

# REIMAGINING High School Success

## A Community-Centric Approach

High school success is critical for any community. Ensuring all youth are able to thrive will lead to a healthier, more equitable Milwaukee. Discover the incredible need for support – and the bright spots that can drive us forward.

## Redefining High School Success

High school success goes beyond grades and other standard metrics. It encompasses the whole student – from their mental and emotional well-being to their cultural inclusion and access to resources. True high school success involves fostering an environment where **students feel seen, heard and supported** as they transition into adulthood.

*"I came [to the Youth Forward MKE Ambassador Program] because I felt like there was nothing really changing, but when I heard about this opportunity, I knew I had to get on to it because they were actually willing to hear us out and put our voices onto a platform."*  
– Youth Forward MKE Youth Ambassador Amaya Baldwin



### Mental Health

Mental health is foundational to overall well-being, encompassing emotional, psychological, and social aspects of life.



### Academic Success

Academic achievement not only reflects youth well-being and support, but also significantly influences adult health outcomes.



### Life Skills

Skills such as financial literacy, problem-solving and interpersonal communication are crucial for navigating adulthood.

## Mental Health

*"A lot of the environments in schools aren't set up for Black students to be successful. So, the persistence to achieve in spite of that is amazing and we see that reflected in the data."*  
– Milwaukee student

Prioritizing mental health in schools promotes resilience, adaptive coping mechanisms and positive relationships. A holistic approach to education recognizes that academic achievement is intertwined with mental wellness and emotional stability.



# 51%

of Milwaukee Public School (MPS) high schoolers experienced **significant problems with anxiety** in the past year.



## Academic Success

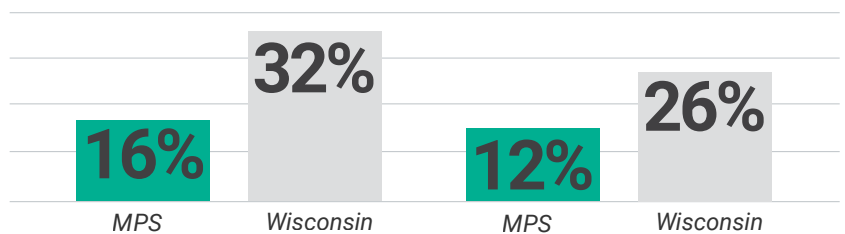
“What we learned from youth in Milwaukee is that the community is eager to see a radical shift away from traditional classrooms and instruction.”  
– Youth Forward MKE Youth Ambassador Kaylee Marsh

Academic success is not solely measured by grades but also by the ability to apply knowledge, pursue passions, and cultivate a sense of purpose and belonging. However, academic success is an area where students across the state struggle to achieve proficiency.

16% of MPS high school students tested proficient in English Language Arts, compared to 32% of students at the state (2022-23 school year). The same goes for Math, with 12% of MPS high school students testing proficient, compared to 26% of peers at the state.

High school students proficient in English Language Arts

High school students proficient in Math



### What does high school success mean to you?

“Knowing what to do after high school, like filing taxes and everyday stuff. Doesn’t revolve around grades. Taking care of yourself.” – Milwaukee youth

## Life Skills

90%

of employed adults say interpersonal skills such as patience, compassion and getting along with people are extremely or very important in their jobs. (Pew Research)

34%

of youth surveyed during Milwaukee Succeeds’ listening sessions mentioned the desire for life skills, such as finances, budgeting, taxes and home buying.

# Driving Change. Together.

High school success is about nurturing empowered, resilient individuals who are equipped with the skills, knowledge and agency to navigate the complexities of the world. By addressing these priority areas and centering youth voice and experiences, we can create high schools that not only educate but also empower the next generation to lead fulfilling and purposeful lives. Join us in making change:



Join the **Youth Forward MKE Coalition**. Together we can strengthen our impact and drive tangible change.



Understand if your organization is truly incorporating youth voice in your work by completing the **Youth Adult Equity Ladder Assessment**.



Learn about the **Autonomous Youth Council** and our efforts to shift power to young people and center their voice in decision-making. Let’s empower youth to be the leaders of tomorrow and actively shape their own futures!

### ABOUT MILWAUKEE SUCCEEDS

Milwaukee Succeeds advances education equity in Milwaukee, ensuring all children have the resources they need to succeed. We do this by sharing decision making, centering racial justice and changing existing systems of power. Through our Youth Forward MKE Coalition, we aim to make lasting change for youth in the city.

Contact [info@milwaukeesucceeds.org](mailto:info@milwaukeesucceeds.org) for more information.

Visit [milwaukeesucceeds.org/state-of-hss](http://milwaukeesucceeds.org/state-of-hss) to read the full report and learn more about our priority areas.