

# WELLNESS OF WATERTOWN

YOUTH RISK BEHAVIOR SURVEY (YRBS) RESULTS, 2025



# ABOUT THE YRBS

**The Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS)<sup>1</sup> monitors the prevalence of health risk behaviors that are often established during adolescence and contribute to the leading causes of death, disability, and social problems among youth and adults. In Watertown, the YRBS reports on:**

- **Student demographics:** Gender, sexual identity, race, ethnicity, and grade
- **Substance use:** Alcohol, marijuana, vaping, and perception of substance use
- **Mental health and wellness:** Stress, anxiety, depression, self-harm, suicide
- **Personal safety:** Bullying in school, electronic bullying
- **Protective factors:** Sense of belonging, trusted adults, coping strategies

The YRBS is conducted every two years nationally by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and state-wide in Massachusetts by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) and Department of Public Health (DPH).

# YRBS IN WATERTOWN

**Wayside Youth & Family Support Network provides a wide variety of mental health counseling and family support services to children, young adults and families in Massachusetts. Wayside’s mission is: “empowering children, young adults and families to achieve greater independence and emotional well-being.”**

In Watertown, the YRBS is administered every two years to all students at the high school and middle schools. Wayside works with John Snow, Inc. (JSI) to support survey administration, produces this report in partnership with Data+Soul Research, and disseminates findings in collaboration with school and community partners. See more information on survey administration in [Appendix A. Methodology](#).

JSI supports YRBS administration among other Middlesex County communities (“Middlesex League”) to monitor and compare trends in health and wellness. Participating communities include Arlington, Belmont, Burlington, Melrose, Reading, Stoneham, Wakefield, **Watertown**, Wilmington, Winchester, Woburn.

# YRBS IN WATERTOWN

## History of using YRBS data to address youth health and well-being

Watertown has been collecting YRBS data for the past three decades to understand trends in youth substance use, mental health and overall well-being. We also work on the W2B2 coalition with three other towns (Belmont, Brookline, and Waltham) to address these **factors influencing youth substance use**:

**Sense of Belonging:** Students who feel like they belong at school are less likely to use substances.

**Trusted Adults:** Youth need adults in their lives (caregivers, adults at school, adults in the community) who they trust to listen and support them without judgment. However, these adults are hard to identify.

**Misperceptions of Risk and Harm from Using Substances:** Youth overestimate substance use among their peers and underestimate the risks and harms of use.

# ABOUT THIS REPORT

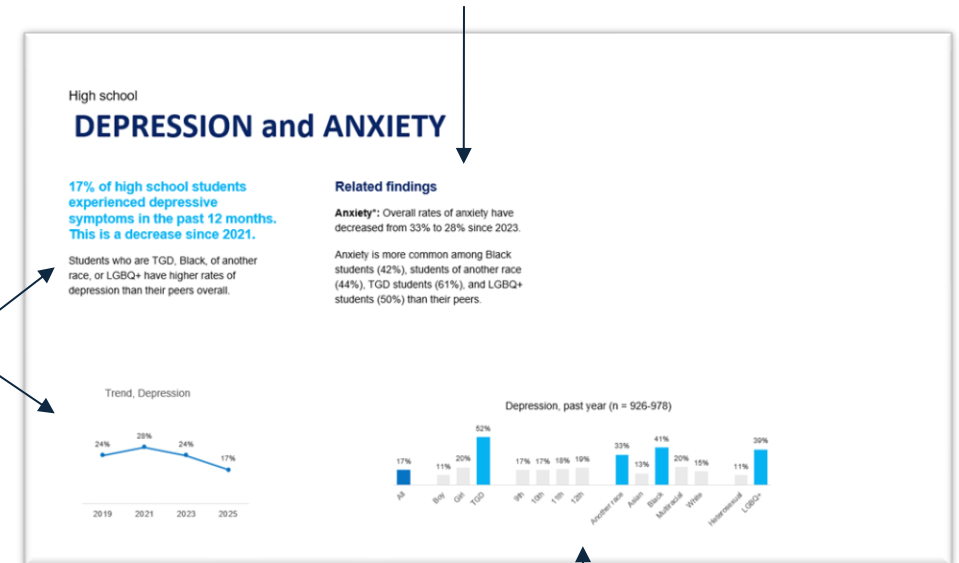
Throughout the report, key findings are featured in both text and chart form presented on the left and across the bottom. Related findings are presented on the right.

All findings are calculated as percentages. Patterns are reported with 5% used as a general benchmark for noting differences between groups or over time. The chart on the bottom right of each slide disaggregates data by demographic group. Overall rate is represented by dark blue, general rates are in light blue, and values that are 5% or more than the overall rate are highlighted in blue.

When relevant, the number of respondents (n) for a given question or response option is reported. Overall n counts are reviewed to maintain student anonymity. Some n counts of disaggregated groups are low, which can lead to higher percentages.

Key findings, also illustrated in charts across the bottom

Related findings



All key findings are broken down by gender identity, grade, race/ethnicity, and sexual orientation

# COUNT OF SURVEY RESPONSES

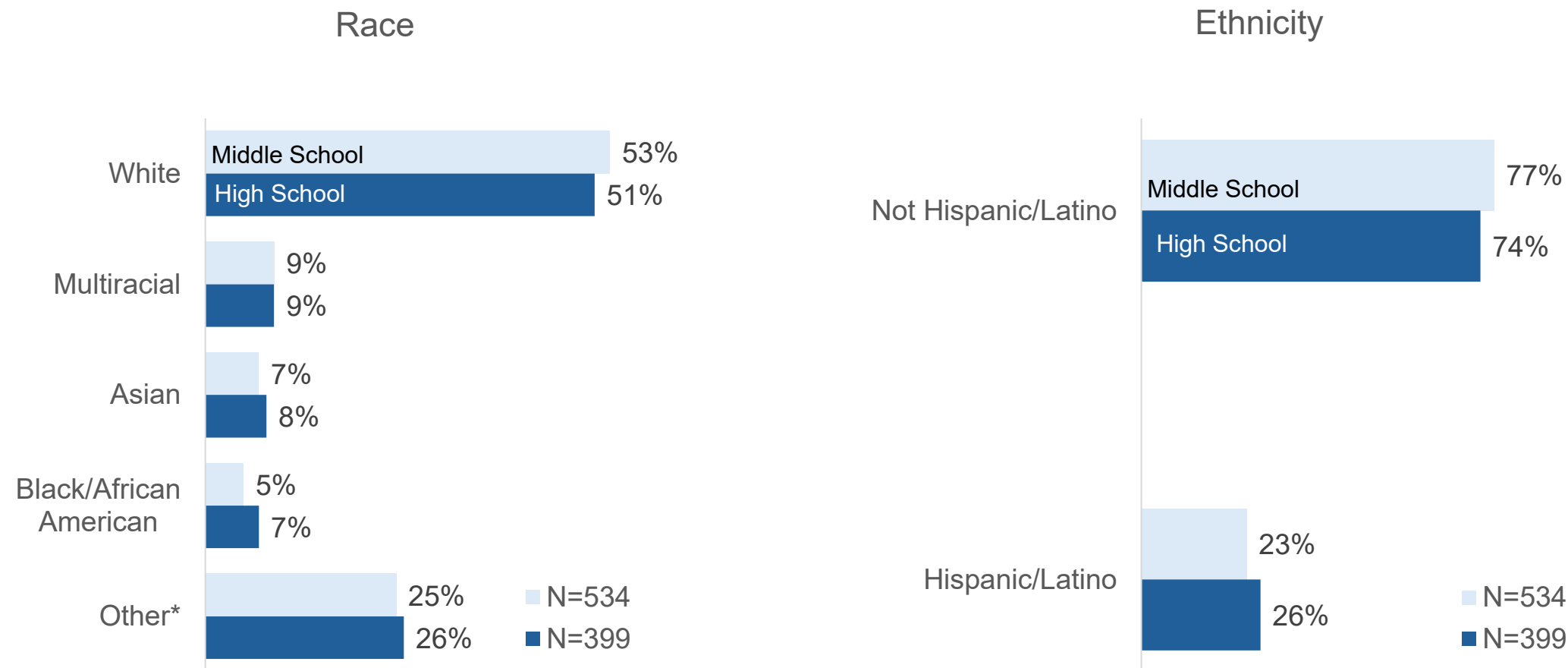
## Middle School

Grade	Responses
6 <sup>th</sup>	197
7 <sup>th</sup>	184
8 <sup>th</sup>	156
<b>Total</b>	<b>537</b>

## High School

Grade	Responses
9 <sup>th</sup>	105
10 <sup>th</sup>	113
11 <sup>th</sup>	105
12 <sup>th</sup>	80
<b>Total</b>	<b>403</b>

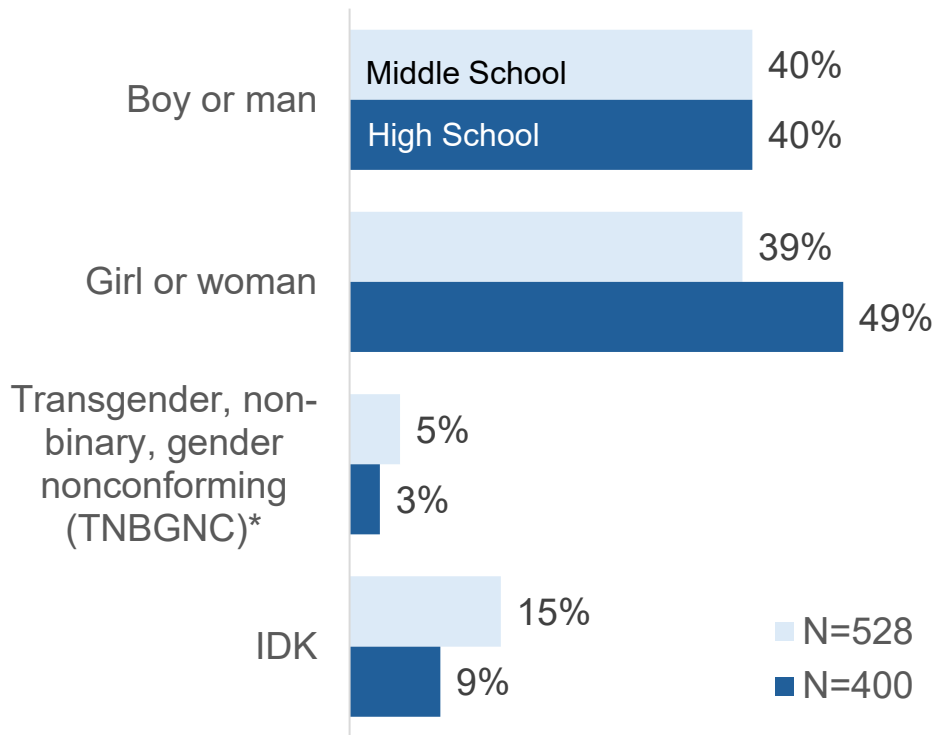
# RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS



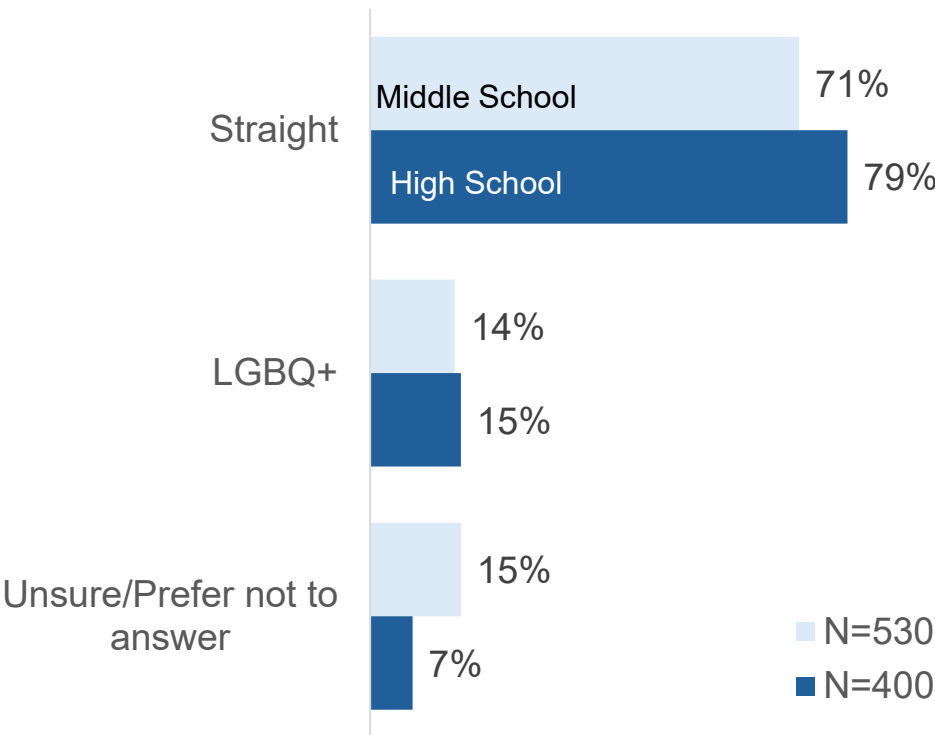
Another race\* incl. American Indian/Alaska Native, Hispanic/Latino, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, Middle Eastern/North African, Another race.

# RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

Gender Identity



Sexual Orientation



TNBGNC\* includes students who are transgender, non-binary, genderqueer, questioning, another gender.

# HIGH SCHOOL

SUBSTANCE USE

MENTAL HEALTH & WELLNESS

PERSONAL SAFETY

PROTECTIVE FACTORS

# SUBSTANCE USE

ALCOHOL  
MARIJUANA  
VAPING  
PERCEPTION OF USE

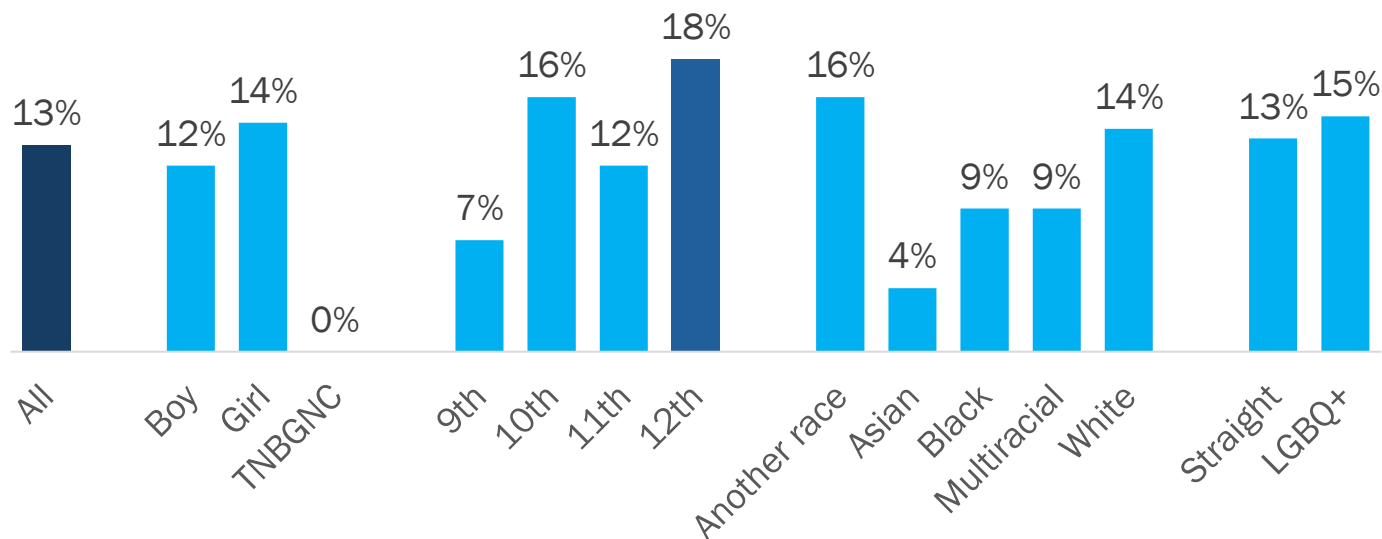
High school

# ALCOHOL USE

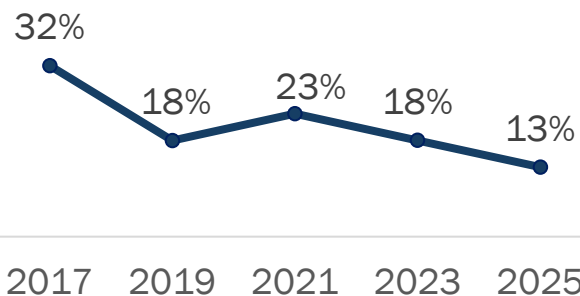
**Among high school students, current alcohol use has decreased since 2021.**

Rates of drinking are mostly level across demographic groups, apart from TNBGNC students. 12<sup>th</sup> grade students (18%) report the highest rates of alcohol use among their peers.

Drank alcohol at least once, past 30 days



Trend, Alcohol use, past 30 days



# ALCOHOL USE

**Student perceptions of risk:** Student perceptions of the risk of regularly consuming alcohol have decreased since 2019.

**Student perception of parental and peer disapproval:** Perception of parental and peer disapproval of alcohol use have increased since 2023, returning to previous levels.

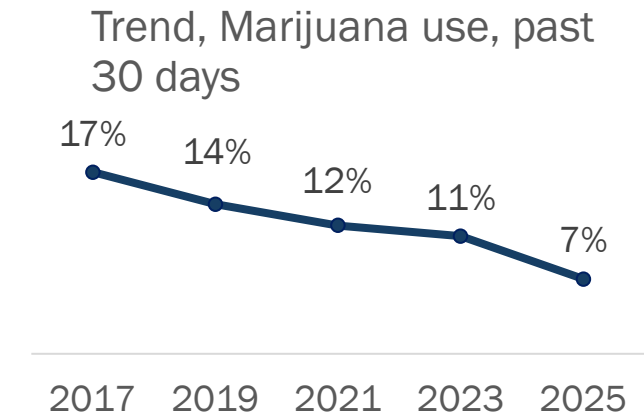
Student perceptions of	2019	2021	2023	2025	Dif
Risk/harm of daily alcohol use	77%	80%	64%	60%	▼
Parental disapproval	91%	89%	76%	90%	▲
Peer disapproval	75%	69%	47%	77%	▲

High school

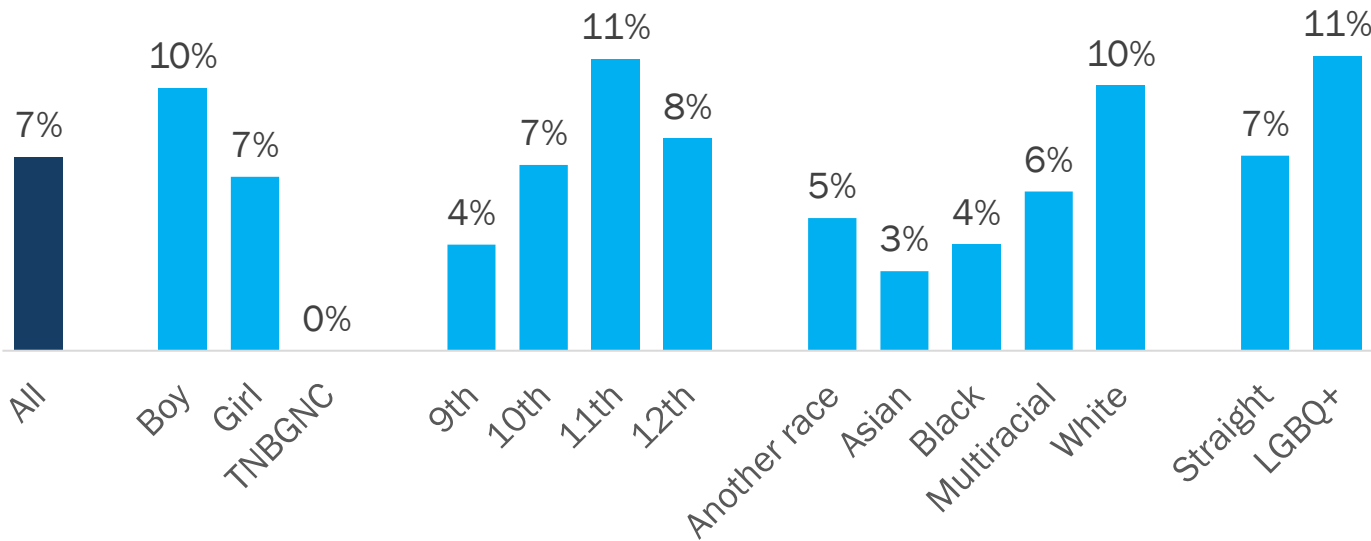
# MARIJUANA USE

Since 2017, current marijuana use among high school students has decreased by 59%.

11th grade (11%) and LGBTQ+ students (11%) report the highest rates of marijuana use among than their peers.



Used marijuana at least once, past 30 days



# MARIJUANA USE

**Student perceptions of risk:** The perception of risk of marijuana use has increased from 45% in 2019 to 57% in 2025.

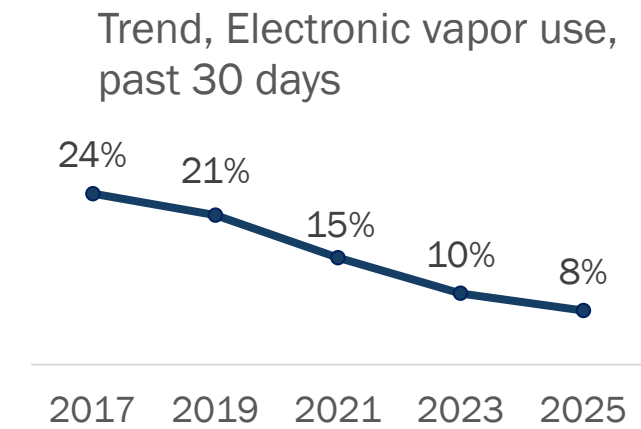
**Student perception of parental and peer disapproval:** Student perception of parental disapproval of marijuana use has fluctuated between 84% and 88% since 2019, while student perception of peer disapproval has steadily increased since 2019 (from 50% in 2019 to 74% in 2025).

Student perceptions of	2019	2021	2023	2025	Dif
Risk/harm of marijuana use	45%	53%	51%	57%	▲
Parental disapproval	84%	85%	88%	88%	▬
Peer disapproval	50%	52%	59%	74%	▲

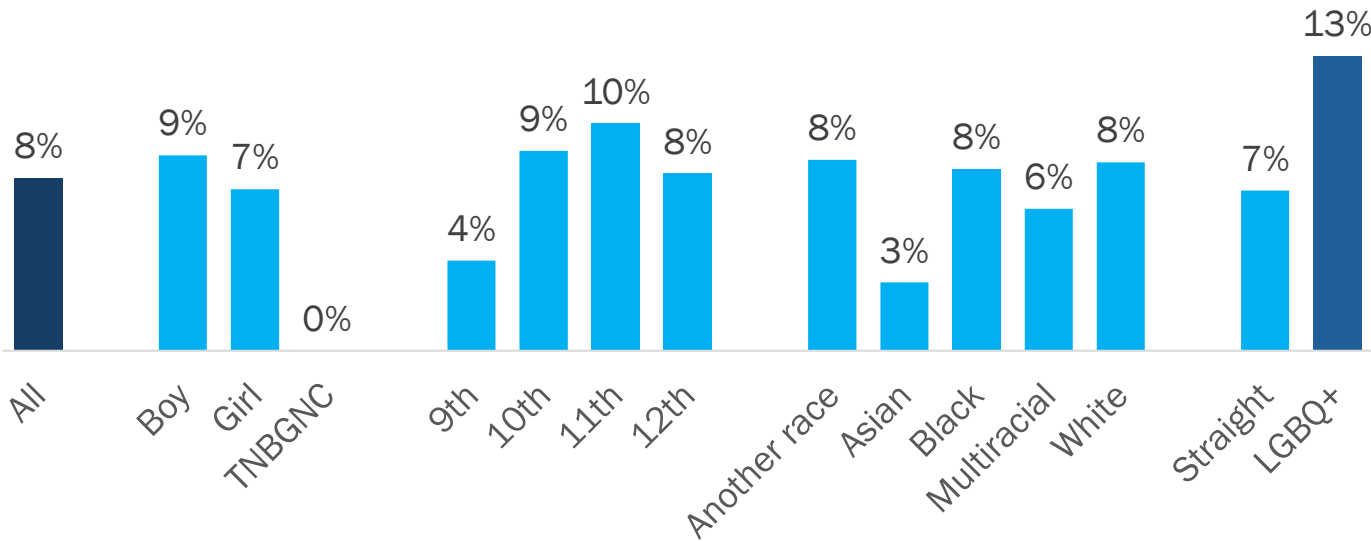
# ELECTRONIC VAPOR USE

Since 2021, current electronic vapor use among high school students has decreased by 67%. Use has remained consistent since 2023.

At 13%, electronic vapor use is more common among LGBTQ+ students than their peers.



Used electronic vapor products at least once, past 30 days



# ELECTRONIC VAPOR USE

**Student perceptions of risk:** The perception of risk of electronic vapor use has remained level since 2023 but has decreased since 2019.

**Student perception of parental and peer disapproval:** Student perception of parental disapproval of electronic vapor use has remained level since 2021. However, student perception of peer disapproval has greatly increased.

Student perceptions of	2019	2021	2023	2025	Dif
Risk/harm of electronic vapor use	88%	82%	78%	79%	▬
Parental disapproval	88%	94%	94%	93%	▬
Peer disapproval	----	51%	60%	75%	▲

# PERCEPTION OF CURRENT SUBSTANCE USE

High school students believe that their peers are currently using\* substances at higher rates than they report using.



Substance	% students who reported using substance in the past 30 days (ACTUAL)	% students who perceived use to be		
		LOWER than actual use	HIGHER than actual use	SIMILAR to actual use
Alcohol	13%	21%	66%	13%
Marijuana	7%	0%	74%	26%
Vape products	8%	0%	83%	17%

*\*New survey question: During the past 30 days, what percentage of students at your school do you think used the following substances?*

# MENTAL HEALTH & WELLNESS

STRESS  
ANXIETY  
DEPRESSION  
SELF-HARM  
SUICIDE  
COPING STRATEGIES

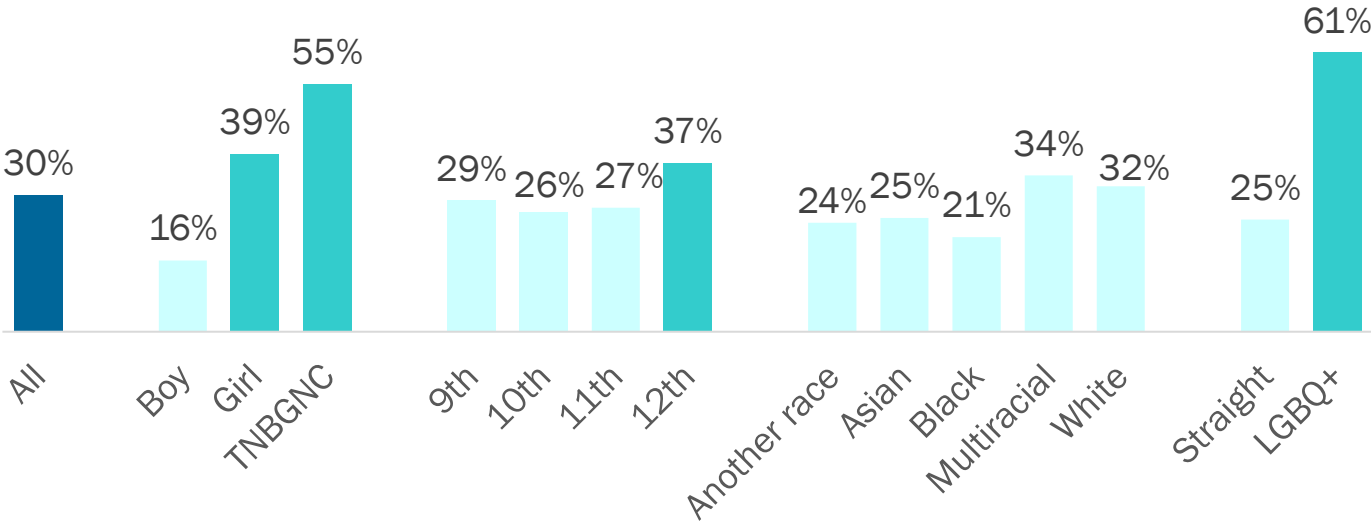
High school

# STRESS

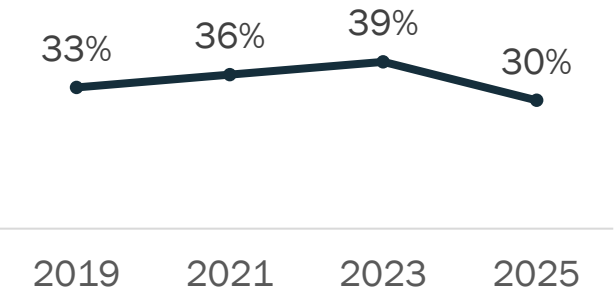
**30% of high school students have experienced overwhelming stress in the past year.**

Overall rates of overwhelming stress have decreased from 2023 and are comparable with pre-COVID rates. Girl (39%), TNBGNC (55%), 12<sup>th</sup> grade (37%), and LGBTQ+ students (61%) report higher rates of experiencing overwhelming stress than their peers overall.

Overwhelming stress, past year



Trend, Overwhelming stress, past year

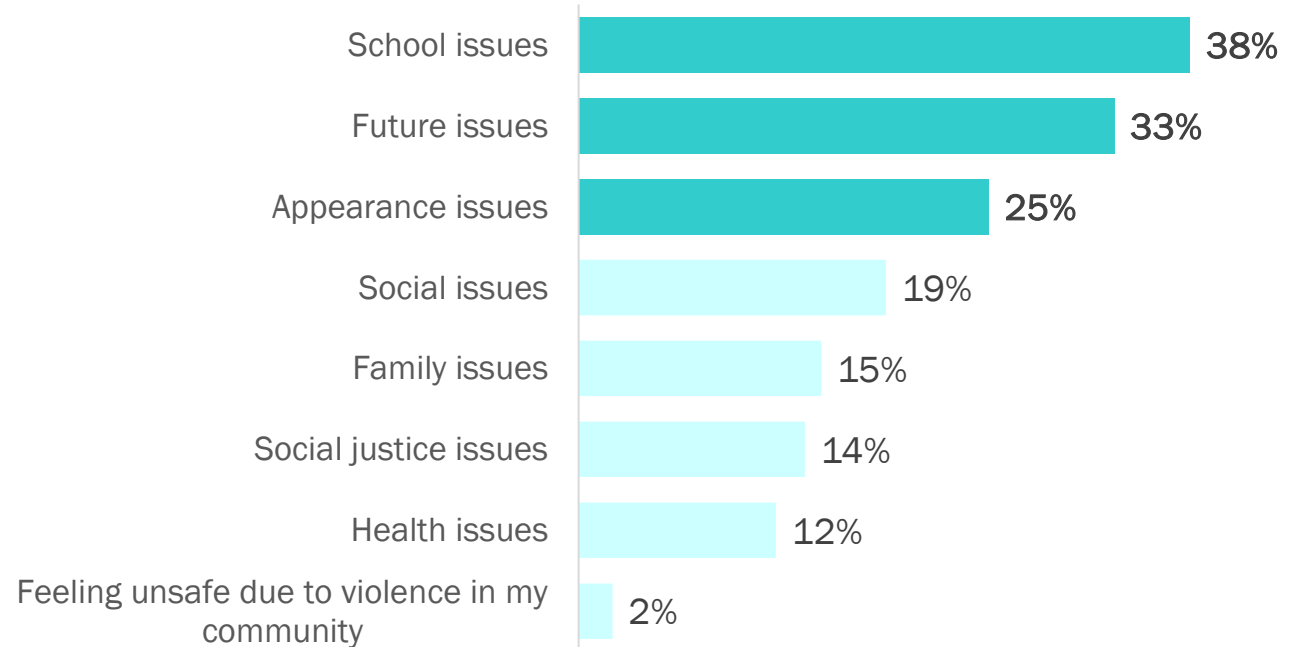


High school

# STRESS

**Among high school students, the leading causes of stress are school issues (38%), future issues (33%), and appearance issues (25%).**

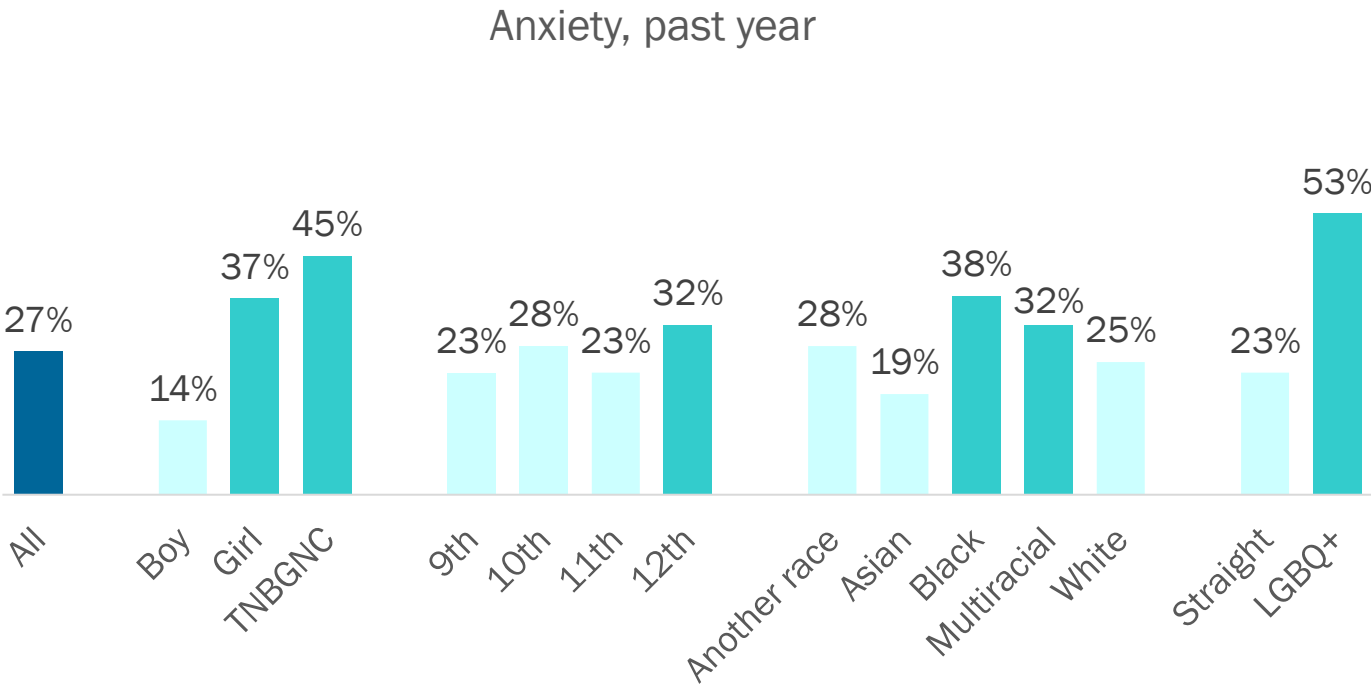
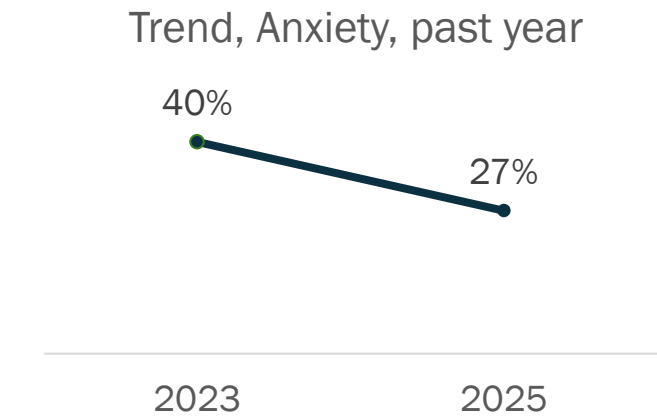
Causes of stress (n=383-389)



# ANXIETY

**27% of high school students report experiencing anxiety in the last year.**

Among high schoolers, girl (37%), TNBGNC (45%), 12<sup>th</sup> grade (32%), Black (38%), multiracial (32%), and LGBTQ+ students (53%) report the highest rates of anxiety.

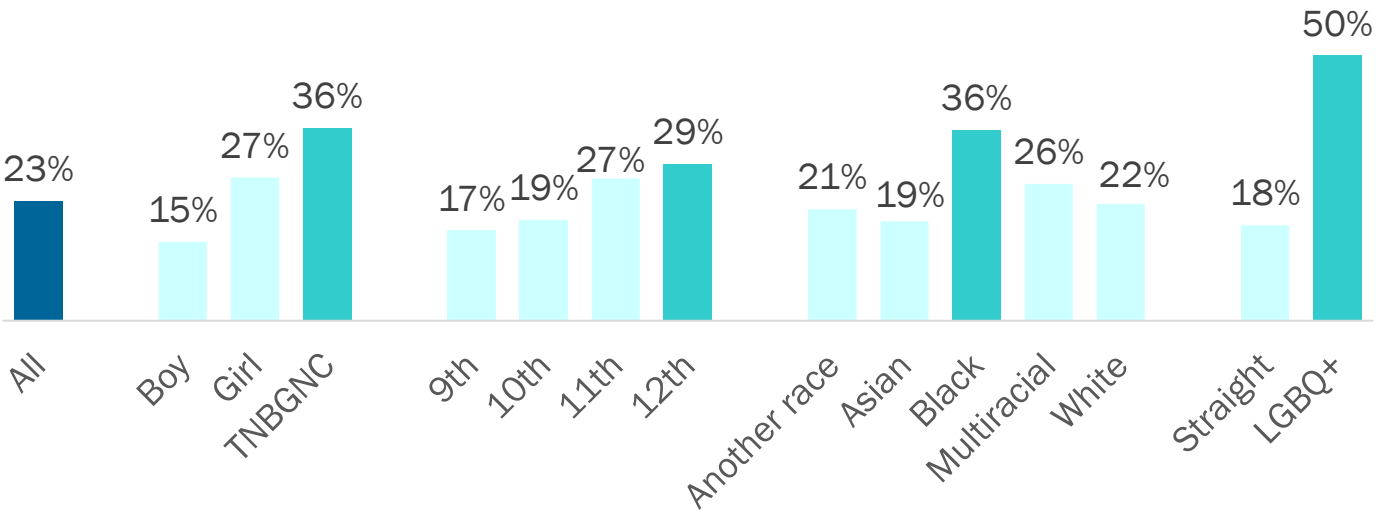


# DEPRESSION

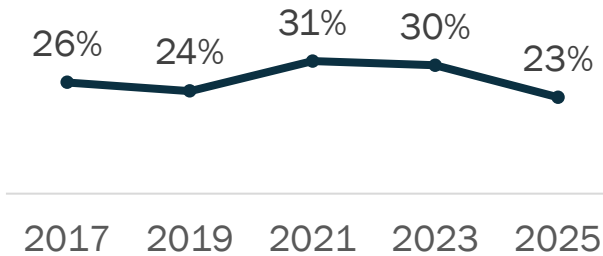
**Overall rates of high school students who experienced depressive symptoms in the past 12 months have fluctuated between 23% (2025) to 31% (2021).**

Students who are TNBGNC (36%), in 12<sup>th</sup> grade (29%), Black (36%), and LGBTQ+ (50%) report higher rates of depression than their peers overall.

Depression, past year



Trend, Depression, past year

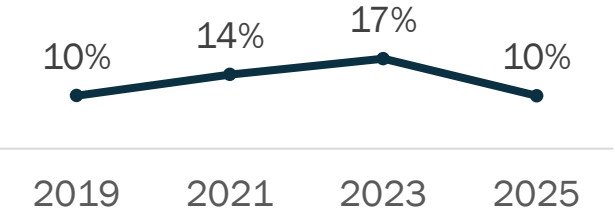


# SELF-HARM

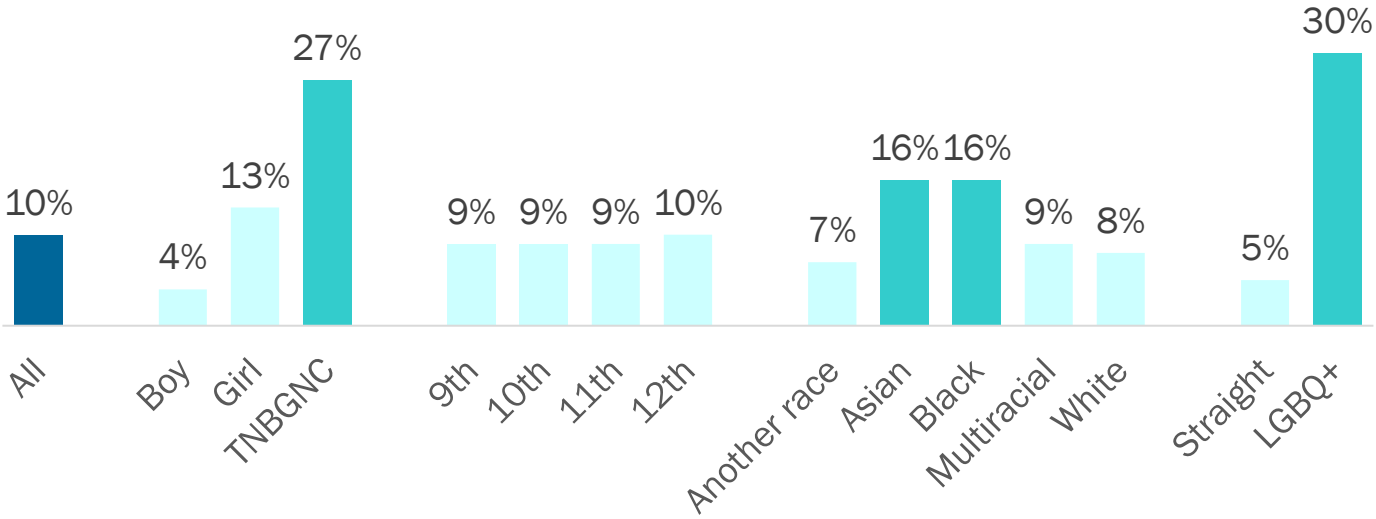
**Overall, 10% of high school students have hurt or injured themselves without the intention of dying in the past year.**

TNBGNC (27%), Asian (16%), Black (16%), and LGBTQ+ students (30%) have self-harmed more than their peers.

Trend, Self-harm, past year



Self-harm, past year

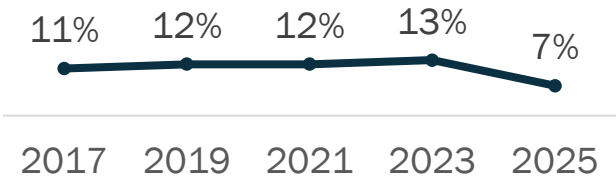


# SUICIDE

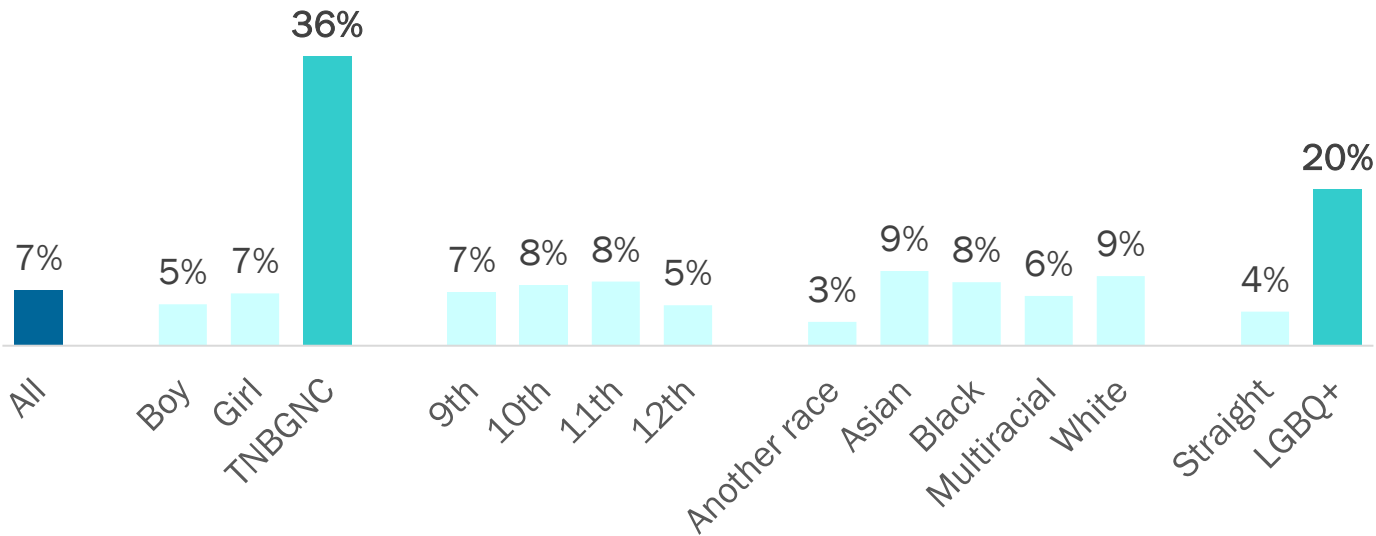
**Overall, 7% of high school students (27 students) have seriously considered attempting suicide, a decrease from previous years. 3% (10 students) have attempted suicide in the past year.**

Among high school students, suicide ideation among TNBGNC and LGBTQ+ students is high compared to overall. 36% of TNBGNC students and 20% of LGBTQ+ students have considered suicide.

Trend, Consider Suicide, past year



Consider suicide, past year



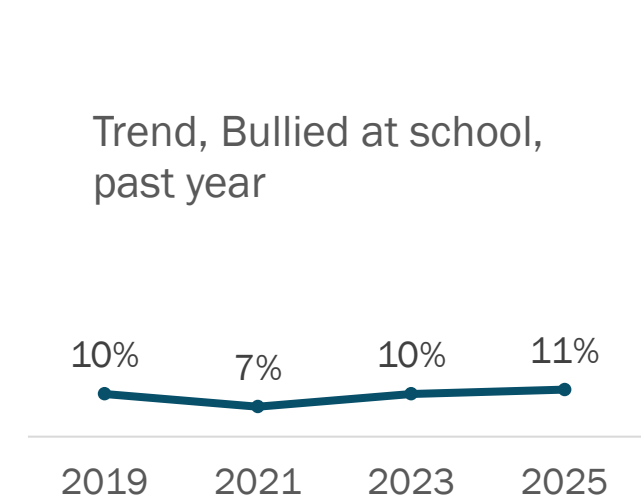
# PERSONAL SAFETY

BULLYING AT SCHOOL  
ELECTRONIC BULLYING

# BULLYING

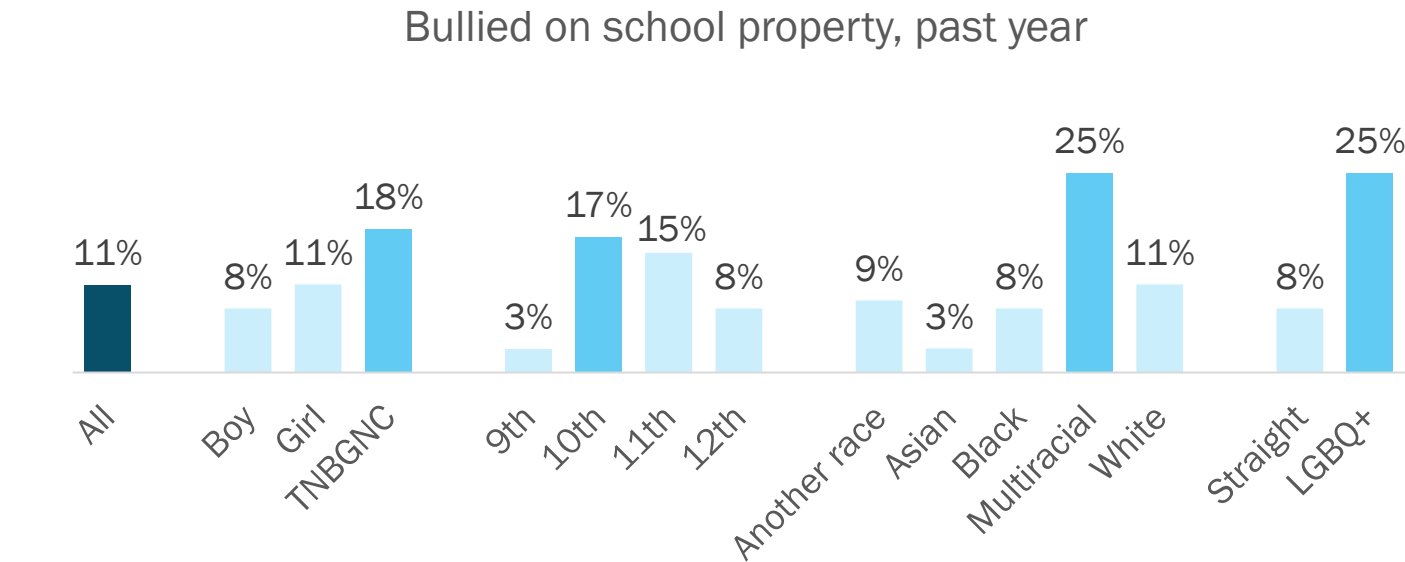
**Overall, 11% of high school students have been bullied on school property in the past year.**

Among high school students, TNBGNC (18%), 10<sup>th</sup> grade (17%), multiracial (25%), and LGBTQ+ students (25%) report higher rates of bullying than their peers.



## Related findings

**Electronic bullying:** 9% of all high school students have been bullied electronically, a slight increase from 2023. TNBGNC (18%) and LGBTQ+ students (26%) report higher rates of electronic bullying than their peers.



# PROTECTIVE FACTORS

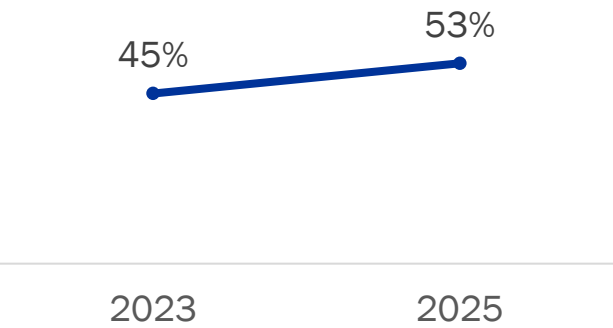
SENSE OF BELONGING  
TRUSTED ADULTS

# SENSE OF BELONGING

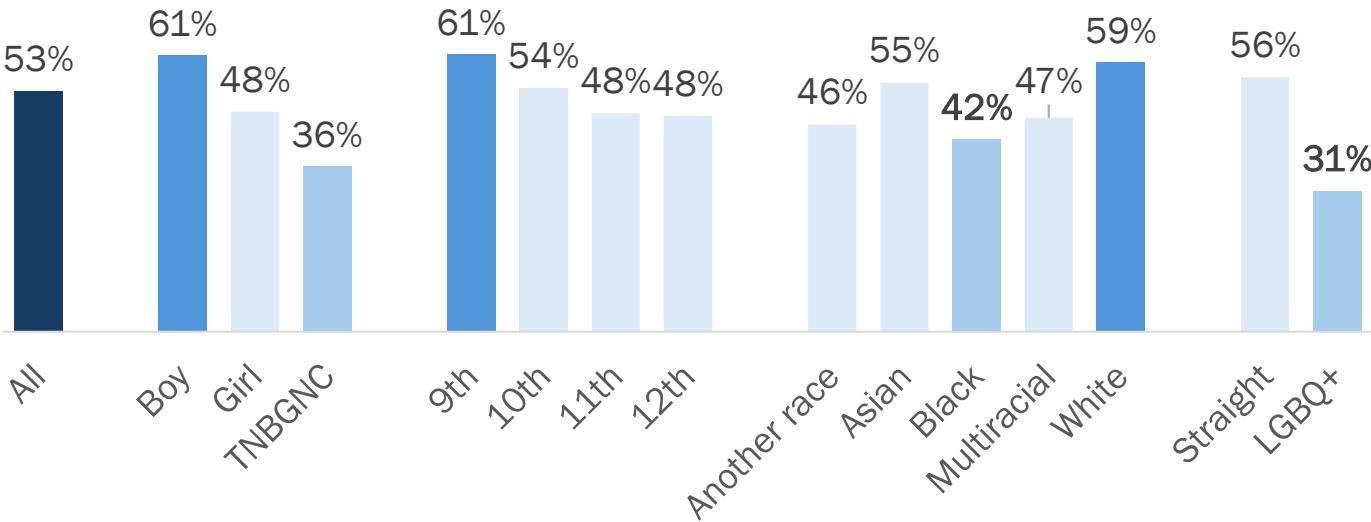
Approximately half of all high school students express feelings of belonging at school\*, an increase since 2023.

Among high school students, boy (61%), 9<sup>th</sup> grade (61%), and white students (59%) express the *highest* rates of belonging compared to TNBGNC (36%), Black (42%), and LGBTQ+ students (31%), who report the *lowest* rates of feeling like they belong at school.

Trend, Belonging at school



Feeling of belonging at school



*\*Note:* This number represents the percentage of students who responded, “quite a bit” or “a lot” to the question “To what extent do you feel that you belong at your school?”

# TRUSTED ADULTS

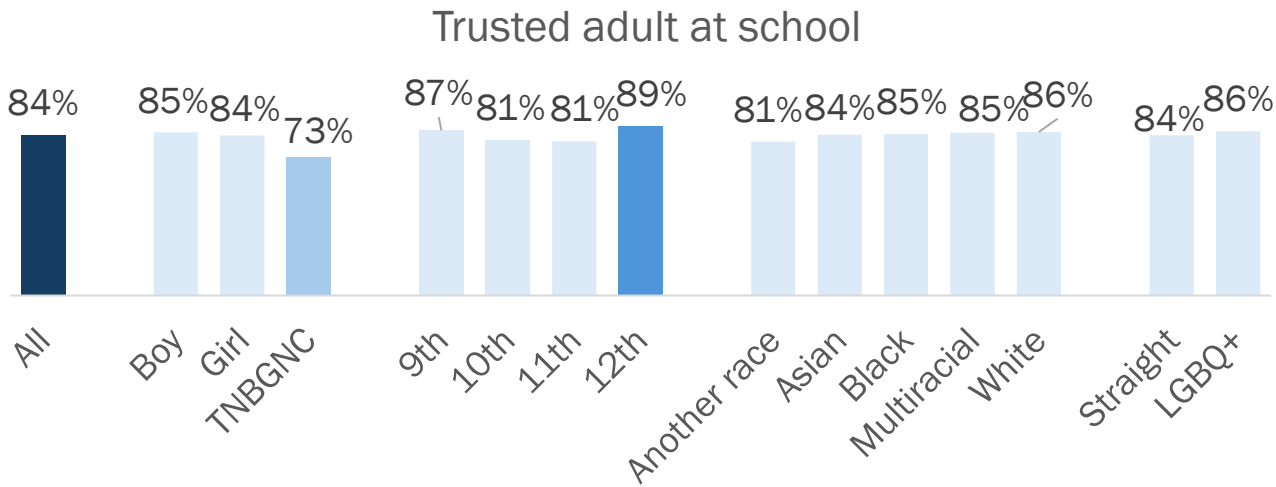
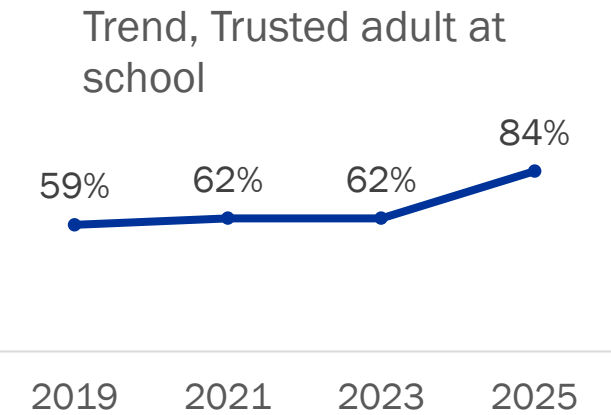
**Over 4 out of 5 high school students (84%) say there is at least one teacher or adult in school they can talk with if they have a problem.**

The overall rate is consistent across most groups, although TNBGNC students report lower rates at 73%.

## Related findings

**Trusted adult outside of school:** 75% of high school students report that they have a trusted adult in the community, a large increase from 2023 (60%).

**Trusted adult in family:** 92% of high school students have someone at home that they can talk with if they have a problem, an increase from 2023 (81%), and comparable to rates from 2021 (88%).

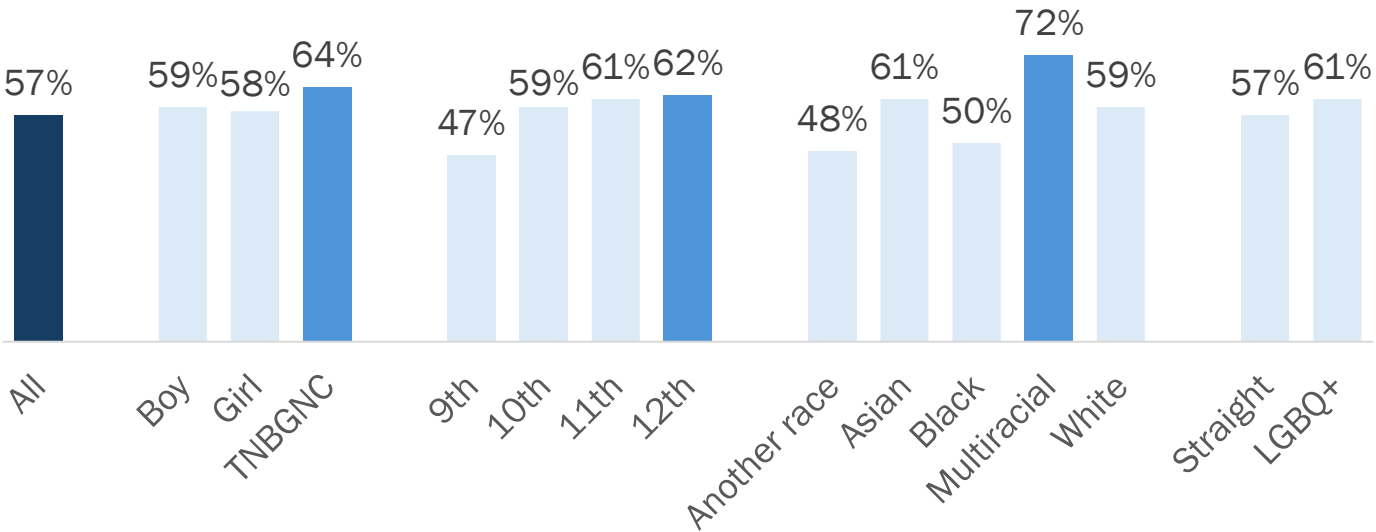


# COPING STRATEGIES

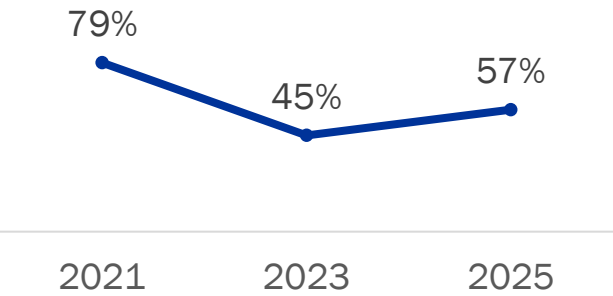
**57% of all high school students say they have a healthy activity or behavior (coping strategy) to help them relieve stress.**

TNBGNC (64%), 12<sup>th</sup> grade (62%) and multiracial students (72%) report the highest rates of having a coping strategy, while 9<sup>th</sup> graders (47%) and students of another race (48%) report the lowest.

Have a coping strategy



Trend, Have a coping strategy



# MIDDLE SCHOOL

SUBSTANCE USE

MENTAL HEALTH & WELLNESS

PERSONAL SAFETY

PROTECTIVE FACTORS

# SUBSTANCE USE

ALCOHOL  
MARIJUANA  
VAPING  
PERCEPTION OF USE

# ALCOHOL USE

Since 2017, current rate of alcohol use has fluctuated between 1 and 3% among middle school students.

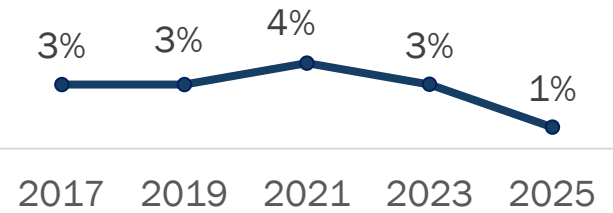
Drank alcohol at least once, past 30 days

Note: Data could not be disaggregated due to small sample size.

1%

All  
Boy  
Girl  
TNBGNC  
6th  
7th  
8th  
Another race  
Asian  
Black  
Multiracial  
White  
Straight  
LGBQ+

Trend, Alcohol use, past 30 days



# ALCOHOL USE

**Student perceptions of risk:** Since 2021, student perception of the risk of regularly consuming alcohol has decreased.

**Student perception of parental and peer disapproval:** Student perception of parental disapproval has remained level since 2019. The rate of students reporting their peers disapprove of alcohol use has slightly increased since 2023.

Student perceptions of	2019	2021	2023	2025	Dif
Risk/harm of daily alcohol use	82%	87%	64%	56%	▼
Parental disapproval	95%	93%	91%	93%	▬
Peer disapproval	86%	87%	86%	91%	▲

Middle school

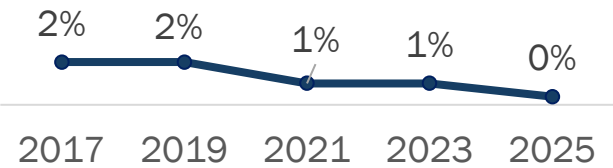
# MARIJUANA USE

**Current marijuana use has remained consistent among middle school students since 2017.**

Used marijuana at least once, past 30 days

*Note: Data could not be disaggregated due to small sample size.*

Trend, Marijuana use, past 30 days



0%

All  
Boy  
Girl  
TNBGNC  
6th  
7th  
8th  
Another race  
Asian  
Black  
Multiracial  
White  
Straight  
LGBQ+

# MARIJUANA USE

**Student perceptions of risk:** The perception of risk of marijuana use has remained mostly level, with a slight decrease from 2021 to 2025.

**Student perception of parental and peer disapproval:** Perception of parental and peer disapproval of marijuana use has remained level.

Student perceptions of	2019	2021	2023	2025	Dif
Risk/harm of marijuana use	74%	73%	70%	67%	<div></div>
Parental disapproval	95%	96%	95%	96%	<div></div>
Peer disapproval	86%	86%	90%	93%	<div></div>

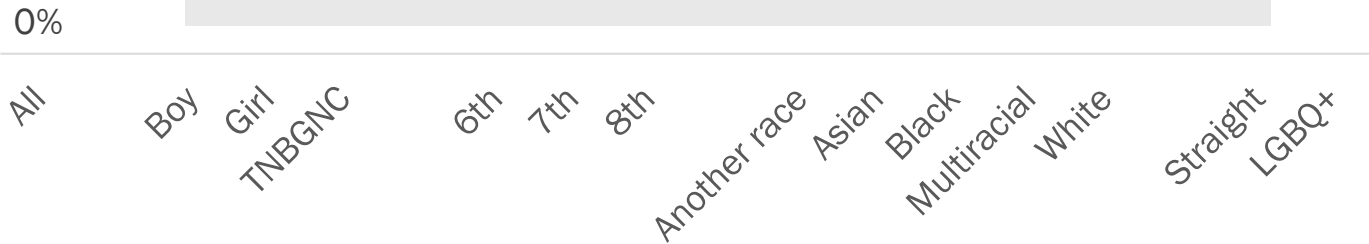
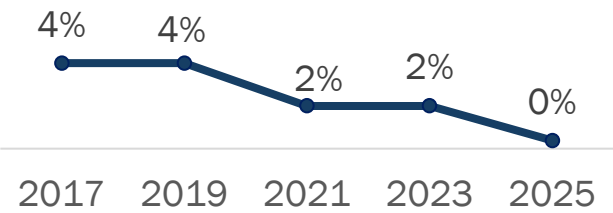
# ELECTRONIC VAPOR USE

Since 2021, current rates of electronic vapor use have stayed consistent among middle school students.

Used electronic vapor products at least once, past 30 days

Note: Data could not be disaggregated due to small sample size.

Trend, Electronic vapor use, past 30 days



# ELECTRONIC VAPOR USE

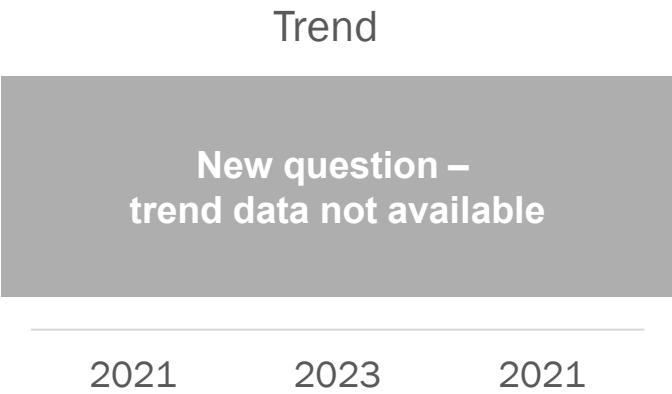
**Student perceptions of risk:** Student perception of risk of electronic vapor use has remained level since 2023.

**Student perception of parental and peer disapproval:** Students consistently report that their parents/guardians disapprove of electronic vapor use at high rates. Perception of peer disapproval has increased.

Student perceptions of	2019	2021	2023	2025	Dif
Risk/harm of electronic vapor use	77%	84%	78%	76%	▬
Parental disapproval	94%	99%	96%	95%	▬
Peer disapproval	---	83%	86%	92%	▲

# PERCEPTION OF LIFETIME SUBSTANCE USE

Middle school students believe that their peers have ever used\* electronic vapor products at higher rates than they report using. However, they report a more accurate understanding of alcohol and marijuana use.



Substance	% students who reported using substance in their lifetime (ACTUAL)	% students who perceived use to be		
		LOWER than actual use	HIGHER than actual use	SIMILAR to actual use
Alcohol	8%	0%	46%	54%
Marijuana	1%	0%	28%	72%
Vape products	3%	0%	67%	33%

*\*New survey question: What percentage of students at your school do you think ever used the following substances?*

# MENTAL HEALTH & WELLNESS

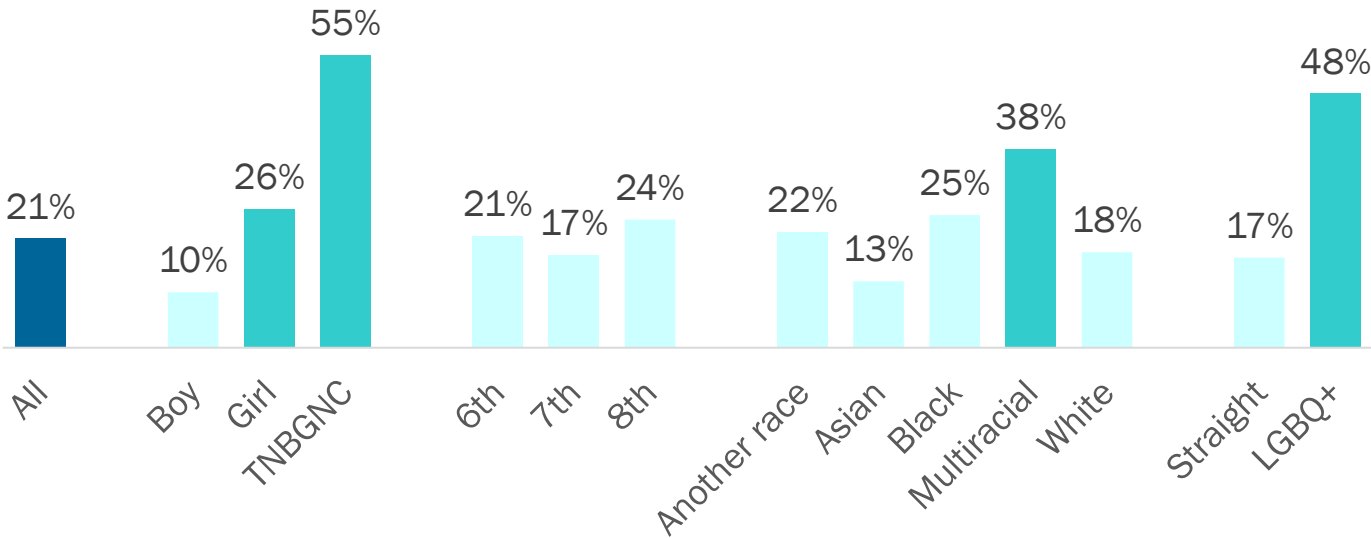
STRESS  
ANXIETY  
DEPRESSION  
SELF-HARM  
SUICIDE  
COPING STRATEGIES

# STRESS

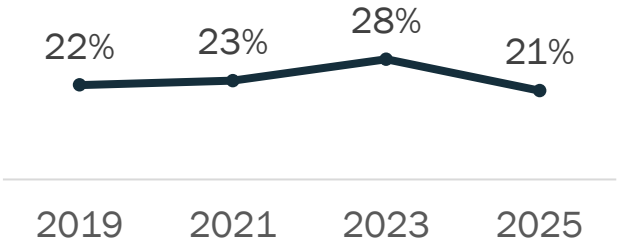
**21% of middle school students experienced frequent overwhelming stress this past year.**

Overall rates of overwhelming stress have fluctuated between 21% and 28% since 2019. Girl (26%), TNBGNC (55%), multiracial (38%), and LGBTQ+ students (48%) report higher rates of overwhelming stress than their peers.

Overwhelming stress, past year



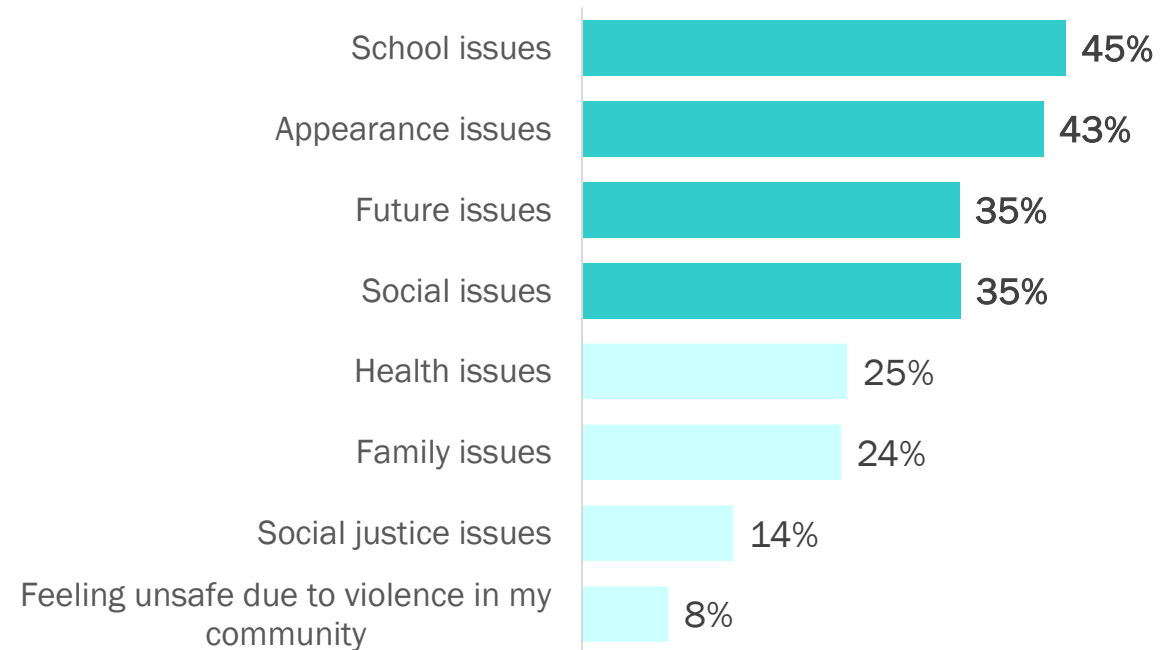
Trend, Overwhelming stress, past year



# STRESS

**The top causes of stress among middle school students are school issues (45%), appearance issues (43%), future issues (35%), and social issues (35%).**

Causes of stress (n=533)

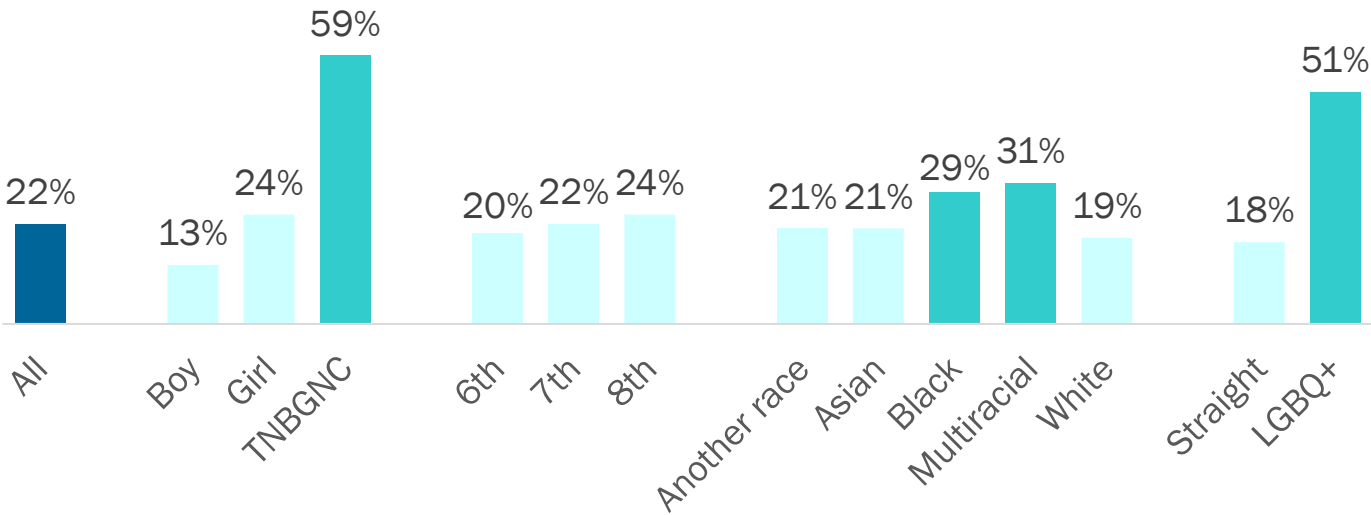


# ANXIETY

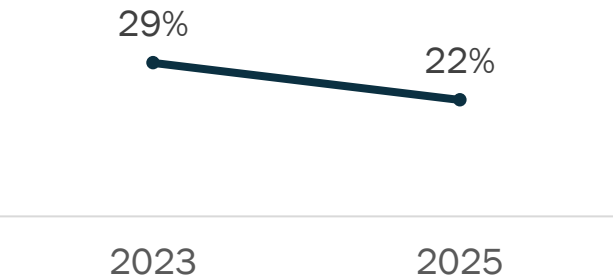
**Overall, 22% of middle school students report experiencing anxiety in the last year.**

Among middle school students, TNBGNC (59%), Black (29%), multiracial (31%), and LGBTQ+ students (51%) report the highest rates of anxiety.

Anxiety, past year



Trend, Anxiety, past year

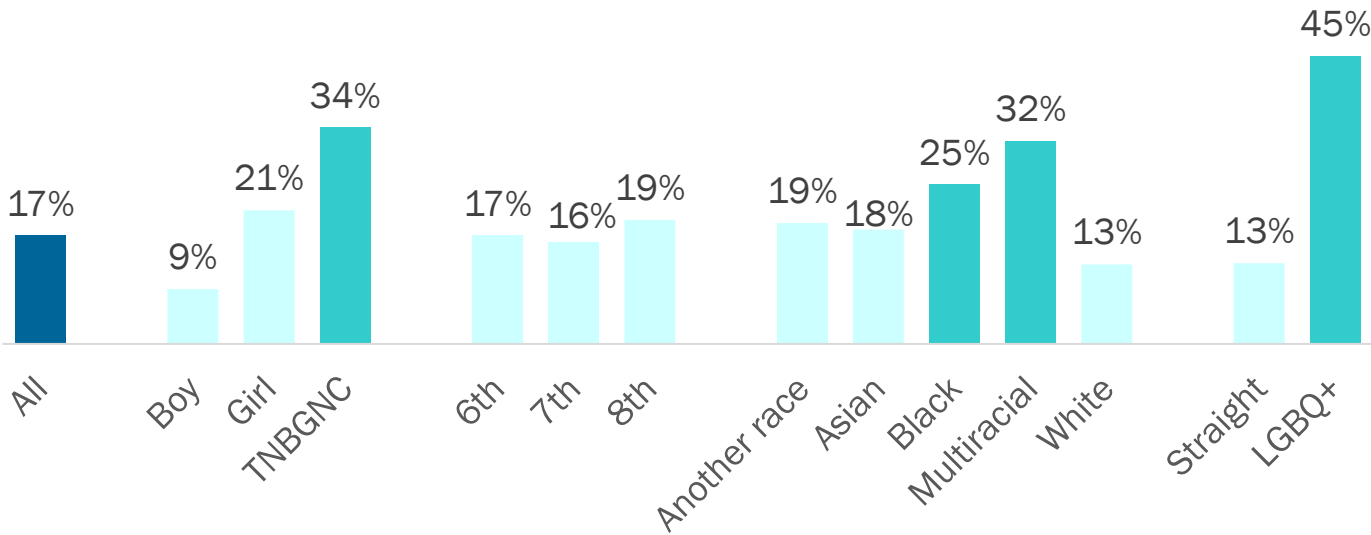


# DEPRESSION

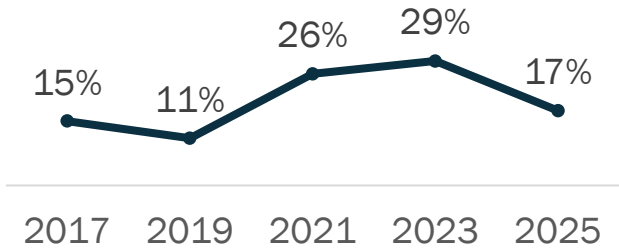
**17% of middle school students experienced depression in the past year, a decrease since 2023.**

TNBGNC (34%) and LGBTQ+ students (45%) have higher rates of depression than their peers overall. Black and multiracial students also report higher rates of depression than their peers (25% and 32% respectively).

Depression, past year



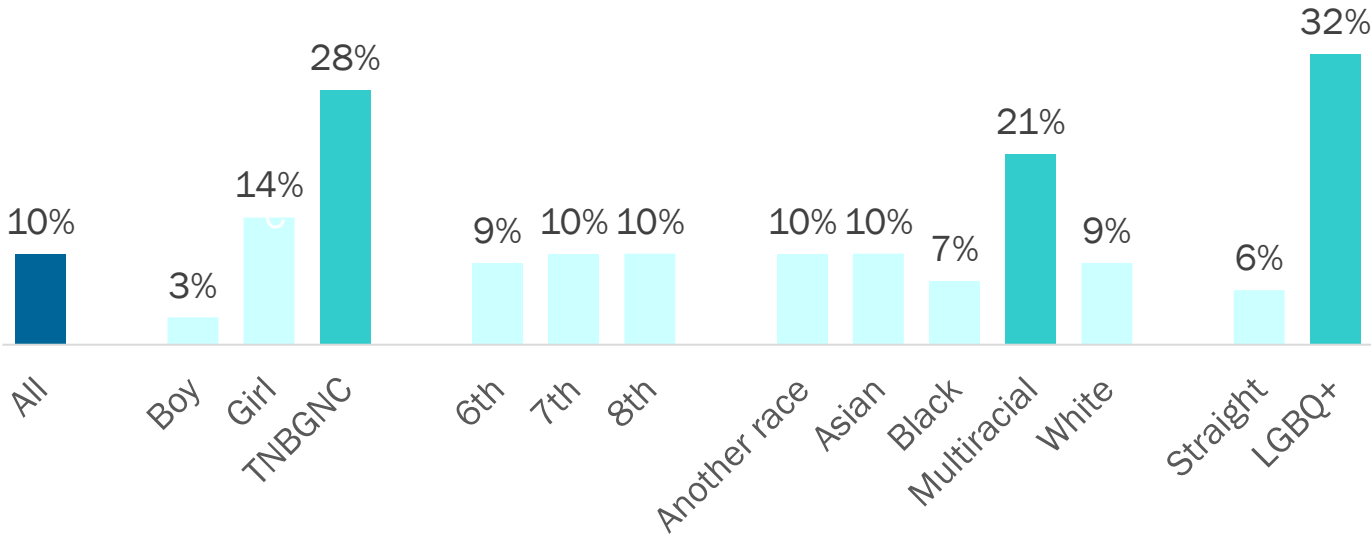
Trend, Depression, past year



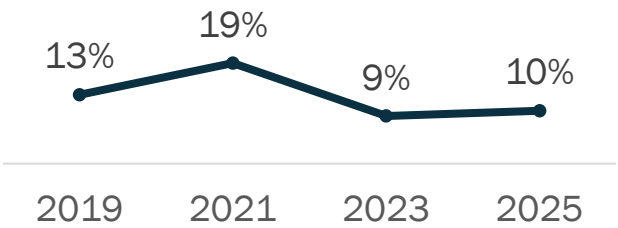
# SELF-HARM

In the past year, 10% of middle school students have hurt or injured themselves without the intention of dying compared to 28% of TNBGNC, 21% of multiracial, and 32% of LGBTQ+ students.

Self-harm, past year



Trend, Self-harm, past year

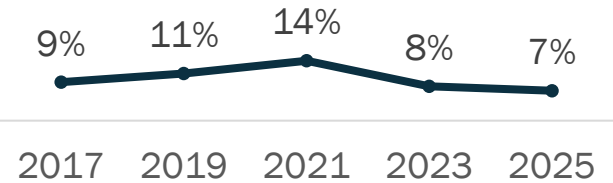


# SUICIDE

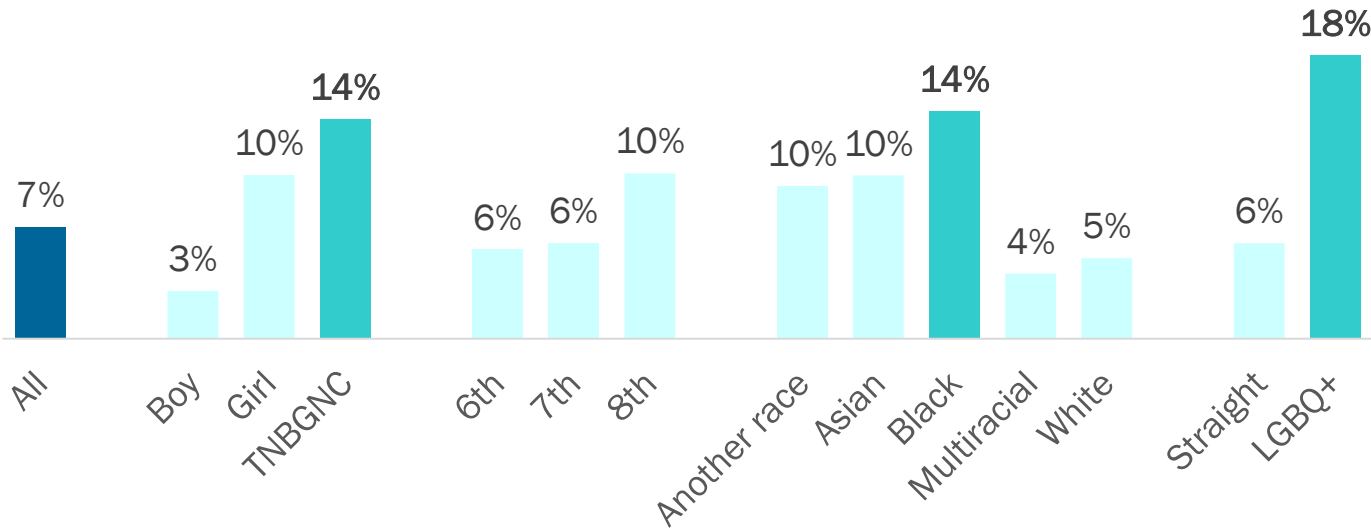
**Overall, 7% of middle school students (39 students) have seriously considered attempting suicide. This is consistent with data from 2023. 2% (8 students) have attempted suicide in the past year.**

TNBGNC (14%), Black (14%), and LGBTQ+ students (18%) report higher rates of suicide ideation than their peers, although the difference is less than with other mental health issues.

Trend, Consider Suicide, past year



Consider suicide, past year



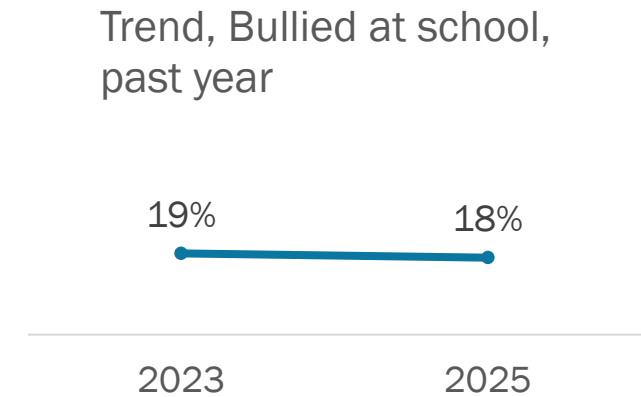
# PERSONAL SAFETY

BULLYING AT SCHOOL  
ELECTRONIC BULLYING

# BULLYING

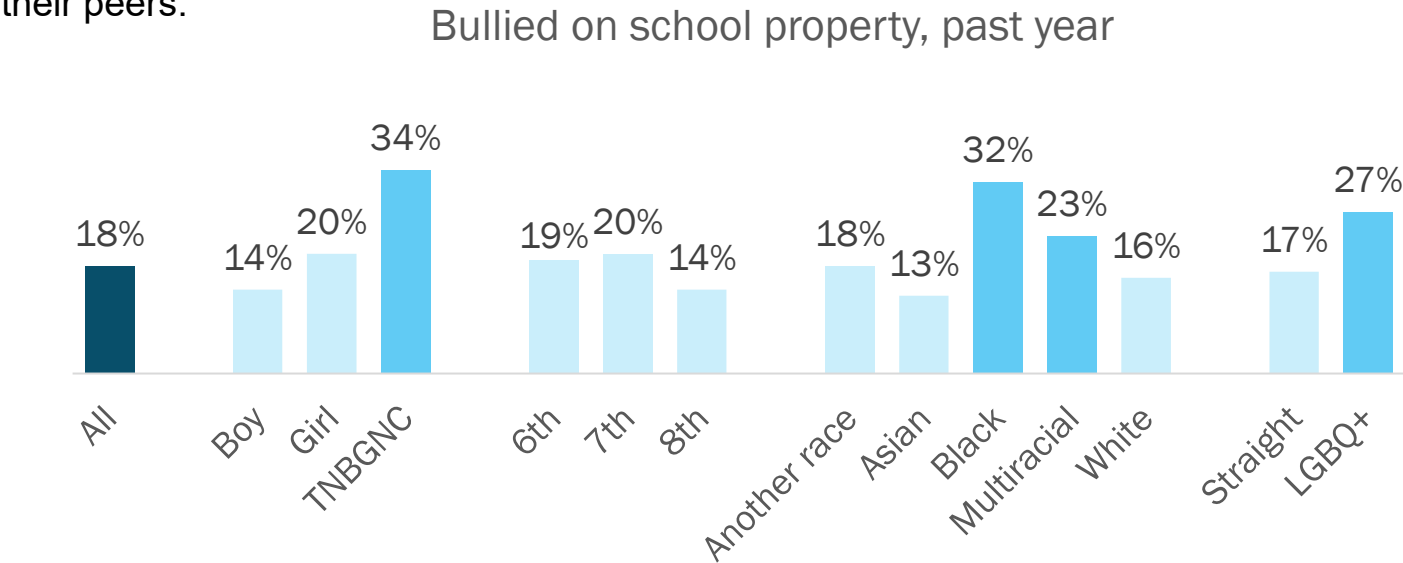
**Overall, 18% of middle school students have been bullied on school property in the past year.**

Among middle school students, TNBGNC (34%), Black (32%), multiracial (23%), and LGBTQ+ students (27%) report experiencing higher rates of bullying than their peers.



## Related findings

**Electronic bullying:** 13% of all middle school students have been bullied electronically in the past year, an increase from 7% of students who reported electronic bullying in 2023. Asian students (18%) report higher rates of electronic bullying than their peers.



# PROTECTIVE FACTORS

SENSE OF BELONGING  
TRUSTED ADULTS

# SENSE OF BELONGING

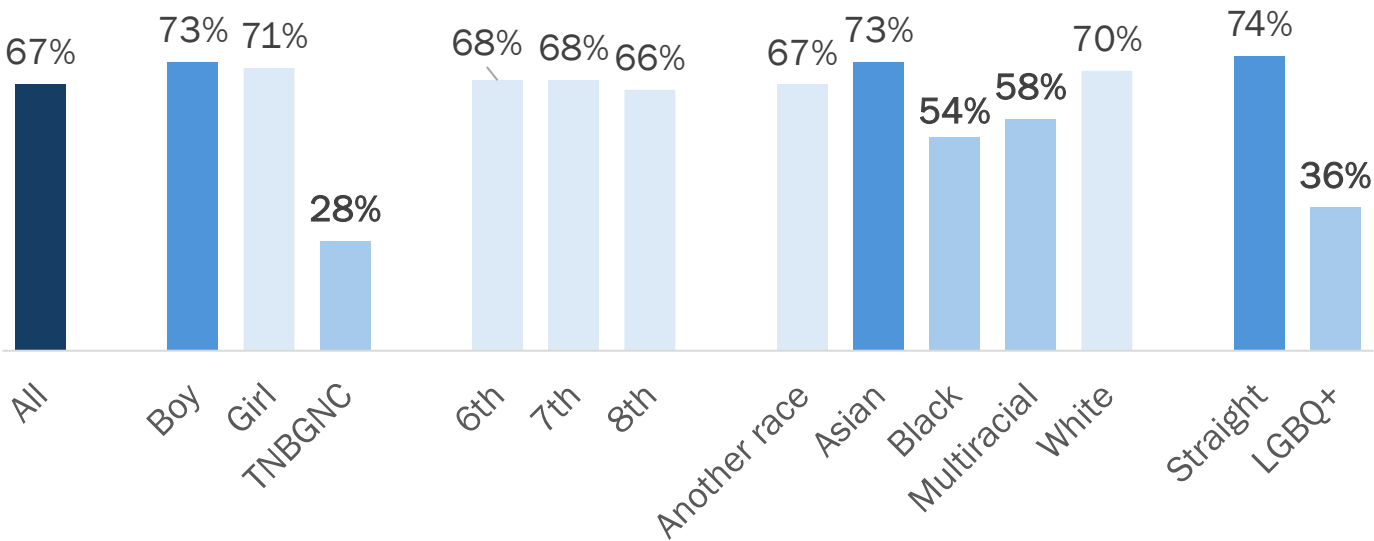
Overall, 67% of middle school students report that they feel like they belong at their school.

Among middle school students, boy (73%), Asian (73%) and straight students (74%) report the *highest* rates of belonging, compared to TNBGNC (28%), Black (54%), multiracial (58%), and LGBTQ+ students (36%) who report the *lowest* rates of feeling like they belong at school.

Trend, Belonging at school



Feeling of belonging at school

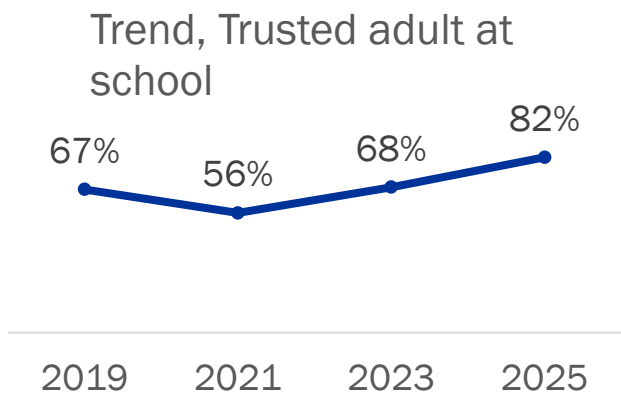


*\*Note:* This number represents the percentage of students who responded, “quite a bit” or “a lot” to the question “To what extent do you feel that you belong at your school?”

# TRUSTED ADULTS

The number of middle school students who say there is at least one teacher or adult in school they can talk with if they have a problem has increased since 2023.

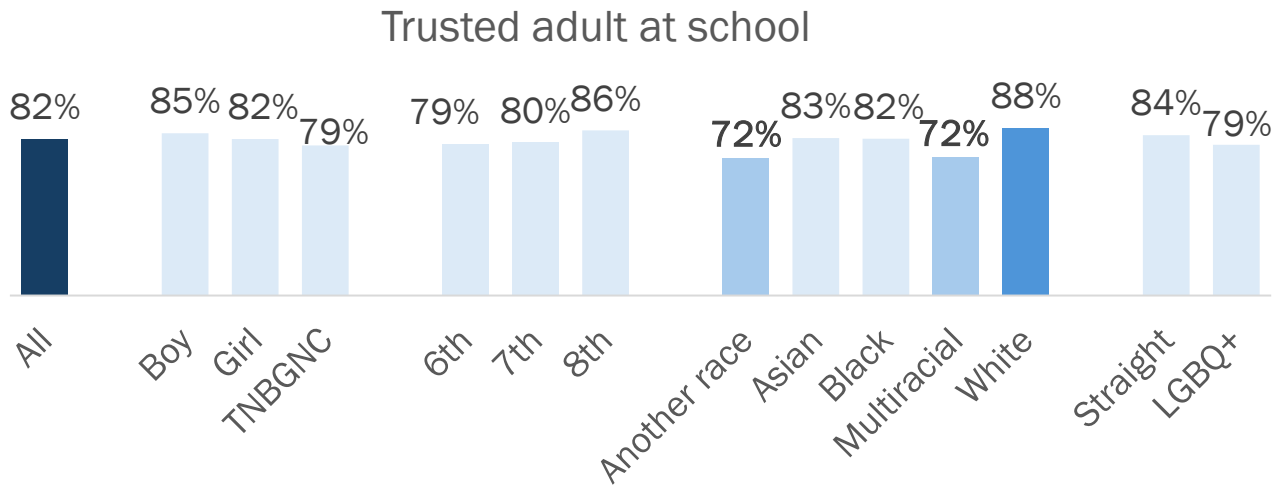
Overall, 82% of students have a trusted adult at school. This is consistent across most groups, though lower among multiracial students and students of another race (both reporting 72%).



## Related findings

**Trusted adult outside of school:** 64% of middle school students report that they have a trusted adult in the community, slightly higher than rates from 2023 (58%).

**Trusted adult in family:** 92% of middle school students have someone in their family that they can talk with if they have a problem, an increase from 2023 (83%) and previous years.

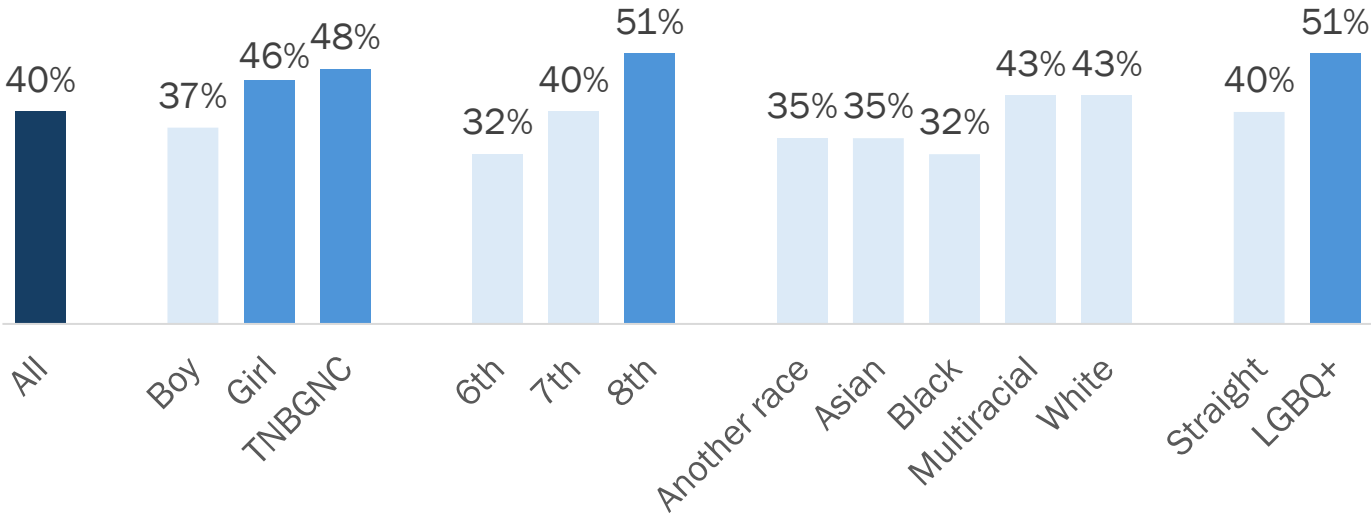


# COPING STRATEGIES

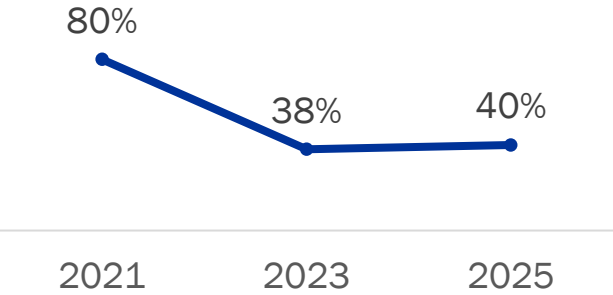
**40% of all middle school students say they have a healthy activity or behavior (coping strategy) to help them relieve stress.**

Girl (46%), TNBGNC (48%), 8<sup>th</sup> grade (51%), and LGBTQ+ students (51%) report the highest rates of having a coping strategy.

Have a coping strategy



Trend, Have a coping strategy



# CROSS ANALYSIS

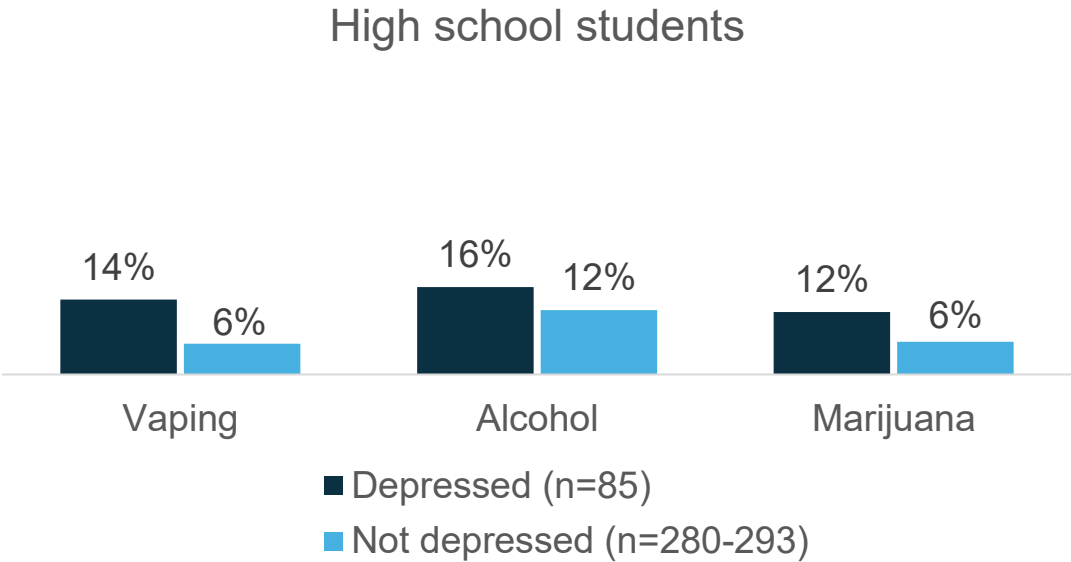
SUBSTANCE USE x DEPRESSION  
SUBSTANCE USE x STRESS  
FEELINGS OF BELONGING X  
TRUSTED ADULT  
FEELINGS OF BELONGING X  
BULLIED AT SCHOOL

# CURRENT SUBSTANCE USE AMONG STUDENTS WHO EXPERIENCE DEPRESSION

High school students who experience depression are more likely to vape and use marijuana.

**High school:** Among high school students who experience depression, 14% vape and 12% use marijuana. Rates of alcohol use are slightly higher among those who experience depression (16%) and those who do not (12%).

**Middle school:** Rates of middle school students who use substances and experience depression are too low to report.

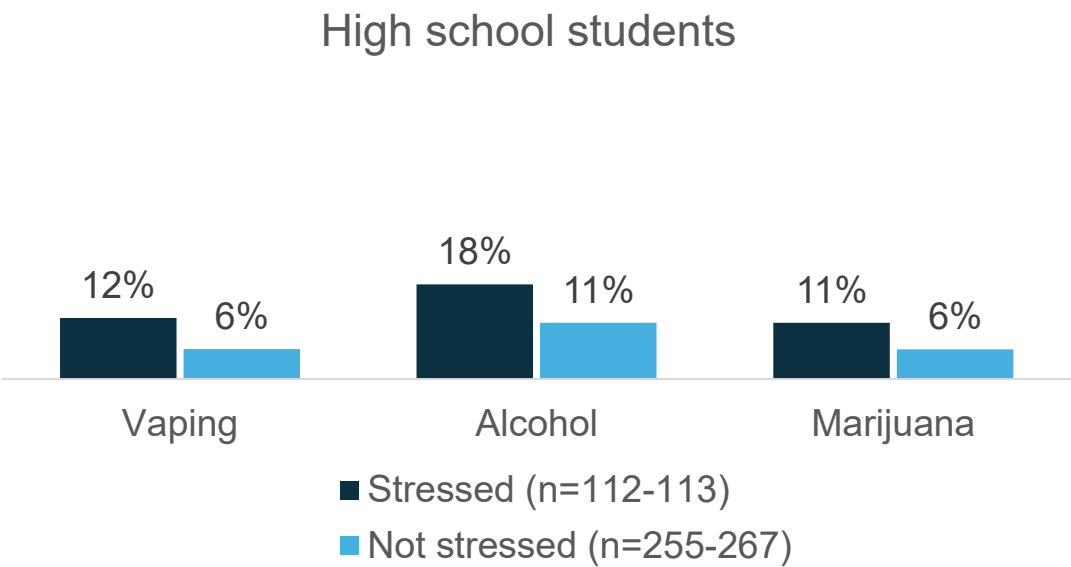


# CURRENT SUBSTANCE USE AMONG STUDENTS WHO EXPERIENCE OVERWHELMING STRESS

High school students who experience overwhelming stress are more likely to use substances than those who did not.

**High school:** Among high school students who experienced overwhelming stress in the last year, 12% vape, 18% drink alcohol, and 11% use marijuana.

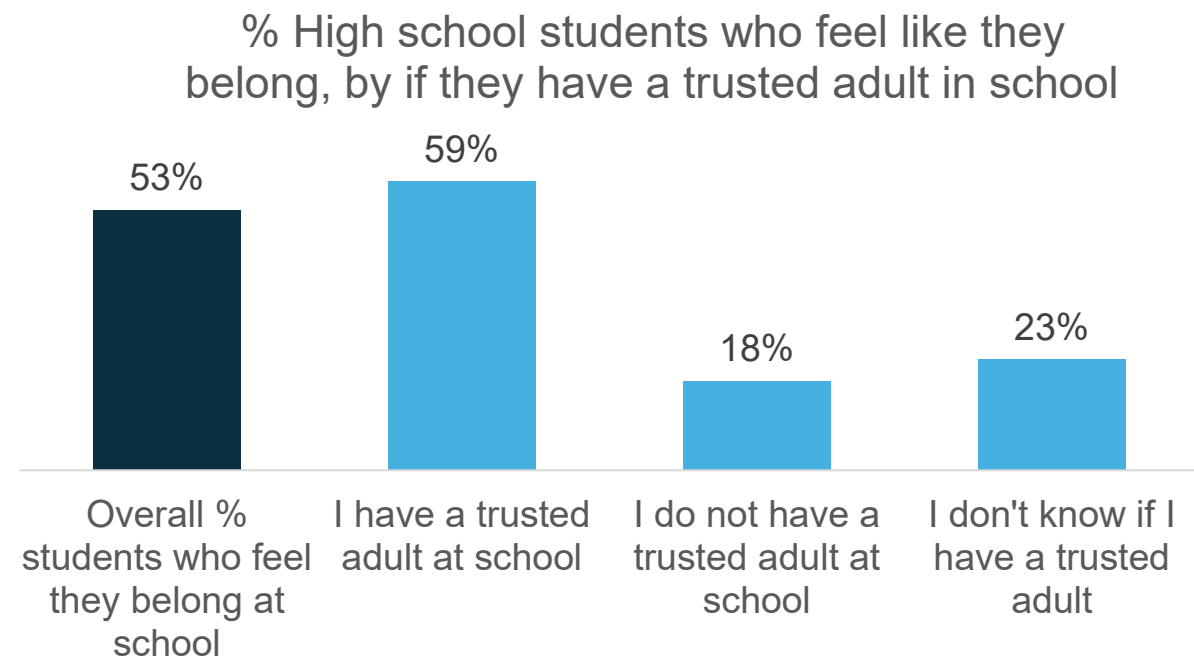
**Middle school:** Rates of middle school students who use substances and experience overwhelming stress are too low to report.



# FEELINGS OF BELONGING AND HAVING A TRUSTED ADULT AT SCHOOL

**Students of all grades who have a trusted adult at school report higher rates of feeling like they belong at school.**

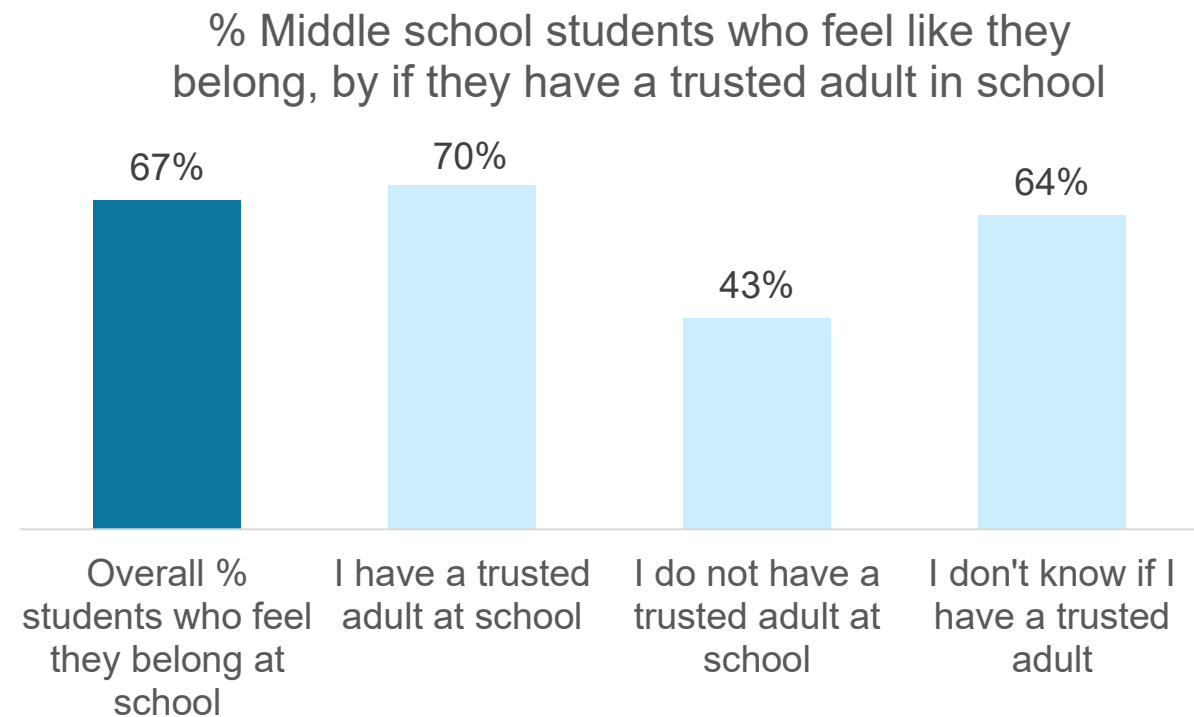
**High school:** 59% of high school students who have a trusted adult at school feel like they belong, whereas only 18% of students who do not have a trusted adult at school feel like they belong.



# FEELINGS OF BELONGING AND HAVING A TRUSTED ADULT AT SCHOOL

**Students of all grades who have a trusted adult at school report higher rates of feeling like they belong at school.**

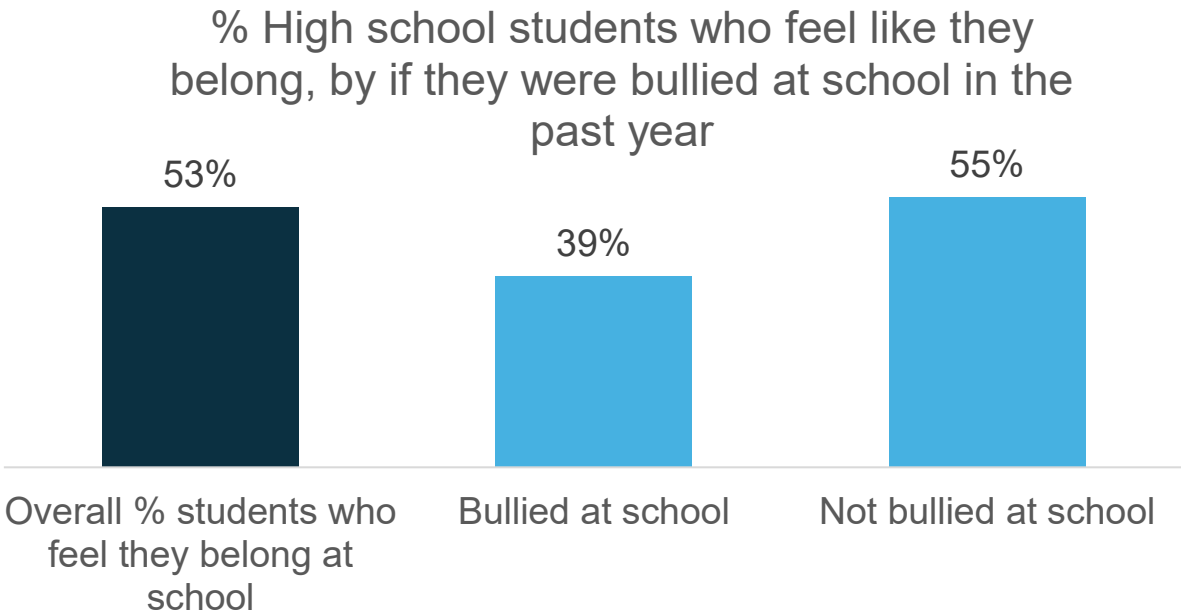
**Middle school:** 70% of middle school students who have a trusted adult at school feel like they belong, whereas only 43% of students who do not have a trusted adult at school feel like they belong.



# FEELINGS OF BELONGING AND BEING BULLIED AT SCHOOL

**Students who have been bullied on school property in the past year report lower rates of belonging than students who were not bullied.**

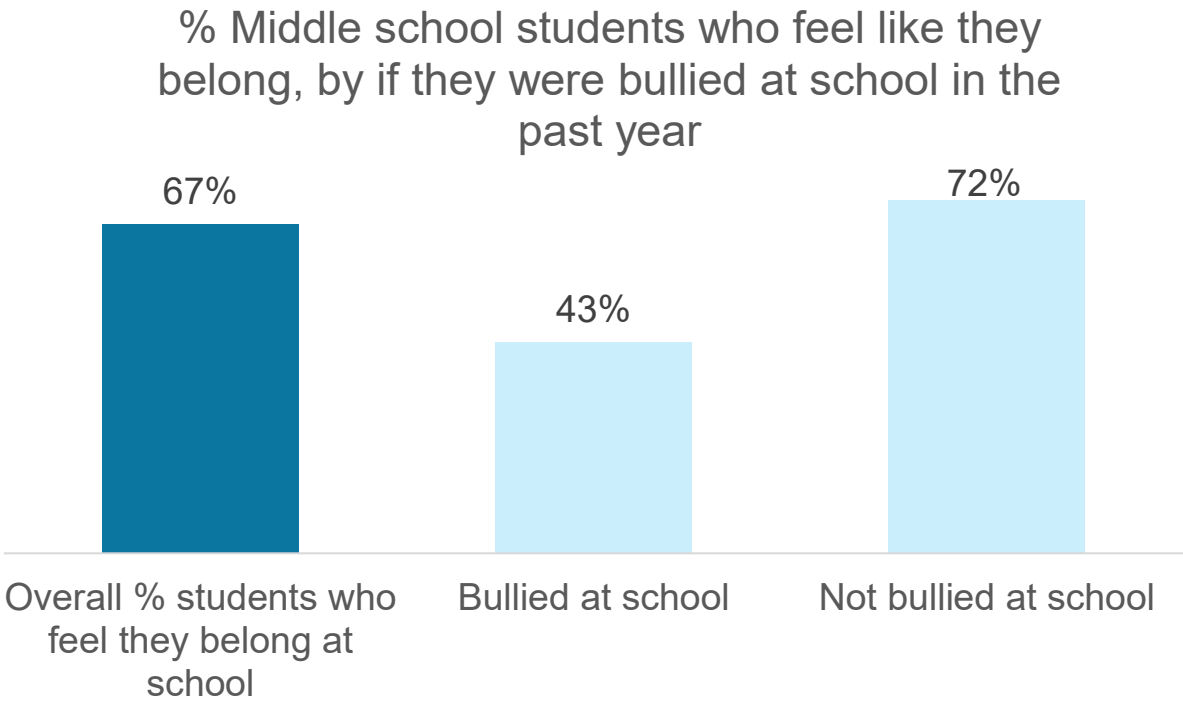
**High school:** Of high school students who were bullied, 39% feel like they belong at school, compared to 61% of high school students who were not bullied.



# FEELINGS OF BELONGING AND BEING BULLIED AT SCHOOL

**Students who have been bullied on school property in the past year report lower rates of belonging than students who were not bullied.**

**Middle school:** Of middle school students who were bullied, 43% report feeling like they belong at school, compared to 72% who were not bullied.



# APPENDIX A. METHODOLOGY

# SURVEY PROCESS AND RESPONSE

The YRBS is administered during the spring semester to all students (i.e. census sampling) on a date and class period designated by each school. The survey is administered by teachers with support from school administrators and Wayside Youth & Family Support Network.

Completion of the survey is voluntary and anonymous. Parents are informed of the survey in advance and given the option to opt out.

In 2025, all students took the survey online through a link provided by their teacher under test administration protocol.

Watertown's YRBS instruments are adapted from the 2025 CDC and Massachusetts Youth Risk Behavior Surveys.

For 2025 implementation, John Snow, Inc., Data+Soul Research, WPS leadership, and Wayside worked closely together to review and recommend changes to both high school and middle school instruments. General revisions were made to the survey instrument to clarify, lower reading level, use relevant language, and align between MS and HS and four-town W2B2 coalition.

The 2025 YRBS included the following changes relative to 2023:

- **Disaggregation:** Sample sizes under 10 were not disaggregated to protect student anonymity.
- **Gender:** Used MYRBS version of gender question, which includes language about cisgender and transgender

The 2025 High School YRBS contains 133 questions.

The 2025 Middle School YRBS contains 122 questions.

Survey was offered online using a survey platform called Alchemer. Students were able to choose between English, Haitian Creole, Portuguese, and Spanish.