

## Highlighting Youth Voices & Priorities 2025 Impact Report

### A CITY WHERE RED AND BLUE MEET

At a time when Americans nationwide are facing the challenges of political polarization, the city of Dallas, Texas, offers a valuable case study.

Already the ninth most populous city in the United States, Dallas sits at the heart of **a rapidly growing region**. One of its suburbs, Princeton, was the fastest-growing city in the country in 2024, increasing its population by nearly one-third in one year.

With a median age of 33.4, Dallas has **a relatively young population**—younger than the United States as a whole (39.1 years). It is 41.9% white, 41.9% Hispanic or Latino (of any race), 23.7% Black or African American, 23.4% foreign-born, and 3.7% Asian. It is the seat of a county that voted for Vice President Kamala Harris (60% to 38%) in 2024 but in a state that went decisively for President Donald Trump (56% to 42%), making it a convergence of red and blue America.

In other words, Dallas is one of the American cities where Generation Z is preparing to set the agenda and tone of our national discourse for years to come. Now is the time for students in Dallas to learn what it means to sit down with those of different backgrounds, to hear why others think the way they do, and to work together to find solutions to pressing policy issues.



## A PARTNERSHIP TO BUILD DELIBERATIVE SKILLS

On April 24, 2025, Close Up and our partners joined forces for **NextGen Roundtable: Dallas Youth Summit**, an effort to highlight the policy priorities of Generation Z and build in them the skills and dispositions of deliberative dialogue.

A collaboration between **Close Up**, the **City of Dallas**, and the **Dallas Youth Commission (DYC)**, this interactive deliberative event gathered **250 high school students** from across Dallas to address complex issues and the trade-offs they pose in an environment curated for respectful conversation across ideological lines.

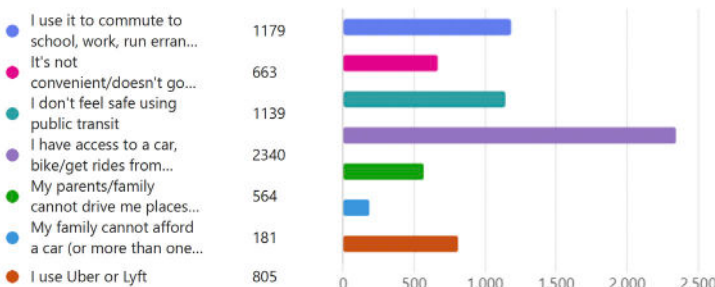
Participants convened in small groups to deliberate a series of public policy issues related to civic engagement, climate change, homelessness, public and school safety, and public transportation. Informing students' discussions was data collected in the **2024 Dallas Youth Survey**, a community survey conducted in partnership by DYC and the National Civic League. DYC—a group of 15 diverse, civically engaged Dallas youth—acts as a voice for students to guide city priorities and ensure that student viewpoints help shape Dallas' future. Over the course of 105 days, this by-youth, for-youth survey garnered responses from more than 4,200 students aged 13-24 across the city of Dallas.

## 2024 DALLAS YOUTH SURVEY

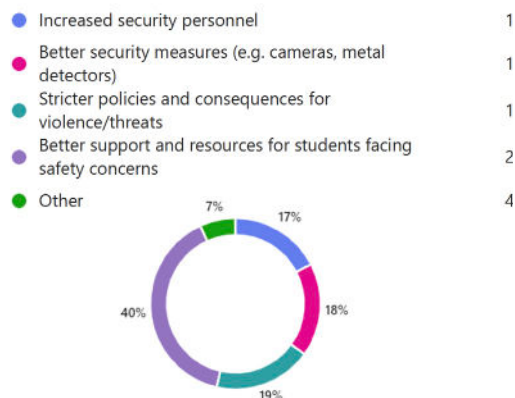
What measures do you think could be taken to improve safety in your neighborhood or community?



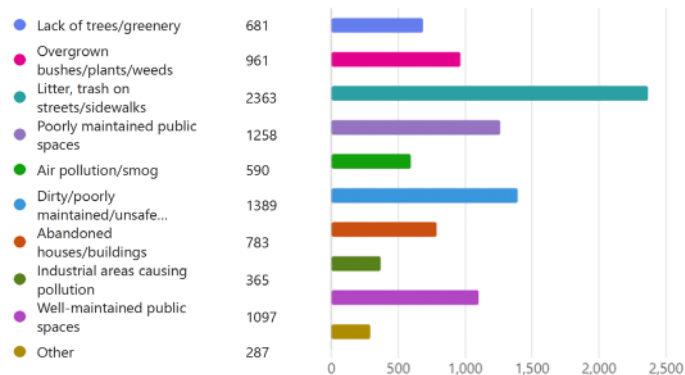
What are the main reasons you do or do not use public transportation?



What improvements would you suggest for enhancing safety and security at your school?



Which of the following issues exist in your neighborhood environment?



PUBLIC POLICY ISSUES

Civic Engagement  
Climate Change  
Homelessness  
Public & School Safety  
Public Transportation

On the day of NextGen Roundtable: Dallas Youth Summit, between the morning and afternoon deliberations, participants convened for a plenary session with policy experts and local government officials representing a range of backgrounds and perspectives. Before and after the deliberations, participants answered questionnaires about their views on the issues at hand and their attitudes about the democratic process.

## KEY FINDINGS: DELIBERATION

The experience of deliberation at NextGen Roundtable: Dallas Youth Summit increased participants' sense of efficacy, mutual respect, and trust in government and each other.

- **The idea that “public officials care a lot about what people like me think” gained significant agreement among deliberants,** rising from 35.9% before deliberation to 58.4% afterward.
- **Deliberants showed increased confidence in themselves, in their opinions, and in their ability to influence government.** Those who said they “have opinions about political and social issues that are worth listening to” rose from 76.4% before deliberation to 86.5% after deliberation. The share who agreed that “people like me don’t have any say about what the government does” fell from 38.1% pre-deliberation to 30.3% post-deliberation.
- **When asked about those with whom they strongly disagreed, deliberants showed increased mutual respect after the process.** The shares of participants who attributed a strong difference of opinion to the other person “not thinking clearly” (40.5% pre-deliberation, 28.1% post-deliberation) or believing “some things that are untrue” (69.7% pre-deliberation, 53.9% post-deliberation) both fell significantly. After deliberation, fewer participants (22.5%) felt “it is hopeless to reach an agreement” with those with whom they disagree than they did prior to deliberation (30.3%).
- **The experience built significant trust among community members and with local government.** The deliberative process increased the share of participants who said they trust people in their community (60.6% pre-deliberation, 68.6% post-deliberation), their elected officials (32.5% pre-deliberation, 53.9% post-deliberation), and their local government (41.7% pre-deliberation, 50.6% post-deliberation).

## KEY FINDINGS: ISSUES & PRIORITIES

Both before and after the small-group deliberations, participants weighed in on which goals Dallas should prioritize in the areas of civic engagement, climate change, homelessness, public and school safety, and public transportation. They ranked the following goals the highest:

- **Civic Engagement:** Increasing civic learning and civic engagement opportunities for young people.
- **Climate Change:** Reducing carbon emissions from industry.
- **Homelessness:** Boosting employment opportunities, followed closely by enacting Housing First programs.
- **Public and School Safety:** Increasing police presence.
- **Public Transportation:** Ensuring reliability, safety, fares are paid, and the user experience is reliable and positive.





## THE FUTURE OF DELIBERATION

No matter where we find ourselves in the cycle of local, state, and federal elections, the skills of deliberation are essential in all of us. Deliberation is a key to understanding public policy issues from multiple perspectives, to making informed decisions about how to resolve those issues, and to acting cooperatively in the best interests of entire communities.

**That's why Close Up and our partners are seeking to embed a culture of deliberative dialogue in middle schools, high schools, and post-secondary institutions across the country.**

- **NextGen Roundtable: Dallas Youth Summit is adaptable to communities nationwide**, as a regional, one-day or multi-day workshop for student cohorts from area schools to deliberate local and national issues. Next up, on December 3-6, 2025, Close Up will host students in Houston for From Classrooms to Careers: How AI is Shaping Our Paths.
- **Ahead of the midterm elections, Close Up is convening NextGen Roundtable: Decision 2026**, a large-scale experiment in democracy launched through our work on America in One Room: The Youth Vote. From July 8-11, 2026, we are gathering a nationally representative and scientific sample of first-time voters to listen to each other and deliberate key policy issues in a reasoned and mutually respectful way.
- **Close Up has designed programming to help schools bring deliberative dialogue to their student bodies**, including facilitation training for student leaders followed by an opportunity for students to participate in a community-wide deliberation.
- **Close Up has created comprehensive professional development for educators** to amplify the use and effects of deliberation in schools, ensuring teachers and students have the skills, strategies, and resources to make deliberation an everyday practice.
- **Close Up and our partners have built a coalition of university partners**, including Duke University and American University, to continue building pathways that highlight the importance of civic education and support ongoing deliberation opportunities.



## REPRESENTING DALLAS YOUTH VOICES

The participants in NextGen Roundtable: Dallas Youth Summit were students in grades 9-12 from high schools across Dallas, reflecting a cross-section of the city's diverse community. Participating schools included those from Dallas Independent School District and private, independent, and charter schools.

ALCUIN SCHOOL

BARACK OBAMA MALE  
LEADERSHIP ACADEMY

BISHOP DUNNE CATHOLIC  
SCHOOL

BISHOP LYNCH HIGH SCHOOL

CITYLAB HIGH SCHOOL

DR. WRIGHT L. LASSITER  
JR. EARLY COLLEGE HIGH  
SCHOOL

HARMONY SCHOOL OF  
EXCELLENCE DALLAS

THE HOCKADAY SCHOOL

IDEA HIGH SCHOOL

IRMA LERMA RANGEL YOUNG  
WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP  
SCHOOL

JESUIT COLLEGE  
PREPARATORY SCHOOL OF  
DALLAS

JUDGE BAREFOOT SANDERS  
LAW MAGNET

KATHLYN JOY GILLIAM  
COLLEGIATE ACADEMY

NORTH LAKE EARLY COLLEGE  
HIGH SCHOOL

PARISH EPISCOPAL SCHOOL

RED OAK HIGH SCHOOL

TRINITY VALLEY SCHOOL

YOUNG WOMEN'S STEAM  
ACADEMY AT BALCH SPRINGS



They were able to, over time, have stronger opinions and **more informed opinions** and yet still remain cordial with one another. They're going to be able to be friends after this even if they disagreed.

— Robert Thornton, Harmony Public Schools



## EXPERT PANELISTS

We are grateful for the policy experts and local government officials who took part in our plenary session to engage with students and answer their questions about policy issues.

**Adam Bazaldua\***

Deputy Mayor Pro Tem  
City of Dallas

**Liz Cedillo-Pereira**

Assistant City Manager  
City of Dallas

**Christine Crossley**

Director  
Office of Homeless Solutions  
City of Dallas

**Lisa Fullerton**

Process Improvement Manager  
Department of Public Works  
City of Dallas

**Jenny Kerzman**

Assistant Director of Treasury  
Office of the City Controller  
City of Dallas

**Lisa Marshall**

Founder & CEO  
Fighting Homelessness

**Crystal Ross**

Senior Deputy Director  
Dallas Park & Recreation  
City of Dallas

**\*Close Up Alumnus**

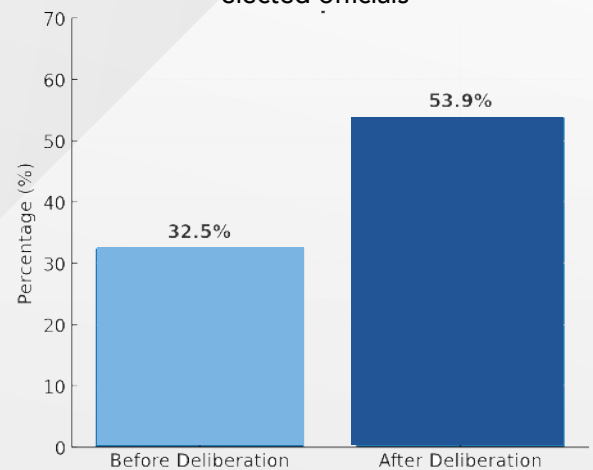


## DONORS

Our deepest thanks go out to all of our donors whose generous contributions helped make NextGen Roundtable: Dallas Youth Summit possible. To learn more about opportunities to support and partner with Close Up, please **contact us at [support@closeup.org](mailto:support@closeup.org)**.

**COMMUNITIES FOUNDATION OF TEXAS  
THE HERSH FOUNDATION  
KATHY AND HARLAN CROW**

Deliberants who express trust in their elected officials



**Close Up** is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, civic education organization that informs, inspires, and empowers young people to become active citizens. For over 50 years, we have delivered experiential learning programs, professional development, curriculum design and consulting, and other civic education opportunities to more than one million students and educators nationwide. We connect what students learn in class to the real world around them, helping them to articulate their own views, listen to those of others, and engage with people of different backgrounds with tolerance and understanding.

**The City of Dallas Office of Community Care & Empowerment (OCCE)** provides direction and oversight of the City's social, human, and supportive services to help create equity for seniors, children, and other Dallas residents to improve their quality and standard of living.