

COUNTY OF KANE



Kane County Government Center
719 South Batavia Avenue
Geneva, IL 60134
P: (630) 444-1108
MannJulie@co.kane.il.us
www.countyofkane.org

Kane County Releases 2025 Youth Forum Report on Mental Health Solutions

Report Highlights Student-Driven Priorities and Actionable Recommendations

(Media Release – 5/20/25) On February 7, 2025, the Kane County Health Department (KCHD) and the Regional Office of Education (ROE) hosted the 6th Annual Youth Voices Forum on Mental Health at Elgin Community College, bringing together 86 students from 10 area high schools to tackle one of the most urgent issues facing today's youth: mental health. **The forum's mission was to:**

- Provide an inclusive platform for youth, educators, and mental health professionals to collaborate
- Amplify youth voices and recognize students as experts of their own experiences
- Facilitate open conversations to break down stigma around mental health
- Promote holistic support systems that are trauma-informed, culturally sensitive, and gender-affirming
- Build connections and resilience among peers, school staff, and community providers
- Develop actionable outcomes to guide local policy and programming

The day featured a panel moderated by Josh Axelson (ROE), with representatives from KCHD and Dundee-Crown High School, and concluded with an inspiring keynote from motivational speaker Brandon McCall, who shared his journey of resilience following family trauma and incarceration. Students then participated in small group discussions led by trained youth facilitators, developed in partnership with Dr. Piper Stratton of Dundee-Crown.

Key issues identified by youth included:

- Discrimination—especially among LGBTQIA+ students and those from diverse backgrounds—contributing to anxiety, depression, and isolation
- Cyberbullying and harmful social media trends, which students described as widespread, damaging, and often ignored
- Teacher bias and its impact on student well-being, with students calling for culturally responsive teaching and equitable school discipline
- Lack of structure, physical activity, and emotional regulation skills, which many youth said exacerbate mental health challenges

The report outlines targeted strategies for all stakeholders:

- **Schools & Leadership:** Implement restorative justice, expand school-based mental health staffing, integrate social-emotional learning, and form Student Advisory Committees
- **Parents & Caregivers:** Model empathetic listening, establish online safety practices, and engage in community support networks
- **Students:** Strengthen healthy habits (sleep, nutrition, hygiene, exercise), advocate for peer support groups, limit social media influence, and participate in school resource referrals

“Students face unique challenges growing up today, and we can learn a lot by taking the time to listen to their important perspectives,” said Michael Isaacson, Executive Director of the Kane County Health Department. “We have the ability to

create a better environment for our young people and can act on what they've told us to build a future where mental health is prioritized and support is accessible to all."

The 2025 forum was held as part of the **Kane County System of Care**, funded by the **Illinois Children's Healthcare Foundation**, and reflects Kane County's long-term commitment to youth-led, equity-driven mental health solutions.

For a full copy of the 2025 Youth Voices Forum on Mental Health Report in English and Spanish, visit:

kanehealth.com/Pages/YVF.aspx