West Mifflin Area School District Evaluation Report
2024-2025 School Year

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Executive Summary

The West Mifflin Area School District, located about 11 miles southeast of the city of Pittsburgh, serves a total of 2,628 students across four buildings. Families in this community have historically experienced substantial socioeconomic challenges, including higher rates of poverty and lower educational attainment than state and national averages. Baseline student-reported data also suggested significant exposure to violence and adverse childhood experiences, high rates of mental health concerns, and low perceived school connectedness among district students. Moreover, student absenteeism and disciplinary referrals presented major challenges for the district. In the 2023-2024 school year, there were a total of 22,619 unexcused absences across the district, amounting to about 9.4 unexcused absences per student. Likewise, there were a total of 455 disciplinary referrals (equal to 0.19 referrals per student) made by staff across the district.

For the 2024-2025 school year, the West Mifflin Area School District received the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act (BSCA) Stronger Connections Grant (SCG) to address chronic absenteeism and student misconduct, as well as to better support and meet the needs of students and families served. The district implemented several different initiatives to this end, including the Titan Assistance Program, 3Rs, Expect Respect, Forging Hopeful Futures, Coaching Boys into Men, Making Positive Life Choices, and Healthy Schools. Overall, the district sought to adopt a strengths-based, restorative approach involving a diverse set of school and community collaborators. Collectively, the programs introduced had a significant positive impact on many factors identified in the literature as being related to chronic absenteeism, including family challenges, parental perceptions of the school's role in supporting students/families, students' relationships with school staff, school climate, school connectedness, and youth empowerment. These impacts were also reflected in attendance and disciplinary data for the 2024-2025 school year. Compared to attendance data from 2023-2024, there was an overall decline in the number of unexcused absences per student, from 9.4 to 8.2. Similarly, there was a decrease in the number of disciplinary referrals per student, from 0.19 in 2023-2024 to 0.11 in 2024-2025. The district has received a renewal of the Stronger Connections Grant to continue this work in the 2025-2026 school year, building on the relationships cultivated with community partners and lessons learned.

Introduction:

District/Community Context

District Demographics: The West Mifflin Area School District, located about 11 miles southeast of the city of Pittsburgh, serves a total of 2,628 students across four buildings. The district consists of two elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school, as well as a virtual option (West Mifflin Titan Cyber Academy). *Table 1* includes a detailed breakdown of student demographics (as of May 13, 2025) by building.

Table 1: Breakdown of Student Demographics by Building

Building	Grade Levels Served	Number of Students Enrolled	Gender	Race/Ethnicity
Clara Barton Elementary	K-3	228	M- 49.1% F- 50.9%	American Indian- 0% Asian or Pacific Islander- 5.3% Black- 13.6% Hispanic- 7.0% Multi-racial- 13.2% White- 61.0%
Homeville Elementary	K-3	426	M- 51.9% F- 48.1%	American Indian- 0.2% Asian or Pacific Islander- 0.5% Black- 31.9% Hispanic- 4.0% Multi-racial- 12.2% White- 51.2%
West Mifflin Area Middle School	4-8	778	M- 51.4% F- 48.6%	American Indian- 0.1% Asian or Pacific Islander- 1.7% Black- 22.1% Hispanic- 5.1% Multi-racial- 12.5% White- 58.5%
West Mifflin Area High School	9-12	944	M- 48.5% F- 51.5%	American Indian- 0% Asian or Pacific Islander- 3.4% Black- 31.8% Hispanic- 3.2% Multi-racial- 10.3% White- 51.4%

The district employs a total of 384 individuals, including 239 teachers and school counselors, 125 staff members (including school nurses, paraprofessionals, administrators, secretaries, behavior specialists, psychologists, and tech professionals), and 20 district substitutes.

Community Demographics: Students attending the West Mifflin Area School District reside in West Mifflin Borough, Whitaker Borough, or the city of Duquesne, comprising a significant portion of the 20,738 total residents living within district boundaries. In the surrounding community, the median household income is $62,446, which is significantly lower than state ($73,170) and national ($75,149) statistics (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.-a). Likewise, among families with school-aged children, 20% earn an income below the poverty level and 40% of families receive Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits. In contrast, only 14% of families in Pennsylvania and 14% nationally live below the poverty line, and only 22% and 20% receive nutrition assistance at the state and federal levels, respectively. In terms of employment, 84% of district caregivers are in the labor force, compared to 86% in Pennsylvania and 84% in the U.S. overall. Considering educational attainment, 21% of caregivers have a Bachelor's degree or higher, which is substantially lower than state and federal levels (both 40%). Taken together, these data suggest significant socioeconomic challenges and needs among district families.

Baseline Attendance/Disciplinary Referral Data: Attendance and disciplinary referral data from the 2023-2024 school year provide crucial context regarding challenges experienced by the West Mifflin Area School District.

In the 2023-2024 school year, there were a total of 22,619 unexcused absences across the district. These absences occurred among 2,019 unique students, representing 84% of the 2,400 total students in the district. Overall, this amounted to about 9.4 unexcused absences per student.

Comparing across grade levels, 12th graders had the highest number of unexcused absences per student, at 15.1, followed by 9th graders, at 15.0 absences per student. 2nd graders had the lowest number of absences per student, at 5.4. In terms of race/ethnicity, American Indian (25.5 absences/student) and Black youth (14.7 absences/student) had the highest absence rates, while Asian/Pacific Islander youth had the lowest absence rates (6.7 absences/student). *Table 2* shows the detailed breakdown of attendance data by demographics.

Table 2: Breakdown of Unexcused Student Absences by Demographics, 2023-2024 School Year

		Number of Unexcused Absences	% of Unexcused Absences	Number of Unique Students	% of Total Students	Total Number of Students	Absences per Student
Grade Level	*K*	1044	4.6%	125	7%	156	6.7
	1st	846	3.7%	117	6%	136	6.2
	2nd	950	4.2%	141	7%	176	5.4
	3rd	866	3.8%	113	6%	142	6.1
	4th	910	4.0%	127	7%	162	5.6
	5th	818	3.6%	118	6%	142	5.8
	6th	1075	4.8%	127	7%	164	6.6
	7th	1217	5.4%	134	7%	152	8.0
	8th	1528	6.8%	141	7%	166	9.2
	9th	4118	18.2%	249	12%	275	15.0
	10th	3718	16.4%	236	11%	250	14.9
	11th	2726	12.1%	209	10%	235	11.6
	12th	2803	12.4%	182	8%	186	15.1
Gender	*Female*	11714	51.8%	1017	49%	1162	10.1
	Male	10897	48.2%	1001	51%	1180	9.2
Race/ Ethnicity	*American Indian*	51	0.2%	2	<1%	2	25.5
	Asian/Pacific Islander	302	1.3%	31	2%	45	6.7
	Black	9025	39.9%	578	27%	615	14.7
	Hispanic	1099	4.9%	85	4%	104	10.6
	Multi-racial	3047	13.5%	251	12%	273	11.2
	Unknown	47	0.2%	8	<1%	8	5.9
	White	9048	40.0%	1064	56%	1304	6.9

Moreover, in the 2023-2024 school year, there were a total of 455 disciplinary referrals made by staff across the district. These referrals were for 288 unique students, representing 12% of the 2,400 total students in the district. Overall, this amounted to about 0.19 referrals per student.

Male youth had significantly higher disciplinary referral rates (0.24 referrals/student), compared to female youth (0.15 referrals/student). In terms of race/ethnicity, Black (0.39 referrals/student) and multi-racial youth (0.30 referrals/student) had the highest disciplinary referral rates, while Asian/Pacific Islander and White youth had the lowest referral rates (both 0.09 referrals/student). American Indian students had no reported disciplinary events. *Table 3* shows the detailed breakdown of disciplinary referral data by demographics.

Table 3: Breakdown of Disciplinary Referrals by Demographics, 2023-2024 School Year

		Number of Referrals	% of Referrals	Number of Unique Students	% of Total Students	Total Number of Students	Referrals per Student
Gender	*Female*	174	38.2%	105	49%	1162	0.15
	Male	281	61.8%	183	51%	1180	0.24
Race/ Ethnicity	*American Indian*	0	0.0%	0	<1%	2	0.00
	Asian/Pacific Islander	4	0.9%	3	2%	45	0.09
	Black	237	52.1%	135	27%	615	0.39
	Hispanic	16	3.5%	12	4%	104	0.15
	Multi-racial	81	17.8%	47	12%	273	0.30
	Unknown	1	0.2%	1	<1%	8	0.13
	White	116	25.5%	90	56%	1304	0.09

Baseline Healthy Allegheny Teen Survey Data: Results from the most recent iteration of the Healthy Allegheny Teen Survey (conducted in Spring 2023) also provide significant insights about the experiences of students in the district and their families. The Healthy Allegheny Teen Survey (HATS) was developed by the Allegheny County Health Department and the University of Pittsburgh Division of Adolescent and Young Adult Medicine (AYAM). The survey is derived from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's national Youth Risk Behavior Survey for students in grades 9-12. In the West Mifflin Area School District, 292 high school students completed HATS in 2023. For the purposes of this report, we reviewed youth responses related to violence, mental health, health behaviors, relationships with school community/future orientation, and adverse childhood experiences. *Table 4* provides detailed comparisons of district-level responses to state and national statistics, when available.

Considering experiences of **violence**:

- 12% of students reported that they carried a weapon on school property in the last 30 days, compared to 2% and 4% at the state and national levels, respectively
- 29% of high school-aged youth in the district had ever witnessed physical violence in their neighborhood, compared to 25% of youth in Pennsylvania and 23% of youth in the U.S. overall

- More than 1 in 5 students (21%) had experienced the murder of a family member in their lifetime
- 10% of both district and state respondents had experienced sexual dating violence in past 12 months, compared to 6% nationally

HATS results also raise concerns about students' **mental health**:

- About 1 in 5 students (21%) were bullied on school property in the past 12 months, and the same proportion reported being electronically bullied in that timeframe
    - These percentages are slightly higher than those observed at both the state and national levels
- Moreover, roughly 1 in 3 survey respondents in the district (33%) reported self-harming without suicidal intent in the past 12 months
- Nearly 1 in 2 (47%) endorsed feeling sad or hopeless for two weeks or more in the past 12 months (a clinical indicator for depression), while nearly 1 in 4 students (24%) shared that they had seriously considered suicide in the past year
    - Both of these proportions are considerably higher than comparative statistics for Pennsylvania and the U.S. overall

In terms of **health behaviors**:

- 28% of students had not seen a doctor in the past 12 months for a well visit
- 28% of students did not seek medical treatment when they thought they needed it in the past 12 months
- 87% of survey respondents got less than 8 hours of sleep on an average school night, compared to 80% and 77% at the state and national levels, respectively

Youth also shared perceptions of their **relationships with the school community** and **future orientation**. Notably:

- 40% of survey respondents shared that they felt close to people at school, compared to 52% in Pennsylvania and 55% in the U.S. overall
- 27% of youth reported feeling happy to be at school
- 34% of youth reported feeling safe in school

- Just under half of youth (48%) believed that teachers treated students fairly
- More than 2 in 3 youth (68%) had missed two or more days of school in last 30 days
- About 1 in 3 youth (32%) had been suspended from school in their lifetime
- About 1 in 2 youth (51%) shared that they felt excited about their future

Collectively, a significant proportion of high school-aged youth in the district reported having **adverse childhood experiences**, including the following:

- 16% of survey respondents shared that a parent or other adult in their home "most of the time" or "always" insulted them or put them down, compared to 11% at both the state and national levels
- 1 in 4 youth (25%) had ever lived with a parent or guardian who was having a problem with alcohol or drug use
- 1 in 3 youth (33%) had ever lived with a parent or guardian who had severe depression, anxiety, or other mental illness, or was suicidal
- 14% of survey respondents had ever been separated from a parent or guardian because this individual went to jail, prison, or a detention center
- Nearly 1 in 3 youth (30%) had worried that they or their family would not have enough food to eat at some point in the past 30 days

Table 4: Healthy Allegheny Teen Survey 2023, District Comparison to State and National Data

Survey Category/Item	District	Pennsylvania	United States
Violence	***% of youth who answered affirmatively***		
Carried a weapon on school property in the last 30 days	***12%***	2%	4%
Had ever seen someone get physically attacked, beaten, stabbed, or shot in their neighborhood	***29%***	25%	23%
Had ever been forced to have sexual intercourse	9%	10%	9%
Experienced physical dating violence in the past 12 months	9%	9%	10%

Experienced sexual dating violence in the past 12 months	10%	10%	6%
Mental Health	***% of youth who answered affirmatively***		
Were bullied on school property in the past 12 months	***21%***	20%	19%
Were electronically bullied in the past 12 months	***21%***	18%	16%
Felt sad or hopeless for two weeks or more in the past 12 months	***47%***	39%	40%
Seriously considering attempting suicide in the past 12 months	***24%***	18%	20%
Health Behaviors	***% of youth who answered affirmatively***		
Got less than 8 hours of sleep on an average school night	***87%***	80%	77%
Relationship with School Community/Future Orientation	***% of youth who answered affirmatively***		
Felt close to people at school	***40%***	52%	55%
Adverse Childhood Experiences	***% of youth who answered "most of the time" or "always"***		
A parent or other adult in their home insulted them or put them down	***16%***	11%	11%

Description of Grant

The West Mifflin Area School District applied for and was awarded the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act (BSCA) Stronger Connections Grant (SCG) for the 2024-2025 school year. This grant is federally-funded, but state-allocated by the Pennsylvania Department of Education. The West Mifflin Area School District was one of 36 local educational agencies (LEAs) in Pennsylvania that received funding from the Stronger Connections Grant. The total grant amounted to $916,680.00; however, $131,450.10 was diverted to nonpublic schools within district boundaries as part of an equitable share requirement.

Eligible uses of the grant include (Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, n.d.):

1. Promoting the social, emotional, physical, and mental well-being of students and staff
2. Addressing family and community engagement
3. Promoting equitable and inclusive policies and practices in the [Local Educational Agency]

The specific ways in which this funding was used by the West Mifflin Area School District in the 2024-2025 school year are described in the methods section of this report, in terms of the various initiatives implemented. The district contracted the University of Pittsburgh Division of Adolescent and Young Adult Medicine (AYAM) research team to conduct a comprehensive evaluation, involving collection, analysis, and compilation of data related to these initiatives. To support the reciprocal transmission of relevant data between the two parties, the district and research team signed a data-sharing agreement.

Evidence Base for Approach:

Chronic absenteeism (defined as missing 10% or greater of school time) is a major concern in the United States, with nearly 30% of students considered chronically absent in the 2022-2023 school year (U.S. Department of Education, 2025). The research literature highlights chronic absenteeism as a complex, multifactorial issue. Gubbels et al. (2019) conducted a meta-analysis of risk factors for school absenteeism and identified significant effects for multiple individual, family, and school-related risk factors, including student or parent health concerns, students' negative perceptions of school, poor relationships with teachers, low parental school involvement, family challenges (i.e. low socioeconomic status), and negative school climate. Kearney et al. (2022) further suggest that broader-level factors, such as community violence/safety and structural economic inequities, may also contribute to chronic absenteeism.

The relationship between school climate and absenteeism may be particularly important, with Van Eck et al. (2017) finding higher rates of absenteeism in schools with student-reported "moderate" or "negative" climates, as compared to schools with student-reported "positive" climates. Understanding the association between school climate and absenteeism, restorative

practices that center students' and families' wellbeing rather than punishing students for missing school are well-suited to address the root causes of chronic absenteeism. Although the literature on restorative justice approaches to addressing absenteeism is nascent, a few studies have demonstrated positive results of such interventions. For instance, Watts and Robertson (2022) found that one school that had implemented restorative practices had lower tardiness, suspension, and absenteeism rates, as compared to a matched control school in the same district.

Similarly, recognizing the complicated context in which chronic absenteeism occurs, a multilevel, integrated approach that addresses multiple risk factors and is adaptable to individual families' needs is critical. Childs and Scanlon (2022) advance such an ecological systems approach. They conducted qualitative interviews with various school leaders and community organization representatives engaged in a chronic absenteeism initiative in Pittsburgh to understand how these groups partnered with students/families and coordinated their efforts across organizations. Their findings highlight the importance of empowering youth, incorporating families into initiatives, promoting positive student relationships with school staff, and providing opportunities for collaborative partners to engage with each other and to share resources. Moreover, Kearney and Graczyk (2022) suggest that a multi-tiered support structure, whereby the intensity of support aligns with individual students' needs, can be beneficial to addressing chronic absenteeism. Some interventions (Tier I), such as identifying community-level barriers to school attendance and implementing systems to track attendance, are universal. Tier II interventions aim to intervene early for students who begin to miss school more, while Tier III interventions provide the highest level of support to students/families demonstrating the most significant need.

The Titan Assistance Program (TAP) was designed to address several factors related to school absenteeism that are described in the literature, including:

1. Parental engagement
2. Parental perceptions of the school's role in supporting students/families
3. Students' relationships with school staff
4. Students' perceptions of school and feelings of school connectedness
5. Family challenges (housing, finances, etc.)

Overall, the West Mifflin Area School District sought to adopt a strengths-based, restorative approach involving a diverse set of collaborators (students, families, school staff/administrators, child and adolescent health experts, and community partners). This not only aligns with the literature on chronic absenteeism, but more broadly, aims to maximize potential for youth thriving in the school environment.

Methods:

Titan Assistance Program (TAP)

The West Mifflin Area School District implemented the Titan Assistance Program (TAP) at the beginning of the 2024-2025 school year. The goals of the program were to:

1. Build collaborative relationships with families, helping them to access appropriate resources and meet their specific needs
2. Support students to meet their academic goals
3. Promote students' overall health and wellness
4. Foster increased school connectedness
5. Improve school attendance

A dedicated team of school-based professionals conducted the program, with oversight from the Director of Pupil Services. These professionals included an Attendance Family Liaison, a Home School Visitor, Parent Liaisons (including a multilingual liaison for ESL families), and a Mental Health Counselor. The team received student/family referrals on an ongoing basis from school counselors, who completed an online referral form. Counselors could refer students to the program for various reasons, including:

1. Attendance concerns (frequent absences [5 or more unexcused], tardiness, past truancy)
2. Family issues (housing, finances, etc.)
3. Parents not attending meetings
4. Language barrier
5. Trauma/mental health needs

Once students and families were referred to the program, TAP team members made initial contact via phone. For those families that team members could not reach over the phone, the team conducted dedicated home visits. Overall, the purpose of this outreach was to establish contact with families, assess current needs, and offer appropriate services/resources, such as:

1. Referral to school-based therapy
2. Help with academic needs (e.g. connecting with school-based resources, providing information about tutoring, explaining remediation times, etc.)
3. Help with getting appliances
4. Help with transportation
5. Help with Medicaid or other federal assistance applications (e.g. SNAP, WIC, LIHEAP, etc.)
6. Providing food, clothing, or other essentials
7. Providing alarm clocks
8. ESL support
9. Connection to community-based organizations (e.g. DHS, Salvation Army, Steel Valley Family Center, etc.)

The TAP team maintained an ongoing caseload of students, following all students referred, keeping in regular contact with parents/guardians, counselors, and teachers, and attending Student Attendance Improvement Plan (SAIP) meetings. They used a tiered approach, similar to that advanced by Kearney and Graczyk (2022), thus maximizing the program's reach in a school context with limited person power and resources. Each team member documented their activities in an individual OneNote file and the team also maintained a shared Excel spreadsheet. The Attendance Family Liaison used this spreadsheet to compose monthly reports of counts for referrals (broken down by reason and building) and activities (phone calls, home visits, referrals to counseling, etc.).

The Attendance Family Liaison also distributed a TAP family feedback survey via email to families served during the 2024-2025 school year. The survey was developed by district partners from the University of Pittsburgh Division of Adolescent and Young Adult Medicine (AYAM)

and was administered via REDCap. The survey consisted of four multiple-choice/select-all-that-apply questions designed to assess the impact of TAP for families served in terms of:

1. Services/resources provided
2. Utility of information/resources provided by the TAP team
3. Level of support in promoting child's wellbeing
4. Parent/guardian's confidence in their ability to promote their child's wellbeing

The survey also included an open-ended item, allowing families to share qualitative feedback.

In addition to the family feedback survey, other insights about TAP were obtained through interviews with TAP team members, school personnel, and families. The AYAM research team was responsible for developing the interview guides and reaching out to recruit participants from each of the three stakeholder groups. All of the TAP team members (Attendance Family Liaison, Home School Visitor, Parent Liaison, and Mental Health Counselor) agreed to participate, as did the district's Director of Pupil Services. Five additional school personnel were recruited, representing a variety of roles (teachers, school counselors, principals) across the four district buildings. Parents/caregivers were originally meant to be recruited through a link included at the end of the TAP family feedback survey. The link connected to a separate survey in which parents could share their contact information; however, no parents completed this form. As a result, TAP team members were asked to identify families who they believed might be interested in participating and provided contact information so that the AYAM research team could directly contact parents. Through this alternative recruitment method, 2 parents agreed to participate in interviews.

A research assistant from the AYAM team scheduled and carried out individual, 30-minute interviews with each of the recruited participants. Interviews were conducted virtually via Zoom or in person at West Mifflin Area High School in a private conference room. In the interviews, the research assistant asked each participant 6-7 questions, with questions corresponding to their respective roles as TAP team members, school personnel, or parents. All interviews were audio-recorded with the consent of participants. Both parents did not speak English as their primary language; thus, the multilingual Parent Liaison offered his support and translated

questions/responses during these interviews. Families who participated received compensation for their time in the form of school district mementos provided by the district.

At present, the AYAM research team is in the process of coding and analyzing interview transcripts to identify themes. A summary is included in the results section of this report, while the full results of the thematic analysis will be presented in a separate, future report once completed.

3Rs

The 3Rs (Reading, Racial Equity, and Relationships) Program, developed and implemented by the Office of Child Development in the University of Pittsburgh School of Education, is an initiative focused on enhancing literacy experiences among early school-aged children. The program achieves this aim primarily through strategic partnerships with important adult stakeholders (school staff, parents/guardians, etc.) and exposure to high-quality, racially-affirming literature (The Pittsburgh Study, n.d.).

Elementary-level educators (grades K-5) in the West Mifflin Area School District received 9 hours of professional development training in the 3Rs program during the 2024-2025 school year. Training was broken into 5 sessions, as follows:

- *Session 1 (11/22/2024):* 2 hours
- *Session 2 (1/10/2024):* 2 hours
- *Session 3 (3/28/2025):* 2 hours
- *Session 4 (4/7/25):* 1.5 hours
- *Session 5 (5/30/25):* 1.5 hours

As the training progressed, teachers were provided materials and encouraged to integrate opportunities into classroom education and homework activities for their students to engage with racially affirming literature and other literacy-fostering content. There was a sign-in sheet for each session to track educators' participation.

In addition, the Director of Family and Community Partnerships in the Office of Child Development planned to host four family literacy workshops. Families with children in grades K-3 were invited to participate; however, no families signed up for the workshops and they had to cancel. Thus, to strengthen the 3Rs program's relationship with the district's students, the Director of Family and Community Partnerships, as well as the Community Co-lead for the 3Rs program, visited both elementary schools in the district in May 2025 to read to students. Now that these connections have been established, the 3Rs team hopes to conduct the family literacy sessions next school year. In future evaluation work, we plan to review parent post-session survey responses regarding:

1. Caregivers' understanding of the importance of reading in their child's development and education
2. Caregivers' intention to use the books they received with their child

Youth Violence Prevention Programming (Expect Respect, Forging Hopeful Futures, Coaching Boys into Men)

In collaboration with the University of Pittsburgh Division of Adolescent and Young Adult Medicine (AYAM), the school district implemented several evidence-based youth violence prevention initiatives during the 2024-2025 school year.

The *Expect Respect* program focuses on youth in grades 4-8 and aims to prevent teen dating violence (TDV), sexual violence (SV), and other forms of relational aggression. Curriculum content focuses on establishing healthy group dynamics, considering relationship norms/perceptions, handling stress and other emotions, fostering skills for healthy relationships (i.e. communication, boundary-setting, etc.), and strengthening support systems (Stop Abuse for Everyone, 2019). Students at West Mifflin Area Middle School were referred to Expect Respect by school-based staff (teachers, counselors, TAP team, etc.) and invited to enroll in the program. Once students had assented to participate, two trained community facilitators engaged the youth in weekly, grade-specific support groups from February to May 2025. Final program rosters were identified based on the youth assented, and facilitators also collected weekly sign-in sheets.

Personnel from the AYAM research team maintained all program-related data in the Expect Respect REDCap database.

The *Forging Hopeful Futures* program engages youth ages 13-19 in a 12-session curriculum. Content focuses on racial/gender equity, positive relationship-building, conflict resolution techniques, job skills, and youth advocacy/leadership (University of Pittsburgh Division of Adolescent and Young Adult Medicine, 2024). Students at West Mifflin Area High School were recruited for Forging Hopeful Futures by school-based staff (teachers, counselors, TAP team, etc.) and invited to enroll in the program. Once students assented to participate, a trained community facilitator engaged the youth in biweekly, one-hour sessions. The first round ran from February to March 2025, while the second round ran from April to May 2025. Final program rosters were identified based on the youth assented, and facilitators also collected session sign-in sheets. Personnel from the AYAM research team maintained all program-related data in the Forging Hopeful Futures REDCap database.

For Expect Respect and Forging Hopeful Futures, we compiled data on student demographics. In addition, enrolled youth were asked to complete baseline and post-program surveys to gather youth perspectives. For the purposes of this evaluation, we reviewed survey responses regarding:

1. Knowledge of healthy and unhealthy relationship behaviors (Expect Respect)
2. Willingness to talk to a friend in an unhealthy relationship or to get help for problems in their own relationship (Expect Respect)
3. Skills for healthy relationships (Expect Respect)
4. Connections to positive, supportive community members (Expect Respect)
5. Confidence in personal ability to advocate for positive change in their community (Expect Respect)
6. Intention to become involved in advocacy work in their school (Expect Respect)
7. Positive future orientation (Expect Respect)
8. Feelings of inclusion in group (Forging Hopeful Futures)
9. Comfort sharing personal things in front of the group (Forging Hopeful Futures)
10. Sentiments toward program leaders (Forging Hopeful Futures)
11. Favorite sessions (Forging Hopeful Futures)

12. Satisfaction with program (both programs)
13. Willingness to recommend program to a friend (both programs)
14. Overall perception of knowledge/skills gained (both programs)

The *Coaching Boys into Men* program targets athletes in middle and high school and aims to prevent teen dating violence (TDV)/sexual violence (SV). Content experts train coaches, who then incorporate lessons into team practices/routines to promote healthy relationships and build positive bystander skills (University of Pittsburgh Division of Adolescent and Young Adult Medicine, n.d.). Pittsburgh Action Against Rape (PAAR), in collaboration with the AYAM research team, conducted outreach to coaches in the district and provided training sessions during the Fall, Winter, and Spring sports seasons. PAAR maintained a list of coaches trained and tracked the number of athletes on each team in the district with at least one trained coach.

Gwen's Girls

The Gwen's Girls *Making Positive Life Choices* program engages high school-aged female-identifying youth in a gender-responsive, developmentally-appropriate curriculum. Content focuses on understanding contextual factors that affect the girls' development, building skills for healthy relationships with family, peers, and community, and positively addressing challenges experienced (Gwen's Girls, n.d.). The support group style of the program is meant to provide a safe setting for girls to engage in collaborative activities and connect with their fellow participants. The program offers some degree of flexibility in its implementation, allowing youth to collectively identify specific topic areas to work on in the group. For the West Mifflin Area High School group, the Friendship curriculum was used. Topics covered included choosing supportive friends, understanding exclusion, empathy, respect, and fairness, self-esteem, personal values, and self-reflection.

Prior to program implementation, the Gwen's Girls team tabled on two consecutive Tuesdays during high school lunch periods to advertise the program, answer questions, and recruit female-identifying youth to participate. The program facilitator obtained verbal permission from families and also sent a parent letter home with the girls to provide additional information about the

program. Gwen's Girls maintained a list of enrolled youth and facilitators also collected weekly sign-in sheets. To evaluate the program's impact, youth participants were asked to complete feedback surveys. For the purposes of this evaluation, we reviewed survey responses regarding:

1. Girls' understanding of various social-emotional concepts (exclusion, empathy, respect, fairness, and supportive friendships)
2. Girls' confidence levels with respect to body image, self-esteem, personal values, and self-reflection

UPMC Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh Division of Community Health (Healthy Schools, CareMobile, AnywhereCare@School)

The West Mifflin Area School District also partnered with UPMC Children's Community Health to implement one school-based program, as well as to plan for several future programs focused on fostering overall student health and wellness during the 2024-2025 school year.

The *Healthy Schools* program is a national initiative from the Alliance for a Healthier Generation that is managed locally by the UPMC Children's Community Health team (UPMC Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh Division of Community Health, n.d.-a). Each school assembles a group of interested staff members, headed by a wellness coordinator, who collaboratively completes the Thriving Schools Integrated Assessment. This assessment is designed to assess the school's performance on various health- and wellness-related topics (including wellness policies, nutrition, physical activity, tobacco use, social-emotional health, school health services, school climate, and staff wellbeing) (Alliance for a Healthier Generation, n.d.). The Division of Community Health supports schools in filling out the assessment, reviewing the results, implementing appropriate structural and policy changes, and exploring and connecting to local resources. The Community Health team also offers health education presentations for students, school staff, parents, and professional development opportunities for staff. During the 2024-2025 school year, a research assistant from the AYAM team met with the wellness coordinators from each school, along with the Healthy Schools Program Specialist from UPMC Children's Community Health, to assess each school's progress in assembling a team, completing the assessment, and implementing initiatives.

Two additional clinical services are in process with the West Mifflin Area School District, with planning for each taking place in the 2024-2025 school year. The *Ronald McDonald Care Mobile* is a mobile medical clinic that brings care directly to youth who are otherwise unable to access regular care (UPMC Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh, n.d.). Through this service, youth are able to receive physical exams and vaccinations. School districts can sign up to schedule the Care Mobile (and its team of health care professionals from Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh) to visit their schools. The district is working with the UPMC Children's Community Health team to schedule the Care Mobile to visit the two elementary schools and middle school in October/November 2025. Likewise, *AnywhereCare@School* is a school-based telehealth program that allows school nurses to conduct virtual visits for students with an emergency room provider at Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh (UPMC Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh Division of Community Health, n.d.-b). The UPMC Children's Community Health team has scheduled school nurse training for the telehealth software in August 2025, with plans for program implementation in the 2025-2026 school year.

District Attendance/Discipline

The AYAM research team also reviewed and analyzed attendance and disciplinary data from both the 2023-2024 and 2024-2025 school years. District attendance is tracked daily through classroom teacher reporting to the PowerSchool platform, while discipline events are tracked as they occur through staff reporting to Powerschool. The data collected throughout each school year was aggregated and downloaded into summative annual reports, which include breakdowns by grade level, gender, and race/ethnicity. These reports were shared by the Director of Pupil Services with the AYAM research team as part of this evaluation.

Collaborative Partner Communication/Meetings

The authors of this report (from the AYAM research team), the Director of Pupil Services, and the Attendance Family Liaison maintained email contact and met (either in person at West Mifflin Area High School or virtually via Zoom) a total of 7 times over the course of the 2024-2025 school year. In addition, each of the above parties corresponded regularly with community

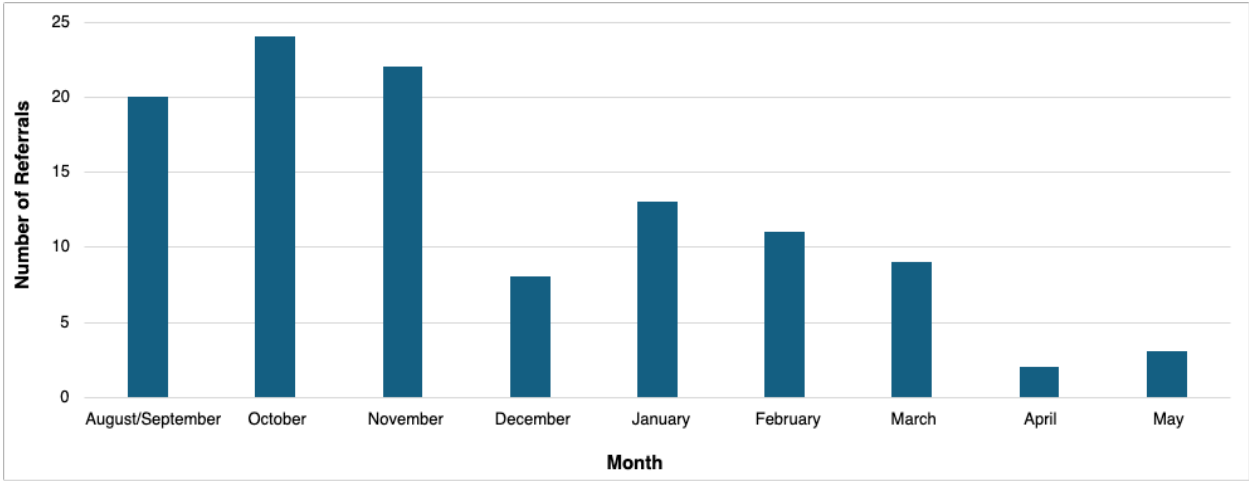
partners to check in and address challenges. In the spring semester, we began to conduct monthly collaborative partner meetings, bringing together district staff and community collaborators in an effort to streamline communication and keep everyone engaged/informed. This group met 3 times (March, April, and May 2025) prior to the end of the school year.

Results:

Titan Assistance Program (TAP)

Over the course of the 2024-2025 school year, the Titan Assistance Program (TAP) team served 112 students. Referral counts were highest in the first three months of the school year, August/September (20 cases), October (24 cases), and November (22 cases), but there was a steady influx of cases throughout the entire year (*Figure 1*).

Figure 1: TAP Referral Totals by Month



The most common reasons for referral were frequent absences (76 cases with 5 or more absences), followed by tardiness (43 cases), and family issues such as housing/finances (41 cases). *Table 5* includes a detailed breakdown of all the reasons for referral.

Table 5: Breakdown of TAP Referrals by Reason for Referral

Reason for Referral	**Number of Referrals by Month**									**Total**
	Aug/ Sept	**Oct**	**Nov**	**Dec**	**Jan**	**Feb**	**Mar**	**Apr**	**May**	
Frequent absences	15	17	14	5	9	7	6	2	1	***76***
Tardiness	9	14	3	2	3	5	3	2	2	***43***
Past truancy	3	4	7	3	4	6	2	1	2	***32***
Family issues	12	2	3	2	7	7	4	2	2	***41***
Parent not attending meetings	2	4	5	2	5	2	0	0	0	***20***
Trauma/Other	4	0	0	0	5	3	5	1	2	***20***
Language barrier	1	6	5	1	2	1	2	0	1	***19***
Mental health	0	0	0	0	2	7	2	2	2	***15***

The TAP team received referrals across all four district buildings. There were 39 referrals for students at West Mifflin Area High School, 37 at West Mifflin Area Middle School, 18 at Homeville Elementary School, and 18 at Clara Barton Elementary School. Moreover, 44 of the referrals were for Special Education students, while 18 were for ESL students.

In terms of activities, the TAP team completed 129 parent/guardian phone contacts (at least one per case, but sometimes multiple). The team conducted 276 total home visits, including 55 specifically to ESL families. Team members also attended 354 SAIP meetings over the course of the school year.

Out of the 112 students referred to the TAP team, 38 were referred to the mental health counselor. 30/38 students referred (79%) attended at least one session with the counselor and many received weekly services.

A total of 13 families completed the TAP family feedback survey. The most common service/resource provided by the TAP team was help with academic needs (8/13 cases), followed by referral to school-based therapy (7/13 cases). *Table 6* displays a detailed breakdown of all the services/resources provided to families who responded to the survey. In terms of "other assistance," one parent specified that the TAP team provided "assistance & support with any question I have and repl[ied] quickly with all the helpful answers." Another parent indicated that the TAP team "offered to help me with anything we needed." Overall, 12/13 families (92%)

"agreed" or "strongly agreed" that the information and resources provided by the TAP team were helpful to them and their family, and the same percentage "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that the TAP team made them feel more supported by the school in promoting their child's wellbeing. Likewise, the vast majority of parents (92%) indicated that they felt more confident in their ability to promote their child's wellbeing as a result of engaging with the TAP team.

Table 6: Breakdown of Services/Resources Provided by the TAP Team

Service/Resource Provided	Number of Families Receiving Service (%)
Referral to school-based therapy	7 (53.8%)
Help with academic needs	8 (61.5%)
Help with getting appliances	1 (7.7%)
Help with transportation	3 (23.1%)
ESL support	3 (23.1%)
Connection to community-based organization (e.g. DHS, Salvation Army, Steel Valley Family Center, etc.)	2 (15.4%)
Other assistance	2 (15.4%)

The qualitative feedback provided in the TAP family feedback survey offers a glimpse of parents' perceptions of the program. *Table 7* includes direct quotes of the responses that families wrote to the item, "Please provide any additional feedback you have about the TAP program." In particular, parents highlighted:

- Their overall appreciation for the program, as well as for specific services like therapy from the mental health counselor, assistance with transportation, and ESL support
- How flexible and accommodating the TAP team members were in addressing their families' needs and schedules
- The improvements in communication between the school and families with the TAP team's support

Table 7: Families' Qualitative TAP Feedback

"I have both of my children in the TAP program and they're fairly new to this program but began to open up and it has tremendously helped them so far and not to mention [counselor] does [an] excellent job because they both are very anxious and he makes them comfortable and at ease in each weekly session."

“They accommodate my schedule as I am going through a lot of medical issues with my parents & its just my brother & I helping them with around the clock care. I learned about different ways different people deal w/ grieving.”
“They were understanding and supportive about my mother's mastetic lung cancer progression getting worse & my father's fractured ribs so helping to take care of them meant switching schedules & cancelations.”
“I have nothing to say. But they are very helpful and like to help others.”
“I feel very [supported] when [communicating] with TAP team [Parent Liaison], it is easier to receive and send messages to school for my children [*names redacted to maintain anonymity*]. This program is very helpful.”
“I've been supported by TAP team to enroll my child [*name redacted*] to WMASD, schedule transportation, and support my son in ESL classes [if needed].”
“I have both my kids in the Tap program and even though it's fairly new they have participated and it's [helped] them open up about their personal issues. [Counselor] is excellent and my kids are uncomfortable with stranger[s] but they are extremely common with the weekly sessions with [the counselor].”
“The program and TAP response team has been instrumental in my [children] integrating into the school after a [long] move.”
“Although we weren't able to see [counselor] as often as I liked to, the 3 of us felt secure in knowing anytime we needed him he'd be there. Sometimes all I needed was an email from him to feel better or to rethink something. Its also convenient to have him right at school during their school day. So missing 1 class is better than taking them to Oakland during school and missing half a day of classes. Our family has been surrounded by negativity and sickness (cancer) for almost a year so the kids know they can talk about any of those things bothering them in the moment right at school or even online if needed.”

Moreover, the two parents who completed family interviews shared additional insights about the impact of TAP on their families. One parent cited how working with the TAP team helped to ease their child’s transition to a new school after they moved into the district. Indeed, both families had had experiences with other school districts, and specifically stated that they felt better supported by the West Mifflin Area School District and the TAP team. Likewise, both parents emphasized improved communication and collaboration with the school as a result of the TAP team. They cited how helpful it was that the multilingual Parent Liaison could physically come to their house to translate and explain paperwork, and how this communication enabled their children to be connected with additional services offered by the school. Overall, the parents expressed their appreciation for the services their families received and both indicated that they would like the program to be continued.

The five interviewed district staff members also overwhelmingly conveyed their esteem for the TAP team. In particular, they emphasized the benefits of having a full dedicated team to address challenges experienced by students in the district, rather than simply one individual, as had been the case in years past. Moreover, staff felt that the TAP team was able to support families more deeply than they personally could in their roles as classroom teachers or counselors (largely due to lack of time and competing responsibilities). As they expressed, the TAP team not only had greater knowledge of community resources and were able to connect families with these resources, but the team was also better positioned to follow up with and work more closely with families. In a similar vein, staff members emphasized the importance of the physical presence of the TAP team, both in the four district buildings and out in the community (e.g. through home visits). They felt that the TAP team provided an additional layer of connectivity between families and the district that had previously been lacking.

In terms of implementation challenges, district staff indicated that one of the biggest initial issues at the district level was determining the most effective way to use the team. From a staff perspective, this lack of role definition made it difficult to know who to reach out to and when it was appropriate to seek support for various situations. Overall, staff seemed to feel that this improved as the year progressed—they better understood what the team could help with and felt more comfortable reaching out for support. They also acknowledged that they were referring the neediest families in the district to TAP, making it more difficult for the team to have a measurable impact. However, they felt that TAP team members effectively navigated tough family situations, connected families with resources, built trusting relationships, and improved parental involvement. Considering areas for improvement, staff highlighted that the TAP team was spread thin, given the immense level of need among families across the district. Multiple individuals suggested having a dedicated team member each at the high school, middle school, and elementary school levels, since those respective students/families experience different challenges. This could also help to improve engagement between the TAP team and school staff, as several staff members wished they had had more frequent visits from the team.

From the perspective of TAP team members themselves, the most important sources of support for their work in the program were other members of the team, district staff, and community

partners/resource organizations. Team members especially seemed to appreciate being part of this dedicated group, secure in the knowledge that they could rely on each other for support to discuss cases and determine appropriate courses of action. Overall, team members characterized their work as a "bridge" between the district and families. They described functioning as a connection point for students/families, breaking down barriers (language, mental health, transportation, etc.) to attending and thriving in school. With regard to implementation challenges, team members cited getting in contact with families as the most significant issue. Over the course of the year, they learned not to make assumptions about why children were not coming to school, why families were not answering their calls, etc. Instead, they spoke about the need to be persistent, continually reaching out, traveling to homes, and meeting families where they were. Moreover, team members sought to challenge families' traditional perceptions of what their individual relationships with the district could look like, emphasizing that the TAP team was not there to punish them/their child for missing school, but rather to support them in addressing their specific needs. In that vein, team members also identified the importance of taking a more holistic approach to support. Rather than simply focusing on a student's issues, they also worked to address challenges experienced by the student's family and within the broader community. This proved crucial to the team's overall impact, as a student's academic and social-emotional success is interconnected to family and community circumstances.

3Rs

A total of 78 educators across three buildings (Clara Barton Elementary, Homeville Elementary, and West Mifflin Area Middle School) were engaged through the 3Rs professional development trainings. *Table 8* shows the breakdown of educators engaged by building and session.

Table 8: Educators Engaged in 3Rs by Building and Session

School	Total # Engaged	Attended all 5 sessions	Attended 4 sessions	Attended 3 sessions	Attended 2 sessions	Attended 1 session
Clara Barton	21	4	7	3	4	3
Homeville	41	5	13	12	7	4
Middle School	16	1	2	3	4	6
	78	**10 (12.8%)**	**22 (28.2%)**	**18 (23.1%)**	**15 (19.2%)**	**13 (16.7%)**

Youth Violence Prevention Programming (Expect Respect, Forging Hopeful Futures, Coaching Boys into Men)

Expect Respect: Overall, 57 students enrolled in the Expect Respect program: 19 students (33%) in the fourth- and fifth-grade group, 18 students (32%) in the sixth-grade group, 14 students (25%) in the seventh-grade group, and 6 students (11%) in the eighth-grade group. 30/57 enrolled youth (53%) completed the baseline survey, while 27/57 enrolled youth (47%) completed the post-program survey. The demographic breakdown of participants (based on a separate demographics form completed by 41/57 enrolled youth) is captured in *Table 9*.

Table 9: Demographic Profile of Youth Participating in Expect Respect

		Number of Youth (%)
Gender	*Male*	28 (68.3%)
	Female	12 (29.3%)
	Prefer not to say	1 (2.4%)
Race/Ethnicity	*American Indian/Alaska Native*	4 (9.8%)
	Asian/Pacific Islander	1 (2.4%)
	Black	17 (41.5%)
	Hispanic	7 (17.1%)
	Multi-racial	8 (19.5%)
	White	7 (17.1%)
	Prefer not to say	1 (2.4%)

While there was insufficient time to cover the full 24-session curriculum in the spring, comparisons between pre- and post-program surveys reveal significant insights about the impact of the program on enrolled youth. Even with these limitations, there were positive changes in students' perceived abilities to recognize abusive behaviors, willingness to get help for problems in their own relationships, and skills for healthy relationships. Moreover, a higher percentage of youth indicated that they were connected to positive, supportive community members and youth expressed a greater intention to be involved in decision-making in the school environment. *Figures 2-3* depict these positive changes among youth participating in Expect Respect.

Figure 2: Expect Respect Pre- and Post-program Survey Response Comparison, Positive Changes in Relationship-Related Knowledge, Intentions, and Skills

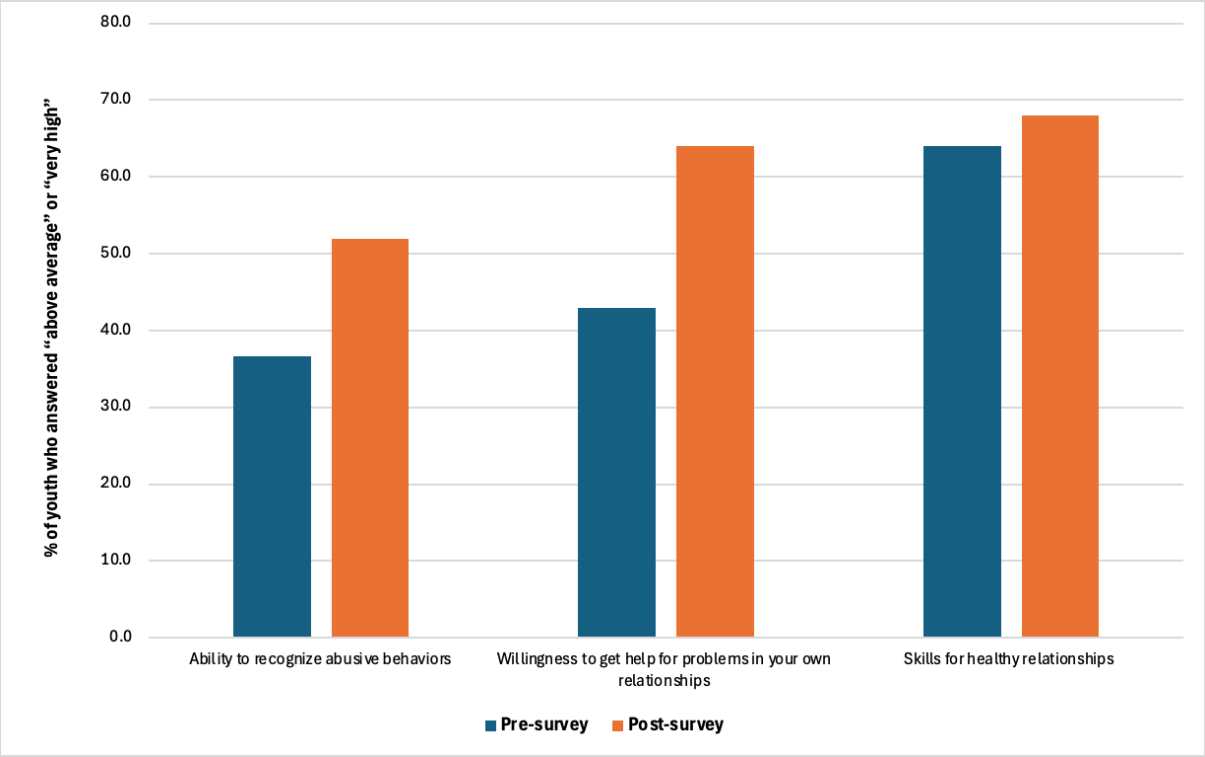
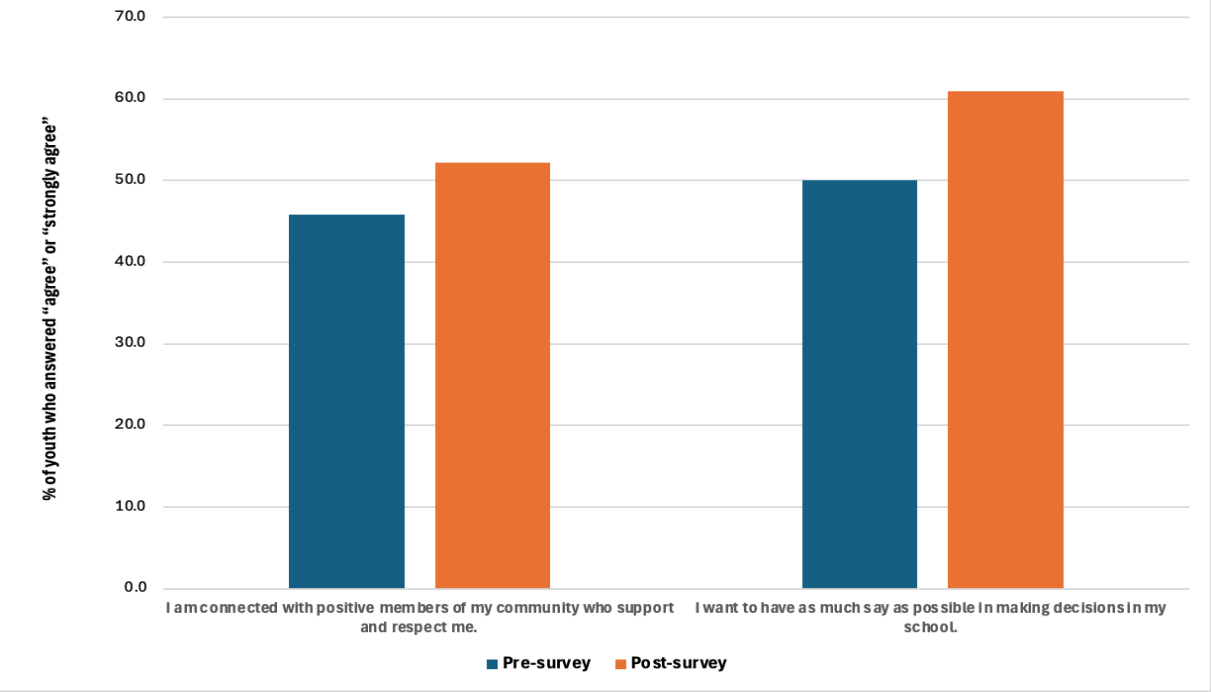


Figure 3: Expect Respect Pre- and Post-program Survey Response Comparison, Positive Changes in Connectedness and School-Related Engagement Intention



Interestingly, both perceived ability to recognize healthy relationship behaviors (17% decrease) and willingness to talk to a friend in an unhealthy relationship (4% decrease) declined from pre- to post-program. Moreover, students indicated small declines in confidence in their ability to advocate for positive change in their community and a slight decrease (2%) in being excited about their future. See *Table 10* for a full comparison of baseline to post-program survey responses to these items.

Table 10: Expect Respect Pre- and Post-program Survey Response Comparison

Survey Item	Pre-survey	Post-survey	% change
	% of youth who answered "above average" or "very high"		
Ability to recognize abusive behaviors	36.7%	51.9%	***15.2%***
Ability to recognize healthy relationship behaviors	66.7%	50.0%	-16.7%
Willingness to talk to a friend in an unhealthy relationship	48.3%	44.4%	-3.9%
Willingness to get help for problems in your own relationships	42.9%	64.0%	***21.1%***
Skills for healthy relationships	64.0%	68.0%	***4.0%***
	% of youth who answered "agree" or "strongly agree"		
I am connected with positive members of my community who support and respect me.	45.8%	52.2%	***6.4%***
I am confident I can play a role in making my community safer for youth and young adults.	50.0%	48.0%	-2.0%
I am comfortable talking to youth and young adults in my school about how to prevent or reduce youth violence in our neighborhood.	56.0%	54.2%	-1.8%
I want to have as much say as possible in making decisions in my school.	50.0%	60.9%	***10.9%***
I am excited about my future.	60.0%	58.3%	-1.7%

Overall, these data suggest that the program, as it was implemented in a condensed format, had greatest impact on a smaller scale (largely on personal relationship knowledge, skill-building, and help-seeking intention) and did not necessarily extend to advocacy in the broader community or future orientation. In future iterations of Expect Respect in the district, these content areas can be more fully addressed when the complete evidence-based curriculum is implemented.

In terms of overall satisfaction with the Expect Respect program, 18/21[1] respondents (86%) rated the program as "good" or "excellent." Likewise, 13/23 respondents (57%) "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that participating in the group was worth their time and effort. 16/18 (89%) reported that they would recommend the program to other students, while 14/21 students (67%) indicated that they had gained skills and experience through Expect Respect that they could use in the future.

Forging Hopeful Futures: A total of 22 students enrolled in the Forging Hopeful Futures program. 12 of those students were enrolled in the first round of programming, while 10 were enrolled in the second round. 15/22 enrolled youth (68%) completed the baseline survey, while 14/22 enrolled youth (64%) completed the post-program survey. The demographic breakdown of participants (from the baseline survey) is captured in *Table 11.*

Table 11: Demographic Profile of Youth Participating in Forging Hopeful Futures

		Number of Youth (%)
Age	*14 years old*	1 (6.7%)
	15 years old	7 (46.7%)
	16 years old	3 (20.0%)
	17 years old	4 (26.7%)
Gender	*Male*	7 (46.7%)
	Female	8 (53.3%)
Race/Ethnicity	*Black*	10 (66.7%)
	Hispanic	2 (14.3%)
	Multi-racial	2 (13.3%)
Parent Education Level	*Did not graduate high school*	5 (33.3%)
	Graduated high school	5 (33.3%)
	Graduated technical school or college	5 (33.3%)

[1] Note that some students did not answer each question in the Expect Respect post-survey, hence why the denominator varies between items.

In the post-program surveys, the youth shared additional insights about their experiences with Forging Hopeful Futures. Notably, 10/14 youth (71%) indicated that they felt included in the sessions, while 7/14 youth (50%) felt comfortable sharing personal things in front of the group. Moreover, 10/14 youth (71%) shared that they liked the group facilitators, and the same percentage indicated that they felt they could trust the group leaders. The youths' favorite sessions were as follows (multiple selections were allowed):

- *Session 0: Introduction*—6 votes
    - Youth stated that they chose this session as a favorite because they "got to meet everyone" and "got to have contact with other people about what's going on in life."
- *Session 3: Healthy Relationships*—5 votes
- *Session 1: Exploring Identity*—4 votes
    - One youth stated that they chose this session as a favorite because they were able to "learn more about myself and others."
- *Session 2: Understanding Our Emotions and Experiences*—4 votes
- *Session 6: Strengthening Job Skills*—4 votes
    - One youth stated that they chose this session as a favorite because they "learned new skills I could use."
- *Session 7: Succeeding in the Job Search*—4 votes
    - One youth stated that they chose this session as a favorite because they "got extra help of what I could do during [an] interview."

In terms of overall satisfaction with the Forging Hopeful Futures program, 12/14 youth (86%) reported being "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with the program. Likewise, 8/14 (57%) reported that they would "probably" or "definitely" recommend the program to a friend. Considering perceptions of knowledge gained, 12/14 students (86%) indicated that they learned "some" or "a lot" and the remaining 2 students (14%) indicated that they learned at least "a little."

Coaching Boys into Men: 8 coaches were fully trained in the Coaching Boys into Men program across 7 teams (HS Baseball, HS Boys Basketball, HS Football, HS Boys Soccer, HS Softball, HS Swimming, and MS Wrestling). 7/8 coaches implemented the program with their athletes,

while the Softball coach was trained mid-season and opted to wait until the 2025-2026 school year to fully implement the program. However, the Softball team still held a “kick-off” event, during which a Prevention Educator from Pittsburgh Action Against Rape (PAAR) came to introduce the program to the team. Overall, this resulted in a total of 173 athletes engaging with the program.

8 additional coaches attended Zoom trainings for the program. 3 of these coaches also met individually with the PAAR Prevention Educator to obtain materials and review the training, but ultimately did not move forward with implementing the program for the 2024-2025 school year. PAAR and the AYAM research team hope to re-engage these coaches in the 2025-2026 school year to support them in fully implementing Coaching Boys into Men with their athletes.

Gwen’s Girls

24 female-identifying youth across three groups enrolled in the Making Positive Life Choices program. Feedback survey responses show a wide range of understanding and confidence levels among students regarding various social-emotional concepts. Most girls recognized the importance of preventing exclusion and showed understanding of empathy, frequently identifying strategies to help others feel included and valued. Students generally understood core concepts of respect and fairness, particularly around listening and ensuring equal treatment, and many recognized the importance of giving everyone opportunities to be heard. The data indicated that Making Positive Life Choices participants largely understand the value of supportive friendships and the importance of choosing friends who provide positive encouragement. The survey also revealed mixed confidence levels with body image, self-esteem, personal values, and self-reflection. This provides an opportunity for improving support systems and developing targeted interventions for students showing lower confidence scores.

UPMC Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh Division of Community Health Healthy Schools Program

The four buildings in the district implemented the Healthy Schools program to varying degrees in the 2024-2025 school year.

- **Clara Barton Elementary School:** Clara Barton Elementary has an established wellness committee of 8 members, headed by a single wellness coordinator. The committee completed the Thriving Schools Integrated Assessment for the 2024-2025 school year and met twice to discuss the assessment and plan activities. The committee was able to introduce some wellness initiatives to the school, including:
    - Wellness Wednesdays and Thankful Thursdays
    - Incorporating wellness topics into morning announcements and physical education classes
    - Student health education about tobacco use and nutrition (PowerUp Program) in partnership with Adagio Health
    - Student health education about consumption of added sugars in partnership with UPMC Children's Community Health
- **Homeville Elementary School:** The school nurse and physical education teacher were appointed to serve as joint wellness coordinators at Homeville Elementary. Their priorities for the 2024-2025 school year included assembling a wellness committee (comprised of one representative from each grade level) and reviewing the Thriving School Integrated Assessment in preparation for completing it at the beginning of next school year.
- **West Mifflin Area Middle School:** The middle school has an established wellness committee of 10 members, headed by a single wellness coordinator. The committee met approximately monthly and identified several priorities for the 2024-2025 school year based on the results of the Thriving Schools Integrated Assessment. These included food access, vaping/tobacco use, and physical activity. To address these priorities, the school implemented a number of initiatives including:
    - Kind Closet (pantry to help students access food, hygiene, personal care products, clothing, etc.)

    - Connecting families with resources for transportation, food access, and employment
    - Student health education about vaping/tobacco use (through presentations from Adagio Health, announcements, and tabling during lunch periods) and nutrition
    - Open weight room before school and during lunchtime
    - Mile running club once per week (from March to May 2025) in preparation for the Pittsburgh Kids Marathon on May 3, 2025
- **West Mifflin Area High School:** The high school has been unable to maintain a consistent wellness coordinator/wellness committee. Their priorities for the 2024-2025 school year were to identify a replacement coordinator and to assemble a complete team for the upcoming academic year.

District Attendance

As of May 19, 2025, there were a total of 21,656 unexcused absence events across the district for the 2024-2025 school year. These absences occurred among 2,019 unique students, representing 77% of the 2,628 total students in the district. Overall, this amounted to about 8.2 unexcused absences per student.

Comparing across grade levels, 12th graders had the highest number of unexcused absences per student, at 14.7, followed by 9th graders, at 13.7 absences per student. 1st graders had the lowest number of absences per student, at 5.0. In terms of race/ethnicity, American Indian (19.5 absences/student) and Black youth (14.2 absences/student) had the highest absence rates, while White youth had the lowest absence rates (6.4 absences/student). *Table 12* shows the detailed breakdown of attendance data by demographics.

Table 12: Breakdown of Unexcused Student Absences by Demographics, 2024-2025 School Year

		Number of Unexcused Absences	% of Unexcused Absences	Number of Unique Students	% of Total Students	Total Number of Students	Absences per Student
Grade Level	*K*	1139	5.3%	136	7%	180	6.3
	1st	812	3.7%	121	7%	162	5.0
	2nd	811	3.7%	111	6%	139	5.8
	3rd	937	4.3%	131	7%	173	5.4
	4th	944	4.4%	120	6%	146	6.5
	5th	1059	4.9%	144	7%	167	6.3
	6th	1114	5.1%	127	6%	147	7.6
	7th	1158	5.3%	147	7%	163	7.1
	8th	1163	5.4%	136	7%	155	7.5
	9th	3402	15.7%	216	11%	248	13.7
	10th	3003	13.9%	214	11%	243	12.4
	11th	2626	12.1%	191	9%	215	12.2
	12th	3488	16.1%	225	10%	238	14.7
Gender	*Female*	10978	50.7%	1007	50%	1185	9.3
	Male	10678	49.3%	1012	50%	1191	9.0
Race/ Ethnicity	*American Indian*	39	0.2%	2	<1%	2	19.5
	Asian/Pacific Islander	484	2.2%	35	2%	59	8.2
	Black	9054	41.8%	616	27%	639	14.2
	Hispanic	1009	4.7%	98	4%	103	9.8
	Multi-racial	2760	12.7%	252	12%	276	10.0
	Unknown	55	0.3%	12	<1%	12	4.6
	White	8255	38.1%	1004	55%	1297	6.4

Compared to attendance data from the 2023-2024 school year, there was an overall decline in the number of unexcused absences per student, from 9.4 to 8.2. In addition, for most grade levels, there was a decrease in the number of absences per student, with the most significant reductions observed among 10th graders (decreased by 2.5 absences/student) and 8th graders (decreased by 1.7 absences/student). Notably, while 12th and 9th graders continued to have the highest rates of absenteeism, both grade levels observed declines in absences from 2023-2024 to 2024-2025, decreasing by 0.4 and 1.3 absences per student, respectively. There were also small declines in absences per student among both male and female youth.

Moreover, most racial/ethnic groups saw reductions in absences per student, with the greatest decreases among American Indian students (decreased by 6.0 absences/student) and multi-racial

students (decreased by 1.2 absences/student). While American Indian and Black youth continued to have the highest rates of absenteeism, both groups observed declines in unexcused absences from 2023-2024 to 2024-2025. As noted previously, absences among American Indian students decreased by 6.0 absences per student, while absences among Black youth decreased by 0.5 absences per student. Only Asian/Pacific Islander youth had an increase in unexcused absences per student from the previous school year; however, their respective proportion of total district absences rose from 1% in 2023-2024 (below what would be expected, given that they accounted for 2% of the student population) to 2% in 2024-2025 (closer to what would be expected). *Figures 4-6* offer detailed attendance data comparisons between the two school years, broken down by demographics.

Figure 4: Comparison of Unexcused Absences per Student, 2023-2024 to 2024-2025, by Grade Level

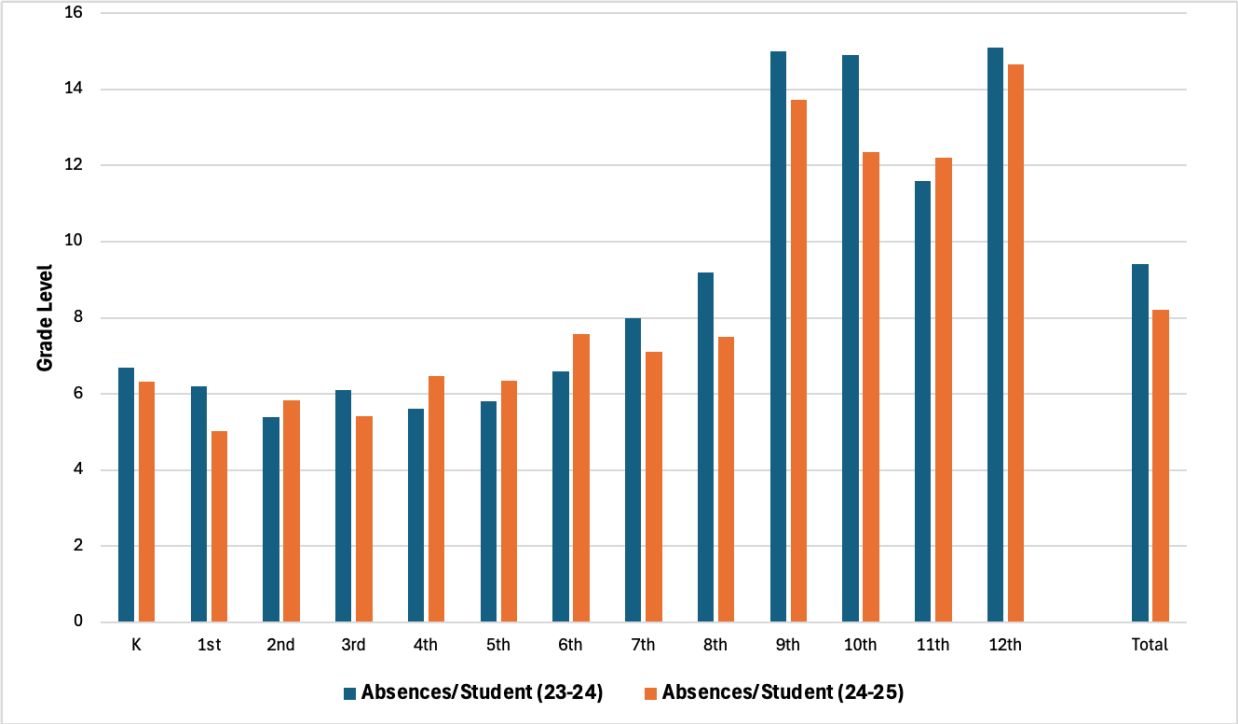


Figure 5: Comparison of Unexcused Absences per Student, 2023-2024 to 2024-2025, by Gender

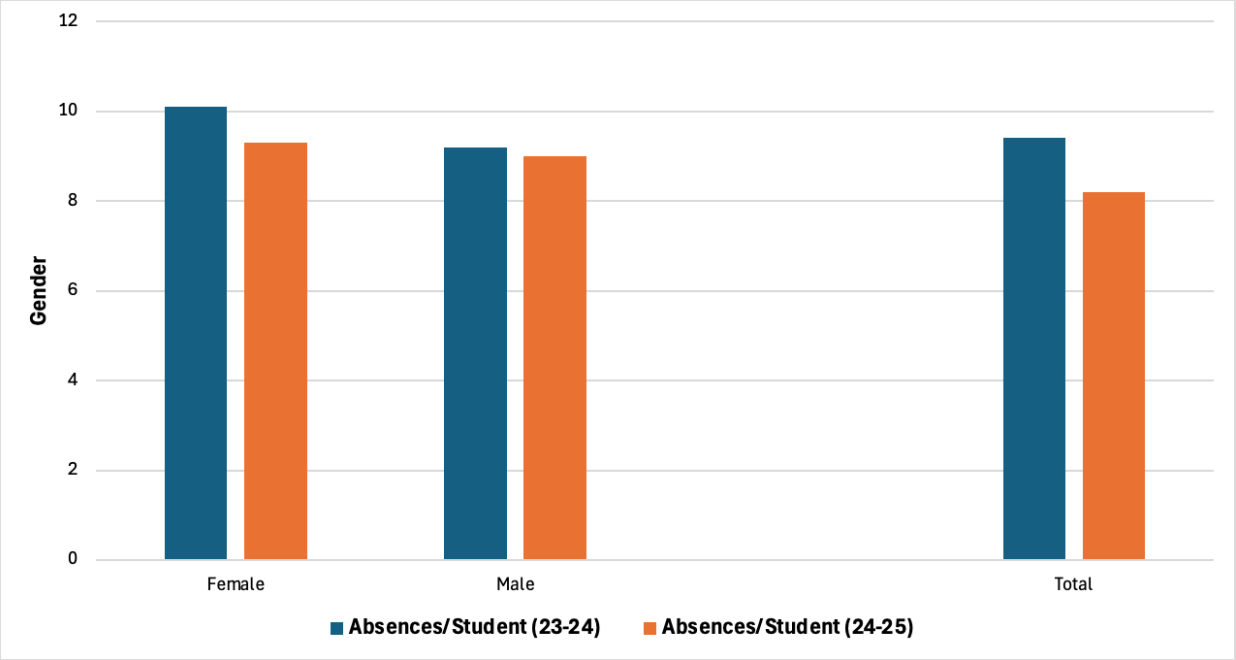
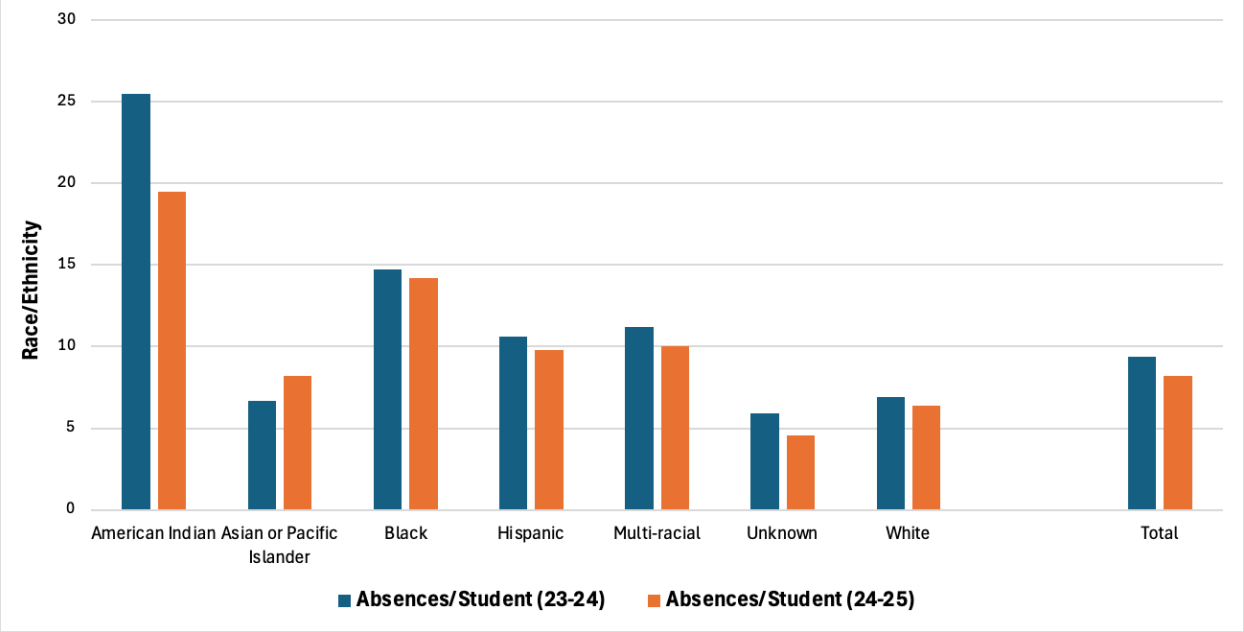


Figure 6: Comparison of Unexcused Absences per Student, 2023-2024 to 2024-2025, by Race/Ethnicity



District Discipline

As of May 19, 2025, there were a total of 302 disciplinary referrals made by staff across the district for the 2024-2025 school year. These referrals were for 222 unique students, representing 8% of the 2,628 total students in the district. Overall, this amounted to about 0.11 referrals per student.

Comparing across grade levels, 5th graders had the highest number of disciplinary referrals per student, at 0.31, followed by 9th graders, at 0.24 referrals per student. Male youth had higher disciplinary referral rates (0.17 referrals/student), compared to female youth (0.08 referrals/student). In terms of race/ethnicity, Black (0.24 referrals/student) and multi-racial youth (0.18 referrals/student) had the highest disciplinary referral rates, while White youth had the lowest referral rates (0.06 referrals/student). American Indian students had no reported disciplinary events. *Table 13* shows the detailed breakdown of disciplinary referral data by demographics.

Table 13: Breakdown of Disciplinary Referrals by Demographics, 2024-2025 School Year

		Number of Referrals	% of Referrals	Number of Unique Students	% of Total Students	Total Number of Students	Referrals per Student
Grade Level	*K*	1	0.3%	1	7%	180	0.01
	1st	4	1.3%	3	7%	162	0.02
	2nd	4	1.3%	3	6%	139	0.03
	3rd	7	2.3%	5	7%	173	0.04
	4th	29	9.6%	19	6%	146	0.20
	5th	52	17.2%	38	7%	167	0.31
	6th	25	8.3%	18	6%	147	0.17
	7th	21	7.0%	17	7%	163	0.13
	8th	5	1.7%	4	7%	155	0.03
	9th	60	19.9%	35	11%	248	0.24
	10th	36	11.9%	30	11%	243	0.15
	11th	25	8.3%	23	9%	215	0.12
	12th	33	10.9%	26	10%	238	0.14
Gender	*Female*	96	31.8%	74	50%	1185	0.08
	Male	206	68.2%	148	50%	1191	0.17

Race/ Ethnicity	*American Indian*	0	0.0%	0	<1%	2	0.00
	Asian or Pacific Islander	8	2.6%	7	2%	59	0.14
	Black	151	50.0%	104	27%	639	0.24
	Hispanic	11	3.6%	6	4%	103	0.11
	Multi-racial	49	16.2%	39	12%	276	0.18
	White	83	27.5%	66	55%	1297	0.06

Compared to disciplinary referral data from the 2023-2024 school year, there was an overall decline in the number of referrals per student, from 0.19 to 0.11. In addition, while male youth still had a higher overall rate of disciplinary referral compared to female youth, both males and females experienced a decrease by 0.07 referrals per student.

Moreover, most racial/ethnic groups saw reductions in disciplinary referrals per student, with the greatest decreases among Black students (decreased by 0.15 referrals/student) and multi-racial students (decreased by 0.12 referrals/student). This is especially significant considering that these two groups had the highest rates of disciplinary referral at baseline. Only Asian/Pacific Islander students had an increase in disciplinary referrals from the previous school year; however, their respective proportion of total district referrals rose from 1% in 2023-2024 (below what would be expected, given that they accounted for 2% of the student population) to 3% in 2024-2025 (just slightly higher than would be expected). *Figures 7-8* offer detailed disciplinary referral data comparisons between the two school years, broken down by demographics. Unfortunately, there was no 2023-2024 breakdown of disciplinary data by grade level, preventing comparison across school years.

Figure 7: Comparison of Disciplinary Referrals per Student, 2023-2024 to 2024-2025, by Gender

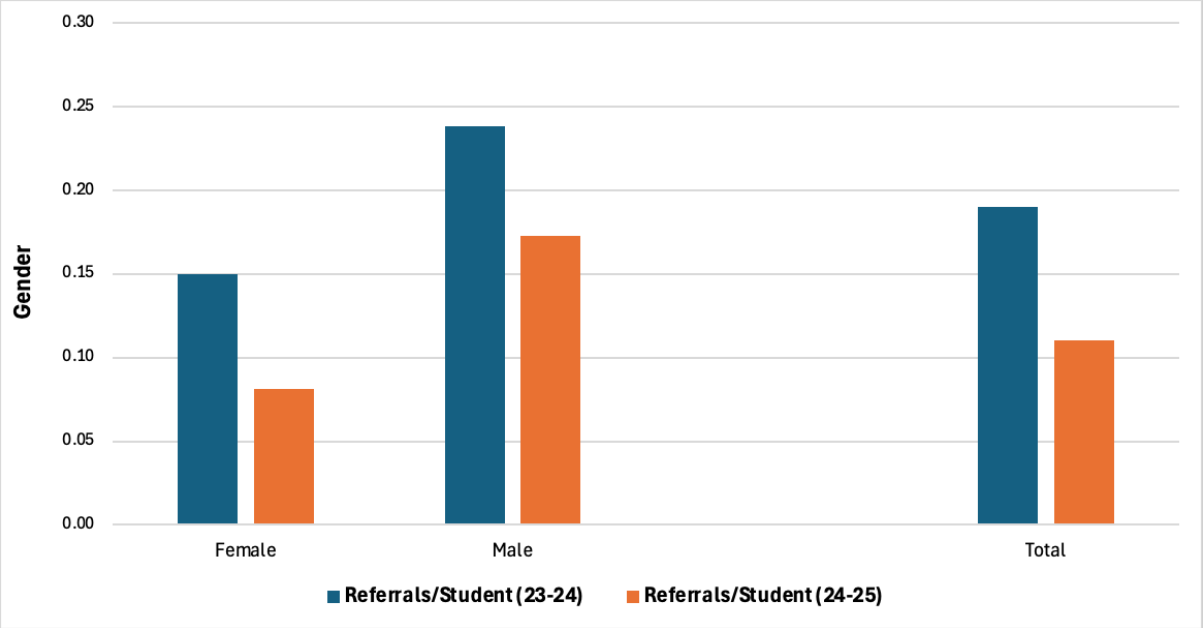
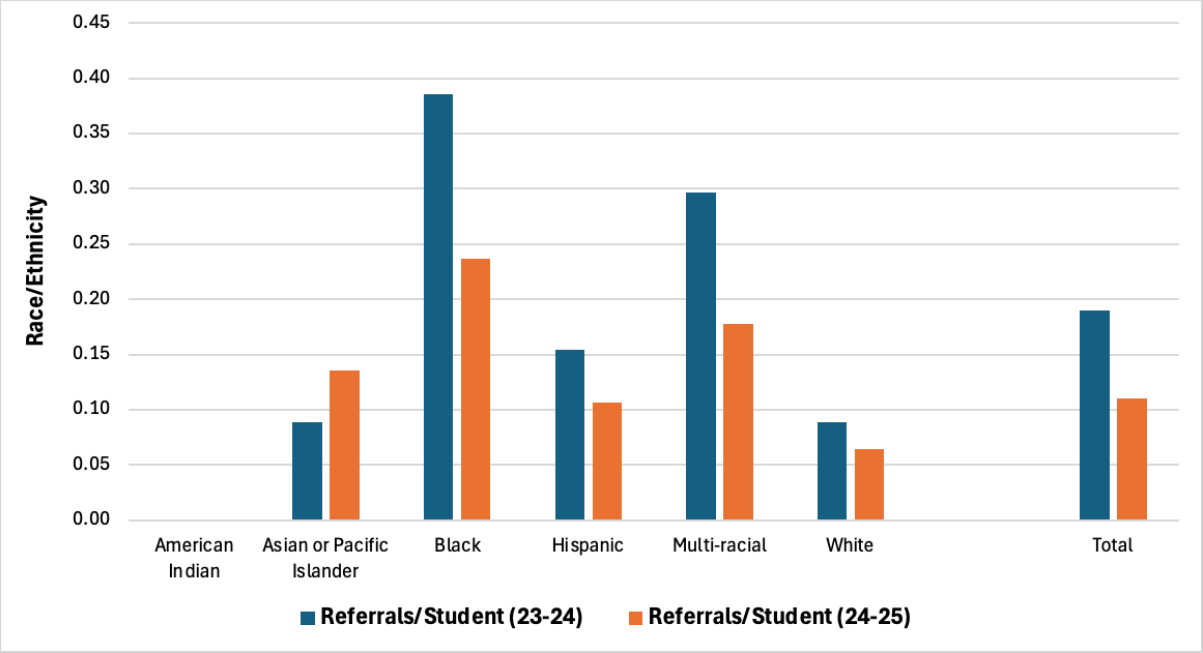


Figure 8: Comparison of Disciplinary Referrals per Student, 2023-2024 to 2024-2025, by Race/Ethnicity



Discussion:

Summary of Results

Recognizing the complex context in which chronic absenteeism occurs, the West Mifflin Area School District opted to take a multidisciplinary, holistic approach to supporting its students and their families in the 2024-2025 school year. The implementation of the Titan Assistance Program (TAP) was at the forefront of this strategy. Data reveals that the program was able to effectively address multiple factors related to chronic absenteeism, including family challenges, parental perceptions of the school's role in supporting students/families, and students' relationships with school staff. For instance, to address family challenges, the TAP team was able to provide numerous resources and supports to families, including basic essentials (food, clothing, hygiene products), school-based therapy, language interpretation services, transportation, and connections to community-based organizations (e.g. for housing, finances, employment, medical insurance support, etc.). In the family feedback survey, families overwhelmingly agreed that the information and resources provided by the TAP team were helpful to them and their families.

Likewise, the TAP team sought to change how families perceived the district's role in supporting students/families. Rather than punishing students for missed school days, the TAP team instead focused primarily on building trusting, collaborative relationships with families as they worked to re-engage students in the school environment. These positive relationship-building efforts are underscored by the fact that 92% of families who completed the feedback survey indicated that the TAP team made them feel more supported by the school in promoting their child's wellbeing. Both district staff and TAP team members spoke to this idea in interviews as well, emphasizing how the TAP team provided a connection point between families and the district that had previously been lacking.

In addition to implementing TAP, the district also brought in a number of supplementary programs run by their community partners. These programs addressed various other factors identified in the literature as being related to chronic absenteeism, including school climate, school connectedness, youth empowerment, community violence/safety, and structural economic inequities.

For instance, both the 3Rs and Healthy Schools programs aim to improve school climate by engaging district staff. The 3Rs program educates staff about fostering inclusive, racially-affirming literacy experiences for students, while the Healthy Schools program supports staff to collaboratively implement initiatives that promote students' health and wellbeing in the school setting. While staff across the district were engaged to varying degrees in these programs, those who did participate were able to take some important steps toward more positive school climates for their students (e.g. reading the books provided by the 3Rs team to their students, implementing Wellness Wednesdays and Thankful Thursdays at Clara Barton Elementary, starting a mile running club at West Mifflin Area Middle School, etc.).

The programs run by the University of Pittsburgh Division of Adolescent and Young Adult Medicine (AYAM), Pittsburgh Action Against Rape, and Gwen's Girls engaged youth in racially- and gender-responsive curriculum content about healthy relationships, conflict resolution techniques, positively addressing challenges, job skills, and youth advocacy/leadership. Pre- and post-survey data from Expect Respect indicated significant improvements in students' perceived abilities to recognize abusive behaviors, willingness to get help for problems in their own relationships, and skills for healthy relationships. These changes could be potentially significant for improving school climate if more students are engaging in healthy relationship behaviors with peers and staff. Moreover, an increased percentage of Expect Respect participants indicated that they were connected to positive, supportive community members and for Forging Hopeful Futures, the majority of youth participants indicated that they felt included in the sessions and felt they could trust the group leaders. Taken together, these data suggest improvements in school/community connectedness, which are important protective factors against chronic absenteeism. Notably, youth in Expect Respect also expressed a greater intention to be involved in decision-making in the school environment. Such youth engagement and empowerment in school can be crucial for reducing absenteeism, and future programmatic efforts should seek to further foster youth advocacy.

Overall, the impact of these various initiatives was demonstrated by the reductions in both attendance and disciplinary referral events in the 2024-2025 school year. Compared to attendance data from the 2023-2024 school year, there was an overall decline in the number of

unexcused absences per student, from 9.4 to 8.2. Broken down by demographics, there was a decrease in the number of absences per student for most grade levels and among both male and female students. Most racial/ethnic groups also saw reductions in absences per student, with the greatest decreases among American Indian students (decreased by 6.0 absences/student) and multi-racial students (decreased by 1.2 absences/student). While American Indian and Black youth continued to have the highest rates of absenteeism, both groups observed declines in unexcused absences from 2023-2024 to 2024-2025. In terms of disciplinary referrals, there was an overall decline in the number of referrals per student, from 0.19 in 2023-2024 to 0.11 in 2024-2025. While male youth still had a higher overall rate of disciplinary referral compared to female youth, both males and females experienced a decrease by 0.07 referrals per student. Moreover, most racial/ethnic groups saw reductions in disciplinary referrals per student, with the greatest decreases among Black students (decreased by 0.15 referrals/student) and multi-racial students (decreased by 0.12 referrals/student). This is especially significant considering that these two groups had the highest rates of disciplinary referral at baseline. Future work should consider additional approaches that may be necessary to further reduce the observed age (indicated by grade level), gender, and racial disparities in absenteeism and disciplinary referral.

Challenges/Lessons Learned

Overall, the TAP team cited getting in contact with families as the most significant challenge they faced. To address this, they spoke about the need to be persistent, continually reaching out, traveling to homes, and meeting families where they were. While many families were receptive and appreciative, others were a bit more skeptical of the team's role. It was crucial for team members to approach families with honesty, humility, and empathy, demonstrating through both their words and actions that they were there to help students and their families, rather than to punish them. By being consistent in this regard, the TAP team was able to cultivate meaningful, trusting partnerships with many families.

Another substantial challenge to implementation of these various initiatives was the slow process of relationship building. For instance, at the beginning of the year, as the TAP team was assembling and everyone was getting acclimated to their role, many district staff members felt

that it was difficult to know who to reach out to and when it was appropriate to seek support. However, as the TAP team began to take on more referrals and collaborate more closely with staff members, this improved. A facilitator to this effort was the fact that both the Home School Visitor and the Attendance Family Liaison had worked in the district for many years—their established rapport with many staff members enabled them to build connections between the overall TAP team and staff across the district buildings. Indeed, district staff shared that, over time, they better understood what the team could help with and felt more comfortable reaching out for support. However, they did feel that the TAP team was spread thin, given the immense level of need among families across the district. In the future, they suggested that the district consider (if feasible) having a dedicated team member each at the high school, middle school, and elementary school levels. This would allow the team to provide a deeper level of support to students and families, as well to engage more regularly with staff at all district buildings.

Likewise, it took several months for the district and community partners to overcome logistical barriers (e.g. contract development, program staffing, youth recruitment, etc.) to bringing in each of the outside programs. As a result, most were not implemented until the spring semester. Successful eventual implementation involved regular communication between the Director of Pupil Services, the Attendance Family Liaison, and the AYAM research team, with the evaluators (who already had established rapport with many community partners) helping to cultivate relationships between the district and community partners. The Director of Pupil Services then served as a key liaison between the district and community partners, maintaining these relationships throughout the school year and providing organizational/logistical support to aid program implementation. Communication was further facilitated by the establishment of a monthly collaborative partners meeting. This meeting brought together district staff and community collaborators to keep all parties abreast of each other's work, as well as to promote information-sharing and proactive problem-solving. Next school year, with all of these relationships established and processes already in place, the district and its partners will be better positioned to implement programming right at the start of the school year.

Next Steps

The West Mifflin Area School District has received a renewal of the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act Stronger Connections Grant funding to continue TAP for the 2025-2026 school year. Each of the remaining four TAP team members (Attendance Family Liaison, Home School Visitor, one Parent Liaison, and Mental Health Counselor) plan to remain in their current role.

Moreover, the district hopes to continue and expand upon its collaboration with the numerous community partners highlighted above. Specifically:

- The Office of Child Development in the University of Pittsburgh School of Education hopes to implement the 3Rs family literacy workshops
- The University of Pittsburgh Division of Adolescent and Young Adult Medicine will continue its youth violence prevention initiatives, with plans to implement the full curriculums of the following:
    - Expect Respect at West Mifflin Area Middle School
    - Forging Hopeful Futures at West Mifflin Area High School
    - Coaching Boys into Men with middle and high school coaches and their teams (in partnership with Pittsburgh Action Against Rape)
- The University of Pittsburgh Division of Adolescent and Young Adult Medicine, in partnership with the Allegheny County Health Department, will carry out the 2025 Healthy Allegheny Teen Survey
- Gwen's Girls will continue to implement the Making Positive Life Choices program at West Mifflin Area High School and hopes to expand the program to female-identifying youth at West Mifflin Area Middle School
- UPMC Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh Division of Community Health will continue to support district schools in carrying out and expanding the Healthy Schools program. The Division also hopes to bring the Care Mobile to visit Clara Barton Elementary, Homeville Elementary, and West Mifflin Area Middle School in October/November 2025 and plans to train the district's school nurses on the AnywhereCare@School telehealth software in August 2025 to allow for program implementation during the 2025-2026 school year.

The district plans to convene the above-identified parties in August 2025 (during staff professional development days) to begin planning for the upcoming school year and ensure that all programs are set to begin in September 2025. Moreover, the district will continue meeting collectively with these partners on a monthly basis during the 2025-2026 school year to check in and assess progress. This approach will allow community partners and district staff to align goals, proactively address challenges, and overall, to better sustain collaborative efforts to support the wellbeing of the district's students and families.

A special thank you to all collaborative partners:

- Allegheny County Health Department
- Gwen's Girls and Caring Connections for YOUth (Sara Nevels, Tamera Stafford)
- Pittsburgh Action Against Rape (Bernie Colbert)
- University of Pittsburgh Adolescent and Young Adult Medicine research team and community facilitators (Alison Chin, Dr. Alana Fields, Casey Hanner, Jordan Harper, Christina Henry, Reesha Jackson, Courtney McFeaters, Aaleah Oliver, Kayla Ortiz, Emily Sierra)
- University of Pittsburgh School of Education Office of Child Development (Dr. Rhonda Hall, Dr. Shallegra Moye, Dr. Caitlin Spear)
- UPMC Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh Division of Community Health (Kristi Burry, Corliss Gunn, Anne Marie Kuchera, Angelica Paletta)
- UPMC Western Behavioral Health Cool Zone Program (Victoria Blosser)
- West Mifflin Area School District Director of Pupil Services (Noelle Haney)
- West Mifflin Area School District staff (Kate Banaszak, Stacy Galiyas, Amy Krek, Dr. Hal Minford, Chad Perry, Lauren Rowe, Jennifer Stark, Terry Whalen)
- West Mifflin Area School District TAP team members (Dipen Chhetri, Jill Jakub, Jeremy Seman, Melissa Wall, Tonya Washington)

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