

## **Kane County Youth Share Mental Health Challenges and Solutions at 2026 Youth Voices Forum**

The Kane County Health Department, in partnership with the Kane County Regional Office of Education, has released the report from the 7th Annual Kane County Youth Voices Forum on Mental Health, held February 6, 2026, at Elgin Community College. The event brought together more than 100 high school students from 11 schools across Kane County to discuss mental health, belonging, stress, and the support systems young people need to thrive.

Partially funded by the Illinois Children's Healthcare Foundation, the forum created an environment where students openly shared their experiences and recommendations for schools, families, and community organizations.

The newly released report highlights several key themes identified by students, including emotional exhaustion, anxiety, loneliness, academic pressure, social media impacts, and the need for stronger relationships with trusted adults. Students consistently emphasized the importance of feeling heard, understood, and connected.

"Students shared thoughtful and honest perspectives about the challenges they face every day," said Michael Isaacson, Executive Director of the Kane County Health Department. "Their voices provide valuable insight into how schools, families, and communities can better support youth mental health and create environments where young people feel connected and supported."

Throughout the day, students participated in small group discussions led by trained student facilitators, explored resources from local youth-serving organizations, and heard from keynote speaker Nathan Harmon, founder of Your Life Speaks. Some students reported they felt less alone after hearing from peers across the county.

The report also outlines recommendations generated from both student input and evidence-based research. Recommendations include increasing access to low-barrier mental health supports, strengthening peer connection opportunities, improving communication between schools and families, reducing stigma around help-seeking, and shifting from punitive to supportive approaches for attendance and behavioral concerns.

Participating schools included Bartlett High School, Batavia High School, Blackhawk Academy, Dundee-Crown High School, Elgin High School, Geneva High School, Hampshire High School, Larkin High School, South Elgin High School, Streamwood High School, and West Aurora High School.

The full 2026 Kane County Youth Voices Forum on Mental Health Report is available at: <https://www.kanehealth.com/Pages/YVF.aspx>

For more information about behavioral health resources and youth mental health initiatives in Kane County, visit: <https://www.kanehealth.com/Pages/Behavioral-Health.aspx>