

Pandemic Education Research Project

WHO DID WE SPEAK TO?

Hamilton Community Foundation works closely with community programs and school boards in Hamilton; together we want to support student learning and wellness. We spoke to young people to understand how the COVID-19 pandemic was affecting them and how they can be better supported.


23 young people

5 youth-serving organizations

In November and December 2021, we talked with 23 young people who were between 7 and 17 years old. They were connected to us through five different Hamilton organizations.

4 THINGS WE HEARD FROM YOUNG PEOPLE!

"I didn't know how much fun I had at school until I had to go online. I just missed seeing my friends and teachers in person."

1 - ONLINE LEARNING WASN'T ALWAYS EASY

It was hard to stay interested when online school felt boring. Some youth said school felt pointless when so few students participated and assignments weren't always graded. Sometimes it was hard to ask questions and some students felt left out if they learned in different ways.



"It was hard because if I didn't get something the teacher was explaining, it's not like in-person where you can get the teacher to help you. You kind of have to figure it out yourself."



2 - YOU NEED THE RIGHT TOOLS TO LEARN AT HOME

Sometimes the internet didn't work, or there wasn't a computer or tablet to use, or the online learning platform was confusing. Being at home could sometimes be more comfortable, but there were also many distractions that made it hard to learn, like online games, YouTube, or family activities.

"It's like, you know when you're learning something [at school], everywhere is quiet and everyone is listening to the teacher. But [at home] your dad could be mowing the lawn outside and it could disturb you, your mind, instead of focusing on the teacher..."i>

3 - YOUR RELATIONSHIPS CHANGED DURING THE PANDEMIC

Young people tried to keep in touch through social media, texting, and platforms like Discord and Kids Messenger, but felt less close with old friends and found it hard to make new friends during the pandemic. Some changes in friendships have remained even as we return to in-person.



"...My old friends and all, it's not like how it used to be. Like we used to hang out all the time, talk all the time. But now I have to say it's like an on-and-off thing. It pains me to say that it's an on-and-off thing, but that's just the truth."



4 - EVERYONE NEEDS CARING ADULTS

Some youth felt teachers would make assumptions about them, like when youth struggled with technology, teachers sometimes assumed they weren't listening or engaged. Youth said they felt cared for when adults listened to them and considered their needs. Some young people said they felt like they didn't have consistent adult support during the pandemic.

"[Adults should] ask [kids] if they're okay, if they don't sound good."

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

"I felt like I was in this endless loop, and it was just the same thing every day, I'd wake up, go to online school...[be] in Minecraft for a little while and then I'd leave. Go to sleep and repeat."

You know what you need to learn best. **Young people recommended:**

- + getting active
- + incorporating more games, competitions, and prizes into learning
- + time outdoors
- + active learning using all of their senses
- + making time for play and social connections



We heard how hard the pandemic was on young people's well-being. Supportive relationships with friends and trusted adults help keep mental health strong; as we go back to in-person learning, **building strong mental health** will be just as important as academics.

"My teacher would always talk to us, like at the end of the day, she would see we were tired and like my teacher herself, she could, she would get stressed too, so she would play a fun game with us and would just try and cheer us up."

QUESTIONS FOR THE FUTURE

RELATIONSHIPS

Some programs used prizes to encourage young people to keep cameras on so they could see each other's faces and feel more connected. Some programs found creative ways to connect virtually through: cooking clubs, virtual tutoring, and new ways of connecting with families.



How can you stay close with friends and adult mentors during the pandemic? ?

PLAY AND WELLNESS

When things were hard during the pandemic, young people worked to stay strong by:

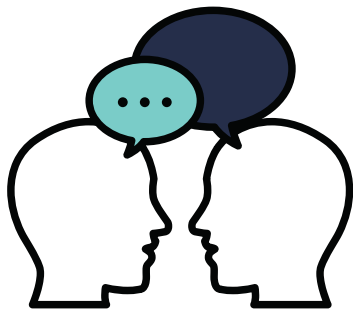
- + making or listening to music
- + reaching out to someone they trusted
- + being with pets
- + spending time outside
- + playing sports
- + making art
- + trying to learn something new like a new language or new instrument

What other ways can you find to relax, connect, and play every day? ?



COMMUNICATE AND ENGAGE

Many young people shared how frustrated they were when they felt they had little control during the pandemic. They wanted clearer communication and to better understand expectations.



How can adults help support you when big changes are happening in your life? ?

Thank you for sharing with us!

Questions? Contact us at research@hamiltoncommunityfoundation.ca

A report prepared for:

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