Background:

In the Climate Session at the 2017 Strength in Voices Conference, students and staff were asked to participate in an activity discussing major issues uncovered in the Student and Staff Climate Survey. These issues include student drug and alcohol use, teacher work stress, student satisfaction in school, and relationship skills (see presentation here). Students and staff were asked to voice their opinions on why they believe these data patterns were happening and how the data could be improved. The following are themes analyzed from the posters developed during the activity, including how many times the theme or statement was mentioned.

Why does drug and alcohol use increase in high school?

Why is this happening?

- Some students think doing drugs and alcohol looks cool. (mentioned 2x)
- It's easier to access at an older age, and with age comes more comfort with taking risks. (mentioned 6x)
- Use occurs due to peer pressure or influence. (mentioned 2x)
- Some students may believe using drugs and/or alcohol helps cope with problems, stress, and responsibilities. (mentioned 3x)
- Use may be seen as a social norm from the way it's portrayed in the media and on social media. (mentioned 2x)
- Some may be unaware of its effects and may not think it can be detrimental.
- There are parties held without supervision.

What can we do to improve the data?

- Educate students using detailed information and statistics about drugs, alcohol, and their effects. (mentioned 3x)
- Provide random surveys that can be taken anonymously to gain more "true" data.
- Offer peer counseling and establish trust.
- Present influences on social media.
- Educate on different ways to cope with stress without using drugs.
- Find the drug/alcohol source or provider.
- "Frame survey to students as 'real answers help make real change' (and change can't happen if we don't get honest responses)."

Why are so many staff feeling work-stress and how can students help?

Why is this happening?

- Teachers have too much busy work and too many responsibilities. (mentioned 2x)
- Too much pressure is put on teachers by parents (ex: expect teachers to be available ALL the time, or return calls immediately). (mentioned 4x)
- Teachers don't have enough time to accomplish what's required, and they don't get paid for the extra hours they put in. (mentioned 5x)
- The student to teacher ratio is too high. (mentioned 2x)
- Teachers worry about their students and their behaviors. (mentioned 2x)
- They are evaluated based on student achievement, and many contributing factors are out of their control.
- There is a lack of respect for the teaching profession.

What can we do to improve the data?

- There needs to be smaller student-teacher ratios and smaller class sizes. (mentioned 2x)
- Teachers should be paid more.
- Bring awareness to importance of having good student-teacher-parent communication and collaborations, as well as community involvement. (mentioned 5x)
- Share all the responsibilities and efforts teachers do on a daily basis to increase understanding of all they do (mentioned 3x)
- Increase students' focus, attention, and effort in classes. (mentioned 3x)
- Increase student voice.

Why are students less satisfied with school in middle and high school compared to elementary school?

Why is this happening?

- The work load increases and is more difficult. (mentioned 3x)
- Expectations are much greater in the higher levels. (mentioned 2x)
- Students have one teacher in elementary school and seven in high school. (mentioned 2x)
- There is more pressure on grades in order to earn a diploma.
- At some schools students don't have the ability to express themselves due to the dress code. (mentioned 2x)
- Some students don't care because there is a lack of incentive for engagement.
- In middle and high school there is more pressure and influences from social media.
- Students are held to certain expectations and rarely receive respect in return.
- "Middle and high school you start to discover who you are as a person. People start to define each other making school harder because you feel you have to have a 'place.'"

What can we do to improve the data?

- Provide a clearer understanding of the data's purpose. (mentioned 2x)
- The purpose and reasoning for lessons taught should be explained to students. (mentioned 2x)
- Important life skills need to be included in the curriculum.
- Surveys should be anonymous, and not ask for students' ID, so answers can be more honest.

Why are some relationship skills harder for students and how can we improve them?

Why is this happening?

- Lack of skills could be a result of not learning them at home or an inability due to home-life stressors (i.e. poverty, disabilities, family history, etc.)
- Students learn to be polite to teachers early in school, but it's not really encouraged to share feelings at school.
- It may depend on one's personality, such as whether they're introverted or extroverted.
- Some students may have a more difficult time with relationship skills due to alcohol or drug use, changing hormones, or their cognitive abilities.
- Some might have a hard time with relationships skills because of the high use of social media.
- Bullying plays a huge part in relationship skills. Some students may not want to reach out to others out of fear of being judged.

What can we do to improve the data?

- Greater support from staff members in providing a more open environment for communication. (mentioned 3x)
- Students should be more aware of their surroundings. Use the results to take small steps, set goals, and make improvements.
- More implementation of limited cellular device usage to promote more interaction.
- Try to decrease amount of judgment placed on peers.