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Youth Perspectives on Being Healthy and Thriving

MyVoice Team

University of Michigan

Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Brief Description of Methodology	4
MyVoice Cohort	5
Figure 1: Map of participants who responded to the poll (n=958*)	5
Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents	6
Specific NASEM Inquiries	7
Themes and Illustrative Quotes	9
Q1. Describe what it would look like to live your best life.	9
Q2. Tell us about something or someone that helps you live your best life.	29
Q3. Specifically, what could your school do to help you live your best life?.....	38
Q4. What keeps you from living your best life, if anything?	47
References	55
MyVoice Team Members	55

Introduction

One open-ended poll was administered to the MyVoice national cohort on behalf of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) committee on Applying Lessons of Optimal Adolescent Health to Improve Behavioral Outcomes for Youth. The purpose of this poll was to inform the committee's understanding of youth today including their perceptions of what it means to be healthy and thriving. The poll was developed in collaboration with the NASEM Staff and underwent rigorous pilot testing with youth and experts in youth-centered text message survey design.

Brief Description of Methodology

Data were collected via MyVoice, a national mixed methods text message poll of youth age 14-24 years. Targeted recruitment was performed via Facebook and Instagram to meet national benchmarks based on weighted samples from the 2016 American Community Survey. Informed consent/assent and demographic data were also gathered from participants through an online survey including age, gender, race, ethnicity, level of education, qualification of free or reduced lunch, and region of the country. Further details on the MyVoice study protocol have been previously described and can be found in DeJonckheere (2017).

The poll was administered on 8/2/2019 regarding what it means to be a healthy and thriving youth:

1-Hi {{name}}! This week we want to hear about what it means to be a thriving young person. Describe what it would look like to live your best life.

2-Tell us about something or someone that helps you live your best life.

3-Specifically, what could your school do to help you live your best life? (now or in the past)

4-What keeps you from living your best life, if anything?

Two investigators reviewed and coded participant response data and organized the codes into major themes to understand what youth said in their own words. Any discrepancies in coding were discussed until agreement was reached. Responses were summarized using descriptive statistics. The MyVoice study is approved by the University of Michigan Institutional Review Board (HUM00119982).

MyVoice Cohort

There were 980 individuals who responded to at least one poll question (response rate = $980/1539=63.7\%$). Participants who responded were from 49 of the 50 states including several participants from Alaska and Hawaii.



Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

	n=980*
Age, mean(SD)	18.7 (2.9)
14-17, n (%)	428 (43.7)
18-24	552 (56.3)
Gender, n (%)	
Male	392 (40.1)
Female	508 (51.9)
Other	78 (8.0)
Race/Ethnicity, n (%)	
Non-Hispanic White	550 (56.2)
Non-Hispanic Black	87 (8.9)
Hispanic	129 (13.2)
Non-Hispanic Other	212 (21.7)
Education, n (%)	
< High School	561 (57.4)
High School Grad	81 (8.3)
Some College or Tech School	220 (22.5)
Associate's or Tech Grad	28 (2.9)
Bachelor's Degree +	88 (9.0)
Parent Education, n (%)	
High School or less	156 (16.0)
Some college or Tech school	121 (12.4)
Associate's or Tech grad	86 (8.8)
Bachelor's Degree	242 (24.7)
Master's Degree	265 (27.1)
Doctoral Degree	108 (11.0)
HS Free Lunch (n=966), n (%)	
Yes	373 (38.6)
No	593 (61.4)
Region (n=972), n (%)	
West	179 (18.4)
Midwest	387 (39.8)
South	281 (28.9)
Northeast	125 (12.9)

*2 participants were missing all demographic information except age

Specific NASEM Inquiries

1. Understand youth perceptions of what it means to be healthy and thriving.
 - a. What do youth think it means to be healthy and thriving?

This question was addressed by asking youth to “describe what it would look like to live your best life.”

Individuals noted a wide variety of attributes in describing living their best life and thriving as youth. Responses included financial stability, a successful career, being happy, supportive relationships with friends, family, and spouses, educational achievements and working towards goals, mental and physical health, doing things they enjoy, opportunities to travel, confidence and independence, ability to make a difference, and much more.

Most youth expressed multiple factors important to thriving and less than 15% of coded responses (143/955) identified only one important characteristic of their “best life”. Financial stability was most commonly noted by participants but only 3% (11/375) of those individuals indicated it was the only factor in thriving. A similar tendency was noted with career related responses as well (11/312 only mentioned career). Interestingly, while it was commonly noted that money was the primary barrier to achieving “their best life,” many participants detailed the ways in which access to money would allow them to reach their life goals and as a result, support their happiness.

The importance youth placed on factors outside of financial and career success (relationships, happiness, physical and mental health) suggest that, overall, youth view thriving as being fulfilled in multiple aspects of life. Youth may perceive financial success as a way to achieve their best life without it being the end goal or sole indication of being healthy and thriving.

- b. What can their schools do to help them be healthy and thrive?

Youth most commonly reported more opportunities for freedom in their education, additional class opportunities, access to social and mental health support, a safe and inclusive school environment, reduced cost of education, and better direction in their academic and career path as areas in which schools could improve to help youth thrive.

Recommendations were made to delay the start of school to allow for more sleep, integrate additional breaks and flexibility into the school year, and provide access to a larger variety of extracurricular activities. Youth also noted a desire for coursework that would help prepare them better for the “real world” including taxes, budgeting, and managing debt as well as classes to target their specific interests.

Improvements in treatment and support, including education and awareness, for mental health and emotional issues students may be experiencing were also identified as ways to support thriving. Similarly, environmental factors like a reduction in bullying, creating a caring community, LGBTQ friendly practices, and relaxation spaces were highlighted

In addition to recommending reduced tuition costs, many youths suggested more guidance on starting a

career versus attending college and academic support to enable them to receive scholarships. They noted that additional support in these areas could include access to internships and hands-on experiences for various career opportunities.

c. What can their communities do to help them to be healthy and thrive?

A limited number of responses to the poll indicated any community impact on youth being healthy and thriving. When reporting on factors helping youth thrive several noted extracurricular activities, libraries, or community programs as influential. Sports, music, reading, and fashion design are examples of such activities that could be benefited from community support and engagement.

On a broader level, youth noted societal pressures and expectations, particularly relating to LGBTQ issues as negatively impacting their ability to thrive. A few individuals also commented on safety concerns and being fearful in situations such as using public transportation.

Themes and Illustrative Quotes

Major themes are listed by frequency below each question. Additional quotes are also available upon request for each theme.

Demographic data is noted when available including **age**, **gender** (female, male, other gender), **race/ethnicity** (NH= Non-Hispanic; Hisp= Hispanic), **education** (<HS= less than high school graduate; HS grad= high school graduate, etc), **socioeconomic status** (SES; Receiving free or reduced lunch in middle or high school= Low SES, all others= Med/High SES), and **Census region of the country** (West, Midwest, Northeast, South).

Q1. Describe what it would look like to live your best life.

Responses from 955 individuals contained information on their “best life” that could be coded (97% of all responses). Twenty-seven different themes were identified in this question and 3,048 codes were assigned to participant responses. On average, participants identified three characteristics important to them living their best life.

Youth most commonly noted being financially secure, having a good job, being happy, strong relationships, a good education, physical and mental health, and having fun as being important to them thriving.

Financial Stability (n=374)

ID 16: No debt and no bills!!! Lots of money in savings – 23yo, male, NH white, some college, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 279: No debt, stable income – 18yo, male, NH other, < HS, Med/High SES, West

ID 497: Making enough money to support my dreams – 17yo, female, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, South

ID 644: My best life would be financial stability. I would have a promising career and a respectable degree – 18yo, female, Hisp, < HS, Low SES, Midwest

ID 711: My best life would be one where I was happy, had a lot of supportive family/friends, and where I had financial independence – 18yo, male, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, Northeast

ID 1138: I have a stable job, a decent salary, and I'm not struggling to pay for my basic needs – 20yo, male, NH white, Assoc. degree, Med/High SES, South

ID 1225: To thrive as a young person in my opinion is not having to worry about paying for college and going into lots of debt – 16yo, male, NH white, Med/High SES, Northeast

ID 1490: Living my best life would look like having enough money to help my parents pay the bills, being able to drive to do the things that need to get done, and having friends that I can care for and care for me back. It could also look like having a projection for my future and succeeding at things that help with my future – 15yo, female, NH white, < HS, Low SES, West

ID 1630: If I was personally living my best life, it would involve having a well paying job and my bills paid on time with left over money for the month. It would also mean that I'd be able to mentally cope with stress in a healthy way and have healthy relationships with the people around me – 18yo, female, NH other, < HS, Low SES, Midwest

ID 1666: Have enough money to pay rent/utilities and not worry about any other costs – 18yo, other gender, NH white, < HS, Low SES, Midwest

ID 1762: Living my best life, would mean to have a steady decent paying job, a house, a good car, a good girlfriend, a dog of course lol, being able to put money away in savings in case I need it, not having to worry about whether I can pay rent, or buy food, or clothes, or pay any bills, but a lot of that is out of reach, especially for young people who haven't been to college, or are working minimum wage jobs between college, that struggle just to make ends meet – 23yo, male, NH white, HS grad, Midwest

ID 1797: I think if I were living my best life, I would first need to feel financially secure enough to pursue my passions wholeheartedly. That is to say, in today's world, I would dive into climate change activism, pushing for radical global reform, and support and inspire other young people to do the same. I would also rally for movements that support and uplift the voices of oppressed identities, such as LGBTQIA+ and indigenous communities – 22yo, other gender, NH white, Bachelor's degree, Low SES, West

Job/Career (n=312)

ID 22: Have a job and hobbies I love, with work life balance and time for my friends and family – 23yo, female, NH white, some college, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 195: I would be living as a model in California – 18yo, female, Hisp, < HS, Low SES, Midwest

ID 431: I would have a job that has me doing meaningful and productive work. I would have enough time to work and maintain a healthy social life. I would be healthy both physically and mentally – 23yo, female, NH white, Bachelor's degree, Med/High SES, South

ID 552: To discover and work in a job that provides me enough money to have the freedom to do what I'd like without being miserable and working too much, to have a stable

emotional and physical health, and to stay on good terms with my family – 16yo, female, NH other, < HS, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 669: to be able to go to work & be happy doing it – 19yo, female, NH white, HS grad, Low SES, Midwest

ID 811: good salary, amazing job, perfect family, be healthy – 16yo, female, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 1126: Have a solid job, people that love you, and be able to provide for yourself – 17yo, male, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, South

ID 1375: Being completely comfortable with my identity. Having a job I enjoy rather than stress about. Living in a community of friends and family who all support each other – 21yo, female, NH white, some college, Med/High SES, West

ID 1399: To work in a job which I enjoy, an environment which challenges me mentally, provides career opportunities and chances for advancement, and has mentors. To have access to affordable, quality health care. To have chances to continue my education without accruing debt. To make a living wage, not minimum wage, and not have to live paycheck to paycheck. To be treated equally in all aspects of life regardless of my race, religion, ethnicity, gender, or sexuality. To be safe in my home and in my community. To have a supportive social network and engaging hobbies – 24yo, female, Hisp, Assoc. degree, Med/High SES, Midwest

Happiness/Less Stress (n=299)

ID 95: being happy with how things are, and accepting the good and bad in your life – 23yo, female, NH other, some college, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 302: I think the only thing that I could possibly find important to live my best life would be to find peace. I'm a musician so naturally pursuing that would be a part of a peaceful existence for me, but I've had a lot of experiences in my life outlined by anger and violence, and I think my best life would be the one void of those things – 17yo, male, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, Northeast

ID 362: being happy!! – 18yo, female, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 579: I think it means that you're happy in what your doing. Being physically, mentally, emotionally, and financially stable in all aspects of life and feeling able to support oneself – 23yo, female, NH white, some college, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 594: To be happy and not worry so much about everything – 18yo, male, Hisp, < HS, Med/High SES, West

ID 1319: It would be involving better stress management and having a somewhat carefree attitude – 20yo, female, Hisp, some college, Low SES, Northeast

ID 1491: Living my best life would be being content and excited about every day despite any hardships – 17yo, female, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, West

ID 1525: Living your best life means to be happy and healthy. For me, it would include being happy, having positive relationships, and working toward my goals – 16yo, other gender, NH white, some college, Med/High SES, Northeast

ID 1553: Living my best life would be living without a stress in the world. Influencers and such always depict a very carefree, adventurous life. The reality of youth, though, consists of pressures from school and family issues, these both affecting lower class families more – 16yo, female, NH other, < HS, Med/High SES, West

ID 1733: To live my life to the best would be me being successful and a cheerful person. It would be like me, teen to a soon to be adult, going to college, getting a degree and soon have a career and family of my own to have. The main importance to my thriving, wishful life is to be happy especially. Nothing overpowers happiness – 16yo, female, NH black, < HS, Low SES, South

ID 1978: Being with friends and family. Being happy and being able to make others in the world happy. To live with nothing but joy and happiness – 23yo, male, NH white, Assoc. degree, Low SES, Northeast

ID 1982: To be a thriving young person is to be happy. In my best life, I have straight A's, I'm in a relationship, I have a part-time job that I can tolerate, and I regularly volunteer. My skin is clear, my friends and I hang out all the time, and the environment is healthy (no climate change) – 15yo, female, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, South

ID 1994: I'd say a thriving young person is an individual who is happy despite whatever conditions and stresses may be challenging a peaceful state of mind – 15yo, male, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, South

ID 2058: To thrive as a young person means feeling great, being successful in your chosen career, making time for doing things that bring joy – 23yo, female, NH black, Bachelor's degree, Med/High SES, Midwest

Peer Relationships (n=268)

ID 125: Living with financial stability, being around friends pretty often, feeling like I'm making at least a small difference – 23yo, other gender, NH other, some college, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 161: Feeling healthy and happy and content with how I spend my time. Having people around me who care and love me and who I also love and care about in return. – 21yo, female, NH white, some college, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 196: To be worry and stress free, surrounded by the ones I love most – 18yo, male, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 220: For me living my best life is just being surrounded by friends who love and care about me. Also being able to support others and meet new people – 19yo, male, NH black, <HS, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 643: To hang out with friends and family and smile all the time – 18yo, male, Hisp, < HS, Med/High SES, South

ID 787: It would look like feeling calm most of the time and being connected to family and friends – 21yo, other gender, NH white, some college, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 978: Just being with friends – 18yo, other gender, NH other, < HS, Med/High SES, South

ID 1221: Living every day like it is your last and spending time with the ones that mean the most to you – 17yo, male, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, South

ID 1338: I would be on the beach with family and friends – 17yo, female, NH white, < HS, Low SES, Northeast

ID 1854: being independent enough and having the means to do whatever makes you happy, while at the same time having the maturity to pick what would be most worth it out of what you want and leaving other things behind. additionally, being surrounded by those that create a supportive environment that allow you to flourish and reach the best you can be - allowing you to be at your happiest – 16yo, male, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 1875: Living my best life would involve secure, loving friendships, making enough money to both pay the bills and save for the future, and pursuing meaningful work – 24yo, female, Hisp, Bachelor's degree, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 2008: Be surrounded by people who I love and who support me and make me happy. Find joy in what I do, and be able to support myself and be proud of the work I put out into the world – 24yo, female, NH white, Bachelor's degree, Med/High SES, Midwest

Family Relationships (n=230)

ID 555: Graduate college with honors, land a stable job, raise a family – 18yo, male, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, West

ID 1008: My current life, friends, food, family – 16yo, male, Hisp, < HS, Low SES, South

ID 1084: in order for me to live my best i would probably need to surround myself with people who know what my goals are and help me achieve them. that's it. as long as i know that people support me and my goals, im living my best life – 15yo, male, Hisp, < HS, Low SES, West

ID 1216: Happy family. Mom not having a disease that'll lead her to an inevitable doom. Parents caring about what your involved with and constant communication for more than so that they know when to assign chores around your schedule – 18yo, male, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, South

ID 1226: I would say being with family working in your dream job and helping around the community having a nice home and just being happy with good family and friends – 17yo, male, Hisp, < HS, Low SES, West

ID 1547: My best life would be married with three of four kids and a loving husband while I own my own law firm – 21yo, female, NH black, some college, Med/High SES, South

ID 1752: Having my friends and family all around me. Sharing stories, memories and hope we have for our lives – 15yo, female, NH other, < HS, Low SES, South

ID 2016: To live my best life would be to be able to take care of my family have a stable career that I look forward to everyday and be healthy. It would also be to help people. One of the things I want to do that will contribute to being a good person living my life would be to help others who are in need – 17yo, female, Hisp, HS grad, Low SES, West

Education (n=172)

ID 110: I would be succeeding in school, work, having a healthy social life and a stable mental health – 24yo, female, Hisp, some college, Low SES, Midwest

ID 338: No worries, having the job of my dreams, graduated with bachelors and masters degrees and having a nice house – 20yo, female, NH black, HS grad, Low SES, Midwest

ID 394: Having a 4.0, being accepted into a good college, knowing what you want to do with your life, and doing things that make you happy – 16yo, female, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 446: ...with a cumulative GPA of 3.8 or more, taking all AP and honors classes, with 2 extracurricular activities, and be in 3+ clubs at school – 16yo, female, Hisp, < HS, Low SES, West

ID 688: I believe to have the best life as a young person is to start out with good values and a good education once you have the education you can go on to finding a good paying job that you enjoy next step is finding/ buying a stable place to live that you can make your own then trying to find someone that that has the same goals and values as you that you

can share your time and success with – 24yo, female, NH white, Tech grad, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 720: My best life would probably be going to college without having to pay for anything and being able to get a degree without any debt after I graduate – 18yo, male, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 1002: Being successful getting into a college with a full ride... – 18yo, male, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 1544: in the ideal thriving situation, college is paid for so i can take as long as i need getting through my required classes and taking other classes i just find interesting... – 18yo, other gender, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, South

Romantic Relationships (n=168)

ID 94: Be married have a strong religious life with a fulfilling job – 21yo, male, NH white, some college, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 287: If I were living my best life, I would have great grades in college and be loving what I was doing. I would have a perfect boyfriend (attractive, smart, sexy, mature). I would have great friends that I care about and who care about. I also would not worry about money and live modestly yet sustainably – 18yo, male, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, South

ID 681: Be in love – 18yo, male, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 1050: Living life and being happy with my significant other – 18yo, female, Hisp, HS grad, Low SES, South

ID 1807: Living the best life is being who you want. Loving the one you love. A life where you can just be you without being judged – 17yo, other gender, Hisp, < HS, Med/High SES, West

ID 2004: I would live in a fancy lake house with my wife and two children. We would retire at age 18 because we won the lottery. There's a nearby church to go worship the lord. Good schools and good food – 15yo, male, NH white, HS grad, Med/High SES, South

ID 2019: To be rich and have a hot girlfriend – 19yo, male, NH white, HS grad, Med/High SES, South

ID 2059: To be completely satisfied in personal relationships and working a job that made a difference in the world – 22yo, male, NH white, Bachelor's degree, Low SES, South

Physical Health (n=140)

ID 18: To be a thriving young person means that you are emotionally, socially, and physically well and you are ambitious enough to be moving your life forward – 21yo, female, NH white, some college, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 275: Being social and healthy and getting enough sleep – 16yo, female, NH black, < HS, Low SES, South

ID 325: My best life would be when I am happy, healthy, and achieving my goals. I would be eating right, being active, being productive at work and happy doing it all – 23yo, female, NH white, some college, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 626: Think healthy, eat healthy, work healthy, pray often – 19yo, female, NH white, < HS, Low SES, West

ID 909: being physically and mentally healthy, and succeeding in school, and having good relationships with family and friends – 16yo, female, NH other, < HS, Med/High SES, Northeast

ID 1157: I would always be in peak physical performance I'd never have a sick day or anything – 17yo, male, NH white, < HS, Low SES, South

ID 1228: To live with out pain – 15yo, female, NH white, HS grad, Low SES, South

ID 1554: I love my impact on the world. I am healthy in every aspect. I am expressing myself honestly. I am in a place where I feel I belong – 17yo, female, Hisp, < HS, Med/High SES, South

ID 1862: Drinking a lot of water to be properly hydrated, glowing skin, sleeping well, health in general – 16yo, female, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, Northeast

Doing Things/Having Fun (n=138)

ID 167: Enjoying time with yourself and people you love – 24yo, female, NH other, Bachelor's, Med/High SES, South

ID 178: Happy doing things I want to do – 20yo, male, NH white, HS grad, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 420: Being active in the community, earning money for hobbies, and learning how to be a better person – 16yo, male, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 889: To take care of yourself and do things you love to do, not just things you have to do like work and school – 17yo, female, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, South

ID 1074: If I was "living my best life" and thriving, I would be doing things that made me genuinely happy – 18yo, female, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, South

ID 1141: I would get to do the stuff that I always wanted but couldn't do it – 18yo, male, Hisp, < HS, Med/High SES, South

ID 1754: Doing stuff with your friends, or just going outside and enjoy nature – 15yo, male, Hisp, < HS, Low SES, South

ID 1989: Living my best life would involve just being happy and comfortable . . . no worries about health or money. Thriving would mean being able to engage in creative pursuits and develop meaningful friendships, on top of a rich academic or working life – 20yo, other gender, NH other, some college, Med/High SES, Northeast

Being Successful/Working Hard (n=104)

ID 29: I think it would mean chasing after your goals with determination, and having unwavering motivation – 18yo, male, NH white, < HS, Low SES, Midwest

ID 355: To be around people who make you feel complete while doing tasks (jobs, internships, school, hobbies) that interest you and make you feel happy and fulfilled – 17yo, female, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 661: I would be successful in school and get a well paying job and be able to vacation but also enjoy life without financial worries – 19yo, male, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, South

ID 818: Your working hard to achieve your goals – 15yo, female, NH other, < HS, Low SES, Midwest

ID 1451: To live my best life would mean being independent and successful in places like work, school, and relationships – 16yo, female, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 1532: Living my best life would be able to achieve my dreams and accomplishing the goals I've set for myself. Doing my best to past the obstacles in my path and never giving up along with supporting friends and family members. I would also say, living my best life would including having enough money to not worry about the total expenses used up each month – 17yo, female, NH other, < HS, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 1637: A thriving young person is one that doesn't have any student loans and is making a consistent salary, working hard, and doing everything that they can to advance in whatever their field is. My best life is one where I can be independent to make my own decisions, live healthy, and have financial freedom – 23yo, female, NH other, Bachelor's degree, Med/High SES, South

ID 1740: To me, thriving= success. Coming from an asian family, success come from being able to take care yourself and family. It is more about pride than happiness. However, I

wish to combine the two. I want to thrive by being happy and comfortable in who I am, while also being able to take care of me and my loved ones! – 17yo, female NH other, < HS, Low SES, South

ID 1825: I would be successful, independent, and have the freedom to do whatever I want whenever I want. I would have a steady job and stable finances while having fun at the same time. I would be traveling and seeing the world while I'm still young – 21yo, female, NH white, some college, Med/High SES, South

ID 1881: Being young gives us a opportunity to do so much. We're able to do things in life at this age and make it better for ourselves later in life. Living my best life is being able to work hard at what I want now and be able to help my family with things they need help with. Give back to those in need – 21yo, female, Hisp, HS grad, Low SES, Northeast

ID 2028: I wake up in the morning and I feel accomplished with what my life is. I go to school and learn about the subjects I'm interested in. None of my friends or I are bullied – 15yo, male, NH white, < HS, Low SES, Midwest

Traveling/Taking Vacations (n=98)

ID 145: Wealthy, healthy , traveling, happy – 22yo, female, NH black, some college, Low SES, Midwest

ID 633: Someone with a lot of money and adventures – 17yo, male, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES

ID 906: I would love to go out more! Explore nature, and travel the world taking pictures – 18yo, female, Hisp, < HS, Low SES, West

ID 1397: Going on vacations and living life – 24yo, female, NH black, some college, Low SES, Midwest

ID 1816: First thing first being intelligent and trying your hardest in everything you do even if it's boring. Also doing a lot of cool things like Disneyland or the mall arcades, hiking, rock climbing, boating. A thriving young person should have a sustainable income and not be dull – 15yo, male, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, West

Housing (n=92)

ID 843: I would have enough money to live comfortably and spend as well. I would live in a comfortable nice home or apartment in a safe area... – 18yo, female, NH other gender, HS grad, Med/High SES, Northeast

ID 874: Rent/school would be cheaper, I'd have a doctorate in neurology, and I'd live in a mansion – 18yo, female, NH white, < HS, Low SES, West

ID 1423: Living in a house with size for my activities, with a large shop and plenty of land to roam, far away from other people – 24yo, male, NH other, Assoc. degree, Med/High SES, South

ID 1607: To be happy with a good social life, a well paying job, a nice car, and a big house – 16yo, female, NH other, < HS, Med/High SES, West

ID 1624: To live in a place of my own un beholden to anyone else – 24yo, other gender, NH white, Assoc. degree, Low SES, West

ID 1783: 2,100sq ft, 2 story house, made of Adobe brick house tan color with black Chinese style shingles and the house sits on a 7 acre lot with a concrete fence... – 15yo, male, Hisp, < HS, Low SES, South

ID 1507: To be calm and one with myself, at peace with my friends, and engulfed in my surroundings – 17yo, male, NH black, < HS, Low SES, South

Balance (n=89)

ID 433: To live my best life, all it requires is being able to spend ample time with my family and friends and not have to be so consumed with work – 20yo, female, NH black, some college, Low SES, South

ID 510: To be able to balance school, work, social/family life/ and sleep and to be healthy would be living my best life – 19yo, female, Hisp, some college, Low SES, South

ID 929: Healthy lifestyle and healthy relationships, good stress management, good balance between work and relaxing – 18yo, other gender, NH white, < HS, Low SES, Northeast

ID 1388: To live my best life would to achieve all my goals, to be able to balance all my priorities, and to be happy and healthy – 18yo, female, NH other, HS grad, Med/High SES, Northeast

ID 1537: I think the best life for me would be to have low levels or stress, an organized schedule, and be on top of everything – 17yo, female, NH other, < HS, Med/High SES, South

ID 1644: I guess to me that means not procrastinating and doing things even if they scare me. It would mean not being so held back by the confines of school and just being able to enjoy all aspects of life – 16yo, female, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, South

ID 2024: thriving, or living my best life is me achieving my goals, have a stable social life, and being able to maintain equilibrium within my personal life – 15yo, male, NH other, < HS, Low SES, West

Mental Health (n=89)

ID 165: Being fulfilled emotionally and spiritually – 21yo, female, NH other, some college, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 198: To me living my best life means that I am in a healthy mental state and I have friends that support and friends that I can rely on. I would ideally be in college getting in education and while balancing my social life by being able to study and get good grades while also being able to go out and party – 18yo, female, NH black, < HS, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 202: For me living my best life would mean that I got rid of my diabetes and depression and feel confident enough to fully express myself through my clothing, hair, and interest – 17yo, female, NH black, < HS, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 719: To not be stressed, depressed, or anxious and just be able to live and do what i want – 21yo, male, NH white, some college, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 1143: Living my best life would include being physically, mentally, and emotionally 'fit' and striving every day to reach a sense of stability – 17yo, male, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, South

ID 1814: In my best life I could accomplish all my goals without the stress and anxiety getting in the way...without the belief that I can not achieve my goals. I could balance the fun things like hanging with friends and the hardships of life like work with ease without feeling like I have to cut things out in order to get through the tough part of life. I could work hard, make money, and still enjoy life – 17yo, male, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, Northeast

ID 1824: I'm a trans guy, so if I were living my best life I would have gotten top surgery a while ago, and i would have the ability to get bottom surgery soon. I would have more friends, I would know more people. I would be supported by everyone I know. I wouldn't need therapy anymore, I wouldn't have to take anti depressants...I would be able to safely be open about my gender and sexuality at school – 15yo, other gender, NH white, < HS, Low SES, Midwest

ID 2054: To me living my best life would be to be financially and emotionally stable. I want to live a balanced life and I want to feel accomplished – 18yo, female, NH white, HS grad, Low SES, South

ID 2061: Thriving as a young person involves balancing my life and emotional health. I want to be able to find harmony between my intellectual, professional, and entertaining lives...Having a healthy balance would allow me to thrive mentally, and that's the root of what I wan – 17yo, male, Nh white, < HS, Med/High SES, South

Confidence (n=86)

ID 149: I would be 100% confident about myself and what i wanted to do with my life. My best life wouldn't always be perfect but I would be happy and healthy and have all my amazing friends and family supporting me. I would also have enough money to be financially stable and travel around the world – 21yo, female, NH white, some college, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 306: Empowered, authentic, happy – 23yo, male, NH white, Bachelor's, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 339: Me living my best life would include having confidence in myself and my abilities and having friends and family surrounding you that supports me and Lifts me up – 21yo, female, NH white, some college, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 425: Living my best life is being happy about who I am and what I am doing with my life and who I am with – 17y

ID 595: As a young person being able to understand who you are and having a healthy relationship with your self is important to thrive. Living my best life for me would mean spending time with my friends and family and not having to worry about fighting with them and chasing my own hobbies and dreams – 19yo, female, NH other, < HS, Med/High SES, West

ID 756: To be empowered to have the choices necessary to impact change – 16yo, male, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 939: Living my best life means to be happy and accepting of myself in all aspects. I'm free to make my own decisions and whether they turn out good or bad I know I'm one step closer to where I need to b in life. Living the best life is a lifestyle in itself – 17yo, female, NH black, < HS, Low SES, South

ID 1330: As a thriving young person you have to be focused on yourself and achiev the things that you always wanted to without letting obstacles stop you, being happy – 17yo, female, NH black, < HS, Low SES, South

ID 1682: In order to be thriving you'd have to be secure in what you want and know you have access to help if you need it – 17yo, other gender, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES

ID 1687: It would mean being confident in myself, being outgoing and friendly, other people liking you, having a sense of purpose and motivation for the future – 16yo, female, NH other, < HS, Med/High SES, South

ID 1835: As a thriving young person, living my best life would mean taking any challenge head on and knowing that I could accomplish anything if I put my mind to it. I would have

confidence in my abilities, be generous to others, and make the world a better place –
24yo, female, NH white, Bachelor's degree, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 1910: Basically to sum up what my best life would look like to me, i would definety be happy, mentally stronger and confident (because of experiences that knocked me down before) and at that point i would be accepting and content with the person i've become –
15yo, other gender, NH other, < HS, Low SES, South

Independence (n=75)

ID 133: To live my best life would be to have a successful job that I am happy at, with a good group of friends, family and children. I also feel like my best life would mean that I am a happy and independent person – 23yo, female, NH white, some college, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 506: Being free – 16yo, female, NH black, < HS, Low SES, South

ID 925: Living my best life is being independent and financially stable with a strong support system and happiness – 16yo, female, NH black, < HS, Med/High SES, West

ID 1377: I think living your best life has to do with optimization of opportunities and balance of things you have to do with things you want to do. It's about taking care of yourself and making sure that your health (physical and mental) comes first – 20yo, female, NH white, Assoc. degree, Med/High SES, South

ID 1634: To be independent and helping others achieve that, particularly those from minority groups that may not have a strong sense of privilege – 24yo, other gender, NH white, some college, Low SES, Midwest

ID 1721: Choosing what I want to do and when with no limitations – 18yo, male, NH white, some college, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 1872: Being able to first become an independent individual and not have to rely heavily on anyone all the while keeping up all relationships that are healthy and meaningful to me – 16yo, female, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, South

ID 1885: Being in control of my life and living at my own pace – 16yo, male, NH white, < HS, Low SES, West

Making a Difference (n=59)

ID 85: Giving back to society, keeping myself healthy and occupied, liking my environment, having a support system, engaging in my community – 24yo, female, NH other, Bachelor's, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 174: Living my best life would be me applying myself fully to helping others and succeeding in my professional pursuits. It would also be spending quality time with good friends and family as well as spending time enjoying my hobbies – 22yo, male, NH other, Bachelor’s degree, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 560: Being able to live comfortably, help others, and be a force for good – 18yo, male, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, South

ID 732: helping people and living happily w my family – 16yo, female, Hisp, < HS, Low SES, Midwest

ID 817: I have a fulfilling job that has an impact on the lives of others. I would also have sufficient savings after providing for my parents, family and church – 22yo, male, NH other, some college, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 995: living my best life involves having a supportive social network of friends and family, a career doing something that I find fulfillment in, and volunteering with organizations that invest in the community – 19yo, male, NH other, < HS, Med/High SES, West

ID 1823: To live my best life it means being happy and making others happy. The type of people to be rude to others based on who they are, are terrible. So my best life is being nice to everyone, even when disagreeing – 16yo, male, NH white, < HS, Low SES, West

ID 1905: To life my best life would to be able to do and accomplish all I want in this world and pass off our planet to the next generation better than it is now. Bettering the lives of others and myself – 16yo, female, NH white, < HS, Low SES, South

ID 1931: A thriving person in my opinion means a person who puts others first, helps to support others in times of need. Gives more than they take back, a person who puts dedication and dedication into everything they do – 14yo, male, Hisp, < HS, Med/High SES, West

ID 2042: To live my best life means im happy. When i think about thriving i think about doing good things to help people in need. I wanna make money and be able to live without wondering if I will have enough money till i get paid next. I want fulfillment if I'm gonna thrive – 17yo, male, NH white, < HS, Low SES, Northeast

ID 2063: Getting paid to do good in the world – 17yo, male, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, Northeast

Social Life (n=55)

ID 426: Balancing social life, school, and health while maintaining personal happiness and satisfaction – 17yo, female, NH other, < HS, Med/High SES, South

ID 1117: Your social life has no problems and you have already set and done things to secure a great future – 15yo, male, Hisp, < HS, Low SES, West

ID 1393: ...My best life would be if I didn't have autism or I was somehow able to magically overcome the extreme difficulties I have with socialization and being around others because of it – 17yo, other gender, NH white, < HS, Low SES, Northeast

ID 1883: To live my best life is to surround myself with friends that get me and want to get out of bed and something every day, outgoing and fun people. Living my best life is making myself and others laugh each day – 18yo, male, NH white, some college, Med/High SES, Northeast

ID 2037: Living your best life, as a teen, means to work towards your ultimate future life goals, as well as having a healthy social and school life – 15yo, male, Hisp, < HS, Med/High SES, West

Material Goods (n=52)

ID 717: Shopping, being set financially, having stable mental health, not being dependent on anyone or thing, being happy and not lying about it – 16yo

ID 775: My best life involves a job that I love, living in a beautiful apartment, comfortably enough for unlimited Dunkin', shoes and a few vacations – 22yo, female, NH white, some college, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 1093: Me living MY PERSONAL best life is in a decent sized mansion with a nice car with a good amount of money. A lot of people say money doesn't bring you happiness, but it does. It can bring out other emotions as well, but money helps you get happiness. If giving back is something you like to do, having money will help you do that. If something that you are passionate about is available to buy and you can grow from it or it can grow, money can bring you happiness. That's my way I would like to live -15yo, male, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, West

ID 1484: Lots of gaming equipment and lots of money – 18yo, male, Hisp, HS grad, Med/HIGH SES, South

ID 1942: Have a job where I make enough money to buy nonneccessary items like a new phone and laptop, help pay bills, and put gas in my car without asking for help. Also, buy gifts for my friends and family on their birthdays – 17yo, other gender, NH white, < HS, Low SES, West

Geographic Location (n=43)

ID 250: If I did not have to worry about money and living on an island – 22yo, female, NH white, some college, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 1263: Pretty pictures on Instagram and a cute apt in new York – 18yo, female, NH other, HS grad, Med/High SES, West

ID 1278: Living in Haiti helping the poor by serving God With my family. I would also have plenty of money so I would be able to provide not just for my family but for the Haitians in my community – 18yo, male, NH white, < HS, Low SES, Midwest

ID 1429: I would be living in Finland and get to go to the beach all the time – 15yo, female, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, West

ID 1605: Be in a nice apartment in a safe, convenient, and fun neighborhood. Not worry about money. Be in a job that allows you to rise and grow in your career – 24yo, female, NH white, Bachelor's, Med/High SES, Northeast

ID 1860: Live in a nice quiet area with a lot of animals – 14yo, other gender, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, Midwest

Learning/Growing (n=32)

ID 197: To have a job I love that helps other people and challenges me intellectually and professionally to grow, to have loving supportive relationships in my life, to be healthy and be able to do yoga, run, be outside in nature, and to have a fulfilling spiritual life – 23yo, female, NH white, Assoc. degree, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 1205: Trying new things and traveling – 15yo, male, NH other, < HS, Low SES, South

ID 1953: Living my best life would be me working on any and all projects I can be apart of, whether their my own or other people's, hanging out with good friends, traveling, trying new things, and just making memories. Also being able to make a difference in the world with what I'm doing would be pretty great too – 18yo, female, NH white, HS grad, Low SES, Northeast

ID 2013: As a teenager, I think the best life wouldnt be spent in a classroom. Yeah, learning is needed to become a well-rounded adult, but I think so much more could be learned and experienced through travel! Maybe some online classes, but overall just living life and exploring what the world has to offer would be great – 16yo, female, Hisp, < HS, Med/High SES, South

ID 2035: What it would look like to be a thriving young person to me is a hardworking productive person doing something to help themselves grow or others grow in life weather it be financially or physically – 15yo, male, Hisp, < HS, Low SES, Northeast

Religion/God (n=22)

ID 692: To be the best Christian I can be – 22yo, female, NH white, some college, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 1148: To be thriving for me personally is to be in a relationship with God (as a Christian) and to grow in that relationship and to grow in fellowship with others – 16yo, male, Hisp, < HS, Med/High SES, South

ID 1611: To live my best life would be to serve Christ. I want to be someone who can forgive like Jesus could, I want to be someone who loves people like Jesus could. To thrive like that would be my lifelong goal in this world – 17yo, female, NH white, HS grad, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 2038: To live my best life would have to be being successful spiritually physically and mentally in the right state of mind also well education confining on my path because I have so much more to go through and I'm not just going to stop at one accomplishment I'll keep pushing on having a mind heart and helping each other as a cardiologist and being very wealthy but modest and find love – 15yo, female, NH black, < HS, Low SES, South

Appearance (n=21)

ID 1535: I would be at a ideal weight and exercise regularly, have a best friend, have a best friend that's a guy – 17yo, female, NH white, < HS, Low SES, West

ID 1576: To be able to wear, act, love, and be like I want with out other people judging me – 15yo, male, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, South

ID 1626: happy, financially stable, maintaining friendships and professional relationships in a timely/productive manner, keepign up with personal hygiene and maintenance tasks (haircuts, eating well, etc.) – 24yo, female, Hisp, Bachelor's, Med/High SES, Northeast

ID 2055: if I was living my best life, I would have top surgery already, be living in seattle with 2 of my best friends... – 14yo, other gender, NH white, < HS, Low SES, West

Currently Living Best Life (n=14)

ID 584: I think I am living it right now. I'm married to the love of my life, I'm going to school to get my dream job on a scholarship, and I have my own home – 21yo, other gender, NH white, some college, Low SES, Midwest

ID 625: I feel like I'm living my best life right now. I have hobbies and I enjoy them, i get to spend time with my girlfriend and do well in school – 17yo, male, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, Northeast

ID 1572: My best life is the life I'm living now. Surrounded by family and friends and playing volleyball and going to school. I wouldn't change anything about my life right now. I'm the happiest I've been in a long time, and that is great – 15yo, female, NH white, < HS, Low SES, Midwest

ID 2052: I am living my best life. I have good friends and I'm working on achieving my goals to become a successful adult – 17yo, female, NH white, < HS, Low SES, Northeast

Access to Healthcare (n=9)

ID 771: Low stress, freedom, and good health care – 20yo, male, NH white, some college, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 813: To have a well paying job, reliable health care & able to afford your rent or mortgage – 22yo, female, NH black, some college, Low SES, South

ID 1175: No student debt, free healthcare, a good paying government job, a nice apartment in the city, and a loving husband – 16yo, male, Hisp, < HS, Low SES, Midwest

Government/Policy (n=5)

ID 799: Get a paying job, have health insurance, contributing positively to society, have a great friends and partner, and a good relationships w family. And be able to trust the government to help stop climate change!!! – 21yo, female, NH white, some college, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 1018: Me living my best life would look like me having to worry about less things in the world. Instead of being anxious about the state of the world we live in I could think about less mentally destabilizing things like my chores or homework, average things that teens should be thinking about. If I had less anxiety and fear about the future and the horrific reality of which we live in I think I'd be alright – 16yo, other gender, Hisp, < HS, Low SES, South

ID 1643: by living in a gender libera[t]ed world, id be able to be myself – 17yo, other gender, NH white, HS grad, High/Med SES, Northeast

ID 1758: To be a thriving, young person is regarded as something short of a dream in our contemporary, American climate. Millennials and Centennials are both plagued by a dilapidated economy, communities overrun by narcotics, and corrupt corporations. Our struggles are pressurized by pretentious authority figures and politicians with dubious intentions. Thriving is hard and becoming even harder to achieve. Regardless of the infamous struggles of our youthful life, there is still an overwhelming pressure to succeed. Success, as the authority figures describe it, involves a six figure salary, fancy cars, and outrageously big houses. Often I ask myself, is their definition of success synonymous with our definition of thriving? Is their desire for our success the same as our desire to thrive? I can't seem to find an answer to either. When I see myself as thriving, as living my best life, I see myself happy. I see myself devoid of all these negative things our society likes to place with young people. I see myself breaking free from the chains of my oppression; an

oppression being the outrageous societal expectations. The way I imagine myself living my best life is me being free. – 16yo, female, NH black, < HS, High/Med SES, South

Weed/Drugs (n=5)

ID 525: Living my best life would be smoking all the weed I want with a luxurious car and a nice girl in a hi tech city with a medium to fast pace lifestyle with a friendly but innovative job – 19yo, male, NH other, HS grad, Med/High SES, West

ID 1701: A healthy relationship that makes me happy. And a life drug and alcohol free. Doing only things I love – 17yo, female, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, Midwest

Q2. Tell us about something or someone that helps you live your best life.

Responses from 913 individuals contained information that could be coded (97% of non-blank responses) about something or someone helping them to live their best life. Thirty different themes were identified in this question and 1,205 codes were assigned to participant responses. On average, participants identified only one thing that helped them with living their best life.

Youth most commonly support from family, friends, partners, and others as benefiting them in thriving. Participation in extracurriculars or hobbies were also frequently identified.

Family (n=276)

ID 37: My parents have been externally influential in helping me to be successful and to learn how to cope with anxiety and fear that seemed to overwhelm me early on in my life so I can conquer it as an adult. My boyfriend is extremely supportive and understands/joins me on the journey towards nursing so he is able to motivate and encourage me in ways other people may not relate to. My friends have a very grounding effect and allow me to escape from a lot of my responsibilities for a moment and enjoy the times I get to spend with them – 18yo, female, NH other, < HS, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 362: my parents constant support and love – 18yo, female, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 392: My family, specifically my mom – 19yo, male, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, Northeast

ID 1096: My Mom usually steers me in the right direction. I can ask her just about anything, sometimes I am embarrassed but she makes me feel ok about asking. She is just tough about school – 17yo, female, NH white, < HS, Low SES, South

ID 1352: My parents help me live my best life because they always push me to learn new things and explore new experiences. And even though we don't have a lot of money or free time, they try to take me to see places and things I haven't before – 16yo, female, NH other, < HS, Low SES, Northeast

Friends/Coworkers (n=269)

ID 98: My friends who have equally high set goals for themselves who push you to help you live your best life – 20yo, female, NH white, some college, Low SES, Midwest

ID 131: my friends have my back and best interest in mind. always encouraging me to go out and do things instead of sit inside – 18yo, male, NH other, < HS, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 439: My best friend helps me live my best life because she always looks ahead for things that I may not see when making decisions – 16yo, female, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, West

ID 747: My friends make me happy in order to live my best life – 18yo, male, Hisp, < HS, Med/High SES, South

ID 1933: My closest friends definitely help me live the best of my teenage years. Sometimes it's hard to get me out of the house, even now I'm not motivated to get out anymore because I'm stressed over school, but my friends are always willing to listen and help me improve myself – 17yo, female, NH other, < HS, Med/High SES, West

Significant Other/Romantic Partner (n=145)

ID 15: My boyfriend! He always encourages me to take opportunities that come my way – 22yo, female, NH white, some college, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 550: My partner is one of my greatest supporters who pushes me when I need it and allows me to be my true self even when that means I feel weak, and that's the most important thing – 20yo, female, NH other, some college, Low SES, Northeast

ID 707: something would be my faith, someone would be [name], the girl I love, she's amazing and strong, and Beautiful, and always encourages and inspires me and helps me to be my best self – 19yo, male, Hisp, some college, Med/High SES, West

ID 1720: My girlfriend helps me out of depressive episodes more than anyone else ever has – 16yo, male, NH white, < HS, Low SES, Midwest

Extracurricular Activities/Hobbies (n=73)

ID 10: Music keeps me calm, aware, curious, alive. If I didn't have that, or any art, in my life, I don't know what I would do to live my "best" life – 24yo, male, NH white, Bachelor's, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 426: Dancing – 17yo, female, NH other, < HS, Med/High SES, South

ID 575: Sewing and fashion design helps me live my best life. It's something I love to do – 17yo, female, NH black, < HS, Low SES, Northeast

ID 1429: Field hockey helps me live my best life. Playing it makes me happy (and fit) and I always look forward to playing it – 15yo, female, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, West

ID 1641: Acting helps me to live my best life because it makes me feel like I am in control and capable of doing great things – 16yo, female, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, South

Support/Inspiration from Others (n=48)

ID 420: JROTC, my instructors have taught me lots about leadership and community involvement – 16yo, male, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 579: Something that helps me live my best life are my Jen Sincero books. She's an amazing motivational speaker and I read her books when I need inspiration or am feeling particularly down. I find her to be both uplifting and real without being too preachy. They remind me I can make anything happen but also that I have to cut myself slack and not be so hard on myself all the time – 23yo, female, NH white, some college, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 1012: One of my old teachers helps me live my best life by supporting my dreams and teaching me how to be a better person – 19yo, female, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, South

ID 1460: Having a supportive online community that I can be a part of helps me when I struggle with my self identity. Having real life friends who I can always talk to online helps – 16yo, female, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, Northeast

Money/Financial Support (n=39)

ID 403: Having a job to have money helps – 17yo, male, NH white, < HS, Low SES, South

ID 843: Money enables me to go out with friends or buy clothing and food that makes me feel better about life – 18yo, female, NH other, HS grad, Med/High SES, Northeast

ID 1428: My mom paying for my rent helps me live my best life – 21yo, female, Hisp, some college, Low SES, South

ID 1721: My grandfather helps me live a better life because I don't have to think about the cost of college as much as I would without his help – 18yo, male, NH white, some college, Med/High SES, Midwest

Goals/Passion/Motivation (n=38)

ID 29: Motivation helps me live my best life – 18yo, male, NH white, < HS, Low SES, Midwest

ID 179: setting goals and striving for them – 23yo, male, NH white, some college, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 1164: I keep a goal board in my room – 16yo, female, NH black, < HS, Med/High SES, South

ID 1502: My own personal drive and insane amount of motivation help me to live my best life – 16yo, male, NH other, < HS, Med/High SES, South

ID 1952: My passion for wanting to make change in this world is what really motivates me to live my best life and make this a better place. I have a loving and supporting girlfriend who pushes me to pursue my dreams – 23yo, female, NH white, Bachelor's, Med/High SES, South

Religion/Faith (n=35)

ID 197: Having a strong faith community helps me – 23yo, female, NH white, Assoc. degree, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 295: God. He gives me peace even when my life is in shambles – 18yo, female, NH black, < HS, Low SES, Midwest

ID 626: I took years of therapy instead of medication, and dealt with my emotions. After that, my faith in God grew tremendously, and made me realize He was there for me the whole time. Now, I'm 7 months into becoming vegan and I'm losing weight I held for years – 19yo, female, NH white, < HS, Low SES, West

ID 1029: Going to church and just taking in the advice that comes from that has helped me the most by far. Also, listening to podcasts of other influential people – 18yo, male, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, South

Job/Career (n=29)

ID 505: Working and being able to buy what I want with my money – 19yo, female, NH black, < HS, Low SES, South

ID 656: My job. Because I have work, it keeps me out of the house during the summer and also provides me with some sort of disposable income with which I can use for things that interest me, like hobbies 17yo, male, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, Northeast

ID 1200: My work gotta make that dough \$\$\$ - 17yo, male, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, South

ID 1589: Advancing in your career will help someone Live their best life. It gives satisfaction and a sense of achievement – 22yo, male, NH other, some college, Low SES, Northeast

Pets (n=29)

ID 225: My cat! He calms down my anxiety – 18yo, female, NH white, some college, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 410: My little puppy, Tiny, is the light of my days – 18yo, male, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, Northeast

ID 1381: My cat, because even on days I don't wanna get out of bed, I always do because I have to take care of him – 22yo, female, NH other, some college, Med/High SES, South

ID 1553: my dog is like my stress reliever. Whenever I'm with him, it's just me and him and those are undoubtedly the happiest parts of my life – 16yo, female, NH other, < HS, Med/High SES, West

Electronics/Internet (n=28)

ID 1353: My Xbox. It lets me connect with friends that I have no other way to spend time with... – 17yo, male, NH white, Low SES, West

ID 1489: Something that helps me live a better life is the internet because I can find out so much information and connect to others through it – 24yo, female, NH white, Bachelor's, Low SES, Midwest

ID 1736: My phone is a great resource for living my best life. It helps me with reminders, it helps me keep track of activities and appointments, it allows me easy communication through multiple mediums, and gives me plenty of pleasure activities – 16yo, other gender, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES

Myself (n=22)

ID 161: Self reflection and deep conversations with friends and family – 21yo, female, NH white, some college, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 475: I help myself live my best life. No one motivates me more than myself – 22yo, female, NH black, some college, Low SES, Midwest

ID 1349: Me myself and I – 17yo, female, NH black, < HS, Med/High SES, Northeast

ID 2000: Myself because at the end of the day, I'm the only person I can count on – 17yo, female, NH other, < HS, Low SES, Midwest

Positive Attitude/Being Present (n=22)

ID 606: Just thinking that theres always tomorrow – 16yo, male, Hisp, < HS, Low SES, South

ID 1086: To just think that people are gonna think what they want to think about you and you can't control it, so just don't think about it since it doesn't matter how they feel, it matters how you feel – 16yo, other gender, NH white, < HS< Med/High SES, West

ID 1180: Being positive – 15yo, male, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, South

ID 1951: Recognizing my blessings – 19yo, female, NH white, some college, Med/High SES, South

Socializing (n=21)

ID 22: Spending time with friends, like going to events or just having coffee with people I care about – 23yo, female, NH white, some college, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 864: Spending time with my friends, or going out of my way every now and then to do something exciting – 19yo, female, NH white, < HS, Low SES, Northeast

ID 2023: My friends, we always hang out. Like go to restaurants, amusement parks and stuff – 15yo, male, NH black, < HS, Low SES, South

Education/School (n=18)

ID 694: going to school – 21yo, female, NH white, some college, Low SES, Midwest

ID 919: My school. They've provided me with an education, social life (kinda), and a full time job over the summer – 17yo, male, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 1176: The thought of going to college really helps. Right now I'm still with my parents and they can be controlling sometimes. However I do have my own business so that helps me with the money aspect – 17yo, male, NH black, < HS, Med/High SES, South

ID 1971: my education, which will help me get the job I want and help me become a more well-rounded individual – 19yo, other gender, NH other, < HS

Health (n=16)

ID 512: getting enough sleep and having a good diet! – 24yo, female, NH other, Bachelor's, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 1350: i love doing yoga and stretching to stay happy and healthy – 18yo, female, NH other, HS grad, Med/High SES, Northeast

ID 1660: Eating a healthier selection of food and drinking lots of water – 16yo, female, NH white, < HS, Low SES, Midwest

ID 1795: Working out helps me live my best life because it calms me down and makes me forget about all the trouble and stress that I had to deal with throughout the hours of the past – 14yo, male, NH other, < HS, Low SES, Northeast

Therapy (n=15)

ID 616: My therapist helps me live my best life because they encourage me to take risks and help me be less anxious – 17yo, female, NH black, < HS, Med/High SES, Northeast

ID 1318: My shrink helps me live my best life – 20yo, female, NH other, some college, Med/High SES, West

ID 1525: Therapy has helped me a lot! It gives me an outlet to talk about my emotions – 16yo, other gender, NH white, some college, Med/High SES, Northeast

Material Goods (n=13)

ID 276: My car – 16yo, male, NH white, < HS, Low SES, South

ID 370: I think my pencils help me because I enjoy writing and drawing with them even though it's a material thing that doesn't actually make you happier it makes me feel more motivated to be creative – 19yo, female, NH other, < HS, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 1494: My bed - 24yo, male, NH white, Master's, Med/High SES, Midwest

Food (n=10)

ID 168: Good food and video games – 22yo, male, NH other, HS grad, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 1102: Coffee keeps me awake most days – 15yo, male, NH white, some college, Low SES, South

ID 1444: Sushi every week. It makes me happy, and I feel like it's a nice treat since it's my favorite – 24yo, female, NH white, Master's, Med/High SES, South

ID 1554: Zero waste tools and farmers market – 17yo, female, Hisp, < HS, Med/High SES, South

Balanced/Stable Life (n=9)

ID 335: A regular schedule helps. Not having work follow me home, allowing for plenty of free time – 24yo, male, NH white, Bachelor's, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 855: My boyfriend makes sure I'm happy and healthy and I do the same for him. We create balance in each other's lives – 19yo, female, Hisp, < HS, Low SES, West

ID 1630: When there isn't anything bad happening and everything seems normal and stable... – 18yo, female, NH other, < HS, Low SES, Midwest

Being Organized (n=9)

ID 147: my planner & the app "productive" because it makes sure I do everything and maintain balance – 22yo, female, NH other, some college, Low SES, Midwest

ID 1458: The app called Mint, helps you with your finances and is a budget planner. Very useful and helps keep me accountable – 17yo, male, Hisp, < HS, Low SES, West

ID 1537: A planner helps me keep track of things – 17yo, female, NH other, < HS, Med/High SES, South

Taking Time for Self (n=9)

ID 167: Taking time for myself and enjoying the moment – 24yo, female, NH other, Bachelor's, Med/High SES, South

ID 882: I use meditation and spending time with my friends to keep me happy/calm – 18yo, other gender, NH other, < HS, Med/High SES, Northeast

ID 1656: Partaking in activities that promote self-care, such as taking a bubble bath, going shopping for a new outfit, or taking a vacation – 24yo, female, Hisp, some college, Low SES, South

Traveling/Vacations (n=7)

ID 404: Traveling and enjoying the outdoors – 22yo, female, NH white, some college, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 1034: Definitely fitness and movement - having the time and money to do that as well. And travel to get out of my space sometimes and separate – 24yo, female, NH other, Bachelor's, Med/High SES, Northeast

ID 1382: Traveling helps me live my best life – 16yo, male, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, Northeast

Giving Back (n=5)

ID 560: My passion for helping others – 18yo, male, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, South

ID 1933: ... I started volunteering for a presidential campaign this summer when I realized what kind of change I'm looking for – 17yo, female, NH other, < HS, Med/High SES, West

Prescribed Medications (n=4)

ID 278: My MS medication – 23yo, male, NH other, Assoc. degree, Med/High SES< Midwest

ID 1228: My occupational therapist amanda and my pain medication – 15yo, female, NH white, HS grad, Low SES, South

ID 2055: my testosterone helps me live my best life because it helps me to be more authentically myself and have other people see me how I see myself – 14yo, other gender, NH white, < HS, Low SES, West

Community Resources (n=3)

ID 18: The public library in my town allows me to live my best life because I can get movies and books for free entertainment, and check out test prep books to help advance my career – 21yo, female, NH white, some college, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 1888: Myself and [name] youth center. who are very supportive – 15yo, other gender, NH white, < HS, Low SES, Midwest

Geographic Location (n=3)

ID 726: Living in a city with good public transit and not needing to buy a motor vehicle, my parents, and cooking at home help me – 19yo, female, NH other, < HS, Low SES, West

ID 899: Since I moved to college in Orlando, I have been more happy because I enjoy my surroundings more. There are so many new things to do and I have a lot more independence so that makes me happy – 19yo, female, NH white, some college, Med/High SES, South

Legislation/Policy (n=3)

ID 771: Having reliable insurance to get my basic needs met – 20yo, male, NH white, some college, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 1175: The GI Bill, my boyfriend, and the City of Minneapolis – 16yo, male, Hisp, < HS, Low SES, Midwest

Weed/Drugs (n=3)

ID 717: Weed, music, movies, non-cable TV – 16yo

ID 1169: Cannabis helps me live my best life. When I am very anxious just a little bit of cannabis will help calm me down, and allows me to be more social and outgoing – 20yo, male, NH white, HS grad, Low SES, South

Nothing (n=4)

ID 713: I do not have anybody like that. I feel unmotivated and lonely most of the time – 20yo, male, NH white, some college, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 1356: Nothing really helps me right now – 16yo, female, NH white, < HS, Low SES, West

Q3. Specifically, what could your school do to help you live your best life? (now or in the past)

Responses from 886 individuals contained information on ways schools could benefit them in thriving that could be coded (98% of non-blank responses). Twenty different themes were identified in this question and 1,274 codes were assigned to participant responses. On average, participants identified only one way in which schools could support them in living their best life.

Youth most commonly noted more school breaks, access to their passions, more real-world classes, improved social and mental health support, reduced costs, career and academic guidance, and a supportive school environment as areas where schools could provide benefit to them.

Provide More Freedom/ Opportunities (n=137)

ID 262: offer more arts programs!! less emphasis on academia and competition – 18yo, female, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 355: Schools can offer clubs that suit a wide variety of interests, and focus on making classes engaging, not busywork – 17yo, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 426: Start school later for more sleep – 17yo, female, NH other, < HS, Med/High SES, South

ID 759: Encourage more activities such as more clubs or outside of school activities at bowling alleys or parks – 19yo, female, NH white, some college, Low SES, Midwest

ID 1281: I feel like they could've given me more things to do in my spare time with more clubs that match my interests – 18yo, male, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, Midwest

Better Curriculum/Classes (n=132)

ID 191: By providing more information on how we can prepare for the future – 17yo, female, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 202: They could offer more classes that provide me with important information such as how to do taxes, build a portfolio, interview for a job etc. I personally feel like many public school systems fail to properly educate us on important things like the ones aforementioned... – 17yo, female, NH black, < HS, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 553: I think they could make curriculum more flexible to allow people to take different classes and emphasize self care and respect – 17yo, female, NH other, < HS, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 985: They could have taught more languages – 18yo, male, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, South

ID 1096: Better classes on life skills. More tech classes and better social skills class. Too much time with no talking, lectures – 17yo, female, NH white, < HS, Low SES, South

ID 1682: Offer a lot more in depth real life lessons. Like classes on what makes a healthy relationship, how to set boundaries, how to keep things professional, how to manage debt once you're in it, proper sex Ed, parenting classes, etc. They offer some in special courses but I think it should be mandatory for everyone – 17yo, other gender, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES

ID 1814: School could teach me how to live in the real world. School could teach me less of the useless stuff like analyzing passages of Shakespeare that I probably will never use. Instead school should teach me to cope with hardship and use it as a strength. School should teach me to do my taxes, complete a job interview, create a resume, truly prepare me for college, really make sure I'm a well rounded student that is ready for life after school – 17yo, male, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, Northeast

ID 1984: I wish my school would give us more skills that will actually help us in our lives – 14yo, male, NH white, < HS, Low SES, West

Provide Social Support (n=129)

ID 161: Provide resources in the case that things are not going well. Whether that be mental health resources, nutritional help, opportunities for physical exercise that are affordable and overall support – 21yo, female, NH white, some college, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 359: I think getting to know students so that you know when someone needs help and doesn't know how to ask or what to do. I struggled a lot and am lucky to have somehow gotten through but no one even noticed that I was acting a little off because I was the same student I always was. Even if my grades had dropped, I didn't have anyone who really cared about me enough who would have looked into the why of it. It just would have been brushed off. So I guess relationship building regardless of the level of education you are getting – 23yo, female, NH white, some college, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 576: support me – 17yo, female, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 1088: They could support me with everything and give me advice on anything I need like finding solutions for problems at home – 15yo male, Hisp, < HS, Low SES, West

ID 1334: It could provide social situations that could teach you important things like establishing boundaries, how to work with other people, and how to handle social situations – 17yo, female, NH white, < HS, Low SES, South

ID 1430: They could remind students like me that I could live my best life at my own pace and that it's measured by my own standards. There isn't a perfect life that I have to live up to – 17yo, female, NH other, < HS, Low SES, West

ID 1745: i feel like school faculty should work on making more personal connections with their students, and i dont mean that they should single out each individual pupil and have a sit down conversation with them (but that would be nice), but they should at least work on making the interactions between each other feel less transactional by creating a more inviting atmosphere and removing the tier like relationship of students and teachers – 18yo, female, NH white, HS grad, Med/High SES, Midwest

Support Mental Health (n=127)

ID 36: They should provide mental health services to all their students and let students express their individuality with their clothing – 17yo, female, NH other, < HS, Mid/High SES, Midwest

ID 119: Teach students about the importance of mental health – 24yo, male, NH other, Master's, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 302: Take mental health seriously. I was assaulted last year and my mental health took the biggest nosedive to date. I've always been at least functional if nothing else. And I was given absolutely zero help from the school in both mental health and keeping me separate from people connected to my attacker, which in turn made my mental state significantly worse – 17yo, male, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, Northeast

ID 706: Provide therapy? Or at least better emotional counseling – 17yo, female, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 1755: Not destroy my mental health – 16yo, male, Hisp, some college, Low SES, South

ID 2024: i think my school needs to offer comprehensive emotional and mental care, resource fairs, check ins, supportive environment, and a regulated curriculum – 15yo, male, NH other, < HS, Low SES, West

Lower Costs (n=106)

ID 145: Make education free – 22yo, female, NH black, some college, Low SES, Midwest

ID 225: Make textbooks and classes cheaper – 18yo, female, NH white, some college, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 272: Being less expensive! Also maybe offer some kind of student health insurance discount – 18yo, male, Hisp, HS grad, Low SES, West

ID 1702: Decrease my student loans. I owe almost \$200,000 and the current job market after undergrad just doesn't pay enough – 23yo, female, NH white, Bachelor's, Med/High SES, Northeast

Career Guidance (n=102)

ID 149: School can help me reach my career goals and help me find something that makes me happy and helps me with financial security – 21yo, female, NH white, some college, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 657: My school could have prepared me better for getting out into the real world – 18yo, female NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, East

ID 797: actually help me figure out my future and help me with my goals – 17yo, female, Hisp, < HS, Med/High SES, South

ID 917: They could offer more opportunities for internships or volunteer opportunities with the careers we're interested in – 17yo, female, NH white, < HS, Low SES, South

ID 1501: Help you get ready for your future job – 16yo, NH other, < HS, Low SES, Northeast

ID 2003: They could teach us about more trades and industries – 15yo, male, NH white, < HS, Low SES, Midwest

Positive School Environment (n=94)

ID 29: They should continue to strive for an exceptional learning environment every year – 18yo, male, NH white, < HS, Low SES, Midwest

ID 446: School could help me by 1) understanding that I'm trying my best despite being in a bad place, and 2) creating a better learning environment for me – 16yo, female, Hisp, < HS, Low SES, West

ID 466: Create spaces for students to leave the environment of school and embrace relaxation – 20yo, male, NH other, Assoc. degree, Low SES, Midwest

ID 643: Get more control of the bad things that occur, racism and all that – 18yo, male, Hisp, < HS, Med/High SES, South

ID 729: bring more awareness about the difference unity can bring – 17yo, female, NH other, < HS, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 892: Creating a safer space to talk about stress and stressors. I think that it would help me feel better about myself and the place I'm in – 17yo, female, NH other, < HS, Low SES, West

ID 1576: Begin to foster a community that cares for each other instead of forming cliques – 15yo, male, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, South

ID 1937: Stop the bullying and notice the signs quicker – 17yo, female, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, Midwest

More Academic Support (n=89)

ID 510: Offering tutoring for every subject so I didn't have to teach myself outside of class – 19yo, female, Hisp, some college Low SES, South

ID 1035: My school could help the students with SAT prep and things – 18yo, female, NH other, < HS, Med/High SES, South

ID 1225: Provide free or inexpensive tutoring in STEM subjects – 16yo, male, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, Northeast

ID 1496: Provide more academic and emotional support – 17yo, female, NH white, > HS, Med/High SES, Northeast

ID 1502: Focus on reaching out to students who don't appear to be feeling good or who appear to be depressed or who appear to be struggling at any given point during their academic career – 16yo, male, NH other, < HS, Med/High SES, South

ID 1679: Help me with work if I'm not doing good in certain classes. Take the time to talk with me – 14yo, male, NH white, < HS, Low SES, South

ID 1953: It could help teach me the skills I need for what I want to do, or if they don't have the resources to do so, they could help me find a school or other program that will teach me the skills I need to know – 18yo, female, NH white, HS grad, Low SES, East

Less Stress (n=57)

ID 102: Not creat such a demanding environment with sports, academics, and clubs – 16yo, female, Hisp, < HS, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 263: In high school I think they could have helped us cope with stress better. It was a very competitive environment. My current college does a good job but they should allow more therapy sessions than just 7 per year – 19yo, female, NH white, some college, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 413: Not pressure me so much – 17yo, female, Hisp, < HS, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 1143: Make it less stressful overall!!! – 17yo, male, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, South

Less Homework (n=56)

ID 280: give less homework – 17yo, male, NH other, < HS, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 616: Having less homework. I understand that no homework is impossible but having less would certainly lower stress – 17yo, female, NH black, < HS, Med/High SES, Northeast

ID 864: LESS HOMEWORK after spending 8 hours at school I don't want to go home to 8 hours of homework – 19yo, female, NH white, < HS, Low SES, Northeast

ID 1359: School could ease up? There's exams every other day or just every day on top of hours of homework. It's so hard just to handle my extracurriculars, advanced course load, and internships without all the undue stress of do many hours of school work. I feel I spend just as much time doing homework as I do in school itself. It would be nice to have a few less hours of assignments or maybe a rule barring teachers from assigning a bunch of work over the weekends or at least vacations like winter and spring break – 16yo, female, NH other, < HS, Med/High SES, South

More Fun/Social Events (n=43)

ID 32: They could have more fun events for students – 17yo, female, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 306: Help facilitate social events and work to connect people – 23yo, male, NH white, Bachelor's, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 605: Host events during the summer like movie nights or a picnic. Even if not many came, it could be a free fun way to get kids to ease back into school and see it as a more positive place – 19yo, male, NH white, < HS, Low SES, Midwest

ID 1084: the school could probably host more activities during and after school – 15yo, male, Hisp, < HS, Low SES, West

Better Teachers/Staff (n=35)

ID 363: Have teachers who actually care. When I was behind in reading, a teacher noticed and I got extra teaching in that field – 18yo, female, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 562: They could have been more understanding when problems came up. Many teachers don't understand medical issues or even care what problems you have. They just shove assignments at you and expect life to not get in the way. More understanding teachers would have helped me live my best life – 18yo, female, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, West

ID 1045: Better teachers and staff to help with teaching and to help us feel more welcome at school – 16yo, female, NH other, < HS, Low SES, South

ID 1752: Have staff that actually cares about the students – 15yo, female, NH other, < HS, Low SES, South

Fewer Rules/Restrictions (n=25)

ID 342: Allow for breaks where we have no school obligation so that way we may relax and pursue other interests and to also realise that we are humans and things come up or we make mistakes but to work with us and not always penalize – 22yo, female, NH white, some college, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 805: Maybe stop having tons of rules that are just restrictions – 16yo, female, NH white, some college, Low SES, West

ID 1167: well my school could possibly be more lenient with phone policies such as allowing students to listen to music while the teacher isn't teaching – 15yo, male, Hisp, < HS, Low SES, South

ID 1558: Letting me express my individuality through a less restricted dress code, having more after school activities and working with students based on their interests – 16yo, female, NH white, < HS, Low SES, South

ID 1611: Allow real religious freedom. I always saw atheist being allowed to say oh my God, yet I could not bow my head to pray or wear a cross necklace unless it was tucked under my shirt – 17yo, female, NH white, HS grad, Med/High SES, Midwest

Less Emphasis on Grades (n=21)

ID 366: School would have to give less homework and be more lenient on the grades – 16yo, female, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 485: Put our happiness above our grades – 19yo, female, NH white, < HS, Low SES, South

ID 806: I think if they focused more on developing a love for learning instead of just grades, it would help us all get scholarships to colleges and limit debt – 17yo, female, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, West

ID 882: Stress less about tests, and know that my worth isn't measured by an arbitrary number – 18yo, other gender, NH other, < HS, Med/High SES, Northeast

Provide Healthy Food (n=13)

ID 461: I think my school could have improved food when I was eating in the dining halls during my freshman year – 23yo, male, NH white, some college, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 1680: Encouraging fitness events and providing healthy options in the dining hall – 24yo, female, NH other, Master's, Med/High SES, South

ID 2031: Enforce my 504 and improve it. Plus improve the quality of the school lunches – 14yo, female, NH other, < HS, Med/High SES, West

Support LGBTQ Students (n=13)

ID 471: support other lgbt students, especially when it comes to bullying – 16yo, other gender, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 840: Be supportive of the LGBTQ+ student community, listen to their students opinions, not enforce a dress code, allow us more freedom – 18yo, other gender, NH white, < HS, Low SES, Northeast

ID 1824: It would help a lot if my school put in gender neutral bathrooms. I would feel way less anxious than I am right now, and i would definitely say more hydrated. It would also be very helpful if the school had LGBT inclusive sex education. It would help me be more accurately educated and would definitely help other people figure themselves out. It would also help the teachers and students to be more tolerant of LGBT students. It would be great if the teachers went through some sort of training on how to treat and deal with transgender students, most teachers i know at my school would just ignore us, and probably misgender us too. If there was a way for them to be educated about how to properly treat transgender students it would make me feel a lot safer and I would be able to express myself more – 15yo, other gender, NH white, < HS, Low SES, Midwest

ID 1910: My middle school could've created a GSA club (gay- straight alliance) to help me know that i wasn't alone when i first came out in 7th grade – 15yo, other gender, NH other, < HS, Low SES, South

More Sports/Physical Fitness (n=10)

ID 27: Offer resources like workout facilities or mental health awareness programs – 21yo, female, NH white, some college, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 1604: have more social events and dances. give more study and relaxation breaks, care more about the stress put on us. have sports and club activities – 17yo, female, Hisp, HS grad, Low SES, South

ID 1989: My school could have more health/wellness programs to encourage me to exercise and engage in self care more – 20yo, other gender, NH other, some college, Med/High SES, Northeast

Ensure Safety (n=8)

ID 756: Keep you safe – 16yo, male, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 873: Make learning enjoyable and ensure a safe environment – 17yo, male, Hisp, < HS, Med/High SES, Northeast

ID 1163: My school isn't necessarily the best at safety, so I'm constantly worrying about safety and me rather than my schoolwork. Living your best life means doing as well as possible in school, and I can't really do that currently – 16yo, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, West

Nothing (n=33)

ID 606: Nothing really, im fortunate to go to a great school – 16yo, male, Hisp, < HS, Low SES, South

ID 626: I don't believe it's any entity's issue other than my own, and they did all they could – 19yo, female, NH white, < HS, Low SES, West

ID 664: Nothing. My school has been super supportive of me, my goals, and my health – 16yo, male, NH white, < HS Med/High SES, West

Not Sure/Miscellaneous (44)

Q4. What keeps you from living your best life, if anything?

Responses from 867 individuals contained information that could be coded (97% of non-blank responses) on factors inhibiting their best life. Twenty-three different themes were identified in this question and 1,262 codes were assigned to participant responses. On average, participants identified only one factor keeping them from living their best life.

Youth overwhelmingly noted a lack of money as holding them back as well as their own bad habits, behaviors, or self-doubt.

Money (n=260)

ID 10: Lack of resources -- mainly time and/or money – 24yo, male, NH white, Bachelor's, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 272: Money will forever be a barrier or me living my best life – 18yo, male, Hisp, HS grad, Low SES, West

ID 726: School debt, high rent costs in the area I live, high cost of produce and other healthy foods – 19yo, female, NH other, < HS, Low SES, West

ID 1403: My financial need. I do not have means to go to college at this moment. Going to college can help me reach more people because I want to be a teacher and help kids reach their greatest potential – 17yo, female, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, West

ID 1720: My family is poor – 16yo, male, NH white, < HS, Low SES, Midwest

Myself (n=124)

ID 196: Myself. Lack of self confidence, lack of social skills, overall awkwardness. Fear of losing the ones – 18yo, male, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 370: I think maybe just myself I doubt myself a lot and procrastinate on important stuff often – 19yo, female, NH other, < HS, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 446: My high standards for myself and my lack of discipline and effort – 16yo, female, Hisp, < HS, Low SES, West

ID 964: My own pride or self-interest is probably the number one thing that keeps me from living my best life. Sometimes I know something is good for me, but I'm too stubborn to do it – 24yo, female, NH white, some college, Med/High SES, West

ID 1704: I keep myself from living my best life – 17yo, male, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, South

Demands of School (n=89)

ID 98: Being overworked with school and other responsibilities – 18yo, male, NH other, < HS, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 1325: Pressure to get into a good college/to get good grades – 16yo, female, NH other, < HS, Med/High SES, West

ID 1607: Bad teachers and ridiculous amounts of unseeded homework – 16yo, female, NH other, < HS, Med/High SES, West

ID 2057: Lack of time, lack of money, busy with school – 20yo, male, NH white, some college, Med/High SES, South

Fear/Insecurity (n=86)

ID 63: I think fear of failure prevents me from living my best life. I avoid things that scare me instead of jumping into them -22yo, female, NH white, Assoc. degree, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 424: My insecurities about myself in general, my gender dysphoria, and my lack of confidence as a musician – 18yo, other gender, NH other, < HS, Low SES, South

ID 471: not much, but generally: fear of being hurt by others for my expression – 16yo, other gender, NH white, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 579: I think financial issues as well as stress. Stress makes me overthink things as does fear. Fear of failing, fear of being in too much debt, or fear of not being good enough... – 23yo, female, NH white, some college, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 1002: The fear of failing and letting myself and the people around me down – 18yo, male, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 1687: Fear of judgement from others, fear of disappointing others, feeling like you are doing the wrong thing – 16yo, female, NH other, < HS, Med/High SES, South

ID 2031: Life it's self. There are too many obstacles in my way, too much anxiety and fear – 14yo, female, NH other, < HS, Med/High SES, West

Stress (n=85)

ID 295: Overthinking maybe. It can lead to me being sad or something. Or stress...or being overwhelmed – 18yo, female, NH black, < HS, Low SES, Midwest

ID 953: Stress mainly. I get easily stressed out about school work – 16yo, other gender, NH other, < HS, Low SES, Midwest

ID 1599: Stress and anxiety – 18yo, male, NH white, some college, Med/High SES, South

ID 1736: I often feel overly stressed and unable to do things at my full capacity – 16yo, other gender, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES

ID 1814: Stress honestly when I get stressed the only thing I can think about is the stress from not being able to do something and then I just break down and can't do it. I just feel sad and empty and feel like life is impossible and I can't complete the task in front of me. I'm also a procrastinator which does not help at all – 17yo, male, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, Northeast

ID 1884: I think my anxiety, stress and sometimes questioning my personal and professional identity is keeping me from living my best life. Sometimes I feel like I have no voice – 24yo, male, NH black, HS grad, Low SES, South

Mental Health (n=84)

ID 186: I have a lot of health issues both mental and physical that range from nerve damage to genetic mess ups anxiety disorders to kill an army and phobias that could wipe out the planet. When you live like that and everyone treats you like there all your fault and you just want attention it holds and it's taken years to get where I am and it will be a long time till I'm living to my full potential again – 17yo, female, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 841: My mental illness – 17yo, other gender, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, South

ID 922: My anxiety, my struggle with type one diabetes, and past situations that have caused me to have ptsd – 18yo, female, Hisp, < HS, Med/High SES, South

ID 1490: My mental health keeps me from living my best life. My depression and anxiety are constantly telling me I'm not good enough and that I will not reach my goals no matter how hard I try. Another thing that holds me back is my family, who are unsupportive of what it would take to live my best life – 15yo, female, NH white, < HS, Low SES, West

Job (n=60)

ID 100: Large debt and a low-paying job despite having a degree. Money isn't everything, but I really hate that I can't have true financial independence because I could never afford a vehicle or health insurance on my own, and both are necessities for me – 23yo, female, NH white, some college, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 510: Having to work too much and not having enough time for everything else – 19yo, female, Hisp, some college, Low SES, South

ID 675: Being around people who think negatively, pushing off homework, having to have 2 jobs to sustain a place to live and to be able to afford tuition fees, and constantly worrying about money – 19yo, Hisp, < HS, Low SES, Midwest

ID 925: My age and my lack of a job – 16yo, female, NH black, < HS, Med/High SES, West

Time (n=57)

ID 877: Time and motivation – 19yo, female, NH white, some college, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 1226: Time im too young i still have to study and work to improve my reputation and my resume – 17yo, male, Hisp, < HS, Low SES, West

ID 1297: My toxic relationship with my parents is a lot of stress and energy and leads to me having to spend more time on self care than what I want to be doing – 18yo, female, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 1899: The lack of time. I always feel that I'm rushing from one event to another. I go from school to work then to practice after that to competitions and then to meetings and appointments. I feel that In order for my future self to be able to live his best life, I must live the worst one – 16yo, male, Hisp, some college, Med/High SES, South

Peers/Friends (n=51)

ID 355: Not being able to surround myself with people who love me for me, and toxic friendships – 17yo, female, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 1243: Probably people if I'm being honest. There's this one girl that used to like me and now she causes drama and trouble with her boyfriend and I always get stuck in the middle – 17yo, male, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, West

ID 1465: Life problems. Friendship issues, low income, trouble finding true self – 15yo, male, Hisp, < HS, Low SES, West

ID 1734: Well, Bullying Used to keep me from living my best life- I used to deal with bullying For a while and it finally stopped- but bullying isn't ok – 14yo, male, NH black, < HS, Low SES, Midwest

Parents (n=43)

ID 85: Emotionally abusive mom and unsupportive (emotionally) family – 24yo, female, NH other, Bachelor's, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 806: My dad is overly restrictive, and he makes it hard for me to do much – 17yo, female, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, West

ID 1102: My parents. I have plenty of money saved on my own that I could live comfortably, but my parents have control over me until I am 18 – 15yo, male, NH white, some college, Low SES, South

ID 1407: Stress, pressure from my parents to do well academically, social norms in my city – 16yo, male, NH other, < HS, Med/High SES, West

Health/Disability (n=42)

ID 278: My MS – 23yo, male, NH other, Assoc. degree, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 762: Worrying about finding a job I love but that also gives me the health insurance I need to take care of my medical issues – 23yo, female, NH white, some college, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 1799: Probably my health (I have a bone disorder) and just social pressures of my family – 16yo, female, Hisp, < HS, Low SES, West

ID 2045: Not enough accessibility, crappy doctors, lgbt-phobia, ableism – 19yo, other gender, NH other, HS grad, Low SES, Midwest

Family (n=40)

ID 152: Feeling stuck/trapped at home or in any place for a long time. It is very much time for me to move out and figure out some things by myself without my family's constant feedback and influence – 18yo, female, NH other, < HS, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 706: I am living in a broken household – 17yo, female, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 1176: Unfortunately my family. I would like to openly date my boyfriend (I'm a male) but they wouldn't be the most accepting so I've had to secretly date him – 17yo, male, NH black, < HS, Med/High SES, South

ID 1807: My family doesn't know who I really am – 17yo, other gender, Hisp, < HS, Med/High SES, West

Lack of Opportunities/Life Obstacles (n=36)

ID 220: The obstacles life throws at me and the challenging course I'm taking – 19yo, male, NH black, < HS, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 1348: Lack of money and opportunities could keep me from my best life – 15yo, female, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, South

ID 1480: I oftentimes have a harder time succeeding in my areas of passion because of my gender and ethnicity – 18yo, female, NH other, < HS, Med/High SES, West

ID 1630: Unfortunate and unexpected situations that cost time, money and extra effort and may cause excessive amounts of stress – 18yo, female, NH other, < HS, Low SES, Midwest

ID 1730: Lack of resources, a weak foundation growing up, lack of money, and institutional discrimination towards certain personality types – 16yo, other gender, Hisp, HS grad, Med/High SES, West

Negativity (n=32)

ID 711: My negativity and my tendency to procrastinate keep me from living my best life – 18yo, male, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, Northeast

ID 743: My parents....my mom is really negative about everything and she's always criticising me. It makes me second guess my choices and life course and feel overall shitty about myself – 23yo, female, NH white, some college, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 1396: !Just negativity and not keeping a positive attitude – 17yo, female, Hisp, < HS, Med/High SES, South

ID 1446: Negative people, and haters – 15yo, male, NH other, < HS, Low SES, Northeast

ID 1699: People that are negative, or getting bad energy or vibes – 23yo, female, NH black, some college, Low SES, Midwest

Social Expectations (n=30)

ID 1074: There is a lot of peer pressure to follow the crowd and "fit in". This paired with adults who have clear opinions on everything that teenagers do makes it difficult at times to feel empowered enough to pursue what makes me happy – 18yo, female, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, South

ID 1421: Pressures. From family and society. Both have a vision of what the world will be and how I fit into it. I am fine not fitting in. I want to stand out as doing something – 16yo, female, NH other, < HS, Low SES, West

ID 1576: Homophobia and society expectations – 15yo, male, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, South

Social Anxiety (n=25)

ID 275: My social anxiety and insecurity – 16yo, female, NH black, < HS, Low SES, South

ID 616: Anxiety if what people think and over my future (specifically college) – 17yo, female, NH black, < HS, Med/High SES, Northeast

ID 1795: The very big introvert that I am keeps me from living my best life – 14yo, male, NH other, < HS, Low SES, Northeast

ID 1917: Mental health stuff - I'm shy, not very confident, and anxious, so I don't put myself out there and meet people or go do cool things a lot – 22yo, female, NH white, Bachelor's, Med/High SES, South

Experience/Age (n=23)

ID 302: Dependence. I heavily value my personal freedom and needing others to provide for me and being spoken down to by institutions like universities and schools doesn't go over well. Though I suppose that comes with the territory of being legally an adult but financially still stunted by my age. And my previous experiences with violence and anger. Home life wasn't always as good as it is now and it definitely messed me up a bit – 17yo, male, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, Northeast

ID 1126: I'm only 17 so I cant move out and go travel where I want, I cant go buy that nice car I want. I'm limited to what i can do right now – 17yo, male, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, South

ID 2006: One limitation would definitely be my freedom since I have very little permissions to do things at a young age – 16yo, female, NH other, < HS, Med/High SES, West

Government (n=14)

ID 255: the government – 17yo, male, Hisp, < HS, Low SES, South

ID 1460: My anxiety and depression. My struggles with my sexuality. I don't have a job so I don't have any money to spend. I don't have friends who hang out easily. Politics stress me out – 16yo, female, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES, Northeast

ID 1762: The court system, in particular having a felony conviction, it makes it really hard as most jobs look down on it, as well as housing prospects, also the targeting from the police as they automatically assume I'm a criminal because of my conviction – 23yo, male, NH white, HS grad, Med/High SES, Midwest

Transportation (n=13)

ID 606: Not being able to drive is a bit of a set back – 16yo, male, Hisp, < HS, Low SES, South

ID 1096: I have no transportation right now, Mom has had no car for 5 years. No public busses in our town and I have no where to go, nothing to do – 17yo, female, NH white, < HS, Low SES, South

ID 2038: If anything it would only be transportation I don't have a car but other than that nothing – 15yo, female, NH black, < HS, Low SES, South

Past Trauma (n=8)

ID 595: Probably myself, it's hard to get motivated and remember to let go of the past and move forward – 19yo, female, NH other, < HS, Med/High SES, West

ID 1621: just the past keeps sucking me back down and just school, i feel like i wouldn't put so much burden on me if those two things disappeared – 21yo, female, Hisp, HS grad, Low SES, West

ID 1682: My trauma from when I was a little kid mostly – 17yo, other gender, NH white, < HS, Med/High SES

ID 2056: Fixating on the past/worrying about the future. Past failures – 16yo, male, NH other, < HS, Med/High SES, South

Safety Concerns (n=4)

ID 473: I guess the reality of life. Debts, social peer pressure and conformity in order to be kept physically safe and not killed – 24yo, female, NH other, some college, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 2062: A lot of things actually. I'm very cautious when I go to places now. I always carry an alarm system in case anything happens to me. That's because I ride public transportation, and I just never know what might happen while I'm on them. Also, I've become fearful of going to public places (e.g. grocery stores, the mall, etc.) because of the mass shootings that have happened in Dayton and El Paso – 19yo, female, NH other, HS grad, Low SES, West

Loneliness (n=2)

ID 18: My own lack of motivation and feels of loneliness – 21yo, female, NH white, some college, Med/High SES, Midwest

ID 25: Being lonely – 22yo, male, NH white, some college, Med/High SES, Midwest

Nothing (n=55)

References

DeJonckheere M, Nichols LP, Moniz MH, Sonnevile KR, Vydiswaran VGV, Zhao X, et al. MyVoice National Text Message Survey of Youth Aged 14 to 24 Years: Study Protocol. JMIR Res Protoc. 2017;6(12):e247.

MyVoice Team Members

All members of coding team are trained in qualitative coding with significant experience in MyVoice text message data.

Marika Waselewski, MPH, Research Program Manager, Department of Family Medicine, University of Michigan Medical School

Tammy Chang, MD, MPH, MS, Assistant Professor, Department of Family Medicine, University of Michigan Medical School

N'Dea Moore-Petinak, PhD student, Health Services Organization & Policy, Political Science Cognate, University of Michigan

Kelsey Rose, MPH, Graduate student, University of Michigan School of Public Health

Sasha Akuezue, High School Intern, Skyline High School, Ann Arbor, MI

Chloe Harper, High School Intern, Skyline High School, Ann Arbor, MI