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Background

REPORT FORMAT

The RYHS is heavily modeled after the national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System that is tailored to meet the needs of the school district. The questionnaire is designed to gather information on the important issues facing youth in the town of Shrewsbury and towns and cities in the Central Massachusetts Regional Public Health Alliance (CMRPHA) district. Topics include substance use, violence and safety, dietary behavior, and sexual health. This is the fourth iteration of the RYHS in Oak Middle (2015, 2017, 2019 and 2021).

METHODS

The RYHS was made possible through partnerships with the Shrewsbury Public Schools, the Worcester Division of Public Health, the UMass Prevention Research Center and the Daniel’s Foundation. The questionnaire was administered electronically via REDCap, a secure web application widely used in research studies. Teachers were given instructions on how to administer the survey and were responsible for answering any questions in the classroom.

VALIDITY

Participation in the survey is voluntary, which research have found increases the likelihood that students respond truthfully. In efforts to further increase validity students were asked how honest they were in taking the survey, at the end of the survey; **99%** of students reported that they were either ‘completely’, ‘very’, or ‘pretty honest’; while **1%** responded that they were not very or at all honest.

Further steps to increase validity include screening individual questionnaires for patterns of frivolous and inconsistent responses and omitting them from the analyses.

TRENDS

It is possible to look at trend comparisons to ascertain whether behaviors among Shrewsbury youth have improved, worsened, or remained the same, over the years. However, some questions may become incomparable to prior years’ creating a break in trend analyses whenever the questionnaire is modified.

ACCOUNTABILITY

It is important to note that the RYHS is designed primarily to assess the risky behaviors of youth, and does not highlight many of the positive aspects of their life. Also very important to note is that, although the surveys are administered in the schools, it should not be interpreted that the schools should be held solely accountable for the behaviors of youth. “Issues such as those addressed in the survey are not school problems; they are

community problems that require the attention of all community members and organizations.”¹ In addition, the majority of questions in the RYHS questionnaire ask about risky behaviors done either in youths’ lifetime or during the past 30 days before taking the survey. **Unless the question specifically states “on school property” it should not be interpreted that these behaviors were conducted on school property.**

Demographic Characteristics

SEX, GRADE, AND RACE/ETHNICITY

A total of 833 students completed the survey in Oak Middle School. There were slightly more male respondents as compared to female respondents (52% vs. 48%, respectively), 49% were in the 7th grade and 51% were in the 8th grade (Figure 2). 44% of students identified as white, 30% identified as Asian/Asian American, 6% identified as Hispanic/Latino/a, 3% as Arab or Middle Eastern, 3% identified as African American/Black, and approximately 9% identified as Multiracial (Figure 3).

Figure 1. Age Distribution of Oak Middle School Participants, 2021

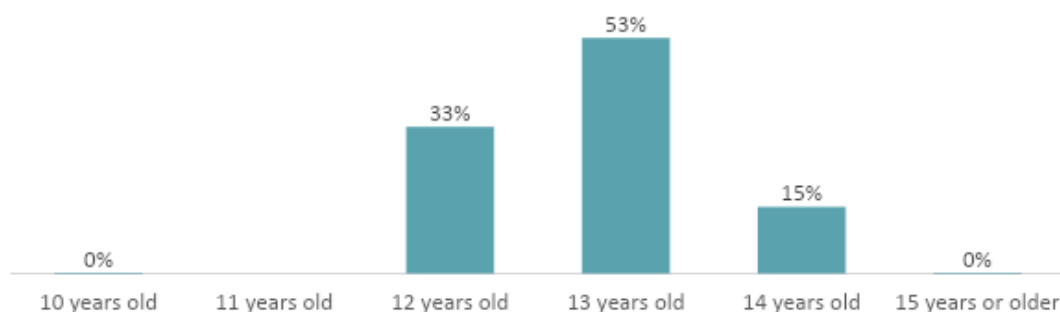
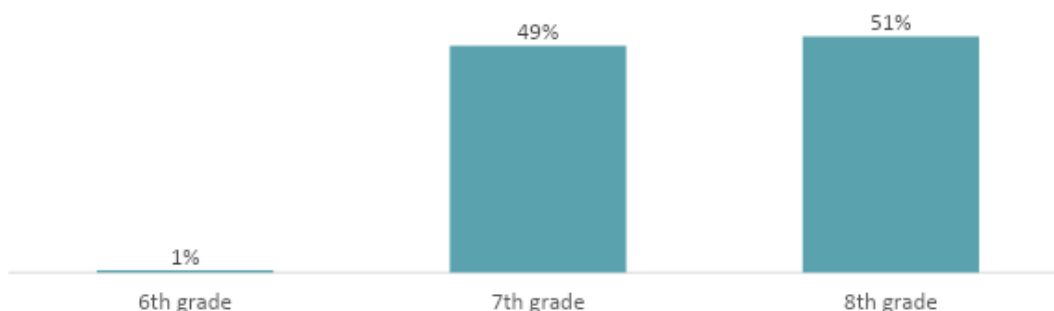
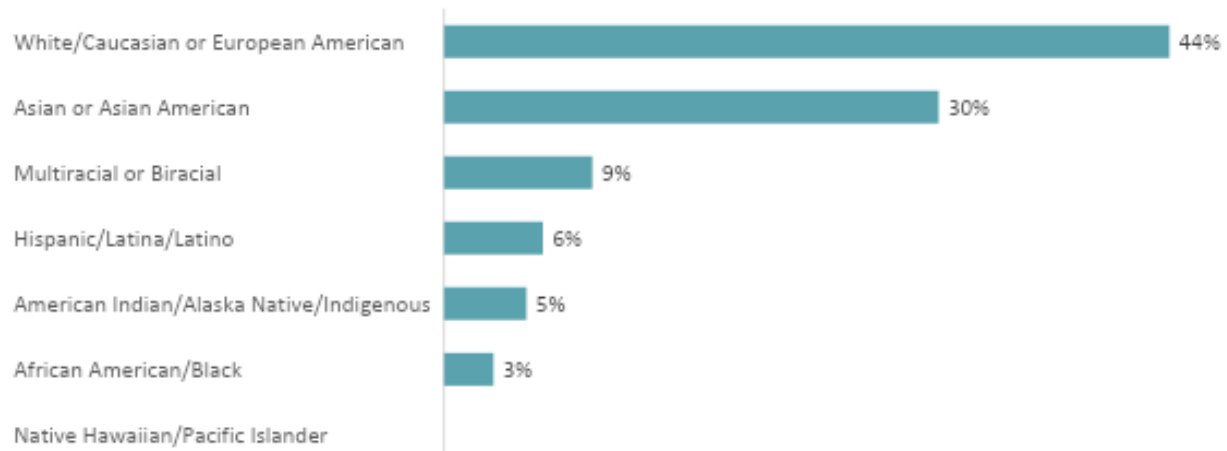


Figure 2. Grade Level Distribution of Oak Middle Participants, 2021



¹ Summary of Results from the 2016-2017 Cambridge Middle Grades Health Survey.

Figure 3. Race and Ethnicity among Oak Middle Participants, 2021



Behaviors that Contribute to Unintentional Injuries & Violence

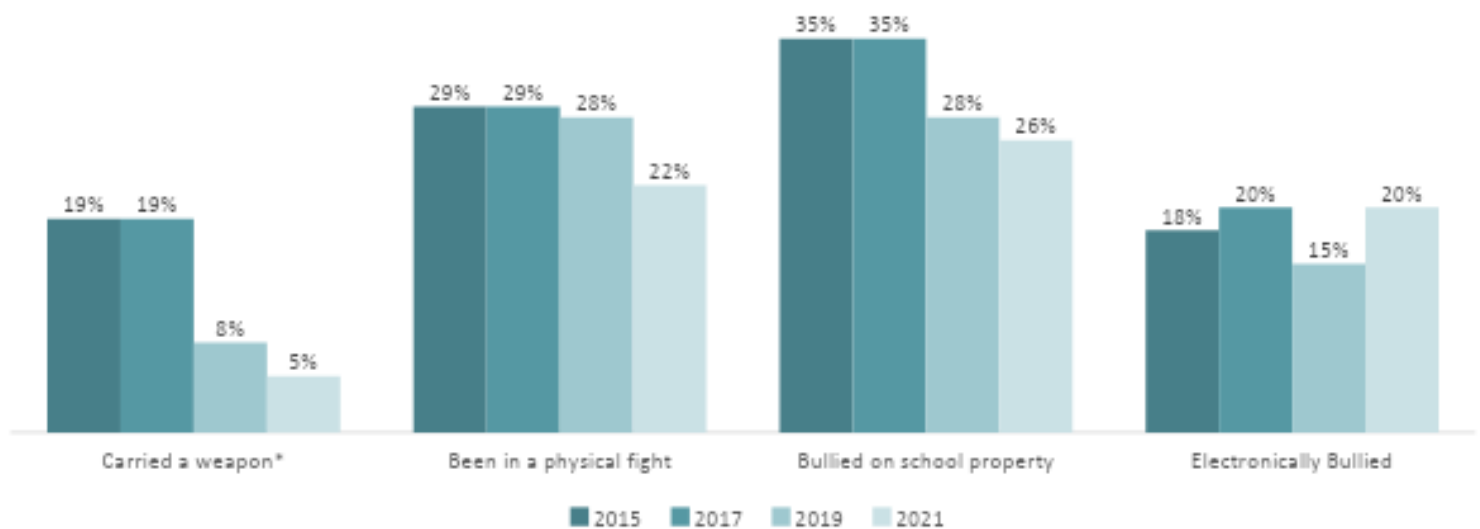
SAFETY

- 8% reported that they rode in a car driven by someone who was drinking alcohol in their lifetime; 13% were not sure

WEAPONS, PHYSICAL FIGHTS, AND BULLYING

- o 5% carried a weapon such as a gun knife or club
- o 22% had been in a physical fight
- o 26% had been bullied **on school property**
- o 20% had been electronically bullied
- o 11% had been electronically bullied **on school property**
- During the 12 months before the survey:
 - o 4% reported they had been physically hurt by someone on their family
 - o 3% reported witnessing violence in their family

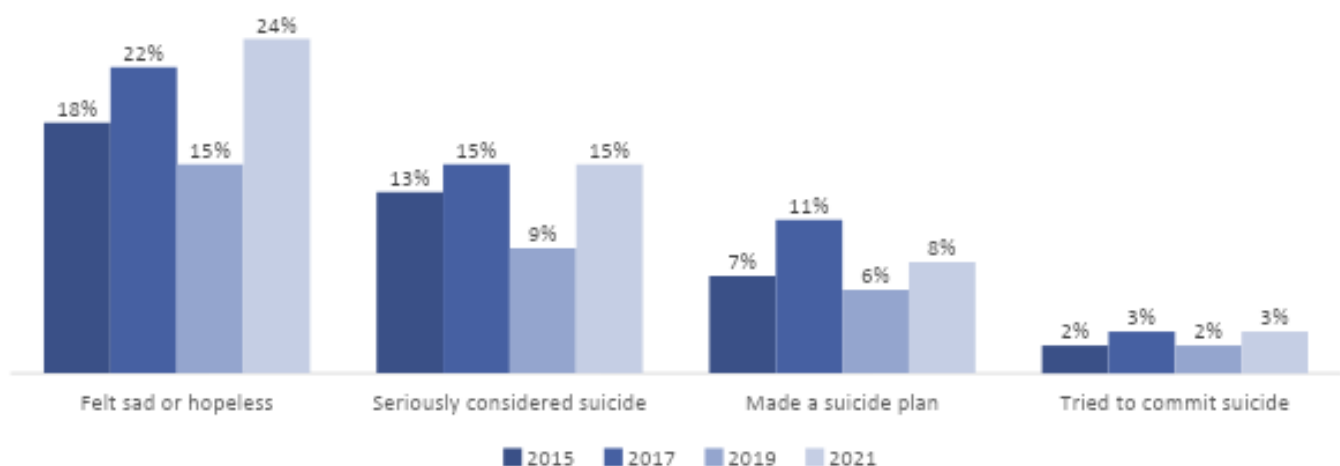
Figure 4. Weapons, Physical Fights and Bullying among Oak Middle Participants Over Time



DEPRESSION AND SUICIDAL IDEATION

- During the 12 months before the survey:
 - 24%** felt so sad or hopeless almost every day for 2 or more weeks in a row that they stopped doing some usual activities; 33% females vs 14% males
 - 15%** had seriously considered attempting suicide; 20% females vs 9% males
 - 8%** had made a plan about how they would attempt suicide; 11% females vs 5% males
 - 3%** had actually attempted suicide one or more times
 - 13%** reported on hurting themselves on purpose without an intention to die

Figure 5. Emotional Health and Suicidal Ideations among Oak Middle School Participants

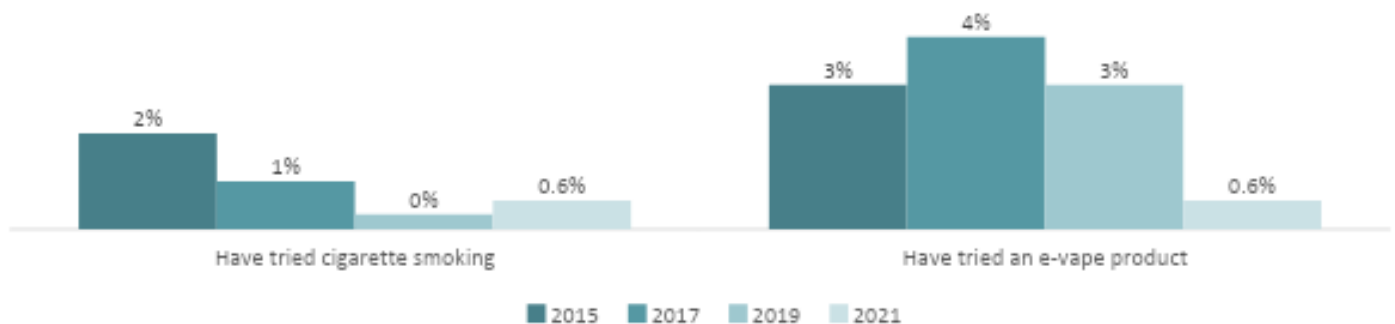


Tobacco Use

EVER AND CURRENT USE OF TOBACCO PRODUCTS

- 0.6% had ever tried a regular cigarette
- 0.1% had ever tried a non-flavored cigar (cigarillo, Swisher Sweet, Black and Mild, etc.)
- 0% had ever tried a flavored cigar
- 0.5% had ever tried a non-flavored e-cigarette
- 0.7% had ever tried a flavored e-cigarette
- 94% had never tried any of the above tobacco products
- 1% reported using an e-vape product in the past 30 days before the survey

Figure 6. Lifetime Nicotine Product Use among Oak Middle School Participants



REASONS FOR USING NICOTINE PRODUCTS

The vast majority (~99%) of students report they had never used any nicotine product when asked the main reason for trying. **Among those students who reported they ever used a nicotine product:**

PERCEPTIONS AROUND NICOTINE PRODUCTS

- 8% believe there is no/slight risk in harming oneself if they use e-vape products
- 92% believe there is moderate/great risk in harming oneself if they use e-vape products
- 99% believe their parents feel it would be 'very wrong/wrong' for them to use e-vape products regularly
- 1% believe their parents feel it would be 'a little bit wrong/not at all wrong' for them to use e-vape products regularly
- 92% believe their friends feel it would be 'very wrong/wrong' for them to use e-vape products regularly
- 8% believe their friends feel it would be 'a little bit wrong/not at all wrong' for them to use e-vape products regularly

Alcohol Use

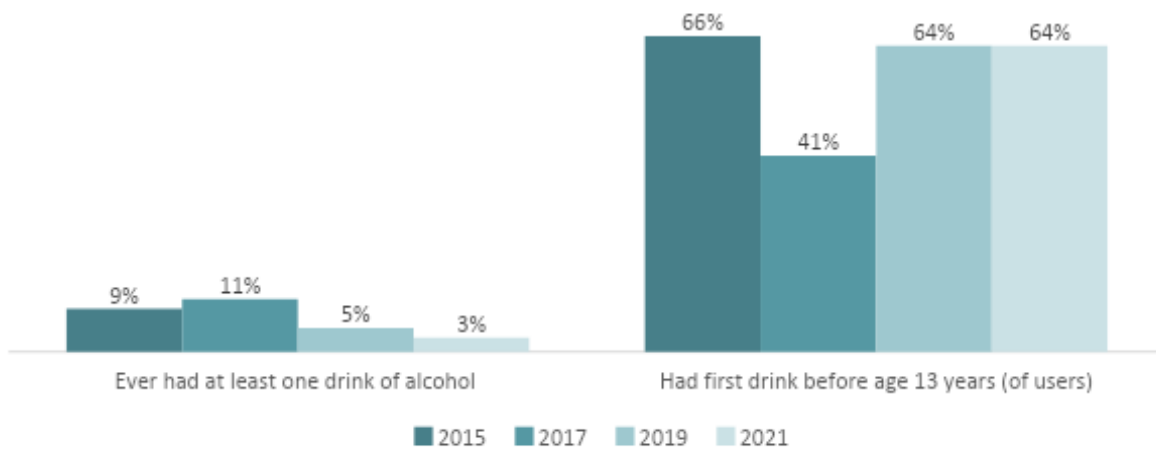
EVER AND CURRENT USE OF ALCOHOL

- 3% of students had had at least one drink of alcohol on at least 1 day during their life
- Among those who had ever had a drink of alcohol, 64 % had their first drink of alcohol, other than a few sips, **before age 13 years**

PERCEPTIONS AROUND ALCOHOL USE

- 13% believe there is no/slight risk in harming oneself if they drink alcohol regularly
- 87% believe there is moderate/great risk in harming oneself if they drink alcohol regularly
- 97% believe their parents feel it would be 'very wrong/wrong' for them to drink alcohol regularly
- 3% believe their parents feel it would be 'a little bit wrong/not at all wrong' for them to drink alcohol regularly
- 92% believe their friends feel it would be 'very wrong/wrong' for them to drink alcohol regularly
- 8% believe their friends feel it would be 'a little bit wrong/not at all wrong' for them to drink alcohol regularly

Figure 7. Alcohol Use among Oak Middle School Participants

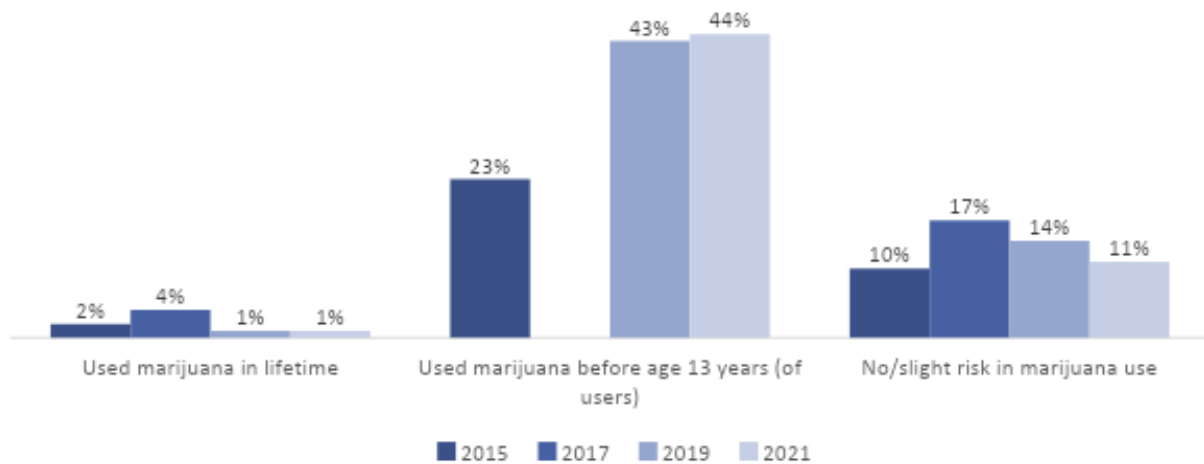


Marijuana Use

EVER AND CURRENT USE OF MARIJUANA

- 1% of students had used marijuana one or more times during their life and; among those few who had used marijuana, 44% had tried marijuana for the first time before age 13 years

Figure 8. Marijuana Use among Oak Middle School Participants



METHOD OF USING MARIJUANA

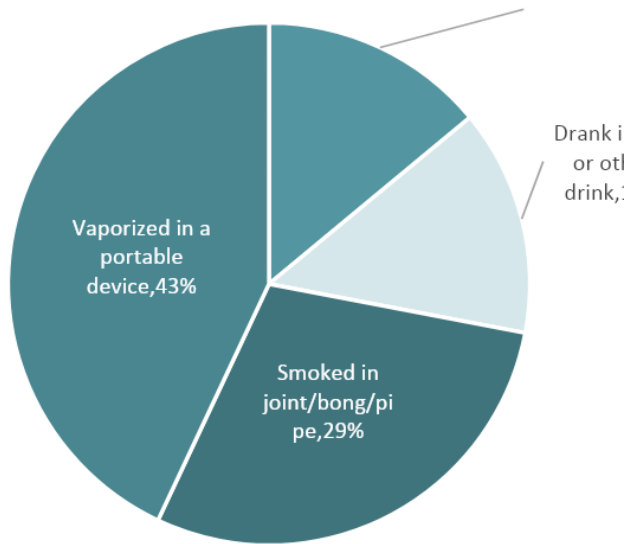
- 33% smoked it in a joint, bong, or pipe
- 22% vaporized it in a portable device such as a vaping pen or e-hookah
- 22% smoked it in a blunt wrap
- 22% ate it in food such as brownies, cakes, cookies, or candy

PERCEPTIONS AROUND MARIJUANA USE

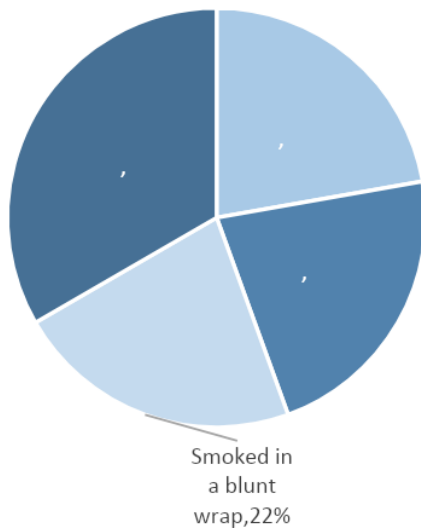
- 11% believe there is no/slight risk in harming oneself if they use marijuana
- 89% believe there is moderate/great risk in harming oneself if they use marijuana
- 95% believe their friends feel it would be 'very wrong/wrong' for them to smoke marijuana
- 5% believe their friends feel it would be 'a little bit wrong/not at all wrong' for them to smoke marijuana
- 99% believe their parents feel it would be 'very wrong/wrong' for them to smoke marijuana
- 1% believe their parents feel it would be 'a little bit wrong/not at all wrong' for them to smoke marijuana

Figure 9. Method of using Marijuana among Oak Middle Participants, 2019 and 2021

2019



2021



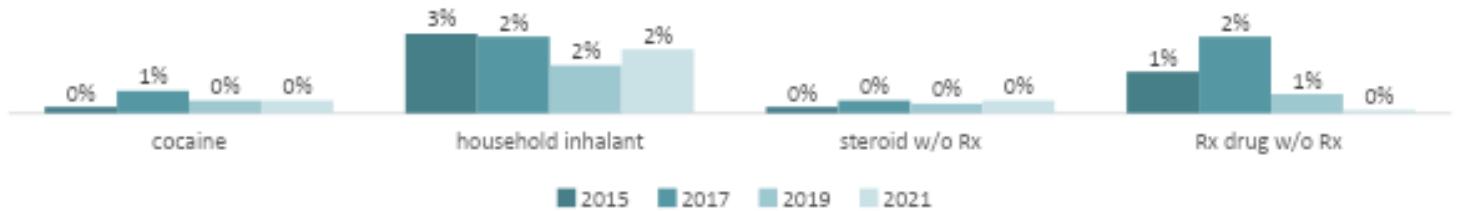
Other Drug Use

EVER USE OF OTHER DRUGS

- 2% had **sniffed glue or inhaled the contents** of aerosol spray cans, paints or sprays to get high one or more times during their life
- 0.4%% had used any form of **cocaine**, including powder, crack, or freebase in their life
- 0.4% had taken **steroid pills or shots** without a doctor's prescription in their life

- 1% had taken a **prescription pain medicine** (counting drugs such as codeine, Vicodin, OxyContin, Hydrocodone, and Percocet) without a doctor’s prescription or differently than how a doctor told them to use it in their life

Figure 10. Lifetime Substance Use among Oak Middle School Participants



Body-Image & Dietary Behaviors

BODY IMAGE

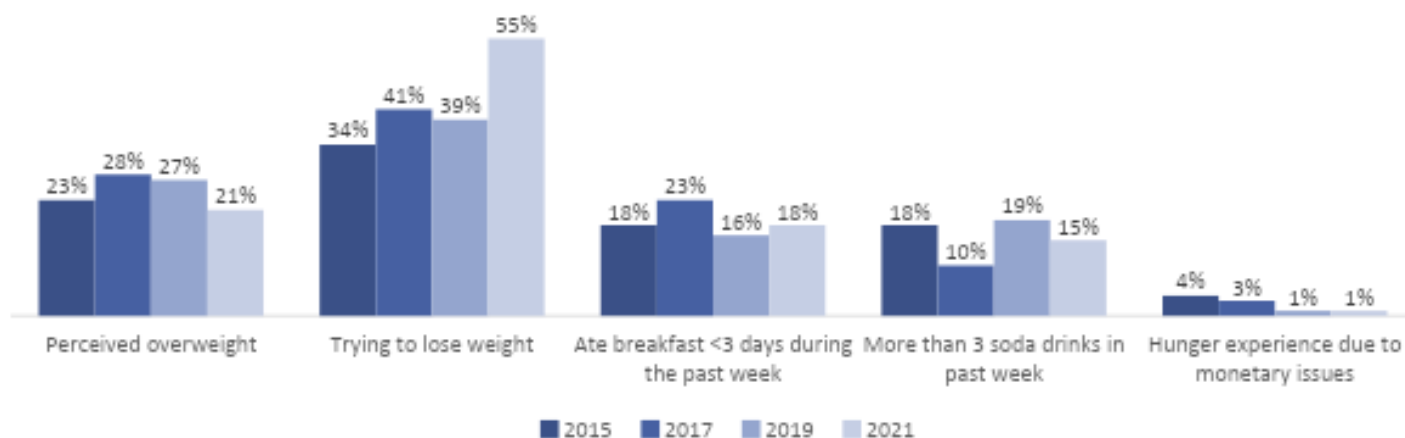
The majority (58%) of students described their weight as being ‘about the right weight’; while 21% each described their weight as ‘very/slightly underweight and ‘slightly/very overweight’. However, 31% stated they were trying to lose weight and 55% were trying to either stay the same or were not trying to do anything about their weight.

DIETARY BEHAVIORS

When asked about the past 7 days before taking the survey:

- 8% of students had not eaten breakfast
- 52% of students had eaten breakfast all 7 days
- 61% had drunk a sugar sweetened beverage such as a soda, sports drink, sweetened lemonade or iced tea, sweetened coffee or lattes
- 1% reported being hungry but did not eat because there wasn’t enough money for food in their house; 2% was not sure

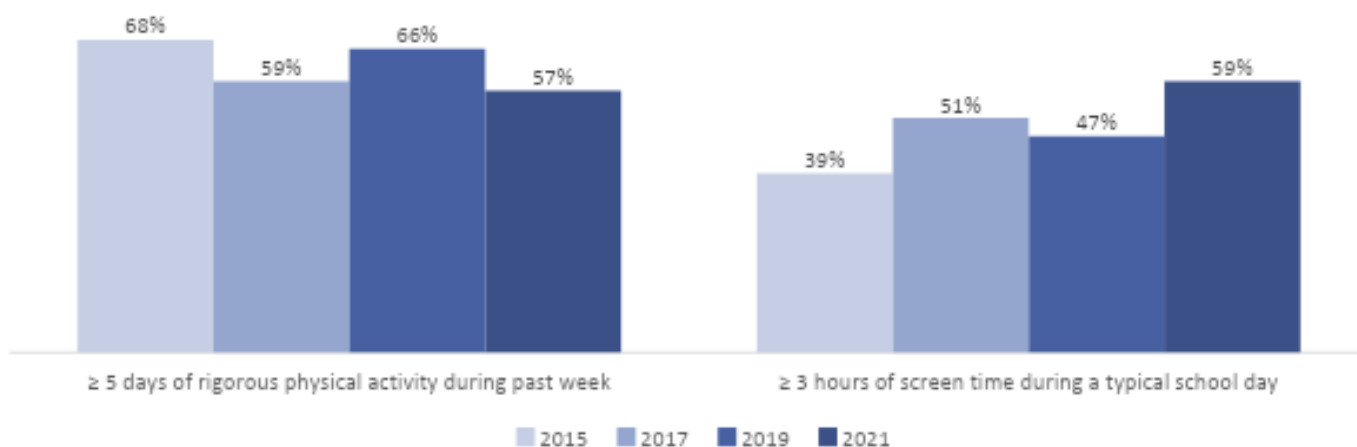
Figure 11. Perception of Weight and Dietary Habits among Oak Middle School Participants



PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

- 6% of students had not been physically active for a total of at least 60 minutes on at least 1 day during the 7 days before the survey
- 57% of students had been physically active for a total of at least 60 minutes per day on 5 or more days during the 7 days before the survey
- 25% of students had been physically active for a total of at least 60 minutes per day on all 7 days during the 7 days before the survey
- 59% of students had spent 3 or more hours a day on “screen time” on something that is not school work, such as watching TV, playing video games, internet use, mobile apps such as Twitter and Instagram and mobile games on cell phones, tablets and iPads

Figure 12. Physical Activity and Screen Time among Oak Middle School Participants



Sexual Health

SEX EDUCATION

- 44% reported being taught about AIDS or HIV infection in school
- 59% reported being taught about Sexual Health in school
- 58% reported being taught about healthy relationships in school
- 43% reported being taught how to use a condom to prevent pregnancy or sexually transmitted infections
- 32% of students had talked about ways to prevent HIV infection, other sexually transmitted infection or pregnancy with their parents or other adults in their family, in school, or in their community

SEXUAL ACTIVITY

About 69% of students identify as heterosexual or straight, 3% as gay or lesbian and 6% as bisexual; 9% stated that they are not sure. Less than one percent (0.6%) of students had ever had sexual intercourse in their lifetime.

SEXTING AND PORNOGRAPHY

- About 12% of students reported that they have received a nude or sexually suggestive picture or video of someone else. Similarly, 8% stated that they have been asked to send a nude or sexually suggestive picture or video of someone else and 2% reported that they have electronically sent a nude or sexually suggestive picture or video to someone.
- 12% of students have viewed pornography online or other formats
- **Among those who had ever viewed pornography during the past year:**
 - 49% had viewed at least once
 - 8% viewed at least once a day
 - 24% viewed at least once a week
 - 20% viewed at least one a month
- 95% believe their parents feel it would be 'very wrong/wrong' for them to view pornography
- 5% believe their parents feel it would be 'a little bit wrong/not at all wrong' for them to view pornography
- 77% believe their friends feel it would be 'very wrong/wrong' for them to view pornography
- 23% believe their friends feel it would be 'a little bit wrong/not at all wrong' for them to view pornography

Other Health-Related Topics

On average, 61% of students got 8 or more hours of sleep on an average school night. Most (62%) students reported getting 7 to 8 hours of sleep on an average school night. The vast majority (95%) of students had visited their doctor for a routine visit during the past 12 months of the survey. When asked about other possible protective factors:

- 85% of students stated they have an adult in their life who they can trust and who they can talk to
- 72% were a part of a group in their community that cares about them like a church, friends, scouts or sport team
- 39% stated they were religious and their faith is important to them
- 70% stated they know they can handle most problems that came their way

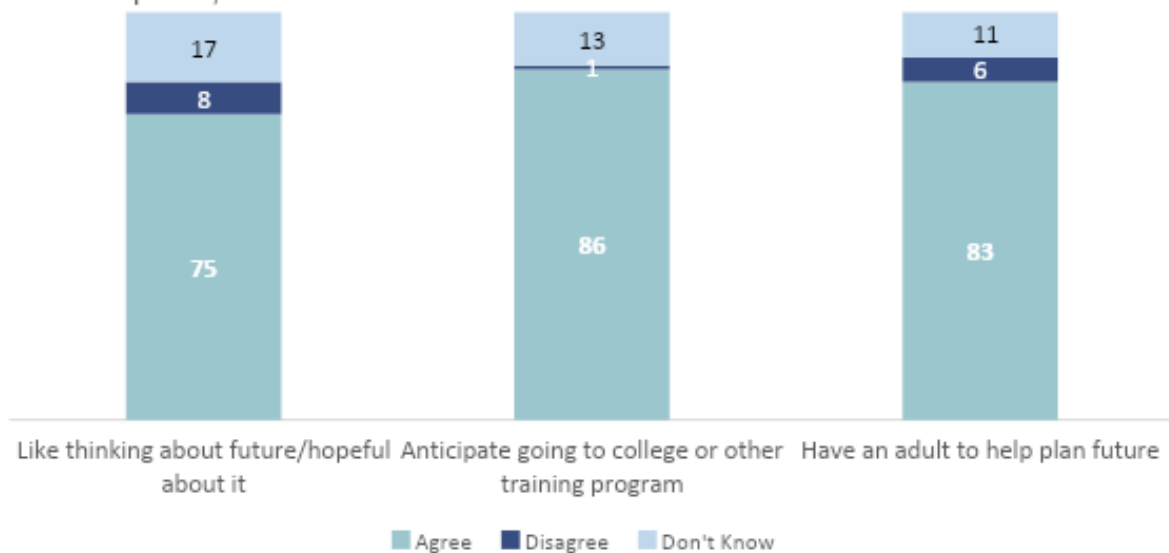
- 82% stated they have something in their life that they are good at
- 55% stated there is at least one teacher or other adult in school that they can talk to
- 99% of students reported they currently sleep at home with their parents or guardians
- 92% of stated that they had dinner with their family at least once or twice per week
- 57% stated they think the school health curriculum has provided them with many skills and concepts necessary for successful real life choices in and beyond middle school

Life Adjustment and Future Plans

POST HIGH SCHOOL ATTITUDES

The vast majority (75%) of Oak Middle youth is hopeful about their future and anticipate going to college or other training institution (86%). In addition, 83% have an adult present in their life to help plan their future (Figure 13).

Figure 13. Post High School Attitudes among Oak Middle School Participants, 2021



TOP ISSUES AMONG YOUTH

As illustrated in Figure 14, stress remains the top reported issue among Oak Middle youth (34%), distantly followed by anxiety (22%) and peer pressure and peer relationships (15%). While the issue of bullying slightly increased from 8% in 2019 to 9% in 2021, the issue of health decreased from (7% in 2019 to 5% in 2021).

Figure 14. Top Issues among Oak Middle School Participants,
2021

