



# County of Fairfax, Virginia

## MEMORANDUM

**DATE:** September 4, 2024

**TO:** Board of Supervisors  
Fairfax County School Board

**FROM:** Bryan J. Hill  
County Executive  
Michelle Reid  
Superintendent, Fairfax County Public Schools

**SUBJECT:** Results of the School Year 2023-2024 Fairfax County Youth Survey

The School Year 2023-2024 Fairfax County Youth Survey has been successfully completed. Since its inception, the survey has provided insights about the behaviors and attitudes that affect the health and well-being of Fairfax County youth.

A total of 28,545 students in 8<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> grades participated in the survey, representing 66.1% of all 8<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students enrolled in Fairfax County Public Schools (excluding alternative schools). Simultaneously, a total of 11,444 students participated in the 2023 Fairfax County Youth Survey of 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Students, representing 87.4% of all 6<sup>th</sup> grade students enrolled. A total of 39,989 students (71.1%) participated in the Youth Survey this year.

Overall, the percentages of students who reported risky behaviors continued to decrease this year in many areas including substance use, sexual activity, and aggressive and delinquent behavior. Mental health indicators, including feelings of sadness/hopelessness, suicidal ideations, and suicide attempts, also reached their lowest levels in the past decade, following a peak during the pandemic in 2021. Most Fairfax County youth reported no substance use in the past month. Fairfax's rate was also lower than the national average. Most students reported they feel safe at their school. However, the rates of risky behaviors and protective factors varied by demographic factors such as gender, grade, and race/ethnicity.

### Mental Health

- All mental health indicators among 8<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students, including levels of stress, prolonged feelings of sadness or hopelessness, and suicidal ideations and attempts have improved significantly compared to during the pandemic period in 2021. This trend was consistent across all grades, genders, and racial/ethnic groups. The rates of depressive feelings, suicidal ideations, and attempts among 8<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students were the lowest recorded in the past 10 years.
- A fourth of the students in grades 8, 10 and 12 (25.0%) reported feeling so sad or hopeless for two or more weeks in a row in the past year that they stopped doing some usual activities. Over the past decade, the percentage of students experiencing these feelings steadily increased, peaking at 38.1% in 2021. Since then, the rate has trended down, decreasing by 13.1 percentage points from 2021 to 2023.
- Meanwhile, 29.1% of 6<sup>th</sup> grade students reported feeling sad or hopeless every day for two or more weeks in the past year. This rate was higher than that of older students. Although it represents a decrease from the 2021 rate, when 33.1% of 6<sup>th</sup> graders reported such feelings, it remains higher than the pre-pandemic levels.
- Despite the overall decline in rates, the prevalence of mental health concerns varied significantly by demographic factors such as gender, grade, and race/ethnicity.

### Substance Use

- The reported rates of alcohol and substance use among 8<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students were the lowest in the past 10 years for most substances including alcohol, marijuana, synthetic marijuana, smoking cigarettes, smokeless tobacco, vaping<sup>1</sup>, non-medical use of painkillers, non-medical use of other prescription drugs, non-medical over the counter drugs, methamphetamine and heroin.
- Fairfax County youth reported lower rates of use than national averages for most substances assessed on the survey, including LSD or other hallucinogens, ecstasy, and hookah.

### Bullying and Aggression

- About 10% of 8<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students (10.2%) reported having been bullied on school property in the past year. The 2023 rate for having been bullied was up by 1.3 percentage points from the 2021 rate, which was the lowest rate reported since the item was adopted in the survey in 2015.
- Over a quarter of 6<sup>th</sup> grade students (25.3%) reported having been bullied on school property in the past year. The percentage of 6<sup>th</sup> grade students who reported this experience increased by 2.7 percentage points from the previous year and 5.3 percentage points from 2021. This year's rate was the highest since 2015 when the question was modified.

### Physical Health and Nutrition

- More than one third of 8<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students (38.0%) and over four in ten 6<sup>th</sup> grade students (42.6%) reported being physically active for at least one hour per day for five or more days in the past week. These rates have declined gradually in recent years for both younger and older students, reaching the lowest levels in the past 10 years.
- Less than half (45.4%) of 8<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students reported spending three or more hours playing video or computer games or using a computer (including tablets and smartphones) for non-school activities on an average school day.
- Six percent of 8<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students (5.9%) and over eight percent of 6<sup>th</sup> grade students (7.6%) reported going hungry in the past month due to a lack of food in the home.

### Extracurricular Activities and Civic Behaviors

- Over two-fifths of 8<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students (41.5%) reported participating in extracurricular activities at school for at least an hour on an average school day. The 2023 rate has increased from the lowest points in 2021 but have not yet returned to the pre-pandemic levels.
- Two-thirds of 8<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students (65.9%) and 6<sup>th</sup> grade students (67.0%) reported having had an experience of being a leader in a group or organization in the past year. For both older and younger students, Hispanic students were least likely to report such experience, followed by black students. The rate was highest among White students.

### Protective Factors

- Most 8<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students reported feeling safe at their school (82.6%) and having opportunities to talk to their teacher one-on-one (79.6%). Overall, female students reported lower rates than male students on these school-related protective factors.
- Overall, the more protective factors a student had, the less likely the student was to engage in risky behaviors.

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<sup>1</sup> Questions about vaping were added in 2018.

The Fairfax County Youth Survey data support the Three to Succeed campaign: when children and youth have three or more positive, protective factors in their lives, they are more likely to manage stress, make better choices, and develop healthy habits. The data show that providing opportunities to be involved, offering supportive relationships, and recognizing their good work and accomplishments give youth assets to help them make good decisions, become resilient to risky behaviors and develop a healthy mindset. Above all, it is vital for youth to have at least one caring, trusted, and supportive adult relationship in building resiliency, whether they be from their family, school, or community. Learn more about our [Three to Succeed](#) campaign and how you can help on the [Youth Survey website](#).

The enclosed PowerPoint slides include highlights from the 2023-2024 Fairfax County Youth Survey report. The full report is enclosed as well. These documents, along with previous years' results will be available to the public on the county's website ([www.fairfaxcounty.gov/youthsurvey](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/youthsurvey)) beginning September 10. The public will also have access to the [Youth Survey Data Explorer](#), which is an interactive online tool.

For more information about the Fairfax County Youth Survey, please contact Chloe Lee, Department of Management and Budget, at [Kyung.Lee@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Kyung.Lee@fairfaxcounty.gov) or 703-324-7167, or Donna Desaulniers, Department of Special Services, FCPS, at [dmdesaulnier@fcps.edu](mailto:dmdesaulnier@fcps.edu) or 571-423-4265.

Attachments: SY2023-2024 Fairfax County Youth Survey Reports  
PowerPoint of SY2023-2024 Fairfax County Youth Survey Report Highlights

cc: Christina Jackson, Chief Financial Officer, Fairfax County  
Tom Arnold, Deputy County Executive  
Christopher Leonard, Deputy County Executive, Fairfax County  
Ellicia Seard-McCormick, Deputy County Executive, Fairfax County  
Karla Bruce, Chief Equity Officer  
Dr. Gloria Addo-Ayensu, Director, Health Department  
Michael Axler, Director, Intervention and Prevention Services, FCPS  
Michael Becketts, Director, Department of Family Services  
Tony Castrilli, Director, Office of Public Affairs  
Kevin Davis, Chief, Police Department  
Donna Desaulniers, Senior Manager, School Psychology Services, FCPS  
Terri Edmunds-Heard, Assistant Superintendent, Department of Special Services, FCPS  
Philip Hagen, Director, Department of Management and Budget, Fairfax County  
Stacey Kincaid, Sheriff, Sheriff's Office  
Chloe Lee, Principal Data Scientist, Department of Management and Budget, Fairfax County  
Christina Setlow, Clerk of the Fairfax County School Board  
Matt Thompson, Director of the Court Service Unit, JDRDC  
Lloyd Tucker, Director, Neighborhood and Community Services  
Daryl Washington, Executive Director, Fairfax-Falls Church CSB



# 2023-2024 Fairfax County Youth Survey