



# Research Summary: School and Community Safety

Understanding Youth in Adams County

August 2018

## The Challenge

The Youth Initiative of Adams County (ACYI) hopes to garner authentic voice and perspective from key stakeholders to deepen its understanding of the lives of children and youth in Adams County and inform the work of the Partnership its Collaborative Action Networks (CANs).

To do so ACYI, through its national network StriveTogether, partnered with Girl Effect to establish a network of 12 TEGAs - Technology Enabled Girl Ambassadors - to inform and validate the work of the ACYI Partnership.

TEGA (Technology Enabled Girl Ambassadors) is a mobile-based, peer-to-peer research app that empowers adolescent girls to conduct research within the communities in which they live. TEGAs are employed and receive training to become Market Research Society (MRS) qualified digital researchers.

During the capacity building phase, which took place over three months, TEGAs developed their skills as interviewers by conducting practice interviews with over 180 girls, boys, parents, and community

members, all from diverse backgrounds, about their daily life in Adams County. During this training, TEGAs explored topics like livelihood, education, safety in home and at school, peer relationships and power dynamics which sets the stage for future rounds of research.

As with all TEGA research, the process was iterative and agile; we adapted the research questions based on findings from each wave of research, so we were able to explore emerging themes and answer new questions posed by unexpected findings.

This executive summary identifies the key findings from this research in the area of school and community safety, suggests further research recommendations, and outlines youth inspired improvements for organizations who directly serve youth in Adams County.

## Resources and Safety Outside of School

Most youth and parents surveyed felt that there was a lot to do in Adams County and a lot of resources and programs for those who need them. From outdoor activities to extra-curricular activities, these youth have plenty of structured activities, typical suburban things to do (movie theater, restaurants, roller skating, being outside, exploring Colorado), but in their downtime, there aren't enough places for kids to go (e.g. teen café), that are away from the home or school, safe from bad influence and crime, and fun enough to keep kids, particularly teens, coming regularly.

*“Make sure youth have things to do because when they don't have things to do, they'll find things to do, and typically those things are BAD.”*

*- 14 year old African American Female*

Some barriers exist when it comes to providing more opportunities. Not everyone is aware of or can access the resources that are available. Increasing awareness of programs that already exist and closing the gap between students and the community is a key role that schools can play in strengthening the support systems of its students. Many students mentioned wanting more support services in school, particularly for those students who are having the most trouble. This is an area where a support resource, responsible for “connecting the dots” for students who need help, would be most beneficial.

*“I feel like we have the programs. What needs to be done is finding out more ways that we can get people to find out about them and get excited about them so that they can start helping out too.”*

*- 14 year old African American Female*

*“I would have more counselors and professional people to come down, people who have dealt with students and teens who have been in trouble with the cops and have been in trouble with gangs and stuff like that. I would have more people who could help students with their education and teach them and learn to do this instead of this, to guide them so they won't go into a bad situation again.”*

*- 13 year old Hispanic/Latino Male*

When it came to safety specifically, a majority of youth surveyed felt safe in their homes and communities. They felt like Adams County was a place where neighbors looked out for each other. Some youth talk about how this feeling of safety has been built up over the years by growing up with other children in their neighborhoods and getting to know the adults.

*“I like where my house is located too, because all my neighbors are super friendly, and they know what to do if there's ever an emergency, and we all take care of each other too, and we all have a really close relationship with each other. We all know each other by our first names. Yeah, we hang out a lot, and we also have block parties every year, so we really come together as a community and we do a lot of stuff together too.”*

*- 18 year old Mixed Race Female*

## Overall School Safety Sentiment

While youth and adults describe their own neighborhoods as safe, saying that neighbors look out for each other, schools are not seen as safe places, and 80% of students said they feel safer at home than at school. This is for a host of reasons, including fear of physical violence like shooting, and a prominent concern about the unpredictability and vulnerability of being at school.

**80%**  
Of students surveyed  
said home is safer than  
school

*“I think at school, it's a safety hazard because you don't know what's gonna happen to you in school. And I prefer to stay safe at home because it's more secure than school.”*

*- 18 year old Hispanic/Latina Female*

Students are aware of school shootings that happen around the country and it makes them nervous when going to school. In general, they feel like their home is more secure than at school, and there is obviously more control over who gets in and out of the home.

However, some of those surveyed said that they see that schools are trying to create a safer environment. Those surveyed mentioned teachers who check-in with them and lead them through lock-down drills as a reason to feel a bit safer at school.

*“I feel like teachers are also really important because they're surrounded by it as well, and they can see the certain kids and stuff. And, for the most part, they know what's going on, so they can help you out a lot too.”*

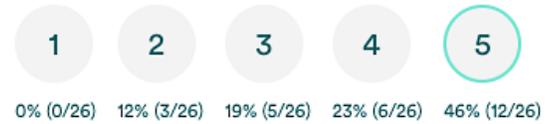
*- 13 year old Caucasian Female*

## School Lockdowns and Drills and Safety Plans

Overall, students think their schools are doing a good job in planning for active threat, but at home, more can be done. While talking about safety plans with parents or guardians at home came up for respondents, many said they did not have a specific plan that they talked about with their families. Some students mentioned relying on schools to help them and their families be prepared in the event that something dangerous did happen at school.

SCALE

Q31 — On a scale of 1-5, do you think your school is doing a good job with their gun/terrorist safety plan?



When it comes to active shooter preparedness, 88% of kids know the drill when it comes to physical safety at school. Lockdown drills are the norm and all students surveyed could recite exactly what to do in the case of a lockdown. They also said the drills made them feel like they would be more prepared in the event of an actual safety threat. And although only one respondent mentioned it, students becoming accustomed to the drills and not taking them seriously may be an issue to look into in the future.

## Bullying

When we dug a little deeper into safety at school, we learned that safety becomes more of an issue at school because of bullying and harassment.

*“I feel like the most safe I am, if I were to pick here, would be, like, downtown Brighton, where, like, all the shops and everybody is at...School, not so much, just because I feel like you're a little bit more vulnerable, just 'cause, like, adrenaline, hormones; everybody wants to say something.”*

*- 19 year old Hispanic/Latina Female*

This makes sense considering school is the place where young people say they make the most friends and is also the place where friendships are the biggest source of stress and anxiety, with 23 of 26 students surveyed saying they had been bullied or shamed at school or knew someone who had.

**88%**  
of students surveyed said they had experienced some kind of bullying or harassment

Bullying takes many forms and includes judgement based on physical appearance, class and even ‘majorism’, which was described as judging others based on which major they selected.

While they don’t always seem to have the knowledge or skills to seek support when facing emotional harm, youth are equipped to deal with serious threats, particularly to their physical safety. If things do escalate and become a serious safety threat, kids know what to do. They will seek a trusted adult’s advice and more often than not, moms were cited as most helpful in these situations.

School staff such as counselors and teachers also come up as important resources for students who are dealing with bullying or harassment. This highlights the importance of having an adequate amount of professionals who are trained to help students deal with these issues.

*“So, bullying, it’s totally not cool, not good. But it’s happened to me, it’s happened to everyone...I always try to confide in an adult, so someone I trust. Maybe my guidance counselor or teacher or my parents, someone like that.”*

*- 13 year old Caucasian Male*

## Online Safety

Another area where safety concerns came up was online vs. in person safety. 16 out of 26 respondents said that they felt safer in person. Most held this opinion because the anonymity of online interactions opened up the potential for bullying and negative interactions with strangers.

*“I would feel safer in real life, because on social media, like, you don’t know what kind of people are out there in the world. Like, they could be sending you nasty things, saying, “You want to do this, or you want to do that?” So, I prefer -- it would be much safer in real life. Like I have -- there’s this guy that keeps sending me nasty things, like, stripping his clothes off and everything, and he would, like, say, “Send me something.” And I was like, “No,” like, that’s disgusting.”*

*- 18 year old Hispanic/Latina Female*

The online platforms where students said they had the most frequent negative interactions were Instagram and Snapchat followed by Facebook and Twitter. An area where schools could play a major role is in teaching students how to be safe online, because while most said they had negative interactions online, very few mentioned ways that they protected themselves. Schools could provide more support so that the majority of youth respond to online situations as this student did:

*“I’d say that I feel pretty safe both ways, because I take a lot of precautions on the Internet. Like I don’t usually give out my name, I make all of my social media accounts private and everything. So, personally, I like to act really safely with the Internet.”*

*- 18 year old Caucasian Female*

## Safe2Tell

Safe2Tell (an anonymous website where kids can express their concerns about their peers and school threats) is seen overall as a positive thing and taken seriously by the majority of students. More students knew what and how to use Safe2Tell than not. However, while students spoke about Safe2Tell positively, it is not clear whether Safe2Tell is actually being used by students. Only four of those surveyed mentioned actually using the service. Of those that were aware of Safe2Tell, most thought it was a good venue to talk about issues and concerns anonymously.

*“I feel like Safe2Tell is a good, like, app to, like, talk about your personal stuff, because you're not, like, exposing yourself out, but you're getting help on it. And, like, if you need -- and you want to help someone else, then it helps to do without the person getting mad at you because your intentions are right. It's just a way so that you feel more comfortable, because it's not you going face to face talking about it with someone, but it's you behind your screen, which makes it seem like, oh I don't -- like, they can't look at me and judge me in that type of way right now.”*

*- 12 year old Hispanic/Latina Female*

## Recommendations & Future Research

-  Make the best use of school personnel resources by identifying programs already available in the community and closing the gap between student wants and participation.
-  Integrate students and other community outreach organizations in multi-tiered support systems. Find opportunities to solicit more student voice to identify what is needed.
-  Provide curriculum resources for students, particularly in the area of online safety. Many students seem to be aware that the internet may not be the safest place but are naïve on ways to protect themselves.
-  While not a specific question in this round of research, a handful of youth mentioned wanting support services for peers who used drugs such as marijuana or alcohol. Future rounds of research where youth attitudes and perceptions toward drug use and peer pressure are needed to inform how schools can counsel students on avoiding these risks.
-  Students were surveyed about school active shooter and lock down response but were not asked about their attitudes toward building safety measures such as locked or key accessed doors and metal detectors. Future research should address student perceptions of these safety measures and how these may affect school morale.
-  Given that this stage of research was only capacity building to set the foundation for future, more targeted interviews, future research should draw comparisons between students at different levels of risk.