



2021

# State of the Youth of Loudoun County



Prepared by the Loudoun County Advisory  
Commission on Youth

May 6, 2021

## To the Board of Supervisors

Thank you for the opportunity to advise the Loudoun County Board of Supervisors (Board) and serve the youth of Loudoun County. The Advisory Commission on Youth (ACOY) considers the health and connectedness of all of Loudoun's 129,000+ youth from pre-K to young adult. We gather as representatives from each Board Member's district and liaisons from Loudoun County Public Schools (LCPS), the Loudoun County Sheriff's Office (LCSO), Youth Advisory Council (YAC), Loudoun County Public Libraries (LCPL), and the Loudoun County Juvenile Court Services Unit (JCSU). We share the results of our work and gather input from the Department of Family Services and the Department of Mental Health, Substance Abuse, and Developmental Services. In 2021, ACOY expanded our community representatives to include Department of Family Services (DFS), Mental Health Services, Children's Programs, and County Administration.

While the pandemic has redirected some of our efforts, we continue to provide recommendations to the Board for Loudoun Youth's future. Our mission expanded this year to include the Youth Net initiative. Also, we met with Loudoun youth psychologists to assess the impact of the pandemic and social unrest on Loudoun Youth population. We provided additional data analysis and recommendations to the Loudoun County School Board based on their surveys to teachers and students to include a follow up survey of our own. And as always, we have compiled our annual report to the Board, so that you have the information you need to make decisions and policy for the benefit of Loudoun Youth. The report provides public data and analysis. We are volunteers appointed by the Board, and while many of our recommendations impact other Loudoun County government branches, we are only a committed group of volunteers serving the Board. It is ultimately up to the Board to use this information as they see fit and advise other government branches under their jurisdiction.

### Key Findings:

- Loudoun Youth are accomplished.
- Youth-led programming thrives in Loudoun County.
- On time graduation rates rose after four years of decline and remain above overall state levels however some populations and schools with those populations remain below the state average.
- Bullying and Drug Availability are still youth top concerns. Loudoun County Public Schools implementing promising interventions in response.
- Vaping stores opening surge continues normalizing inhalant use for Loudoun Youth.
- Some students may thrive in an online learning environment as opposed to in person attendance.
- Cascades is still the only Loudoun County library in the county with an after-hours teen center but during the pandemic, there has been success holding a virtual teen center with programming.
- Loudoun's youth population is becoming increasingly diverse, and schools are adding resources to accommodate this change.
- School chronic absenteeism is on an increasing trend through last reported data to VDOE.

**Key Recommendations:**

- Continue to support Youth-Led programming at all levels as these yield the largest participation and satisfaction among the youth population.
- A multi-step plan to reduce drug use and to address the perception of drug availability Loudoun Youth.
- Evaluate success and consider making distance learning available for as many classes as possible as a permanent option to run like the hybrid schooling is run under the pandemic response. Fund after hours teen centers (physical and virtual).
- Consider including learning lab time for the general curriculum once in-person schooling resumes.
- Fund the additional three culturally aware Attendance Officers (AO) proposed by LCPS to help reduce absenteeism and lower dropout rates of certain school populations.
- CAMPUS and EDGE programs, and other targeted interventions for underserved populations should continue.
- With the placement of a new school superintendent LCPS board should consider their background in educating diverse student populations.

Importantly, in learning from racially charged hate crimes occurring recently in other areas of the United States, the Loudoun Advisory Commission on Youth, will redouble our commitment advocating for youth-oriented programs, services and events that are inclusive, and which welcome and support young people of all backgrounds. The children and youth of Loudoun County are our most precious resource. We believe the diverse mix of cultures, races, religions, and socio-economic backgrounds found among them is part of what makes Loudoun one of the nation's most preferred places to live, do business and recreate. By nurturing an enthusiasm for our diversity and renouncing all policies and actions that might serve to undermine it, we are committed to creating an environment where all people — especially our children and youth — feel welcome, respected, and safe.

The following report offers current data for Loudoun's youth from a variety of government sponsored sources and offers the Board of Supervisors practical and affordable solutions to each problem presented. In most cases the solutions are inexpensive and do not require more than a commitment to reshape existing programming and resources for our kids.

The research for this report, data analysis, meetings to vet proposals, and other costs are contributed by the volunteer commission members. If you have questions or feedback about the data presented or recommendations made, please contact ACOY Vice Chair, Mr. Michael Reles at [mreles@comcast.net](mailto:mreles@comcast.net) or ACOY Chair, Dr. Jeffrey Goldman at [jeff@ieee.org](mailto:jeff@ieee.org).



## Loudoun Youth Are Accomplished.



You do not have to look far to see the achievements of our 129,000 Loudoun youth. Their hearts are big, and their hands are busy. For example, seventeen-year-old Loudoun student, Colby Samide found a way to use his hobby to help his community. The **Woodgrove High School** junior has been single-handedly building desks for students in need. Samide launched the Desks

for Distance Facebook page Sept. 2. A day later, he had the first desk built for donation and began cranking out simple but well-crafted and functional desks to help low-income students tackle distance learning during the Pandemic.

Three **Loudoun County high school students** have created a research fellowship program that spans across the globe. Kamran Majid, Varun Pasupuleti and Rahul Kumar created ALUNA Research at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic when they realized their extracurricular science and math activities would be canceled. The three high schoolers wanted to connect others who were interested in furthering their education in the fields by being able to contribute their research to published scientific journals. The fellowship program has grown beyond just Loudoun County, expanding to other countries such as Ghana, Egypt, and India.



The fellowship allows students to conduct research in a field that they are interested in. ALUNA Research has its fellows read more prestigious papers written at universities to get an understanding of the material they will need to produce. The goal is to contribute a new finding to the science field before getting it published.



**Members of Loudoun Team Resi-lution** react to the announcement of their top prize win during the 2019 Loudoun Youth Inc. Step Up Loudoun Youth Competition. The group is leading community efforts to keep the parkland around the Beaverdam Creek Reservoir litter-free. This winning project will help control litter at the Beaverdam

Reservoir as it reopens for public activities this summer. Other projects at Step Up allow retailers to put their online merchandise returns to use for charities and help get Girl Scouts more involved in STEM education.

On college signing day top division one schools from around the nation swoop in and sign our athletes and many of those athletes move on to play professionally.



Former **Briar Woods High School** Standout Trace McSorley made the most of his first opportunity to lead an offense in a National Football League regular season game. McSorley —



a quarterback selected by the Baltimore Ravens in the sixth round of the 2019 draft following a record-setting college career at Penn State — entered a Dec. 2 game at Pittsburgh. D.C. United made history signing a 16-year-old Loudoun attacker Kevin Paredes to a deal. Paredes, a **South Riding, Va.**, native made three appearances for D.C. United's USL Championship affiliate, Loudoun United before joining the Major League soccer professional side.



**Dominion High School placed first in the Large Varsity Hip Hop division** for the first time in school history. Dominion earned a score of 93 on its routine to finish ahead of 70-plus teams in the Hip Hop division. Dominion's national championship was the first for Loudoun County.



## Youth-Led Programming Thrives in Loudoun County

As young people build their knowledge, skills, and abilities to change the world, they should have positive, purposeful opportunities to develop and expand their commitment to positive social change. Youth-led programs are opportunities created by individuals and organizations where youth lead planning, decision-making, facilitation, reflection, and evaluation on issues that matter to them, using actions they want to use. In youth/adult partnerships adults can act in supportive and engaging ways while allowing Loudoun's youth to maintain the lead, direction, and authority. Loudoun is rich with Youth Led programming. Below are a few:

### Spotlight on Loudoun's Youth-Managed Activities

Step Up Loudoun Youth Competition	Loudoun Habitat for Humanities	Youth Advisory Council
Middle and high school youth across Loudoun County identify an issue in their school, neighborhood, or community, create a plan to address that issue, and implement the plan. The goal is to encourage, support and reward the youth of Loudoun County for making positive changes in their own lives and the lives of others.	High school students work with Loudoun Habitat to host fundraising events, provide volunteers for Habitat events, and spread the word about the work of Habitat in Loudoun County. This provides the opportunity for students to learn valuable leadership skills, understand economic issues facing the community and earn service hours needed for graduation.	The Youth Advisory Council (YAC) is a student led organization composed of highly motivated teens who reside in Loudoun County Virginia. As a leadership development, community service, and civic engagement program, YAC is mentored by Loudoun County Parks, Recreation and Community Services Youth Initiative and Teen Services Specialists.
The Happiness Foundation	TED Ed Club	Youth in Government Day
Students that stand up against drunk driving and honor the memory of Haeley, Spencer, Johnny and all the lives lost to this tragedy. Ten thousand shirts later, the Happiness Foundation clings firmly to its message that people have fun, live life to the fullest, and stay safe by not drinking and driving.	TED Ed Club's mission is to spark and celebrate the ideas of every student and educator in the world.  TED Ed program for middle school and high school students. This will be a self-paced program with guidance from teen youth leaders and adult support staff.	Youth in Government Day is an annual spring event, which provides the opportunity for Loudoun County high school students to meet and speak with members of the Board of Supervisors while learning about Loudoun County government departments and potential careers.

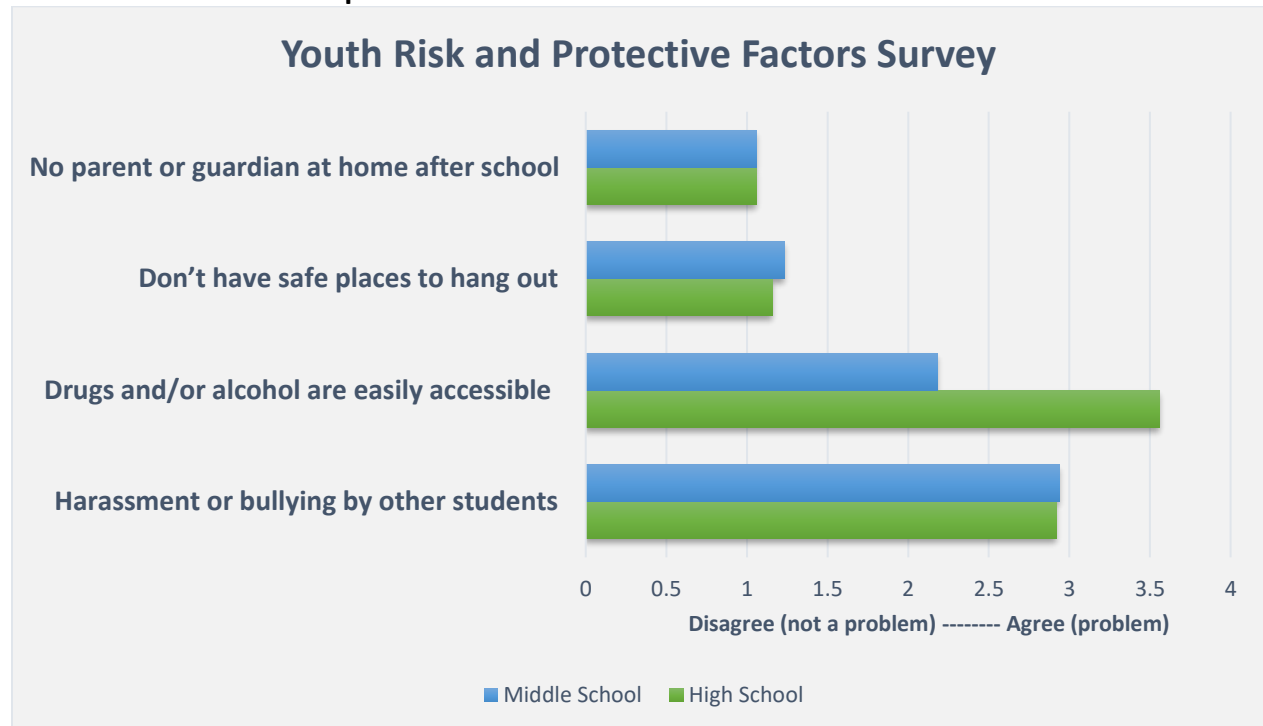
## Youth Tell Board of Supervisors and School Board of Problems with Drug Availability and Bullying

Loudoun County invests in its schools and services more than any similar sized county in the nation. Despite the investment each of the past five years, on time graduation rates have dropped, absenteeism steadily increased, Hispanic students are dropping out at an alarming rate, and students are stressed by unmanageable workloads and expectations. Loudoun Students report they are most impacted by bullying and a scourge of drug supply. When we went to the youth and asked about key protective factors and risk factors what they told us was clear and insightful.

### Loudoun Youth Report Bullying and Drug Availability as Their Top Concerns.

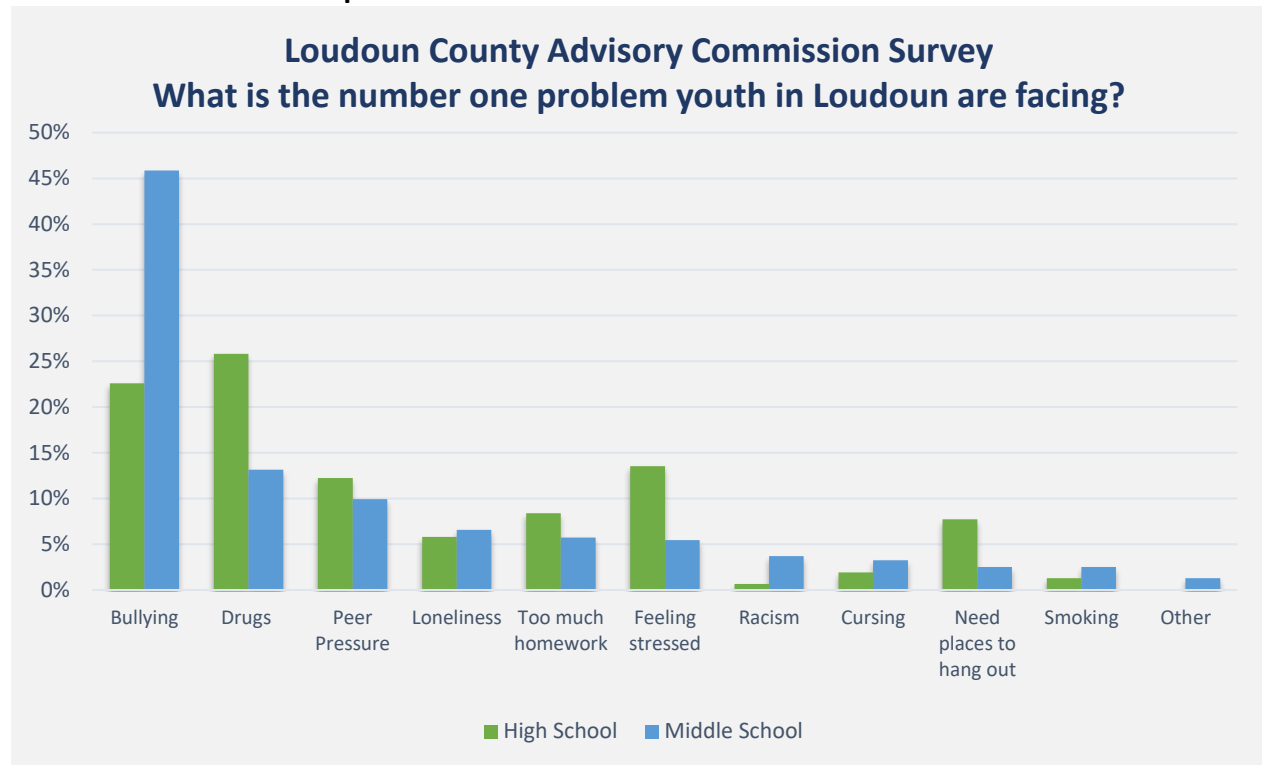
The data from our survey of over 1,500 Loudoun youth informed our conclusions and recommendations on the health, success, and struggles of our County's kids. We asked each youth to consider four preventive factors that facilitate their ability to grow up in a safe and supportive environment; and four risk factors that stifle that ability. The two biggest risk factors they named were: 1) drugs and alcohol are easily available, and 2) students are bullying and harassing each other. Survey results shown below:

**Chart: Loudoun Youth Reported Selected Risk Factors**



Source: Tabulated Advisory Commission on Youth student survey results



**Chart: Loudoun Youth Reported “Problems Faced”**

Source: Tabulated Advisory Commission on Youth student survey results

### What Is Bullying?

Bullying is unwanted, aggressive behavior among school aged children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behavior is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time. Both kids who are bullied and who bully others may have serious, lasting problems. To be considered bullying, the behavior must be aggressive and include: An Imbalance of Power: Kids who bully use their power—such as physical strength, access to embarrassing information, or popularity—to control or harm others. Power imbalances can change over time and in different situations, even if they involve the same people. Repetition: Bullying behaviors happen more than once or have the potential to happen more than once.

Bullying includes actions such as making threats, spreading rumors, attacking someone physically or verbally, and excluding someone from a group on purpose.


Loudoun High school teens said they have easy access to drugs, both at school and in other places. Loudoun Teens develop networks and lingo to find drugs and distribute them to each other most often without adults figuring out what is going on. Loudoun is the home to dozens of vape shops and hookah bars that glorify drug use. Further legitimizing drug use occurred with Virginia’s governor signed a law that decriminalized the simplest drug charges related to marijuana possession with simple possession of marijuana is now punishable by a \$25 civil fine instead of criminal charges. This provides a level of confusion by presenting conflicting messages to Loudoun Youth.

## A Closer Look at Youth Drug Use

Youth can easily become addicted to alcohol or other drugs. Substance use during the teen and young adult years foretells addiction in early adulthood. The human brain continues to develop well into one's twenties, making the adolescent and young adult years a critical time for establishing healthy behavior and habits. Substance use during these years creates the potential for a variety of long-term negative effects. 90% of people with addictions started using substances in their teen years.

*The National Institute of Health Survey on Drug Use and Health indicate that among those adults who first tried marijuana at the age of 14 or younger, 13.2 percent were classified with illicit drug dependence or abuse later in life; this percentage was 6 times higher than that for adults who first used marijuana at the age of 18 or older. In fact, among adolescents, the transition from Initiation to regular use of alcohol, marijuana, and other drugs often occurs within 3 years.*

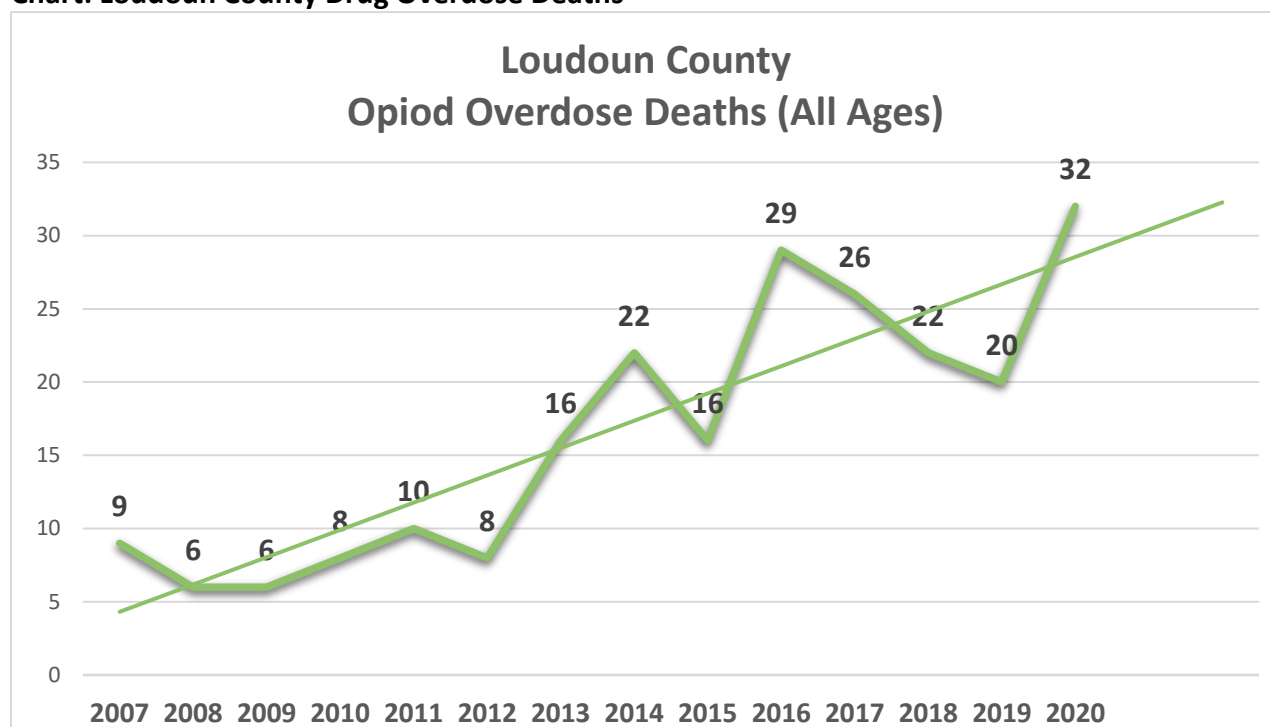
More than 81.2% drug users have experience of first-time drug intake before they reach 20 years. More than 32% of drug users took drugs for the first time in their life. As early as 15 years old.<sup>1</sup> Adolescence period is generally regarded as a critical risk period for the initiation of alcohol use, with multiple studies showing associations between age at first alcohol use and the occurrence of alcohol abuse or dependence. Our own Loudoun High School students named drug availability as the number one concern. Loudoun County is facing a steady rise in drug overdose deaths. While only some of these are youth, nearly all initiated drug use as youth.



**RISK FACTORS ARE THE PRECURSORS OF BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS. PROTECTIVE FACTORS ARE THE COMPONENTS OR CIRCUMSTANCES THAT REDUCE THE PROBABILITY OF YOUTH DEVELOPING PROBLEMS.**

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<sup>1</sup> BMC Psychiatry. 2017; 17: 10. Published online 2017 Jan 11. doi: 10.1186/s12888-016-1191-0 PMCID: MC5225546 PMID: 28077106 Age of onset of substance use and psychosocial problems among individuals with substance use disorders

**Chart: Loudoun County Drug Overdose Deaths**

Source: Virginia Medical Examiner -

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1rxETz8VO68vYu686iOualUd13P0pXR5gRWqujyWsaCl/edit#gid=932188522>

**Loudoun Drug Use and Availability:** Early use of any illicit drug increases a person's chances of developing addiction or using more toxic substances. Remember, drugs change brains—and this can lead to addiction and other serious problems. So, preventing early use of drugs or alcohol may go a long way in reducing these risks. If we can prevent young people from experimenting with drugs, we may reduce incidents of drug addiction. Risk of drug abuse increases greatly during times of transition. For a teenager, risky times include moving or changing schools. In early adolescence, when children advance from elementary through middle school, they face new and challenging social and academic situations. Often during this period, children are exposed to illicit substances such as cigarettes and alcohol for the first time. When they enter high school, teens encounter greater availability of drugs, drug use by older teens, and social activities where drugs are used.

As mentioned in the survey above, Loudoun high school students perceive drugs are readily available. Loudoun County schools should continue to partner with existing Loudoun County Sheriff staff on programs such as DARE and though seminars by the Prevention Alliance of Loudoun (PAL) to message the consequences of drug offenses through broad based high school presentations in health class. Loudoun should adopt a peer messaging program that has high school students presenting anti-drug messaging to middle school students for their community service hour requirement. Already the Sources of Strength is currently implemented in 27 secondary schools which promotes healthy activities, physical/mental health, mentoring,



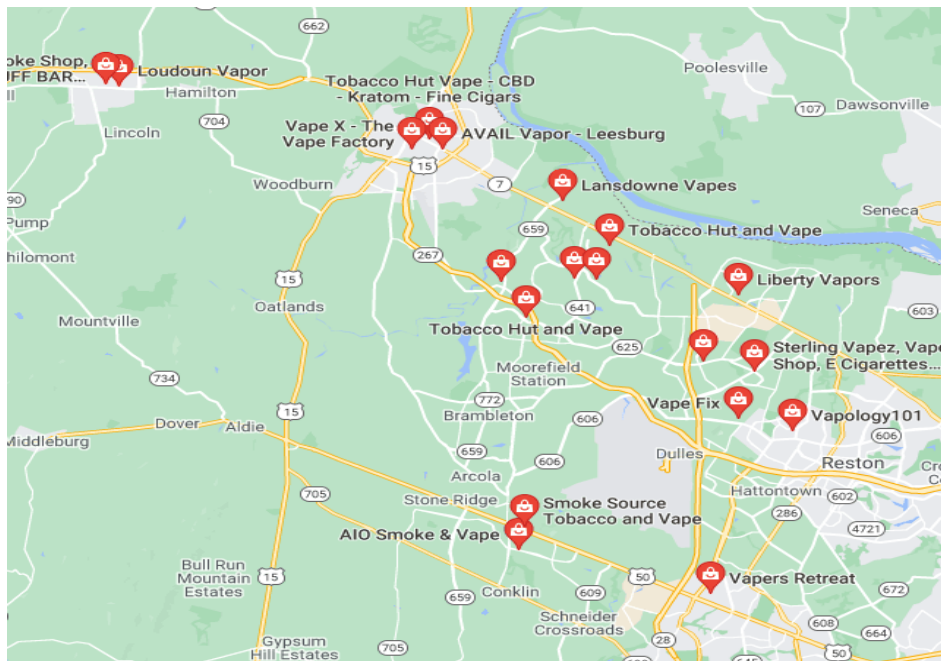
positive friends, generosity, spirituality. LCPS uses best practices to determine which messaging program has evidence that it has an impact on student behavior.

### Vaping Normalizes Inhalant Use Among Loudoun Youth.

Vaping is the act of inhaling and exhaling the aerosol, often referred to as vapor, which is produced by an e-cigarette or similar device. The term is used because e-cigarettes do not produce tobacco smoke, but rather an aerosol, often mistaken for water vapor, that consists of fine particles. Many of these particles contain varying amounts of toxic chemicals, which have been linked to cancer, as well as respiratory and heart disease.



The LCSO reports in just the past year high school-aged students using electronic cigarettes increased 78%. In Loudoun County, vapes have been found on students in both middle and high school. Vaping has grown in popularity with the addition of nineteen vape and smoke shops in Loudoun alone. Vaping devices include not just e-cigarettes, but also vape pens and advanced personal vaporizers (also known as ‘MODS’). E-cigarettes, which resemble smoked cigarettes, and vape pens (because they resemble large fountain pens) are typically simpler in design and less expensive than devices that have been customized by the user.



Nineteen new  
Vape shops  
open around  
Loudoun  
County.



In June 2019 **ACOY joined the American Association for Cancer Research to brief the Senate on impacts of vaping and interventions that work.** At this presentation, Senators Dick Durbin (D-Illinois), Senator Tim Kaine (D-Virginia), and Mitch McConnell (R- Kentucky) introduced legislation to raise the minimum age for vaping product sales to 21. Providing a window into the actual experience of American youth, Michael Reles, vice chair of the Advisory Commission on Youth, Loudoun County, Virginia, joined the panel. He said vaping is a significant issue among local youth and concurred with the panelists who noted that teens often perceive vaping as less dangerous than smoking combustible cigarettes.



#### **MHSADS Youth Programming:**

The Prevention and Intervention (P/I) services from the Department of Mental Health,

Substance Abuse and Developmental Services (MHSADS) promote public health using evidence-based approaches for the public and strategies specifically tailored for high-risk populations (e.g., prevention of youth suicide, substance use and bullying.). P/I services are both school and community based. P/I have strong collaborative partnerships with Loudoun County Public Schools, public and private agencies, and local residential complexes.

- The Loudoun County Prevention Team of the MHSADS Department provides merchant education and associated materials to prevent sales to underage youth.
- P/I provide Club REAL (Raising Education, Achievement, and Leadership), in the schools and in community-based settings as a free after-school activity and Camp REAL which is a summer program. Club REAL and Camp REAL provided by P/I include Life Skills Training which is an evidence-based violence/gang and substance abuse prevention/intervention group for selected high risk elementary, middle, and high school students.
- Youth can be referred by school counselors, social workers, probation officers, and clinicians. MHSADS P/I also facilitate the Prevention Alliance of Loudoun (PAL). PAL is a coalition comprised of diverse community stakeholders that works to address a variety of substance abuse related issues and receives special funding from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) to address opioid prevention specifically.

**Recommendations:**

1. Leverage what research tells us about middle school influencers, **adding drug prevention programs and interventions in all middle schools, delivered by high school students using the model in Sources of Strength** rather than school counselors, uniformed police, or other adult staff.
2. Using online training of staff and Student Assistance Team, train Loudoun school professionals on **Screening, Intervening and Referral to Counseling** for substance use.
3. Develop a **“see something say something” anti-bullying social media program** that explains the negative consequences of bullying on social media and the platforms where this occurs. Loudoun schools should work with the county to develop age-appropriate interventions.
4. As part of the adopted budget for the Loudoun County Public Schools **require a funding set aside and requirement to report back to the board** from the school district and the Advisory Commission on Youth, updating the student responses to the following specific risk factors and protective factors:
  - a. Youth experienced (victim or witness) harassment or bullying by other students.
  - b. Youth perceive drugs and/or alcohol are easily accessible.
  - c. Youth do not feel they have safe places to hang out.
  - d. Youth do not have a parent or guardian at home after school.





There is no question youth were impacted. Mental health concerns skyrocketed<sup>2</sup>; stress levels increased<sup>3</sup>. Students have missed out socially. Others have delayed entry into LCPS or have chosen private school alternatives. Our youth have experienced loss and have felt they lost out on a year's worth of traditional experience they will never get back.

That said, a few segments have thrived. The youth population that was already anxious about attending school in person prior to the pandemic, suddenly in distance learning have found themselves set up for success<sup>4</sup>. They no longer are debilitated by physical attendance. Those that felt bullying suddenly had a safe place to learn. Youth introverts who tend to thrive in solitude, are finding distance learning more in line with their temperament<sup>5</sup>.

While not a substitute for in person learning, it is worth offering distance learning options after COVID ends. This is exactly the current hybrid format where some students are learning the same in-class taught curriculum but as distance learners. Having an option for students to continue to participate in school as a distance learner for some to all the school year helps several segments. The student may need a break from their anxieties but do not have to fall behind. They may have an illness but still able to participate. They may have to stay home to

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<sup>2</sup> - We had a guest speaker at our October 2020 meeting who is part of the Atlantic Counseling Group. This 5-person practice, one of the largest in Loudoun, saw the calls for new appointments jump dramatically since the pandemic. They have had to turn away as many as 75 new patient treatment requests each quarter and this was after hiring a new full-time physician (see ACOY November 2020 commentary).

<sup>3</sup> LCPS administered a student survey in 2020 where they expressed their stress levels with their course load. Nearly half of all students reported being overwhelmed in 3 or more of their classes. That number jumped to 64% at the High School Level. See ACOY December 2020 Special Report where we show how grades can be used as a common baseline to confirm the pandemic contribution to significant increases in mental health concerns among youth.

<sup>4</sup> Our evidence is mostly anecdotal from the Atlantic Counseling Group, but it should be obvious to the reader that when bullying, social stressors, and external factors are removed from the youth population segments that are debilitated by this, that segment will thrive.

<sup>5</sup> It should be further noted that these recommendations differ than LCPS's interpretation of Dr. Johnathon Dalton's presentations to the School Board. Dr. Dalton, whose Center for Anxiety and Behavioral Change company subscribes to "Exposure Therapy," has made his recommendations to LCPS on multiple occasions suggesting students who use distance learning as an avoidance mechanism will make matters worse in the long run. We do not disagree with Dr. Dalton's approach. We are simply pointing out that LCPS is not equipped to properly implement "Exposure Therapy." Remote Learning should remain an option to allow those youth crippled with anxiety to re-enter their in-person environment on their own schedule, not a binary all or nothing that LCPS intends to implement in the Fall of 2021.

care for a sibling or elderly caregiver. Students learning from home, even on a part-time basis, also aids in overcrowding issues and alleviate overcrowding for individual classes.

It is important to note that current LCPS policy only allows for Virtual Loudoun online class enrollment when the student's home school does not offer the course or there is a conflict with Academy enrollment. Virtual Virginia is effectively blocked for all LCPS students. We are instead proposing all classes offered today, also be offered online like hybrid learning has operated in 2020.

**Safe Places for Teens to Gather:** We have always been an advocate of safe spaces for our youth. In addition to a home learning environment as a safe space for some, the libraries have been our focus given the availability of a central physical location in each county for dedicated teen centers. During the pandemic, the libraries have creatively adapted their after-hours teen-center program to run virtually each month and thus be available to every youth in the county, regardless of transportation or availability at their local branch. Friday night virtual event programing needs to continue beyond just the pandemic **until every library has a well-equipped dedicated physical teen center and after-hours program.** Even then, we still think a virtual teen center has permanent place in our county.



**Table: 2021 Update - Loudoun Libraries Offering Teen Centers and After-Hours Teen Centers**

Library	Location Served	Teen Center Area	After Hours Teen Center
Ashburn	Ashburn	Yes	No
Brambleton (NEW)	Brambleton	Yes	No
Cascades	Potomac Falls	Yes	Yes
Gum Spring	Stone Ridge	Yes	No
Lovettsville	Lovettsville	Yes	No
Middleburg	Middleburg	Yes	No
Purcellville	Purcellville	Yes	No
Rust	Leesburg	Yes	No
Sterling	Sterling	Yes	No

Source: Loudoun County: <https://library.loudoun.gov/Kids-Teens/Just-for-Teens/Your-Libraries>

We also turned to our students to learn what they need. When we surveyed students, we learned they are strong advocates of their learning lab day. When the schedule changed to an asynchronous time instead, they were extremely disappointed. They used to use learning lab for a variety of learning options. In some cases, their time was used to get extra help on a previous lesson. Unlike asynchronous day where all students are present working independently with the teacher present, learning lab allows students to leave if they are comfortable on their own. If a student needs help, they are reluctant to do so during asynchronous time because they effectively must announce to the class publicly, they do not understand the material and need help from the teacher. It increases anxieties and lowers self-esteem. More importantly students who need help, do not ask in asynchronous time. Learning lab on the other hand offers a safe space as those who remain all need help and do not have the perceived shame of announcing their deficiency to their peers in class.

Others use learning lab time to work out the lessons on their own or work on another class to absorb the material taught. Still others use their time as a break from the full days in front of their screens. Asynchronous time requires students to remain and still be attentive as they may be called upon. It does not offer a break. This “experiment” that was effectively conducted during the pandemic school year, having learning lab and then taking it away, suggests changing the way we run our program of instruction. Learning lab has been viewed positively by all involved from teachers to students to parents. Instead of being a straight set of 5 days’ worth of classroom time, the students value learning lab time, even if it is every other week or a half day a week or even a few hours a week. In some cases, a few high schools were doing something like this before the pandemic. However, they are more like hybrid days where classroom time is simply split up differently instead of a dedicated learning lab day or learning lab time.

### **Recommendations:**

1. Evaluate success and Consider making distance learning available for as many classes as possible as a permanent option to run like the hybrid schooling is run under the pandemic response.



2. Fund after hours teen centers without set programming available on a permanent basis to all of Loudoun's youth, both virtually and in person.
3. LCPS Department of Instruction, based on input from school administration, staff, and other factors, should consider folding learning lab time into the general curriculum for all students

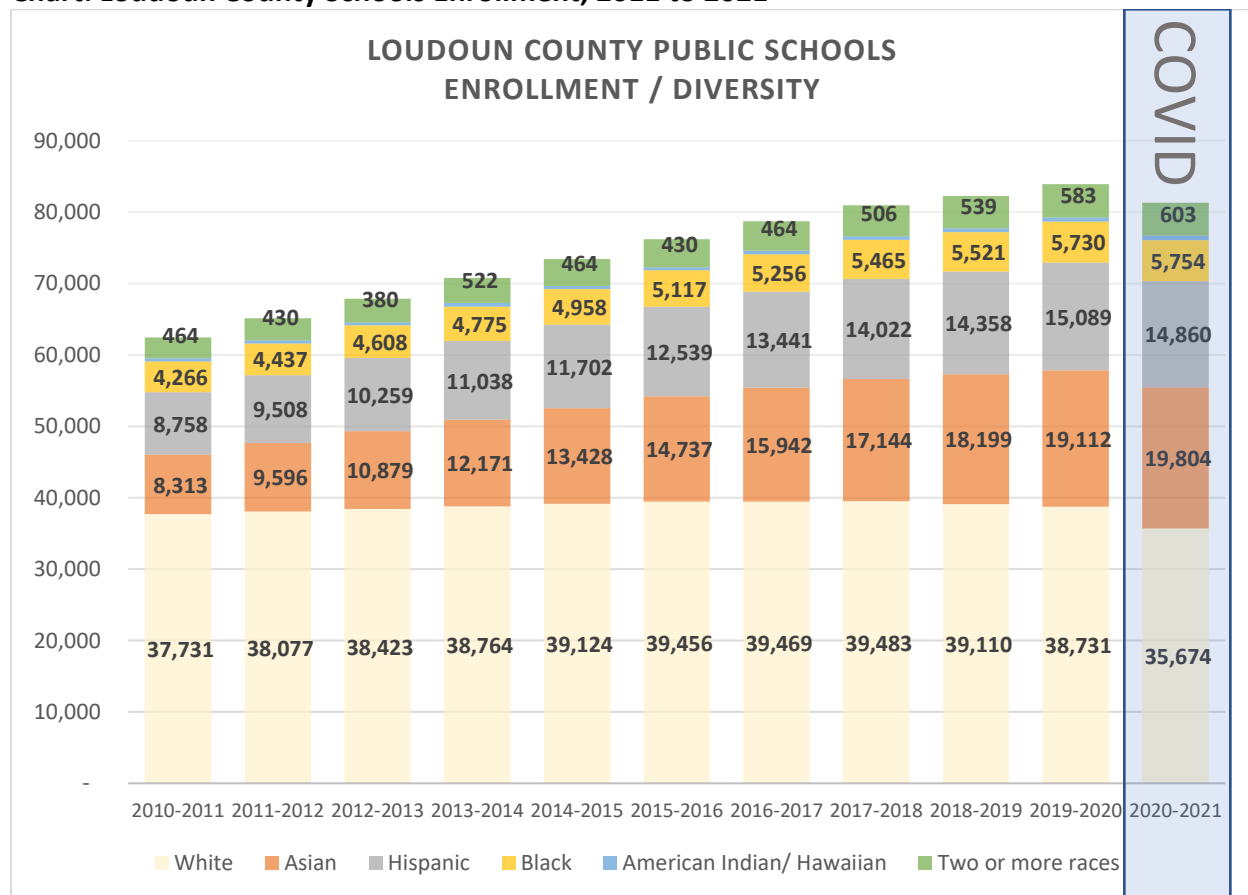
## Diversity Provides Challenges and Opportunities



Loudoun’s youth attend school with an increasingly more diverse population. This creates an opportunity to develop an understanding of the perspectives of children from different backgrounds and learn to function in a multicultural, multiethnic environment. Demands increase to find the most effective ways to help all students succeed academically as well as learn to get along with each other. Teachers are

faced with the challenge of making instruction “culturally responsive” for all students while not favoring one group over another.

**Chart: Loudoun County Schools Enrollment, 2011 to 2021**



Source: Virginia Department of Education School Quality Profile <https://schoolquality.virginia.gov/>

## **Loudoun Minority Students Not Fairly and Fully Represented in Loudoun Academies**

**The County board of supervisors and the school board work hand in hand in the financing and delivery of education to most Loudoun youth.** This has not happened without stress and growing pains. Following a thorough investigation by Virginia's Office of the Attorney General, they found Loudoun school policies and practices did, in fact, result in a disparate negative impact that harmed Black/African American and Latinx/Hispanic students and kept them from gaining admission to Loudoun Academies.



On February 18, 2021, the Virginia Attorney General Mark R. Herring felt the situation was so dire that he secured an enforceable slate of commitments from Loudoun County Public Schools (LCPS) to reform policies, invest in minority community outreach, and submit to third party monitoring, among other commitments, in order to promote equitable educational access for minority students following the first investigation ever conducted by the Office of Attorney General into allegations of systemic racial discrimination in a Virginia public school system. This agreement between Attorney General Herring's Office of Civil Rights and Loudoun County Public Schools will be in effect through June 30, 2024.

## Improving Minority Youth Connectedness

Disconnected youth are young people who are neither working nor in school. Emphasis is placed upon this group because the years between the late teens and the mid-twenties are believed to be a critical period during which young people form adult identities and move toward independence. The effects of youth disconnection—limited education, social exclusion, lack of work experience, and fewer opportunities to develop mentors and valuable work connections—can have long-term consequences that snowball across the life course, eventually influencing everything from earnings and self-sufficiency to physical and emotional wellbeing. Absenteeism is an early indicator that youth are having a problem making connections.

**The 2020 on-time graduation rate at Loudoun County public high schools was 96.8 %**, which exceeds the statewide average. This rate follows four years of declining rates. For those graduates completing high school within four years. The 2019-2020 rate ranked 19th among Virginia's 131 school divisions in on-time graduation. In 2015, Loudoun ranked 10<sup>th</sup>. To better understand the overall on time graduation rates, we looked more closely at the rates by school. We found Loudoun's most diverse schools were closest to or below the state average as shown below.

**Table: FY 2018-19 on-time graduation rates by school**

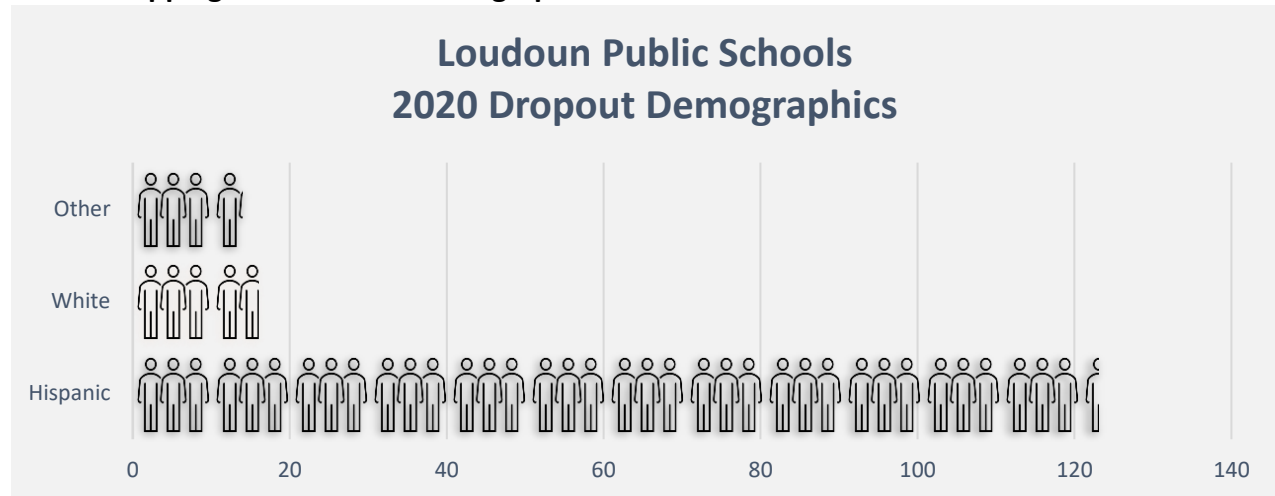
School	2019	2020
Park View High School	77.1 %	89.7%
Tuscarora High School	88.0 %	91.5%
State Average	91.5 %	92.3%
Dominion High School	90.8 %	93.9%
Heritage High School	93.6 %	94.8%
Loudoun County High School	91.5 %	96.5%
Broad Run High School	97.1 %	97.2%
Potomac Falls High School	94.4 %	97.3%
Loudoun Valley High School	97.4 %	97.9%
John Champe High School	98.1 %	98.0%
Stone Bridge High School	98.1 %	98.1%
Riverside High School	97.4 %	98.5%
Woodgrove High School	97.4 %	98.9%
Rock Ridge High School	99.0 %	99.0%
Freedom High School	98.5 %	99.4%
Briar Woods High School	98.6 %	99.6%

Source: Virginia Department of Education: Virginia Cohort Reports

[https://www.doe.virginia.gov/statistics\\_reports/graduation\\_completion/cohort\\_reports/index.shtml](https://www.doe.virginia.gov/statistics_reports/graduation_completion/cohort_reports/index.shtml)

Many factors may place students at risk and contribute to their decision to drop out of school. These include school, community, and family related factors. In many cases, no one factor leads to a student's decision to drop out, rather it is a combination of factors. In Loudoun, most students dropping out of school are Hispanic. While Hispanic students make up just under 20% of the school population, they represent 80% of students dropping out as shown below:



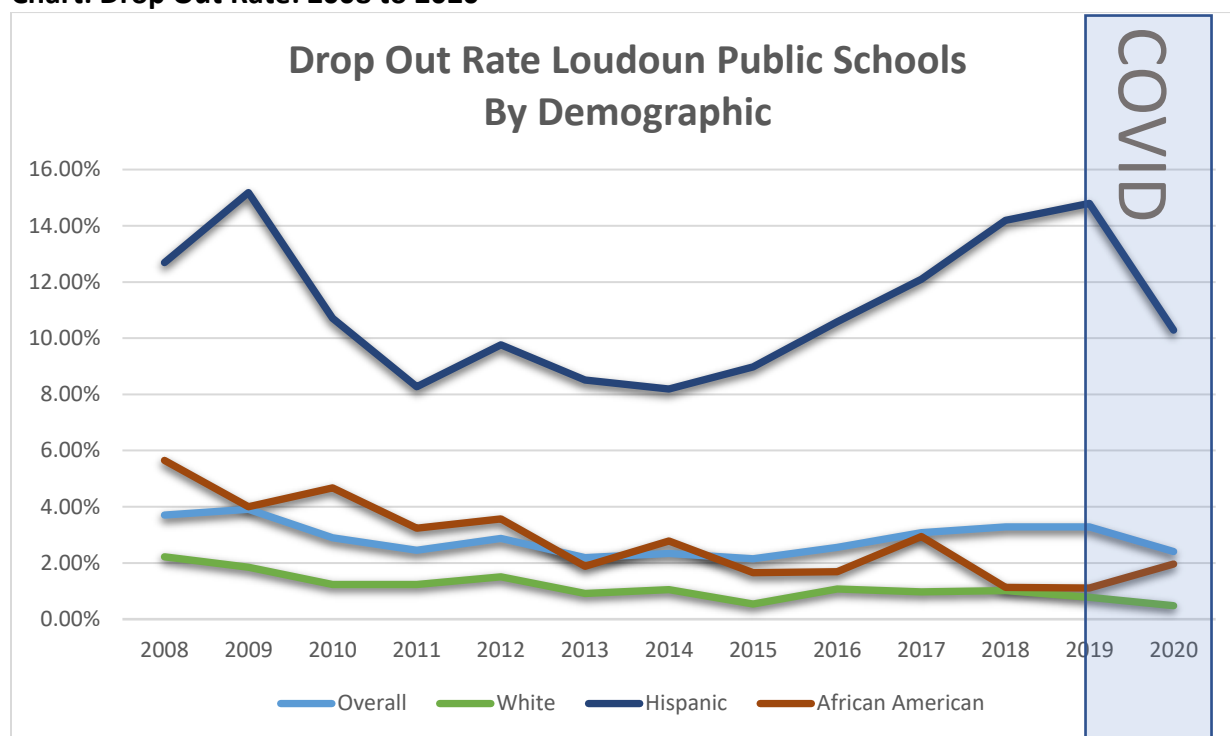
**Chart: Dropping out of School Demographics**

Virginia Department of Education: Virginia Cohort Reports

[http://www.doe.virginia.gov/statistics\\_reports/graduation\\_completion/cohort\\_reports/index.shtml](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/statistics_reports/graduation_completion/cohort_reports/index.shtml)

Recent Urban Institute research in Langley Park, Maryland, a Central American immigrant enclave outside Washington, DC, found that high school dropouts in the neighborhood were not “disconnected.” They were leaving school early to work at a rate four times the national average. The trend is most pronounced among first- and second-generation Latino immigrants whose families are notoriously under-served by our federal safety net and struggling to make ends meet. But it is not exclusive of these groups. A Pew Hispanic research study found that nearly 75 percent of all Latinos stop attending school, either before or after graduating from high school, to help their families economically. To be effective, solutions to the Latino drop-out problem—particularly in our fast-growing immigrant communities—should couple school-based engagement and achievement strategies with approaches that support not only the student, but their parents and family.

ACOY looked closer at historical dropout rate differences in Loudoun schools. We found Hispanic students have a long history of dropping out at a greater rate than all other groups. In fact, it steadily worsened during the period 2013 to 2019 where 14 of every 100 students dropped out.

**Chart: Drop Out Rate: 2008 to 2020**

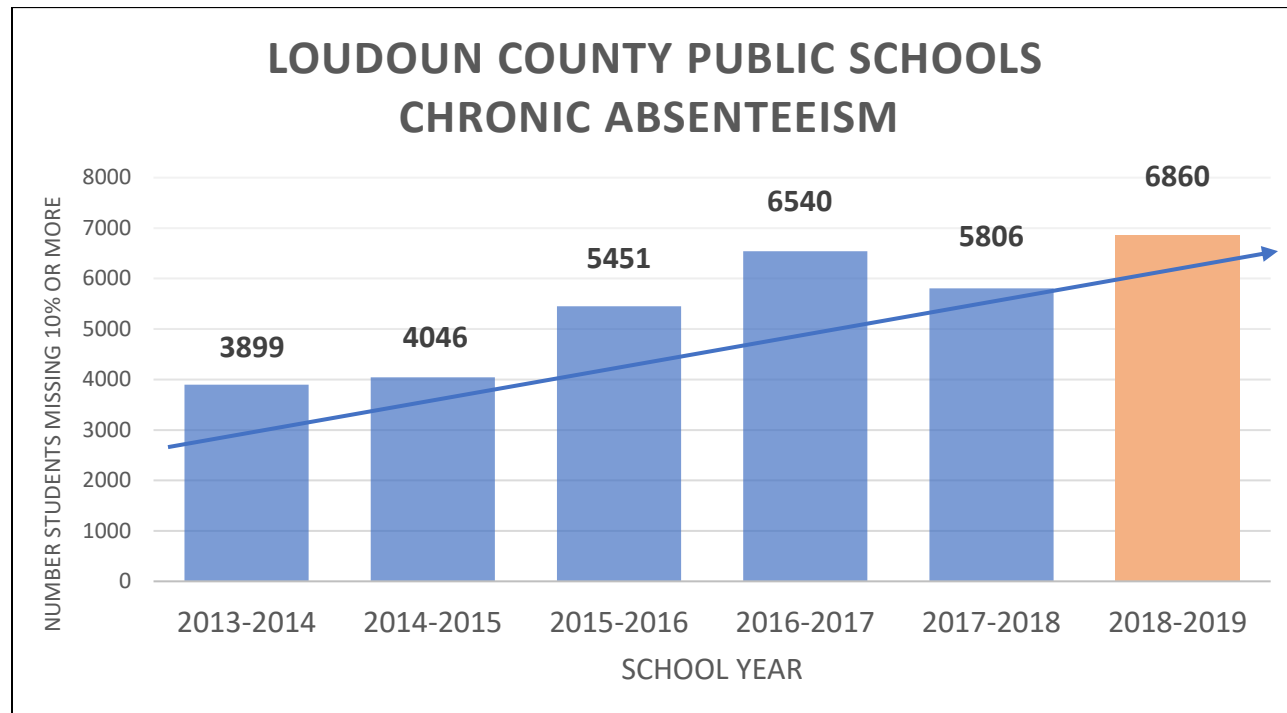
Source: Virginia Department of Education: Virginia Cohort Reports

[http://www.doe.virginia.gov/statistics\\_reports/graduation\\_completion/cohort\\_reports/index.shtml](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/statistics_reports/graduation_completion/cohort_reports/index.shtml)

**School Attendance Is A Protective Factor, and Chronic Absenteeism Is A Risk Factor, for Youth:** The Virginia Department of Education reports daily attendance is critical to success in school. A student is considered chronically absent if they are absent for 10% or more of the school year, regardless of whether the absences are excused or unexcused. Per the U.S. Department of Education<sup>6</sup>:

- Children who are chronically absent in preschool, kindergarten, and first grade are much less likely to read on grade level by the third grade.
- Students who cannot read at grade level by the third grade are four times more likely to drop out of high school.
- By high school, regular attendance is a better dropout indicator than test scores.
- A student who is chronically absent in any year between grades eight and 12 is seven times more likely to drop out of school.
- The calculation for chronic absenteeism includes only students enrolled for at least half the school year.

<sup>6</sup> US Department of Education, CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM IN THE NATION'S SCHOOLS, <https://www2.ed.gov/datastory/chronicabsenteeism.html>

**Table: Loudoun Schools Chronic Absenteeism**

Note: The Virginia Department of Education defines Chronic Absenteeism as a student missing 10% or more of the total school year.

Source: Virginia Department of Education: Loudoun Public Schools: Chronic Absenteeism: All Students

<http://schoolquality.virginia.gov/divisions/loudoun-county-public-schools>

A closer look at the characteristics of chronically absent students in Loudoun County shows that the Hispanic and poor students' chronic absenteeism is double the County average. No other race or ethnic student group presents this risk factor.

The promise of a good education system should be that ZIP code, skin color, family background, and economic status are not a predictor of a student's success. While each of our students comes from different circumstances, this should not limit our systems or our expectations for ensuring that every student is fully equipped for their life after high school. It is essential to understand the demographics of your district—both students and staff. Culturally responsive education facilitates and supports the achievement of all students. In a culturally responsive classroom, effective teaching and learning occur in a culturally supported, learner-centered context, whereby the strengths students bring to school are identified, nurtured, and utilized to promote student achievement. Culturally responsive education comprises three dimensions: (a) institutional, (b) personal, and (c) instructional.

The institutional dimension reflects the administration and its policies and values. The personal dimension refers to the cognitive and emotional processes teachers must engage in to become culturally responsive. The instructional dimension includes materials, strategies, and activities that form the basis of instruction. All three dimensions significantly interact in the teaching and

learning process and are critical to understanding the effectiveness of culturally responsive education.

**Recommendations:**

1. Add **multilingual attendance officers** who encourage attendance and/or reward attendance improvements among Hispanic and economically disadvantaged students.
2. **Chronic absenteeism requires interventions in targeted populations.** This should include activity buses to get students home following afterschool activities, culturally relevant afterschool activities, rewarding attendance, and co-locating community services in schools that serve the at-risk populations.
3. Continue support of the **CAMPUS and EDGE programs** to promote college opportunities to underserved students.
4. With the placement of a new school superintendent, LCPS board should consider background in **educating diverse student populations.**



## Loudoun Youth Juvenile Justice Involvement

The table below indicates the number of youths who have been referred to intake from 2013 through FY 2019. Juvenile crime in Loudoun County has been dropping steadily for the past five (5) years. The table below (Loudoun Juvenile Offenses) indicates the number of offenses reported to the Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court Service Unit (JCSU) by law enforcement in Loudoun County. These numbers do not reflect the number of youths who have appeared in court on a formal petition. Many youths who are arrested by law enforcement are diverted from a formal Court petition and are referred to alternative supports and services, including community service, online educational programming, or restorative justice circles. Loudoun JCSU is one of the state leaders in diversion rates. In FY2020, the JCSU reported a 55% diversion rate for all youth referred to the JCSU.

**Table: Loudoun Schools Student Offenses**

Offense Category	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Other Offenses Against Persons	533	447	467	582	606	715	NA
Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drug Offenses	213	247	234	225	496	707	NA
Disorderly or Disruptive Behavior Offenses	443	362	361	380	412	489	NA
Offenses Against Student	111	167	190	283	264	346	NA
Offenses Against Staff	38	39	50	76	86	95	NA
Weapons Offenses	29	39	34	36	44	45	NA
Property Offenses	44	43	42	53	38	38	NA

Source: Virginia Department of Education School Report Card 2017-2018.

<http://schoolquality.virginia.gov/divisions/loudoun-county-public-schools>

**Table: Loudoun Juvenile Offenses**

Offense Category	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
<b>Total Juvenile Criminal Complaints</b>	<b>1,617</b>	<b>1,876</b>	<b>1,816</b>	<b>1,775</b>	<b>1,525</b>	<b>1,194</b>	<b>1,290</b>
Felony	222	219	285	391	335	163	243
Class 1 Misdemeanor	621	924	889	796	648	566	576
Class 2-4 Misdemeanor	210	255	231	205	167	121	147
Child in Need of Services /Supervisor	148	191	185	236	182	181	139

Source: Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice - Loudoun Court Service Unit (20L FIPS 107). Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ). [www.djj.virginia.gov](http://www.djj.virginia.gov) › pdf › DRG › CSU-DRG-FY20-DataXLS

**Evening Reporting Center:** The Loudoun County Evening Reporting Center (ERC) was closed the purpose of the ERC was to provide an intervention for court-involved youth who have been referred by probation staff, and in some cases ordered by the court for noncompliant behavior with probation and court expectations. The ERC served up to eight youth Monday through Friday from 4:00 PM to 8:00 PM. The ERC provided dinner, mentoring, educational and recreational activities for youth.

## Recommendations:

1. Return the **Evening Reporting Center** or provide a resource for high risk and court involved youth to attend afterschool and evenings.
2. Provide free and/or affordable community-based prevention services and programming through the Department of Parks, Recreation and Community Services (PRCS), Libraries, and local nonprofits, located in the communities where youth and families can easily access services. Evidence-based programming targeting disadvantaged youth is especially recommended. These services and programs should be provided outside of the juvenile justice system to prevent court-involvement and “widening the net” of the juvenile justice system.

Thank You to Contributors and Board of Supervisors:

Our appointed volunteers work for you, the Loudoun County Board of Supervisors. Many of our recommendations are of interest to other governing bodies in Loudoun County. Our report provides our analysis for everyone, related governing bodies, residents, and youth focused groups alike. However, decisions and actions based upon our recommendations rest with the Board of Supervisors. ACOY does not have the authority to do anything other than to inform the Board that appointed us. We do not have influence over other governing bodies such as Loudoun County Public Schools, Libraries, the Sheriff's Office, etc. even though many of our recommendations apply to those governing bodies. Sometimes these groups adopt our recommendations on their own such as the Sheriff's Office creating and distributing cyber bullying awareness training. However, reading and acting on our report is strictly voluntary. It is ultimately up to the Loudoun County Board of Supervisors to directly influence these governing groups.

ACOY presents our recommendations driven by data. In many cases, we do not have access to granular data at population segments we would like to analyze. As such, our conclusions to some may appear to cover broader brush youth groups because that is the available data, we have access to at scale. All youth has been represented, however, in many publicly collected data sets for the youth population, the information has not been segmented for some minority groups such as students with disabilities, those who identify as LGBTQ, or other youth population segments. This does not imply these groups were omitted. We simply do not have the granular data to address some of these segments. To address this issue, ACOY is seeking to run our own survey to further study the questions raised in this report. We are further working with LCPS and the climate survey process to provide information on more granular youth population segments.

We are grateful that ACOY was able to meet virtually for half of 2020 during the pandemic, thanks to the adopting resolutions. Several reports were presented and distributed this year by our group as we were able to invite more guest speakers and take on additional responsibilities with the Youth Net initiative. This report is the culmination of many months of work and several revisions to attempt to present the most comprehensive Loudoun youth population picture as possible. We have several recommendations that are inexpensive now to prevent more expensive solutions later. Youth-Led programing is one of those recommendations that provides huge benefits with very little cost. Drug availability is still a major concern. Distance learning provides significant benefits to youth segments that their own anxiety prevents them from progressing in an in classroom setting. Teen centers continue to be a great option of safe spaces for all youth. Learning lab time has been shown to improve student learning environments. Finally, as Loudoun's demographic continues to change, we need to move much quicker to adapt to that change.

While the ACOY has the unique position to represent all our county's youth with Board of Supervisors, there remains an acute opportunity to expand the committee with community representatives from standing School Board level Sub Committees. These standing

Subcommittees include the Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC), Minority Student Achievement Advisory Committee (MSAAC), Career and Technical Education (CTE), and the Equity Committee. This recommendation dovetails into our new responsibility for the Youth Net initiative which ACOY recently established a subcommittee to lead this effort as well as efforts to specifically report on other segments of the youth population.

The past year has had a full array of challenges resulting not only from a worldwide pandemic, but also, local concerns within Loudoun County. This year has highlighted the growing inequities that exist across student subgroups and our community was required to fully observe and be accountable to these concerns. Youth have had to navigate learning inequities after being thrust into a “shelter in place” mentality, learning to thrive in nonexistent distant learning modalities where technology (i.e., internet concerns) and school syllabus plans do not support months long work of remote learning, and of course student's social, emotional, mental, and physical learning deficits. Another example that points to outcomes that can come with better coordination between ACOY and sub committees for youth in our school system is the 2020 finding from the Virginia State’s Attorney General Office. This report codifies the requirement to ensure every student has equitable opportunities and access regardless of race, gender, socio economic statuses, ability/disability, or status. SEAC’s own 2020 report have made several recommendations to include requiring appropriate training for LCPS staff, ensuring literacy for all students, a review of the restraint and seclusion policy, better transparency, transition, and staffing for students with disabilities.

We want to thank you again for the opportunity to advise the Loudoun County Board of Supervisors and serve the youth of Loudoun County. We want to thank members from Loudoun County Public Schools (LCPS), the Loudoun County Sheriff’s Office (LCSO), Youth Advisory Council (YAC), Loudoun County Public Libraries (LCPL), the Loudoun County Juvenile Court Services Unit (JCSU), Parks, Recreation and Community Services (PRCS), the Minority Student Achievement Advisory Committee, and the LCPS Special Education Advisory Committee for their inputs and comments for this report.