Colorado TRENDS OF THE DECADE 2010-2020

COMMUNITY ISSUES FROM THE YOUTH PERSPECTIVE
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[Logo: YOUTH ROOTS]
WHY IT MATTERS

Youth know the issues facing their schools and communities three years before adults.

If we tap into this knowledge, we can respond to emerging issues three years faster.

SOURCE OF INFO

YouthRoots is a leadership nonprofit where students tackle community issues through philanthropy.

Groups of students (called YouthBoards) conduct Community Needs Assessments on an annual basis. YouthRoots, founded in 2010, has collected ten years of data on needs assessment results from the youth perspective.

Over the past ten years, 38 YouthBoards* across eight Colorado communities have chosen a total of 24 issues considered to be the most pressing issues facing youth today.

This report analyzes their findings across time and geography, summarizes the biggest issues of the past decade, and makes projections about the biggest emerging issues that may dominate the next few years.

Utilizing the unique perspective that youth hold about emerging issues can be a key tool allowing communities to respond more rapidly and stay on top of the issues rather than lag behind.

*Data includes Colorado YouthBoards only.
KEY FINDINGS

Mental Health dominates as the biggest issue facing youth throughout the decade.

- Mental health is the top issue in 5 of the past 6 years (with more than 1 YouthBoard).
- “Mental health” has appeared 20 times over the years by 38 YouthBoards.
- 76% of all YouthBoards have selected a mental health-related topic.
KEY FINDINGS

The next biggest issues are Education and Substance Abuse.

- Education-related issues appeared 12 times over the past 10 years, and Substance Abuse appears 9 times.

- Education: In addition to “education” in general, youth are concerned about Access to Higher Education, Early Childhood Education, Dropout Prevention, and the Opportunity Gap.

- Substance Abuse: Although “Substance Abuse” has appeared throughout the decade, the specifics have changed. For several years, marijuana was the main concern. Now we are seeing a huge spike in teen vaping.
This chart shows the total number of times each issue appears across the years.

- Mental Health - 20
- Education - 12
- Substance Abuse - 9
- Sexual/Physical Assault - 6
- Homelessness - 6
- LGBTQ+ Youth - 4
- Immigrants/Refugees - 4
- Neglect/Abuse/Trauma - 4
- Gangs/Violence - 4
- Suicide Prevention - 3
- Sexual Health - 3
- Healthy Food Access - 3
- Poverty - 3
- Gun Violence - 2
- Youth Engagement - 2
- Youth in Foster Care - 2
- Climate Change - 1
- High Cost of Living - 1
- Emotional Wellbeing - 1
- Opportunities for low-income students - 1
- Preventative Programs - 1
- School-to-prison pipeline - 1
- Services for healthy relationships - 1
- Teen Parents - 1

Others: 14.7%

Mental Health: 21.1%

Education: 12.6%

Substance Abuse: 9.5%

Homelessness: 6.3%

Sexual Health and Education: 3.2%

Healthy Food Access: 3.2%

Suicide Prevention: 3.2%

Poverty: 3.2%

Neglect/Abuse/Trauma: 4.2%

Gangs/Violence: 4.2%

LGBTQIA+ Youth: 4.2%

Immigrants/Refugees: 4.2%

Sexual/Physical Assault: 6.3%
We start to see 1-2 issues emerging as the dominant concerns each year beginning in 2015:

- 2015: Mental health
- 2016: Education
- 2017: Mental Health and Education
- 2018: Mental Health
- 2019: Mental Health
In previous sections, similar issues are grouped for analysis. This complete list of Issues by Year includes the original issue title as written by students in their final community needs assessment results.

2010 (1 YouthBoard):
- Early Childhood Education
- Teen Pregnancy Prevention
- High School Dropout rate

2011 (1 YouthBoard):
- Early Childhood Education
- Childhood poverty
- Emotional Wellbeing

2012 (1 YouthBoard):
- Youth Development

2013 (1 YouthBoard):
- Education
- Mental Health
- Gangs/Violence
- Childhood Poverty

2014 (3 YouthBoards):
- Dropout Prevention
- Youth Mental Health
- Gang Violence
- Youth Homelessness
- Youth Engagement
- Education
- Food Security
- Abuse

2015 (4 YouthBoards):
- Gang Violence
- Reproductive Health and Education
- Substance Abuse
- Neglect & Abuse
- Teen Parents
- Mental Health (2)
- LGBTQIA+ Youth
- Poverty
- Trauma-Based & Preventative Services
- De-stigmatization of Mental Health
- Violence and Abuse
2016 (4 YouthBoards):
- Substance Abuse (2)
- Mental Health Awareness
- Education Opportunity Gap
- Access to Higher Education
- Food Deserts
- LGBTQIA+ Services
- Mental Health
- Nutrition
- Education
- School-to-Prison Pipeline
- Sexual/Physical Assault
- Teen Homelessness

2017 (5 YouthBoards):
- Education Gap
- Mental Health (2)
- Abuse and Neglect
- Access to Higher Education
- Early Childhood Education (Emphasis on Reading Levels)
- Mental Health Training for Teachers
- Sexual Assault (2)
- Homelessness
- Substance Abuse
- Youth in Foster Care System

2018 (7 YouthBoards):
- Youth Homelessness
- Foster Care
- Preventative Programs
- Mental Health (3)
- Opportunities for Low-Income Students

2019 (10 YouthBoards):
- Immigrants/Refugees (Educational Support, Legal Assistance, and Health Care Access)
- Substance Abuse (2)
- Immigrant Resources
- Immigration Rights
- Suicide Prevention
- Climate Change
- Youth Homelessness (2)
- Mental Health (3)
- Mental Health Services
- Gun Violence (2)
- Sexual Health
- Youth Addiction Services
- Teen dating violence in marginalized communities
- The Effects of the High Cost of Living on Youth
- LGBTQ+ Rights
This map shows the top issue(s) for locations that have had YouthBoards for more than one year.

- **Boulder:**
  - Homelessness
  - Assault

- **North Denver Metro:**
  - Mental Health
  - LGBTQIA+

- **Aurora:**
  - Mental Health (various)

- **Northwest Metro:**
  - Mental Health

- **Denver:**
  - Mental Health

- **South Denver Metro:**
  - Mental Health

- **Douglas County:**
  - Mental Health
  - Assault
Some locations see the same needs year after year. This list includes all the needs that appear more than once in each location.

Central Denver:
- Mental Health (4)
- Education (3)
- Gangs/Violence (3)
- Dropout Prevention (2)
- Childhood poverty (2)
- Youth Homelessness (2)
- Reproductive Health and Education (2)
- Substance Abuse (2)

North Denver Metro:
- Mental Health (3)
- LGBTQIA+ Youth (3)
- Neglect & Abuse (2)
- Access to Higher Education (2)
- Substance Abuse (2)

Northwest Denver Metro:
- Mental Health Services (2)

South Denver Metro:
- Mental Health (3)
- Education (2)
- Healthy Food Access (2)
- Immigrant Support/Rights (2)

Boulder:
- Sexual/Physical Assault (3)
- Teen Homelessness (3)
- Mental Health (2)

Douglas County:
- Sexual/Physical Assault (2)
- Mental Health (2)

Aurora:
- Mental Health (2)
ON THE HORIZON

Research suggests that youth know the issues three years before adults (Journal of Community Psychology, 2014), and our data supports this theory. We can use YouthRoots’ needs assessment results to gain insight into emerging issues.

“Mental Health” first appears in the YouthRoots needs assessment results in 2013. It’s not until 2016 when there is sudden increased awareness of the mental health crisis in the United States, as judged by news article usage of the phrase “mental health.”

There are two issues that stand out in youth needs assessment data as the next critical issues:

- **Immigrants/Refugees**: Support for immigrants/refugees appears to be following the same trend as mental health did in 2013-2016. This issue appeared in the results of one YouthBoard in 2018, and seemed to be common knowledge across multiple YouthBoards by 2019. One YouthBoard in 2019 chose immigrants/refugees as their umbrella need, with a particular focus on education, access to health care, and legal assistance for this population.

- **Substance Abuse**: Though Substance Abuse has been a consistent need since 2015, the number of appearances has increased with time. Marijuana is the substance that appears most often in the descriptions, but alcohol, vaping, and mushrooms are additionally mentioned by name.
Tap into the knowledge of your community’s youth to stay informed about emerging issues.

Conducting a youth-led needs assessment doesn’t have to be hard or complicated, and it can provide you with valuable insight into what is happening on the ground with your youngest community members.

Here are some tips for conducting your own needs assessment:

- Gather a group of diverse youth who are representative of the wider community.
- Include elements that capture the intuitive knowledge of youth (discussion, surveys, etc.) and elements to bring in outside knowledge (research, expert speakers, etc.)
- Allow the youth to direct their process and decisions. This is where the magic happens!

For information on bringing YouthRoots to your community, visit our website WWW.YOUTHROOTS.ORG