



Youth Perspectives on:

Social Connectedness & Belonging



Overview

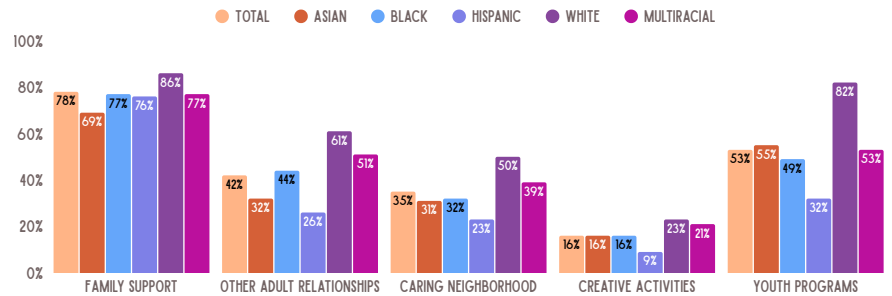
This theme emerged 355+ times during listening sessions and reflects the importance young people place on connection, belonging, and access to supportive relationships and meaningful activities. Youth consistently emphasized the need for low-barrier afterschool programs, safe spaces to unwind, and strong relationships with peers and trusted adults. These elements are foundational to emotional well-being, identity development, and a sense of safety and community.

WHY IT MATTERS

Opportunities to connect with others through recreation, mentorship, and shared experiences are key protective factors for youth. Supportive relationships and engaging out-of-school time activities help young people build self-esteem, develop social skills, and find purpose. When these opportunities are limited or inequitable, youth may feel isolated, misunderstood, or disconnected from their schools and communities.

WHAT THE DATA SAY

Supportive Relationships & Constructive Use of Time Assets, 2025



*Source: Developmental Assets Profile at Alexandria City Public Schools, 2025

WHAT YOUTH WANT

85+ mentions

Constructive Use of Time

"Somewhere I feel included."
 "A lot of community events."
 "Have free time to play sports or spend time with friends."
 "Free school activities."

- Free or low-cost activities after school, including sports, clubs, arts, and social events
- Opportunities in all neighborhoods, not just in East Alexandria
- Transportation and schedules that support participation

120+ mentions

Supportive Relationships & Environments

"More coaches and mentors."
 "More safe community spaces for kids to hang out."
 "A community where disagreeing is okay with people in real life and on the internet."

- Environments that value kindness, diversity, and respect
- Peer relationships that are emotionally safe and authentic
- Consistent, caring, and competent adults who are available to listen and offer support

WHAT YOUTH EXPERIENCE

55+ mentions

Constructive Use of Time

"Fun activities only occur in East Alexandria."
 "Not enough after-school programming."
 "Bus schedule leaves no time for after-school activities."

- Limited availability of engaging programs, especially west of the city
- Logistical and financial barriers to joining clubs or staying after school

90+ mentions

Relationships & Environments

"I'm struggling making new friends."
 "Kids can't be themselves without getting judged."
 "There are almost no places for kids to hang out with friends."
 "Many kids have depression due to not feeling like having a trusted adult."

- Feelings of exclusion, judgment, and social fragmentation
- Experiences of bias, slurs, and gossip that undermine connection
- A lack of accessible adult mentors at school