



2024 Youth Assessment

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Dane County Department of Human Services
Prevention & Early Intervention



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Overview, Survey Development, and Administration

History and Overview

The Dane County Youth Commission is pleased to release the summary report for the 2024 Dane County Youth Assessment (DCYA). Every three years, youth in grades 7-12 complete a survey that captures their opinions, concerns, behaviors, attitudes, and experiences on a range of topics. The DCYA is a collaborative effort led by the Dane County Youth Commission in partnership with the United Way of Dane County, Public Health Madison & Dane County, the City of Madison, and school districts in the county.

Survey Development and Administration

Survey development is led by K12 Associates, LLC and a committee comprised of educators, public health professionals, and project funders. In 2024 we also had a group of youth interns assist with development of the survey. The survey includes questions about protective and risk behaviors across contexts of school, peer relations, family, and community. Risk and protective factors are characteristics that can have a significant impact on mental, physical, and behavioral well-being. Risk factors increase the likelihood of negative life outcomes, while protective factors reduce the impact of risk factors and the likelihood of negative life outcomes. Understanding both the protective and risk factors in the lives of youth is critical to understanding their needs and their health. The 2024 DCYA includes new questions on emerging youth issues while retaining important questions from past surveys to measure trends. The survey includes items from the national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Youth Risk Behavior Survey and other national surveys to allow for comparisons to youth in the U.S. and in Wisconsin. Extensive efforts are made to ensure that questions are clear and understandable. The survey is available in multiple languages.

2024 DCYA Overview

In 2024, 24,471 7th-12th grades students completed the Dane County Youth Assessment. This is the largest unweighted population to complete the survey in its 44-year history. The 2024 survey was administered between January 15, 2024 and April 15, 2024 to middle and high school students across 17 public school districts. Student participation was voluntary and anonymous. Parents were notified in advance of survey administration and could opt their child out of participating. Each school districts' goal was to survey all 7th-12th graders, with most districts capturing over 80% of students.

While it is critical to strive to keep the survey questions intact year after year to allow for longitudinal analysis, it is also critical to acknowledge that the context in which youth live is constantly changing. It is clear that youth's lives are greatly impacted by screen time, internet use, and engagement with social media. It is also clear that it is imperative to continue to seek to understand the full range of mental health challenges facing youth. For these reasons, and with extensive input from our school and community partners, as well as youth themselves, some questions on new topics were added, other questions were added to existing topics in order to gather more detailed information, and additional questions were updated for clarity.

The additions include:

- A three-item loneliness scale developed by UCLA was added due to reports of increasing feelings of loneliness among youth and research correlating loneliness with decreased well-being.
- A three-item Problematic and Risky Internet Use Screening Scale (PRIUSS-3) was added due to increasing concerns about the impact of internet use on youth health.
- A two-item Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-2) scale was added to better assess possible symptoms of depression.
- Due to concerns about youth not getting enough sleep, three questions were added to better understand why youth may be staying up late as well as what rules or guidelines are provided to them around their bedtime.
- Additionally, instead of only asking about whether phones or computers are keeping youth up at night, this question was expanded to be more specific about what phones or computers are being used for, such as homework, gaming, or social media, as well as including other reasons youth are up at night, such as feelings of anxiety.
- Questions about student self-perception in the form of a six-item personal optimism scale that asks students about how they feel about their problem-solving skills, their ability to shape the future, and how they compare to others. Optimism is linked to physical and mental health outcomes.

Changes Since COVID-19

The last DCYA prior to 2024 was administered in 2021 in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. For 7th-12th grade students, this was an unusual time where many students were confined to their homes with little or no social contact. This affected many experiences and behaviors that are measured in the DCYA. For example, in 2021, alcohol and cannabis use were down, incidence of dating and sexual behavior were down, bullying and other anti-social behavior were down, and the number of youth reporting staying up past 11 pm increased. In 2024, most of these experiences and behaviors returned to the 2018 (the DCYA prior to 2021) levels, some even returned to 2015 levels.

Other behaviors that changed during COVID-19 did not fully bounce back. One was the number of students eating breakfast every day. This percentage dropped to 34.7% in 2021 and is lower still (32.5%) in 2024. Another is the number of students missing scheduled classes, which jumped from 20.9% in 2018 to 33.6% in 2021, when many students participated in school from home. Unfortunately, 34.1% missed scheduled classes in 2024, staying at 2021 levels and mirroring statewide and national data.

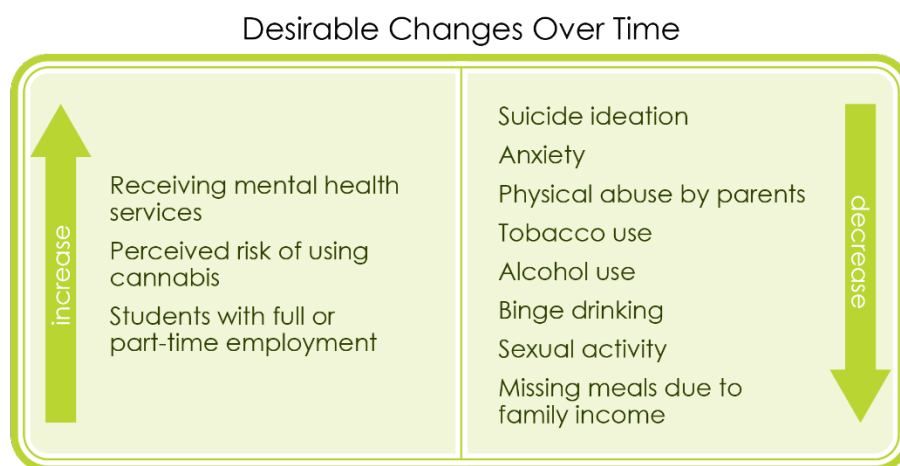
Improvement in Mental Health Indicators

Indicators of anxiety, depression, and suicide ideation have been on a steady rise since 2009. In 2024, each of these mental health indicators declined to at or near 2015 levels, with fewer students expressing symptoms of anxiety or depression, and fewer students reporting suicide ideation.

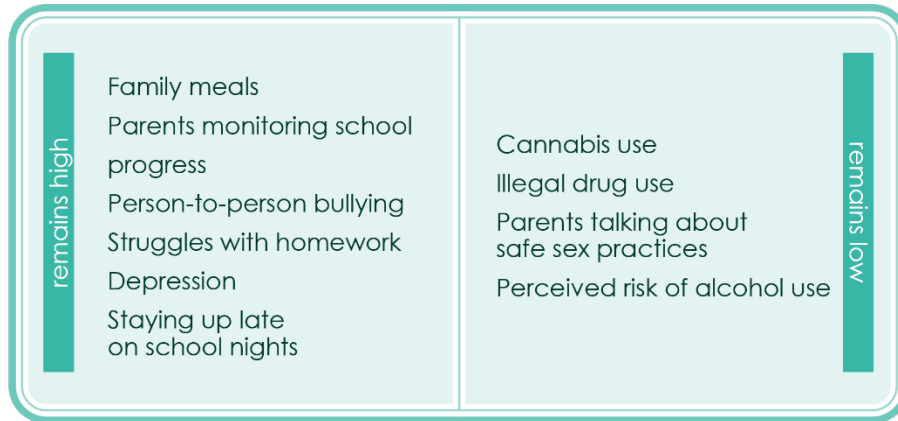
Unfortunately, anxiety and depression still affect females, LGBTQ+, and lower income students at disproportionately higher rates. Although, the indicators for these groups of students declined from 2021 to 2024 as well.

Notable Long-Term Trends

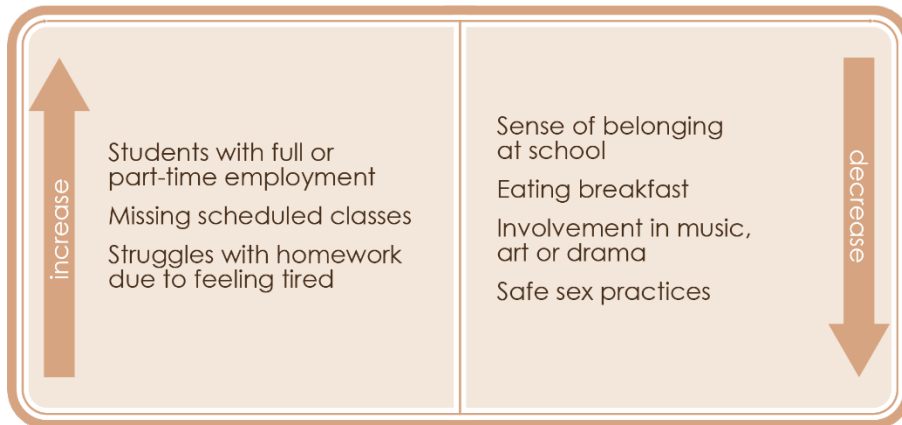
Of the factors examined for this overview report, those that are the same or comparable in 2012, 2015, 2018, 2021 and 2024 DCYA questions were examined. Three or more of the same data points from the 2015, 2018, 2021 and 2024 DCYA surveys reflect a desirable or undesirable pattern or trend overtime.



No Change Over Time



Undesirable Changes Over Time



Data Analysis and Reports

The DCYA is a behavioral risk survey that uses self-report methodology. This methodology is widely used and has proven to be valid and reliable. The validity of the assessment is supported by the large survey population, the fact that results are in-line with national trends, and the consistency of the findings over time. While the survey is available at school district offices for public review prior to its administration, distribution is restricted until after it is administered in order to preserve the integrity of student responses. As mentioned above, this report provides an overview of survey findings.

This overview report is not exhaustive, rather we have tried to highlight topics we think are of interest to the broadest range of community stakeholders. We made efforts to highlight noticeable differences in answers among different demographic groups, however this report is not reflective of a complete, in-depth demographic analysis of each question. Therefore, if differences between demographic groups are not highlighted in a certain section of this report, that does not necessarily mean there were none. We invite and encourage researchers, stakeholders, and community actors to do their own analysis of the data. Additionally, the survey taken by high school youth (9th-12th grade) has more items than that taken by middle school youth (7th and 8th grade), as some of the sections are less relevant or irrelevant for middle schoolers.

Ongoing analyses by research partners will yield additional information about Dane County youth including national and state comparisons, trends over time, and factors influencing youth behavior. These reports will be posted on the Youth Commission website as they become available.

For the full results of the current and past Dane County Youth Assessments, as well as further demographic analyses, please go to: <https://danecountyhumanservices.org/About-Us/Commissions-Boards-and-Committees/Youth-Commission/Youth-Assessment>

Acknowledging Inequities

Throughout the 2024 Dane County Youth Assessment, as in previous years, differences in health and other outcomes exist between various groups of students. While it is important to look at the aggregate data, it is equally important to recognize that the aggregate data can sometimes hide or minimize important differences between subgroups. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services defines these ongoing health inequities as health differences “closely linked with social, economic, and/or environmental disadvantage [which] adversely

affect groups of people who have systematically experienced greater obstacles to health based on...characteristics historically linked to discrimination or exclusion.”

The following groups are more likely to experience these disparities:

- Girls and women
- Transgender, nonbinary and other gender non-conforming individuals
- Lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals
- Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC)
- Individuals with lower socioeconomic status
- People with disabilities

Report Availability, Usage, and Citation

This report and future analysis reports are posted on the Dane County Youth Commission website:

<https://www.dcdhs.com/About-Us/Commissions-Boards-and-Committees/Youth-Commission/Youth-Assessment>

This report may be reproduced or shared without permission. Citation for any reporting of data from the Dane County Youth Assessment: 2024 Dane County Youth Assessment, Dane County Youth Commission, Madison, Wisconsin. The Dane County Youth Commission is interested to know how community organizations make use of this data and it requests that reports using this data be shared with the Commission and the community.

2024 Survey Results

Student Demographics

In the 2024 Dane Youth Assessment 24,471 7th-12th grade students participated. The demographic characteristics of those students are presented in the tables below. The percentages are the percent of all students who took the survey.

Grade	Number	Percent
7	4,494	18.5
8	4,458	18.3
9	4,506	18.5
10	4,215	17.3
11	3,689	15.2
12	2,986	12.3

Age	Number	Percent
12 or under	2,259	9.8
13	4,559	19.8
14	4,487	19.5
15	4,406	19.2
16	3,963	17.2
17	3,326	14.5
18	1,444	9.8

Race	Number	Percent
Asian	1,541	6.5
American Indian or Alaskan Native	171	0.7
Black or African American (not Hispanic)	1,427	6.0
Hispanic or Latinx	2,538	10.7
Middle Eastern or North African	174	0.7
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	39	0.2
White (not Hispanic)	15,751	66.7
Multiracial (more than one race)	1,980	8.4

Age	Number	Percent
Female	12,061	50.1
Male	11,197	46.5
Gender Queer/Gender Expansive	455	1.9
Gender fluid	352	1.5
Other	296	1.2

Transgender	Number	Percent
Yes	741	3.0
No	23,346	95.5
Not Sure	255	1.0

Sexual Orientation	Number	Percent
Straight/Heterosexual	19,835	80.0
Gay or Lesbian	799	3.5
Bisexual	2,429	8.1
Pansexual	709	3.0
Asexual	336	1.6
Questioning	1,524	3.9

Notes on Demographics

Asking youth to self-identify using the above demographic categories is important because we see noteworthy differences across groups of students based on age, grade, race, sexual orientation, and gender identity. While differences across age and grade are most likely due to developmental processes, differences across race, sexual orientation, and gender identity are more likely due to systemic inequities that more negatively impact some groups compared to others. By disaggregating data across demographic groups, we can identify which groups are most impacted by negative experiences and outcomes. We can also use this data to more equitably allocate resources as well as better tailor prevention and intervention approaches to the specific groups who will most benefit from them.

Key differences identified across demographic groups will be highlighted in this report. For a full break out of results along each individual category of race, sexual orientation, and gender identity, please refer to the 2024 DCYA Demographic sub-reports that will be published at: <https://www.dcdhs.com/About-Us/Commissions-Boards-and-Committees/Youth-Commission/Youth-Assessment>

Race

The racial breakdown of the youth that completed the 2024 DCYA is almost identical to the racial breakdown of high school students in Dane County in 2024 provided by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI). This suggests that we have accurately captured the experiences of youth across different racial categories, who regularly attend school, in our survey. However, there are some differences in the racial demographics from the last round of the DCYA in 2021. Most notably, this year the number of respondents identifying as white is about 2.6% higher than in 2021, while the number of respondents identifying as Black or African American is down by 2.6%, and the number

identifying as Hispanic or Latinx is down 2.2%. We cannot be sure what accounts for these changes and will continue to watch for any patterns in demographic shifts in future years.

Sexual Orientation & Gender Identity (SOGI)

Terminology around SOGI is rapidly changing and there is no consensus on which categories to use or how to break them out. The categories above were chosen for inclusion on the 2024 survey based on input from a broad range of school and community partners as well as a countywide youth advisory group. For future surveys we will continue to evaluate, based on emerging best practices as well as community input, how to break out SOGI categories in order to be maximally inclusive.

Sexual Orientation

In the 2024 DCYA respondents chose their sexual orientation from six possible options: Straight/Heterosexual, Gay or Lesbian, Bisexual, Pansexual, Asexual, or Other. In this report, when presenting results by demographic categories, we break sexuality into two categories: heterosexual/straight and LGBTQ+. LGBTQ+ stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, and all other. For purposes of this report LGBTQ+ includes respondents who identified as gay or lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, asexual, or other on the question about sexual orientation in the demographic section of this survey. We group these into one category in this report for two important reasons. First, we consistently see that the experiences of these groups of youth (gay or lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, asexual, or other) are very similar to each other and distinct from youth who identify as straight/heterosexual. Second, by combining these groups into one, we can talk about larger numbers of youth, which makes us more confident in the results.

Gender Identity

In the 2024 DCYA respondents were given five options for gender identity: Female, Male, Genderqueer/Gender expansive, Gender fluid, and other. In this report, when presenting results by demographic categories, gender is broken out in three categories: Male, Female, and Gender expansive. Gender expansive includes respondents who identified as genderqueer/gender expansive, gender fluid, and other in the demographic section of this survey. We group these categories together for the same reasons we did so with sexual orientation—because we consistently find similarities in their responses and because combining groups

allows us to speak about larger numbers of youth, increasing confidence in the results.

Transgender Identity

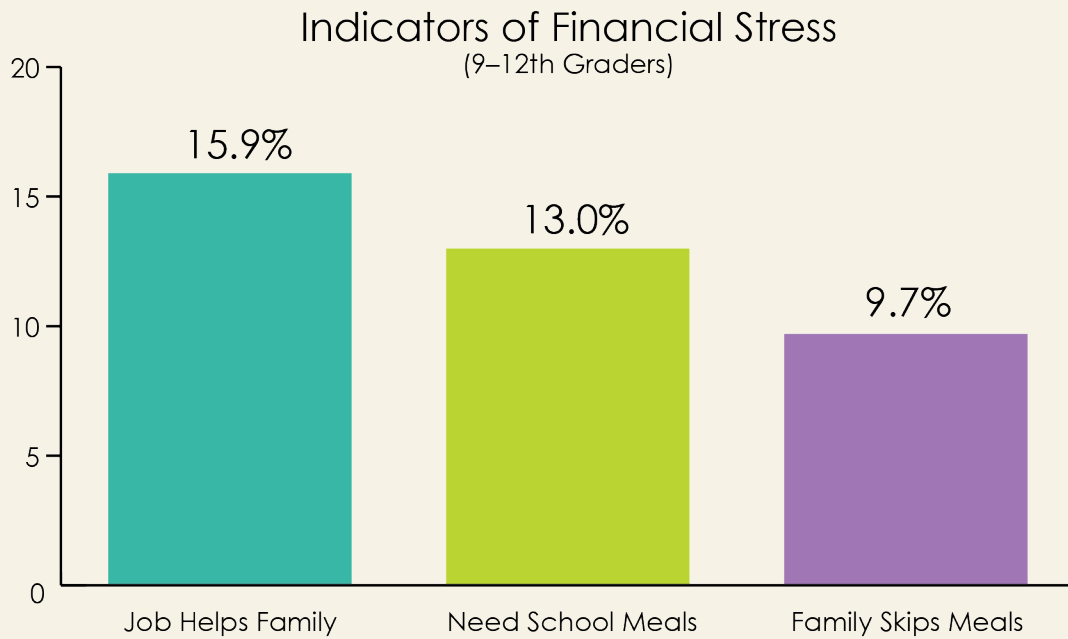
We ask about transgender identity in an additional question and it is reported on separately. The response options for this question include Yes, No, and Not Sure. For the same reasons that we combined groups based on sexual orientation and gender identity, for the purposes of this report, students who responded yes and not sure to this question are grouped together as transgender. These two groups of students had similar responses that differed from the group of students who responded no to this question, and by combining these two groups, we have a larger number of youth and more confidence in the results.

Family and Home

Youth were asked questions about family economic conditions as well as a range of family and parental risk and protective factors. Risk and protective factors are characteristics that can have a significant impact on mental, physical, and behavioral well-being. Risk factors increase the likelihood of negative life outcomes, while protective factors reduce the impact of risk factors and the likelihood of negative life outcomes.

Poverty, Food Insecurity, and Homelessness

- 9.7% of all 9th-12th graders report skipping meals or eating less at least once in the past 30 days because their family did not have enough money for food. Youth reported 8.4% in 2021, 12.0% in 2018 and 12.1% in 2015.
- 20.8% of all 7th-12th graders said they are eligible for free or reduced school lunch, a federal food subsidy for lower income families, compared to 20.3% in 2021, 20.8% in 2018 and 21.4% in 2015.
- 3.4% of all 7th-12th graders report being homeless in the last 12 months. For just 7th-8th graders, 5.4% report being homeless in the last 12 months.
- Of working high school students, 35.6% of Latinx, 30.1% of Black/African-American and 10.0% of White youth report using some or all of their income to support their family.



Immigration

- 5.8% of 9th-12th graders said they or a family member were recent immigrants to the U.S. Another 3.5% said they weren't sure. In 2021, 3.5% said they were recent immigrants and 3.2% weren't sure.
- 88.8% of students from recent immigrant families said they felt supported by their school.
- Students were asked about problems they faced as a result of them or someone in their family being perceived as an immigrant. The things they or their family worried about the most were relatives not in the U.S. (35.4% often or always) and issues with language barriers (27.3% often or always).

Parents and Caregivers

- 86.9% of high school and 88.0% of middle school students say their parents often or always monitor their school progress.
- 92.6% of high school and 96.7% of middle school students say their parents often or always know where they are when they go out.
- 68.0% of high school students say their parents talk with them about healthy dating relationships but only 43.2% say they talk with them about safe sex practices.
- 21.8% of high school youth report having at least one of the following

happening in their home: parents abuse alcohol or drugs; a parent has been in jail; parents who physically fight; or a parent with a mental health problem that worries them. This is similar to 2021 at 20.7%.

Other Supportive Adults

A network of supportive adults is a key protective factor for youth. Students in 7th-8th grade and students in 9th-12th grade were asked how many adults in their lives (not counting their parents) they could go to if they had a problem or needed help.

- 79.3.7% of 9th-12th graders said they had 2 or more adults they could rely on. 44.3% had 4 or more adults they could rely on.
- Similarly, 80.3% of 7th-8th graders said they had 2 or more adults they could rely on. 48.4% had 4 or more adults they could rely on.
- 9th-12th grade students with 4 or more adults they can rely on said they struggle less with homework (44.7% compared 52.8%) and have lower levels of anxiety (25.0% compared to 34.0%).

Physical Health

Youth were asked questions about physical health, including nutrition, exercise, and sleep.

Nutrition

- 95.6% of high school students say they have at least 2 servings of fruits and vegetables each day and 15.8% say they have at least 5 servings per day. The results for middle school students were slightly higher at 96.1% having at least 2 servings per day and 21.1% having fruits and vegetables 5 or more times per day.
- 48.7% of high school students had 5 or more evening meals with their families each week, which is lower than the 54.8% in 2021 during COVID-19, but about the same as 2018 at 47.3%.
- The percentage of 9th-12th graders having breakfast every day had steadily increased from 2009 to 2018 to 40.9%. In 2021, during the COVID-19 pandemic, this percentage decreased to 34.7%, and decreased further in 2024 to 32.5%.

Students Who Report Eating Breakfast Every Day Decreased Again in 2024 (9–12th graders)



Exercise

- 94.6% of high school students report being physically active for 60 minutes at least one or more days per week, slightly higher than 2021 at 88.2% and 2018 at 91.2%.
- However, 25.9% of high school youth are active 1-2 times per week or less.
- 44.6% are active 5 days or more, and most of those students (79.5%) participate in sports.

Sleep

The National Sleep Foundation states that nine or more hours of sleep a night is optimal for healthy adolescent development. Less than eight hours of sleep a night is considered insufficient and associated with learning and discipline problems, risk behaviors, and health problems including obesity, depression, substance use, accidents, and infections. After years of more and more youth staying up past 11pm, 2024 saw a slight decline from the highs of 2021, but the 2024 percentage remained about the same as 2018. In 2018, 59.2% of high school students said they were up past 11pm three or more school nights a week. In 2021, during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of youth getting less sleep jumped significantly to 71.5%. Now in 2024, the percentage declined back to 57.7%, similar to the lower but troubling levels of 2018. Youth who expressed they stayed

up past 11pm three or more nights a week, also reported feeling more depressed, struggling more with homework, and skipping class more frequently than their peers.

- 69.6% of high school students and 41.4% of middle school students say they don't have a regular bedtime in their home.
- In 2024, 36.2% of middle school youth stayed up past 11pm three or more school nights per week, down from 48.8% in 2021 and about the same as 2018 (36.1%).
- In 2024, 57.7% of high school youth stayed up past 11:00 p.m. three or more school nights per week, also down from 71.4% in 2021 and about the same as 2018 (59.3%).
- 30% of high school youth stay up past 11pm every school night, down from 2021 (49.5%) and about the same as 2018 (31.2%).
- 15.7% of middle school youth stay up past 11 pm every school night, down from 2021 (28.8%) and a bit higher than 2018 (14.0%).
- 71.1% of high school students say they struggle with homework because they are too tired, up from 63.3% in 2021.
- Students that report staying up late or sleeping less than nine hours per night four or more school nights are far more likely to say they struggle with homework: 62.5% struggle with homework compared to 42.3% of all other high school youth.

Distractions from Sleep

National data shows that youth ages 11 to 17 who take their computers and other devices to bed with them most nights are 2.5 times more likely to be deprived of sleep during weekdays than teens who do not.

- According to DCYA 2024 data, 57.9% of high school youth say the most common reason they are awake past 11pm is because they are looking at their phone or computer.
- The second most common reason, at 43.5%, is staying up doing homework.
- Other common sleep distractions are watching TV (23.0%), playing video games (22.0%), and worry or anxiety (21.7%).

Mental and Emotional Health

Youth experience emotional and mental health challenges ranging from short-term adjustment issues to long-term mental illness impacting their lives including social interactions and educational achievements. The DCYA asked youth about anxiety, stress, depression, self-harm, and suicidal thoughts and attempts. High school youth were also asked about long-term mental health disorders.

Overview: Diagnosed with a mental health issue*

Disorder	Female	Male	Gender Dxpansive	All High School Youth
Depression	21.5%	9.7%	47.8%	16.8%
Anxiety	33.5%	13.5%	55.5%	24.6%
Eating Disorder	7.3%	1.9%	12.9%	4.8%

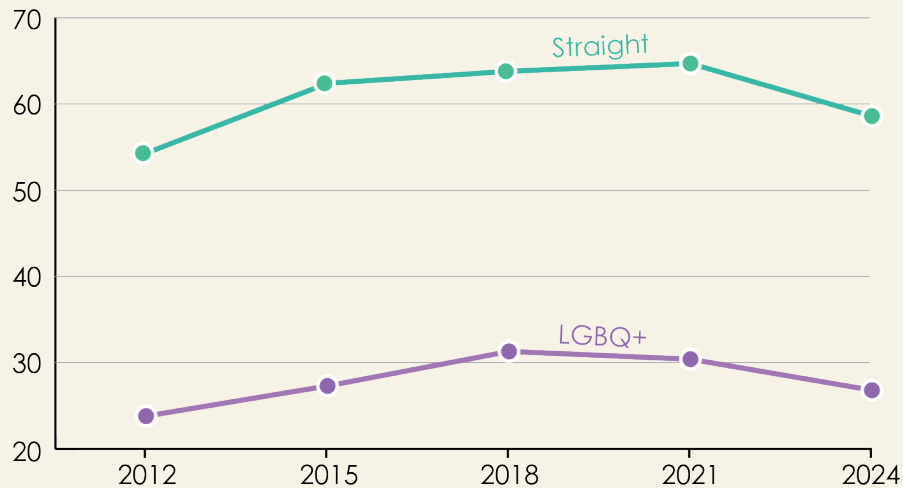
*This chart indicates responses given by high school students to the following question:
Have you been diagnosed by a professional with any of the following emotional or mental health issues?
In previous versions of the DCYA this question was worded differently,
asking youth if they had a “long-term” mental health issue.*

Anxiety

Questions asked from the Generalized Anxiety Disorder scale include how often youth “felt nervous, anxious or on edge,” “not been able to stop or control worrying,” and “felt problems were piling up so high that you could not handle them.”

- 43.8% of high school females and 21.3% of high school males report having these feelings of anxiety often or always. Anxiety among females is down from 2021 (53.8%), after of 15 years of increases. Anxiety among males in nearly the same as 2021 (23.4%).
- For gender expansive students, anxiety levels remain very high but slightly lower for 2024 (70.5%) compared to 2021 (75.9%).
- 36.6% of BIPOC high school youth report anxiety always or often, compared to all other students at 34.0%. This rises to 45.3% for BIPOC females.
- 58.6% of LGBTQ+ youth report feeling anxious “Always or often” compared to 26.8% of youth who identify as straight/heterosexual.
- High school youth whose families are struggling financially are more anxious (69.4%) than students who say money is not a problem for their family right now (27.1%).

High Numbers of LGBTQ+ Students Report Feeling Anxious Often or Always (9–12th graders)



Reasons for Anxiety

Students were asked to identify the three main reasons for feeling anxious.

Reasons for Feeling Anxious	Percentage of high school students selecting this reasons
Too much homework	45.2%
Pressure to perform in school (hard classes, getting good grades)	41.6%
Social pressures to be popular and look good	19.1%
Pressure to have money, have things (phone, clothes, car)	16.5%
Social media	13.7%
Home life or family problems	13.5%

Depression

Loss of interest in activities and prolonged feelings of sadness and hopelessness suggest clinical depression. Youth were asked, “During the past 12 months, did you ever feel so sad or hopeless almost every day for at least two weeks in a row that you stopped doing some usual activities?”

We have been seeing an increase in this overtime. In 2024 we added additional questions about depression (the PHQ-2), as noted in the introduction section of this report. Although student-reported depression is down from the COVID-19 year of 2021 it is similar to the troubling levels seen in 2018.

- 24.6% of all 7th-12th grade youth responded affirmatively to this question compared to 29.2% in 2021. This is the first decrease in reported depression since 2012 but is still slightly above the level of 2018 (23.5%).
- 34.3% of high school female youth report depressive symptoms, down from 2021 (44.0%) and about the same as 2018 (34.2%). Current levels are still higher than 2015 (30.3%).
- For gender expansive students, depression was 60.4% in 2024, much higher than males (17.8%) and females (34.3%).
- 46.6% of high school youth who identify as LGBTQ+ responded affirmatively compared to 19.5% of youth who identify as straight or heterosexual.
- Youth whose families are struggling financially report more depression (69.2%) than students who say money is not a problem for their family right now (16.8%).
- Levels of depression are lower for White students (23.0%) compared to other racial groups: African American at 34.2%; Hispanic at 33.2%; and Multi-racial at 32.6%.
- According to the Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-2) two-item depression scale (added in 2024), 16.4% of high school youth in Dane County are at risk of a major depressive disorder. This percentage is higher for students who might be struggling financially (on free or reduced lunch) at 22.8%.

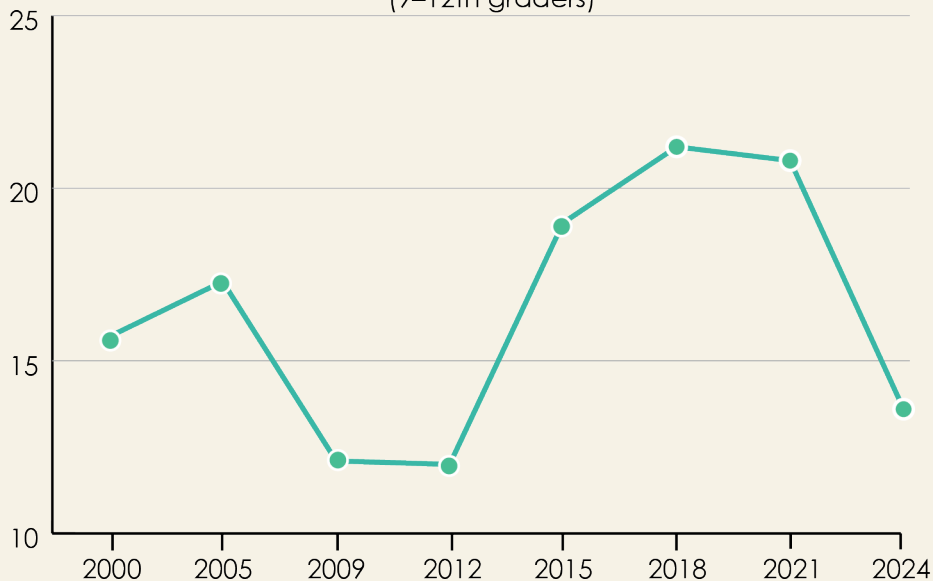
Suicidal Thoughts and Suicide Attempts

Youth were asked, “During the past 30 days, have you thought seriously about killing yourself?” and “During the past 12 months, have you attempted to kill yourself?”

- 13.6% of all 7th-12th grade youth report having suicidal thoughts (ideation) during the past 12 months. This is lower than previous years: 2021 was 20.2%; 2018 was 20.7%; and 2015 was 18.7%. 2012 was even lower than 2024 at 12.3%.
- Lower income high school youth report a higher rate of suicidal thoughts (37.9%) than their more affluent peers (9.9%).

- 9.1% of high school youth who identify as straight/heterosexual report they have thought seriously about killing themselves in the past 12 months compared to 30.3% of youth who have thought about killing themselves that identify as LGBTQ+.
- 14.9% of high school students have access to a gun, and 25.6% of high school males with some suicide ideation have access to a gun.
- 3.6% of middle and high school youth report that they have attempted suicide in the past 12 months compared to 3.8% in 2021 and 5.0% and 5.8% in 2018 and 2015, respectively.

Students Reporting Suicide Ideation
(9–12th graders)



Self-Harm

Youth were asked if they had intentionally hurt themselves, such as cutting or burning, in the past 12 months.

- 16.6% of 9th-12th and 17.0% of 7th-8th grade youth report they had intentionally harmed themselves in the past 12 months compared to 17.2% and 17.7% respectively in 2021.
- Among high school youth, 89.5% of males, 80.6% of females, and 42.9% of youth who identify as gender expansive report they have “Never” engaged in self-harming behavior.

Receiving Mental Health Services

- 19.1% of all high school youth report they are receiving mental health services. Nearly identical to 20.6% in 2021.
- 94.2% of high school students who say they are getting mental health services are receiving services outside of school. 20.3% of those students also say they are receiving services in school.
- 60.4% of high school students receiving mental health services are female, 30.0% are male.
- 50.1% of White students who are depressed are receiving mental health services. Only 28% of students of color who are depressed are receiving mental health services.
- 55.2% of gender expansive youth with depression are receiving mental health services, compared to males (21.8%) and females (39.0%).
- 13% of straight/heterosexual students are receiving mental health services compared to LGBTQ+ students at 39.1%.
- 65.2% of high school students who report feeling anxious often or always are not receiving mental health services.
- 61.8% of high school students who are at high risk of depressive disorder (based on the PHQ-2 scale mentioned above) are not receiving mental health services.

Loneliness

Feelings of loneliness in adolescents have been increasing over the past few years. A study in the Journal of Adolescence found that a sense of loneliness among teens rose sharply from 2012 to 2018 in 36 of 37 countries studied. Loneliness can have long-term negative impacts on physical and mental health, education outcomes, and employability. Loneliness is also highly correlated with depression and social isolation. The 2024 DCYA included the three-item UCLA Loneliness scale, considered the standard for measuring loneliness.

- 58% of high school youth said they were lonely sometimes to always.
- 63.5% of females are lonely compared to males at 50.2%. 85.8% of gender expansive youth said they felt lonely.
- Youth who say they are in bed before 11pm every school night are the least lonely (45.9%) and youth up past 11pm four to five school nights are the most lonely (63.4%).
- Youth who report the highest levels of anxiety (often/always) are far lonelier than students who report little or no anxiety (86.2% compared to 32.7%).

Problematic Internet Use

The three item Problematic Internet Use Scale (Priuss 3) was used on the 2024 DCYA. This scale uses three questions which ask how often youth a) lose motivation to do other things that need to get done because of the internet b) experience increased social anxiety due to internet use c) feel anxious because they are away from the internet.

- 51.9% of high school age youth say they sometimes to very often lose motivation to do other things that need to be done because of the internet.
- The most anxious students (often/always) are more likely to lose motivation due to the internet (70.4%) than students who report no anxiety (34.4%).
- An incredible 89.7% of the loneliest youth (often/very often feel lonely) say they lose motivation due to the internet.

Optimism About Themselves

In 2024 the DCYA added a six-item personal optimism scale that asks students about how they feel about their problem-solving skills, their ability to shape the future and how they compare to others. Optimism is linked to better physical and mental health outcomes, while the lack of optimism can negatively impact mental health and contribute to or worsen conditions like depression and anxiety.

- Most youth were optimistic about themselves (68.6%).
- Youth most likely to feel optimism were males (52.3%) compared to female (45.6%) and compared to gender expansive youth (39.9%).
- More optimistic youth struggled less with homework (43.8%) versus all other students (52.8%). They also report less anxiety compared to all other students (25.1% to 34.0%).
- Youth with lower optimism about themselves had weaker relationships with school and their parents. 49.3% said they felt connected to their school compared to all other students at 65.1%. And 38.1% of students with lower optimism said their parents talked with them about things that bothered them compared to 57.7% for all other students.

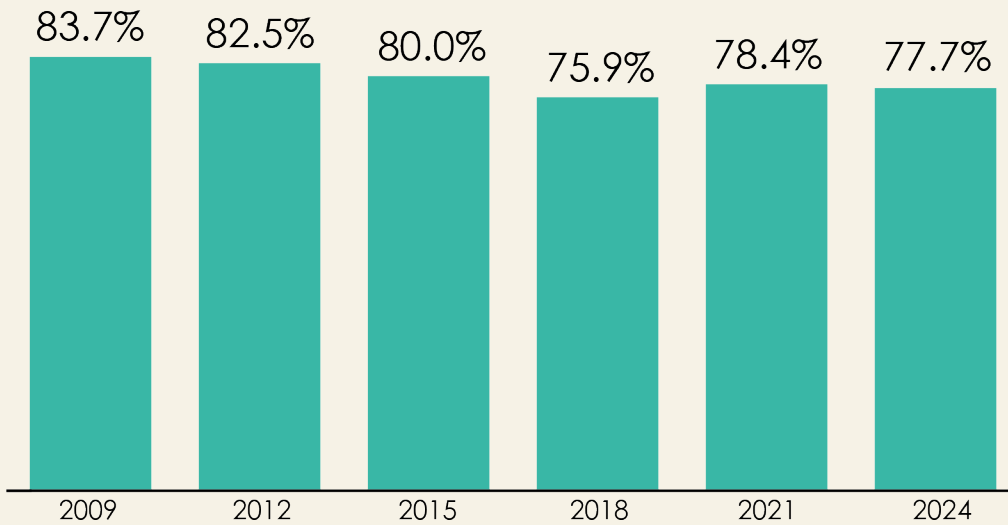
School Experience

Youth were asked about their school engagement, grades, aspirations, and experiences.

School Connection and Attitudes about Education

- 77.7% of all 7th-12th grade youth “Agree” when asked if they feel like they *belong* at their school, which is about the same 2021 (78.4%) and 2018 (75.9%).
- Asian high school students feel the strongest sense of belonging to school (84.8%). White students are next at 79.7%, followed by Hispanic at 74.8%. Black/African American and multi-racial students feel the lowest sense of belonging at 66.3% and 69.3% respectively.
- 64.6% of LGBTQ+ high school youth feel like they belong at school which is similar to past years: 63.8% in 2021 and 63.5% in 2018.
- 79.6% of all 7th-12th grade youth “Agree” when asked if they had adults at school they could talk to if they have a problem. These percentages are similar to 2021 at 79.4% and 2018 at 78.1%.
- 62.5% of 9th-12th grade Black/African-American students “Agree” that they feel close to people at their school, up from 51.8% in 2021 during COVID-19.

Students who agree with the statement
"I feel like I belong at this school."
 (7-12th Graders)



Homework

- 52.8% high school students and 44.7% of middle school students “Agree” that they struggle getting homework done. This is the same as 2021 at 53.8% and 44.0% respectively.
- Struggles with homework vary by race. 49.4% of White, 62.0% of Black/African American, 66.5% of Latinx, and 51.6% of Asian high school youth “Agree” that they struggle getting homework done.
- The main reason high school students say they struggle with homework is because they are too tired (71.2%), too much homework (61.6%), or too many other responsibilities (57.5%). These reasons are consistent across race and sexual orientation.

Missing Scheduled Classes

The percent of students missing scheduled classes increased during COVID-19 and has stayed higher in 2024.

- 34.1% of high school youth reported they had skipped or missed scheduled class at least once in the past 30 days. This is slightly higher than 33.6% during COVID-19 in 2021 and much higher than 2018 at 20.9%.
- Students who miss classes are more likely to be Hispanic (52.0% miss classes) or Black/African American (50.8% miss classes) and say their family financial situation is not secure (25% on free and reduced lunch).

Out-of-School Time

The DCYA provides a snapshot of how youth spend their time outside of the school day, including activities that develop their skills and connection to community.

Jobs and Volunteer Work

- 60.1% of all 9th-12th grade youth have done some volunteer work in the past 12 months. This is more than 2021 (53.3%) but lower compared to 82.6 % in the non-pandemic year of 2018.
- 52.7% of high school youth report regular or occasional work (e.g., babysitting or lawn work).
- 57.1% of high school females and 46.7% of high school males are employed.
- High school youth looking for work but unable to find employment had been declining since 2009 but increased to 21.4% in 2021 and has stayed

higher in 2024 (20.4%).

- 33.5% of Black/African-American and 32.0% of Hispanic high school youth are looking for a job but cannot find one in 2024 compared to White students at 16.9%.

High School Students Reporting Full or Part-time Employment

Group	2009	2012	2015	2018	2021	2024
Females	34.3%	28.4%	32.8%	35.4%	35.4%	41.2%
Males	31.0%	26.6%	30.2%	34.9%	34.9%	36.3%
All High School Students	32.6%	27.6%	31.5%	35.1%	35.1%	38.7%

Extracurricular Activities

Youth were asked about frequency of participation in extracurricular activities (dance, drama, music, sports, and afterschool programs) and in team sports (lessons, practice, or games).

- 84.9% high school youth are involved in some sort of extracurricular activities each week, with 44.0% involved 3 or more days per week.
- 62.3% of high school students participating in extracurricular activities 3 days or more each week are involved in sports.
- 33.0% of high school youth were involved in music, art or drama, down from 40.5% in 2021.
- 75.8% of middle school youth participate in some after school activity. 65.4% are involved in sports, a higher percentage than 2021 (58.4%).

Social Involvement

In the 2024 DCYA we asked 9th-12th grade students about community involvement or engagement or if they had any conversations about racial issues in school or the larger community. These questions were added to the DCYA in 2021 in light of the large increase in social activism, particularly around race, that began during that time. These questions give us

more information about youth’s level of knowledge and engagement in these movements and in their communities.

- 23.2% of all students have been involved in social activism, like marches or protests, similar to 2021 (25.0%).
- 66.0% say they think their opinion makes a difference, fewer than in 2021 at 74.0%.
- 15.7% of students said they have talked about racial inequality a lot with friends and family. 46.7% said they talked about racial inequality a few times. 37.7% said they never really talked about it.
- The percentages are nearly the same for students of color: 17.2% have talked about it a lot; 46.9% a few times; and never talked about it 35.8%.
- How much youth talk about racial inequality varies depending on the rural or urban location of the school. 9.0% of students in rural schools said they talked about racial inequality a lot and 21.7% of urban students said they talked about it a lot.

Bullying

Bullying is recognized as a widespread problem and research points to serious implications for youth who are victimized as well as for those who engage in bullying behavior. Bullies are at higher risk for anger, aggression, hyperactivity, and delinquency. Being victimized by peers has been linked to illnesses, school avoidance, poor academic performance, increased fear and anxiety, suicidal thoughts, and long-term internalizing difficulties including low self-esteem, anxiety, and depression.

- 48% of 7th-8th grade students and 28.9% of high school students reported being the target of some face-to-face bullying in 2024. These numbers are similar to the pre-COVID-19 2018 percentages of 48.9 for middle school and 35.7 for high school. (Reports of face-to-face bullying decreased precipitously in 2021, largely because students weren’t face-to-face with each other nearly as often as usual in 2021, the height of the COVID pandemic.)
- 67.8% of middle school youth say they have witnessed bullying in their school. 55.6% of high school youth say they have witnessed bullying.
- 21.0% of 7th-8th grade youth said they were bullied or harassed electronically, slightly lower than 2021 (23.6%) and about the same as 2018 (19.3%).
- High school students reported lower levels of electronic bullying and harassment in 2024 (17.3%) after nearly identical percentages in 2018 (20.2) and 2021 (20.8).
- 22.3% of high school females report receiving unwanted sexual comments. This is identical to 2021 at 22.0%.

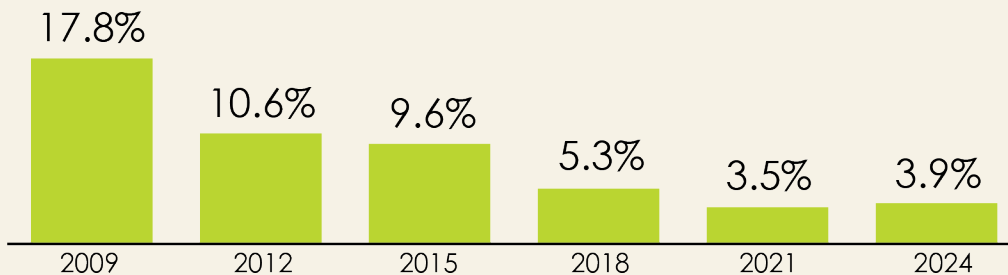
- 30.4% of LGBTQ+ high school students say they have been harassed about their sexual orientation or gender identity.
- 47.5% of gender expansive students say they have been harassed about their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Experiences of Violence

Family Violence

- 3.9% of all 9th-12th grade youth report they have been hit by a parent, leaving signs of injury.
- 28.7% of high school youth who have been physically abused by their parents have run away from home, compared to 5.6% all high school youth who have run away from home.
- 47.4% of physically abused high school youth have had some suicidal ideation compared to 13.9% suicidal ideation reported by all high school youth.

Students Report Decreasing Levels of Physical Abuse by Parents Over the Past 15 Years (9–12th Graders)



Dating Violence

- 59.1% of high school youth say they have dated or “gone out” with someone in the last 12 months, significantly higher than 2021 (44.5%).
- 4.1% of high school students *who have dated* report being physically abused by their partner, the same percentage as 2021 (4.2%).
- 3.4% of high school youth *who have dated* report that a partner forced them to have sexual contact.

- 8.2% of high school youth who are dating report that their partner put them down, calling them names, telling them no one wanted them, or they were ugly. 63.1% of these students are female.

Sexual Assault

- 6.9% of all 9th-12th grade youth report they have been forced, either verbally or physically, to take part in a sexual activity at least once in their lifetime. It rises to 9.4% for all high school females. And rises sharply to 23.0% for youth who identify as gender expansive.
- 15.8% of high school youth who identify as LGBTQ+ report that they have been physically or verbally forced to participate in sexual activity in their lifetime.
- The majority of high school youth (65.2%) who have been forced to participate in sexual activity are female.
- 12.6% of high school girls say they have been encouraged or pressured to be part of sexually explicit photos or videos. That’s down from 17.6% in 2021.

Tobacco, Alcohol, and Drug Use

Tobacco Use

The health, social, and financial consequences of nicotine and tobacco use are well known. Nearly all use begins in adolescence. If young people can remain free of tobacco and nicotine until age 18, most will never start to smoke. Tobacco use is considered a “gateway drug” because its use generally precedes and increases the risk of other drug use. The survey asks youth about cigarette and tobacco use.

- Less than 2.5% of high school youth report smoking a cigarette in the last 30 days compared to 1.5% in COVID-19 2021 and 3.0% in 2018 and 7.0% in 2015.
- 86.2% of high school youth think tobacco is risky substance to use.

Vaping

- 16.3% of high school youth have used some kind of vaping device in the last 12 months. The percentage rises to 23.9 for high school seniors.
- 13.7% of high school students say they have been vaping nicotine in the last 12 months.
- 12.1% of high school youth have been vaping THC in the last 12 months.
- 25.7% of 9th-12th graders report there is a “Slight to no risk” to e-cigarette use daily compared to 55.4% in 2018.

- 7.1% of middle school youth report using some vaping device in the last 12 months, and 26.1% say there is no risk to vaping.

Alcohol, Cannabis, and Drug Use

The potential negative consequences of underage alcohol, cannabis, and other drug use are many. Understanding the patterns and trends of alcohol and drug use by Dane County youth allows parents, schools, and communities to implement effective prevention and intervention strategies.

Alcohol use in the past 12 months is trending down since 2012

- 25.6% of high school youth report drinking alcohol in the past 12 months compared to 22.9% in 2021 (during COVID-19), 30.9% in 2018, 34.8% in 2015 and 43.1% in 2012.
- 39.4% of high school seniors had a drink in the last 12 months compared to 28.2% in 2021 (during COVID-19), 49.2% in 2018 and 71.6% in 2015.
- High school youth who report “Never” drinking: Asian (84.2%), Black/African American (84.5%), Latinx (77.4%), White (77.2%), and multi-race (73.3%).
- 6.8% of middle school students report drinking alcohol in the past 12 months compared to 5.4% in 2021, 7.8% in 2018, 8.1% in 2015 and 12.3% in 2012.
- Youth who consume alcohol are more likely to be female. 51.4% of all high school students who drank alcohol in the last 12 months identify as female, 44.5% identify as male, and 30% identify as gender expansive.

Binge drinking is defined in the survey as “having five or more alcoholic drinks at one time, in a row, within a couple of hours.”

- 6.7% of high school youth report binge drinking in the past 30 days compared to 6.4% in 2021, 10.6% in 2018, 11.1% in 2015, 15.8% in 2012, and 12.6% in 2009.
- 12.3% of high school seniors report binge drinking.
- 48.7% of high school binge drinkers identify as female and 47.5% identify as male.

Cannabis use

- 12.6% of high school youth and 2.3% of middle school youth report using cannabis in the past 12 months, similar to 2021 (HS 14.1% and MS 2.3%) and down from 2018 (HS 21.1% and MS 3.3%).
- 2.9% of high school youth report they used cannabis every day compared to 3.0% in 2021, 5.3% in 2018, 6.7% in 2015 and 8.2% in 2012.

Prescription and non-prescription medications

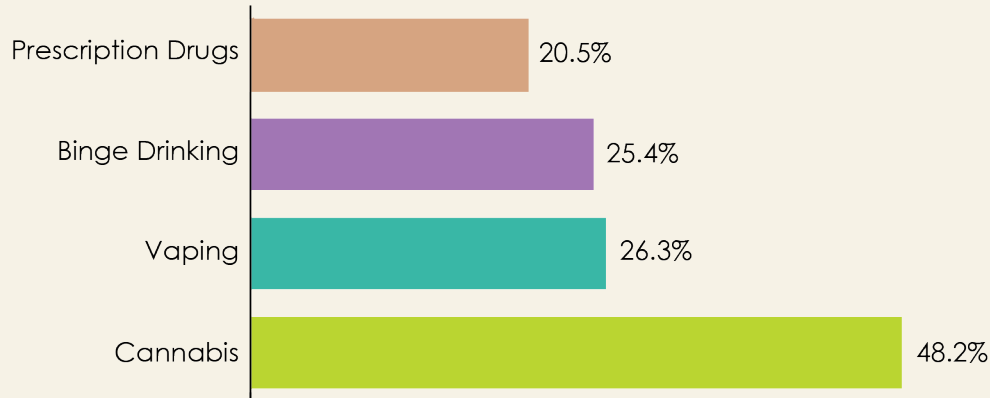
- 69.2% of high school youth with prescription drugs in their home say they can access them easily like in a bathroom cabinet or kitchen counter. This is much higher than 2021 at 56.5% and somewhat higher than 2018 at 60.3%.
- 2.4% of high school youth say they have abused prescription medication in the last 12 months. This is slightly higher than 1.6% in 2021.

Perceived Risk of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Drugs

Youth were asked their perceived risk of using cannabis, nicotine, alcohol, and prescription drugs. They were also asked how wrong their parents and their friends would consider the use of these substances.

- Although the perceived risks of using cannabis stayed low in 2024 (48.2% say slight to no risk), it has improved some from 2021 (55.9% saying slight to no risk) and 2018 (58.1% saying slight to no risk).
- 34.1% of high school youth said their parents would think it was “Very wrong” for them to drink alcohol compared to 70.6% for tobacco use, 76.9% for abuse of prescription drugs, 60.1% for cannabis use, and 73.2% for any vaping.
- 20.8% of high school youth said their friends would think drinking alcohol was “Very wrong” compared to 40.9% for tobacco, 53.8% for prescription drug abuse, and 34.6% for cannabis.
- 60.0% middle school youth said their parents would think it was “Very wrong” for them to drink alcohol compared to 83.3% for tobacco use, 81.9% for abuse of prescription drugs, 81.0% for cannabis use and 85.1% for vaping.
- 53.4% of middle school youth said their friends would think drinking alcohol was “very wrong” compared to 68.0% for tobacco, 69.1% for prescription drug abuse, 68.6% for cannabis and 70.8% for vaping.

Percentage of Students Who Perceive Little or No Risk to Use of Tobacco and Nicotine, Alcohol, and Marijuana (9–12th graders)



Sexual Behaviors

Sexual activity begins during the teen years for many youth. According to the National Institutes of Health, it is estimated that 32% of adolescents have at least one STI. The same sexual behaviors that put teens at risk for infections may also result in unintended pregnancy and other consequences. The 2024 DCYA high school survey included questions related to sexual activity to identify risks that can be prevented or addressed by parents, health care providers, schools, public health and others who work with youth. As noted in the introduction of this report, reported sexual activity was down in 2021 (the height of the pandemic), numbers have increased from 2021, but are still lower than pre-COVID 2018 levels.

- 30.4% of high school youth have engaged in some sexual activity in their lifetime, compared to 28.1% in 2021 and 35.7% in 2018.
- 18.0% of all high school youth said they have voluntarily had sexual intercourse, compared to 15.6% in 2021, 22.6% in 2018, 28.8% in 2015 and 28.1% in 2012.
- Of the high school youth who are sexually active, 54.3% of the lowest income students report having voluntarily had sexual intercourse, compared to 28.2% of the highest income high school cohort.

Sexually active high school youth were asked questions about sexual behaviors that put them at higher risk for sexually transmitted infections and pregnancy:

- 34.6% of sexually active high school youth have had intercourse while under the influence of alcohol, cannabis, or other drugs, compared to 27.1 in 2021 and 33.2% in 2018.
- 27.1% of 9th graders who have had intercourse report they “Never” use birth control compared to 5.5% of 12th graders.
- 67.0% of high school youth who say they are having intercourse “Always” use some form of birth control compared to 67.3% in 2021, 74.3% in 2018, 70.1% in 2015 and 73.7% in 2012.
- 61.8% of Latinx, 65.9% of Asian, 47.0% Black/African American, 64.4% of multi-racial and 71.2% of White youth report “Always” using birth control.

Discussions with Parents

- 68.0% of all 9th-12th grade youth report having “had a good talk with their parents” about healthy dating relationships, 54.3% report having had a conversation about having sex, and 44.8% about preventing pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections.
- 73.3% of high school females say they have had a good conversation with their parents about healthy dating relationships compared to 64.2% of males and 55.6% for gender expansive.

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Additional online resources:

<https://danecountyhumanservices.org/yth/dcyc.aspx>

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<http://performwell.org/index.php/find-surveyassessments/outcomes/health-a-safety/aggression-or-violence-perpetration/illinois-bully-scale--victim-subscale-ibs>

<http://www.transstudent.org/definitions/>

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<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/03/14/u-s-census-looking-at-big-changes-in-how-it-asks-about-race-and-ethnicity/>

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