Brookings Area UNITED WAY

communities that care PLUS

2025

BROOKINGS YOUTH RISK & PROTECTIVE FACTORS ASSESSMENT

REPORT

Prepared By

Brookings Communities That Care (CTC) Risk and Protective Factors Workgroup April 2025

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Risk and Protective Factors Assessment Report

Brookings, SD

Prepared by Brookings Communities That Care:

Risk and Protective Factor Workgroup

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Executive Summary

This Community Assessment Data Report presents the findings from the risk and protective factor analysis conducted by the Risk and Protective Factor Workgroup of Brookings Communities That Care (CTC). The CTC system is a community-based prevention framework developed by Drs. David Hawkins and Richard Catalano. The system helps local stakeholders identify and address factors influencing youth development. Its core aim is to prevent youth problem behaviors—such as substance use, delinquency, school dropout, teen pregnancy, and violence—by targeting the underlying conditions that contribute to these outcomes.

In alignment with this objective, Brookings initiated its CTC effort in Fall 2024 to foster a community environment rooted in safety, belonging, and positive relationships. Over the past several months, the community has established a dedicated CTC Board, formed action workgroups, and collaborated with the Brookings School District and Brookings Area United Way to analyze youth data and set evidence-based priorities.

This assessment primarily utilizes data from the 2024 SEARCH Institute youth survey, administered to students in grades 6 through 12 at Brookings Mickelson Middle School and Brookings High School. The SEARCH survey data is student self-reported perception data. Supplementary data from local and state sources helped round out the analysis, particularly in identifying trends not directly measured by the SEARCH survey.

Based on detailed analysis and community feedback, two priority **risk factors** have been identified:

- **Elevated Absenteeism**
  A notable increase in unexcused absences—particularly at the high school level—signals a decline in student presence and potentially broader social-emotional challenges among youth, especially girls.

- **Low Neighborhood Attachment and Community Disorganization**
  Indicators suggest that some students experience weak connections to their neighborhood and a perceived lack of cohesion or support, which may contribute to risky behaviors and a reduced sense of safety or belonging.

At the same time, the community exhibits key **protective factors** that can be leveraged:

● **Succeeds in School**
   Despite absenteeism trends, a majority of students report striving to do their best and feeling supported by their teachers, signaling strong academic motivation and engagement.

● **Helping Others**
   Youth reported high rates of prosocial behaviors, including volunteering and assisting others, which serve as positive influences and resilience-building traits.

These findings suggest that while external indicators such as attendance and community cohesion require urgent attention, internal protective factors related to academic effort and prosocial behavior remain strong and can serve as a foundation for targeted intervention. Furthermore, Brookings can build on other strengths, such as decreased participation in alcohol, tobacco, drug use, and violent behaviors, as shown in the 2024 SEARCH survey results.

This report serves as a critical first step in Brookings's CTC journey. It will inform the development of a tailored prevention action plan, guiding local efforts to reduce youth problem behaviors while promoting a culture of support, connection, and opportunity.

Introduction

Brookings Communities That Care Effort

In Fall 2024, Brookings began implementing the Communities That Care (CTC) prevention planning system, developed by Dr. David Hawkins and Dr. Richard Catalano of the Social Development Research Group in Seattle, Washington. The CTC framework empowers communities to work collaboratively to promote positive youth development and prevent problem behaviors such as substance use, violence, and school disengagement.

Brookings implemented the Communities That Care process to achieve the community's vision that _Brookings strives to be a community rooted in safety, belonging, and positive relationships to empower youth_.

Key milestones to date include:

● **September 2024:** Brookings Area United Way hired a CTC facilitator to launch the initiative locally.

● **October 2024:** A partnership with the Brookings School District was established to utilize the 2024 SEARCH Institute Youth Survey data—an instrument the district has used since 1999—to guide the effort.

● **December 2024:** Community leaders participated in a Key Leader Orientation and formally committed to the CTC process.

● **January–February 2025:** A diverse Community Board of 40 members was formed, representing multiple sectors of Brookings. The board completed a two-day orientation and established six action workgroups to support implementation.

● **March–April 2025:** The Risk and Protective Factor Assessment Workgroup attended a CTC workshop, then led the data analysis effort presented in this report.

The Community Assessment

The CTC framework identifies risk factors that increase the likelihood of youth problem behaviors and protective factors that buffer against those risks. Communities use this framework to assess their local landscape and create prevention strategies that reduce the most prominent risks while strengthening protective influences.

This report marks the first major step in Brookings's prevention planning. The Risk- and Protective-Factor Assessment Workgroup compiled and analyzed data to build a profile of the factors influencing youth in Brookings and—together with community input—identified strengths and key priorities for action.

Data Collection Methods

The primary data source for this assessment was the 2024 SEARCH Institute youth survey, administered in April 2024 to all students in grades 6 through 12 within the Brookings School District. The district maintains these results, which provide valuable longitudinal insights, given the survey's long-standing use since 1999.

To complement the survey data, the workgroup also reviewed public indicators from local and state agencies. The CTC framework recognizes these indicators as valid and reliable measures of risk factors and problem behaviors not directly captured in the SEARCH survey.

Brookings elected not to use the standard CTC Youth Survey to preserve consistency and relevance with its existing dataset and the district's long-standing survey practices.

Priority Identification Process

Using the SEARCH survey and public data sources, the Risk and Protective Factor Assessment Workgroup identified the most elevated risk factors among middle and high school students. The group also considered the feasibility of impact and additional community input from Board members and key leaders. Final priorities were selected by consensus and forwarded to the CTC Community Board for approval and endorsement by key community leaders.

Report Overview

The sections that follow detail the findings from the assessment, including elevated risk factors, protective factors, and observed youth behaviors. The report concludes with a summary of priorities and recommendations that will guide Brookings's prevention planning and action.

Risk Factor: Elevated Absenteeism

Consistent school attendance is a key indicator of a student's connection to their educational environment. When students no longer feel that their presence matters, they often begin to disengage—both emotionally and physically—from school. This detachment, referred to in the CTC framework as a **lack of commitment to school**, is strongly associated with increased risk of substance use, delinquency, and mental health concerns.

In Brookings, school attendance data reveal a concerning upward trend in **unexcused absences** at both the middle and high school levels. Between 2017 and 2024, unexcused absences at the middle school level rose from **2.65%** to **7.78%**, while high school unexcused absences more than doubled, increasing from **14.36%** to **30.60%**. These figures indicate that a growing number of students are missing school without communication from a parent or guardian—a potential sign of weakened adult-student connection, increased personal or academic stress, or shifting perceptions of the value of education. The data below represents the percentage of students missing school over the school year.
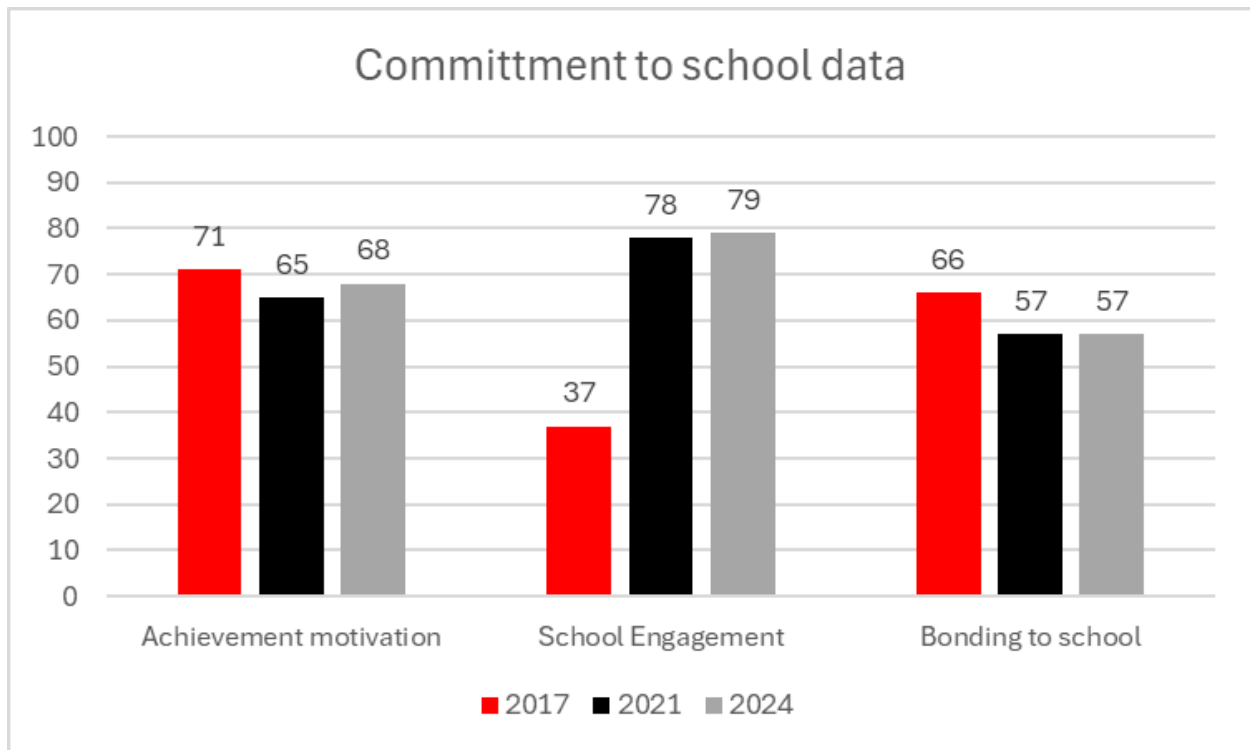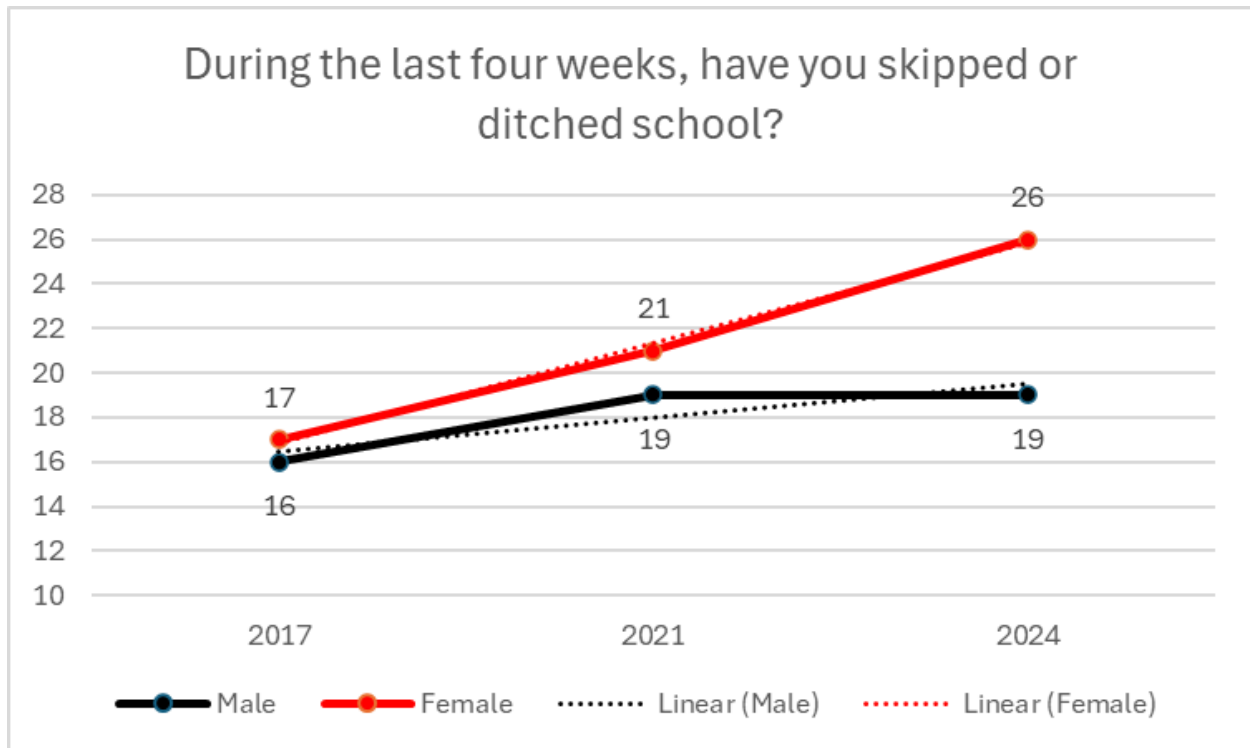
Middle School					
Year	Total students	Present	Absent		Unexcused Absences
2017	806	95.29%	4.71%		2.65%
2021	825	94.67%	5.33%		6.37%
2024	806	93.30%	6.70%		7.78%
High School					
Year	Total students	Present	Absent		Unexcused Absences
2017	973	93.47%	6.53%		14.36%
2021	1104	93.23%	6.77%		25.75%
2024	1081	91.69%	8.31%		30.60%

*Excused - parent/guardian has called and given permission for absence
** Unexcused - no parent/guardian call or communication

Interestingly, other indicators such as **achievement motivation** and **school bonding** have remained relatively stable over the same period, and **school engagement**—as measured by survey responses—has nearly doubled from 2017 to 2024. Despite this, the prevalence of skipping school, particularly among female students, continues to increase.

This divergence presents a nuanced picture. It suggests that absenteeism may not reflect a lack of academic interest or connection to school, but rather may be a behavioral expression of underlying **social-emotional stressors**. Mental health struggles, post-pandemic adjustment challenges, or rising performance pressures may be contributing to absenteeism, especially among students who otherwise report strong academic engagement.

During the last four weeks, have you skipped or ditched school?

Legend: Male, Female, Linear (Male), Linear (Female)

Data points — Female: 17 (2017), 21 (2021), 26 (2024)
Male: 16 (2017), 19 (2021), 19 (2024)

Committment to school data

	2017	2021	2024
Achievement motivation	71	65	68
School Engagement	37	78	79
Bonding to school	66	57	57

*The 2017 survey question for student engagement changed in 2021.

There were a few other SEARCH survey questions that the Risk and Protective Factor workgroup wanted to note regarding school commitment. According to the 2024 SEARCH survey report:

- **81%** of students report trying their hardest to do their best work

- **70%** report often feeling bored at school

- **59%** say their teachers care about them

- **42%** feel they receive a lot of encouragement from school

- **62%** say teachers push them to do their best

These responses highlight a student body that is largely striving—but not always feeling supported or inspired.

Parent-Student Engagement

- **57%** say their parents ask about homework

- **30%** report receiving homework help from parents

- **64%** have at least one parent who talks with them about school activities

- **85%** believe their parents push them to do their best

While parental involvement appears strong in some areas, there are gaps—particularly in areas such as academic support and emotional encouragement.

Key Questions for Consideration

- How can we help build resilience and academic motivation in the 19% of students who are not currently trying their best?

- What strategies could help reduce boredom for the **70%** of students who report feeling disengaged in class?

- How can schools increase the percentage of students who feel genuinely encouraged and supported by their teachers?

- Where can the **70%** of students who do not receive homework help at home turn for additional academic support?

The data highlight an important distinction between external engagement (e.g., attendance, participation) and internal well-being (e.g., emotional readiness, stress levels). Understanding and addressing this gap is critical to reducing unexcused absenteeism and promoting overall youth well-being in the Brookings community.

Risk Factor: Low Neighborhood Attachment and

Community Disorganization

Low neighborhood attachment and signs of community disorganization—such as a perceived lack of care from adults, low youth involvement, and diminished public oversight—have been linked to increased risks of drug use, delinquency, and other problem behaviors. While the 2024 SEARCH survey data does not show elevated levels of these specific behavioral risks among Brookings youth, it does reveal challenges related to young people's sense of belonging, value, and empowerment within their community.

A key concern identified in the 2024 data is the limited sense of connection youth feel to the broader community. Students reported the lowest scores in areas such as:

- Feeling valued by adults in the community

- Feeling cared for by their neighborhoods

- Feeling provided with meaningful opportunities to contribute or participate in local decision-making

These sentiments are underscored by the low scores for youth empowerment, one of four categories of *external assets* in the SEARCH framework (alongside support, boundaries and

expectations, and constructive use of time). Despite strong scores in positive peer influence (**89%**) and positive family support (**78%**), youth empowerment remains a notable gap:
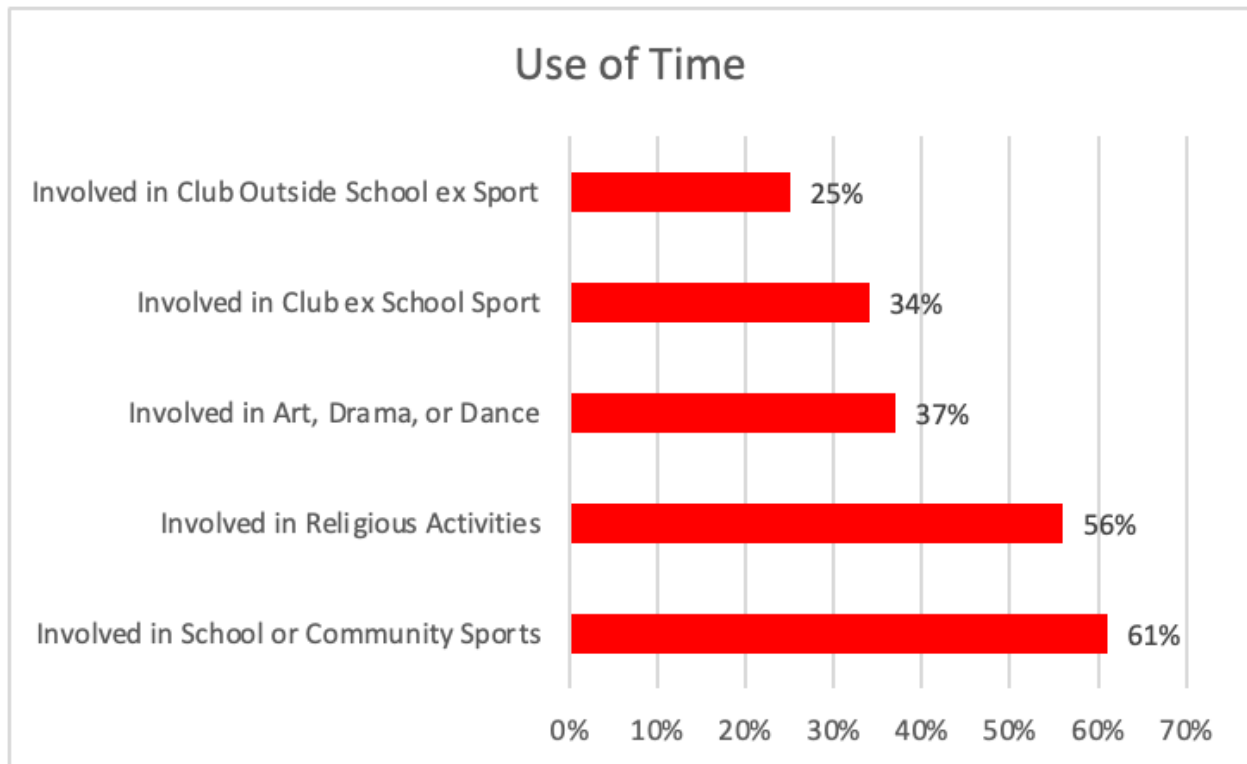
- Only **30%** of students report feeling seen as a resource by their community

- Just **27%** feel valued by the community

These figures suggest that while support systems exist within families and peer groups, broader societal networks, such as neighborhoods, civic groups, and community institutions, may not effectively engage or affirm youth as meaningful contributors.
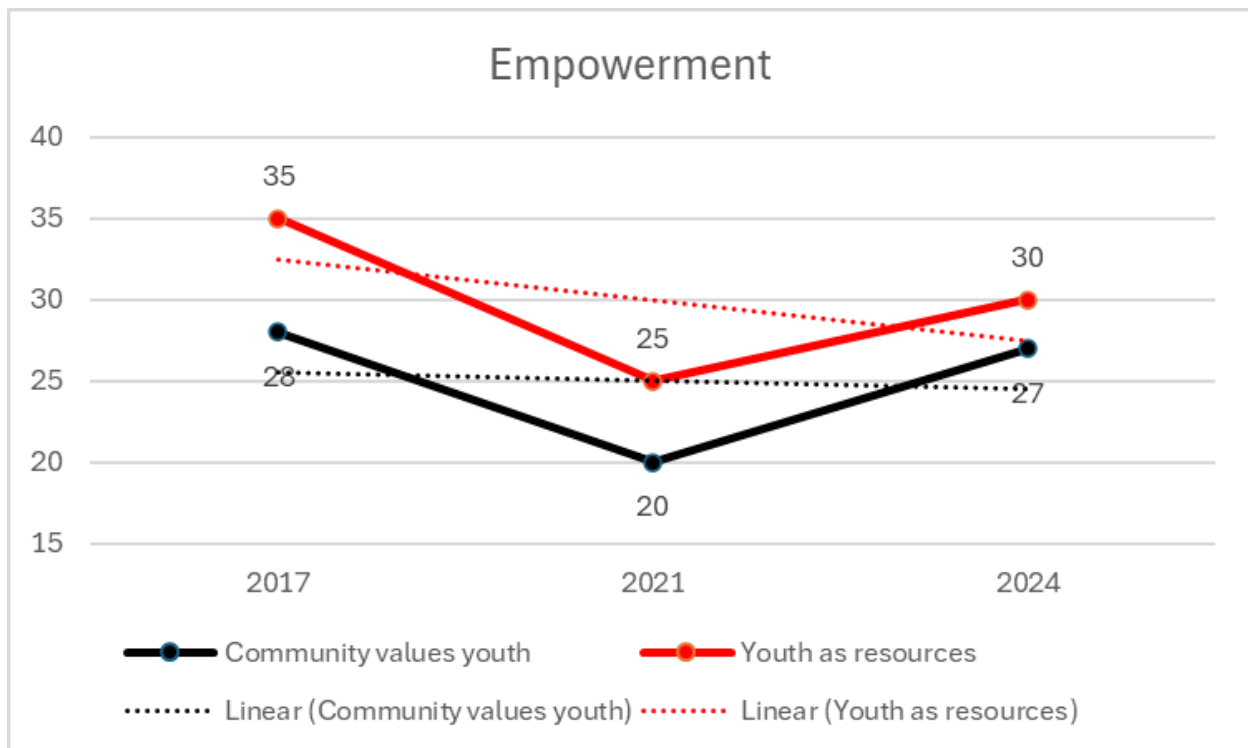
The workgroup also examined how young people in Brookings are currently spending their time outside the classroom. This data is critical to understanding where youth find connection and growth opportunities—and where gaps may exist. Structured activities such as sports, clubs, and religious programs often provide key developmental assets like mentorship, leadership practice, and social belonging. However, a sizable portion of youth are not participating in any such activities, highlighting a potential missed opportunity to build empowerment among those most in need.

This disengagement from structured environments may restrict access to critical supports, particularly for youth who already feel disconnected. Without targeted outreach and inclusive programming, the students who could most benefit from empowerment efforts risk being left behind.

Use of Time

Activity	Percentage
Involved in Club Outside School ex Sport	25%
Involved in Club ex School Sport	34%
Involved in Art, Drama, or Dance	37%
Involved in Religious Activities	56%
Involved in School or Community Sports	61%

Additionally, time-use data revealed that **74%** of students reported "hanging out with friends without anything special to do" two days or less per week—with **30%** indicating they never do so. While this could reflect structured time commitments, it may also point to limited access to informal social opportunities within the community.

In response, the group recommends exploring avenues to broaden youth engagement beyond schools and religious institutions—particularly by increasing awareness of, and access to, diverse activities where young people can connect, contribute, and grow. Creating spaces where youth feel seen, valued, and involved will be critical to enhancing their attachment to the Brookings community and mitigating long-term risks associated with disconnection.

Protective Factors

Protective factors play a critical role in promoting healthy, positive development among youth, and Brookings continues to exhibit strong performance in this area. The latest assessment highlights encouraging trends in academic achievement and service to others, underscoring the community's ongoing commitment to fostering environments where young people can thrive.

Succeeds in School

A key highlight from the 2024 SEARCH survey is the continued improvement in academic outcomes. The proportion of students reporting mostly A's has reached its highest point since the inception of the survey, reflecting a positive trajectory that has been gradually building since the early 2000s. Even accounting for the temporary decline observed in 2021—likely attributable to the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic—Brookings students appear to be demonstrating notable academic resilience.

This progress is particularly meaningful in light of Brookings' longstanding practice of using data to guide community investments in youth. Past initiatives, such as the expansion of the Boys & Girls Club and enhancements to school counseling services, may be contributing to this academic momentum. These data-informed strategies emphasize the value of a coordinated, community-led approach to supporting youth success.

Succeeds in School (Mostly A's)
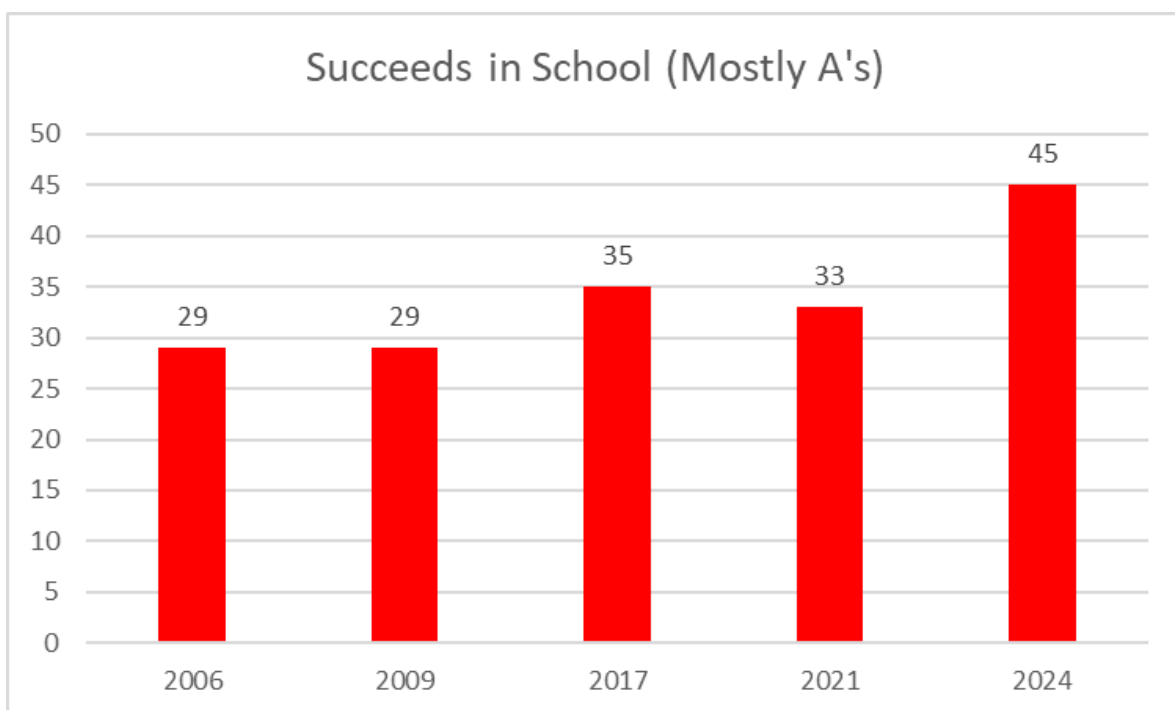
Helping Others

Service to others remains a defining strength among Brookings youth. Although there was a modest decline in volunteerism following 2009, the 2024 survey shows that **80%** of students continue to participate in helping others—an indicator of strong community connection and personal responsibility.
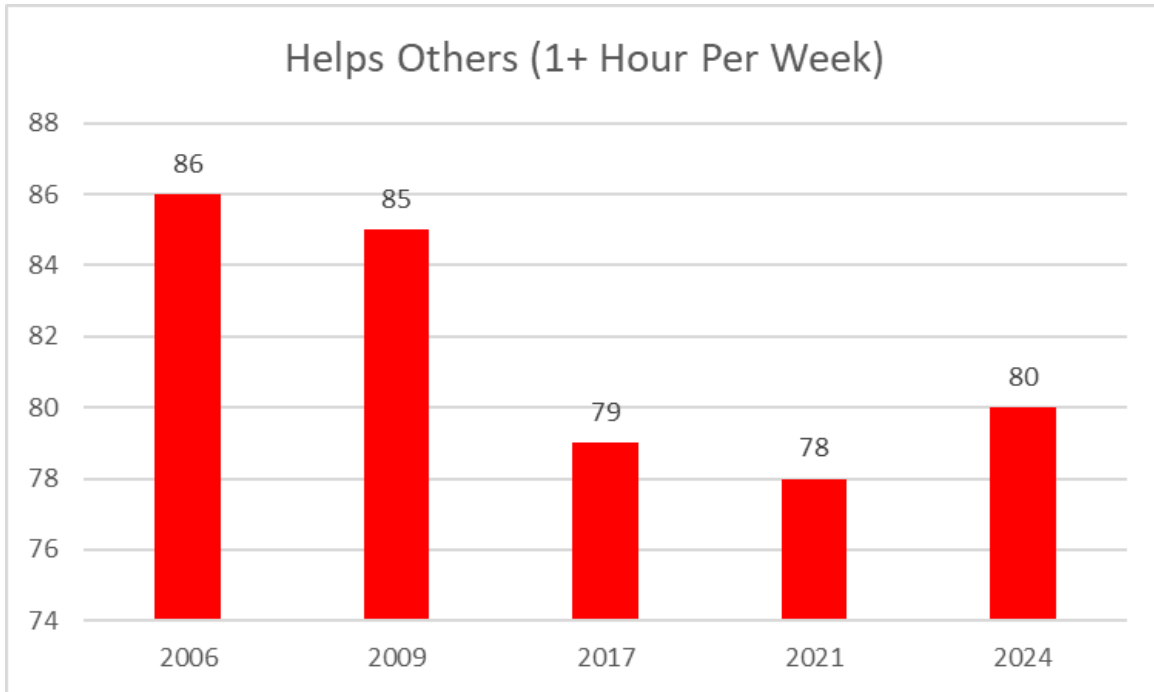
The slight rebound in volunteerism observed this year suggests that ongoing efforts to reengage youth are yielding results. Organizations such as youth-serving nonprofits, school service clubs, and faith-based groups have likely been instrumental in this recovery. Their work reinforces the importance of providing meaningful avenues for young people to contribute to their communities.

Maintaining and expanding these opportunities will be essential to sustaining this momentum. When youth are empowered to serve, they develop critical skills such as empathy, leadership, and civic responsibility—all of which are foundational to long-term well-being and community cohesion.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Brookings Strengths

Findings from the 2024 SEARCH Institute youth survey indicate several positive trends among Brookings youth. Rates of alcohol, tobacco, and drug use remain low, and reported instances of youth violence are limited. These outcomes reflect the impact of existing prevention efforts and affirm that Brookings continues to be a community where protective factors actively support youth development. Continued investment in these strengths will be critical as the community works to enhance other areas of need.

Considerations

It is important to note that this year's data set does not allow for a comprehensive analysis of risk factors within the family domain. This limitation stems from the scope of the SEARCH survey, which relies on students' perceptions and includes only a narrow set of questions related to family engagement. As such, additional data sources may be needed to assess risks and strengths within family dynamics fully.

Community Priorities

Based on both the survey analysis and stakeholder input, the following two risk factors have been identified as top community priorities for future prevention efforts:

- **Elevated Absenteeism**

- **Low Neighborhood Attachment and Community Disorganization**

These areas were selected due to their higher prevalence relative to other risk factors observed in the Brookings youth population. Focused attention on these domains will help ensure that prevention strategies address the most pressing and systemic challenges facing local youth. Targeted interventions that improve school attendance and foster stronger community connections will be essential for long-term impact.

Next Steps

The next phase of the Communities That Care (CTC) process will involve a detailed assessment of existing resources in Brookings that align with the identified priorities. The Resource Assessment and Evaluation workgroup is scheduled to participate in the "Assessing Community Resources Workshop" in May 2025. The findings from this assessment—combined with the

insights from this report—will form a comprehensive community profile. This profile will serve as a foundation for selecting tested, effective, evidence-based programs and strategies that support youth well-being and reduce behavioral health risks across the Brookings area.

Appendix A - Acknowledgments

Brookings Area United Way

We would like to extend our sincere gratitude to the Brookings Area United Way for their generous partial funding in support of the implementation of the SEARCH Institute youth survey. Their continued commitment to supporting data collection efforts plays a vital role in helping us better understand the needs and strengths of our youth. This valuable partnership enables us to make informed decisions and drive meaningful community impact. We deeply appreciate their ongoing support and dedication to the well-being of our local students and the broader Brookings county.

Brookings School District

We would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to the Brookings School District for making it possible to implement the SEARCH Institute youth survey in the Brookings community and for their commitment to administering the survey every three years. Their continued efforts have been instrumental in creating a deeper understanding of the experiences and needs of our youth. Because of their dedication, meaningful programming and impactful community initiatives have become possible, helping to foster a stronger, more supportive environment for all young people in Brookings.

Others

We gratefully acknowledge Brookings Health System, Brookings Police Department, Brookings Behavioral Health and Wellness, the Boys and Girls Club, Brookings Public Library, The Brookings Salvation Army, Inter-Lakes Community Action Partnership (ICAP), and the many other dedicated organizations who have played a vital role in providing important community data. Your collaboration and commitment have been essential in helping us gain a comprehensive understanding of the Brookings community. These efforts are key to shaping programs and initiatives that make Brookings a healthier, more connected, and more vibrant place to live for all. Thank you for your continued partnership and shared vision for a stronger community and county.

Appendix B - References

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