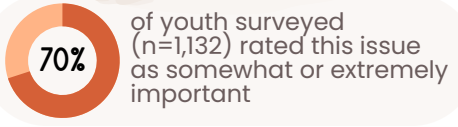


Youth Perspectives on: Youth Agency, Leadership, & Contribution



Overview

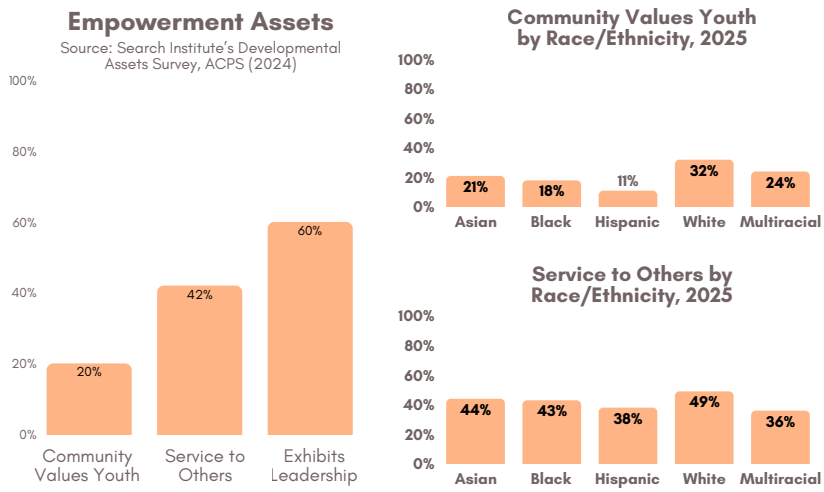
This theme emerged 30 times during youth listening sessions and explores how young people perceive their roles as changemakers and decision-makers in their schools and communities. While students expressed a strong desire to lead, share ideas, and contribute meaningfully, many also described barriers, such as not feeling heard, limited follow-through, and a lack of opportunities to participate in civic life.



WHY IT MATTERS

Young people’s ability to imagine and prepare for their futures is deeply tied to the opportunities and supports they encounter in high school. Equitable access to college and career planning, especially for first-generation students and those from low-income backgrounds, is critical for advancing long-term well-being and economic mobility. When guidance is limited, affordability is a barrier, or certain pathways are undervalued, students are more likely to feel disoriented or excluded from success.

WHAT THE DATA SAY



WHAT YOUTH WANT

15+ mentions

"More chances for teens to have a voice in the community."

"I wish there was more channels for youth to speak about their opinions."

"Everyone feels like they matter."

Not Feeling Valued or Heard

- To be taken seriously by adults in schools and community settings
- Authentic opportunities to shape the programs and decisions that impact their lives

5+ mentions

"More opportunities for teens (mostly middle schoolers) to volunteer in programs outside of school. Like volunteering in a library or helping out in hospitals"

Volunteer or Service Opportunities

- Access to meaningful civic and service activities
- Opportunities to give back to their communities through structured, supported programs

WHAT YOUTH EXPERIENCE

Not Feeling Valued or Heard

- Not feeling heard, valued, or taken seriously - particularly in school settings.
- Feeling excluded from important decisions that directly affect them.
- Frustration with the adult-centric systems that silence them.

10+ mentions

"We are looked down on."

"Lack of respect from adults."

"We don't have enough power."

"Youth don't feel like they matter."

"Don't feel heard, teachers don't hear you out or let you speak. We're spoken at instead of with."

"Adults listen to other adults more than they listen to kids."

"Some students don't feel they have a say or that anything will change. Ideal community is impossible."

Positive Mention: *"My community listens to my opinions."*