

## 2024 Youth Survey Results

### About the Research

A Better Chicago, in partnership with Global Strategy Group (GSG), conducted a survey of 400 Chicago youth ages 10–24 in July 2024. Census data was used to ensure a sample that is representative of the population. The survey asked about a range of topics including education, their futures, community violence, mental health, and their general well-being. Some questions also include trend data from a similar online survey of Chicago youth that A Better Chicago and GSG conducted in August 2023 to track change over time.

### Objectives

Gain firsthand knowledge from youth about the challenges they face and what supports they believe they need to thrive.

Bring the youth perspective to the forefront to better inform decision-makers in the nonprofit, philanthropic, and youth advocacy space.

# Key Findings

1

**A vast majority of Chicago youth are optimistic about their future, and are even more likely to be optimistic if they participate in community-based programs.**

Nearly all students surveyed intend to graduate high school, and most plan to continue their education.

2

**There is an overwhelming desire among youth to see an expansion of community-based programs.**

Youth of all ages and races want more programs in their communities that focus on a wide range of skills. They also want to be able to participate in programming both after school and on weekends.

3

**Mental health and well-being is a major problem for Chicago youth that continues to grow.**

Last August, 92% of youth cited mental health and well-being as a problem experienced by people their age—71% of whom said it was a major problem. Today those numbers are higher, (94% problem, 74% major problem) and youth have become more critical of their community's response to providing services for mental health.

4

**While nearly all youth believe mental health and well-being is a problem for people their age today, a majority of youth have never received mental health services themselves.**

Among those who have not received mental health and well-being services, a third wish they had but likely didn't because of access barriers.

5

**Community violence is ongoing and apparent to Chicago youth—and many see community programs as a solution that helps their peers avoid violence.**

A majority of youth say they have witnessed community violence—with a quarter of those who have witnessed violence saying they see it weekly. When asked what would best keep their peers out of violence, youth point to staying active and busy through school, activities, and community programs.





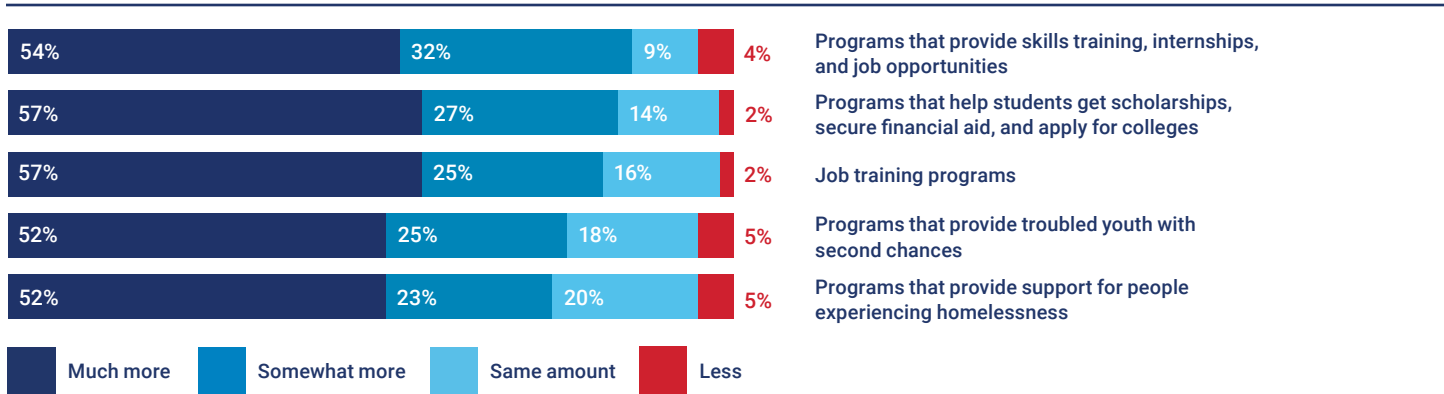
# 2

## There is an overwhelming desire among youth to see an expansion of community-based programs.

**Most youth (76%) participate or have participated in community-based programs. Youth who participate in community-based programs do so regularly, but youth want more opportunities to participate on weekends in particular.** 8 in 10 youth who participate in community-based programs do so weekly, with a majority saying they participate mostly after school (59%).

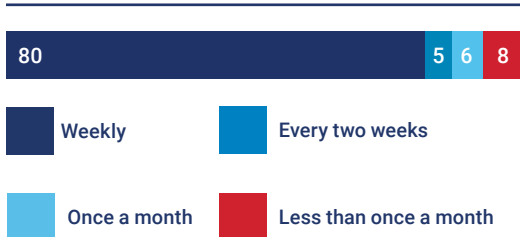
**Youth of all ages and races overwhelmingly want more programs in their communities that focus on a wide range of skills, mentorship, and support networks.**

Across subgroups, Chicago youth overwhelmingly want more programs in their community that focus on a wide range of skills, mentorship, and support networks

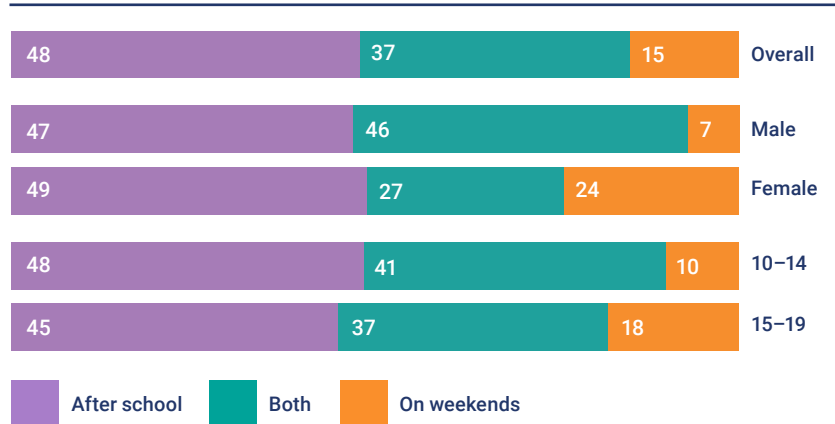


Youth ages 15–19 years-old show higher desire to see more programs aimed at college placement, peer tutoring and mentoring, and recreational programs that offer sports, music, or art. Black and Hispanic youth are more likely than white youth to call for more job training programs—though Black youth also show high desire for recreational programs and tutoring.

(If currently participating in non-school programs) How often do you participate?



(If currently participating) When would you like to participate?



# 3

## Mental health and well-being is a major problem for Chicago youth that continues to grow.

**Chicago youth's concerns about mental health and well-being have only gotten worse since last August.** In August 2023, 92% of Chicago youth said that mental health and well-being was a problem people their age were facing, including 71% who said it was a major problem. Now, 94% of Chicago youth view it as a problem, with 74% citing it as a major problem. Concerns are especially great with older youth aged 20–24—91% consider mental health and well-being a major problem, up 29% from last year.

**Subsequently, youth have also become more critical of their community's response and mental health services.** Last August, a majority of youth gave their community positive ratings when it came to addressing mental health and well-being issues, with positive views leading by a net of +10 (55% positive / 45% negative). Today, that positive advantage is erased, with youth growing more critical (50% positive, 50% negative) of their community's response to mental health.

**Chicago youth also cite many issues related to mental health, including depression, stress, and anxiety, as the biggest problems for people their age.** Depression (89% problem, 70% major problem), Stress (92% problem, 70% major problem) and anxiety (92% problem, 69% major problem) are seen as the biggest problems for youth these days. Older youth (ages 20–24) also consider discrimination (96% problem) and drug and alcohol use (93% problem) among the biggest problems their peers face, while younger youth (ages 10–14) are more concerned with bullying (96% problem).

### Youth ranked the biggest challenges to their mental health

- 1 Depression
- 2 Stress
- 3 Anxiety
- 4 Body Image
- 5 Self-esteem

## Chronic Absenteeism

Chronic absenteeism, defined as students absent 10% or more at any time of the school year, continues to be a major challenge across the city. According to data from the Illinois State Board of Education and Chicago Public Schools, chronic absenteeism is on the rise in Chicago with the rate nearly 45% in 2022 and 49% for low-income students, almost doubling since 2018.

Mental health issues are considered the primary reasons for missing school. A third of youth cite depression and stress as the biggest reasons their peers are missing school, and over a quarter say anxiety, bullying, and drugs and alcohol keep their peers from attending school regularly.

### Top reasons youth believe their peers miss school days

- 1 Depression
- 2 Boredom/dislike of school
- 3 Stress
- 4 Bullying
- 5 Drugs and alcohol

4

# While nearly all youth believe mental health and well-being is a problem for people their age today, a majority of youth have never received mental health services themselves.

A third of youth who have not received mental health services say they felt they needed support in mental health and well-being, but never received services.

Youth volunteer their parents as most helpful when dealing with mental health issues, with fewer pointing to school counselors—even those who have used their services. Younger youth (ages 10–19) especially prefer to turn to their parents, while young adults are more likely to view professionals and their closest friends as most helpful.

Notably, fewer youth view teachers and school counselors as more helpful than parents, therapists, or close friends. Those who have received mental health services from a school counselor are more likely to believe they are helpful, however, still parents, therapists, and close friends are seen as more helpful.

If you are experiencing an issue or a problem like the ones you were asked about earlier, who do you think would be the most helpful in helping you through it?

	10–14	15–19	20–24	White	Black	Hisp.	Total % who received mental health services	Total % who received mental health services from a school counselor
34% My parents or legal guardian	50	40	16	34	46	26	57	60
18% A therapist or psychologist	9	13	30	19	13	20	58	48
18% My closest friends or friend group	10	17	26	14	10	29	54	50
12% My sibling[s] or close relative	14	12	10	13	12	12	34	36
7% A teacher, school counselor, or coach within the school	6	11	4	11	7	2	38	45
6% A trusted adult outside of school, an after-school program, coach, or mentor	7	2	8	5	6	6	32	31
2% Police or public safety officer	1	2	3	3	2	2	14	13
3% None of these	3	1	3	1	3	4	1	2
1% Other	0	2	0	0	1	0	1	1

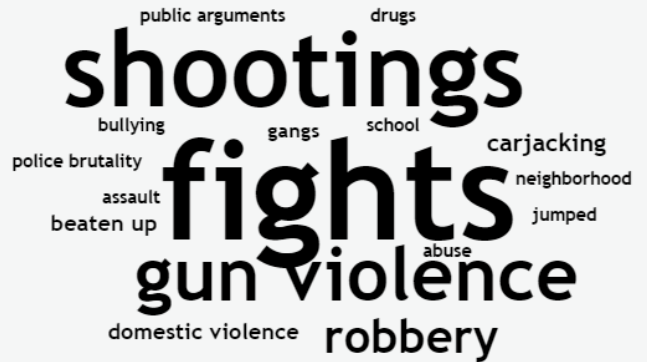
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# Community violence is ongoing and apparent to Chicago youth—and many see community programs as a solution that helps their peers avoid violence.

Nearly two-thirds of Chicago youth have witnessed community violence, and a quarter say they witness violence weekly. Older youth, Black males, and Hispanic females are most likely to see violence frequently in their communities—over a third of Black males and Hispanic females say they witness violence on a weekly basis.



Youth were asked to describe in a few words the types of violence they witness.



Quotes detailing the types of violence youth witness:

“All types of fights on the way to school, from random adults in the neighborhood fighting each other, random shootings that occur, and also police brutality.”

—17, Hispanic male

“I’ve witnessed shootings, domestic violence, and just people getting into fights.”

—20, Black male

**Chicago youth are looking for a twofold solution: more policing to combat community violence, and more programs and activities to keep their peers out of violence.** Youth believe that more police both deters and combats violence, but when asked what prevents their peers from committing violence in the first place, they point to activities that keep them busy, including school, sports, and community programs.

## Takeaways

**A Better Chicago's portfolio organizations are playing a critical role in young people's lives, providing in-school, after school, and weekend programming that has a positive impact. We must continue investing in these innovative programs, particularly those based on the south and west side of the city where there is the most opportunity for growth.**



**Chicago's youth are optimistic about their future, and they view community-based programming as a strategy for mitigating many challenges they face.**

Those actively participating in programs outside of school are more likely to not only have an optimistic outlook on their future and more confidence in their potential, but to also have a plan to pursue a four-year college degree.



**Youth overwhelmingly want more programming that provides skills training, internships, and job opportunities.**

They want programs that help students get scholarships and apply for colleges, and programs that build professional and social skills. They would like schools to have more of a focus on social and emotional skills, and skills like how to budget and invest money.



**Investments in young people should focus on initiatives that enhance learning proficiency and boost high school and college enrollment, such as high-dosage tutoring programs and college access organizations.**

Additionally, investing in housing stability, mental health services, and restorative justice programs is crucial for maintaining youth engagement with their educational environment and for violence prevention.





# A BETTER CHICAGO

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