

News Release

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Survey results show mixed picture for Wisconsin youth

MADISON – Results from the 2017 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) provide both promising and troubling news about the status of high school students in Wisconsin.

On one hand, the vast majority of students are passing their classes, feel they belong at their school, and have a supportive teacher or other adult that they can go to with problems. Rates of sexual activity; smoking; alcohol use, including binge drinking; and marijuana use are all in decline. However, students also sleep less, are on their devices more, and are more likely to feel sad or hopeless, and to consider and plan suicide. Nearly 50 percent of girls and 30 percent of boys report anxiety. While students generally feel safer at school than in the past, there’s a small but growing group that rarely feels safe at school.

YRBS 2017 Snapshot	
Percentage of Students Reporting	
Feel I Belong – 70.8	Feel Unsafe – 6.3
Have an Adult to Talk To – 71.6	Am Bullied at School – 24.2
Report Good or Excellent Health – 55.4	Have a Physical Disability or Long-Term Health Issue – 12.8

First-time questions show 11.6 percent of students are using e-cigarettes or other vapor products, whose long-term health effects are not know. And, 11.2 percent reported unauthorized use of prescription pain medicine, confirming that opioid abuse touches Wisconsin high schools.

The biennial Youth Risk Behavior Survey is anonymous and voluntary with 2,067 Wisconsin students in ninth through 12th grade taking the 2017 survey. Results are representative of all public high school students in the state. The 2015 survey lacked sufficient participation to produce results so the 2017 survey provides long-awaited information on the health and behavior of Wisconsin youth.

“Youth Risk Behavior Survey results, some of which span more than two decades, give us important insights into the challenges our students face,” said State Superintendent Tony Evers. “Local communities can work with their schools to implement programming and policy changes that could make a world of difference for our kids’ safety and well-being.”

In a 6.4 percentage point drop from the 2013 survey, 55.4 percent of students said they are in good or excellent health. Another 12.8 percent of students say they have a physical disability or long-term health issue. Just over a quarter of students say they get adequate sleep (eight or more hours per night). The reasons for this

(more)

sleep deprivation are not clear but increased time on social media and video games may be partly responsible. Smoking rates for cigarettes are down, 7.8 percent of students, from a high of 38.1 percent in 1999. Marijuana use is on a declining trend at 16 percent of students. The high was 25.1 percent in 2001. Alcohol use by Wisconsin teens, while high compared to the nation, is down. Twenty years ago, about half of students said they used alcohol; the 2017 survey reports less than one-third of students are under-age drinkers. Binge drinking, five or more drinks in a row, is down to 16.4 percent of students, the lowest rate on record. The high was 34.4 percent of students in 1999.

About one-quarter of high-school students are sexually active, a drop of 8 percentage points over the decade. Of those students, nearly 8 percent are not consistently using birth control, indicating that comprehensive health education that includes information on sexual health is still needed. More than 10 percent of students have experienced dating violence of a sexual nature. Nearly one-quarter of students are bullied at school, 20 percent get into physical fights, and 5.2 percent carry a weapon on school property. While more than 70 percent of students say they feel they belong at school and nearly 72 percent say they have a trusted adult they can talk to at school, there are notable differences in belonging and mental health between groups of students. The most marginalized students include those who have a disability or health issue; report being bullied; are lesbian, bisexual, gay, or transgender (LGBT); experience homelessness; and are African American or multi-racial. Young women are also at a higher risk of anxiety or suicidal thoughts than their male counterparts. Distressed students say they are twice as likely to turn to a friend or sibling rather than parents, teachers, or other trusted adults when experiencing feelings of sadness, hopelessness, or anxiety. Expanding “Sources of Strength” training like that in Hortonville, which encourages peer-to-peer mental health support, could teach students how to help each other in times of stress.

“Our kids, through their survey answers and current activism, are telling us what they need,” Evers said. “They want to feel safe, they want to belong, and feel as though their opinions and needs matter. And, though our kids are exercising some independence, they want and need adult guidance to chart their path to adulthood.”

The Youth Risk Behavior Survey is part of a national effort by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to monitor health risk behaviors of the nation’s high school students. The 99-item survey was administered in 43 Wisconsin public schools last spring. Survey procedures protect the privacy of students. Local parent permission procedures were followed before administration, including informing parents that their child’s participation was voluntary. Only state-level results are available.

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NOTES: Highlights from the Youth Risk Behavior Survey follow. The full report can be found online on the Youth Risk Behavior Survey website, <https://dpi.wi.gov/sspw/yrbs>. Reports on special topics — bullying, failing students, LGBT, mental health, school safety, students of color, students with disabilities, and suicide— will be posted to that site in the coming weeks. This news release is available electronically at <https://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/news-release/dpinr2018-25.pdf>.

Youth Risk Behavior Survey Highlights

(Percent of 9th- through 12th-grade Students Who Report)

	1993	1997	1999	2001	2003	2005	2007	2009	2011	2013	2017
Health											
Health is excellent or good	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	61.0	62.8	61.8	55.4
Have a physical disability or long-term health issue	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	11.4	12.8
Overweight	-	-	12.5	14.2	13.6	13.6	13.9	13.9	15.0	13.0	15.0
Average eight or more hours of sleep per night	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	35.0	25.6
Feel they belong at school	-	-	-	-	-	-	70.0	72.7	74.4	73.7	70.8
Have a supportive adult at school	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	72.5	73.0	74.1	71.6
Felt sad or hopeless	-	-	27.7	26.7	25.3	27.6	22.4	20.8	22.7	24.6	27.0
Seriously considered suicide	27.4	24.1	22.4	19.9	19.6	17.8	15.0	13.2	13.5	13.2	16.4
Feel anxious	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	39.9
Alcohol & Drug Use											
Smoking cigarettes	31.8	36.0	38.1	32.6	22.8	23.6	22.8	20.5	16.9	11.8	7.8
Using electronic vapor products	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	11.6
Using alcohol	48.1	50.5	51.8	54.1	47.3	49.2	48.9	41.3	39.2	32.7	30.4
Binge drinking	29.0	31.0	34.4	34.2	28.2	31.0	31.6	25.2	23.8	18.4	16.4
Using marijuana	11.2	20.9	21.5	25.1	21.8	15.9	20.3	18.9	21.6	17.3	16.0
Misusing prescription pain medicine	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	11.2
Safety											
Missed school because of feeling unsafe	5.6	3.4	3.7	6.0	5.8	4.6	6.3	3.7	3.4	5.8	6.3
In a physical fight	39.4	34.0	33.1	31.4	31.4	32.6	31.2	25.8	25.3	22.4	20.0
Carried a weapon on school property	9.0	5.4	5.5	3.4	3.2	3.9	3.6	3.4	3.1	3.2	5.2
Bullied on school property	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	22.5	24.0	22.7	24.2
Experienced sexual dating violence	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	9.6	10.2
Currently sexually active	32.5	28.7	30.5	29.1	26.5	29.5	32.9	29.3	30.8	25.6	24.9
Sexually active and no birth control during last intercourse	13.1	10.5	11.3	11.3	7.5	10.1	10.8	6.7	7.4	10.7	7.8

NOTE: The Youth Risk Behavior Survey is conducted as part of a national effort by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to monitor health risk behaviors of the nation's high school students. Survey results are representative of ninth- through 12th-grade public high school students. The 99-item survey is voluntary and survey procedures protect the privacy of students. There are no 2015 YRBS results because the survey did not meet the target response rate that year.