

2021 Durham County Youth Risk Behavior Survey



Public
Health



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Healthy Durham



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Introduction

The 2021 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) is a national survey conducted in each state by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). It encompasses many aspects of middle and high school life for youth in the US. Every other year, Durham County has conducted this survey in selected middle and high schools.

The last survey was conducted pre-Pandemic in 2019. The purpose of this survey is to assess the health and wellbeing of middle and high schoolers in Durham County. This survey also highlights disparities among the youth population including race, ethnicity, and gender among many subjects. This report will also answer questions about how middle and high schoolers have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The YRBS contains questions regarding the following subject areas:

- Bullying
- COVID-19
- Disability
- Mental Health
- Nutrition
- Personal Health
- Personal Safety
- Physical Activity
- School support
- Sexual Behavior
- Substance Use
- Tobacco use

This data is used to provide insight and evidence-based data to elected officials, grant writers, educators, and to the general public. The goal is to enact change in the community that benefits the youth and leads to their success in all areas.

Acknowledgements:

The Durham County Department of Public Health (DCoDPH) worked closely with Durham Public Schools (DPS) to conduct this survey. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and DCoDPH's epidemiologist analyzed and disaggregated the data by race, ethnicity, and gender.

DCoDPH and DPS would also like to acknowledge the students that participated in this important survey.

In addition, support and leadership from the following people is gratefully acknowledged.

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Methods

Questionnaire:

The 2021 Durham County middle school survey consists of 70 questions, while the high school survey consists of 99 questions. All questions were designed and validated by the CDC. At least two-thirds of the questions on each survey must come from the national core set of questions. The remaining one-third of questions were selected by a multi-sector team at the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, Duke health, NC Healthy Schools to name a few.

Sampling:

Charter and public schools were eligible to conduct the surveys. Nine out of 10 eligible high schools participated and all 12 eligible middle schools participated. Surveys were administered in the fall of 2021 electronically to randomly selected second period classes in middle and high schools. Only students that were in person could take the survey.

Analysis:

The CDC analyzed and weighed all results. Once completed, the data was sent to Durham Public Schools and the North Carolina Healthy Schools at the state. State-level data was available first and county-level data was available for DCoDPH to analyze in February 2023. The public health epidemiologist analyzed the data using SAS 9.4 to generate weighted frequencies and percentages. Data are disaggregated by race, ethnicity, gender, and grade when possible.

Analysis Notes;

- In some cases, percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding
- If the number of students in a particular group was less than 10, results were suppressed to protect privacy.
- For analysis purposes, the “Other” race category includes students who reported being of Native American or Native Alaskan descent, Asian, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander.
- In this report, students who answered yes to the question on the survey that asked if they are Hispanic or Latino are included in the Hispanic or Latinx race and ethnicity category. Therefore, Black or African American, Hispanic or Latinx, and white should be understood as mutually exclusive categories throughout the report.

Limitations:

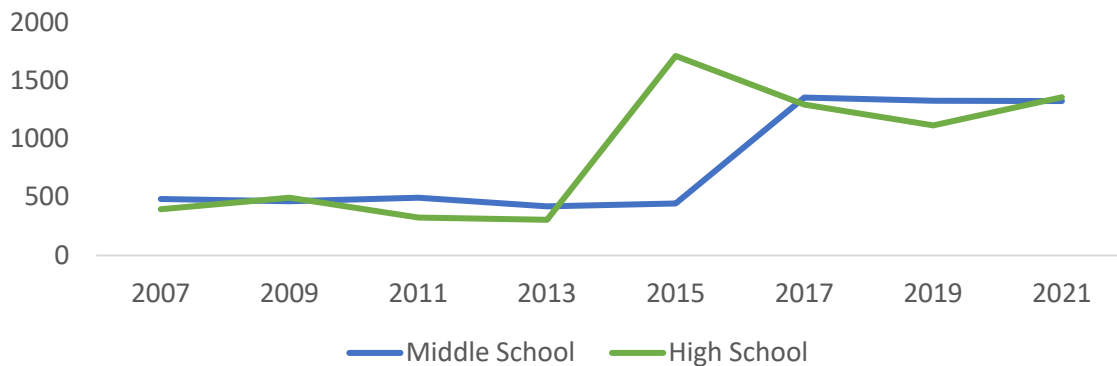
YRBS results do not include information from youth who attend private, alternative, vocational, and special education schools, and therefore cannot be generalized to all students in Durham County. Responses are limited to students who attended class on survey days. All data are self-reported and may be under- or over-represented.

Survey Participant Characteristics

The YRBS sampling method changed in 2015 to draw a large enough sample to produce representative data for Durham. This is reflected in the chart below where a sharp increase in student participation is seen among high schoolers. This increase is reflected in 2017 for middle schoolers. As seen in the chart, high school participation increased from 2019 (21.8%) where as middle school participation decreased by less than 1%.

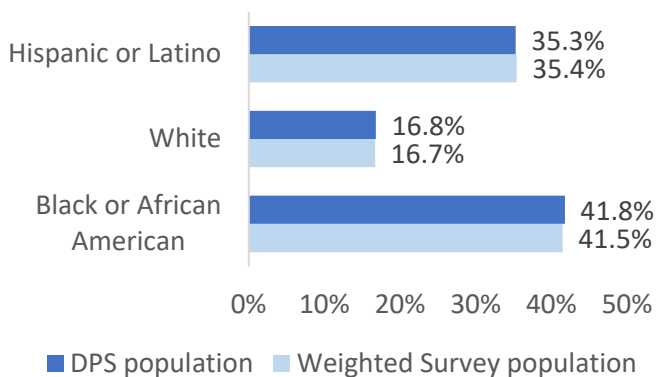
Nine out of the 10 eligible high schools participated in the survey with an overall 66.8% response rate. All 12 eligible middle schools participated in the survey with an overall 78% response rate.

Number of middle and high school participants by year

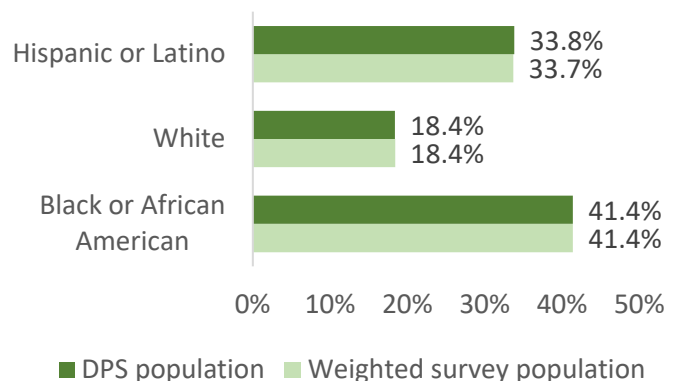


Below, there are two graphs; one for middle school race/ethnicity and one for high school race/ethnicity of those that participated in the 2021 YRBS and the DPS population for the 2021-2022 school year. The YRBS population is representative of the DPS population and therefore can be used to make inferences about the 6th grade-12th grade populations in Durham for eligible schools (public, charter). Male and female populations were also representative but not pictured.

Middle School: Weighted race/ethnicity vs. Durham Public Schools demographics 2021-2022.

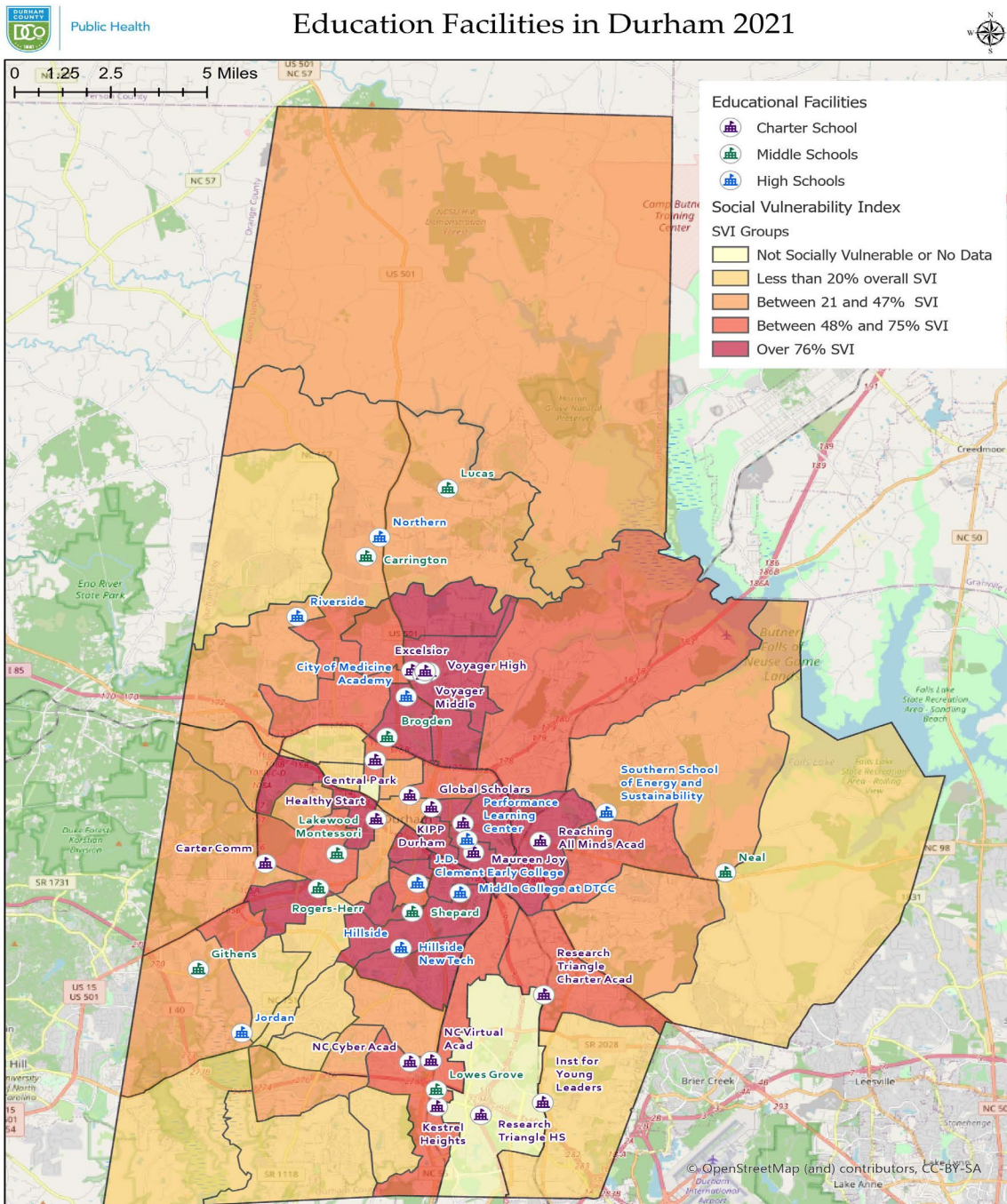


High school: weighted race/ethnicity vs. Durham Public School demographics 2021-2022.



Survey Participant Characteristics

Responses were collected from 12 middle schools in the sample and 9 of the 10 high schools selected. Many of the school are in areas with a high Social Vulnerability Index (SVI) score. The SVI was developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to examine community vulnerability to natural disasters and diseases based on various factors such as socioeconomic status (SES), household composition, racial and ethnic status, housing type and transportation.¹ A higher SVI percentage means that there is greater vulnerability in a particular area.¹ Racism is a core social determinant of health.² Students of color experience racial inequalities such as lack of access to experienced teachers, resources, and advanced coursework.² Lower (SES) is linked to poorer psychological, mental, and physical health outcomes.³ Adolescents from lower SES neighborhoods are often less successful academically.³



Survey Participant Characteristics

Age:

For both middle and high school survey respondents, the age follows a normal distribution. There is some overlap of ages between middle and high school survey respondents. Among middle school participants (ranging from 11 years old – 15 years old), the greatest percentage of ages is 13 years old (34%). Among high school participants (ranging from 13 years old to 18 years or older), the greatest percentage is 15 years old (25.9%). Looking at age is a better indicator of the population than grade because it includes students that were either held back or skipped a grade.

Figure 4: Middle School survey respondents by age (n=1319)

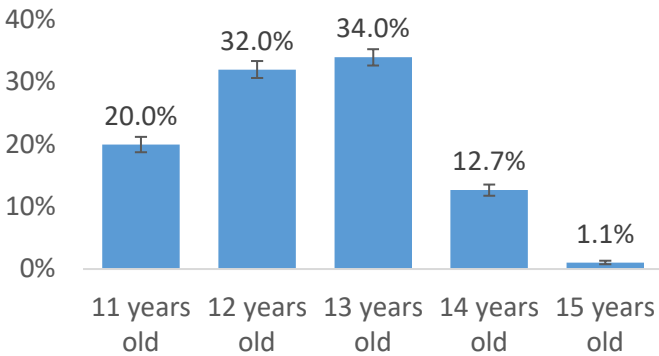
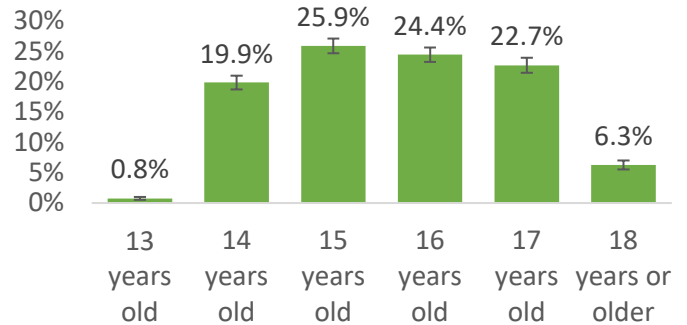


Figure 5: High school survey respondents by age (n=1357)



Grade:

Though age paints a better picture, grade was used in analysis to minimize confusion between middle and high schoolers. Middle school participants are evenly distributed by grade. Twelfth grade high school participants are under-represented with 18.9% while 9th grade participants are over-represented with 33.5%.

Figure 6: Middle school survey respondents by grade? (n=1323)

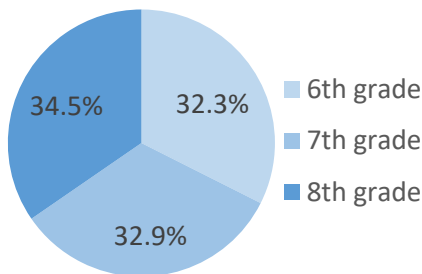


Figure 7: High school respondents by grade (n=1355)

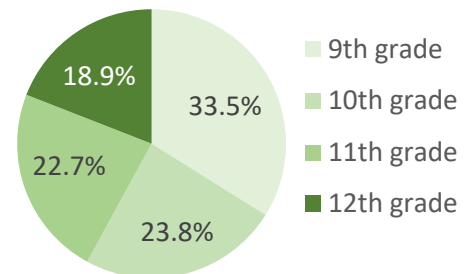
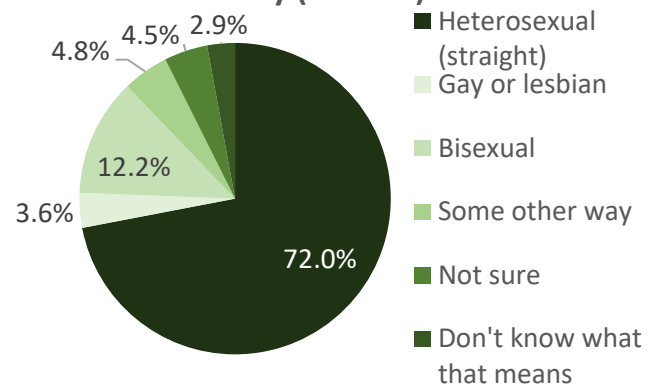


Figure 9: Highschool survey respondents by sexuality (n=1330)



Sexual orientation:

High school students were asked about their sexual orientation. In 2021, 72% of high school participants reported being heterosexual or straight. This is a decrease of 11.1% since 2019. In 2021, a new option was added; 'Some other way' which accounted for 4.8% of participants.

Racial Inequities

Systemic racism has allowed racial inequities persist for centuries. Systemic racism consists of structures, policies, practices, or norms that are designed to benefit white people over people of color.¹ This can be seen in every aspect of life, for example, obtaining affordable housing. Redlining is the racist practice implemented in the 20th century (though later outlawed in the 1960's) to keep people of color, specifically Blacks and African Americans, out of white, wealthier, and neighborhoods with more amenities.² The effects of this harmful policy are still seen today. Institutional racism in educational settings is also evident in this report.

In this report, systemic and institutional racism are discussed as it pertains to risky behaviors among youth in Durham County. Persons of color are often more at risk for unhealthy behaviors and outcomes.⁴ An important predictor of pediatric success is educational achievement.³ A fundamental relationship in educational settings is the one between students and their teachers.³ Studies have shown that if Black or African American students are taught by a non-Hispanic white teacher, they are more likely to receive a worse behavioral assessment than white students.³ The US Department of Education confirmed that Black or African American children are suspended three times more than white students between Kindergarten and 12th grade.³

As a result of experiencing racism at an early age, children and adolescents experience toxic stress.⁵ Toxic stress occurs when there is a constant stressor(s) in a person's life, in this case, racism.⁵ As stress hormones build in a person's body from prolonged stress, it can have physical and mental effects on the body.⁵ As a result, children that experience racism, which leads to toxic stress, are less likely to succeed in educational settings without proper peer and administrative support.⁵

According to the Adolescent Behaviors and Experiences Survey (ABES) conducted January – June 2021 by the CDC among high school students (grades 9-12), 35.6% of students reported experiencing perceived racism.⁶ As a result, those that experience this often report poorer mental health than their peers.⁶ Perceived racism was highest among Asians (63.9%) followed by Blacks and African Americans (55.2%). This data was collected during the COVID-19 pandemic where increased racism was seen towards those of Asian descent.⁶ In addition, following the deaths of George Floyd and Ahmaud Arbery, increased racism was observed towards Blacks and African Americans.⁶



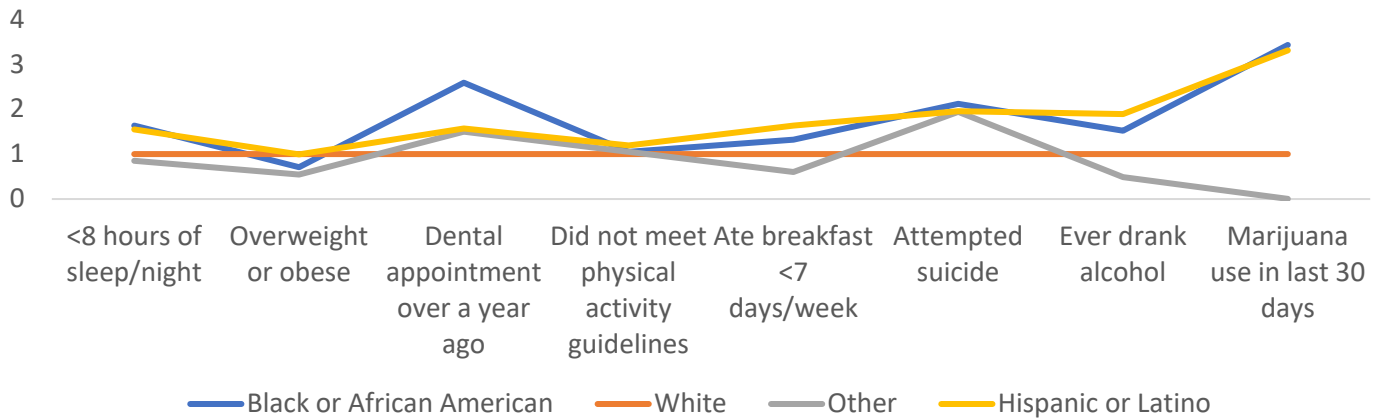
The 2021 Youth Risk Behavior Survey in Durham revealed that one in five of middle schoolers and one in four high schoolers felt they were treated badly or unfairly because of their race or ethnicity either sometimes, most of the time, or always. In addition, nearly one in three high schoolers felt that people assumed they were less intelligent because of their race or ethnicity.

While this report doesn't cover all facets of structural racism, it does contain information on racial and health inequities among youth. Throughout the report there will be data presented from the 2021 YRBS along with related information regarding systemic racism and other social determinants of health and how they influence Durham County's youth.

Racial Inequities

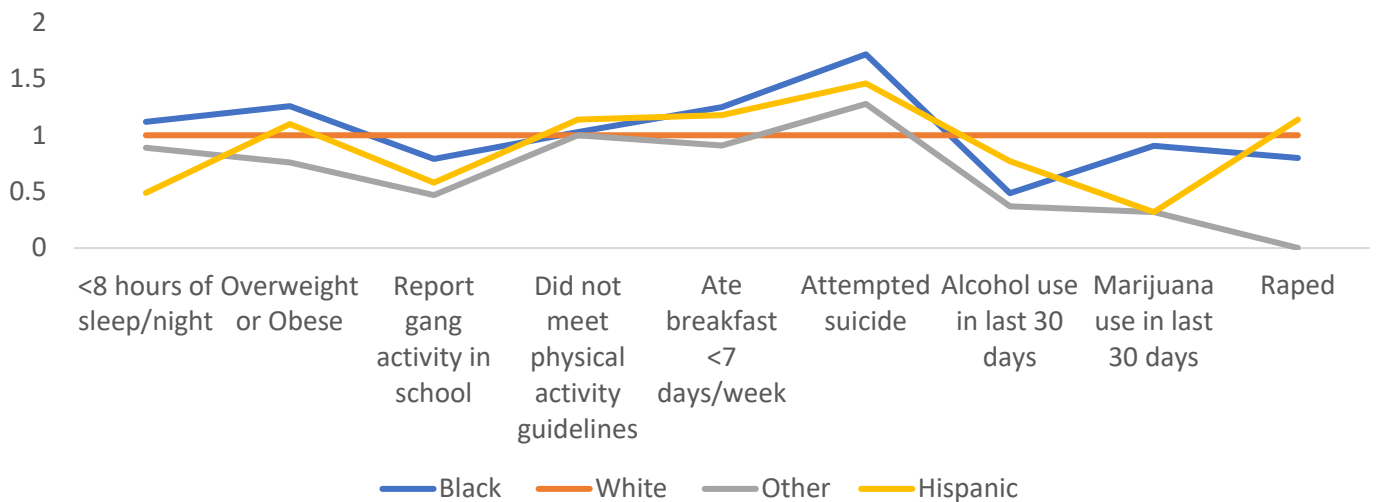
Racial inequities are evident in this dataset. These inequities will be highlighted throughout the report. To understand the racial inequities seen in risky behaviors, a relative risk was calculated. Those identifying as Black or African American, Other race, and Hispanic or Latino were all compared to whites. A relative risk equal to one (as seen in the below figures for whites) indicates that there is no difference between the person of color and white counterparts. A relative risk greater than one indicates that the person of color is at a greater risk for this behavior than whites. A relative risk less than one indicates that the person of color is less likely to perform the risky behavior than whites.

Figure 10: Middle school survey participants relative risk for behaviors



Middle school: Many racial inequities exist for several risky youth behaviors. For example, Black or African Americans and Hispanics or Latinos are more at risk than whites for getting less than 8 hours of sleep each night, not having a dental appointment in over a year, not eating breakfast everyday, attempting suicide, drinking alcohol and using marijuana at least once in the past 30 days.

Figure 11: High school survey respondents relative risk of behaviors



High school: Racial inequities are seen among high school participants. For example, Black or African Americans are more likely than whites to be overweight or obese, not eat breakfast every day, and attempt suicide. Students identifying as Hispanic or Latino are more likely than whites to be raped. White students were more likely to use marijuana within the past 30 days. In the 2021 YRBS, the Relative Risk was 0.90 for Black or African American students using marijuana within the past 30 days. This is a difference of -0.10. This is not a statistically significant decrease in current marijuana use between white and Black or African American students.

Report Highlights

Bullying

- 36% of middle schoolers and 10.9% of high schoolers are bullied at school.
- 23.1% of middle schoolers and 10.8% of high schoolers are electronically bullied.
- 24.4% of middle schoolers and 12% of high schoolers reported being the victim of teasing because someone thought they were gay, lesbian, or bisexual.

Mental Health

- 23.7% of middle schoolers and 19.2% of high schoolers considered suicide.
- 17.8% of middle schoolers and 14.2% of high schoolers made a plan of how they'd kill themselves.
- 12.2% of middle schoolers attempted suicide at least once in their lives.
- 9.8% of high schoolers attempted suicide within the past 12 months.
- 34.3% of middle schoolers and 41.3% of high schoolers reported symptoms of depression.
- Bisexual students were at greater risk for suicidal ideation compared to other LGBTQ+ students.

Nutrition

- 36.1 middle schoolers and 23% of high schoolers reported eating breakfast everyday during the past week.
- 45.9% of high schoolers reported eating less food, fewer calories, or foods low in fat to lose weight or keep from gaining weight.

Personal Health

- 42.6% of middle schoolers and 25.1% of high schoolers reported getting at least 8 hours of sleep a night.
- 26.1% of middle schoolers and 34% of high schoolers reported being overweight or obese.

Personal Safety

- 4.8% of middle schoolers and 14.2% of high schoolers reported skipping school because they felt they'd be unsafe at school or to and from school.
- 47% of middle schoolers reported ever being in a physical fight.
- 17.5% of high schoolers reported being in a physical fight in the past 12 months.
- 7.6% of middle schoolers and 17% of high schoolers reported being able to get and be ready to fire a loaded gun in less than an hour.
- 23% of high schoolers reported gang activity in their school.

Physical Activity

- 21.5% of middle schoolers and 16.9% of high schoolers reported exercising for a total of 60 minute per day during the past 7 days.
- 47% of middle schoolers and 40.7% of high schoolers reported participating on at least one sports team in the past 12 months.

School Support

- 30.6% of middle schoolers and 33.5% of high schoolers reported their grades in the past 12 months were mostly A's.
- 52.5% of middle schoolers and 49.5% of high schoolers reported that they agree that their teachers really care about them and give them lots of encouragement.

Sexual Behavior

- 6.5% of middle schoolers and 28% of high schoolers reported ever having sexual intercourse.
- 7.7% of high schoolers reported being physically forced to have sexual intercourse when they did not want to.

Substance Use

- 16% of middle schoolers reported ever drinking alcohol other than a few sips.
- 6.1% of middle schoolers and 25.7% of high schoolers reported ever using marijuana.
- 13.8% of high school students reported having their first drink of alcohol other than a few sips by age 13.
- 15% of high schoolers reported drinking alcohol at least once during the past 30 days.
- 10.6% of high schoolers reported vaping marijuana in the past 30 days.

Tobacco

- 2% of middle schoolers and 2.4% of high schoolers reported smoking cigarettes for at least one day during the past 30 days.
- 14.6% of middle schoolers and 27.7% of high schoolers reported ever using an electronic vaping product.

Disability

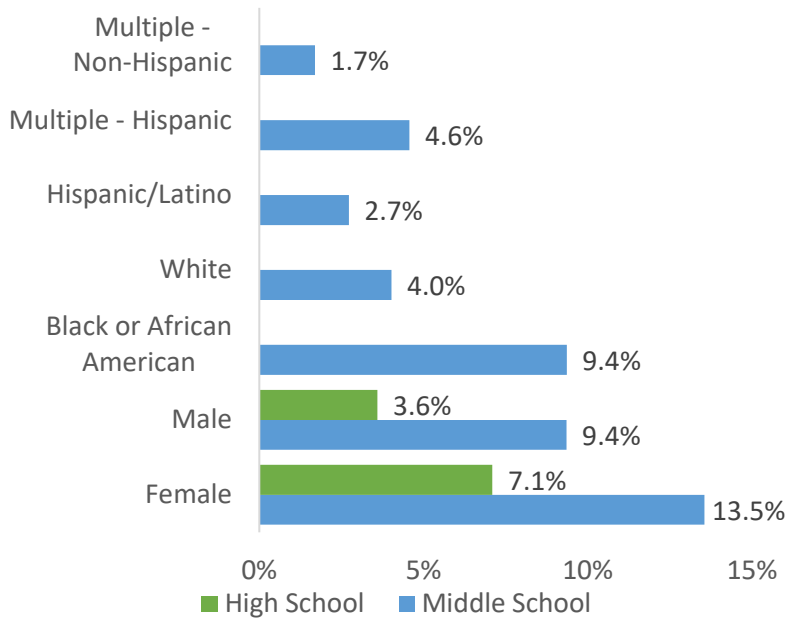
- Black or African American students were 1.3 times as likely to report having a disability than their white peers.

COVID-19

- Nearly 2 out of 5 students reported strongly agreeing that their schoolwork increased in difficulty since COVID-19.

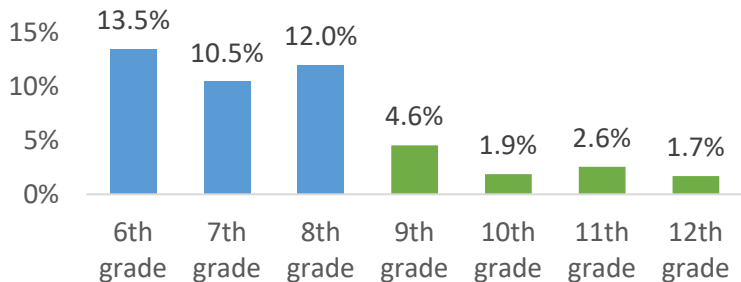
Bullying

Figure 12: Percent of middle and high schoolers experiencing cyberbullying.



Among high school students, more than twice the amount of ninth graders reported being bullied about their sexuality compared to 11th and 12th graders. Among middle school students, 6th graders were more likely to be bullied because of their sexuality (9.4%). LGBTQ+ youth experienced higher levels of bullying than their cisgender- and heterosexual peers both before and after the COVID-19 pandemic.⁸ Suicide attempts among these students decreased since 2019 though bullying-related anxiety increased.⁸

Figure 14: Middle and high schoolers experiencing bullying at school.



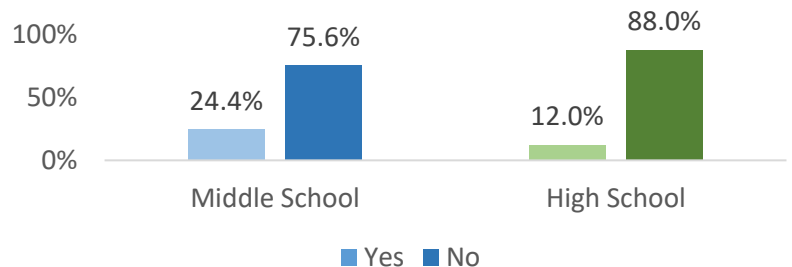
Observing others being bullied:

Among high schoolers, 36.3% reported seeing other students being bullied in their school while 45.5% of middle schoolers reported the same thing. Two-thirds of tweens are willing to step in and help if observing someone being bullied.¹¹ Victimized students reported they felt better when a bystander spent time with them (54%), talked to them (51%), and helped them get away (49%).¹¹

Bullying in school and cyberbullying all decreased as a result of schools going remote in spring 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.⁷ According to the National Center for Education Statistics, pre-pandemic, one in five students between 12 and 18 years of age reported being bullied while one in six students reported being victims of cyber bullying.⁷ The 2021 YRBS results report that one in three middle school students are bullied on school property while one in five are cyberbullied. In high school, one in ten students reported being bullied on school property and the same was noted for cyberbullying. This indicates that middle school bullying increased since before the pandemic while high school bullying has decreased.

Among both high and middle schoolers, cyberbullying was experienced more by females than males. In middle school, Black or African Americans followed by Hispanic students of multiple races were bullied more often than their white peers. The differences in race among high school students was too small to disaggregate. Ninth graders experienced more cyberbullying than other high school grades.

Figure 13: Have you ever been the victim of teasing or name calling because someone thought you were gay, lesbian, or bisexual?

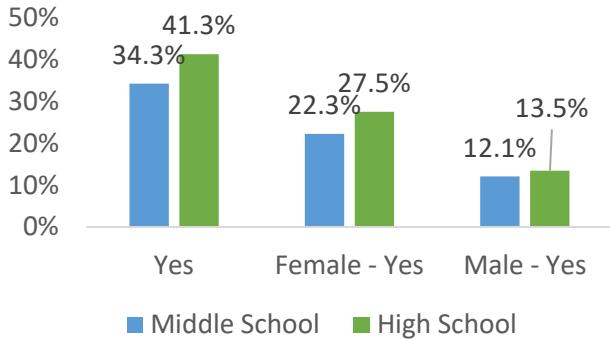


Sixth graders experienced more bullying at school than any other grade. Females were more likely to be bullied than males. Black or African American students were over two times as likely to be bullied as their white peers. In general, bullying begins in elementary school, peaks in middle school, and declines in high school.⁹ This happens because middle schoolers have higher social needs and bullying leads to social power.⁹ Recent studies have shown that girls bully others just as much as boys but often do it in a way that is subtle and covert and therefore is harder to detect, where as boys will often physically hurt or bully a peer.¹⁰

Mental Health

Depression

Figure 15: During the past 12 months, did you ever feel so sad or hopeless almost every day for two weeks or more in a row?

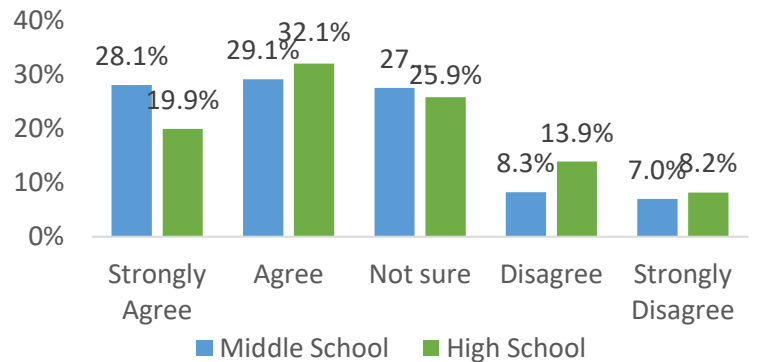


One in three middle schoolers and two in five high schoolers experience symptoms of depression. The American Psychiatric Association defines clinical depression (major depressive disorder) as feeling sad, low, or worthless most days for at least 2 weeks while also having trouble sleeping, loss in interest in activities, or changes in appetite.¹² Pre-pandemic, mental health was a significant issue among youth.¹³ People of color often experienced worse mental health symptoms due to the inequities seen in those contracting, being hospitalized, and dying from COVID-19.¹³ In addition, all students experienced social isolation due to school closures in 2020.¹³ Since the pandemic, adolescent females have experienced increased depression and panic symptoms.¹⁴ This is reflected in the 2021 YRBS with females experiencing depression nearly two times more than males. During the COVID-19 pandemic, almost all adolescents experienced social isolation. Transitioning to remote work led to an increase in parent's concern for their child's mental, social, and emotional health.¹⁴ Every state in the US participated in a large study interviewing parents of children who transitioned to remote schoolwork.¹⁴ This study found that 35% of parents were very or extremely concerned about their child's social and emotional health, while 80% reported having some concern.¹⁴

Self-esteem

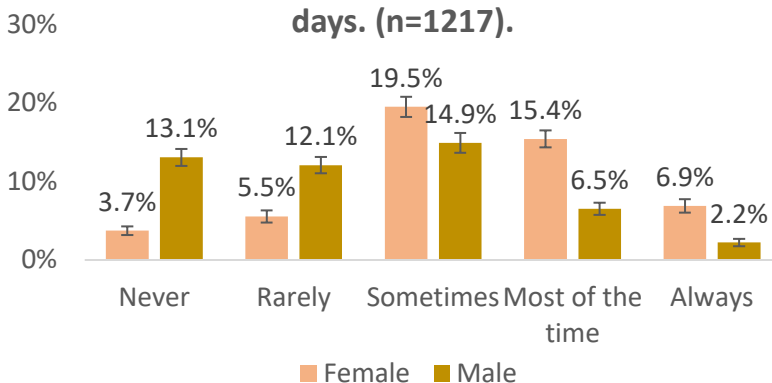
The majority of students report strongly agreeing or agreeing that they feel good about themselves in both middle and high school. However, high schoolers were more likely to report disagreeing or strongly disagreeing meaning that they do not feel good about themselves. Adolescents rely on friendships and peer support to navigate the ups and downs of high school.¹⁵ In 2020 when birthday parties, prom, sleepovers, and graduations were often cancelled, the social and emotional support that teens need was no longer an option.¹⁵ Low self-esteem is linked to feelings of anxiety and depression. Students that experienced remote learning during high school may be stunted socially since the most crucial time to make friends and build social skills was disrupted by the pandemic.¹⁵

Figure 16: Do you agree or disagree that you feel good about yourself?



Bad Days

Figure 17: High schoolers reporting how often they had bad days out of the past 30 days. (n=1217).



When asked how often students experience bad days out of the past 30, most students reported sometimes, most of the time, or always. Distinct differences are seen between genders among high school students with females being over two times as likely to report having bad days most of the time or always than males. The same is true for middle schoolers, although, middle school females are four times as likely to report having bad days always compared to males. Teenage girls are much more likely to be sensitive to judgement from friends and peers either personally or on social media.¹⁶ Girls are also more likely to internalize distress and become depressed as a result.¹⁶

Mental Health

Self harm and suicidal ideation

Figure 18: Number of times high school students self-harmed in the past 12 months while not wanting to die.

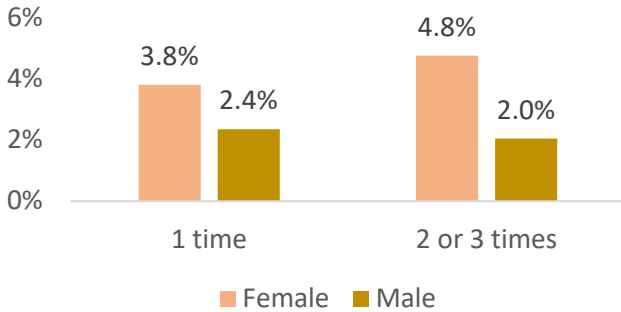
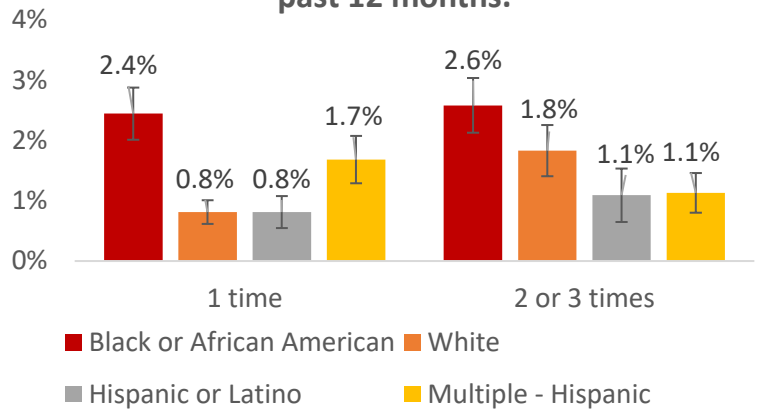
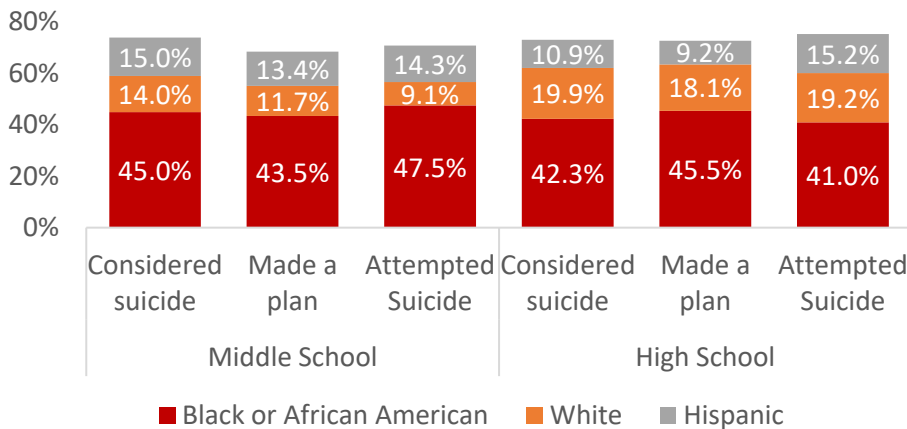


Figure 19: High schoolers that have self-harmed while not wanting to die in the past 12 months.



High schoolers were asked how many times they self-harmed within the past 12 months while not wanting to die. While the vast majority of middle and high school students reported never harming themselves, those that did revealed racial and gender inequalities. Females were more likely to harm themselves than males in all categories including being more than twice as likely to harm themselves 2 or three times than males and five times more likely to harm themselves 4 or more times than males. Black or African Americans and those of multiple races that identify as Hispanic or Latino are more likely to harm themselves one time in the past year than their white peers.

Figure 20: Suicidal ideation among middle and high schoolers.



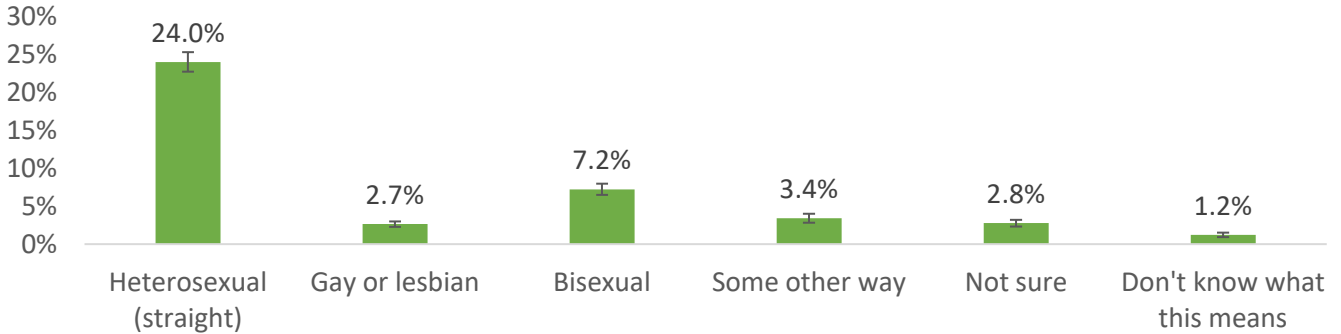
Among middle schoolers, 12% reported attempting suicide while 9% of high schoolers reported attempting suicide. In October 2021, the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and the Children’s Hospital Association declared that the decline of pandemic-related mental health in children and adolescents a national emergency.¹⁷ In 2020, emergency visits due to attempted suicides among adolescents jumped 31% from 2019 to 2020.¹⁷ In addition, among adolescent girls, emergency room visits for attempted suicide increased 51% from 2019 to 2020.¹⁷

The second leading cause of death for Black or African Americans ages 10-24 is suicide.²⁰ Studies have shown that social media often plays a significant role in suicidal ideation among Black and African American youth.²¹ Many students of color think they need to post the picture perfect life on social media while also being bullied because of their race and ethnicity online.²¹ In addition, adverse childhood events (ACEs) also contribute to suicidal ideation among youth of color which are overrepresented in this population.²² Racism in the medical system can also prevent Black or African American youth and their families from seeking proper mental health treatment.²¹

Despite these increases in depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideations, Durham County has one of the best mental health provider to patient ratio of one mental health provider for 160 residents – less than half of the ratio of North Carolina (1:390).²³

LGBTQ+ Mental Health

Figure 21: During the past 12 months, did you ever feel so sad or hopeless almost everyday for 2 or more weeks that you stopped doing some usual activities among LGBTQ+ High schoolers? (n=537)



Twenty-eight percent of high school students in Durham County identify as a member of the LGBTQ+ population. Most significantly, students that identify as bisexual are over twice as likely as their LGBTQ+ peers to experience symptoms of depression or report having poor mental health days some of the time, most of the time, or always. Heterosexual students experience suicidal ideation either as equal or less than twice as much as bisexual students. There are several risk factors for the LGBTQ+ community regarding their mental health.²⁴ These include rejection, trauma from homophobia, substance use, and homelessness.²⁴ In a report from the Trevor Project, only 37% of LGBTQ+ youth live in a LGBTQ+ affirming home.²⁴

Challenges also exist that prevent this population from getting the appropriate mental health care they need.²⁴ Finding a provider that is gender affirming and supportive of LGBTQ+ people can be quite difficult.²⁴ LGBTQ+ youth often face providers that lack cultural competence and are less comfortable sharing their sexuality for fear of discrimination.²⁴ Mental health among bisexual students stands out among the LGBTQ+ population in Durham County. Bisexual people can experience biphobia which is just as detrimental as homophobia.²⁵ Bisexual people can also be the victim of monosexism (the belief that there are only heterosexual, gay, or lesbian people) as well as bi-erasure (the exclusion of bisexuality).²⁵

Figure 22: Suicidal ideation among LGBTQ+ High schoolers

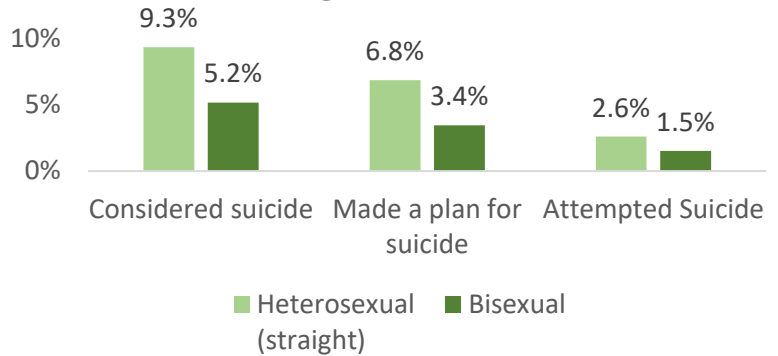
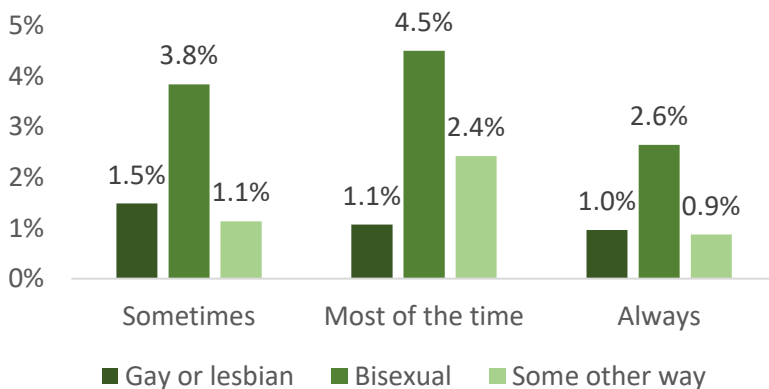


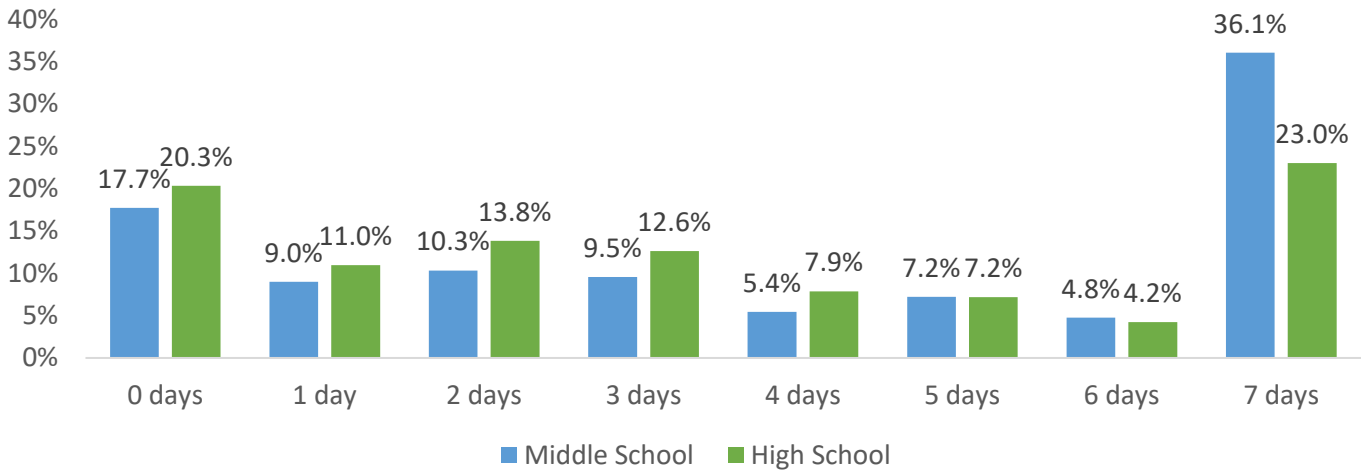
Figure 23: During the past 30 days, how often was your mental health not good? (n=1252)



There is an alarming increase in the education restrictions promoting LGBTQ+ inclusiveness in curriculum and as part of the student body - one of which is Florida's, 'Don't Say Gay' bill.²⁶ This bill, signed into law on in February 2022, bans the teaching and discussion of sexual orientation and gender identity.²⁶ Other laws include banning books that include LGBTQ+ people, themes, or topics as well as banning transgender students from sports and restricting their bathroom use to their birth gender.²⁷ These bills and laws create hostile educational environments for all students, not just LGBTQ+ students.²⁷ In Durham County, LGBTQ+ high school students were more likely to feel that they belong at school than those that don't.

Nutrition

Figure 24: How many days in the past 7 days did you eat breakfast?



High schoolers eat breakfast 7 days out of the week at 3 percentage points higher than high schoolers that do not eat breakfast at all. Middle schoolers are 36.3% more likely to eat breakfast 7 days out of the week than high schoolers. High and middle school females were more likely to eat breakfast less than 3 days a week than males. Among high schoolers, Black or African American students were three times as likely to skip breakfast every day of the week than whites while those identifying as Hispanic or Latino were twice as likely as whites to skip breakfast every day. Due to systemic racism, children of color are more likely to be food insecure.²⁸ This can lead to poor academic and social success in the classroom.²⁸ Durham Public Schools now offers free breakfast for all students even if they are not eligible for free or reduced lunches.²⁹ School breakfasts include fruit or 100% fruit juice, dairy, and a whole grain.²⁹

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) requires 5 components for a school lunch; fruits, vegetables, grains, protein, and milk.²⁹ Durham Public Schools also participate in the farm-to-school program which includes NC-grown food in school meals and supports local farmers.²⁹ The CDC recommends 14 to 18-year-olds eat 1.5 cups of fruit a day and 2.5 cups of vegetables a day.³¹ The majority of students either ate fruits and vegetables 1-3 times per week. Nutrition education in schools is a way to show the importance of nutrition and a healthy diet and how that influences emotional well-being and how emotions impact eating habits.³⁰

Figure 25: How many times in the past 7 days did you (high schooler) eat fruit or other vegetables?

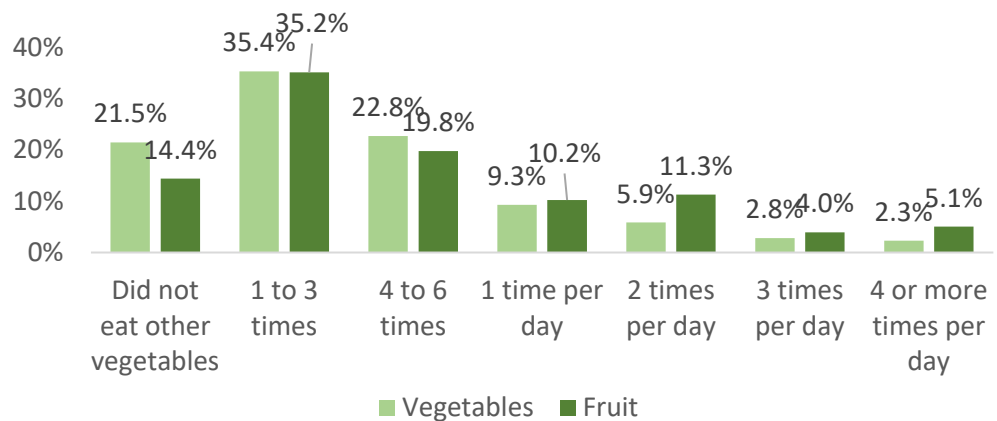
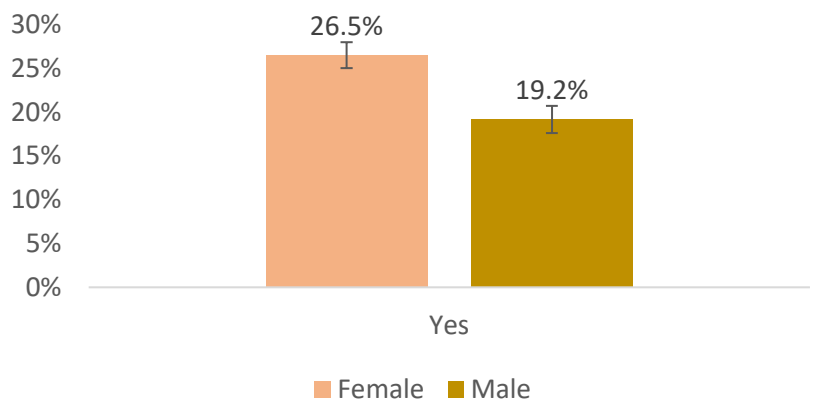


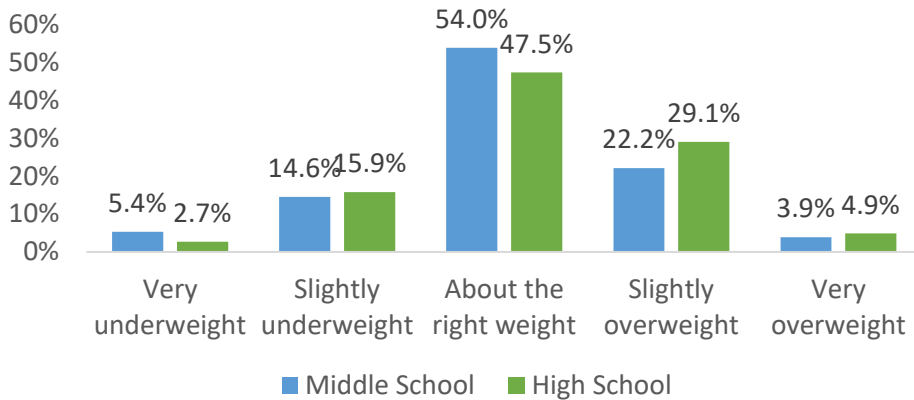
Figure 26: High schoolers that dieted to lose weight or keep from gaining weight.



High schoolers were asked if they ate less food, fewer calories, or foods low in fat to lose weight or keep from gaining weight. Females reported dieting 20% more than males. Black and African Americans and those of multiple races that identify as Hispanic or Latino were more likely than their white peers to diet.

Personal Health

Figure 27: How would you describe your weight?



Most middle and high schoolers report being at about the right weight. High schoolers were more likely to report being slightly or very overweight than middle schoolers. Seventh and eighth graders are more likely to report being slightly to very overweight than sixth graders. Ninth graders are almost twice as likely to report being slightly overweight than the other high school grades. Differences between sex were not significant.

Most students in both middle and high school got more than 6 hours of sleep a night. Higher grades (8th and 12th) were less likely to report getting over 7 hours of sleep. Among both middle and high schoolers, females were more likely to get less sleep than their male peers. The American Academy of Sleep Medicine recommends adolescents aged 13-18 should sleep for 8-10 hours.³² In Durham, only 27.1% of high schoolers and 42.6% of middle schoolers complete the recommended hours of sleep.

Figure 28: How many hours of sleep do you get a night?

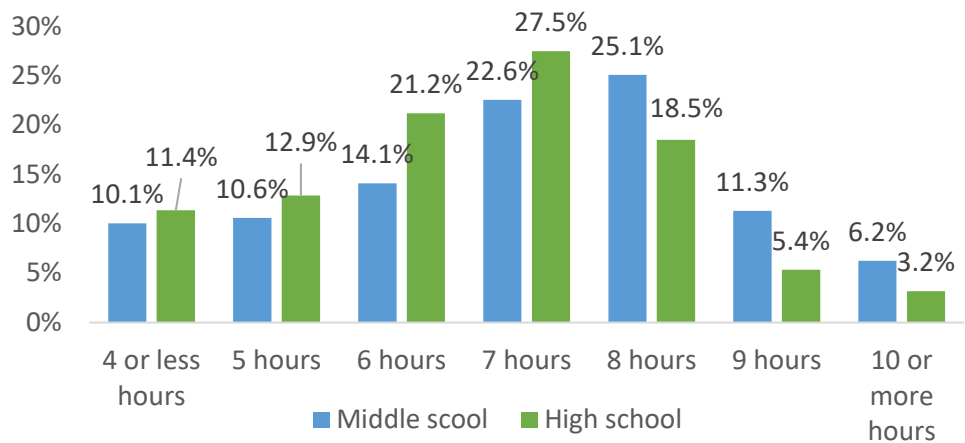
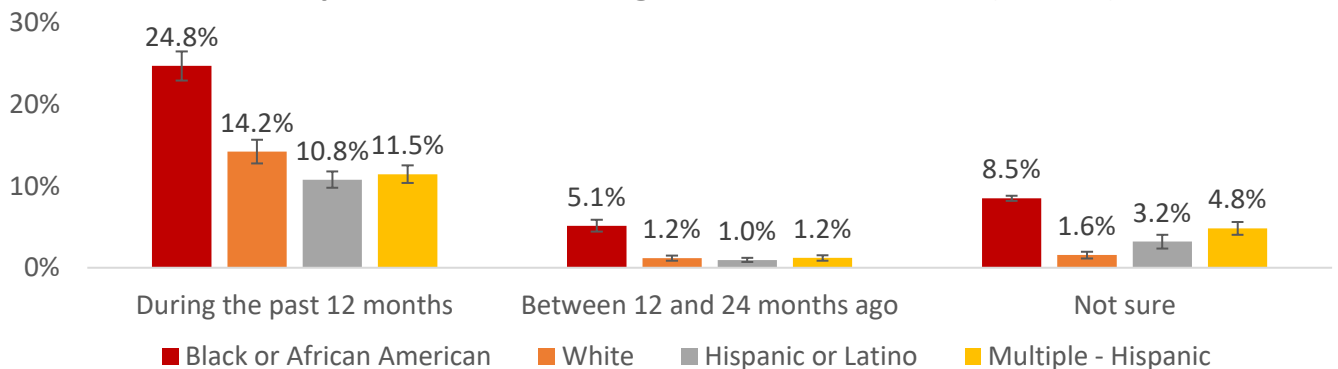


Figure 29: The last time a middle schooler was seen by the dentist for a check-up exam, teeth cleaning, or other dental work. (n=1232)



In March 2020, the CDC and American Dental Association recommended dental offices only attend to emergency care while postponing elective procedures.³³ Loss of income and dental insurance during the pandemic also contributed to lower incidences of dental care.³³ Patient-provider interactions between Black or African American children and their parents are more often described as not meeting the child's needs as opposed to parents of white children.³⁴ One study found that Black or African American children aged 13-15 were 75% more likely to have dental caries than white children.³⁴

Personal Safety

Black or African American middle schoolers are nearly six times as likely to have ever been in a physical fight compared to their white peers. Those of multiple races and identifying as Hispanic or Latino are more than twice as likely to have ever been in a physical fight compared to their white peers. Middle school males are much more likely to have been in a physical fight than females. High school data could not be disaggregated by race or gender.

Figure 30: Middle schoolers that have ever been in a physical fight (n=594)

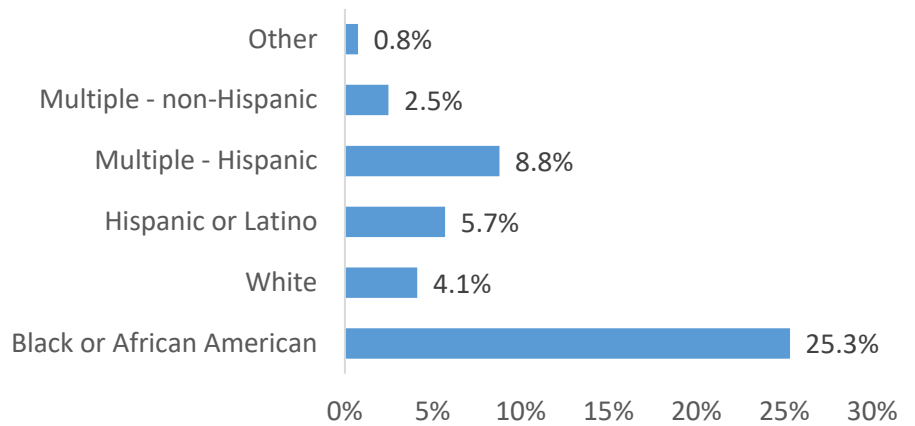
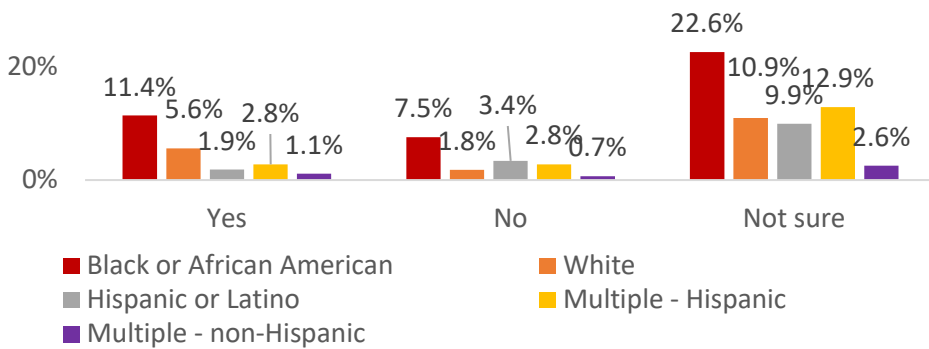
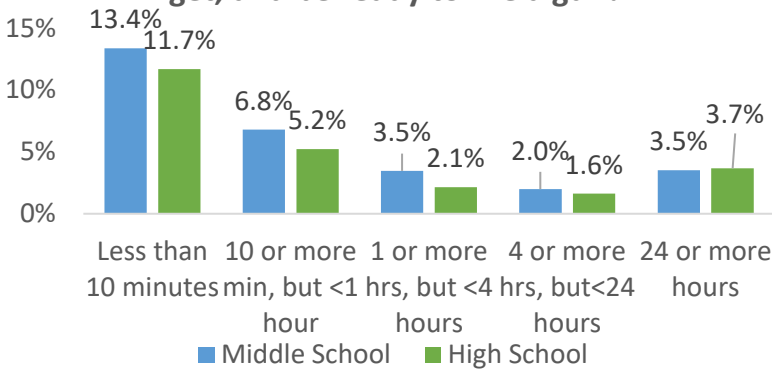


Figure 31: Is there gang activity in your school? (n=1343)



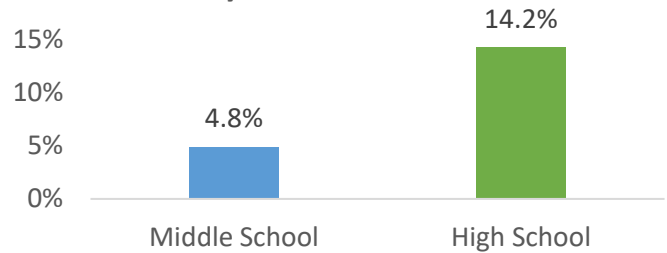
Among high schoolers, 22% reported gang activity in their school. Black or African American students were twice as likely to report gang activity in their school. Males were also more likely to report gang activity than females. The 2021 Durham Gang Assessment found 34% of high schoolers in Durham County reported gang activity in 2019.³⁵ This is a 66.5% decrease in gang activity from 2019 to 2021.

Figure 32: How long would it take you to get, and be ready to fire a gun?



Middle school students are more likely than high school students to be able to get and fire a gun in less than 24 hours. Firearms are the leading cause of death for children and teens (ages 1-19).³⁶ Gun violence has a significant impact on psychological and mental well-being and can lead to poorer performances in school.³⁶ Black or African American teens are 17 times more likely to die by gun homicide than white children.³⁷ Gun locks are available for free in Durham County through the Gun Safety Program.³⁷ Call 919-560-7765 to get a free gun lock.³⁷

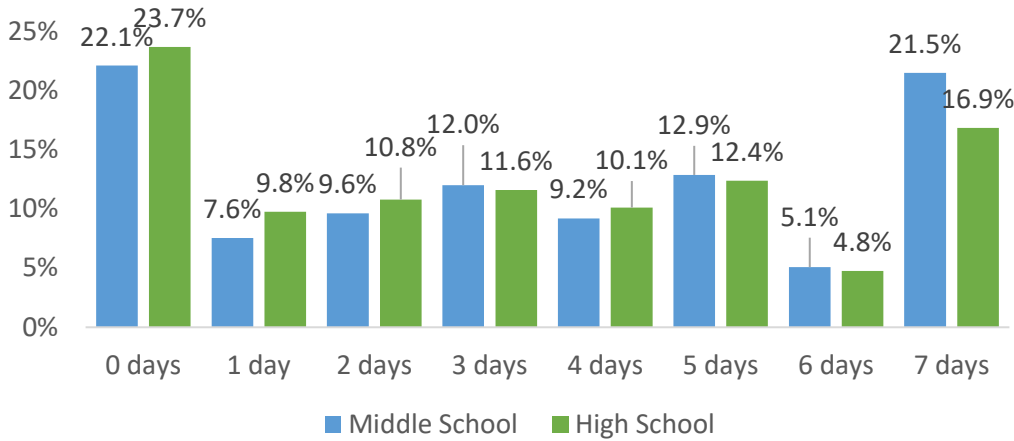
Figure 33: Middle and high schoolers that skipped school because they felt they'd be unsafe at school or on the way to or from school.



High school students were three times as likely to report skipping school for personal safety reasons. In the current climate, school shootings, bullying, and anxiety are major reasons why students feel unsafe at school.³⁸ In a national study, 38% of teens are confident that school officials can create a sense of emotional and physical safety in the classroom.³⁸

Physical Activity

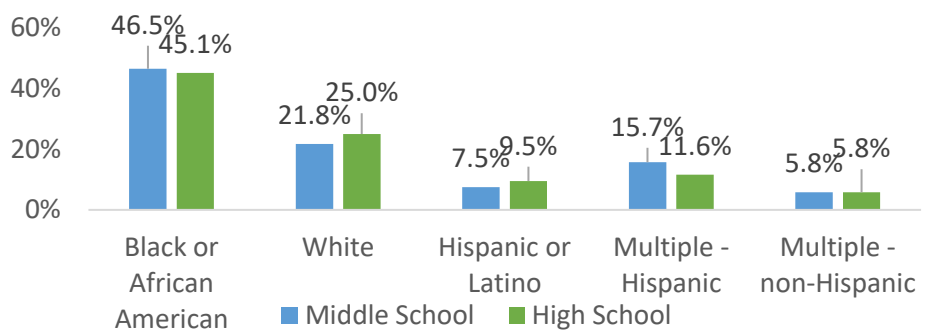
Figure 34: How many days were you physically active for a total of 60 minutes per day in the past 7 days?



Middle schoolers were more likely to exercise five or more days a week for a total of 60 minutes each day compared to high schoolers. The CDC recommends that adolescents have at least 60 minutes per day of physical activity.³⁹ Less than one in five high schoolers met this requirement. One in three middle schoolers goes to physical education (PE) class everyday of the school week.



Figure 35: Students that were physically active for a total of 60 minutes per day for the past 7 days.



Black or African American students are nearly twice as likely to report exercising for 60 minutes everyday during the past 7 days as students of other races or ethnicities. Black or African American students were nearly three times as likely to play on a sports team than white students and more than twice as likely to play on three sports teams than white students. White students were over twice as likely to exercise for 60 minutes or more each day of the week than students identifying as Hispanic or Latino. One study done in Seattle, WA found that socioeconomic status is inversely proportional to youth physical activity outcomes and sports participation.⁴⁰ This means that youth physical activity decreased with lower socioeconomic status.⁴⁰ This study found that children of low-income families reported not participating in sports because they didn't want to get hurt, they didn't feel welcome on teams, it was too expensive, and no transportation.⁴⁰

Screen time

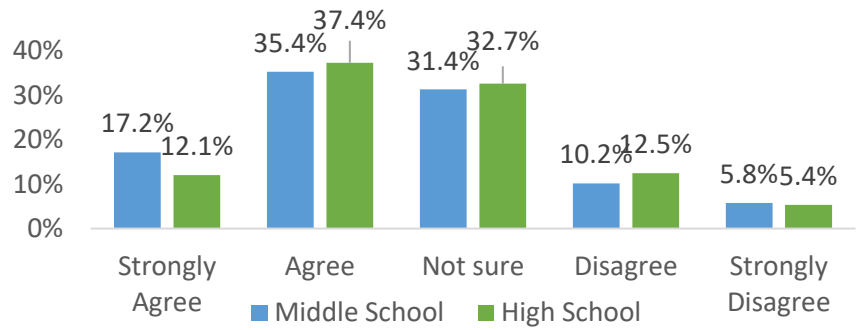
Two in five middle and high schoolers report spending five or more hours a day on a screen doing non-school work related things. Females were more likely than males to spend five or more hours on a screen. In middle school, hours spent on a phone increased with each grade. In high school, however, ninth graders were more likely than their peers to use a screen for five or more hours a day.



School Support

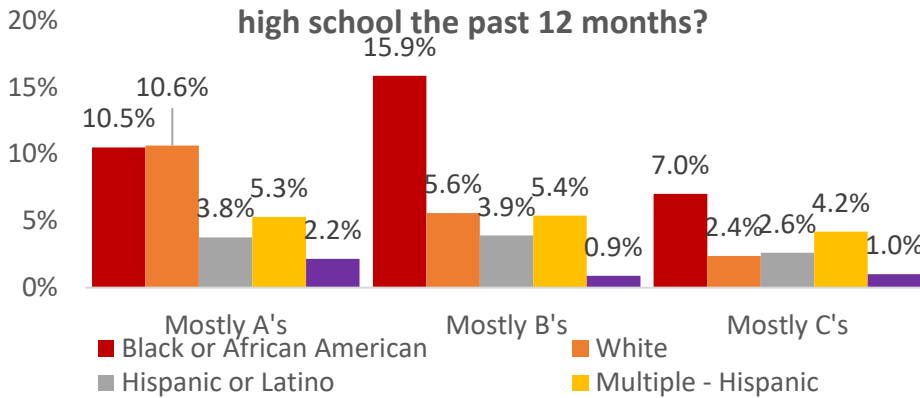
Over half of all middle and high school students agree that they have teachers that support them and give them encouragement. In a national survey, 94% of teachers reported agreeing that students felt comfortable asking for help and 88% of students said the same.⁴¹ Black or African American and Hispanic or Latino households with school-aged children were 1.3 to 1.4 times more likely to face limited access to computers and the internet during remote learning.⁴² Durham Public Schools is proud to participate in the one to one initiative which provided each student with a computer and hot spot.

Figure 37: Do you have teachers that support you and give you lots of encouragement?



Black or African American students were more likely to obtain mostly B's in school compared to whites. There was an equal amount of Black or African American students and white students who obtained mostly A's. Traditional grading practices including giving grading homework, giving zeros or taking points off for late work or averaging grades are all linked in some way to socioeconomic status of children.⁴³ Children experiencing poverty, lack of social-emotional learning, and lack of support outside of school are less likely to succeed academically.⁴³

Figure 38: How would you describe your grades in high school the past 12 months?



The vast majority of high school students (54.2%) reported planning on attending a four-year college or university after graduation. In 2021, 40% of North Carolinians ages 18-24 were enrolled in a four-year college or university.⁴⁴ The majority of these students identify as Asian (57%), followed by whites (43%), and Black or African Americans (38%).⁴⁴ Differences between races were too small to disaggregate in the 2021 YRBS report. However, females were more likely than males to plan to attend a community college or four-year college or university.

Figure 39: High schoolers response to what they want to do after graduation. (n=1277)

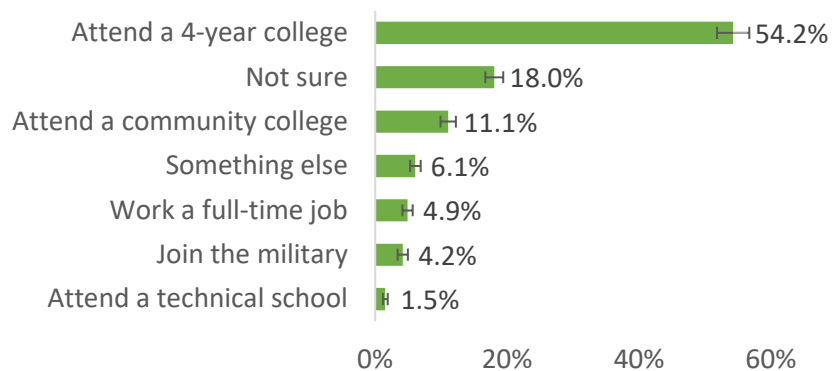
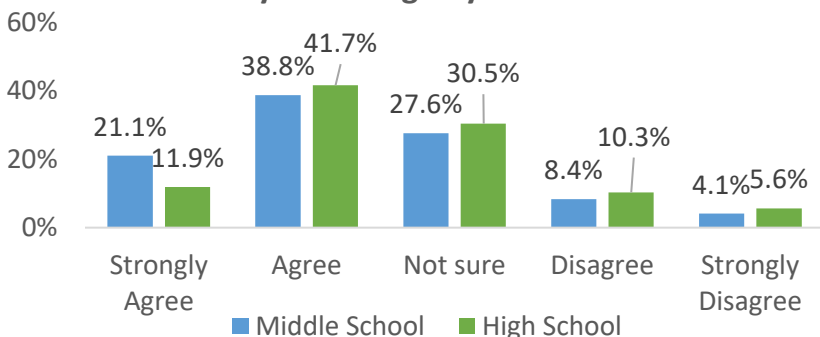


Figure 40: Do you agree or disagree that you feel you belong at your school?



A student's sense of belonging is paramount to their success.⁴⁵ Students that feel they belong often perform better academically and are more engaged.⁴⁵ Many students participate in group sports and 38.8% of middle schoolers participated in a school activities other than sports such as band, drama, clubs, or student government. Having positive relationships with teachers strongly correlates to student belonging.⁴⁵

Sexual Behavior

Though sexual intercourse is rare among middle schoolers, there are still trends present. Eighth graders are more likely to have had sexual intercourse than sixth and seventh graders. Males are twice as likely to have had sexual intercourse than females. Further research needs to be done to understand the sexual behavior patterns of middle schoolers.

Figure 41: Middle schoolers that have had sexual intercourse.

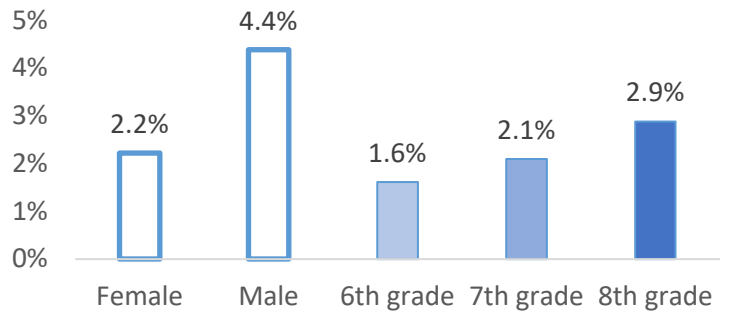
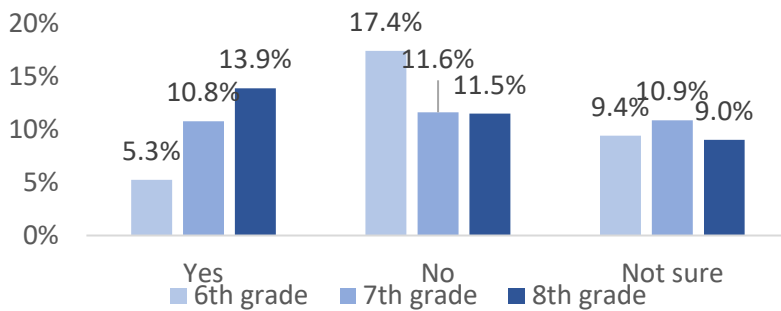


Figure 42: Have you ever been taught about abstaining from sexual activity? (n=1278)



North Carolina law mandates that grades 7 through 9 be provided with medically accurate information on abstinence, contraceptives, Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI) prevention, and sexual assault.⁴⁶ However, parents must sign a permission slip and may excuse a child from sex education classes in Durham County.⁴⁷ This is consistent with the 2021 YRBS results in that 6th graders are much more likely to report not having sex education regarding abstinence.

Black or African Americans are nearly twice as likely to report being physically forced to have sexual intercourse compared to their white peers. In the past 12 months, over 8% of high schoolers reported being forced to do sexual things they did not want to either one to three times. Approximately half of five female rape survivors report first being sexually assaulted as a minor.⁴⁸ Females aged 16 to 19 are four times more likely than the general population to be victims of rape, attempted rape, or sexual assault.⁴⁹

Figure 43: High schoolers that have been physically forced to have sexual intercourse.

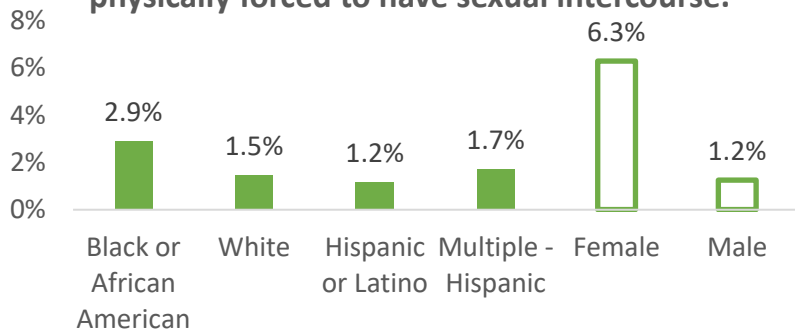
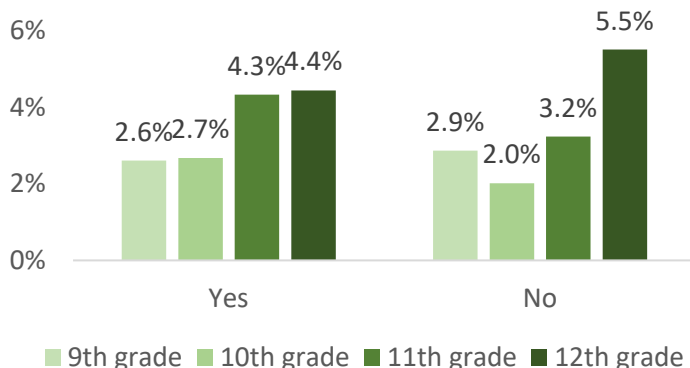


Figure 44: High schoolers that used a condom the last time they had intercourse. (n=328)



Of those high schoolers who are sexually active, 11th and 12th graders are more likely to use a condom. Though among sexually active 12th graders, they were more likely not to use a condom the last time they had sexual intercourse. Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) are on the rise and people ages 15-24 account for half of all new STI cases.⁵⁰ One in two high school students used a condom the last time they had sex.⁵¹ Children of color, LGBTQIA+ youth, and those living in poverty are all at an increased risk of having barriers to accessing birth control.⁵² Not being able to make it to an doctor's appointment to get the prescription and the cost being too high are common reasons why young people cannot get birth control.⁵³

Substance Use

Alcohol



Figure 45: At what age did high schoolers have their first drink of alcohol other than a few sips? (n=479)

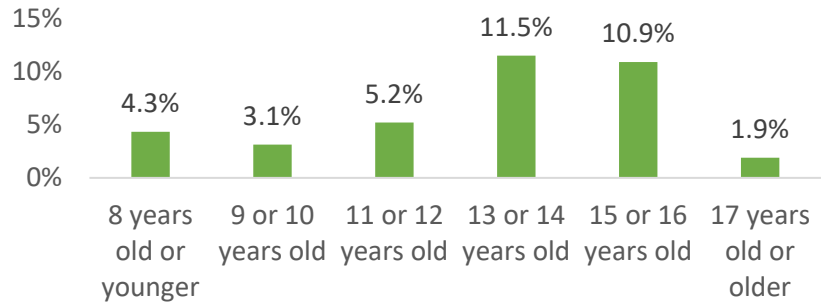


Figure 46: Number of days high schoolers that reported drinking in the past 30 days actually drank. (n=191)

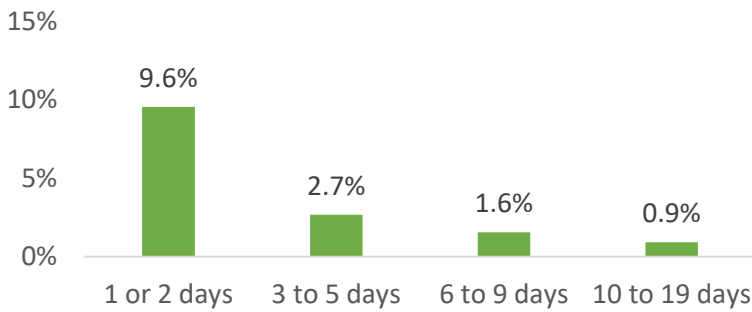
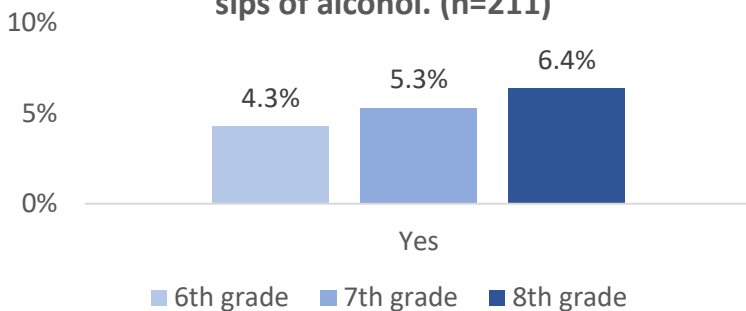


Figure 47: Middle schoolers that reported ever having a drink of more than a few sips of alcohol. (n=211)



Alcohol use among teens has long been part of a larger discussion around substance use. Underage drinking has acute and long lasting effects. For example, those that drink will acutely experience impaired judgement, injuries, or even death.⁵⁴ Long lasting effects of underage drinking include an increased risk for alcohol problems later in life, poor brain development, can lead to trouble with school or the law, and use of other substances.⁵⁴

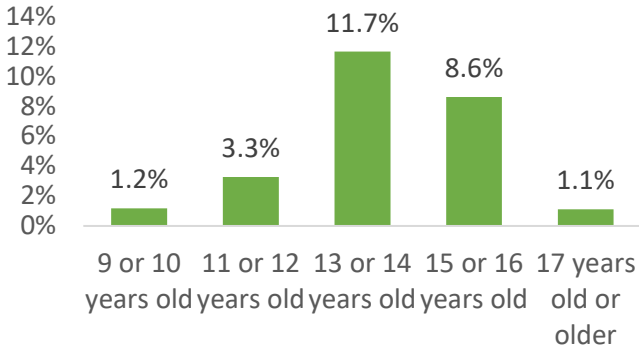
High schoolers were asked how old they were when they had their first drink and 12.6% reported having a drink younger than 13 years old. Among all age groups, females reported drinking more than men except for ages 17 and older in which females and males reported equally. In addition, high schoolers that reported drinking in the past 30 days were more likely to be female than male. This is consistent with recent data that reflects the switch from males drinking more than females to females drinking more than males.⁵⁴ Females are also more likely to binge drink (5 or more drinks on one occasion for males and 4 or more drinks on one occasion for females).⁵⁴ In the 2021 YRBS, 6.8% of high schoolers reported binge drinking in the past 30 days. No significant differences were seen between genders.

Eighth graders are more likely than sixth and seventh graders to have had at least one drink of alcohol other than a few sips, suggesting middle school drinking begins in sixth or seventh grade. In total, 16% of middle schoolers reported ever having a drink of alcohol other than a few sips. Children drink for many reasons including peer pressure, wanting to feel grown up, exposure (they see their parents drink), and self-medication.⁵⁵ There are distinct racial differences among youth that drink.⁵⁶ Neighborhood socioeconomic status and racial profile impacts alcohol use among youth.⁵⁶ For example, black youths' odds of binge drinking are significantly lower than whites' in highly advantaged neighborhoods.⁵⁶ In addition, Hispanic or Latinos living in racially integrated neighborhoods have significantly lower odds of binge drinking than Hispanic or Latinos living in white neighborhoods.⁵⁵ Research suggests that advantaged white youth seek to be part of a 'party' subculture.⁵⁶ In this way, diversity is a protective factor against underage drinking.⁵⁶

Substance Use

Marijuana

Figure 48: High schoolers age when they first tried marijuana. (n=1287)



Since the pandemic, marijuana use among both middle and high school students has decreased. Current use (used at least once in the past 30 days), has decreased among middle schoolers by 63% and decreased by 45% among high schoolers. This is in stark contrast to other research done on pre and post pandemic substance use among adolescents.⁵⁷ Other studies found that though perceived availability of marijuana was lower after COVID-19 lockdown, substance use remained the same.⁵⁷

In 2021, high schoolers were asked about vaping marijuana and 10.7% reported vaping marijuana at least once within the past 30 days.

Eighth graders were three times as likely to use marijuana than sixth graders. This is also consistent with high schooler's answers to what age they were when they first tried marijuana.

Opioids, methamphetamines, sniffing glue or spray cans

The use of harder drugs (not marijuana, tobacco, or alcohol), is very uncommon among Durham County adolescents according to the 2021 YRBS. Only 1.2% of high schoolers ever tried heroin – middle school data was too small to report. Among middle schoolers, 1.2% reported ever trying methamphetamines while 1.3% of high schoolers reported the same. There is a slight increase in sniffing or breathing in contents of a spray can or glue at 4.5% of middle schoolers. This was more commonly seen among 6th graders and females.

Among high schoolers, 14.3% reported using prescription pain killers without a doctor's prescription or differently than how a doctor told them to use it while 8.7% of middle schoolers reported the same. From Medicaid data from 2016-2018, one in ten adolescents filled at least one prescription opioid per year.⁵⁸ One study found that Black or African American youth were less likely to fill a prescription for opiates but were more susceptible to substance abuse or dependence).⁵⁸

Figure 49: Middle schoolers that have used prescription pain medication without a doctor's prescription or taken differently than how a doctor told you to use it.

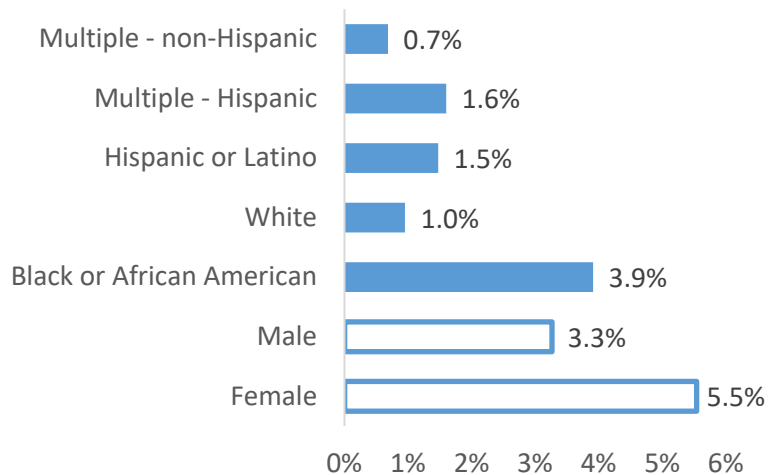
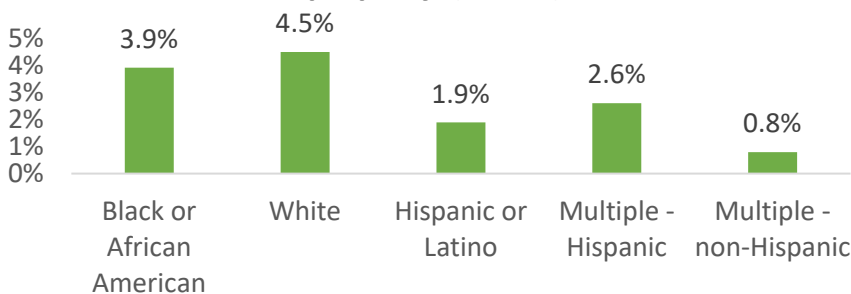


Figure 50: High schoolers that reported being offered, sold, or given illegal drugs on school property. (n=191)



White students were more likely than other races and ethnicities to deal drugs on school property. One study found that family socioeconomic status was inversely related to drug dealing.⁵⁹ This suggests that children from low-income families/neighborhoods are less likely to deal drugs.⁵⁹ However, In this study, white male adolescents were more likely to deal drugs, and this was strongly associated with personal use of substances.⁵⁹

Tobacco



Electronic Vapor Products

Figure 51: What is the main reason you have used electronic vapor products?

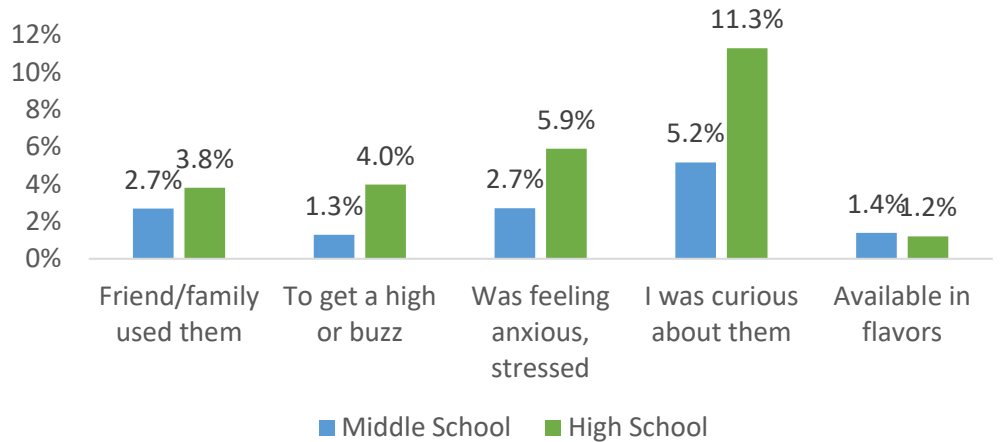
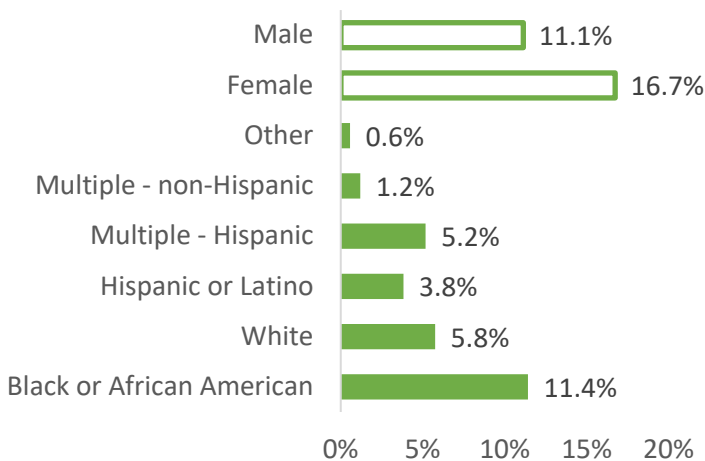


Figure 52: High schoolers that have ever used an electronic vapor product (EVP).



Electronic Vapor Product (EVP) use has become more widespread.⁶⁰ High school students (15.7%) are more likely to have used an EVP in the past 30 days than middle school students (7.9%). According to the 2022 National Youth Tobacco Survey, 16.5% of high school students currently use EVPs and 4.5% of middle school students use EVPs.⁶⁰ Flavored EVPs are preferred by 85% of EVP adolescent users.⁶⁰ One study suggested that non-Hispanic whites and Hispanic or Latino students are more likely to use EVPs than non-Hispanic Black or African Americans.⁶¹ The 2021 YRBS data did not reveal any clear disparities between race and ethnicity for current users of EVPs. Another study showed that non-Hispanic Black or African Americans and Hispanic or Latino students are more likely to begin using EVPs at a younger age than white students.⁶¹ Black or African American students are less likely to transition to, or add, cigarette use compared to their white or Hispanic or Latino peers.⁶¹

EVP use is being seen more and more in females than before.⁶² This has been accomplished by using certain marketing techniques such as using pastel colors, promoting the curbing of appetite to help with weight loss, and makes women independent.⁶² Male adolescents are typically younger when they try EVPs for the first time.⁶² In the 2021 YRBS, females were more likely to be a current EVP user.

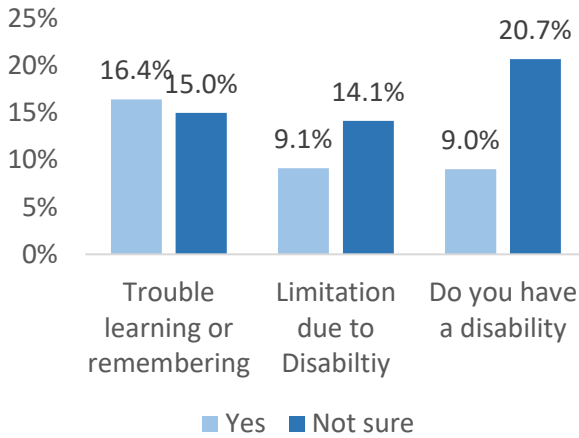
Cigarettes

From 2011 to 2020, cigarette use went down among both middle and high schoolers.⁶³ The 2021 YRBS saw only 2.4% of high schoolers reported using cigarettes while only 2% of middle schoolers reported using cigarettes.



Disability

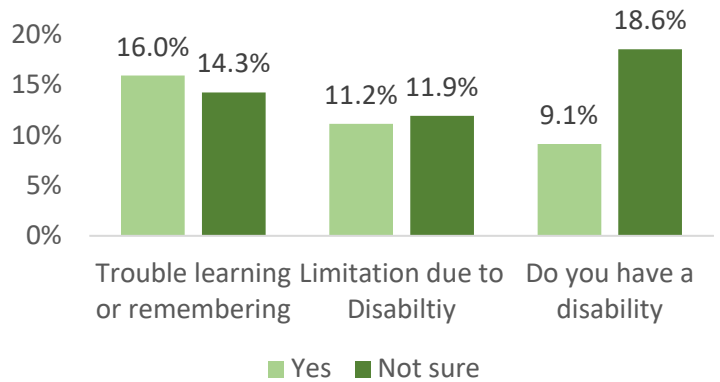
Figure 53: Disability among middle schoolers



One in five American children have learning or attention difficulties according to the National Center for Learning Disabilities.⁶⁴ In Durham County, nearly one in five middle schoolers reported having trouble learning or remembering. One in ten reported having a disability and one in ten reported having limitations due to their disability. Children that have learning disabilities have a unique way of viewing the world regardless of IQ or creativity.⁶⁴ Boys receive learning disability diagnoses at four times the rate as females.⁶⁴ In Durham County, middle school males reported having a learning disability at 1.25 times as females. Children with learning disabilities often have high rates of mental health and behavioral problems.⁶⁴ In Durham County, 66.8% of high schoolers that reported having trouble learning or remembering also reported symptoms of depression. Students with learning disabilities are more likely to report bullying and dropping out of school.⁶⁴ The Leandro Comprehensive Remedial Plan is North Carolina's plan to eliminate the inequities and funding deficiencies that block children from receiving the sound, basic education guaranteed by the state constitution.⁶⁵ This plan seeks to provide funding to increase the number of support personnel including school nurses, psychologists, and counselors once funds have been allocated.⁶⁵

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in higher anxiety among all students, particularly those with disabilities.⁶⁶ Those with auditory learning disabilities or have difficulty paying attention struggled with remote learning.⁶⁶ Teacher's decision to refer a student for disability testing is subjective.⁶⁷ A study performed among Wisconsin's public schools revealed that students of color were more likely to be referred for lower-status disabilities such as emotional behavioral disorders as opposed to their white peers who were often referred for high-status disabilities such as learning disabilities, ADHD, and autism.⁶⁷ In Durham County, Black or African American students were more likely to report having a disability 1.3 times as their white peers.

Figure 54: Disabilities among high schoolers

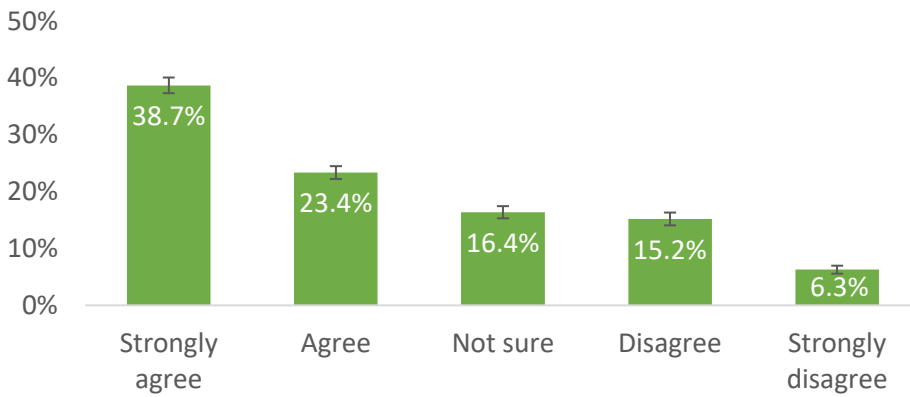


Durham Public Schools is providing quality services and support to schools to ensure the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and North Carolina Policies Governing Services for Children with Disabilities are implemented.⁶¹ Through DPS, Individual Education Programs (IEPs) identify the student's academic and functional performance.⁶⁸ The IEP teams will begin addressing student's post-secondary needs once the student turns age 14.⁶⁸



COVID-19 Impact

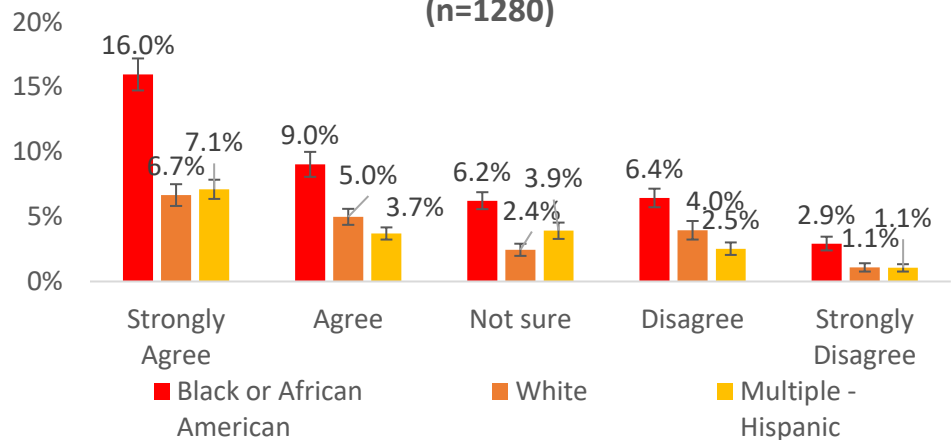
Figure 55: Do you agree or disagree that doing your schoolwork was more difficult during the COVID-19 pandemic than before the pandemic started?



Virtual learning was an unexpected and an unplanned experiment brought on by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020.⁶⁹ Being unable to log on to virtual learning platforms and being unable to complete homework affected lower income families the most who may not have access to the tools needed to succeed.⁶⁹ Twenty percent of low-income households that make less than \$30,000 per year don't have a computer at home.⁶⁹ In Durham County, over twice as many students strongly agree that their schoolwork was more difficult compared to those that disagreed.

Structural racism has especially prevented Black or African American and Hispanic or Latino students from succeeding during remote learning.⁶⁷ These students were more likely to than white teenagers to feel less close to their friends.⁶⁹ According to the Pew Research Center study, only nine percent of students preferred remote learning.⁶⁹ In Durham County, Black or African American students reported having more difficulty completing schoolwork than their white or Hispanic or Latino peers. Remote learning has impacted student's academic success and has exacerbated racial and social inequities in education.⁷⁰

Figure 56: Do you agree or disagree that doing your schoolwork was more difficult during the COVID-19 pandemic than before the pandemic started? (n=1280)



Black or African American students are already at a disadvantage among culturally affirming education.⁷¹ In addition to barriers to academic success, students of color are also exposed to increased financial hardship, daylong sibling care, limited access to technology, emotional hardship, and limited access to food.⁷¹ Students that attended school virtually often reported negative emotions towards school according to a multistate study.⁷²

Resources

Durham Together for Resilient Youth (TRY)

Together for Resilient Youth (TRY) is a coalition of youth and adults working together to prevent substance use among adolescents, with long term impacts on reduction in substance use in adults. The coalition focuses on advocacy, education, mobilization, and collective action. TRY facilitates work within many domains, including Youth Living in Future Tense (LIFT), young adults (CollegeTRY), parents, faith community, Forward Together (Community Support for Recovering), Resilient Together (family members that have lost loved ones due to overdose or substance use) and Achieving Health Hand in Hand (AHHH - ACE's and Resilience). For more information on TRY or to get involved, contact Dr. Wanda Boone at 919-491-7811 or visit www.DurhamTRY.org.

City of Durham Office of Youth

The City of Durham Office on Youth partners with Durham's young people and their families and others that support youth. This organization works to find ways that local government programs and systems can better support all young people ages 13-24. Several initiatives continue to benefit the young people of Durham including the Youth Listening Project which focuses on energizing youth, grow partnerships, and work together on shared priorities. The Protecting Our Dignity in Education program focuses on creating liberatory, joy-filled, and healing spaces for Black and Brown youth. The Changed by Youth (CBY) ambassador began in 2022 and was set up to work with partners to create leadership and consulting roles for youth. More information can be found here: <https://www.durhamnc.gov/1350/Office-on-Youth>.

Universal Free Breakfast

Free breakfast is available to all students enrolled in DPS. Students are not required to complete any forms or documents.

To receive a free breakfast on school days, students must go to their school cafeteria. Students are given a choice of four items and are asked to choose three of the four items for breakfast.

Breakfast offerings vary throughout the week; however, cereal, juice, fresh fruit, and milk are always available.

[School Nutrition Services / FAQs \(dpsnc.net\)](#)

Project BUILD

Project BUILD outreach workers engage with representatives from the education, social service, mental health, substance use, and criminal justice sectors to provide coordinated case management to youth between the ages of 14 and 21 who are at high risk for gang involvement. Outreach workers provide one-on-one coaching for youth to help them make positive decisions, connect them with employment, encourage academic success, and support involvement in extracurricular activities.

Project BUILD outreach workers are available to meet students at school, home, or in the community. They facilitate weekly group meetings and voluntary summer and holiday camps when school is out. Participation in Project BUILD programming is free. For more information on Project BUILD, contact Arkeem Brooks at the Durham County Department of Public Health. Mr. Brooks can be reached at 919-560-7725 or visit tinyurl.com/projectBUILDDurham

Made in Durham's Durham Work-based Learning Collaborative

This Collaborative is a partnership of nineteen organizations working to align a system that will be easier to navigate for employers and youth and their families. Goals include the rollout of the Durham's Public School's 3-2-1 Work-based Learning Initiative and the expansion of the Youth Work Summer Internship Program. More information can be found at <https://madeindurham.org/strategies/work-based-learning/>

SmokefreeTeen

SmokefreeTeen is a specific program to help teens quit vaping. There is also a SmokefreeTXT program and the quitStart App. All these resources are provided by National Cancer Institute as part of the Smokefree.gov series. More information can be found at <https://teen.smokefree.gov/quit-vaping>

Resources

Durham Parks and Recreation Department

Durham Parks and Recreation Department continues to provide residents with affordable and fun physical activities both indoors and outdoors across the city. One initiative of DPR, “MyDurham,” aims to engage youth in afterschool activities for peer support, health promotion, and physical activity in a developmental setting.

DPR also continues to partner with Duke Children’s to deliver “Bull City Fit” at the Edison Johnson Recreation Center. Bull City Fit is a free program for low-income families who have at least one child with obesity. The program offers family-centered and peer-based group physical fitness, cooking classes, and outdoor recreation opportunities.

DPR hosts numerous fitness classes and coordinates a wide variety of sports for all ages, from young children to older adults. Their “Play More” guide includes information about their programs, and it also includes other trails and greenways in the area where Durham residents can go to be physically active. More information can be found at <https://www.dprplaymore.org/200/Play-More-Guide> and <https://www.dprplaymore.org/>

Carolina Outreach Behavioral Health Urgent Care

Carolina Outreach Behavioral Health Urgent Care is a walk-in clinic for children and adults experiencing a mental health crisis and/or substance use issues. For more information, visit <https://carolinaoutreachbhuc.com/>

Durham Community Collaborative

Durham Community Collaborative is a group of community members and organizations who collaborate to implement a System of Care approach and build an array of services, supports and linkages to assist children and families. More information can be found at <https://www.alliancehealthplan.org/consumers-families/system-of-care/community-collaborative/>

Durham Crisis Response Center

This Center offers free, confidential services to victims of sexual assault. Services include 24-hour help lines in English (919-403-6562) and Spanish (919-519-3735), information and referrals, case management, crisis intervention and ongoing emotional support, support groups in English and Spanish, advocacy, and accompaniment to the police, court, hospital and follow-up medical appointments. For more information, visit www.durhamcrisisresponse.org

The Child and Adolescent Gender Care Clinic

This Clinic provides family-centered care to transgender and gender non-binary youth children and adolescents, as well as treatment for children with differences of sex development. The clinic staff includes pediatric mental health professionals with expertise in gender-affirming mental health care. There are also services available for spiritual care. For more information, visit <https://www.dukehealth.org/locations/duke-child-and-adolescent-gender-care>

Duke Child Development and Behavioral Health Clinic

This clinic is staffed with child psychiatrists, child psychologists, a physician assistant, child psychiatric clinical social workers and licensed substance abuse counselors. Diagnostics and treatment services are available for a wide range of pediatric issues and psychiatric consultations. This clinic is located at 411 Trent Dr. Durham, NC 27705. To make an appointment call: 919-668-5559 or visit: <https://www.dukehealth.org/locations/duke-child-development-and-behavioral-health-clinic>

The Lifeline and 988

The previous National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255 remains available. In 2022, an additional number was made available and could be reached by dialing 9-8-8. More information can be found here: <https://988lifeline.org/current-events/the-lifeline-and-988/>

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