

## We Heard You!

# Nute Middle High School Youth Voice Day



On December 16<sup>th</sup>, 2014, all Nute students and staff participated in small group conversations focused on giving input to the school and town about what it is like to live, learn, work, and play in Milton. The students learned that in the October conversation with parents, teachers, and community members, many of the adults talked about:

- Needing to communicate better among the town, schools, and parents
- Providing more opportunities for kids to get involved including and beyond sports
- Making sure that anyone struggling knows where to go for help

Then students were invited to give their input. The following is a summary of key themes shared by the students.

### **Small Town with Close Community Support and a Good School**

Milton's youth were asked to identify their favorite parts of living in Milton. The three predominant answers were the sense of peace and quiet from living in such a small town, the strength of the community, and their appreciation for their school and teachers. Among other common answers were easy access to nature and related activities such as fishing, snowmobiling, and biking, as well as the opportunity to play sports. Students also reported that they felt safe in their town and that they feel that Milton has a strong sense of history.

### **Strong Reliance on Parents, Teachers, and Friends**

When asked to name who they would speak to if they needed to go to an adult, the most common answer was parents and step parents. A number of students also highlighted specific teachers in the school. The next question invited students to think of an adult they would like to speak to other than a parent, and while many students reported that they would seek out a friend, a number answered that, in that case, they would speak to no one. When asked whether students felt they had enough adults to talk to, the majority answered yes, although quite a few students reported that they did not. Students felt frustrated in finding an adult with whom they could build a trusting relationship.

### **Enjoy Time with Friends, Outdoor Activities, Sports, and Video Games**

Milton's youth reported that they spent their time after school and on weekends predominately with their friends and/or playing video games. They also said that they spent time on homework, playing sports, watching TV or movies, engaged in outdoor activities, sleeping, working, and with family. While video games were listed among the most prevalent activity, when asked what their favorite things to do were, they reported outdoor activities including various sports, swimming, hiking, and biking. Their second favorite activity was spending time with their friends and their third was video games. They also showed a strong preference for listening to or playing music, watching TV, sleeping, shopping, eating, drawing, and reading. When asked what they would like to do more of, the overwhelming majority reported that they would like to spend more time with their friends, followed by sleeping, playing sports or being outside, then video games, shopping, reading, and listening to or playing music.

## **Desire for a Rec Center, More Businesses, More Activities, and a Cleaner Town**

When asked how to improve Milton, the strongest preference was for a recreation center that was geared toward youth. They reported that there were not enough activities or places for them to gather. In conjunction, they suggested more outdoor activity areas such as basketball courts, tennis courts, and a number wished for a skate park. Milton's youth also wished to see more businesses come to town, as well as more opportunities to work and earn money. Another common theme among their answers was their desire to see less trash, animal waste, and cigarette butts around town, as well as a general improvement of town infrastructure.

## **Want to Be Heard**

When asked what they think about the fact that adults are concerned that some young people don't feel like they matter to the Milton community (based on the Youth Risk Behavior Survey Data), some youth agreed and some did not. A common response was that the adults had a tendency to either not listen to youth or, when they did listen, not to enact change.

## **More Respect, a Greater Voice, and Acknowledgement That Youth Are the Town's Future**

When asked, "Is there anything else you want the adults to know?" the most common answer was that Milton's youth want more respect from adults. They feel as if they matter, and they want the adults to recognize that. They also asked for more of a voice in the town and said that they were either currently helping or able to help and take on more responsibility, if the adults would let them. Another frequent comment was that the youth saw themselves as the future of the town and therefore felt that the adults should take them into consideration and take them more seriously.

*NH Listens is a civic engagement initiative of the Carsey School at the University of New Hampshire.*



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