



AIM Ideas Lab Youth Survey 2024

Alameda & Santa Clara Counties

Research Design Collaborators

AIM Youth Mental Health

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Youth Report Created by AIM Ideas Lab Participants March 3-12, 2024

Introduction

AIM Youth Mental Health invited high school student volunteers in Alameda & Santa Clara Counties to take part in the AIM Ideas Lab: A Youth Participatory Action Research project focused on mental health advocacy. This program ran from January 21 - March 12, 2024.

Twenty-two AIM Ideas Lab youth researchers from throughout both counties worked together to conduct youth mental health research and make recommendations to policy makers, researchers, and their community about how to address the youth mental health crisis. Over 40 hours of community service was invested by the youth participants in this program.

AIM Ideas Lab Program Objectives:

1. Discuss youth mental health, emerging issues, and brainstorm ways to address the crisis with teens from other high schools
2. Learn about qualitative and quantitative scientific research
3. Conduct peer-to-peer research mentored by youth mental health researchers and professionals
4. Collect, compare, and analyze research with the findings of AIM Ideas Labs across multiple counties
5. Bring the youth voice to the table by presenting ideas, research, and recommendations via identified channels

Research Design: Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR)

Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) is an approach to research and social change that encourages young people to utilize their own perspectives and strengths to identify, study, and address issues that impact them.

Research Objective: Survey a demographically representative sample of teens in Alameda & Santa Clara Counties to explore ways to address mental health challenges youth in the community are facing.

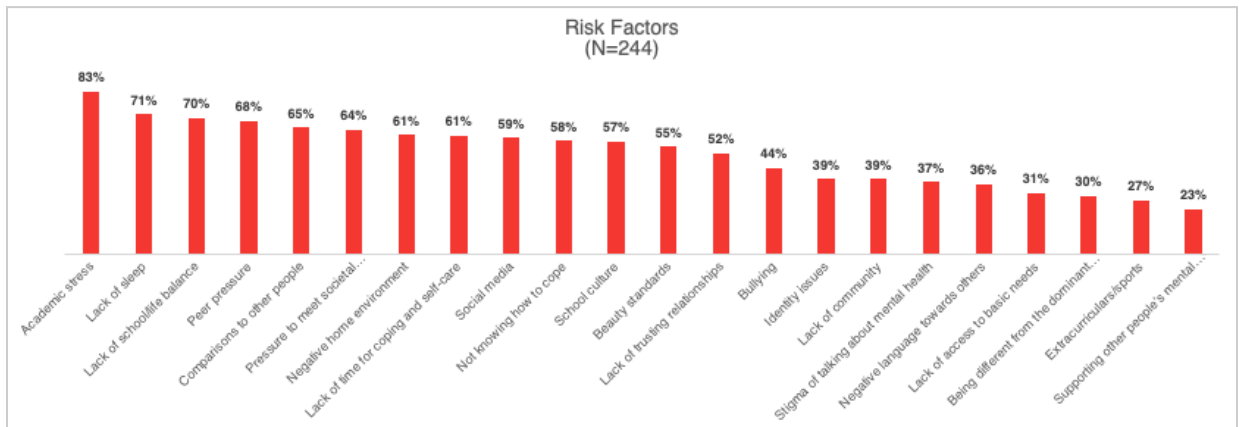
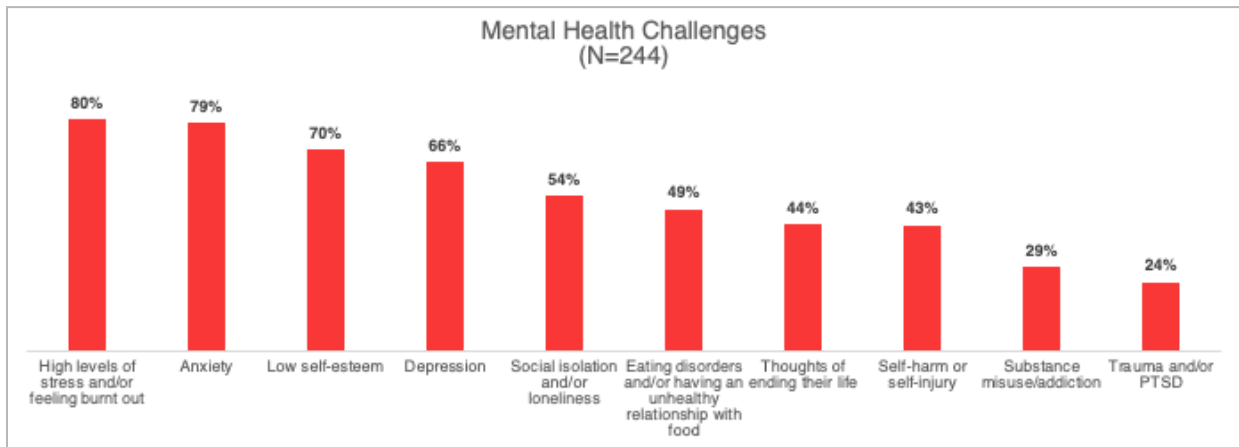
Survey Distribution: The survey took about 10-15 minutes to complete. Questions included demographic information like age, grade, gender identity, and racial/ethnic identity, as well as questions about youth mental health, support services, and social media. The survey was distributed February 18 - 29, 2024, via word-of-mouth, text message, social media, and in select schools. 241 youth in Alameda & Santa Clara Counties completed the survey.

Mixed-Methods Approach: The survey consisted of 19 quantitative (frequencies, percentages) and 2 qualitative (open ended response) questions and were analyzed by the youth researchers to form conclusions and recommendations for youth and adult

stakeholders in the community.

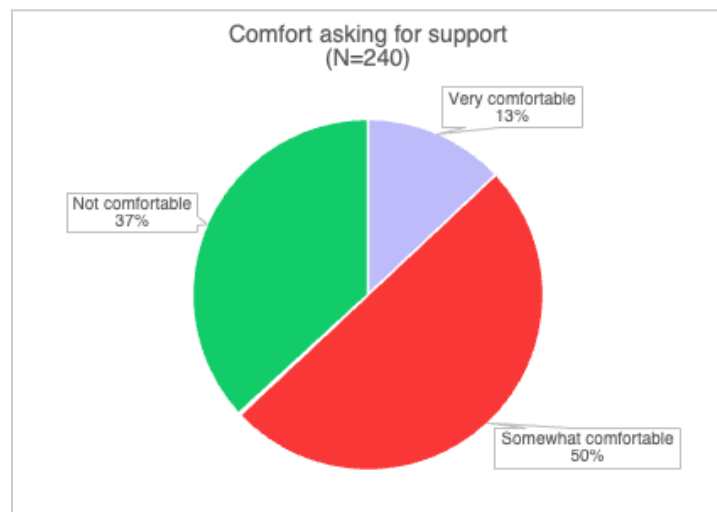
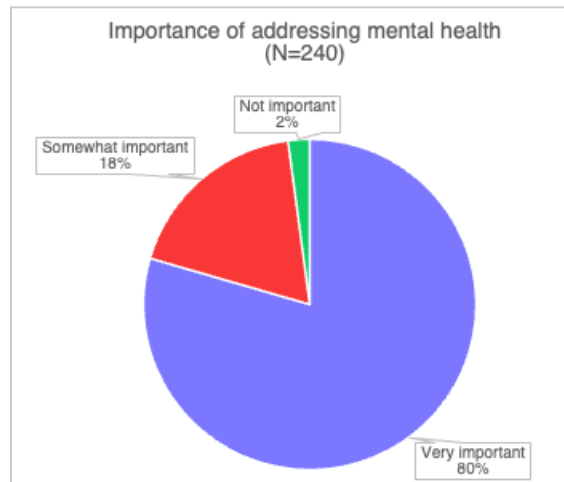
Executive Summary

1. The school environment takes a toll on students' mental health, leading to high levels of stress, anxiety, low self-esteem, and depression. The main risk factors appear to stem from school and academics.



2. Schools must shift the school culture to promote less emphasis on academic achievements and have more of a focus on wellness and building a more positive environment.
 - Because shifting culture is very difficult, as it requires a systemic and social change, schools can't just promote a simple "activity". The focus on wellness has to be a consistent and more integrated effort, maybe starting in elementary school and consistently present as a theme into and throughout high school.
 - Create campaigns that happen more than once a year to help integrate the importance of mental health in the school's culture e.g., schools can host wellness weeks once a quarter or semester

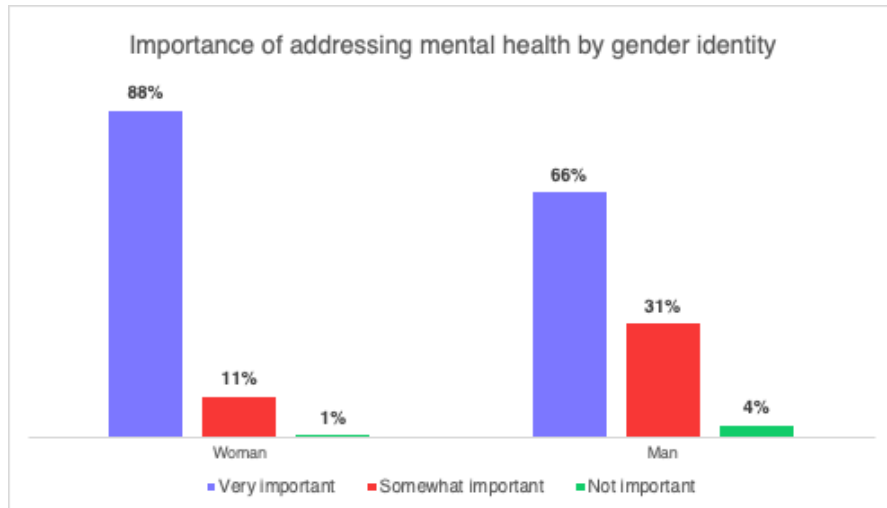
3. Youth agree that mental health is a heavily severe issue, which should be solved. Many students are aware of the severity of mental health, however the majority of students are not fully comfortable seeking help.



- More needs to be done to destigmatize reaching out for support
- **Recommendation:** Schools should create spaces for wellness that aren't necessarily solutions-focused and then inform students about those on-campus wellness centers and teachers who can support students facing troubling times
 - Hold events in the wellness centers for more visibility e.g., mandatory tours with a homeroom teacher at the beginning of the year
- Currently, there is pressure to not need to go to the wellness center. Students mention that teachers "make fun" of the wellness center by mentioning the wellness center is available but "they won't need that"
 - **Recommendation:** Teachers should be mindful of the language they're

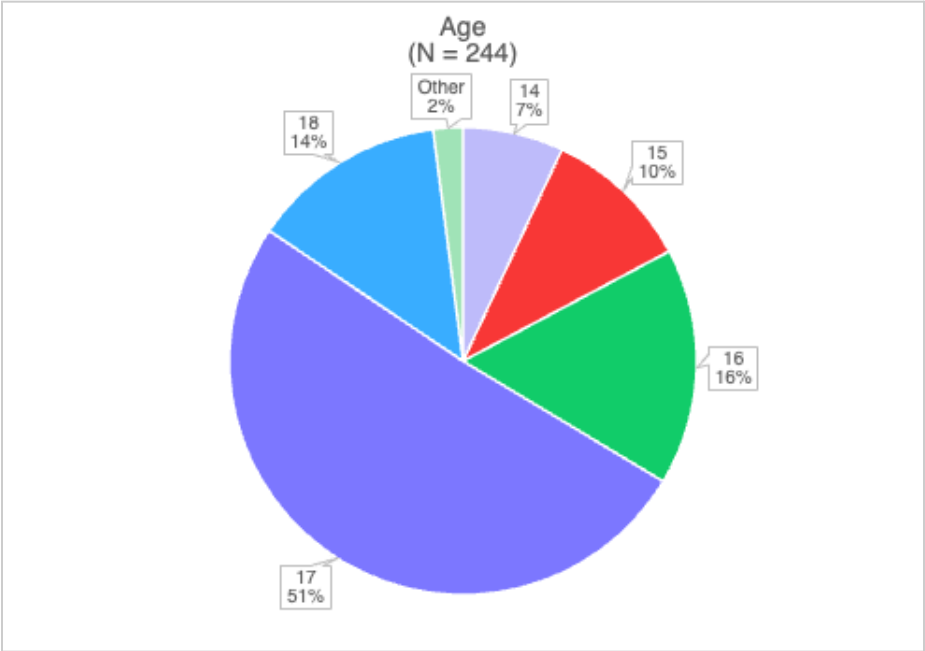
using to describe the wellness center and mental health resources

4. There is a discrepancy between genders about the importance of mental health conversations, treatment, and general awareness. Restructuring conversations about mental health to better reach male populations will help people struggling with mental health feel more accepted.

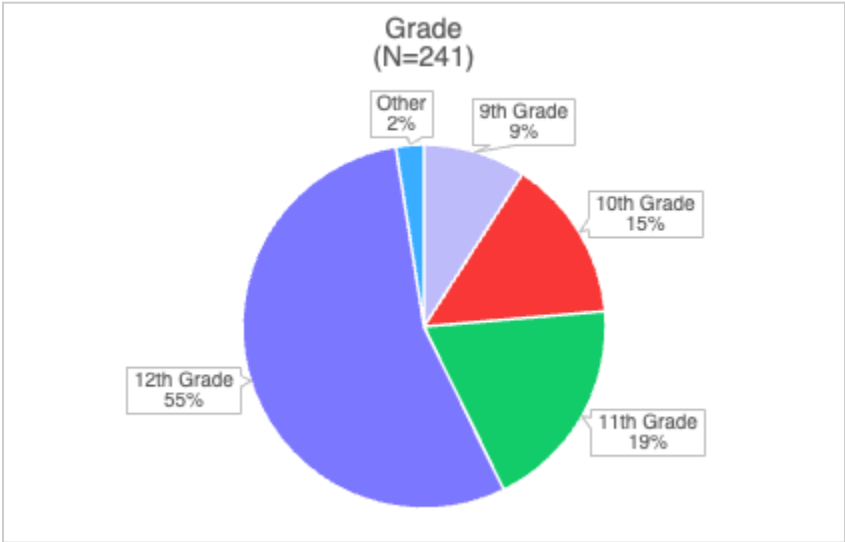


Respondent Demographics

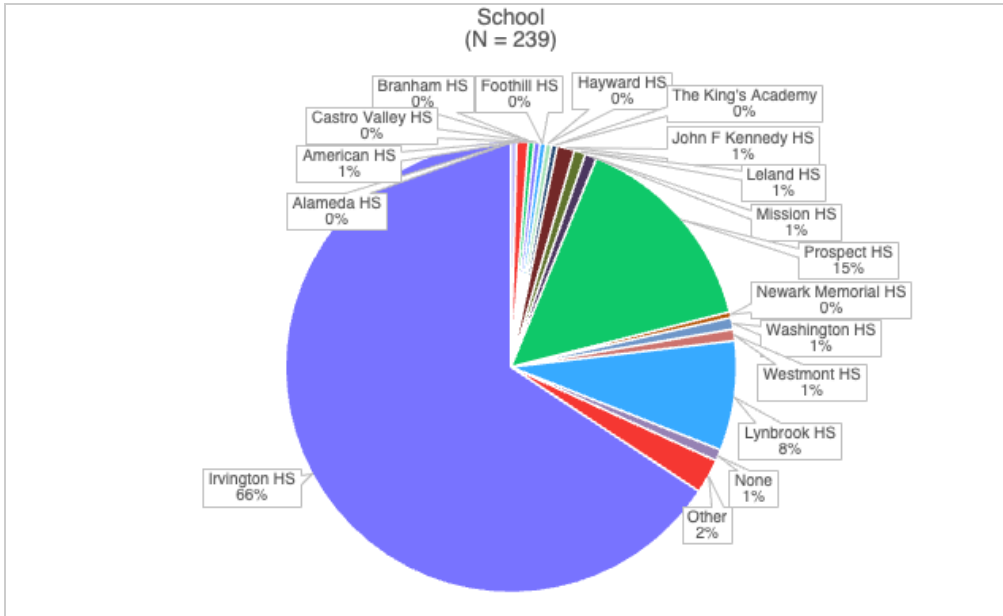
What is your age?



What grade are you in school?

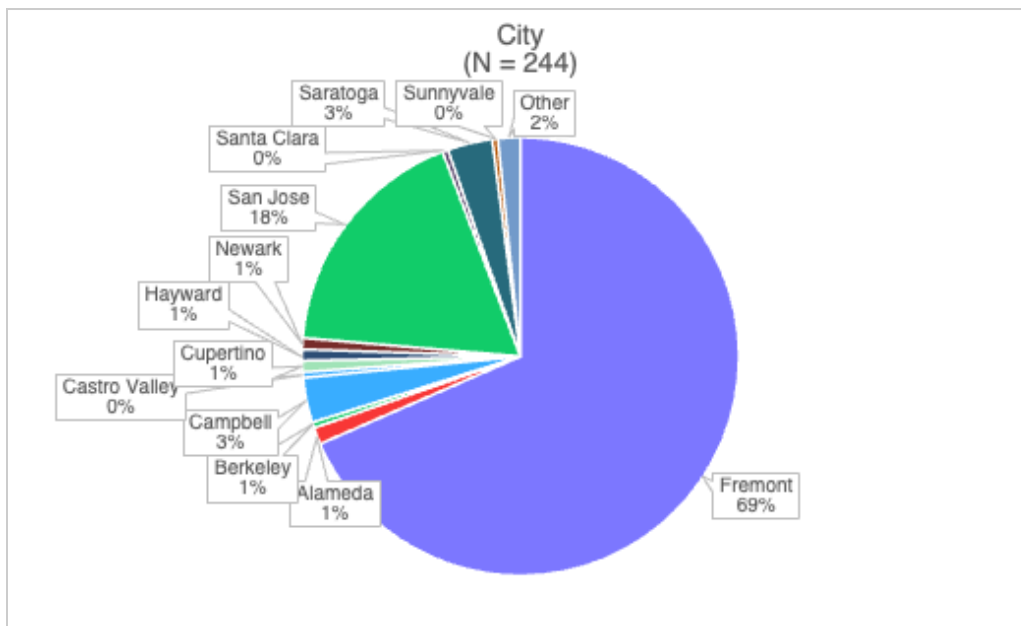


Which school do you go to?



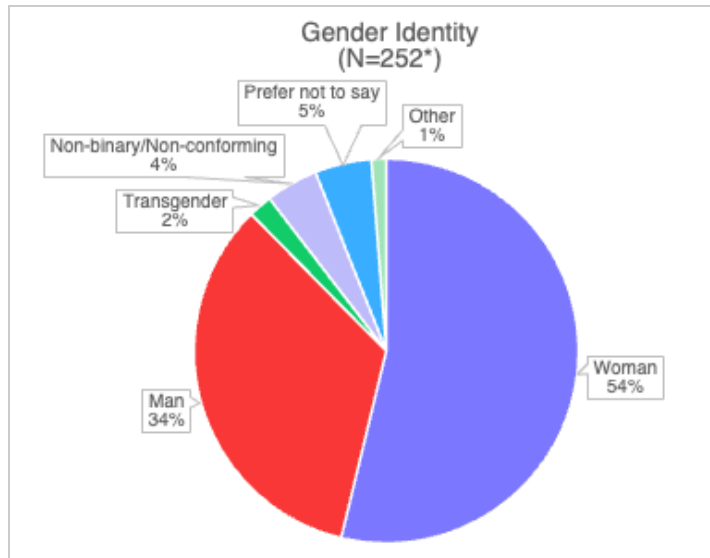
- A majority of the data appears to have come from the same source, Irvington High School in Fremont, as well as from the senior class.

What city do you live in?



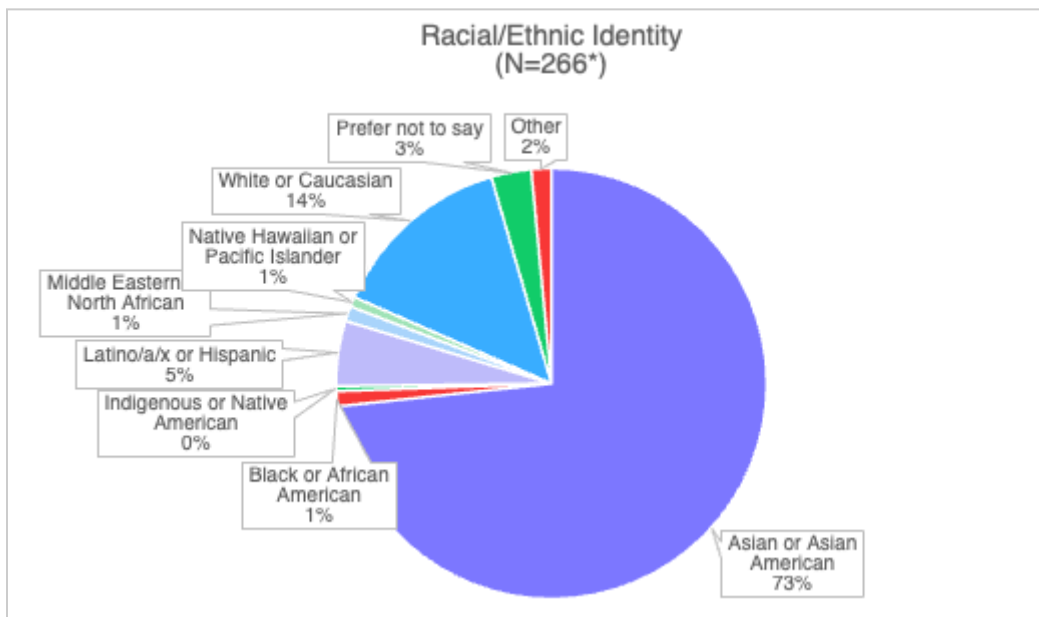
- Many respondents live in the counties that were asked about on the survey

What is your gender identity?



*Includes 8 respondents who selected more than 1 gender identity

What racial/ethnic group do you belong to?



*Includes 22 respondents who selected more than 1 racial/ethnic identity

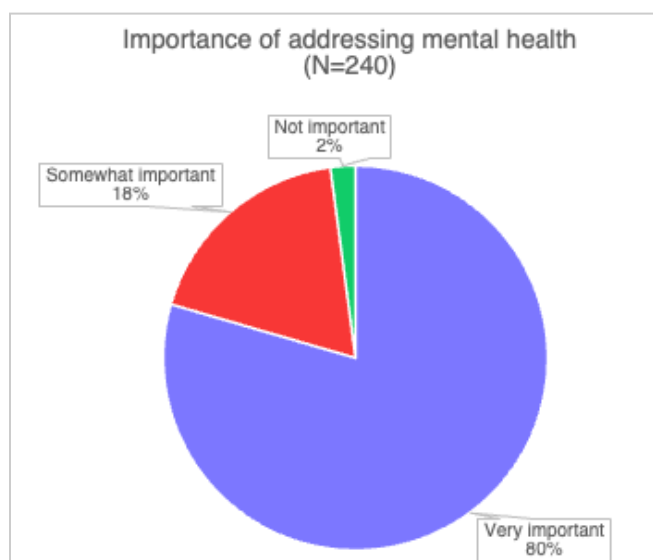
- The sample is majority Asian, resulting in a possible skew in the data

Demographic Insights:

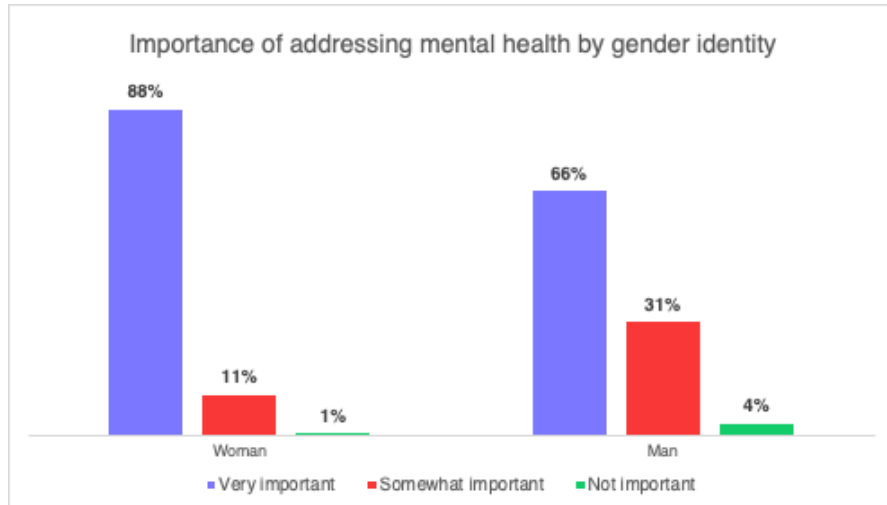
- Data shows that respondents come primarily from Fremont, CA, and the majority are 17 and Asian/Asian American.
- The data shows a variety of different respondents however, it appears that one data point dominates each category
- Fielding the survey in school ensures that the sample matches the desired population, making it more representative.

Survey Results

Q1: How important do you think it is to address the mental health of teens in Alameda and Santa Clara counties?

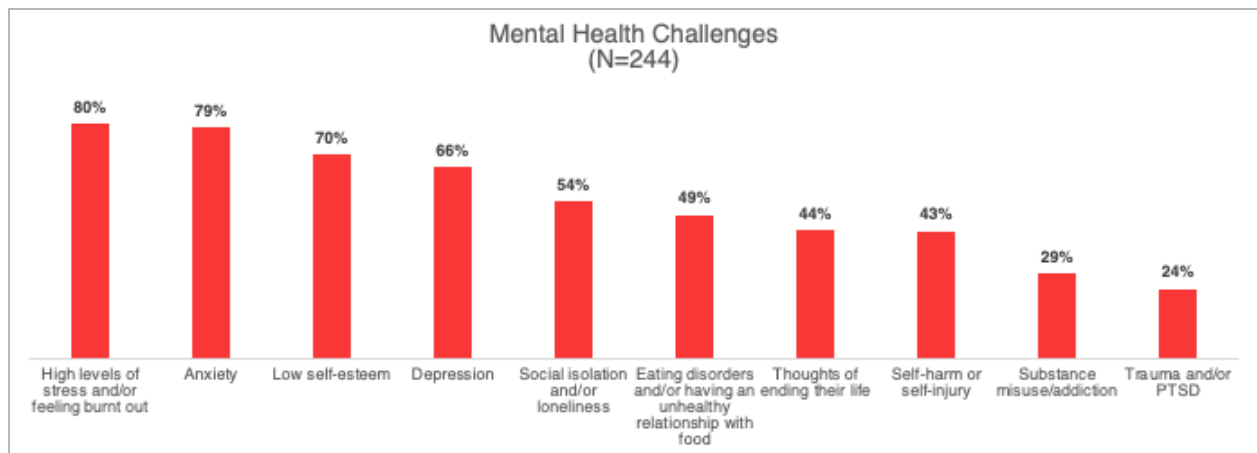


- Many respondents understand the severity of mental health likely due to efforts to publicize this issue.
- Individuals are aware of how much of an issue mental health is within the community because of how relatable it is or having heard of it from others.

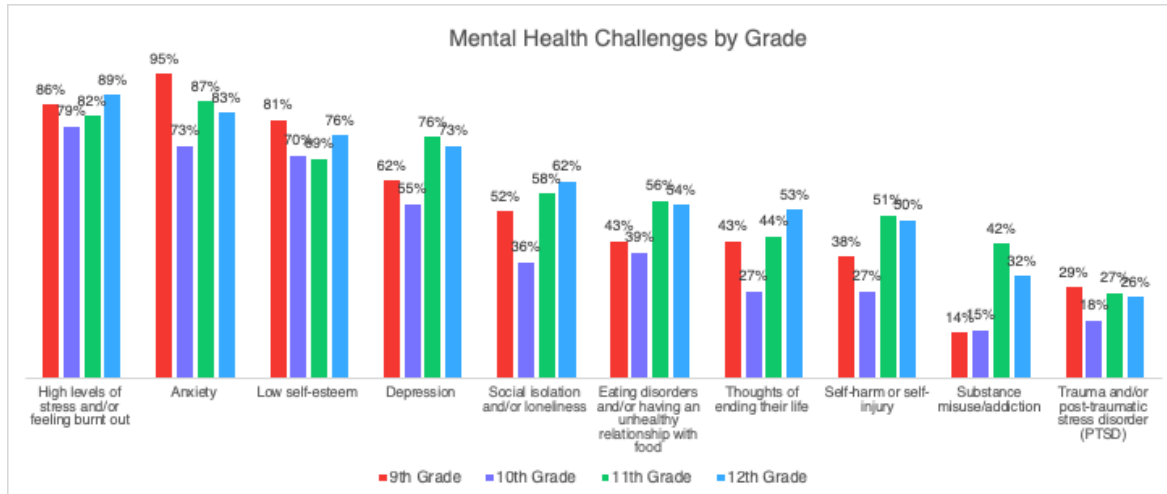


- Women consider it more important to address mental health than men.
- **Recommendation:** Destigmatize male mental health through education and making mental health a "human issue", changing the language around mental health, and creating positive male role models who have honest conversations around mental health.
 - Curriculum should start early with SEL skills like communication and naming feelings, can develop to more specific mental health skill building

Q2: Have any of your friends shared with you that they have experienced any of the following?

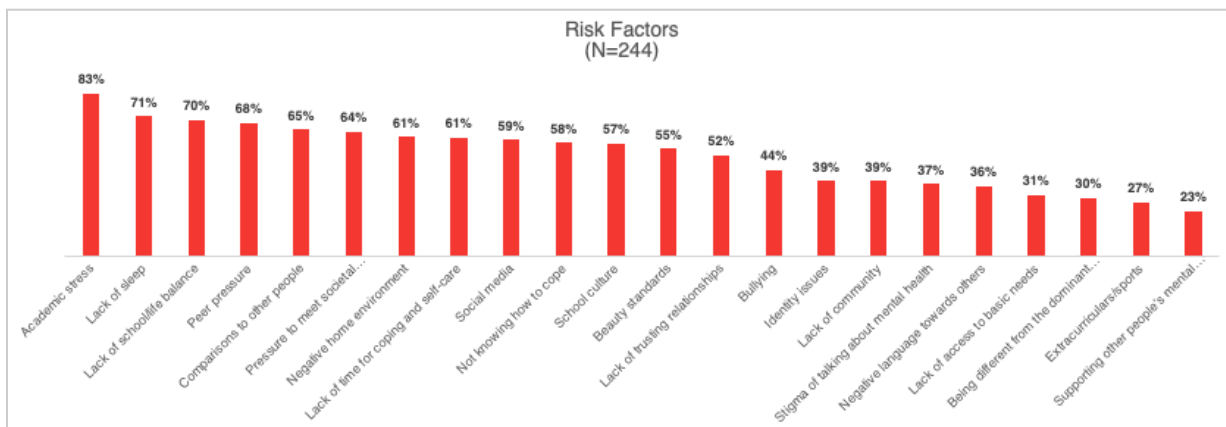


- The main mental health challenges appear to be stress, anxiety, low self-esteem, and depression
- Common mental health challenges that appear in youth can stem from one another (ex. the reason of stress might be because of anxiety)



- Stress seems to correlate with grade and the social aspect that comes along with each grade
 - **Recommendation:** Emphasize to teens that value and esteem should come from one’s character, not their academics
- Freshmen maintain similar numbers to those of Juniors/Seniors except for substance abuse. This may be due to the adaptation to a new environment and a different level of workload they are not used to.
- **Recommendation:** Host a “What I Wish My Teachers Knew” symposium held by students for teachers, with topics and conversations chosen by the students.

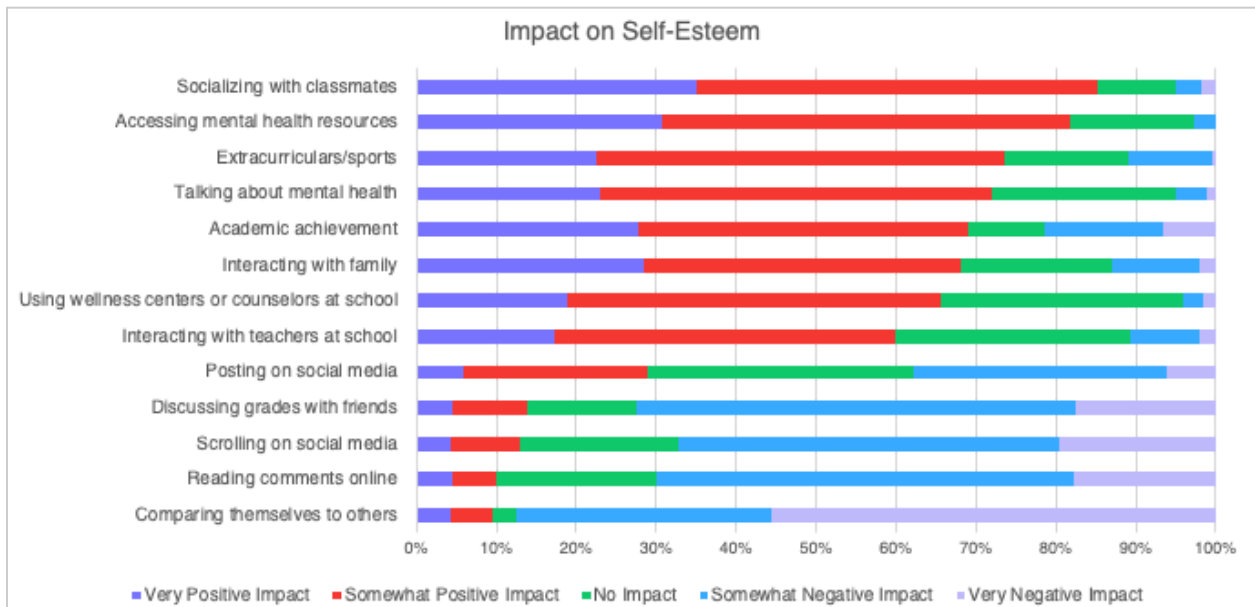
Q3: Which of the following do you think worsens mental health for teens in Alameda and Santa Clara counties?



- The main risk factors appear to stem from school and academics, at least those with a higher response rate.
 - **Recommendation:** Schools should implement more wellness and encourage safe coping methods to help alleviate their students’ mental health concerns.

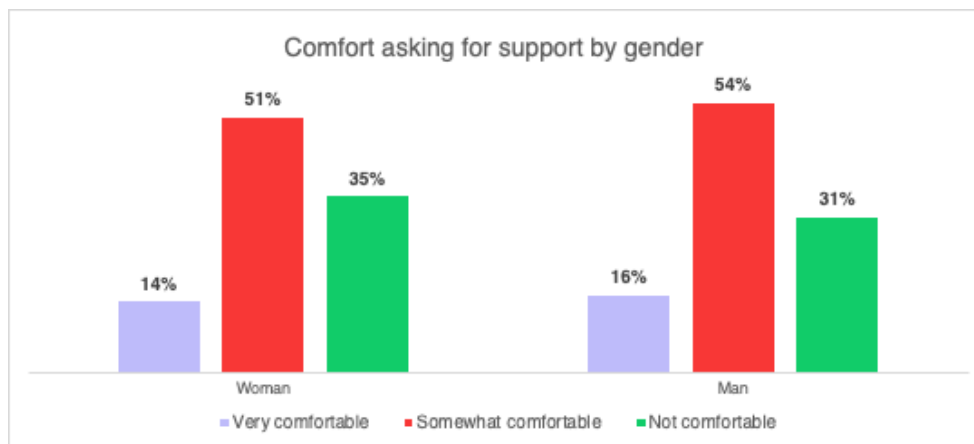
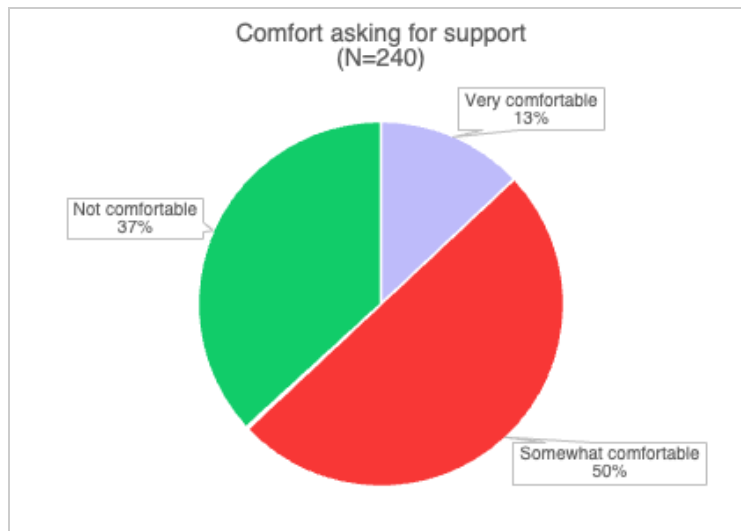
- The focus on academics is not solely a school culture issue but could also be related to ethnic culture of Asian Americans, who make up the majority of survey respondents

Q4: How do you think the following activities impact the self-esteem of teens in Alameda and Santa Clara counties?



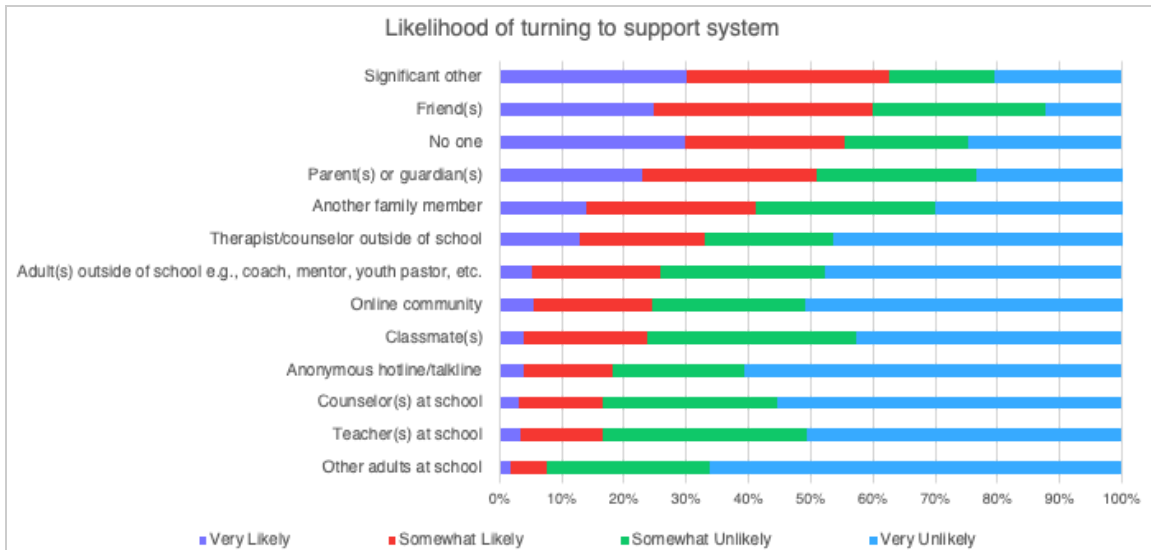
- Activities with the most positive impact on teens' self-esteem are related to social interaction
- Comparing oneself to others and social media both hurt teens' self-esteem, and are likely connected to one another
- Discussing grades with friends tends to hurt self-esteem, particularly if one got a lower grade than a friend
- **Recommendation:** Changing school culture to emphasize character; encourage students to identify and appreciate selves more than academics, body image, etc
 - More practical applications to align with real world sensibilities
 - Look at the [Stanford Body Project](#) as something schools can implement since the program is being expanded to high schools
- **Recommendation:** Encourage social atmosphere that would encourage courage amongst teens

Q5: If you were going through a challenging time, how comfortable are you asking for support?



- There is a general mediocre level of uncomfortable feelings associated with asking for help
- Both genders are relatively comfortable with reaching out to others for support, there was no significant difference between the two genders above
- **Recommendation:** Campaigns to ensure mental health becomes part of the conversation early (e.g DARE, MADD, Truth ad campaigns, which educate around harmful effects) and to check in on your friends and peers (e.g., [R U OK day](#))
 - Provide guidance to respond to a friend who does need support, mitigate anxiety responses about saying the “wrong thing”
 - Create campaigns that happen more than once a year to help integrate the importance of mental health in the school's culture.
 - Schools can host wellness weeks once a quarter or semester

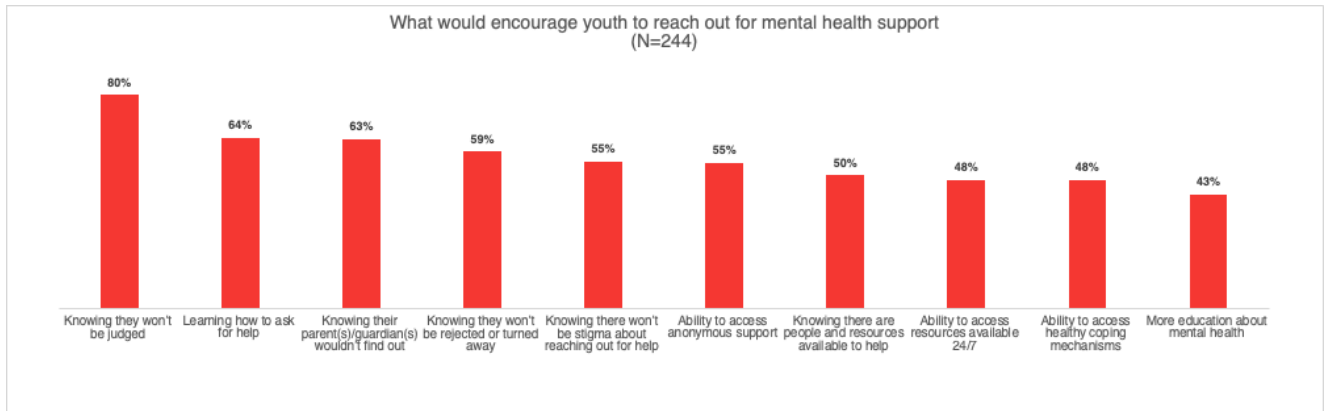
Q6: If you were going through a challenging time, how likely are you to ask the following people for mental health support?



- Students seem to tend to keep their mental health issues to themselves due to how high the unlikely percentage is
- Reaching out to talklines seem to be rising, possibly due to interest in non-face-to-face communication and not having to call
- Students aren't likely to reach out to their teachers or adults at school, possibly since they get the sense that their teachers would not care
 - Students share stories about lack of trust for the adults at school e.g., the adults report back (non-confidentiality)
 - **Recommendation:** School staff need to be humanized in the eyes of the students, "job isn't just to teach but also be kind"
 - Main focus on academics over emotional support
 - **Recommendation:** Have a dedicated team of mental health professionals at the school who are assigned to students and have meetings once a year to build trust
 - **Recommendation:** Dedicated counselors who build relationships with their students at the start of the school year and proactively check on students as they progress through high school to build trust.
 - Preference for counselors sorted by last name vs grade level to avoid relationship changes throughout high school
 - **Recommendation:** Schools should create spaces for wellness that aren't necessarily solutions focused and then inform students about those on-campus wellness centers and teachers who are willing to comfort students facing troubling times

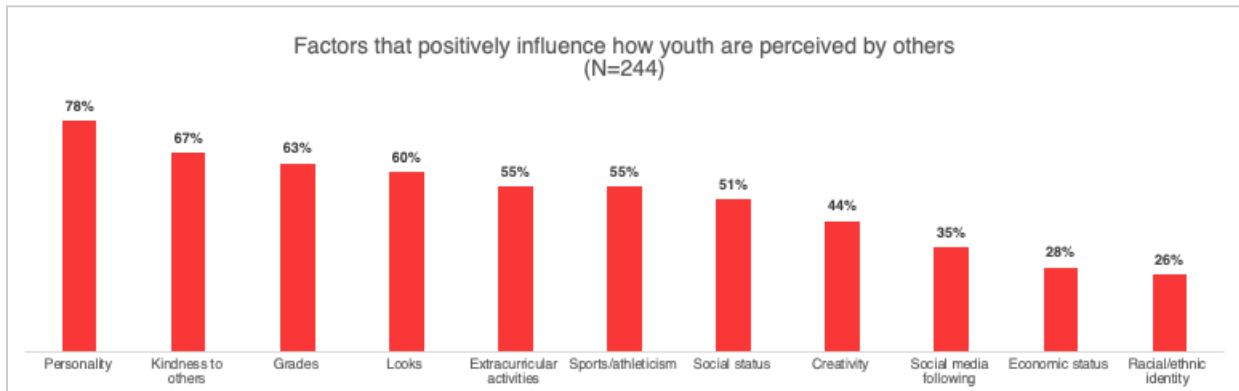
- Hold events in the wellness centers for more visibility e.g., mandatory tours with a homeroom teacher at the beginning of the year
 - Currently, there is pressure to not need to go to the wellness center. Students mention that teachers "make fun" of the wellness center by mentioning that the wellness center is available but "they won't need that"
 - **Recommendation:** Teachers should be mindful of the language they're using to describe the wellness center and mental health resources to not further stigmatize reaching out for support
- Willingness to reach out to therapist/counselor outside of school is also low, possibly due to stigma against getting support from mental health professionals

Q7: What do you think would encourage youth in Alameda and Santa Clara counties to reach out for mental health support?



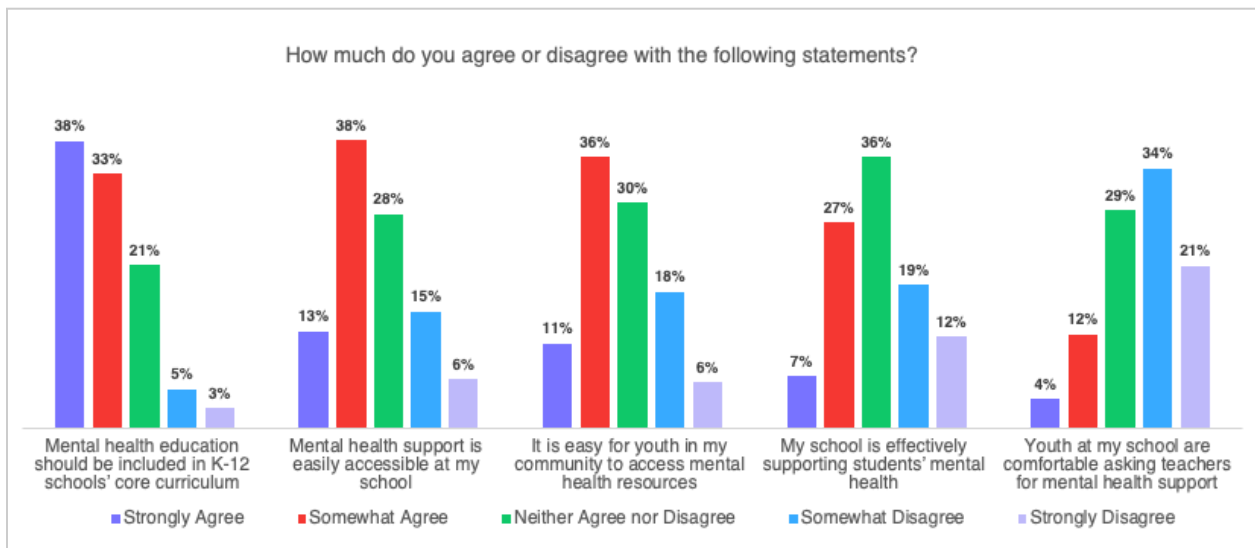
- Stigma, not knowing how to label feelings, and not knowing the process of getting support prevents youth from reaching out for support, especially for more serious issues e.g., systemic inadequacies in responding to the issues such as bullying, sexual assault, family issues
 - **Recommendation:** Schools should incorporate mental health education into its curriculum - mental health is touched on once in high school curriculum in a health class, it should be built into every year
 - **Recommendation:** Greater awareness around supporting survivors, education around victim blaming and stigma.
 - AIM Ideas Lab participant: "Teaching about mental health; things like naming your feelings and habits to support your mental health from a younger age. I think if students learn habits like this when they're young, it'll be really handy when they need those skills and habits in the future."
- **Recommendation:** To encourage youth to reach out, show significant proof or evidence of methods that reduce or help the issue

Q8: What are the factors you believe positively influence how youth are perceived by others?

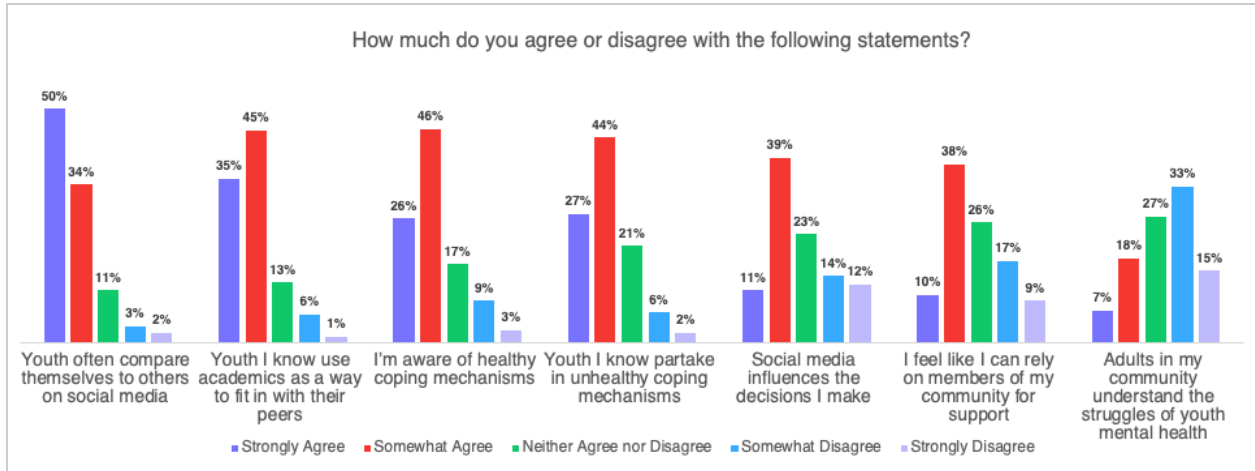


- It is surprising that grades ranked highly on this data plot above looks or extracurriculars
- The results may be due to social desirability bias where respondents want to select the responses that will be seen as “good” or “right”

Q9: Please select how much you agree or disagree with the following statements.



- Students don't tend to have good bonds with adults at school
 - **Recommendation:** Teachers should have a mental health seminar (e.g Youth Mental Health First Aid) and practice open communication around mental health in class (e.g., open door invitation on extensions)
 - **Recommendation:** Campaign to support the [P.E.E.R Mental Health Act](#), which includes grant funding to increase the education school staff receive
 - **Recommendation:** More discussion about mental health in school



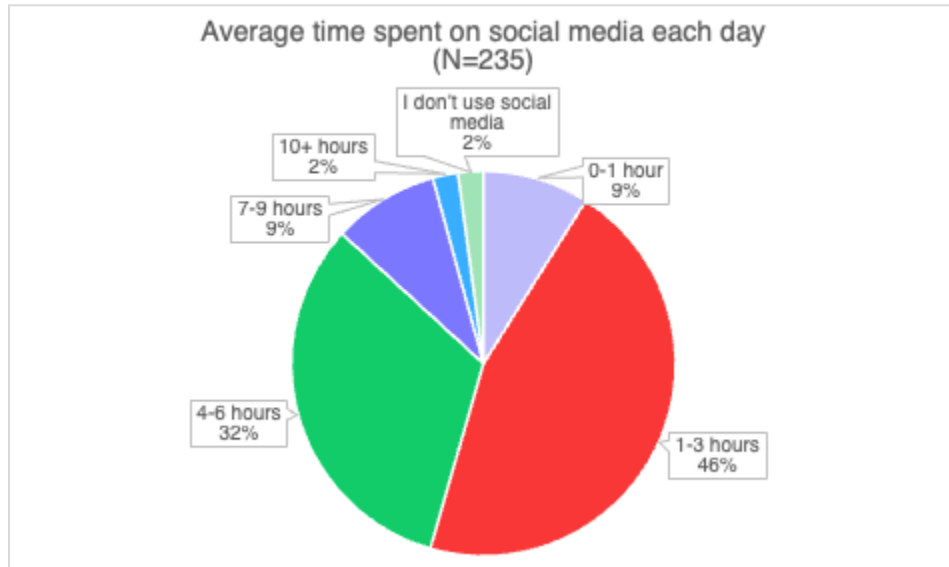
- The data between “youth at my school are comfortable asking teachers for mental health support” and “adults in my community understand the struggles of youth mental health” seem to reflect on each other, suggesting that adults not understanding mental health creates an environment where youth are less comfortable to ask adults at school for support
 - **Recommendation:** Host a [“What I Wish My Parents Knew”](#) event to help adults in the community better understand youth mental health

Q10: How can your school better support students’ mental health?

Top ways for schools to support student mental health (N=244)	
68%	Ability to take extensions for schoolwork
66%	Offering redos on quizzes and schoolwork
66%	Encouraging students to take mental health days
64%	Less emphasis on grades
61%	More resources during stressful times e.g., finals, college applications
60%	Reducing amount of homework
60%	Adjusting the schedule so students can get more sleep
59%	Teachers who understand what students are going through
59%	More academic support

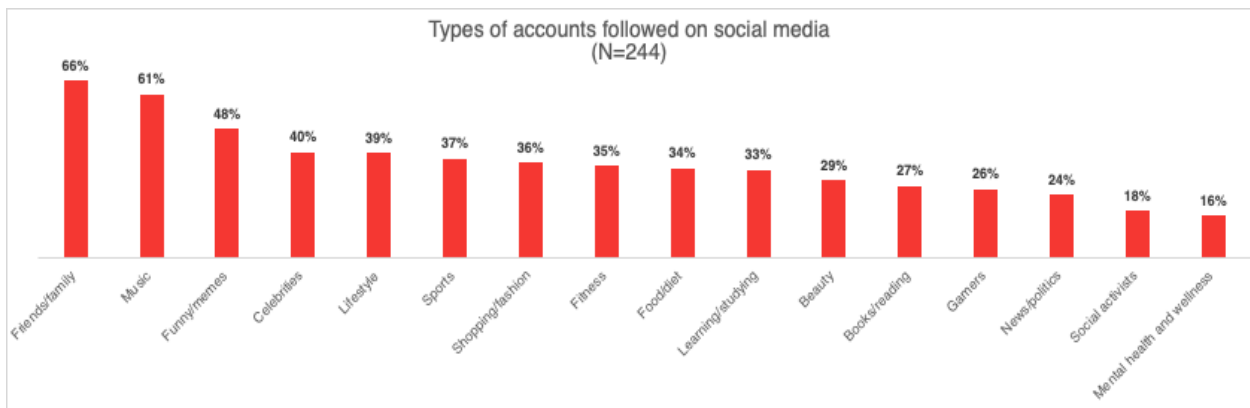
- The mental health of students worsens because many teachers do not allow redos and test/quiz scores are final, stressing students further.
- If there are more opportunities for school-based assignments (such as extensions or redos) there is a chance for a more significant change in the mental health of students

Q11: On average, how much time do you spend on social media each day?

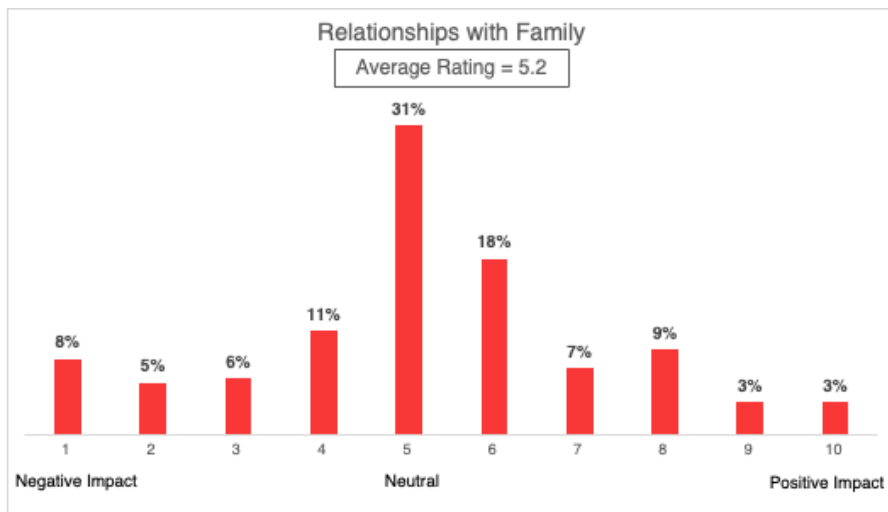
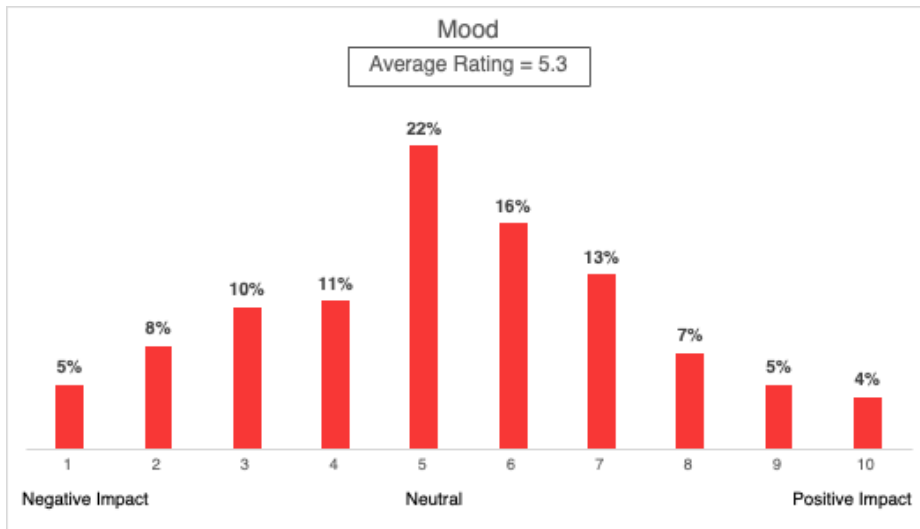
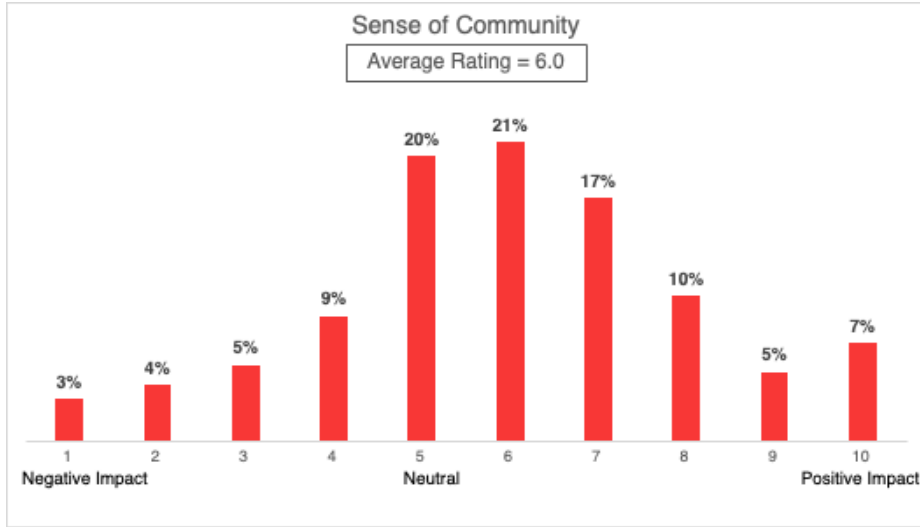


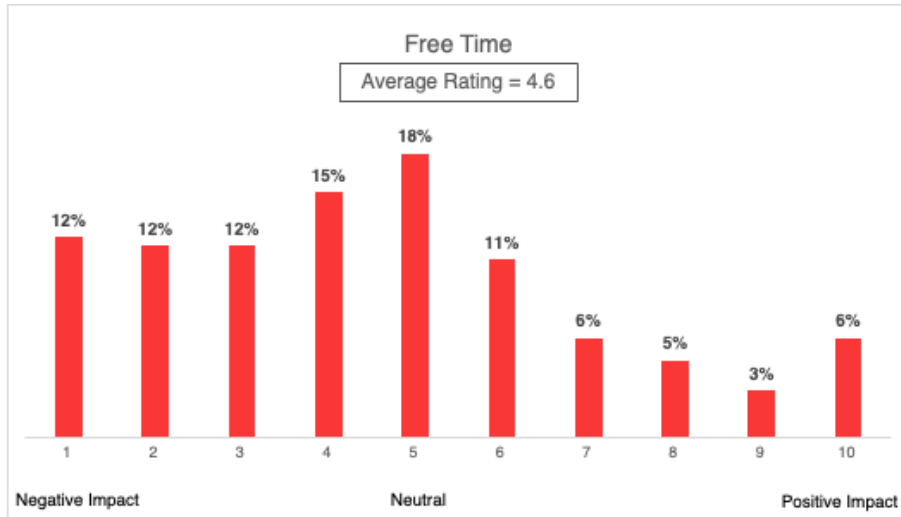
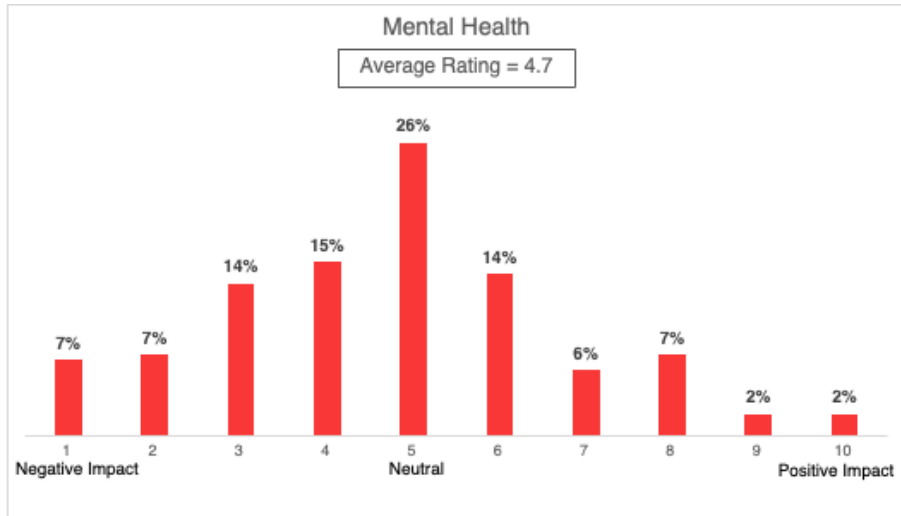
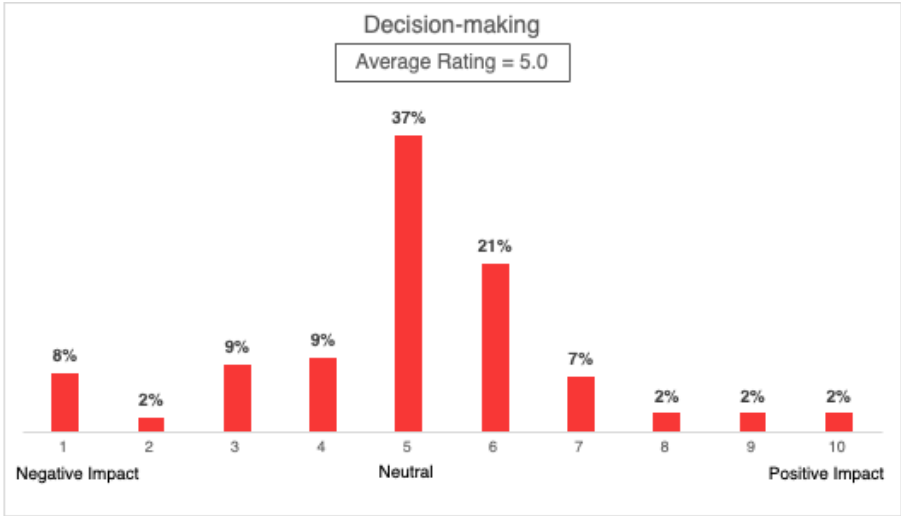
- The data implies somewhat healthy social media usage (in terms of hours spent) but still could lead to numerous consequences
 - **Recommendation:** Set screen time limits for apps that don't support mental health, build healthy relationships with technology at school

Q12: What types of accounts do you follow on social media?

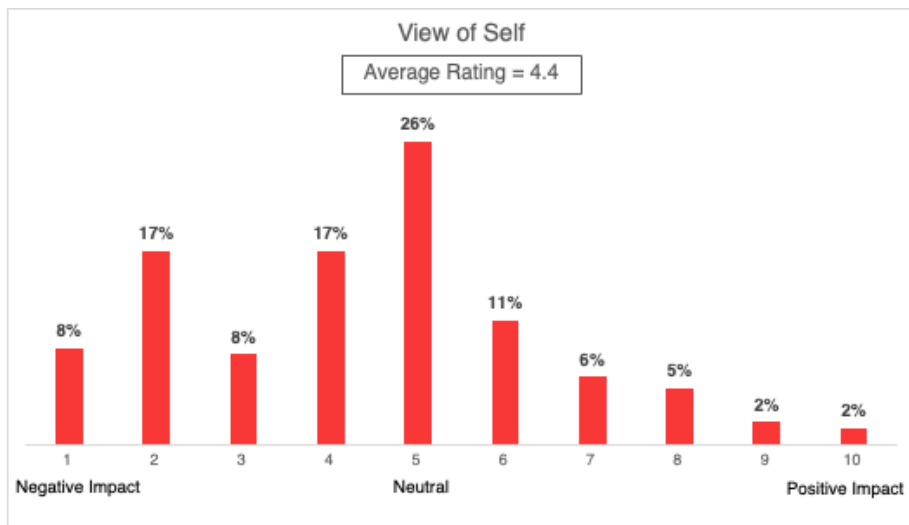
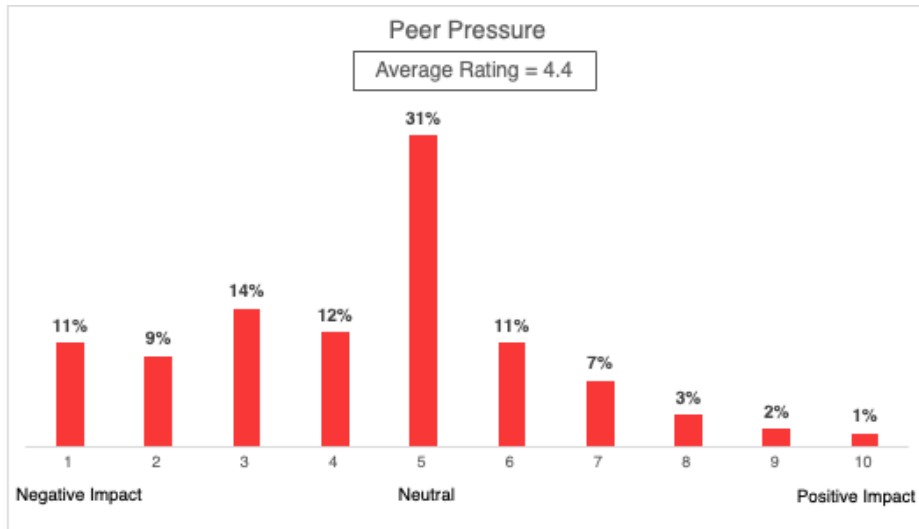
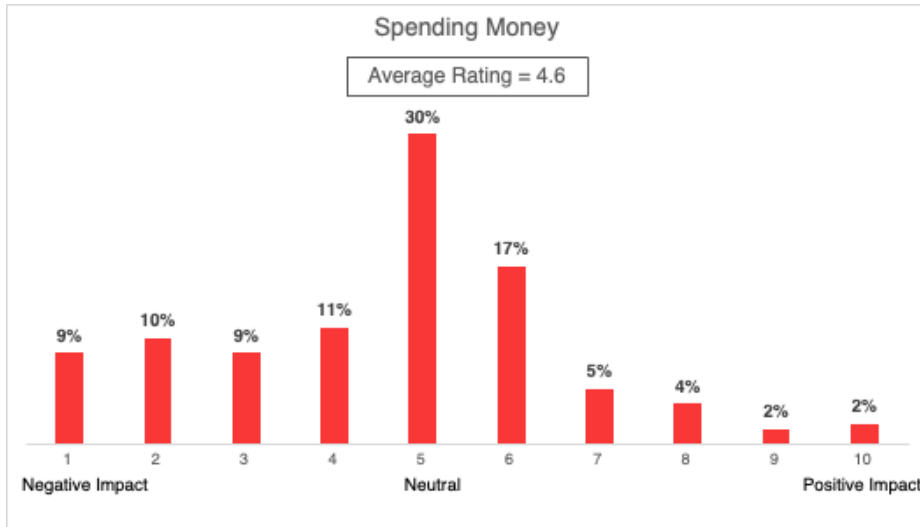


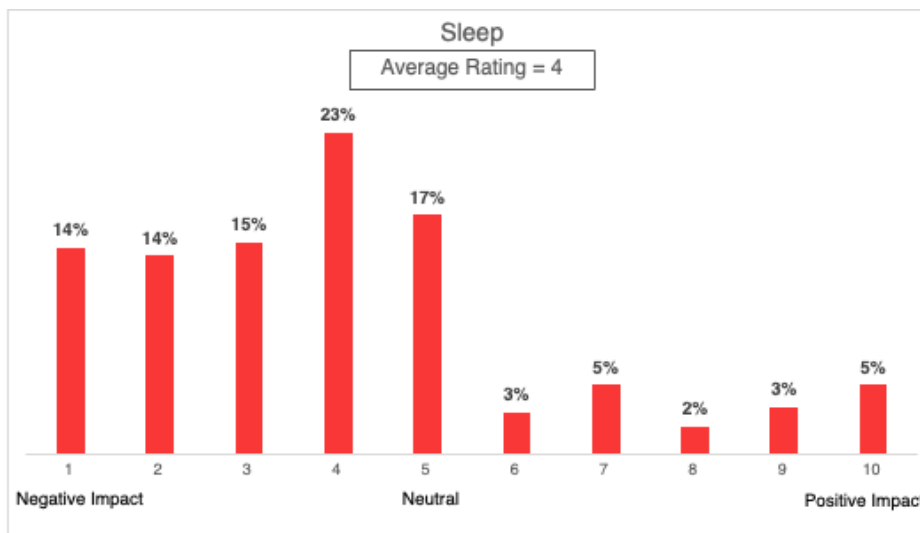
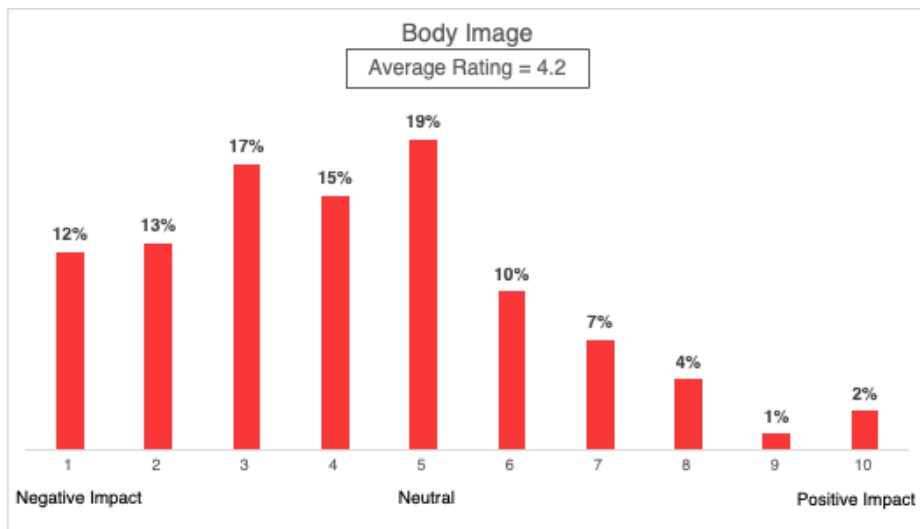
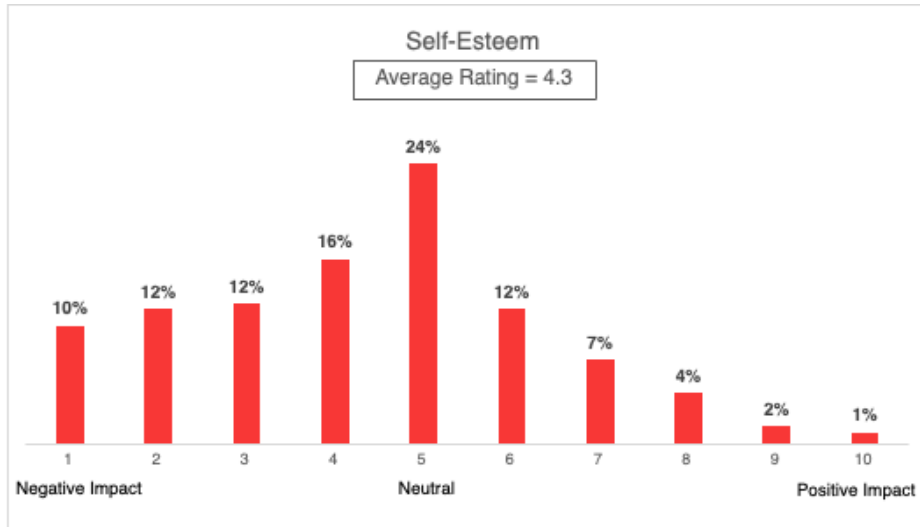
- **Recommendation:** Youth should build healthier boundaries with social media and technology by curating your feed and limiting screen time. Schools can help identify positive accounts for students to follow.





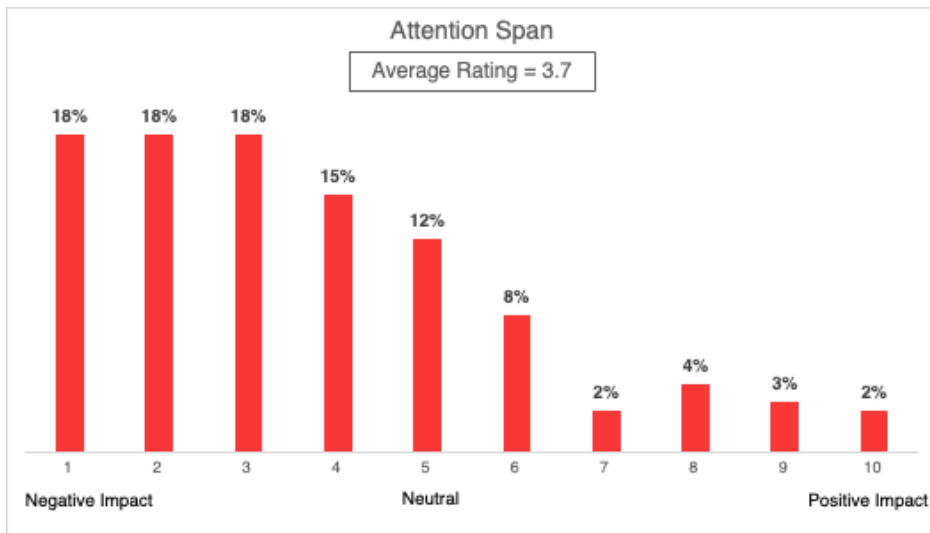
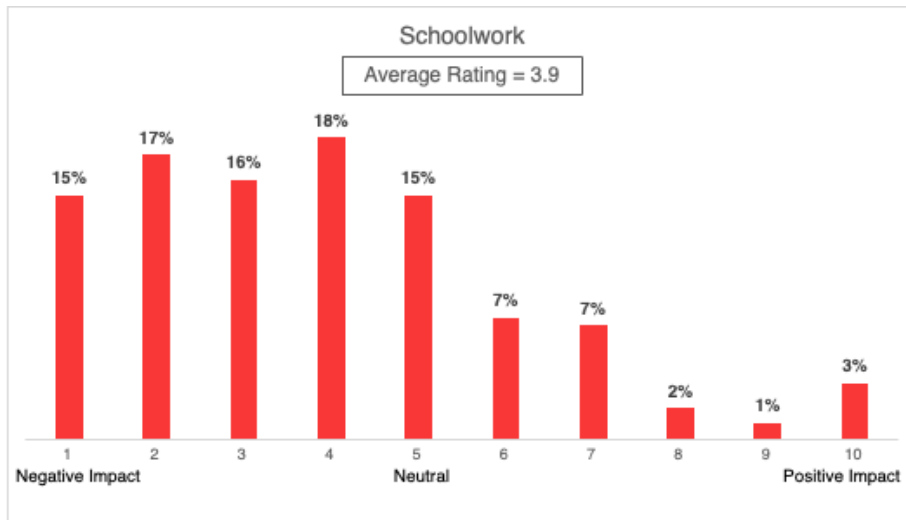
- Implement screen time limitations on most used apps





- **Recommendation:** Education around healthier sleep habits and hygiene, such as

limited screen time before bed



- **Recommendation:** Build attention span through consuming longer forms of content

Q14: How do you think youth in Alameda and Santa Clara counties typically feel after consuming social media? (Open-ended) (N = 176)

Common Themes	Direct Quotes
Range of negative emotions: Depressed, drained, guilty, disappointed, stressed, anxious, exhaustion	<p>“They feel depressed due to not being able to achieve the things they see on social media”</p> <p>“... are exhausted and disappointed that so much time was spent doing something seemingly unproductive”</p>
Constantly comparing themselves to others and having feelings of unworth and being lesser than. Insecurity and negatively affects self-esteem	<p>“They often compare themselves to the edited pictures they see and don't understand they're perfect”</p> <p>“Most teens here have lots of self esteem issues, so after consuming lots of media, it's easy for them to compare themselves.”</p>
Makes them feel unproductive and like they wasted time	<p>“Many may feel unsatisfied after spending lots of time on social media because of the amount of time they put into social media with no reward or benefit to their lives.”</p>
Concerned about the effects on body image specifically	<p>“Having a false perception of what people should look like could have a negative impact on how they interact with others. Men who follow accounts of women with highly edited bodies will have that expectation with women they know in real life. If women see these distorted images, they may compare themselves to these high standards that aren't even naturally achievable (photo editing or plastic surgery).”</p>
Depends on the type of media consumed	<p>“It does ultimately depend on the posts on their feed whether or not it's something that regards self image.”</p> <p>“it depends on what kind of content they consume. if they regularly watch healthy media that promotes a healthy lifestyle balance between work and rest, they will feel seen and be more motivated to lead a healthy lifestyle themselves. if they consume more materialistic and political content, i think it negatively impacts their mental health. for most youth it would be a mix of both but it really depends on the person”</p>

- Overall, youth feel they have to follow societal standards, which can lead to positive attitudes but most people end up feeling “bad”, which shows up as a motif among the responses. Most people really vary between responses, and some realize that it does depend on what media is being consumed. But it mostly leans towards

bad/negative feelings towards one's self.

Q15: What coping mechanisms do you believe are the most effective for youth in your community? (Open-ended) (N = 176)

Common Themes	Direct Quotes
Having a trusted emotional support system and talking to people who understand. Prioritize interactions with others.	<p>“Learning how to communicate one's feelings, finding a support group”</p> <p>“I honestly think talking about it with people you trust is the most effective”</p> <p>“Communication with friends and trusted adults”</p>
Self care, resting, and taking breaks	<p>“doing something you enjoy, meditation, journaling”</p> <p>“Knowing when to take time off for yourself.”</p> <p>“doing activities that allow you to slow down and take time to reflect are the most effective. This could include taking a walk, taking care of your body, taking deep breaths, or journaling.”</p>
Physical activity, exercise, hobbies	<p>“Having time to participate in a hobby/time to yourself such as taking a walk, listening to music, painting, etc.”</p> <p>“Sports, it gets your mind off your daily issues. Going outdoors and spending time in nature.”</p>
Getting off technology	<p>“Having designated time away from social media just to clear the mind.”</p> <p>“deeper interpersonal relationships offline”</p> <p>“Dopamine cleansing”</p>
Reduced academic pressure	<p>“Understanding the big picture, that not everything is about grades/school”</p> <p>“less stress on academics”</p>

- **Recommendation:** Building positive habits early on. Find time to recharge and focus on you. Encouraging and celebrating time spent away from academics.