



DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

OFFICE OF THE STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF

EDUCATION

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Youth Risk Behavior Survey Shows Positive Trends Among DC Youth for 2015, While Highlighting Areas of Concern

(WASHINGTON, DC) – [Results from the 2015 District of Columbia Youth Risk Behavior Survey](#) (YRBS) released today by the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) show positive trends related to obesity and sexual activity among DC youth. Survey results also highlight areas of concern related to mental health that must be addressed to ensure DC students are reaching their maximum academic potential and living healthy lives.

“This rich data source allows us to know what is going well and what may be problematic across the city and in individual schools,” said State Superintendent Hanseul Kang. “Additionally, knowing what pockets of students are most at risk allows us to target those individuals with appropriate programming and development of policy at the state level.”

The biennial YRBS evaluated a representative sample from both District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) and public charter schools (PCS) in 2015, compiling data from more than 30,000 District students in grades six through 12. YRBS data are compared to results from 2012, the last year the survey was administered, and include data from 2007, the first year OSSE administered the survey, to show trends over time.

The survey covers the following risk behavior categories, which coincide with the categories of OSSE’s Health Education Standards: Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drugs, Mental and Emotional Health, Nutrition and Physical Activity, Disease Prevention/Sexual Health, and Safety Skills. The report notes significant differences within subgroups of the DC youth population (e.g., sex, grade, race/ethnicity) for various health behaviors and describes behaviors that have undergone significant changes since the YRBS was previously administered in 2007 and 2012.

Results show positive trends in student well-being with a nearly 2 percent drop in the number of high school students who were obese in 2015. Results for middle school students who described themselves as slightly or very overweight remain unchanged since 2007. DC has worked to combat obesity and hunger since 2010 through the [D.C. Healthy Schools Act](#) – a landmark law designed to improve the health and wellness of all District public school students.

Other positive trends include a 4 percent drop in the pregnancy rate among high school students since 2012, the last year the survey was administered. Condom use among high school

students increased, while sexual activity declined. And more than 60 percent of our students have a supportive adult at school, which we know is vital, particularly for those that experience trauma in their lives. Despite these positive findings, results also highlight areas of concern, including a decrease in testing rates for HIV and sexually transmitted diseases among high school students and a large percent of students who reported feeling depressed, hopeless or suicidal, particularly among Hispanic/Latino students.

Hispanic/Latino high school students reported significantly higher rates of attempting suicide (14.4 percent for boys, 18.3 percent for girls) compared to non-Hispanic black (10.2 percent for boys, 13.2 percent for girls) and white students (6.2 percent for boys, 4.7 percent for girls). Compounding the problems reflected in these data, Hispanic/Latino middle and high school students were significantly less likely than their peers to have a teacher or other adult that they could talk to if they had a problem.

Results also indicate troubling trends among lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) students in several categories. While LGB youth made up 7.3 percent of the District middle school population and 14.4 percent of the District high school population, they were disproportionately represented in youth who used alcohol (21.2 percent of middle school students, 23.5 percent of high school students), tobacco (23.5 percent of middle school students, 22.1 percent of high school students) and other drugs (23 percent of middle school students and 22.1 percent of high school students who used marijuana).

Lesbian, gay, or bisexual high school students were two to three times more likely to feel sad or hopeless and to think seriously about, plan, and attempt to kill themselves. For example, one out of 11 lesbian, gay, or bisexual high school students had to be treated by a doctor or nurse as a result of an attempted suicide.

The YRBS also shows a correlation between academic outcomes and health behaviors. For example, mood and suicidal behaviors were associated with academic performance among high school students, with more than one quarter of students receiving mostly D's and F's reporting having attempted suicide one or more times during the previous 12 months. High school students who receive mostly D's and F's were approximately two-and-a-half times more likely to use marijuana and about seven times more likely to use synthetic marijuana. Results also indicate that students who participate in sports and eat breakfast have significantly better academic outcomes than those who don't.

OSSE will use the data collected through the YRBS to target trainings for all District teachers and principals at public and public charter schools and licensed personnel at child development

facilities on how to identify and refer students with behavioral health needs. Data also will be used for public awareness campaigns and training parents, family members, teachers, school personnel and peers on how to assist youth facing mental health challenges or crises. OSSE is strategically partnering with various agencies and organizations to address the issues reflected in the report.

It is important to understand these risky behaviors, in order to create appropriate multifaceted programs. OSSE is revamping current programs and initiatives to focus on the whole child to coordinate and systematically address issues that are intersected. By doing this, OSSE will focus on expanding the availability of resources to schools and families to address the issues both at school and at home. OSSE also understand the importance of diversifying professional development offerings and including youth at the table to address some of the risky behaviors identified.

Read the full 2015 DC YRBS report on [OSSE's website](#).