Student-Staff Summits Report

COLORADO OFFICE OF SCHOOL SAFETY - DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY

La Junta, January 15th

Durango, January 29th

Virtual February 26th

2025

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Background

Empowering Student Voices in Safe Schools

This event was hosted in three separate locations in Colorado: La Junta (Southeast), Durango (Southwest), and the Northeast (hosted virtually). Although the sessions were the same in each region and common themes were identified by students throughout the state, some topics are specific to areas. This report focuses on statewide themes. Access to region-specific data is available at the end of this document

Empowering Student Voices in Safe Schools:

Building Safe and Inclusive Schools

Presented By Amy Miglinas, Chelsey Lehmkuhl, and Mike Vagher

Background

What makes a school truly feel safe, not just physically, but also psychologically? In this workshop, we explored the elements that create a sense of security and belonging for students. Through group discussion, participants identified what helps them feel safe and valued in their school environment. We focused on the role of trusted adults in fostering inclusion, building connections, and promoting a culture where everyone feels they belong. This section provides actionable insights for creating schools that support the well-being and success of all students.

Data Collection and Summary

To gather student perspectives, a series of open-ended and structured questions were presented to students across the state. These questions focused on physical safety, emotional safety and belonging. Students were invited to respond anonymously, ensuring they could share their thoughts openly and without concern for identification.

Responses were collected, securely compiled, then tallied and analyzed to identify recurring themes, patterns, and areas of concern or celebration.

In short, students gained a sense of security when having caring and trustworthy adults on the premises. This trend could explain why more secluded areas like bathrooms, parking lots, and locker rooms feel less secure for students. When it comes to a student's sense of belonging, extracurricular activities have a major impact. However, it is important to note that students may feel secluded if they do not have clubs or activities that do not match their interest. The topic, questions, and most common answers are shown in the table below. More detailed tables for each region can be found in **Appendix A**, **B**, and **C**

Topic	Question	Most Common Answer Choices
Physical Safety	How do you know you are physically safe?	Trusted Adult/SRO/Police Presence, Locked Doors, Cameras, Drills/Emergency Procedures
Physical Safety	Where at school do you NOT feel safe?	Parking Lot, Bathrooms, Lunchroom, Outside Spaces, Locker Rooms, Classrooms
Physical Safety	What are adults doing to make you feel safe?	Check Ins, Monitoring/Supervision, Follow Safety Procedures/Drills, Caring/Supportive
Emotional Safety	What are those adults doing that let you know you can trust them?	Supportive, Caring/Kind, Honest/Trustworthy, Willing to listen, Respectful

Emotional Safety	What are students doing that make you feel safe and secure to participate in class?	Supportive, Caring/Kind, Honest/Trustworthy
Emotional Safety	Where can you be completely yourself?	Clubs/Sports/Activities, With friends, Classrooms/Library, Outside of School
Belonging	What helps you feel like you belong?	Friends/Students, Respectful/Kind/Caring Teachers and Staff, Clubs/Sports/Activities, Inclusive/Respectful Environment
Belonging	What clubs/activities/ athletics/groups help you feel a part of the school?	Sports, Clubs, Extra/Intra-Curricular Activities & Organizations
Belonging	Why do you think there are students that don't feel like they belong at your school?	Mistreatment, No Social Circle, Nothing to Match Their Interests

What's Working; What Could be Improved

Students were asked to comment on safety practices that should be continued, begun, or ended in their schools ("Start/Stop/Continue" Activity,) and identified themes are summarized below.

START:

- Prioritizing inclusive and equitable practices that affirm all student identities, not just academic or athletic success.
- Taking student concerns about bullying seriously with consistent follow-up and meaningful intervention.
- Ensuring mental health and emotional well-being are integrated into everyday school practices, not isolated to counseling offices.
- Modeling positive staff behavior—professionalism, healthy boundaries, and respectful interactions with students.
- Addressing racism directly and creating environments where diversity is actively celebrated.

STOP:

- Ignoring or downplaying student complaints, especially around bullying, racism, and safety concerns.

- Allowing staff behavior that undermines trust, such as gossiping, inconsistent enforcement of rules, or intruding on student privacy.
- Treating students as only academic performers rather than whole individuals with diverse needs and strengths.
- Bypassing safety protocols which damages student trust and sense of security.

CONTINUE:

- Building strong, trusting relationships between students and staff—students value when adults show genuine care.
- Maintaining physical safety measures like locked doors, cameras, and visible school resource officers.
- Supporting mental health through available resources and approachable staff.
- Upholding the teacher's role as a respected authority while encouraging student voice and agency in school life.

Conclusion

The report examines the crucial dimensions of school safety, focusing on physical, emotional, and psychological well-being. Through an engaging workshop with students from across the state, it gathered anonymous responses that revealed key themes essential for fostering security and a sense of belonging. Students highlighted the importance of trusted adults in creating inclusive environments and called for direct action against bullying and racism. They also emphasized the need for mental health support in daily school life. Ultimately, strong student-staff relationships, commitment to physical safety, and robust mental health resources are essential for nurturing schools where every student feels valued and safe.

Popular Media & Healthy Relationships

Presented By Jae Dee Wood and Kelly Donnelly

Popular Media & Healthy Relationships

During this session, participants explored how popular media portrays love, friendship and family dynamics - and how these representations impact students' perceptions of what is normal, desirable or healthy.

Students were asked to identify what they found hardest about social media. 52% of responses included negative actions that are found on social media such as cyberbullying, people being rude or mean, discrimination, racism, sexism, and comparison. 13% of responses were around the topic of misinformation. This included things such as rumors, getting scammed, and no one being real. Students found the addictive nature of social media and the wasted time also as being challenges of social media. The remaining 13% of responses were diverse and lacked a unifying theme.

What is the hardest thing about social media?

- Misinformation 13.0%
- Wasted time 11.0%
- Addictive 11.0%
- Other 13.0%
- Negative Actions 52.0%
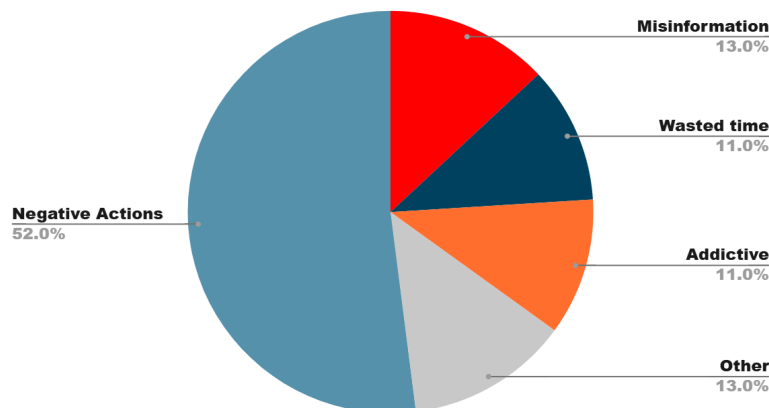
Next, we asked students to identify what they loved about social media. 34% of responses identified connection as one of the things they loved about social media. This included responses such as the ease of being able to connect with people including friends, family, support communities, and those with like interests. 29% of responses were about the entertaining aspect of social media. This included funny content that made them laugh and music. 25% of responses loved the ability to learn new things on social media. Students use social media to learn new things or find inspiration. Finally, 11% of responses loved the creativity of social media. They loved to see other people's work but also loved that they were able to create their own content too.

When asked how students recognized harmful media, they noted that they recognized it was negative when it contained content that depicted guns, violence, bullying, vaping, drinking, or smoking. Students also identified that it was harmful when it caused them to feel a negative emotion such as feeling guilty after viewing it or making them feel upset. Students also identified age restrictions or content warnings as another way they could identify that the media could be harmful. Students identified some coping mechanisms for dealing with harmful media. That included

blocking it, ignoring, taking a break, scrolling onto something else, or talking with family or friends.

Around the topic of media, students found it helpful when adults educated them, protected them, and supported them. Students were united on the actions they wished adults would stop doing. Those included supervision and screen limits. They felt that adults blame social media for most things. They also were concerned about bad role modeling from adults. Finally, they did not find that adults could understand the role that social media plays in their lives.

MORE DATA TO COME ON THIS WORKSHOP

Knowledge is Power:

Substance Use in Schools

Presented By Kelly Addington and Cary Lynch

Substance Use in Schools

Substance use is a challenge many schools face, but what do students actually see and experience? In this interactive workshop, we anonymously gathered student input on the types of substances they encounter in school and with their peers, and methods of delivery used in schools. We explored strategies students use to avoid peer pressure and stay substance-free, and discussed how to recognize the signs when a friend may need help. This session created a safe space for honest conversations and empowered students with knowledge and resources to support themselves and their peers in making healthy choices.

Data Collection Summary

The survey results revealed a concerning pattern of substance use among students, with vapes and nicotine products being the most commonly mentioned, followed closely by marijuana and, to a lesser extent, alcohol and harder substances like pills, cocaine, and fentanyl. Students reported that substance use is most prevalent in school bathrooms, locker rooms, and even classrooms when unsupervised, as well as in parking lots and during school events. While some students expressed concern over their peers' use (especially opioids and cocaine), many seemed indifferent or unsure how to help. A few said they would talk to their friends about it and some would involve adults, but others admitted to feeling helpless or unaware of effective ways to help. Students said that they feel the reason teens start using substances is due to peer pressure, stress, boredom, or family influence, and that the substances typically come from older friends, family members, or online dealers. Students listed vape detectors, increased adult supervision, counseling access, and tools like nicotine gum as methods adults are using to try to help the problem, however the majority of the students felt little is being done. When the students were asked what the adults in their schools could do differently to help curb the substance use, recommendations included increased monitoring in high-risk areas like bathrooms, peer-led education, guest speakers, better visibility of signage with anonymous help resources, and greater family engagement– given the role of parents and siblings in both enabling and modeling substance use. For a more thorough summary, please see **Appendix D**.

Appendix A - Safe Spaces Workshop Safety Questions Data, Sterling

Topic	Question	Most Common Response	%	2nd Most Common Response	%	3rd Most Common Response	%
Physical Safety	How do you know you are physically safe?	Trusted Adult/SRO/Police Presence	66%	Locked Doors	53%	Cameras	37%
Physical Safety	Where at school do you NOT feel safe?	Parking Lot	34%	Bathrooms	18%	Lunchroom	7%
Physical Safety	Do you feel the adults at your school are concerned about your safety?	Yes	82%	Maybe	16%	No	3%
Physical Safety	What are adults doing to make you feel safe?	Check Ins	42%	Monitoring/Supervision	32%	Follow Safety Procedures/Drills	21%
Emotional Safety	What are those adults doing that let you know you can trust them?	Supportive	58%	Caring/Kind	21%	Honest/Trustworthy	8%
Emotional Safety	What are students doing that make you feel safe and secure to participate in class?	Supportive	32%	Caring/Kind	29%	Honest/Trustworthy	11%
Emotional Safety	Where can you be completely yourself?	Clubs/Sports/Activities	16%	In my classes	13%	With friends	11%
Belonging	What helps you feel like you belong?	Friends/Students that care about me	55%	Teachers/Staff that care about me	16%	Clubs/Sports/Activities to be a part of	16%
Belonging	What clubs/activities/athletics/groups help you feel a part of the school?	Sports	47%	Clubs	21%	Extra/Intra-Curricular Activities & Organizations	16%
Belonging	Why do you think there are students that don't feel like they belong at your school?	Mistreatment	21%	No Social Circle	16%	Nothing to match their interests	13%

Appendix B - Safe Spaces Workshop Safety Questions Data, Durango

Topic	Question	Most Common Response	%	2nd Most Common Response	%	3rd Most Common Response	%
Physical Safety	How do you know you are physically safe?	Trusted Adult/SRO/Police Presence	34%	Locked Doors	26%	Cameras	24%
Physical Safety	Where at school do you NOT feel safe?	Bathrooms	50%	Outside Spaces	14%	Locker Rooms	10%
Physical Safety	What are adults doing to make you feel safe?	Follow Safety Procedures	23%	Monitoring/Supervision	20%	Check Ins	15%
Emotional	What are those adults doing that let you know you can trust them?	Caring/Kind	42%	Supportive/Listen to me	41%	Honest/Trustworthy	6%
Emotional	What are other students doing that make you feel safe and secure about participating in class?	Encouraging/Inclusive	25%	Kind & Caring	24%	Non-judgmental	23%
Emotional	Where can you be completely yourself?	Classrooms/Library	50%	With Friends	29%	Outside of School	25%
Belonging	What helps you feel like you belong?	Inclusive Environment	54%	Respectful/Kind Adults	24%	Availability of clubs/sports/activities	8%
Belonging	What clubs/activities/athletics/groups help you feel a part of the school?	Sports	50%	Extra/Intra Curricular Activities	22%	Clubs	20%
Belonging	Why do you think there are students that don't feel like they belong at your school?	No Social Circle	39%	Nothing that matches their interests	30%	Mistreatment	24%

Appendix C - Safe Spaces Workshop Safety Questions Data, La Junta

Topic	Question	Most Common Response	%	2nd Most Common Response	%	3rd Most Common Response	%
Physical Safety	How do you know you are physically safe?	Locked doors	43%	Trusted Adult/SRO/Police Presence	38%	Drills/Emergency Procedures	13%
Physical Safety	Where at school do you NOT feel safe?	Bathrooms	15%	Classrooms	14%	Parking Lot	11%
Physical Safety	What are adults doing to make you feel safe?	Caring/Supportive	44%	Supervision/Monitoring	27%	Follow Safety Procedures	20%
Emotional Safety	What are those adults doing that let you know you can trust them?	Willing to listen	32%	Respectful	19%	Caring/Nice	18%
Emotional Safety	What are other students doing that make you feel safe and secure about participating in class?	Engaged	21%	Kind/Supportive	18%	Inclusive	7%
Emotional Safety	Where can you be completely yourself?	Class	31%	Clubs/Activities	30%	Friends	8%
Belonging	What helps you feel like you belong?	Inclusion/Respect	19%	Friends	18%	Clubs/Activities	15%
Belonging	What clubs/activities/athletics/groups help you feel a part of the school?	Sports	51%	School Clubs	28%	Other Activities	14%
Belonging	Why do you think there are students that don't feel like they belong at your school?	Mistreatment	25%	Nothing Matches Interest	19%	No Social Circle	18%

Appendix D - Substance Use in Schools Survey Data

Substance Use in Schools Survey	
What kind of drugs do you see, or are aware of, at your school or school functions?	**Number of times mentioned**
Vapes	103
Marijuana	81
Nicotine	37
Alcohol	15
Cocaine	6
Fentanyl	4
Other	17
Where are friends using substances on campus? (ie: bathrooms, parking lots, locker rooms, etc...)	**Number of times mentioned**
Bathrooms	127
Locker Rooms	35
Parking Lots	25
Classrooms	13
Other Facilities	24
Are your peers using substances or drugs that really worry you?	**Number of times mentioned**
Yes	46
No	99
Maybe	11
What would you say is the number one reason friends begin using drugs/ alcohol/ vapes/ nicotine?	**Number of times mentioned**
Social Reasons	68
Stress/Mental Health	68
Peer Pressure	35
Family Issues	10
Other	15

Appendix D - Substance Use in Schools Survey Data (Continued)

How do friends get access to vapes/ drugs/ alcohol, etc...?	Number of times mentioned
Friends	66
Family	62
Close Adult	34
Dealer	28
Other	16
Would you know how to help a friend that needs to stop taking drugs or using other substances?	**Number of times mentioned**
Yes	102
No	44
Maybe	15
What would you do?	**Number of times mentioned**
Talk To Them	60
Tell Adult	33
Connect Them With Resources	18
Confiscate	14
Offer Support	10