Mental Health Services Oversight and Accountability Commission

Bullying support for teens and young adults

September 2021

program 11

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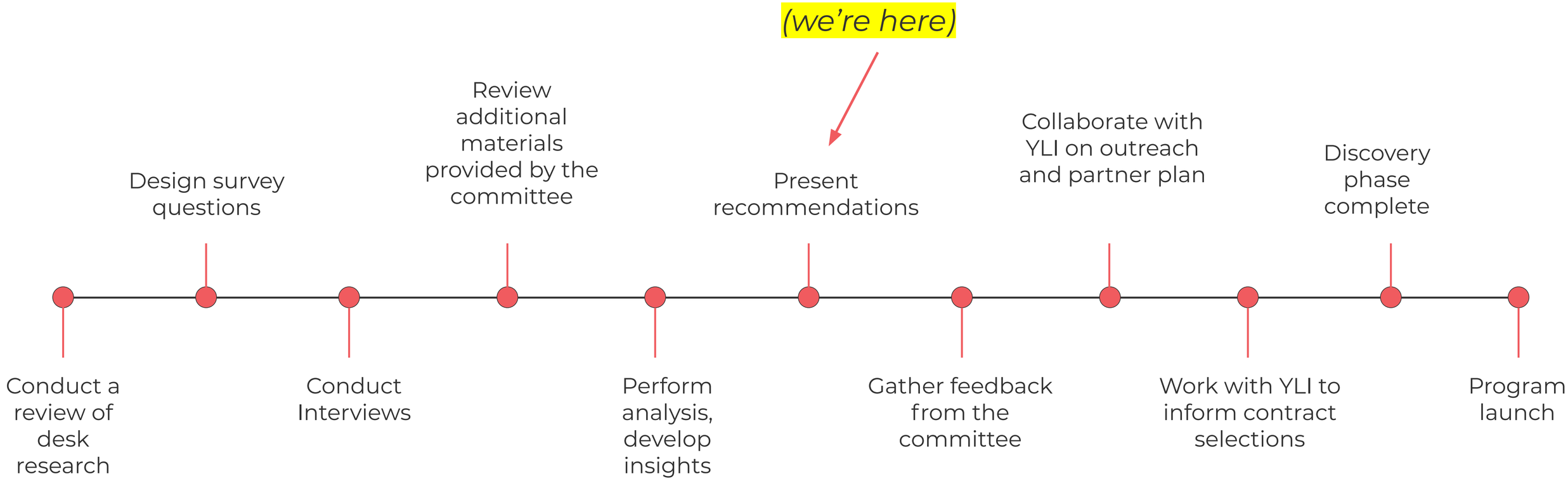
Background and Methodology

The question that informed this study was:

“How to develop a plan for the state of California to effectively allocate $5 million to support teens and young adults who experience or are at risk of experiencing bullying based on race, ethnicity, gender, country of origin?”

We collected data from interviews, surveys, literature and resources. We examined this research through a qualitative lens. From there several themes emerged which we have synthesized in order to create recommendations for an outreach and partner plan.

Scope Overview



Methodology — What We Did

1. **Qualitative Interviews/Surveys**
   - We conducted 30 minute interviews with 14 members of the committee and recommended participants.
   - We shared the interview questions via survey with those who couldn't attend.
   - We reviewed resources and documents that were shared.
   - We designed questions to deliver information and insights about solutions and support for those that have been bullied.

2. **Literature Review**
   - We reviewed research over the previous 3 years (2019-2021) with an eye toward how this work could impact our findings.
   - The literature search was based on bullying, young adults and adolescents.

3. **Analysis:** We derived our top findings and themes to present to the team for questions and feedback.

Qualitative Research

Qualitative Research Demographics

- **Background.** Leaders in the community with a wide variety of lived experiences. Members of various boards and social justice groups.
- **Subject Matter Expertise.** Have worked in areas such as Asian hate, mental health, queer bullying and mental health, young adult shelter and respite housing. Experience working with adolescents and young adults.
- **Ages.** Interviewees were of various ages from youth (under 18) to adults.

Lit Review Sources Included:

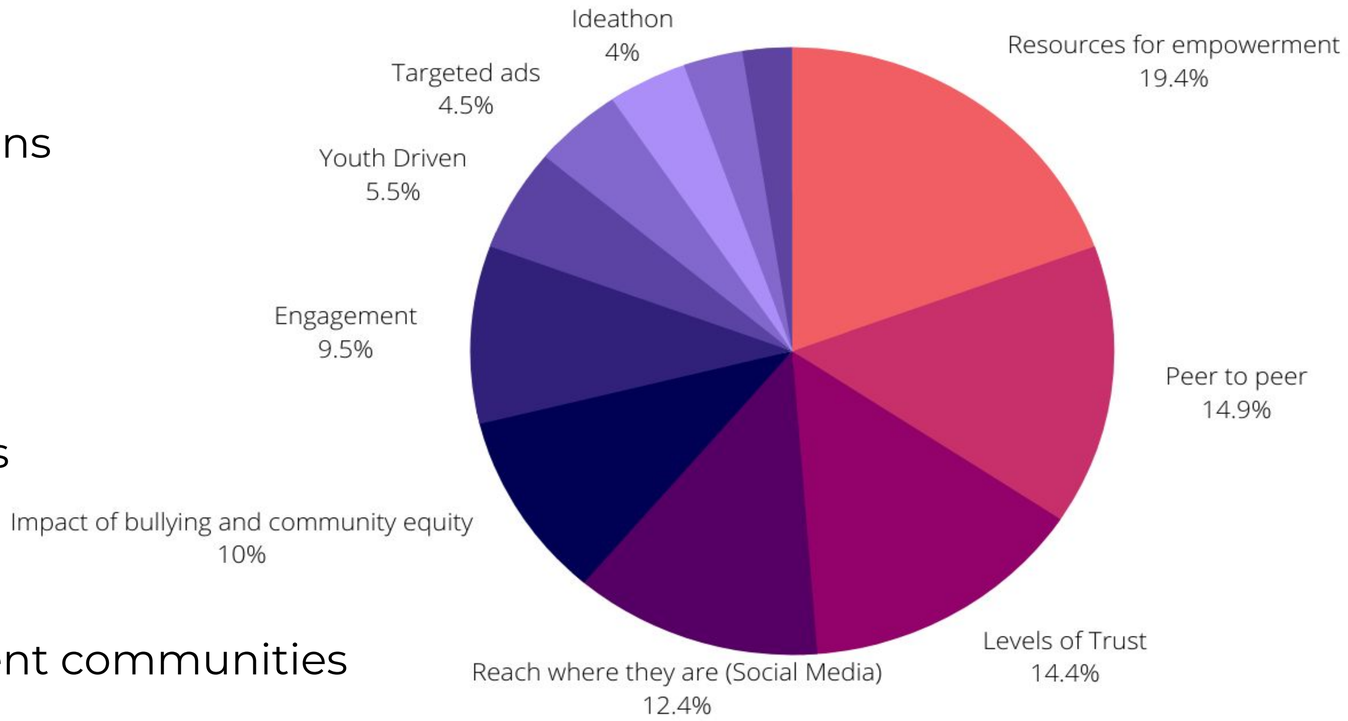
- **Journals**
  - The Journal of Early Adolescence
  - The Journal of Youth and Adolescence
  - Adolescent Research Review
  - International Journal of Bullying Prevention
  - The Journal of School Health
  - Aggressive Behavior
  - The American Journal of Health Education
  - Journal of Immigrant and Minority Health
  - JMIR Human Factors / JMIR Mental Health

- **Dissertations**
  - A More Comprehensive Approach to Anti Bullying Programs: Interventions in the School and Home
  - Bullying Prevention as a Form of Social Justice: A Critical Review of the Literature

- **Books**
  - Group Processes in Children and Adolescents
  - Compassion: How to Help and Understand Every Bullying Situation

Emerging Themes

1. Enable peer support
2. Empower the youth to create the solutions
3. Create video content/testimonials
4. Make resources readily available
5. Let the youth drive this when it launches
6. Reach our audiences where they are
7. Recognize bullying is different for different communities
8. Recognize differing levels of trust
9. Consider underserved youth with barriers to technology access
10. Tailor outreach in and for various markets



1 Enable peer support

Interviewees said that students were more likely to find support within their peer groups.

"Oftentimes, as adults, we are a bit on the outside. It can seem uncomfortable, potentially, connecting to an adult versus another kid their age. Would you want to tell an adult stranger that you've been bullied versus telling another youth that you've been bullied? So I think users would mostly connect better with other youth."

- *Committee Member*

"I would say the ones that are able to…they get support from their peers – those who are their true friends."

- *Committee Member*

"I think we're seeing the peer movement grow a lot. So being able to connect to peer to peer support, if that's available in some way."

- *Committee Member*

"Research has shown that peer support could positively impact children's school experience and well-being and could function as school bullying intervention and prevention."

- Tzani-Pepelasi, Ioannou, Synnott, and McDonnell (2019)

2 Empower the youth

Interviewees were looking for ways to allow the youth to have a say in solutions that can help.

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*"...[we need to] empower youth to develop solutions that would be a best fit for **them** instead of us coming from what **we** think would be helpful for them. How can we enable more of a platform approach to empower more youth to push forward projects that **they** want to do?"*

- *Committee Member*

"I think that's where we've really pushed to be a youth-centered and youth-driven model where the peers are the ones that are getting trained up instead of necessarily training the teachers."

- *Committee Member*

"In order to empower youth to create a kinder and braver world, we must begin by making sure that youth are safe. Youth are not safe when they are being bullied, harassed, or threatened."

- *Boyd and Palfrey (2013)*

3 Create content / testimonials in video format

Video content was cited a number of times as a key source of user generated content and engagement.

"...If you're creating video content and video content could be linked from [a] website, then it would ultimately land on the platforms that youth are using."

- *Committee Member*

"...TikTok related video content ...will be important for youth. Instagram? We could [be] there. It could be important to have YouTube as well."

- *Committee Member*

"Education is the best medicine to prevent bullying, and technology can be used to deliver educational literature and videos."

- *Tulasi (2018)*

4 Make resources easy to find

Resources need to be user friendly and made readily available and accessible to those that need it.

“[Consider] making it an app that is easily accessible. We also need a website version that is not too complicated to access. It should be easy to understand - not having to login, readily available. You should be able to talk to people right away and not have to put in too much information to access.”

- *Committee Member*

“Adolescents are likely to discuss bullying personally and receive support from media exposure in terms of information or coping strategies. They do not consider disclosing bullying to community organizations to seek support.”

- *Kang, Chung and Chung (2014)*

5 Ensure the program is driven by youth

Young people should be completely involved in making the decisions that directly impact their lives

“I'd be so excited to see what could come out of this transformation of adjusting from a reactive “bullying is hard, bullying sucks, here's the ways to get through it” type of thing to something that really empowers and provides agency to transform that experience – something really meaningful and positive for a young person.”

- *Committee Member*

“Teens want to help victims of cyberbullying; they desire more guidance in doing so.

- *Ranney, Pittman, Riese, Koehler, Ybarra, Cunningham, Spirito, and Rosen (2020)*

6 Reach our audiences where they are

Social media is incredibly important when creating content for this audience.

“[Consider] social media - youth like to share things on their platforms, especially if there is a nice looking post. It adds to their reliability when sharing to their stories.”

- *Committee Member*

“So my guess is [use] TikTok because [even though] I don't understand it, I know that young people are using it.”

- *Committee Member*

“Online social marketing-styled campaigns have potential to contribute to, and move beyond, school-based initiatives: operating in digital settings to align with existing youth online practices.”

Spears, Taddeo and Barnes (2018)

7 Recognize that bullying impacts communities in different ways

We need to be cognizant of the different ways that bullying impacts various communities.

LGBTQA [are some] of the nicest people that worry about this. They're the ones getting bullied and bullied a lot.

- *Committee member*

"Students with immigrant backgrounds were rejected more than majority youth, and first generation non-European immigrants were more isolated. Immigrants generally experienced more social exclusion in immigrant sparse than immigrant dense classrooms, and victimization increased with higher immigrant density for majority youth."

- *Plenty and Jonsson (2017)*

"First generation immigrant adolescents experience higher rate of bullying and peer aggression compared to third generation and native counterparts. Refugee status and advanced parental age were associated with increased parent to child aggression among Southeast Asians."

- *Pottie, Dahal, Georgiades, Premji and Hassan (2015)*

8 Recognize differing levels of trust

The youth trust their peers but can also have a support structure of professionals that they can reach out to.

“Sometimes, the youth will also trust teachers or counselors, and reach out to them. So I believe that they should have trainings and stuff in schools to help give teachers and counselors more of the resources to help youth as well.”

- *Committee Member*

“Interventions with an in-person element with a professional, peer, or parent were associated with greater effectiveness, adherence, and lower dropout than fully automatized or self-administered interventions.”

- *Lehtimaki, Martic, Wahl, Foster, and Schwalbe (2021)*

9 Consider underserved youth with barriers to technology access

Barriers and access to resources need to be given thought.

“Underserved youth are facing a barrier to access of digital platforms. How do you create a sense of equity in reaching them?”

Committee Member

“It might be easiest to [give] access to various resources at their fingertips as well, without them having to go to much effort to get access to those resources. So maybe there's counseling outreach [materials] that can be distributed to them for them to see. But something where they don't have to make a lot of effort.”

- *Committee Member*

“The lack of public awareness as to existing programs that are in place to assist children who fall victim to bullying is the problem. There is a direct and immediate need for society to recognize and utilize the programs that are available and most effective.”

- *Williams (2017)*

10 Tailor outreach in and for various markets

We need to be aware of where the need for additional assistance is greater.

“I think that there should be tailored messages to people regardless, because we all can be bystanders and and there's likelihood that we're going to witness these behaviors as well. So that would be super important – to have a community approach versus just “this is a youth problem”, because it's not, it's a societal global problem. With that being said, I'm not sure what the scope of whatever platform is used. But people usually have platforms. I mean, this might be a Facebook thing.”

- *Committee Member*

“Even when looking at youth, you have to look at the individual communities within youth, because it's hard to reach all through one method. You do have unique communities that [bullying] impacts in different ways. You have the LGBTQ plus community, you have people of color, you have disabled youth. Obviously there are similarities between their experiences with bullying, but it does impact these different youth communities in different ways.”

- *Committee Member*

Top questions from interviewees:

- **Who should this program be for?**
  Several interviewees were unsure if this should be a support for those who are being bullied or if it should focus on wraparound services for everyone, including parents, teachers, bystanders, etc.

- **How will we measure effectiveness?**
  Several interviewees were concerned with how we were going to measure the effectiveness of the campaign.

- **Can we ensure access to digital resources?**
  Multiple interviewees mentioned that underserved youth may not have access to the internet or technology, and that we may need to ensure awareness of the program and access multiple ways. This also includes youth living with disabilities and youth who do not participate in social media.

- **Can we ensure that this will be safe, secure, and appropriate?**
  Several interviewees brought up the need to ensure the safety of those seeking resources and conversations in this digital support system. There needs to be oversight and training by licensed professional therapists on all fronts - from those answering calls or online chats to the types of messaging and content that is promoted. Confidentiality and anonymity were also brought up as critical features. Additionally, given the prevalence of cyberbullying, it is important to develop safety measures to ensure those being bullied or at risk of being bullied find a safe space in what we create.

- **Can we ensure equity and inclusivity?**
  Many interviewees underscored the importance of being inclusive of culture, language, race, gender, ability, etc. People accessing these resources should see themselves reflected in imagery, messaging, languages, spokespeople, etc.

Recommendations

Initial Recommendations

1 **Design this Program as a Peer Support Network.** Whatever we create, it must be seen and experienced as a peer to peer or a "lived experience" network. It could absolutely include experts and adult support, but youth want to connect with and listen to one another, or to those who can genuinely and authentically say they understand because they have "been there."

2 **Make this Program by the Youth, for the Youth.** We heard, time and again, that in order for this to work, the program and accompanying marketing campaign must come from the hearts and minds of the youth. We suggest hosting an ideathon, then working with existing youth support and school groups identified by the committee to vote on their favorite program and suggest ways they would bring it to life within their own communities.

3 **Ensure it's Always On:** Bullying is sadly a 24/7 experience, and this program therefore needs to have an "always on" component, much like a suicide hotline. We recommend seeking and sourcing technologies or partners that will allow for those experiencing bullying – or at risk of experiencing bullying – to connect with those willing and available to help at any time of day or night (for example, app-based mental health solutions such as Ginger or Talkspace could fill the gaps).

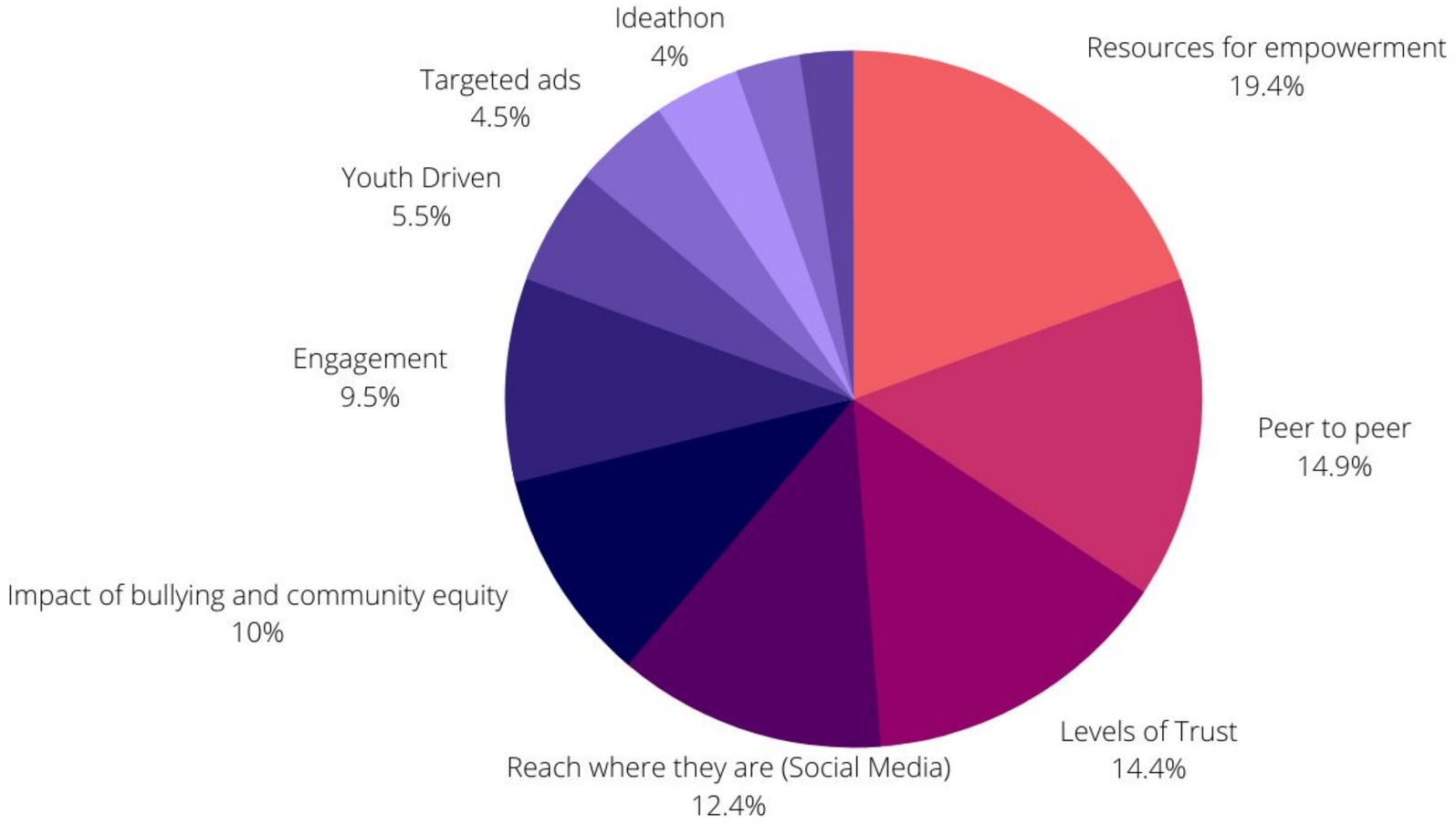
4 **Meet the Youth "Where they Are":** Many teens avoid social media (or their parents restrict it) because that is precisely where bullying so often happens. There are also issues with digital access. We need to find ways (and this is part of the ideathon!) to reach teens where they are beyond the social platforms. Where and how can we show up above and beyond the most popular apps?

5 **Make a Test Case:** Pick a community (demographically or geographically) to measure to learn more intentionally about how this program is truly supporting them. Do a baseline survey of this community at the outset of the program, then re-engage our test subjects at predetermined intervals throughout. Report back to the commission and optimize based on feedback.

Appendix:
Visual Codes and Themes

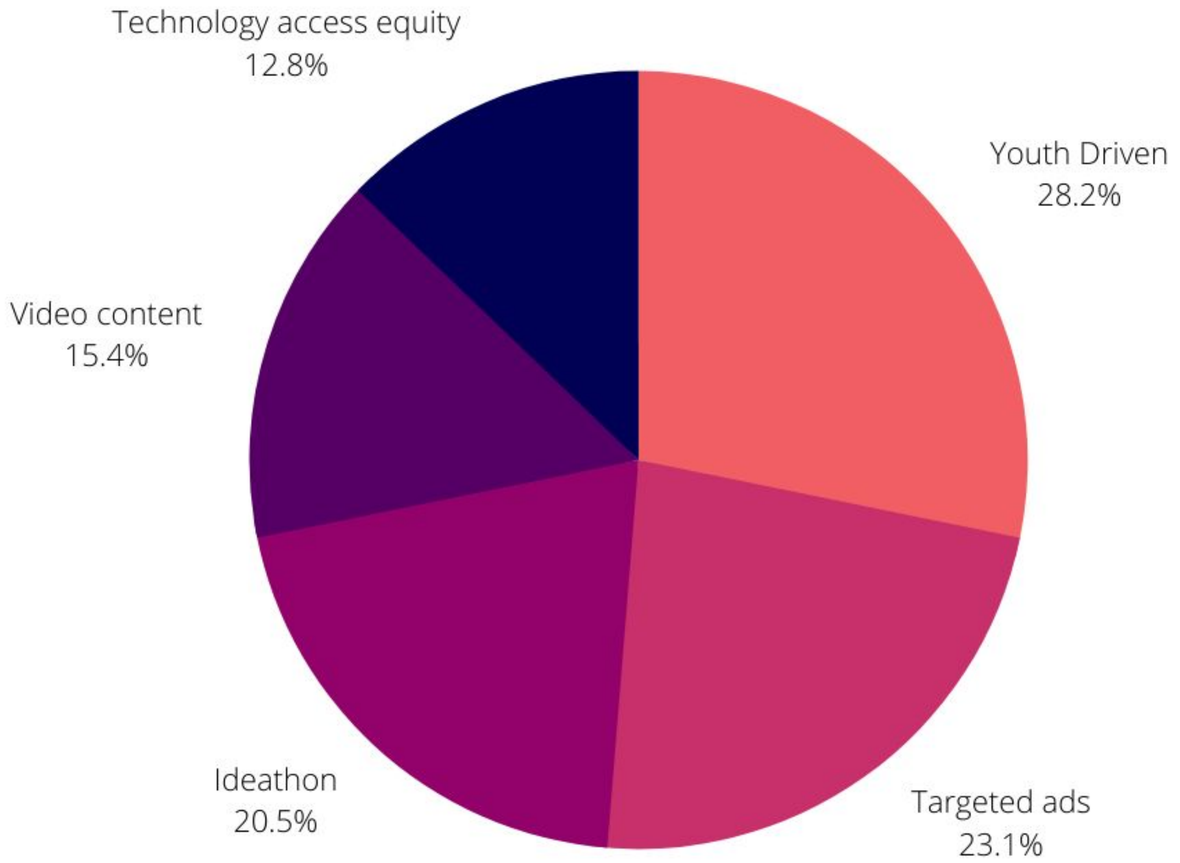
Sept 2021

Emerging Themes



Resources for empowerment	39
Peer to peer	30
Levels of trust	29
Reach where they are (social media)	25
Impact of bullying and community equity	20
Engagement	19
Youth driven	11
Targeted ads	9
Ideathon	8
Video content	6
Technology access equity	5

How to engage



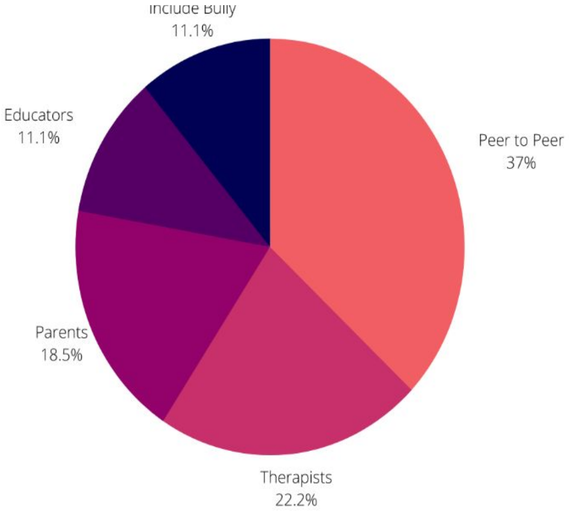
Youth driven	11
Targeted ads	9
Ideathon	8
Video content	6
Technology access equity	5

Question 1

The ideal digital support system for victims of bullying

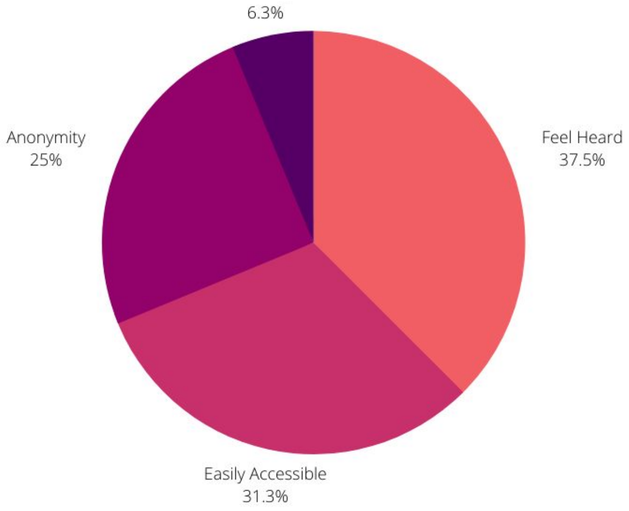
Who is Invited?

Peer to Peer 10
Therapists 6
Parents 5
Educators 3
Include Bully 3



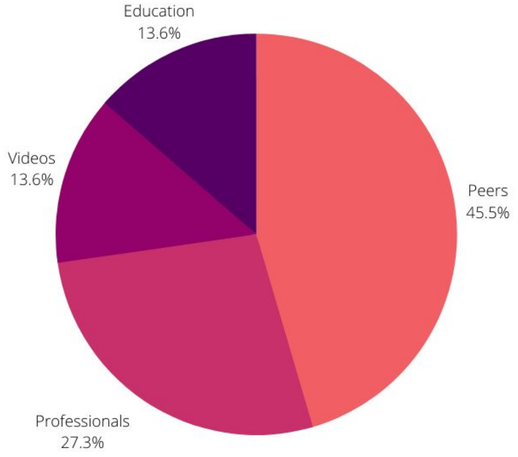
Interactive Platform

Feel Heard - 6
(Chat - Discussion Forum)
Easily Accessible - 5
Anonymity - 4
Parent Support Group - 1



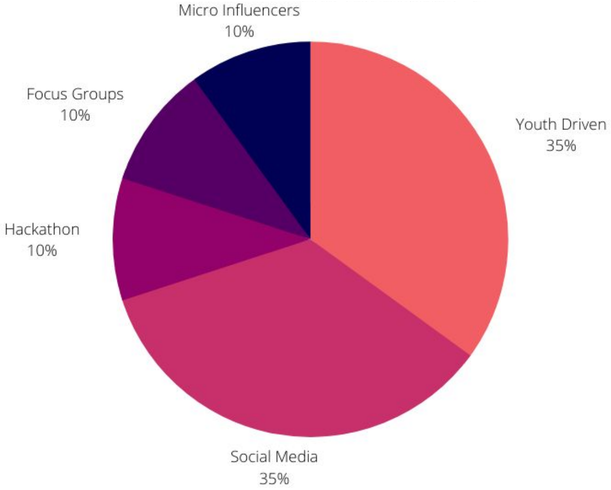
Why will they come?

Peers - 10
Connection to Professionals - 6
Videos - 3
Education - 3



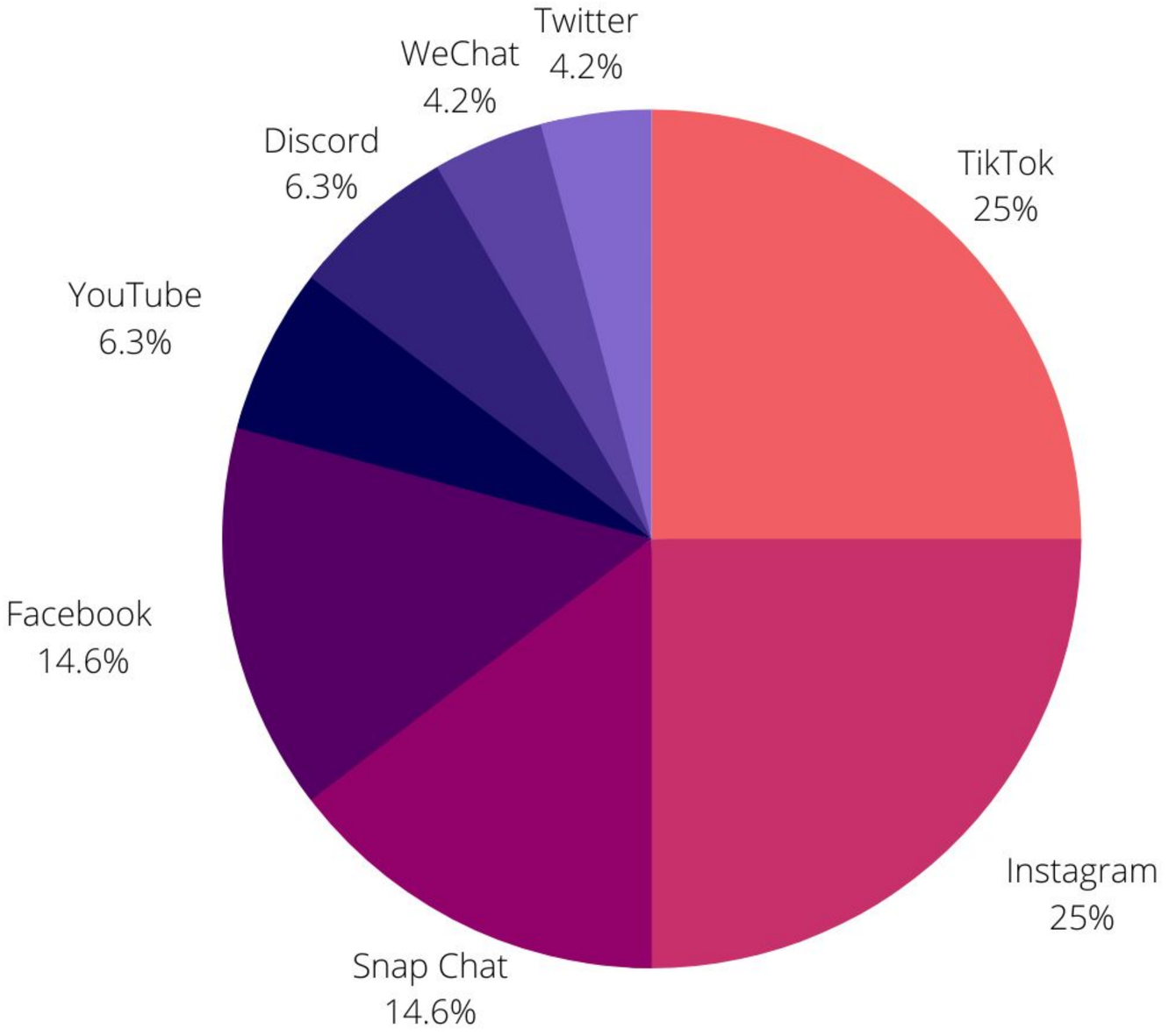
How?

Youth Driven - 7
(Empowerment)
Use of Social Media - 7
Strategic Branding - 3
Hackathon - 2
Focus Groups - 2
Micro Influencers - 2



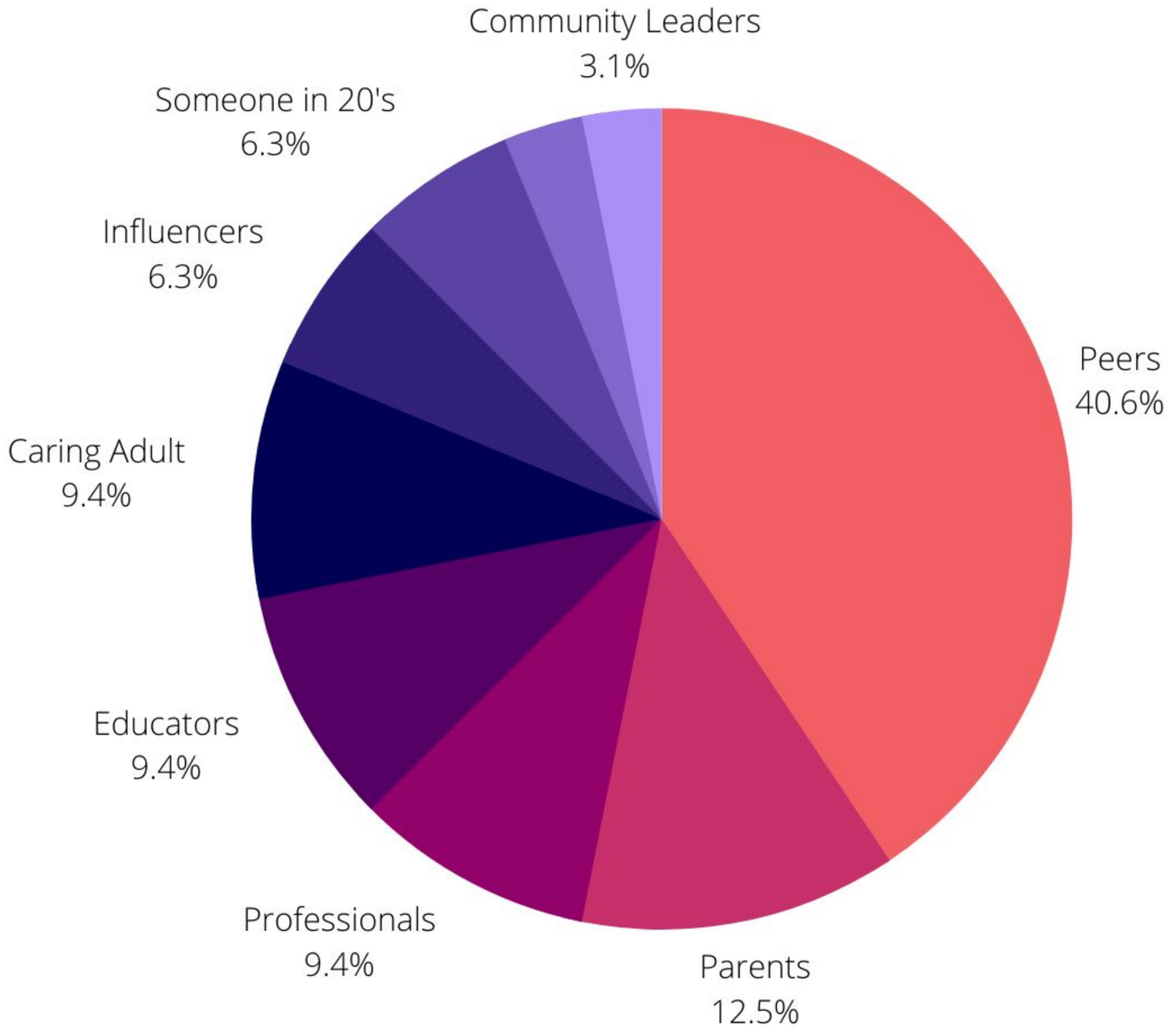
Question 2
What platforms will youth be most likely to use to find support?

TikTok - 12
Instagram - 12
Snap Chat - 7
Facebook - 7
YouTube - 3
Discord - 3
We Chat - 2
Twitter - 2
Internal Chat Platform - 2



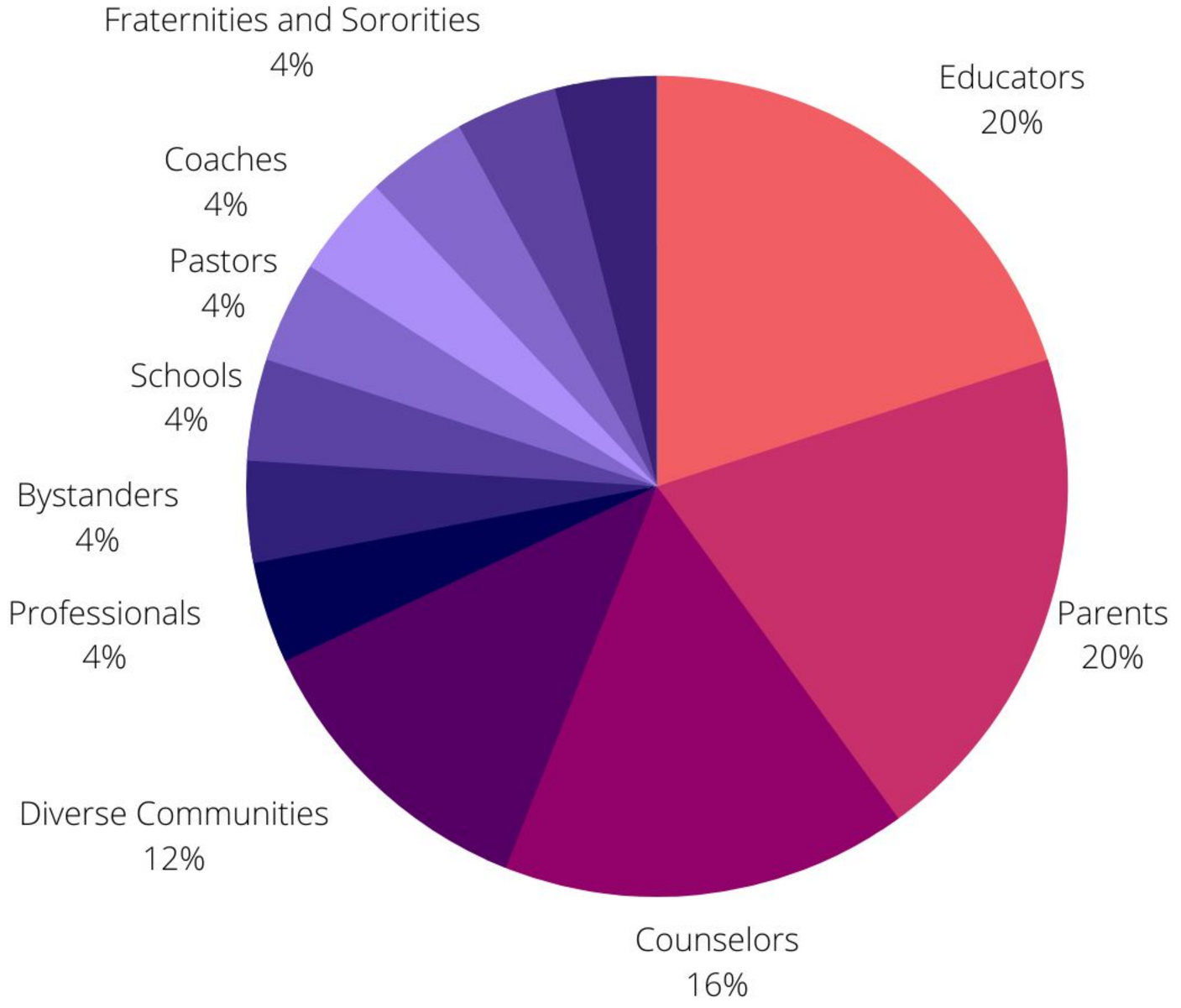
Question 3
Who do you think youth will trust most to connect with?

Peers - 13
Parents - 4
Professionals - 3
Educators - 3
Caring Adult - 3
Influencers - 2
Someone in 20's - 2
Someone who has been bullied - 1
Community Leaders - 1

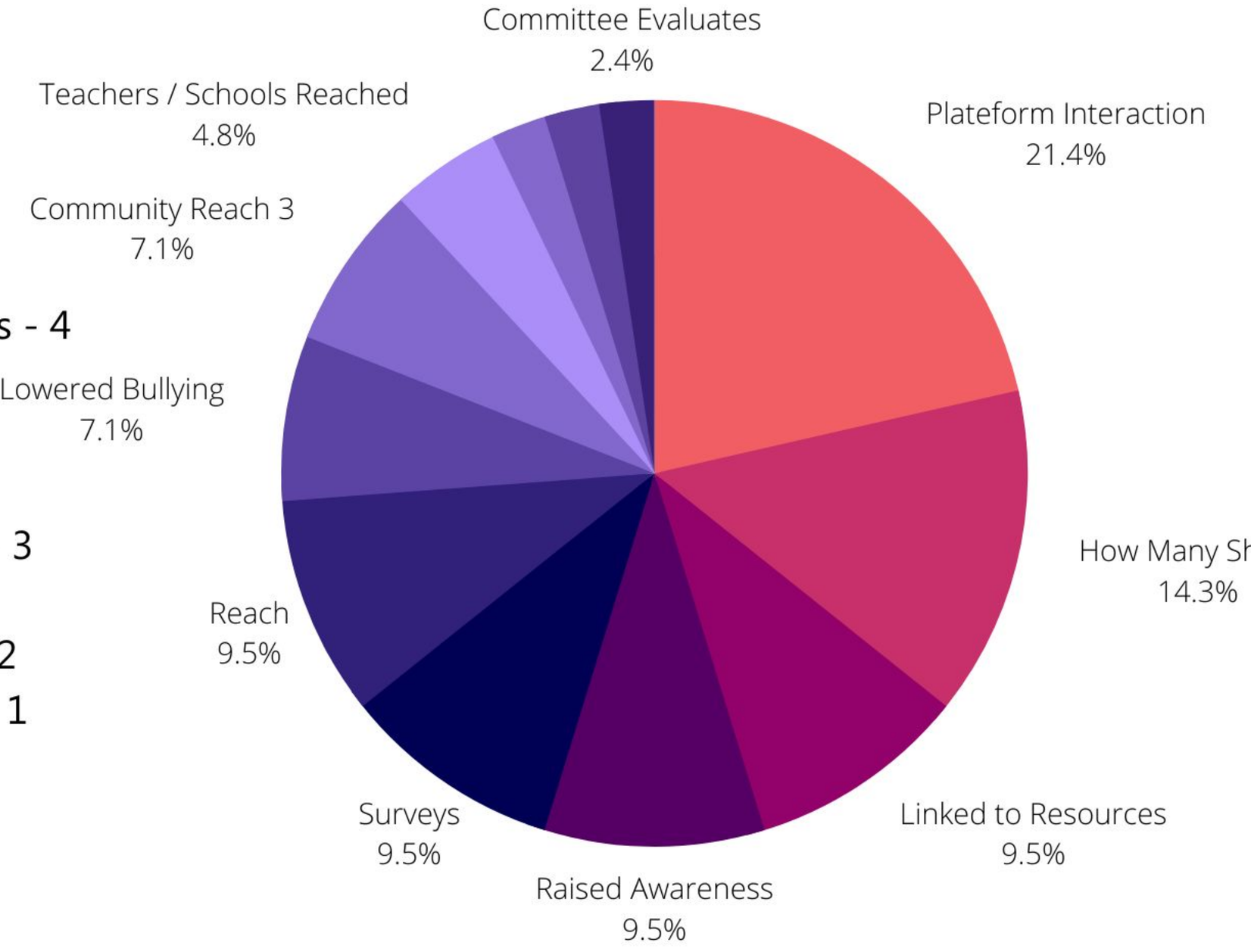


Question 4
What other audiences are important to consider in this initiative?

Educators - 5
Parents - 5
Counselors - 4
Diverse Communities - 3
Professionals - 1
Bystanders - 1
Schools - 1
Pastors- 1
Coaches - 1
Business Owners - 1
Fraternities and Sororities - 1
Probation / Truancy Officers - 1



Question 5

What does success look like once this initiative is rolled out?

Platform Interaction - 9
How Many Shares - 6
How many are linked to resources - 4
Raised Awareness - 4
Surveys - 4
Reach - 4
Lowered Instances of Bullying - 3
Community Reach - 3
Teachers / Schools Reached - 2
School Climate Improvement - 1
Lowered Suicide Rates - 1
Committee Evaluates - 1