

2025 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) Youth Tobacco Survey (YTS) High School Results

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August 2026

Desired Outcomes



Recognize areas of **progress** in student health and well-being.



Understand where student **needs** remain concentrated.



Support **prevention-focused** , data-informed systems.



Reinforce the Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child approach.

ACHIEVING EDUCATIONAL **EXCELLENCE**



**Ensure Healthy, Safe
and Secure Learning
Environments**

Focus Area 2 | Improve student and staff health and well-being



ACTION 3

Promote student and staff well-being by supporting PSUs in implementing Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child models to foster positive school climates and elevate student voice and belonging.

“ **Student voice** is a powerful source of evidence for improving student well-being. The Youth Risk Behavior Survey helps North Carolina **strengthen prevention, foster positive school climates, and support the success of every student.** ”

Connecting Student Voice to Targeted Support

*“Student voice provides **critical evidence** that helps North Carolina strengthen the conditions for learning by informing prevention, improving systems, and supporting student success.”*



Youth Risk Behavior Survey

Process Overview



This is the first administration of the combined Youth Risk Behavior Survey and Youth Tobacco Survey



NC survey conducted at **middle and high** school levels



Administered in **odd years** in NC since 1993



Conducted **electronically** since 2021



All schools and classes are **randomly** selected



Participation is **voluntary** at each level



Parental notification is required



Designed to be completed in **one class period**



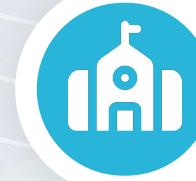
Completely anonymous

What YRBS Measures

Focuses on
Health-Risk
Behaviors and
Protective Factors



Safety



School
Connection



Mental Health



Sexual
Behavior



Substance Use



Physical Activity
& Nutrition



Tobacco &
Vaping



Sleep



2025 NC High School Participation

Participation Snapshot



1,692

**Total Usable
Student Surveys**

2023: 2,265 (↓ 573)



25

NC High Schools
(Still Awaiting Middle School Data)

2023: 32 (↓ 7)



9-12

**Grade Levels
Represented**



48%

**Overall
Response Rate**

2023: 57% (↓ 9 percentage points)



**Weighted
Statewide
Estimates**



**Public &
Charter High
Schools Included**

Focus Areas

01. 02. 03.

Progress to Sustain



Many student **risk indicators improved** in 2025, and nearly all are now at or better than 2019 levels.

Needs to Address



Remaining risk areas continue to affect **attendance, behavior, school connection,** and **readiness to learn.**

Actions to Prioritize



Student, teacher, and administrative data point to earlier **prevention,** coordinated student **supports,** stronger **behavior systems,** and integrated **data use.**



Progress to Sustain

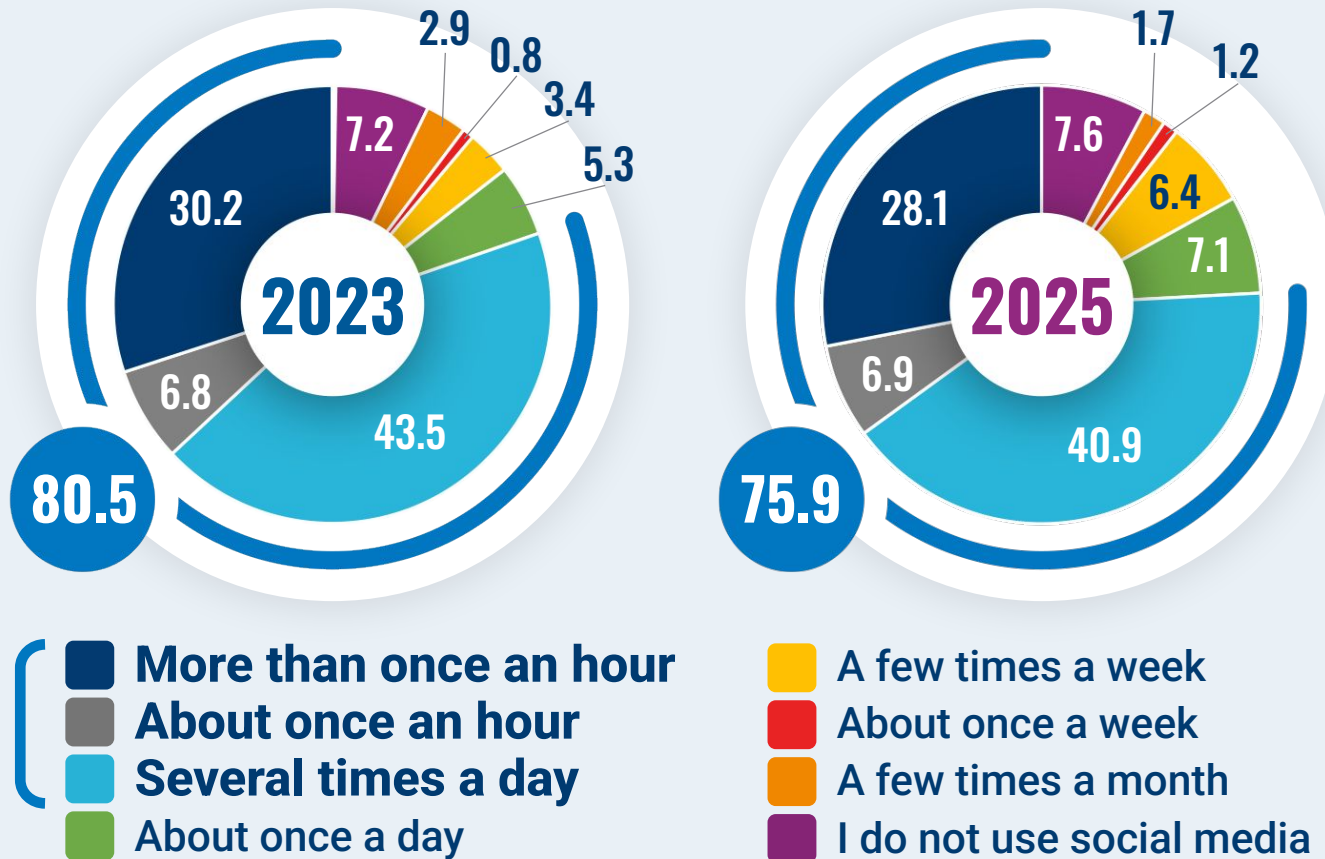
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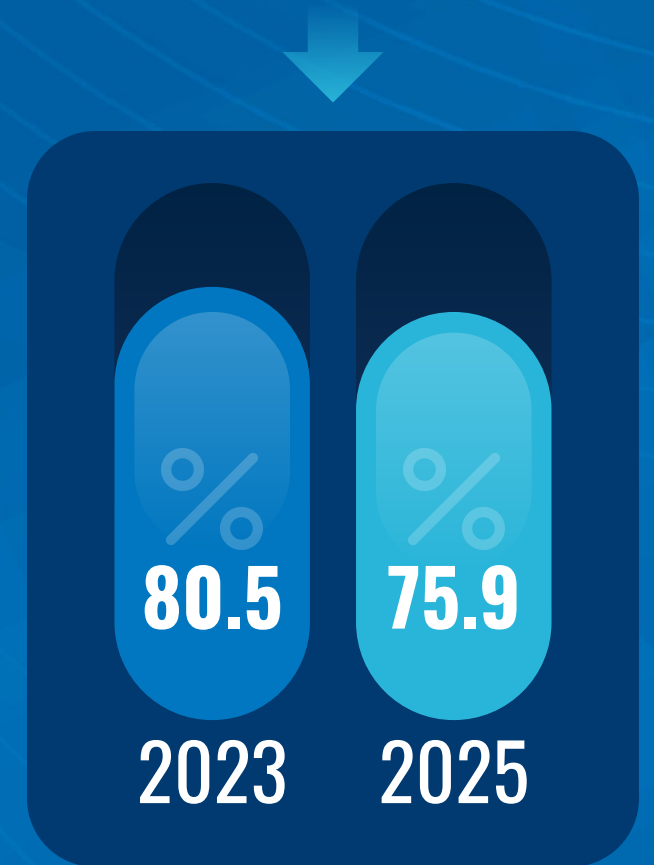
Social Media Use

“How often do you use social media?”

% of NC High School Students’ Responses, 2023-2025



Highest Measures of Social Media Use (Several Times a Day or More) Are Down 4.5% Since 2023





Alcohol and Other Drug Use

Alcohol and marijuana use are at historically low levels.

20
YEAR
LOW

16%



Alcohol Use



-26.3% *since 2005*

20
YEAR
LOW

10.6%

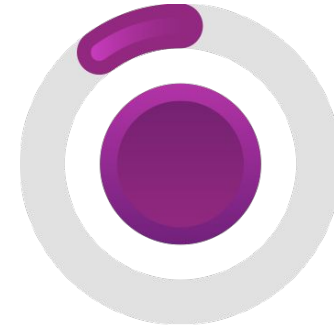


Marijuana Use



-10.8% *since 2005*

9.8%



Prescription Pain
Medicine Misuse



-5.2% *since 2017*

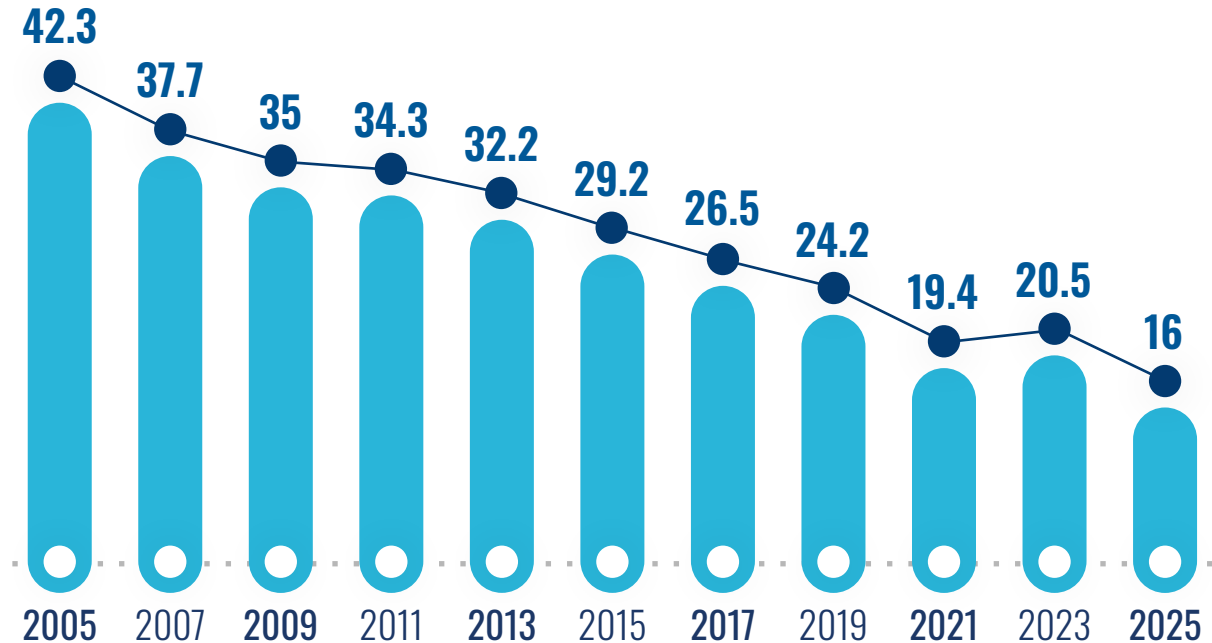
Current Alcohol Use

Down **26.3%** Since 2005

16%



% High School Students Who Currently Drank Alcohol



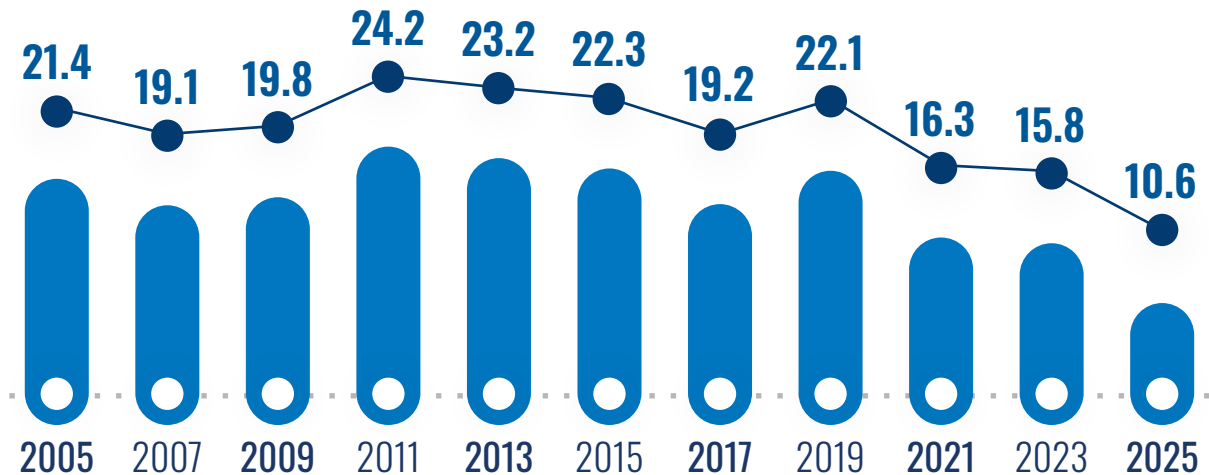
Current Marijuana Use

Down **10.6%** Since 2005

10.6%



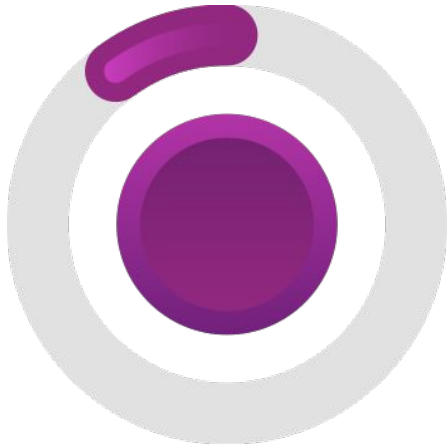
% High School Students Who Currently Used Marijuana



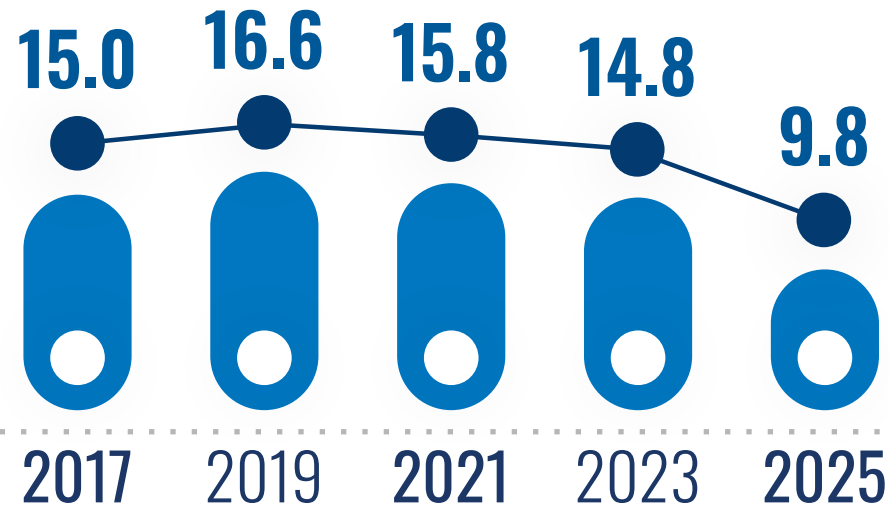
Prescription Pain Medicine Misuse

Down 5.2% Since 2017

9.8%



% High School Students Who Ever Took Prescription Pain Medicine Without a Doctor's Prescription or Differently Than How a Doctor Told Them to Use It

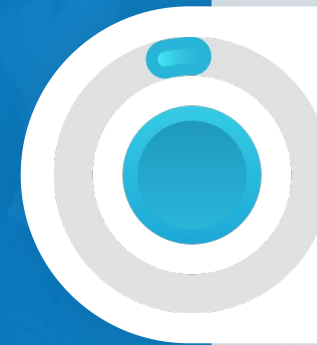




Tobacco and Vaping

Vaping is down, but it remains a practical school prevention issue.

% of NC High School Students who Currently Smoked Cigarettes vs. Currently Used an E-Vapor Product, 2005-2025



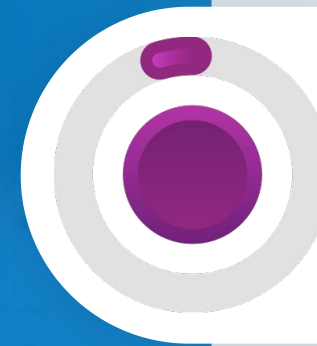
3.5%

Current
Cigarette
Smoking



12.6%

Currently
Use
E-Vapor
Products



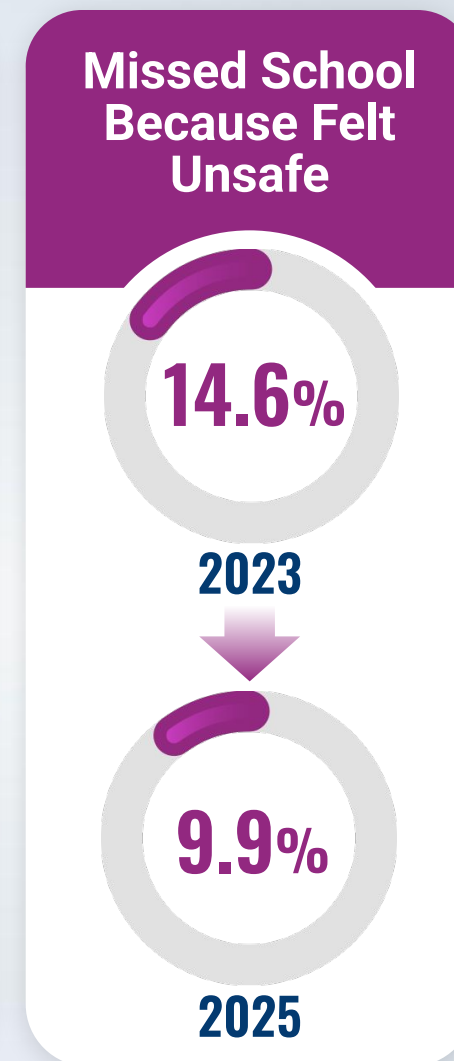
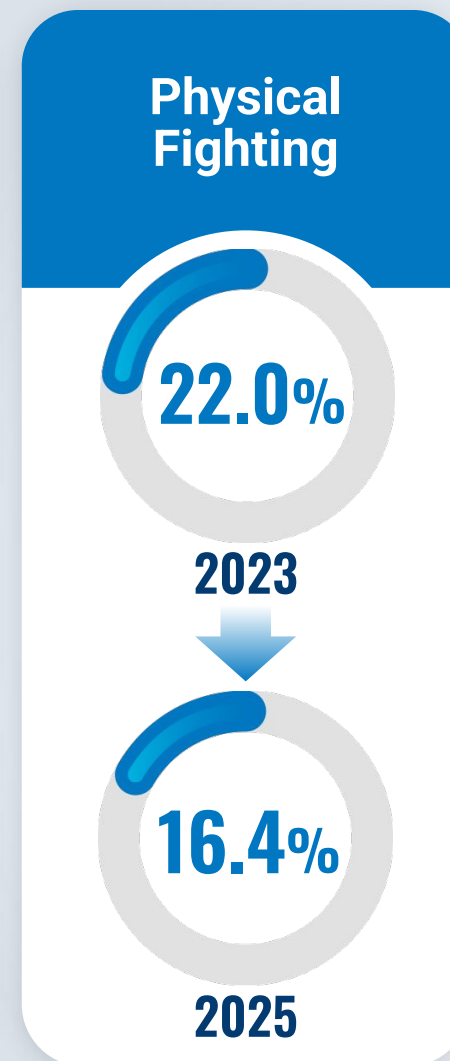
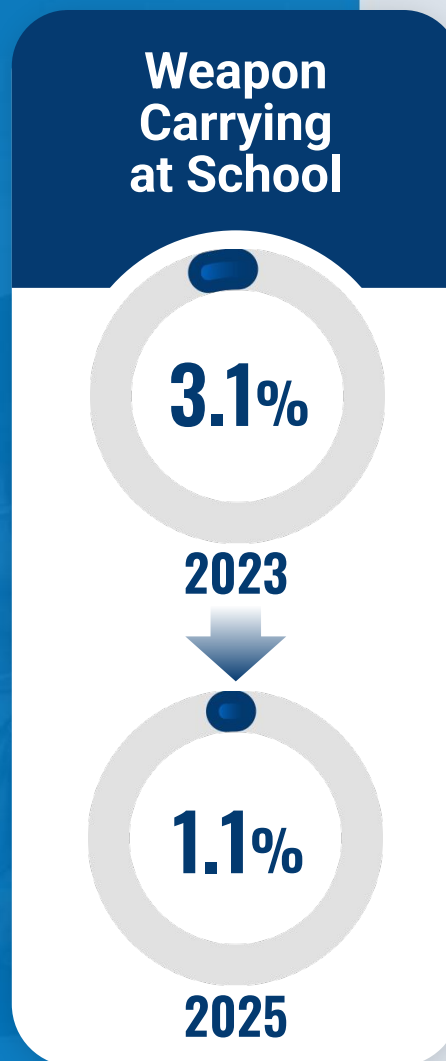
4.2%

Vaping
Marijuana



Safety and Violence

Key safety indicators improved, but safety remains closely tied to attendance and learning.





Needs to Address

Several student risk areas remain
elevated or persistent .



Mental Health

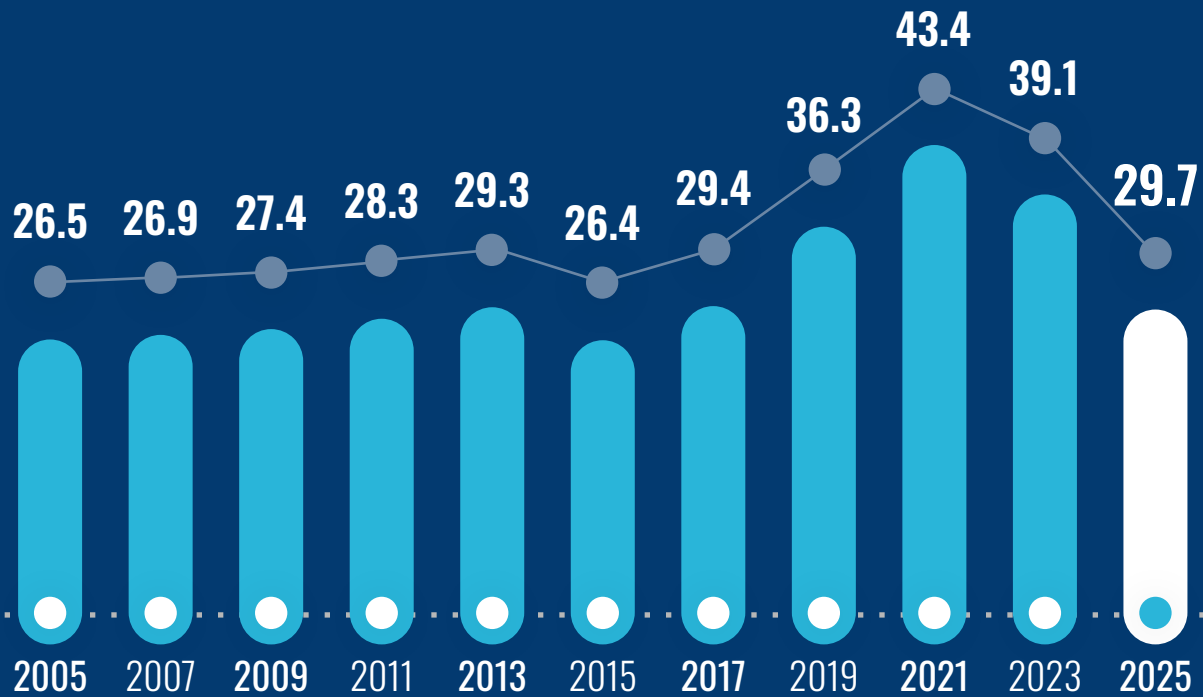


Sadness/hopelessness and suicidal ideation **decreased significantly** from 2023 to 2025, but still warrant continued attention.

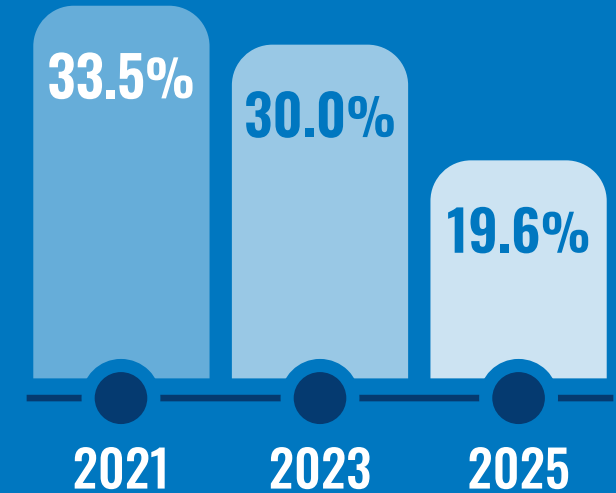


Mental Health Findings

% High School Students Feeling Sad or Hopeless



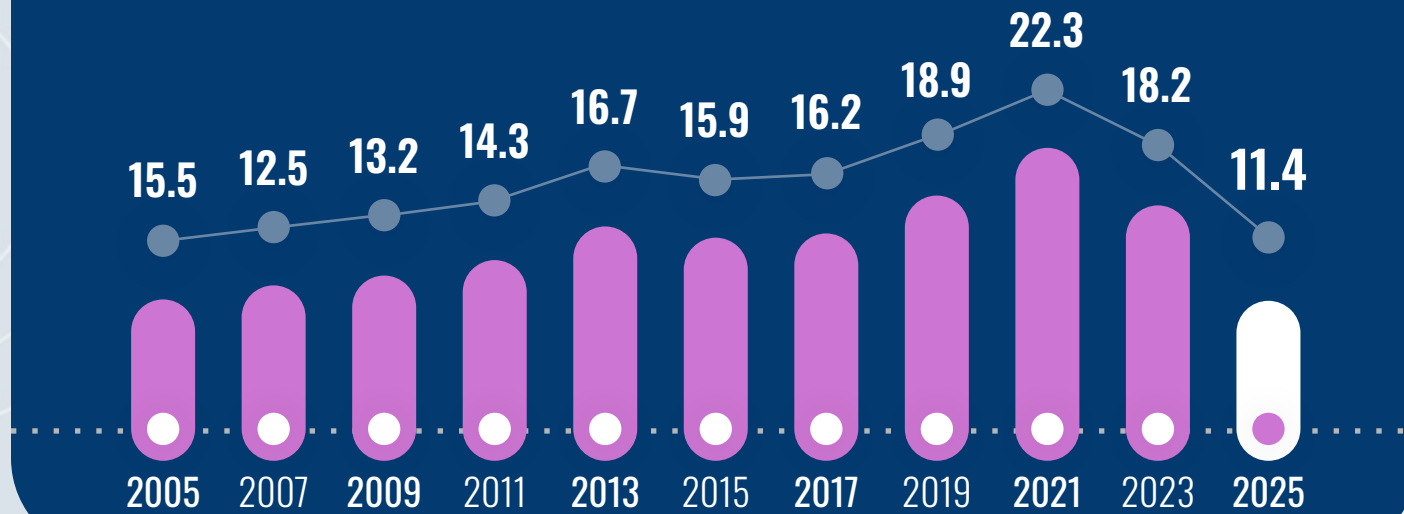
% of High School Students Who Reported Poor Mental Health Most/All of the Time



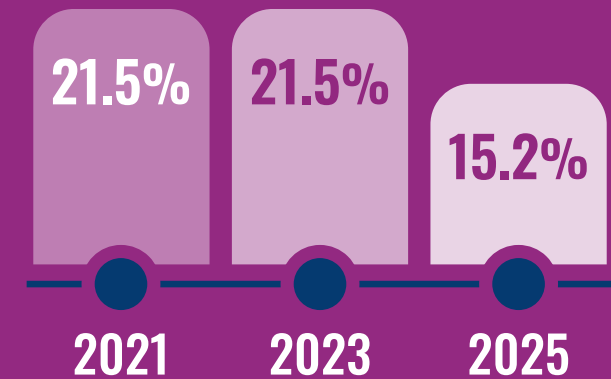


Mental Health Findings

% High School Students Who Seriously Considered Attempting Suicide



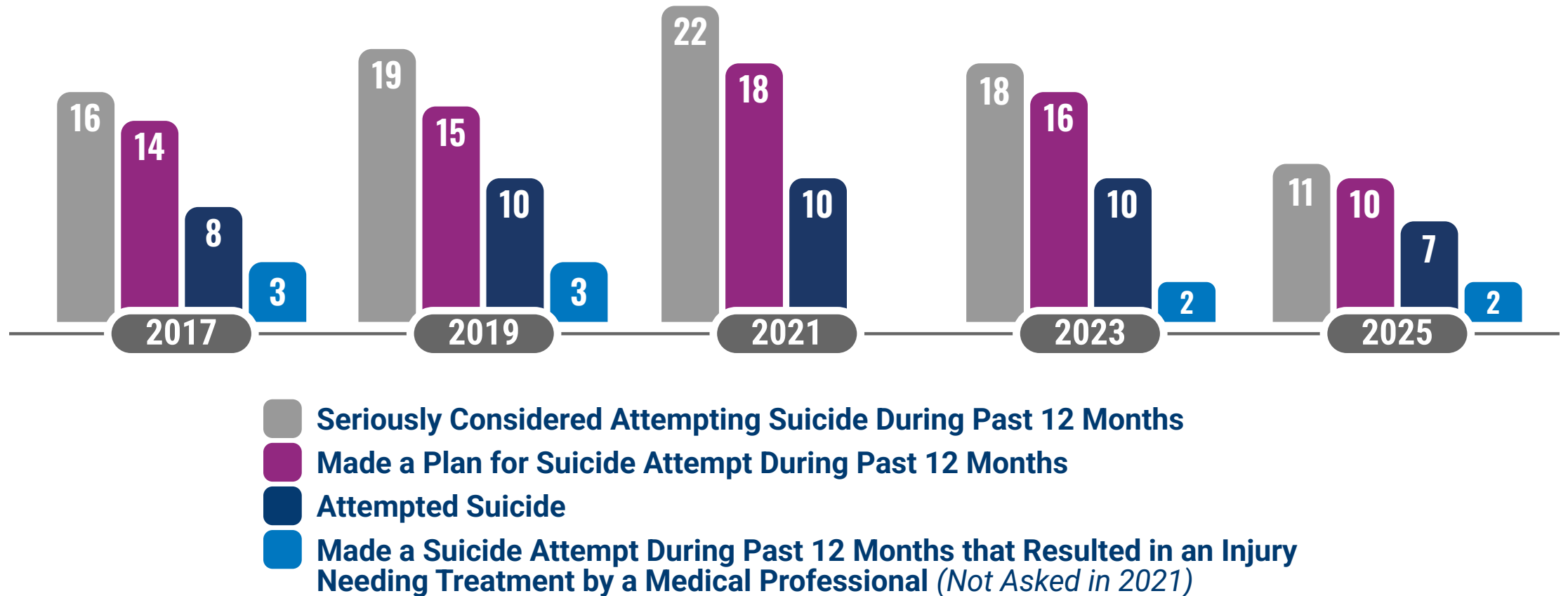
% of High School Students Who Did Something to Purposely Hurt Themselves Without Wanting to Die





Suicidal Behaviors

2017-2025 NC High School Students (%)



Sleep, Nutrition, and Physical Activity

Nutrition indicators show some improvement but remain uneven.

Basic health foundations are mixed, with **sleep** as the clearest concern.

21.7%



Get 8+ Hours
of Sleep

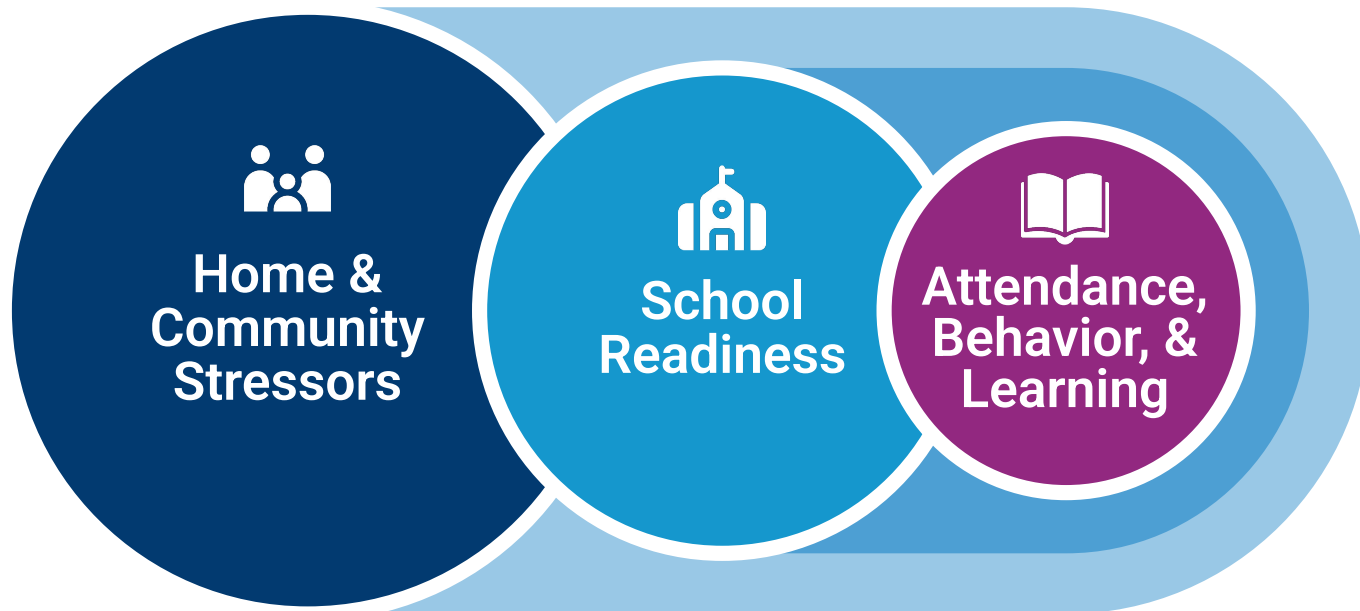
43.1%



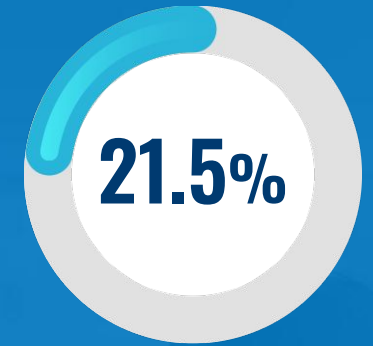
Are Physically
Active 60+ Minutes
on 5+ Days

Adverse Experiences

Some student needs originate outside school but show up inside school.



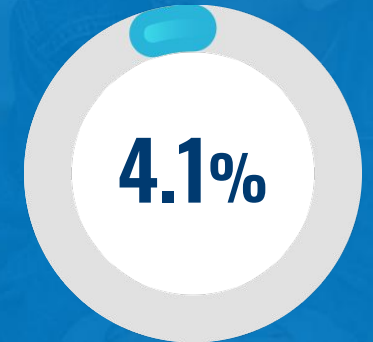
Household
Substance Use



Household
Mental Illness or
Suicidal behavior



Food
Insecurity



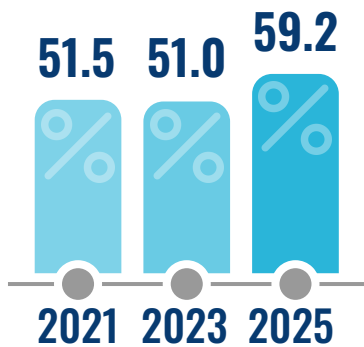
Unstable
Housing



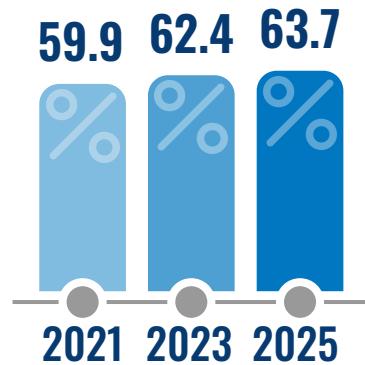
School Connectedness

Connection is a ***protective factor*** schools can strengthen.

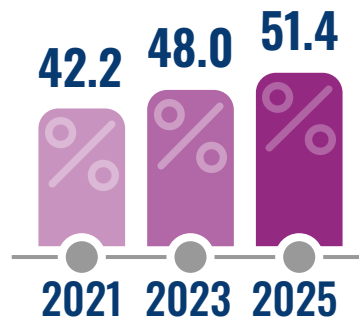
Belong at School



Adult at School To Talk To



Teachers Care and Encourage



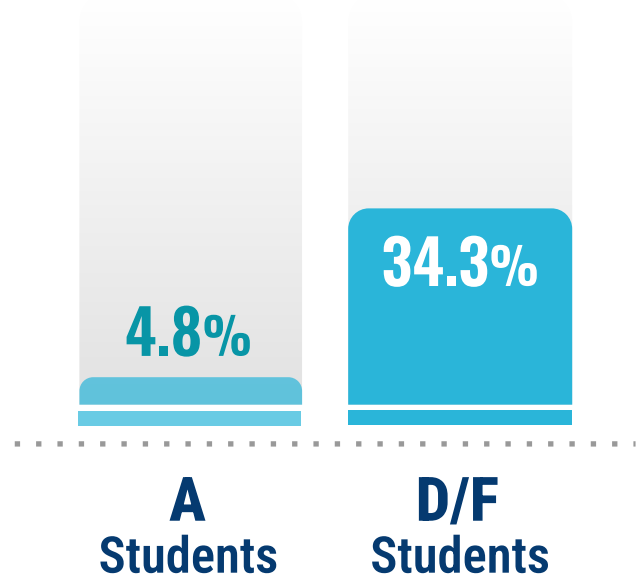
61.2%

Feel Close to People at School (2025)

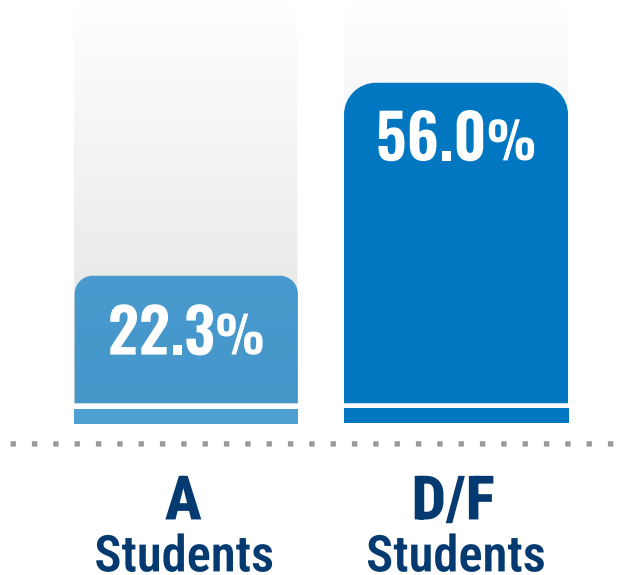
Needs Are Not Evenly Distributed

Some needs are more concentrated among specific student groups, particularly low performing students.

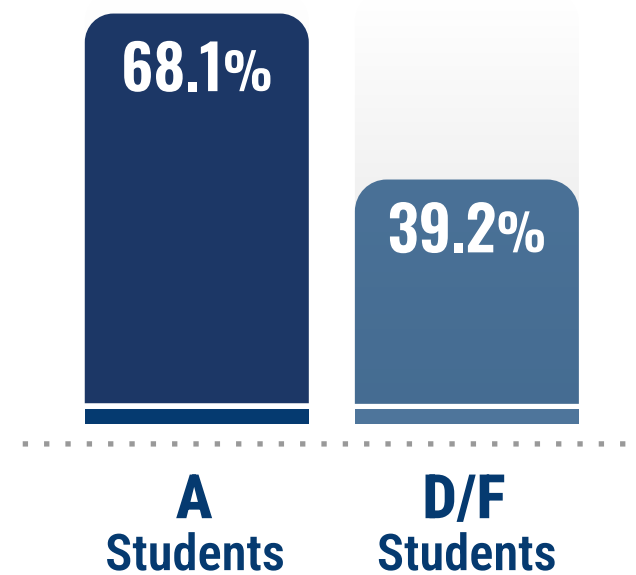
Felt Unsafe at School



Felt Sad or Hopeless



Felt Like They Belong at School

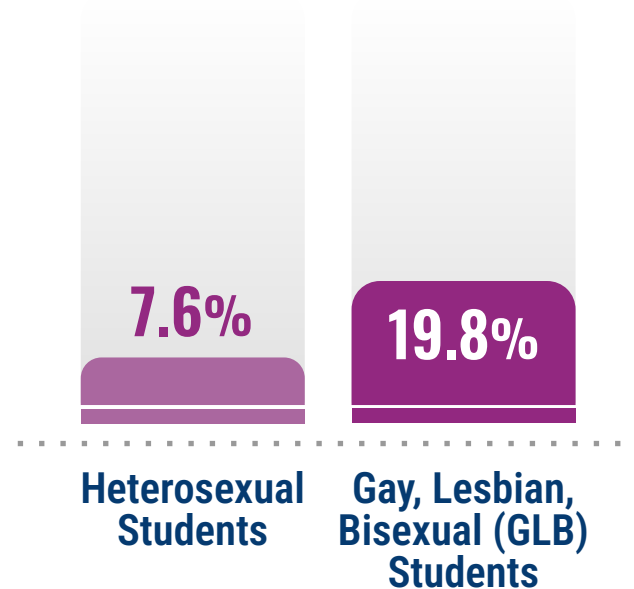


Note: Academic performance reflects students' self-reported grades.

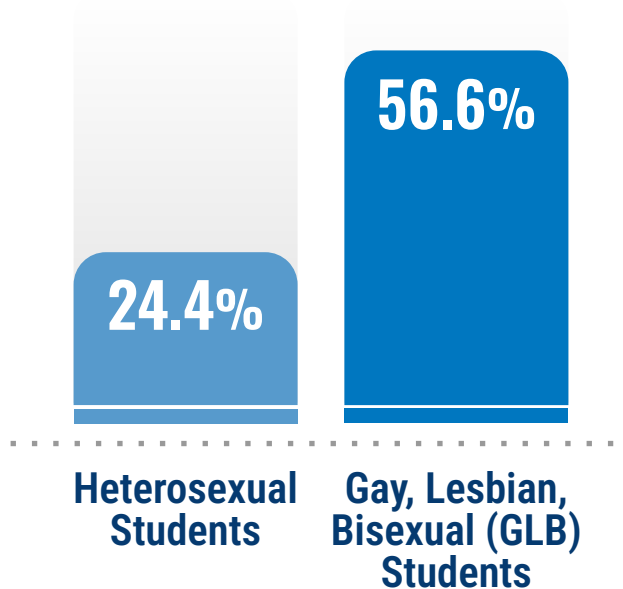
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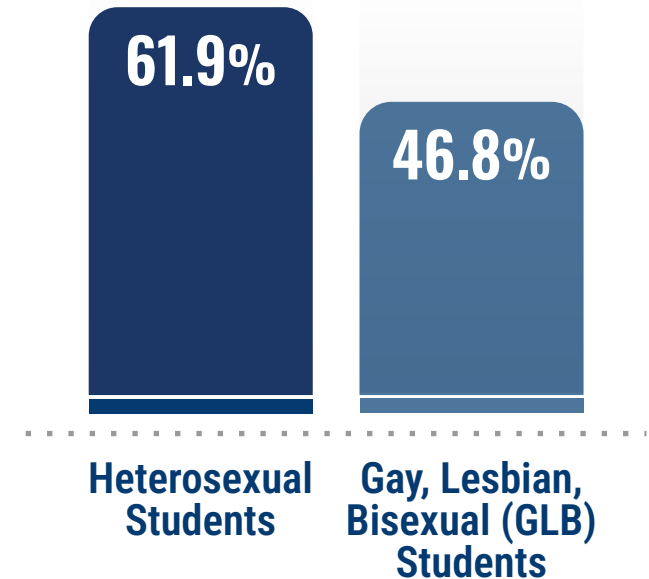
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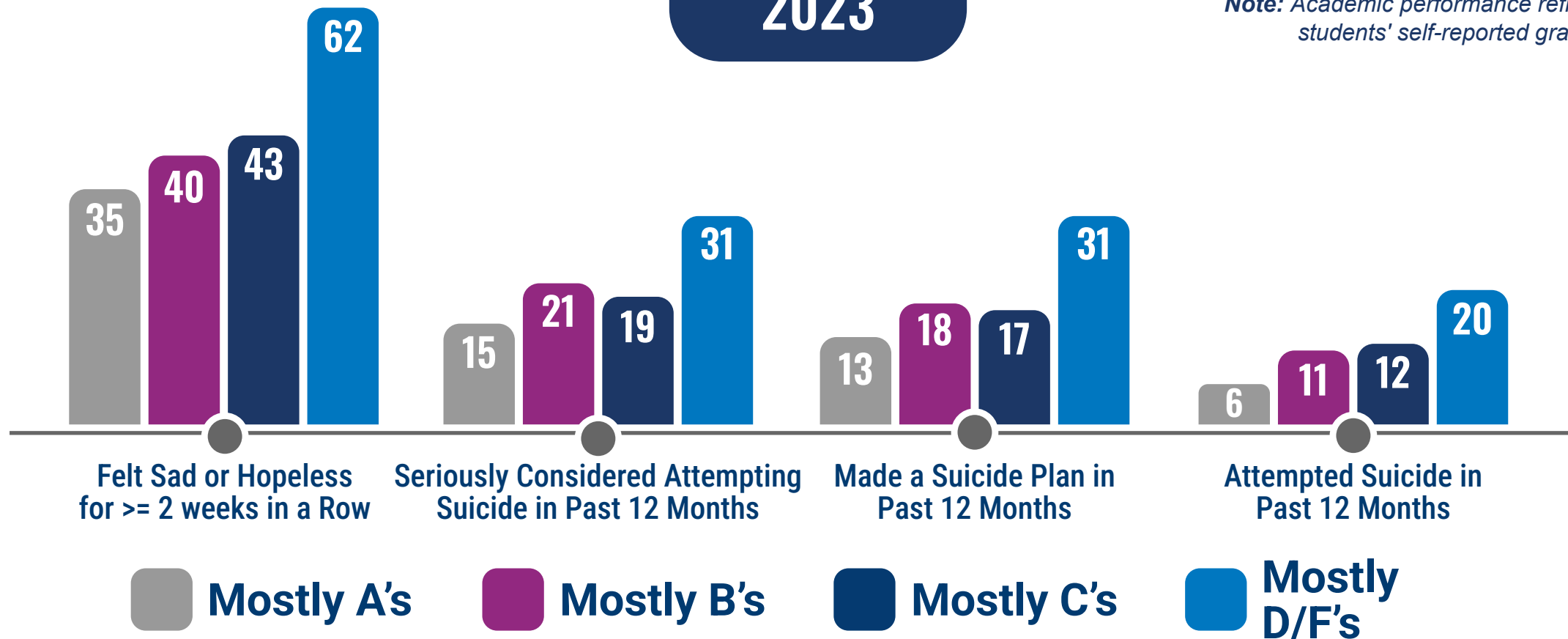


Mental Health and Academics

More Common Among Students with Low Grade Performance

2023

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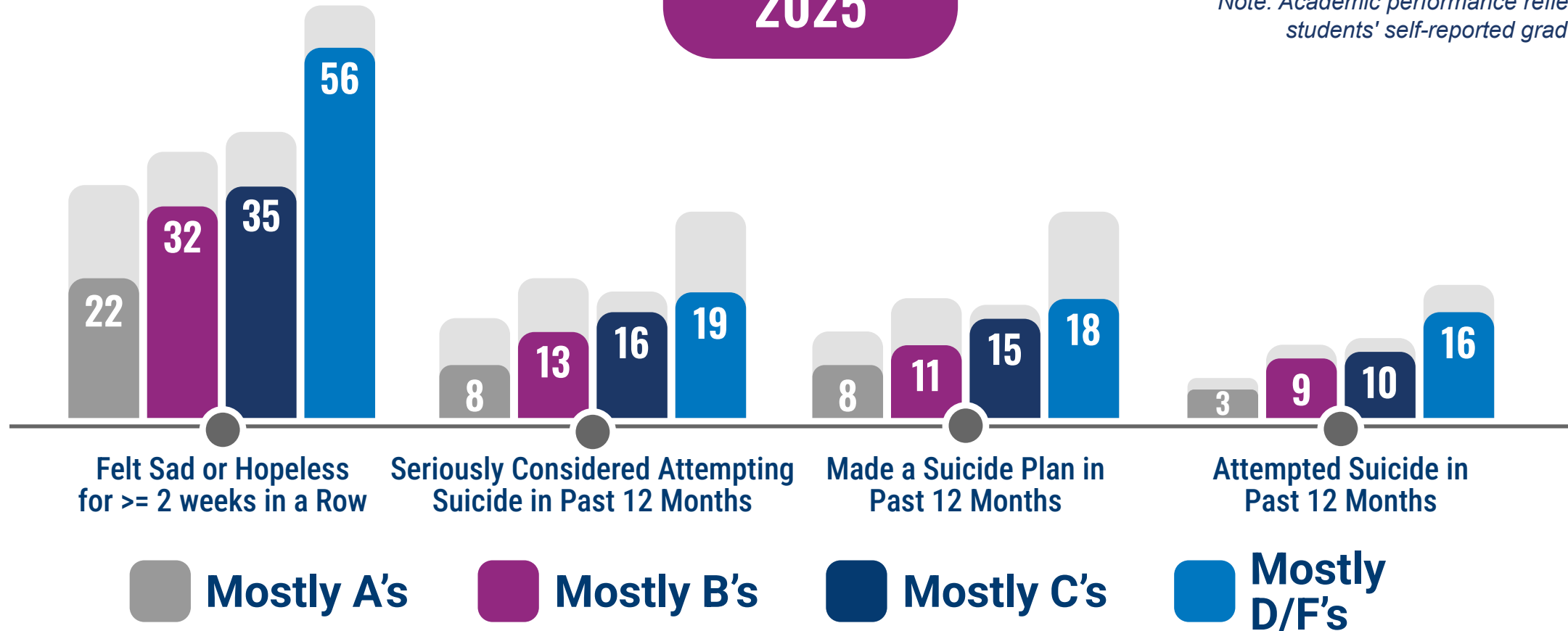


Mental Health and Academics

More Common Among Students with Low Grade Performance

2025

Note: Academic performance reflects students' self-reported grades.



How We Are Responding

P3.F2.A2



Family Support

Promote partnerships between PSUs and local community organizations to provide support for families, especially in underserved areas.

JANUARY 2027

P3.F2.A3



Community Connection

Increase NCDPI supports for the educators who serve as a bridge to the local community, such as nurses, counselors, social workers, school psychologists and parent liaisons.

JANUARY 2027

P3.F2.A4



Reducing Barriers

Advocate for evidence-based school models, such as “community schools,” that reduce barriers by promoting community resources to support student and family well-being.

MAY 2027

How We Are Responding

P3.F2.A5

P4.F2.A1

P4.F2.A2



Local Health Professionals

Identify and share best practices around partnerships between PSUs and local health professionals for providing mental and physical health supports to students and staff.

DECEMBER 2027



Cell Phones & Social Media

Guide PSUs to identify and apply best practices to limit distractions from wireless devices and promote responsible social media use to support safe and focused learning environments.

JANUARY 2026



Attendance Support

Identify and share effective practices for reducing chronic absenteeism and strengthening student attendance.

JANUARY 2026

How We Are Responding

P4.F2.A3



Comprehensive Models

Promote student and staff well-being by supporting PSUs in implementing Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child models to foster positive school climates and elevate student voice and belonging.

MARCH 2026

P4.F2.A4



Student Behavior Pilot

Develop a student behavior pilot to address behavior challenges and scale trauma-informed practices in PSUs identified with significant discipline referrals.

AUGUST 2026

P4.F2.A5



Addressing Behavior Challenges

Support PSUs in implementing Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and share best practices for fostering supportive school environments and reducing behavioral challenges.

AUGUST 2026

How We Are Responding

P4.F2.A6

P4.F2.A7

P4.F2.A8



Physical Activity

Partner with PSUs for widespread implementation of physical activity recommendations in State Board Policy SHLT-000.

JANUARY 2027



School-Based Services

Partner with community and health service organizations to identify and share strategies to expand school-based health services for students and staff, including telehealth.

DECEMBER 2027



Educator Training

Increase educator capacity to address student mental health needs by expanding Youth and Teen Mental Health First Aid training.

DECEMBER 2027

How We Are Responding

Additional Projects



Mental Health Grants
(2 current and 2 new)



**Project AWARE (Advancing
Wellness and Resiliency in Education)**



The Regulated Classroom Pilot
*26-27 School Year in collaboration with
Communities in Schools*



**Statewide Specialized
Instructional Support Conference**
(December 2026)



DHHS Partnerships



Actions to Prioritize

Student, teacher, and administrative data point to:



**Earlier
Prevention**



**Coordinated
Student
Supports**

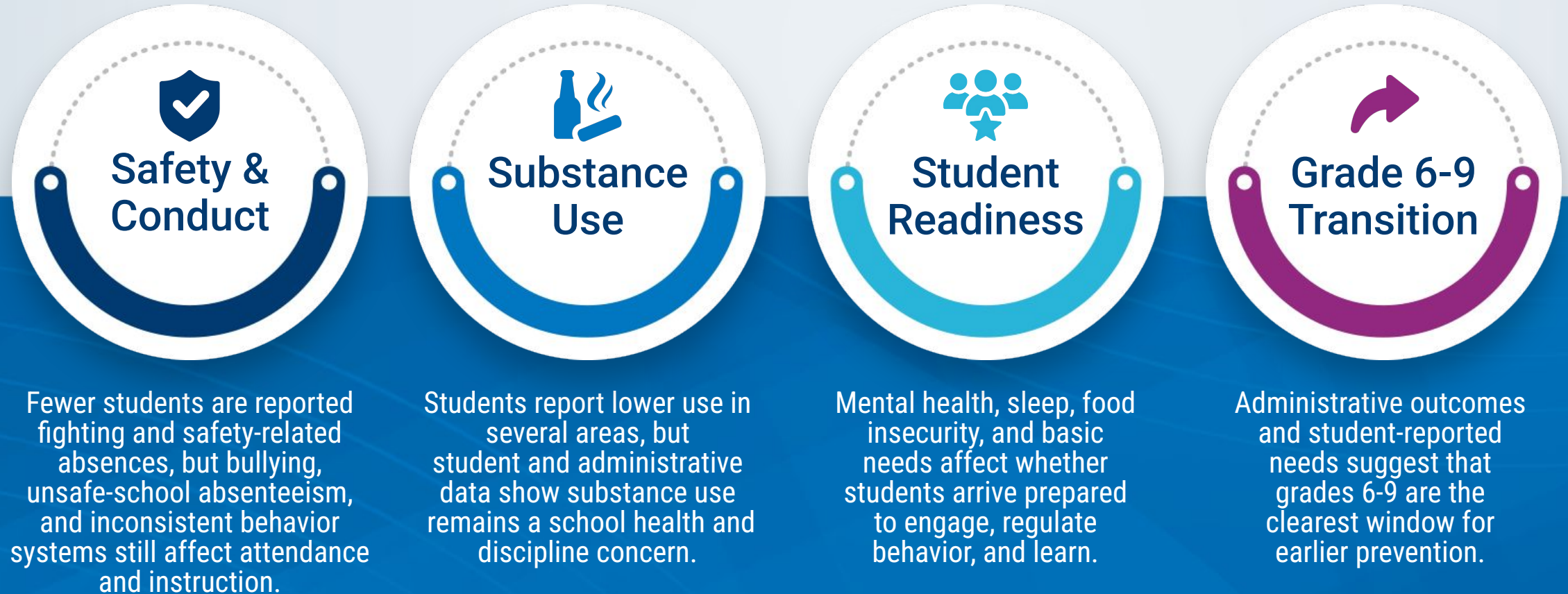


**Stronger
Behavior
Systems**



**Integrated
Data use**

Triangulating the Evidence



Evidence Sources

Teacher Working Conditions ● Youth Risk Behavior Survey ● Discipline, Alternative Learning, and Dropout Reports

Recommendations

Strengthen Grade 6-9 transition supports

focused on attendance, behavior, belonging, course performance, and early warning indicators.



Coordinate mental-health, basic-needs, and substance-use supports

through clearer referral pathways, student services coordination, community partnerships, and re-entry supports after discipline or crisis.



Improve school-wide safety and conduct systems

through clearer expectations, consistent adult follow-through, MTSS alignment, bullying response, and alternatives to escalation when appropriate.



Use integrated data for targeted prevention

by connecting multiple sources of attendance, academic, and local student-support data to identify where needs are concentrated and monitor whether supports are working.





Closing



Progress in several areas is real and should be recognized and reinforced.



Student health, readiness, safety, and connection are **priorities** for support.



Next steps should focus on earlier identification, stronger systems, and better use of data.

**North Carolina has returned to
and exceeded pre-pandemic levels
across nearly all reported measures.**



2025 Youth Risk Behavior Survey

Questions?

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Dr. Ellen Essick, Ellen.Essick@dpi.nc.gov