of friends and maybe y’all will get to talking.”



Student Voices: How Can We Help Students Be More Successful?

- Teachers and parents need to provide structure, encouragement, and support
 - Be consistent and set guidelines
 - Talk with AND listen to youth
- Programs suggested by students:
 - Programs to build self-confidence
 - Programs to create positive view of school
 - School clean-up activities (for class credit)
 - Summer Camp/Outdoor Activities
 - “explore nature”
 - “not be surrounded by factories and everything where we can actually run around and climb trees and stuff”
 - Empowering Programs
 - Karate
 - Help look for jobs



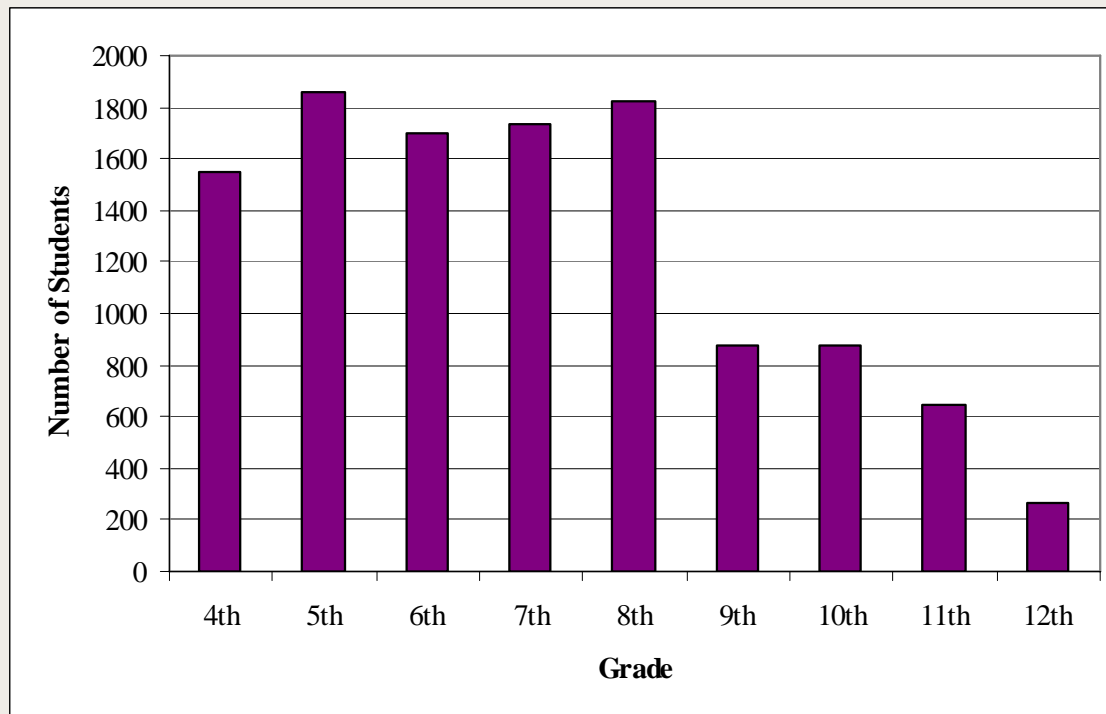
2007 C²S² Results

Districts and Schools Surveyed

- 24 Districts
- 127 Schools

Student Demographics

- 10,680 Students Surveyed
- 44.9% Boys, 55.1% Girls



Contact Information for Dr. Barnes

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