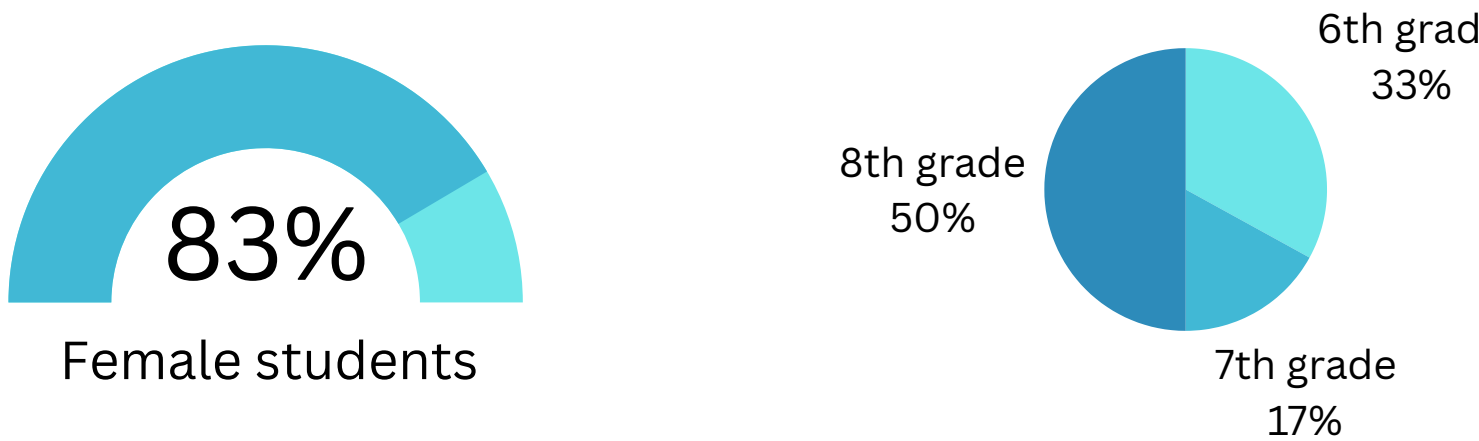


2024 Middle School Listening Sessions

On August 29th, 2024, six middle schoolers lined up to get checked in and pile their plates high with local Puerto Rican food. Once the students filled their plates, they settled in a classroom located downstairs in the Emily K Center in Durham, NC. The students ate and talked to their peers before hearing a brief presentation on what their peers reported in the 2017, 2019, and 2021 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (a national survey administered to middle and high schoolers every two years to assess nutrition, physical activity, substance use, mental health, bullying and more). With this information, the students further discussed what they thought about these topics. The following information summarizes these conversations. After participating, students received a \$25 Amazon gift card.

Student Demographics



What would you do if you or someone else is being bullied?

If another student was getting ready to go to the next class but was stopped by a bully, they might be approached with kindness by another student asking if they are ok. One student that mentioned being bullied said they “try to act like they don’t care” so they can move on with their day.

What are your top causes of stress?

Once back in the classroom after the COVID-19 pandemic, students remain stressed about their schoolwork, often feeling like there is too much work and too little time. When describing their stress, students included words like “overstimulation”, “anxiety”, and “panicky”.



What substances are common in your school? Why do you think your peers are interested in vaping?

Substance use among teens has overall increased since the COVID-19 pandemic. A student mentioned that students will do “anything.” Without mentioning illicit substances, students mentioned their peers often favor nicotine. Students balancing schoolwork, home life, friendships, and other relationships may feel overwhelmed by all their responsibilities and might turn to vaping as a way to escape. Some students responded that if they saw a student vaping, they would just say “you do you.”

“To take their minds off of stuff.”
- student when asked about why their peers are interested in vaping.

What supports your mental health?

Many students mentioned “being around people or watching anime”, or “working with other people.” Online students will call their friends for a social connection. Anime came up quite a bit because it is “kind and inspirational.” Exercise is a big stress reliever and way of “blowing off steam” for many students. Once they get on the field, they are able to play and have fun with their peers - something they were isolated from during the COVID-19 pandemic.



“Me and my friends when we have questions about homework, we text each other. We made a pact to meet up once/week.”

What can adults do to support you?

- Students mentioned they’d like more freedom. For example, freedom on their phones, without parental controls.