



Results of the
**MetroWest
Adolescent Health Survey**

Pollard Middle School
Needham
Grades 7 and 8
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



2008

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EDC

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Pollard Middle School, Needham

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Results from the 2008 MetroWest Adolescent Health Survey

INTRODUCTION

In 2006, the MetroWest Community Health Care Foundation embarked on a ten-year initiative to provide communities with timely, local data on the health and risk behaviors of youth. To accomplish this goal, the **MetroWest Adolescent Health Survey (MWAHS)** is being administered every other year to middle and high school students in the MetroWest region. The current report provides data from the second administration of the MWAHS in the Fall of 2008.

The 2006 survey was initially targeted only to district high schools. However, at a meeting with district representatives, many expressed interest in better understanding the early initiation of risk behaviors and the health needs of middle school students. In response, middle school surveys were offered as an optional addition. In 2006, 13 of 25 districts in the region decided to conduct middle school surveys. In 2008, the number of participating middle school districts increased to 19 (76%). This increase shows a strong commitment to using data to drive community-level decision-making, programming, and policy change. It also allows for the creation of a highly representative regional MetroWest dataset to which individual school districts can compare their results.

For the first time, the report provides information on trends from the 2006 and 2008 survey waves. As subsequent waves of surveys are conducted, communities across the region will be able to monitor emergent issues and trends, identify priorities, and measure progress towards achieving a healthier adolescent population.

The MWAHS development, coordination of survey administration, analysis, and reporting were carried out by the Health and Human Development Division at Education Development Center, Inc.

METHODS

Middle school students in 19 MetroWest districts participated in the 2008 survey. All schools surveyed grades 7 and 8; at four school districts, administrators chose to survey students in 6th grade as well.* Rather than surveying a sample of students, a census was conducted of all students in the participating grades who were present on the days of the survey. Therefore, the results in this report reflect the range of students in the region.

The MWAHS is an anonymous and voluntary survey. Parents/guardians are informed of the survey in advance and given the opportunity to opt out their child(ren). Students are also informed of the voluntary nature of the survey and can decide whether or not to participate. Very few students (0.7%) did not participate for either of these reasons. In addition, the survey administration protocol takes numerous steps to protect students' anonymity and provide privacy. Such steps have been shown to result in valid and reliable youth reporting.^{1,2,3}

This report includes regional data from 10,650 students in grades 7 and 8 (93% of the eligible students in the 19 participating school districts). In Needham, 653 students in grades 7 and 8 participated, representing 93.6% of students. To make use of all data and provide a foundation for future analyses, we have included all 19 participating districts when examining trends from 2006 to 2008.†

* Due to the relatively small number of schools surveying 6th grade, findings are reported in a separate supplement.

† We explored whether it was necessary to restrict the trend analysis to the 13 districts that participated in both surveys. Analyses showed that the differences between the original cohort of 13 districts and the current group of 19 districts were minimal and did not impact the overall findings.

The MWAHS is largely based on the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS), a program of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).⁴ The YRBSS monitors national and state trends in the prevalence of risk behaviors contributing to the leading causes of morbidity and mortality among youth, including:

- ◆ Tobacco, alcohol and drug use
- ◆ Unhealthy dietary behaviors
- ◆ Inadequate physical activity
- ◆ Suicide
- ◆ Violence.

In addition, the MWAHS incorporates topics of particular interest to the MetroWest (MW) communities. Based on feedback from school district personnel, the MWAHS also assesses:

- ◆ Prescription drug misuse
- ◆ Stress and mental health
- ◆ School attachment and adult support
- ◆ Bullying.

The middle school MWAHS is designed specifically for middle school youth in terms of length, reading level, and developmental appropriateness. Questions generally focus on the initiation of risk behaviors that are known to increase over the middle school years.

Massachusetts administered a middle school risk behavior survey for the first time in 2007. When possible, this report will compare data from the MW region and the state. No national comparison data is available, although efforts are underway to expand the CDC middle school survey to a nationally representative sample of youth.

SUBSTANCE USE

OVERALL PATTERNS

One in four middle school youth in Needham (24%) have experimented with alcohol or other substances in their lifetime. Alcohol is the most commonly used substance: 20% of students have had at least one drink of alcohol in their lifetime and 6% report drinking in the past 30 days. 7% of youth report having a drink before they were 11 years of age, and current drinking doubles from 4% in 7th grade to 8% in 8th grade. Middle school students who use alcohol are far more likely to also smoke cigarettes or use marijuana or inhalants.

Fewer students smoke cigarettes than use alcohol: 7% of youth have smoked cigarettes in their lifetime, and 2% have smoked in the past 30 days. Marijuana use is still relatively rare, with 3% reporting lifetime use and 2% reporting current use. Many students initiate use in middle school: from 7th to 8th grade, cigarette smoking increases from 5% to 8% and marijuana use increases from 1% to 6%. While cigarette smoking is more prevalent than marijuana use in middle school, this pattern reverses in high school, where students are more likely to use marijuana than smoke cigarettes.

The proportion of youth who report lifetime cigarette smoking (7%) is the same as the proportion who have ever used inhalants (7%). While other substance use typically increases as students get older, inhalant use decreases after middle school.

Males are more likely to report substance use than females in middle school. For example, more males than females report lifetime cigarette smoking (9% vs. 4%), alcohol use (26% vs. 12%), marijuana use (5% vs. 1%), and inhalant use (9% vs. 5%).

OVERALL TRENDS FROM 2006 TO 2008

Use of most substances—alcohol, cigarettes, marijuana, steroids, and prescription drugs—has remained steady in the past two years. Lifetime inhalant use decreased from 13% in 2006 to 7% in 2008.

Alcohol is the substance most frequently used by middle school students in MetroWest: 20% of students have had a drink of alcohol in their lifetime, and 9% consumed alcohol in the past 30 days. This does not include drinking a few sips of wine for religious purposes.

8% of MW youth have smoked cigarettes in their lifetime, and 5% have smoked marijuana.

Lifetime inhalant use is reported by 7% of youth, defined as sniffing glue, breathing the contents of spray cans, or inhaling paints or sprays to get high.

There were no substantial changes in use of tobacco, alcohol, marijuana, or other substances among middle school students in the MW region.



CURRENT PATTERNS

- ◆ **Cigarettes are used by a small proportion of middle school students:** 7% of students smoked cigarettes in their lifetime, and 2% have smoked in the past 30 days.
- ◆ **Experimentation with cigarettes increases over the middle school years.** Only 1% of students smoked a whole cigarette before the age of 11. From 7th to 8th grade, lifetime smoking increases from 5% to 8%, and current smoking increases from 1% to 3%.
- ◆ **A very small number of middle school youth smoke regularly.** No 7th grade students and 2% of 8th grade students smoked at least one cigarette every day for 30 days at some point in their lifetime.
- ◆ **Smoking on school property is rare.** Only 1% of youth smoked at school in the past 30 days.
- ◆ **Males are more likely than females to smoke cigarettes.** More males than females report lifetime smoking (9% vs. 4%) and current smoking (3% vs. 1%).

Cigarettes are the second most commonly used substance in middle school after alcohol. In MW, 8% of youth smoked in their lifetime, and 4% smoked in the past 30 days. 2% have smoked regularly for at least 30 days in their lifetime.

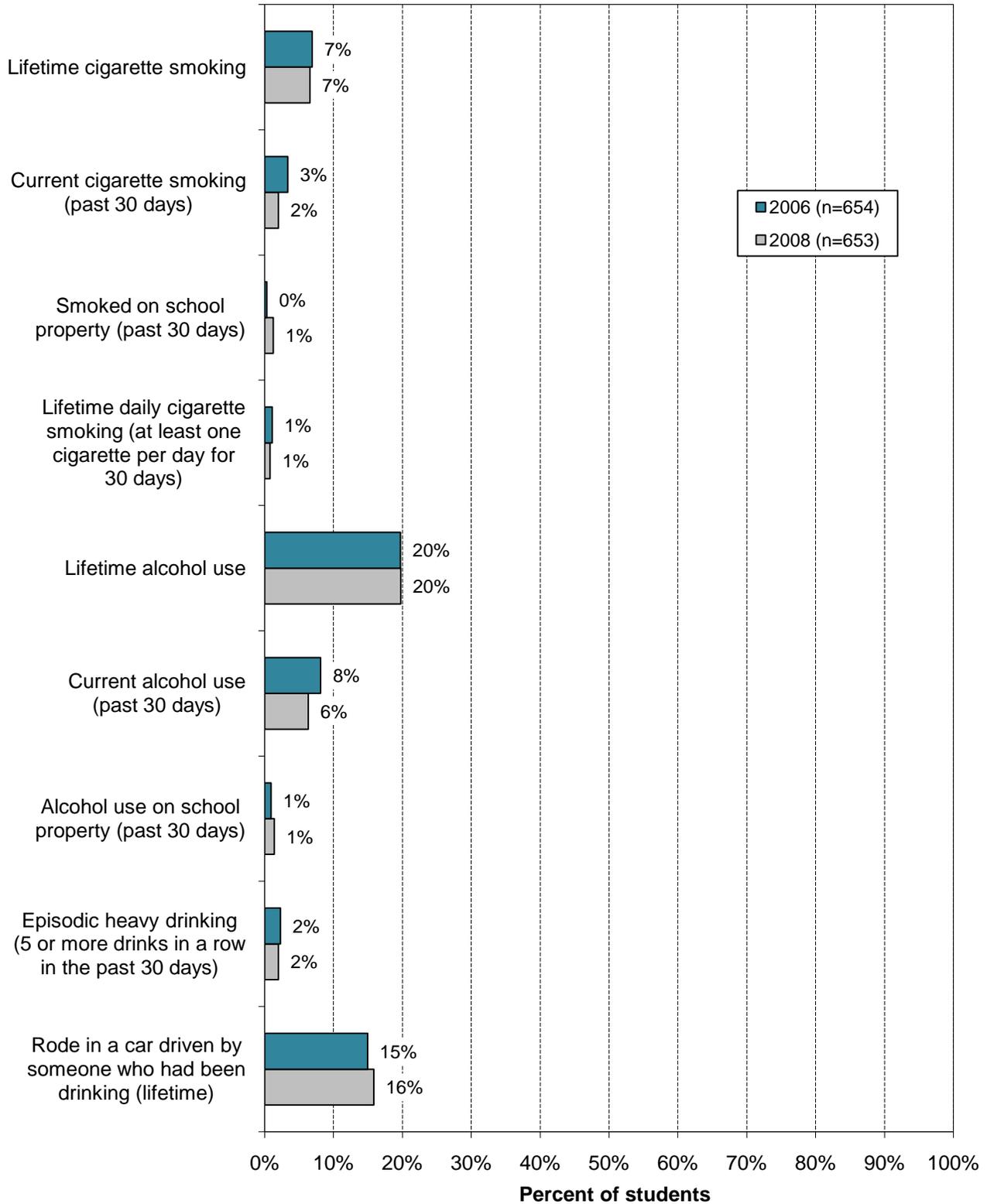
Youth smoking in MW is substantially lower than in MA. For example, in 8th grade, lifetime smoking among MW youth (12%) is half that of MA youth (23%). Current smoking is also lower in 8th grade in MW compared with the state (5% vs. 8%).

TRENDS FROM 2006 TO 2008

- ◆ **Reports of cigarette smoking are similar in 2006 and 2008.** 2-3% of students are current smokers at each time point, and 7% have tried smoking at least once.

In the MetroWest region, cigarette smoking in middle school has not changed substantially in the past two years.

Tobacco Use, Alcohol Use, and Riding With Impaired Drivers in 2006 and 2008
Pollard Middle School, Needham - Grades 7 and 8
MetroWest Adolescent Health Survey, 2008



CURRENT PATTERNS

- ◆ **Alcohol is the most frequently used substance among middle school youth:** 20% report lifetime use, and 6% consumed alcohol in the past 30 days.
- ◆ **A substantial number of youth experiment with alcohol early.** 7% of all youth had their first drink prior to age 11. Lifetime use increases from 16% in 7th grade to 24% in 8th grade, current use increases from 4% to 8%, and “binge” drinking increases from 1% to 3%.
- ◆ **A small number of middle school students report episodic heavy (“binge”) drinking.** 2% of students report “binge” drinking in the past 30 days, and the same proportion report being “drunk” in the past 30 days. *“Binge” drinking is defined as having five or more drinks in a row on one occasion.*
- ◆ **Alcohol use on school property is rare.** Only 1% of students used alcohol on school property in the past 30 days.
- ◆ **One in six youth (16%) report they have been a passenger in a car with a driver who had been drinking.** *Note: this could have happened only once, and the driver could have been a parent, other adult, sibling or older peer.*
- ◆ **Males are more likely to report drinking than females.** 26% of males and 12% of females have had a drink of alcohol in their lifetime. 9% of males and 4% of females drank in the past 30 days. Males also initiate alcohol use earlier: twice as many males as females (8% vs. 4%) consumed alcohol prior to age 11. However, in high school, drinking among males and females is similar.

Alcohol use is substantially lower among MW youth compared with MA youth. For example, in 8th grade, fewer MW youth report lifetime use (26% vs. 34%), current use (12% vs. 17%), and “binge” drinking (2% vs. 8%).

In the MW region, 21% of middle school youth have been passengers in a car with a driver who had been drinking. Data for MA is not available.

MW males are more likely than females to drink alcohol in middle school. For example, more males than females report lifetime use (24% vs. 16%) and early initiation (9% vs. 5%). By early high school, similar proportions of males and females are drinking.

Recent drinking in MW more than doubles from 7th grade (5%) to 8th grade (12%).

TRENDS FROM 2006 TO 2008

- ◆ **Alcohol use is steady over the past two years.** 6-8% of middle school students report recent drinking at both time points and 2-3% report “binge” drinking.

Alcohol use has not changed in MetroWest. Current use is steady at 9%, and “binge” drinking remains at 3% in the region.



MARIJUANA USE

CURRENT PATTERNS

- ◆ **A small but concerning proportion of middle school students (3%) used marijuana in their lifetime**, and 2% used marijuana in the past 30 days.
- ◆ **Experimentation with marijuana begins in middle school.** Only 1% of youth used marijuana prior to age 11. From 7th to 8th grade, lifetime use increases from 1% to 6%. Similarly, current use rises from 1% to 3%.
- ◆ **Males are more likely to use marijuana than females.** Lifetime use is substantially higher among males (5%) than females (1%). Current use is also higher among males (3% vs. 1%).

5% of MW youth have used marijuana in their lifetime, and 3% report current use. Males are about twice as likely as females to have used marijuana at least once (7% vs. 3%).

Marijuana use is lower in MW than in MA. For example, in 8th grade, fewer MW youth report lifetime (8% vs. 14%) and current use (5% vs. 8%) compared with MA youth.

TRENDS FROM 2006 TO 2008

- ◆ **Marijuana use in middle school remains steady.** At both time points, about 3-4% of youth report they have used marijuana at least once, and 2-3% report current use.

Marijuana use in MW has not changed in recent years. Lifetime use has been steady at 5%, and current use has stayed at 3%.



INHALANT USE

CURRENT PATTERNS

- ◆ **After alcohol, inhalants are the substance most often used in middle school.** 7% of students have used inhalants in their lifetime. *This includes sniffing glue, breathing the contents of aerosol spray cans, or inhaling any paints or sprays to get high.*
- ◆ **Lifetime inhalant use increases from 4% in 7th grade to 9% in 8th grade.**
- ◆ **Inhalant use is nearly twice as high among males (9%) compared with females (5%).**

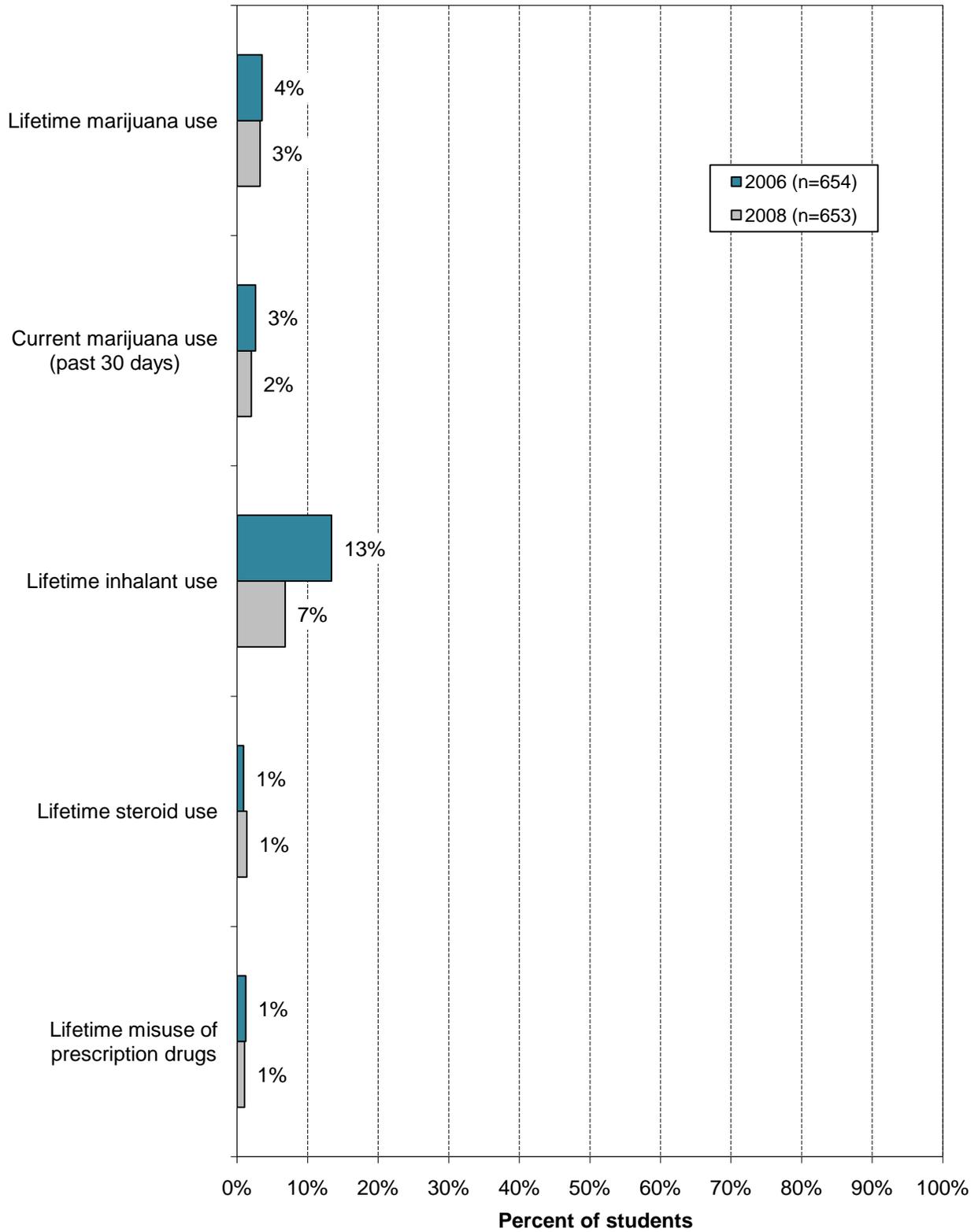
In the MW region, lifetime inhalant use (7%) is reported by about the same proportion of youth who report lifetime cigarette smoking (8%).

TRENDS FROM 2006 TO 2008

- ◆ **Lifetime reports of inhalant use have decreased in the past two years**, from 13% to 7%.

In MW, lifetime inhalant use has remained similar.

Marijuana and Other Substance Use in 2006 and 2008
Pollard Middle School, Needham - Grades 7 and 8
MetroWest Adolescent Health Survey, 2008



PRESCRIPTION DRUG AND STEROID MISUSE

CURRENT PATTERNS

- ◆ **Misuse of prescription drugs and steroids occurs infrequently in middle school.** 1% of students misused prescription drugs in their lifetime, and 1% misused steroids. *This means using them without a doctor's prescription.* While the prevalence of steroid use increases only slightly after middle school, prescription drug misuse increases substantially in the high school years.

Very few MW youth have misused prescription drugs (2%) or steroids (1%) in their lifetime.

TRENDS FROM 2006 TO 2008

- ◆ **Reports of lifetime misuse of prescription drugs and steroids are steady over the past two years.**

Prescription drug and steroid misuse have remained steady in MW in the past two years.

AVAILABILITY OF SUBSTANCE ON SCHOOL PROPERTY

CURRENT PATTERNS

- ◆ **A small number of youth have access to substances on school property.** 3% were offered, sold, or given tobacco or alcohol on school property in the past 12 months, and 4% were offered, sold, or given marijuana, pills, or other drugs during this time.
- ◆ **Males are more likely than females to have access to marijuana, pills, and other drugs.** 6% of males and 1% of females were offered, sold, or given marijuana, pills, or other drugs in the past year. However, availability of tobacco and alcohol was similar among males (4%) and females (3%).
- ◆ **The availability of substances on school property increases notably from 7th to 8th grade.** Availability of tobacco and alcohol increases from 1% in 7th grade to 6% in 8th grade. For marijuana, pills, and other drugs, availability increases from 1% in 7th grade to 7% in 8th grade.

In MW middle schools, availability of tobacco and alcohol on school property is the same as that of marijuana, pills, or other drugs on school property (both 4%).

TRENDS FROM 2006 TO 2008

- ◆ **The availability of substances on school property is similar over time,** with 8th grade students consistently reporting greater access to tobacco, marijuana, alcohol, and other drugs at both time points.

The availability of substances on middle school property has not changed substantially in the region in the past two years.

VIOLENCE AND RELATED BEHAVIORS

OVERALL PATTERNS

Violence, including physical fighting, bullying, weapon carrying, and other threats to personal and school safety, often increases during the middle school years. Bullying – defined as being repeatedly teased, threatened, hit, kicked, or excluded by another student or group of students – is the most common form of violence experienced by Needham middle school youth. 46% of all students were bullied in the past 12 months, 42% were bullied on school property, and 15% were bullied electronically, defined as using the Internet, phone, or other electronic communications to bully, tease or threaten.

Along with bullying, physical fighting and weapons also pose a serious concern in middle school: 24% of youth have been in a fight in the past 12 months, and 6% of youth say they have carried a weapon, such as a gun, knife, or club, in the past 30 days. These behaviors are slightly higher among older students. Physical fighting is highest in middle school and early high school; in the MetroWest regional high school survey, reports of physical fighting decrease steadily after 9th grade.

Males are far more likely to engage in violence-related behaviors. Over five times as many males as females report being in a physical fight in the past year, and males are also substantially more likely to report carrying a weapon in the past 30 days. Males are also more likely to self-report that they are bullying perpetrators (39% compared to 29%). However, males and females report similar levels of bullying victimization (47% vs. 46%), and females are more likely to report being victimized by electronic bullying (17% vs. 13%).

OVERALL TRENDS FROM 2006 TO 2008

There are no overall trends in violence-related behaviors from 2006 to 2008. Despite regional bullying increases, bullying victimization remained steady at 46% in Needham, and bullying on school property was similar at 41-42%. Electronic bullying also does not show an overall increase. Other behaviors related to violence remained similar, although there may be a decrease in lifetime reports of physical fighting on school property, from 20% to 15%.

Bullying is prevalent among middle school youth in MW: 49% were bullying victims and 43% were bullied on school property in the past 12 months. 16% of MW youth were victims of electronic bullying during this time.

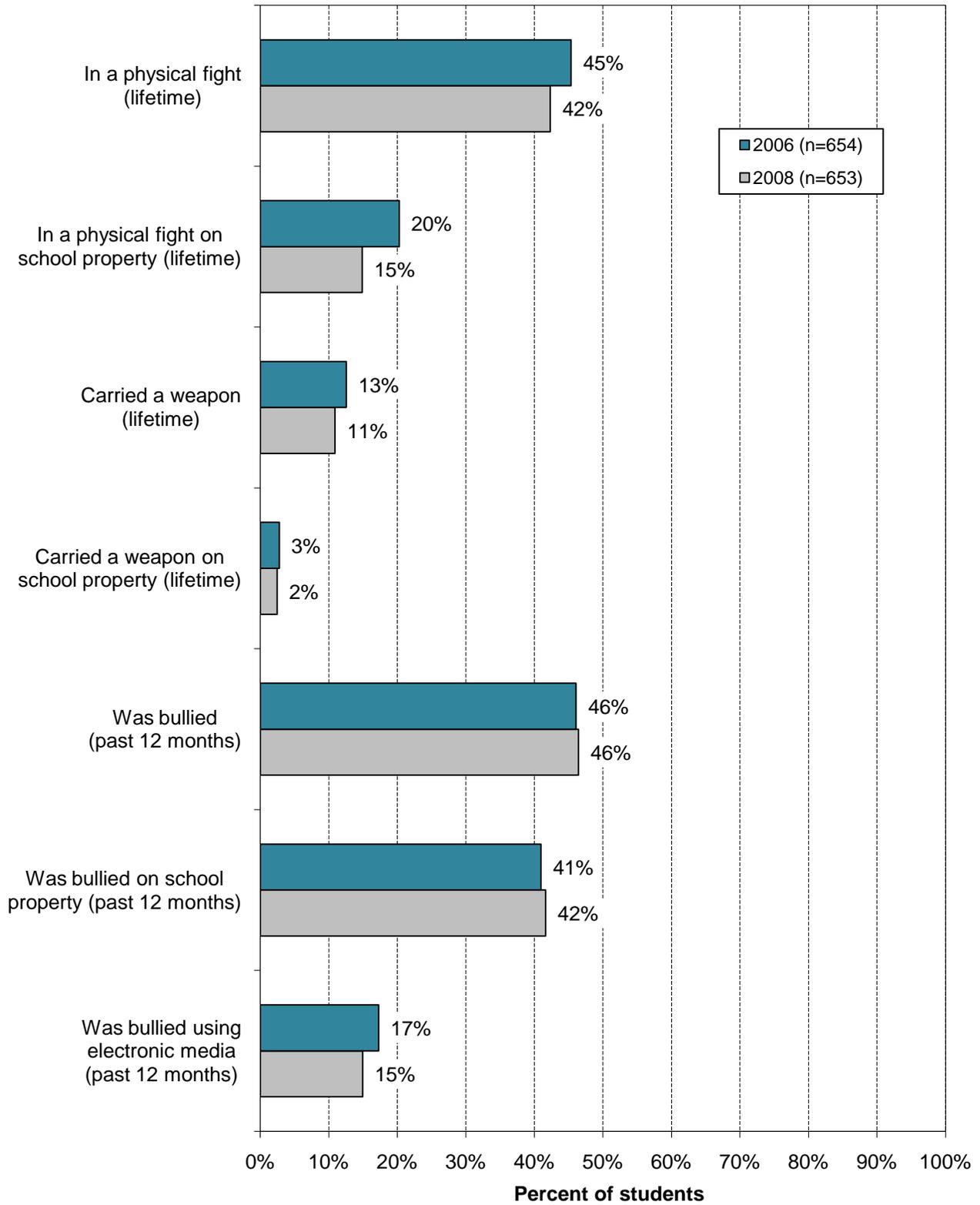
Physical fighting is also common in middle school. One in four MW youth (26%) were in a physical fight in their lifetime, and 8% carried a weapon in the past 30 days.

Males are more likely than females to be in fights, to carry weapons, and to be perpetrators of bullying.

There are increases in reports of bullying in the region over the past two years, both in general and on school property. Electronic bullying has not changed in the region.

Physical fighting and weapon-carrying have remained steady in MetroWest.

Physical Fighting, Weapon Carrying, and Bullying in 2006 and 2008
Pollard Middle School, Needham - Grades 7 and 8
MetroWest Adolescent Health Survey, 2008



PERSONAL SAFETY AT SCHOOL

CURRENT PATTERNS

- ◆ **Theft and damage of personal property at school are common occurrences.** 23% of students had their property (such as clothing or books) stolen or deliberately damaged at school in the past 12 months. More males report this (25%) than females (21%). 8th grade students (29%) are more likely to report this than 7th grade students (18%).
- ◆ **Fears about safety at school impact attendance for a small group of youth.** 2% of students didn't attend school on at least one occasion in the past 30 days because they felt they would be unsafe at school or on the way to or from school.

Most MW youth feel safe at school: Only 3% said they didn't attend school once or more in the past month due to safety concerns.

However, nearly a quarter (23%) had their property stolen or damaged at school in the past 12 months.

TRENDS FROM 2006 TO 2008

- ◆ **Property damage and theft at school has remained steady, at 22-23%.**
- ◆ **Absence from school due to safety concerns has not changed.**

In the MW region, there was an increase in property damage/theft at school, from 19% to 23%. Absence from school due to safety concerns remained steady at 3%.

PHYSICAL FIGHTING

CURRENT PATTERNS

- ◆ **Physical fighting is common among middle school students.** 42% of students were in a physical fight in their lifetime, and 24% were in a fight in the past 12 months.
- ◆ **A substantial amount of fighting occurs on school property.** 15% of youth were in a physical fight on school property in their lifetime, and 8% were in a fight at school in the past 12 months.
- ◆ **Fights can sometimes result in serious consequences.** 6% of youth have received medical treatment as a result of an injury suffered in a fight.
- ◆ **Males are far more likely than females to engage in physical fighting.** Substantially more males than females (39% vs. 7%) were in a physical fight in the past 12 months, and more males were in a fight on school property (13% vs. 1%).
- ◆ **Fighting is slightly higher among older students.** 21% of 7th grade students and 27% of 8th grade students were in a fight in the past 12 months.

Physical fighting among middle school youth is common, particularly among males. Nearly half of MW youth were in a physical fight in their lifetime (45%), and 26% were in a fight in the past 12 months (38% of males and 14% of females). 27% of males and 6% of females were in a fight on school property in the past 12 months.

TRENDS FROM 2006 TO 2008

- ◆ **Reports of physical fighting are similar.** At both time points, slight less than half of students were in a physical fight at least once in their lifetime. However, lifetime reports of fighting on school property decreased from 20% to 15%.

In MetroWest, physical fighting has not changed in recent years: lifetime fighting has remained steady at 45%.

WEAPONS

CURRENT PATTERNS

- ◆ **A small, but concerning, proportion of youth report they have carried a weapon.** 11% carried a weapon, such as a gun, knife, or club, in their lifetime, and 6% carried a weapon in the past 30 days.
- ◆ **A small number of youth (2%) have carried a weapon on school property in their lifetime.**
- ◆ **Males are far more likely to carry weapons than females.** 16% of males and 5% of females carried a weapon in their lifetime. 10% of males and 1% of females carried a weapon in the past 30 days.
- ◆ **Weapon-carrying is higher among older students.** For example, 3% of 7th grade students have carried a weapon in the past 30 days, compared with 8% in 8th grade.

Weapon-carrying is a concern among middle school youth in MW, particularly among males. In MW, 16% of youth have carried a weapon in their lifetime, and 8% have done so in the past 30 days (13% of males and 2% of females).

TRENDS FROM 2006 TO 2008

- ◆ **Reports of weapon-carrying are similar.** At the two time points, about 11-13% of youth have carried a weapon in their lifetime, and 2-3% have carried a weapon on school property at least once.

There have been no substantial changes in weapon-carrying in MW.

BULLYING

CURRENT PATTERNS

- ◆ **Nearly half of all middle school youth have been victims of bullying.** 46% were bullied in the past 12 months, and 42% were bullied on school property. One in three youth (35%) report they have bullied others.
- ◆ **A smaller, but still considerable, proportion of youth are victims of electronic bullying.** 15% of youth were bullied electronically in the past 12 months. 7% were perpetrators of electronic bullying.
- ◆ **Overall bullying victimization is similar between males and females.** 46% of females and 47% of males report that they have been bullied in the past year.
- ◆ **Electronic bullying victimization is higher among females (17%) than males (13%).**
- ◆ **Males are more likely to self-report they have been bullying perpetrators.** 39% of males and 29% of females said they bullied someone else in the past 12 months. 9% of males and 5% of females report electronic bullying perpetration.
- ◆ **Reports of bullying are similar in 7th and 8th grades.**

Bullying is the most common form of violence in MW. 49% of youth in the region have been bullied in the past 12 months (51% of females and 46% of males). During the same time, 16% of youth were bullied electronically (20% of females and 12% of males).

TRENDS FROM 2006 TO 2008

- ◆ **Despite regional increases, overall bullying has remained similar in the past two years.** For example, overall bullying victimization in the past 12 months is about 46% at both time points.
- ◆ **Reports of electronic bullying are also similar at both time points,** with 15-17% of youth reporting electronic bullying victimization.

Bullying victimization increased in MW, from 44% to 49%. Similarly, bullying on school property increased, from 39% to 43%. While bullying increased among both males and females, the increase was greater among females.

Despite media attention, student reports of electronic bullying did not change substantially in the region.

BEHAVIORS RELATED TO UNINTENTIONAL INJURY

OVERALL PATTERNS

Although the vast majority of youth wear seatbelts regularly (91% wear seatbelts all or most of the time), many middle school youth fail to wear helmets when rollerblading, skateboarding, or bicycling, increasing their risk of unintentional injury. Nearly half of those who rollerblade or skateboard (45%) never or rarely wear a helmet, and 24% of students who ride a bicycle never or rarely wear a helmet. Males are more likely than females to ride without helmets, and helmet use decreases from 7th to 8th grade. This is a concern, since rates continue to fall during high school.

Risk of unintentional injury also may increase when youth ride in cars driven by individuals who have been drinking alcohol. At least once in their lifetime, 16% of students were passengers in a car with a driver who had been drinking. *Note: the driver could have been a parent, other adult, or an individual under the age of 21.*

The majority of MW youth wear seatbelts: only 4% never or rarely wear one. However, fewer youth wear helmets. 37% of MW youth never or rarely wear a helmet when riding a bicycle, and 51% never or rarely wear a helmet when rollerblading or skateboarding.

In MW, 21% of students rode in a car with a driver who had been drinking in their lifetime.

OVERALL TRENDS FROM 2006 TO 2008

Overall student reports of safety-related behaviors are similar at the two time points. There may have been a slight decrease in helmet use while rollerblading or skateboarding, with 45% of students reporting they never or rarely wore a helmet, compared with 37% in 2006. Helmet use when bicycling, seatbelt use, and reports of riding with a driver who had been drinking did not change.

Over the past two years, helmet use among youth who rollerblade or skateboard in MW decreased slightly in the region, while helmet use on bicycles and seatbelt use did not change.

Riding with a driver who had been drinking also did not change in the region.

SEATBELT AND HELMET USE

CURRENT PATTERNS

- ◆ **Most students (91%) wear seatbelts most or all of the time.** Only 4% never or rarely wear a seatbelt when riding in a car driven by someone else.
- ◆ **Many students put themselves at risk of injury by not wearing helmets.** 24% of bicycle riders never or rarely wear a helmet. 45% of students who rollerblade or skateboard never or rarely wear a helmet.
- ◆ **Males are more likely than females to be at risk of unintentional injury.** More males than females never or rarely wear helmets when riding bicycles (28% vs. 18%) and when rollerblading or skateboarding (53% vs. 33%). Males are also more likely to never or rarely wear seatbelts (6% vs. 2%).
- ◆ **Helmet and seatbelt use decline as students get older.** 18% of 7th grade students and 30% of 8th grade students never or rarely wear helmets when bicycling. Lack of helmet use when rollerblading or skateboarding also increases from 7th grade (40%) to 8th grade (49%).

89% of MW youth wear seatbelts all or most of the time when riding in cars.

Substantially fewer youth in MW wear helmets, and males are especially at risk of unintentional injury. MW males are more likely than females to never or rarely wear helmets when bicycling (42% vs. 32%) and rollerblading or skateboarding (59% vs. 44%).

TRENDS FROM 2006 TO 2008

- ◆ **Use of seatbelts is similar at the two time points.**
- ◆ **Helmet use while rollerblading or skateboarding may have decreased,** with 45% of students reporting they never or rarely wear a helmet in 2008, compared with 37% in 2006. However, helmet use while riding a bicycle remained steady at 24%.

In recent years, helmet use among MW youth who rollerblade or skateboard in MW decreased slightly: the proportion of youth who never or rarely wear a helmet increased from 48% to 51%. Helmet use among bicyclists did not change.

Seatbelt use in MW also remained steady.

DRIVING AFTER DRINKING

CURRENT PATTERNS

- ◆ **At least once in their lifetime, 16% of youth rode in a car with a driver who had been drinking.** This is slightly higher for males (18%) than females (13%), and the driver could be a parent, other adult, or someone else.
- ◆ **As students get older, they are more likely to report they rode in a car with a driver who had used alcohol.** 12% of 7th grade students and 20% of 8th grade students have ridden with a driver who had been drinking.

In their lifetime, 21% of MW youth rode in a car with a driver who had been drinking. This increases from 7th grade (16%) to 8th grade (25%), but does not vary by gender in the region.

TRENDS FROM 2006 TO 2008

- ◆ **Riding with a driver who had been drinking is similar at the two time points,** with about 15-16% reporting this at least once in their lifetime.

In MW, the proportion of students who have ever ridden in a car with a driver who had been drinking has not changed.

STRESS, MENTAL HEALTH, AND SUICIDE

OVERALL PATTERNS

Mental health is a concern for a substantial proportion of middle school youth. Stress is common, with 10% reporting their life was “very” stressful in the past 30 days. A similar proportion of youth (9%) experienced symptoms of depression in the past 12 months, defined as feeling sad or hopeless for two or more weeks in a row. 8% of students report that they have seriously considered suicide in their lifetime, and 2% say they have made a suicide attempt.

Females are more likely than males to experience suicidality, but reports of stress, depressive symptoms, and suicide attempts are similar between males and females. 8th grade students are more likely to report that they have experienced these mental health issues in their lifetime, with prevalences increasing during the high school years.

OVERALL TRENDS FROM 2006 TO 2008

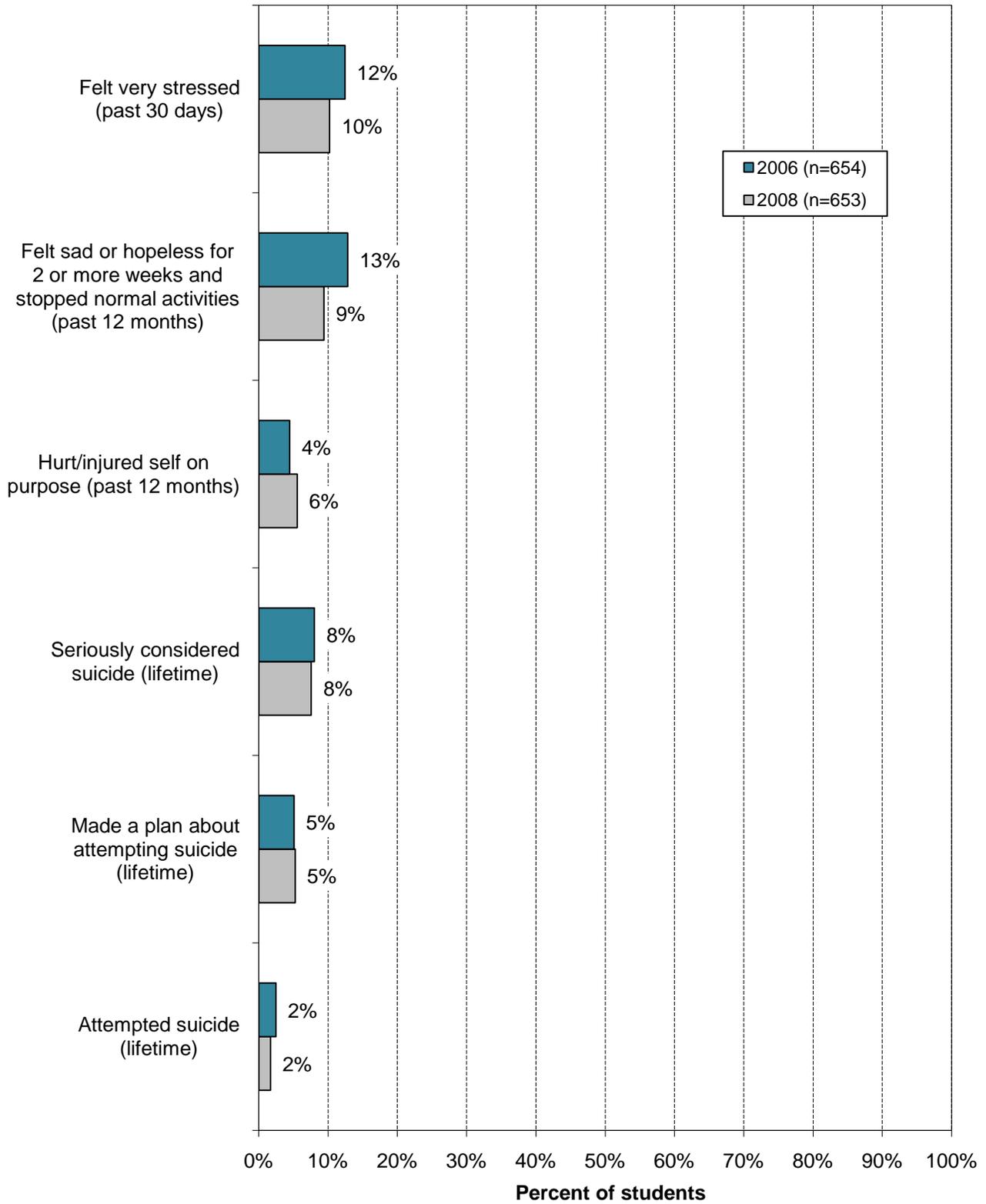
Similar proportions of students report stress, self-injury, and suicidality at both time points. There might be a slight decrease in reports of depressive symptoms in the past 12 months, but other measures do not show a similar decrease.

Stress and poor mental health are a concern among middle school students in the region. In MW, 14% of youth reported that their life was very stressful in the past 30 days, 15% felt symptoms of depression in the past 12 months, and 8% hurt or injured themselves on purpose in the past 12 months.

In their lifetime, 11% of MW seriously considered suicide, 7% made a plan about committing suicide, and 3% actually attempted suicide.

In MW, there have not been any changes in stress, depression, self-injury, and suicidality.

Stress, Mental Health, and Suicide in 2006 and 2008
Pollard Middle School, Needham - Grades 7 and 8
MetroWest Adolescent Health Survey, 2008



STRESS

CURRENT PATTERNS

- ◆ **Stress is common among middle school youth**, with 26% reporting that their life was “somewhat” stressful, and 10% reporting their life was “very” stressful in the past 30 days.
- ◆ **Males and females experience similar levels of stress.** 11% of females and 10% of males said their life was “very” stressful.
- ◆ **Older students are more likely to experience stress.** Reports of recent stress increase slightly from 7th grade (9%) to 8th grade (12%).

14% of MW youth report that their life was very stressful in the past 30 days. This is higher among females than males (17% vs. 11%) and among 8th grade students than 7th grade students (16% vs. 11%).

TRENDS FROM 2006 TO 2008

- ◆ **About one in ten students report their lives are “very” stressful at both time points.**

Reports of stress have not changed in MW in the past two years.

MENTAL HEALTH AND SUICIDE

CURRENT PATTERNS

- ◆ **A substantial number of youth report depressive symptoms.** 9% of youth felt sad or hopeless almost every day for two or more weeks in the past 12 months.
- ◆ **Suicidal ideation is also prevalent.** 8% of students seriously considered suicide, and 5% made a plan about attempting suicide in their lifetime.
- ◆ **Many youth engage in self-injury.** 6% have deliberately injured themselves in the past 12 months. *This includes hurting or injuring themselves on purpose by cutting, burning, or bruising themselves.*
- ◆ **A concerning number of middle school youth (2%) have attempted suicide in their lifetime.**
- ◆ **Females are more likely to report self-injury and suicidal ideation than males.** 7% of females and 4% of males engaged in self-injury in the past 12 months. 10% of females have seriously considered suicide in their lifetime, compared to 6% of males.
- ◆ **Males and females report similar levels of depressive symptoms and suicide attempts.** For example, the same proportion of females and males report symptoms of depression (9% for each) in the past 12 months. In their lifetime, the same proportion of males and females have attempted suicide (2% of each).
- ◆ **Depressive symptoms and self-injury increase as students get older.** More 8th grade students (11%) than 7th grade students (8%) report depressive symptoms in the past 12 months. Similarly, self-injury in the past 12 months is more common among 8th grade students (9%) than 7th grade students (2%). Lifetime suicidality and suicide attempts also increase from 7th to 8th grade.

In MW, females are more likely than males to report symptoms of depression in the past 12 months (18% vs. 13%). In their lifetime, females are more likely to consider suicide (13% vs. 9%) and to make an actual suicide attempt (4% vs. 2%).

While reports of depressive symptoms are similar for youth statewide and in the MW region, self-injury is substantially lower in MW (9% vs. 16% among 8th grade students). Comparison data is not available for suicidality and suicide attempts.

TRENDS FROM 2006 TO 2008

- ◆ **Reports of most mental health measures are similar in 2006 and 2008.** At the two time points, about one in twenty students report self-injury, 8% of students have seriously considered suicide in their lifetime, and 2% have attempted suicide. There is a slight decrease in depressive symptoms in the past 12 months, from 13% to 9%. However, other mental health measures do not show a similar decline.

There have been no notable changes in depressive symptoms, self-injury, and suicidality in the region.

WEIGHT, NUTRITION, AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

OVERALL PATTERNS

Needham youth are less likely to be overweight or obese than youth in Massachusetts. 9% are overweight, *defined as being in the 85th to 95th percentile for body mass index (BMI) by age and gender*, and 4% are obese, *defined as being in the 95th or above percentile*. BMIs are calculated from self-reported height and weight.

Consistent with national data, males are more likely than females to be overweight (13% vs. 4%) or obese (6% vs. 2%). Males are also more likely to report unhealthy eating behaviors, such as consuming fast food and non-diet soda. While females are less likely to be overweight or obese, they are more likely to be trying to lose weight (35% vs. 26%). Substantially more females than males have dieted or fasted in their lifetime to lose weight or keep from gaining weight.

Males are more likely to report unhealthy eating, yet they are slightly more likely to engage in physical activity: 86% of males, compared with 81% of females, exercised vigorously on 3 or more of the past 7 days.

OVERALL TRENDS FROM 2006 TO 2008

There have not been any substantial changes in weight control behaviors, nutrition, or physical activity in the past two years. There may have been a decrease in consumption of non-diet soda, from 42% to 35%, but other patterns of food consumption did not change. There also may be a very slight decline in overweight/obesity, but future data is needed to determine if this is indicative of a trend.

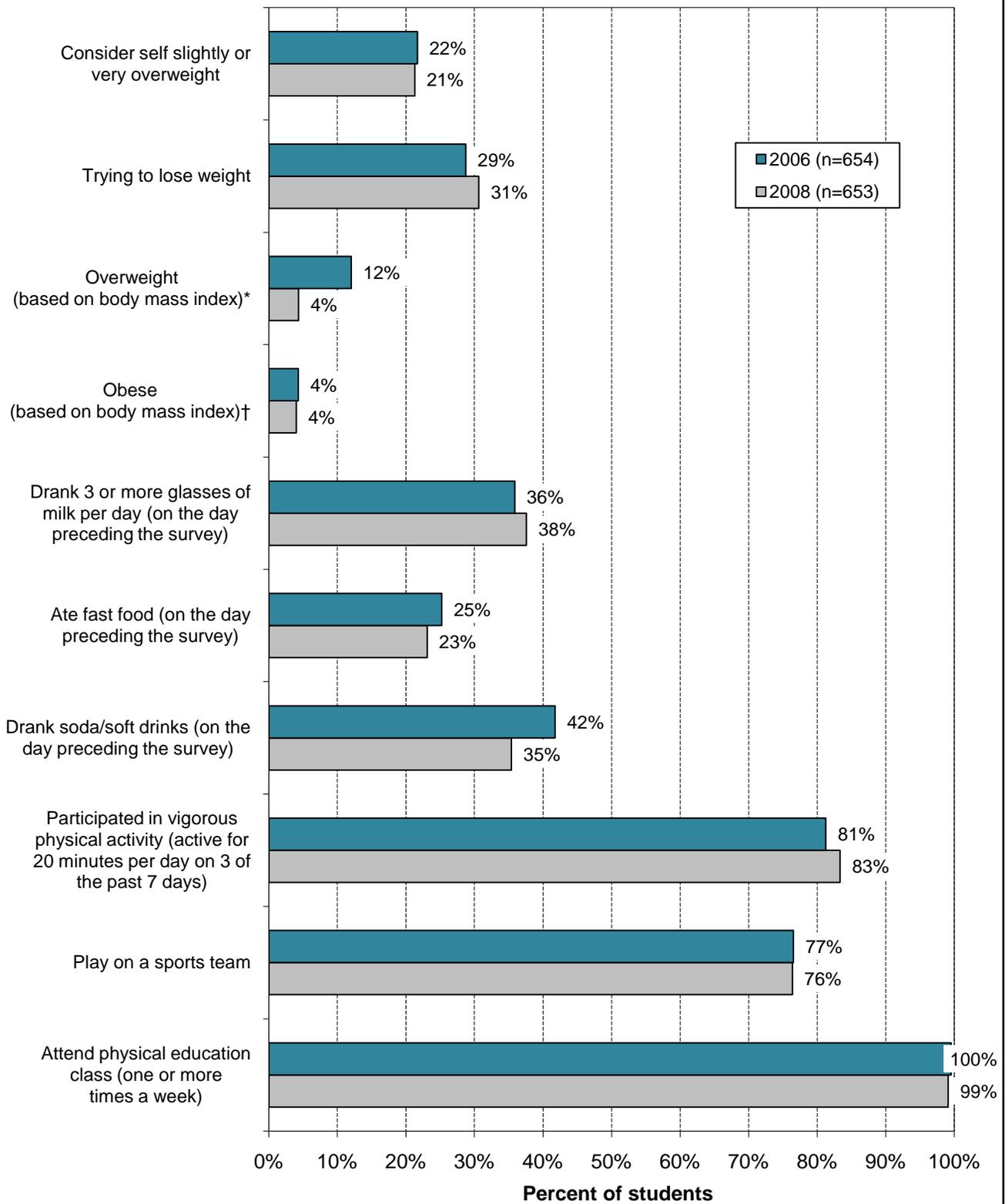
In the MW region, 20% of students are overweight or obese. This is lower than in MA, where 28% of youth are classified this way based on BMI.

29% of MW youth ate fast food and 47% drank non-diet soda on the day before the survey.

79% of youth in the region engaged in vigorous physical activity on at least 3 of the past 7 days. 94% attended physical education class at least once in the past week.

Overweight/obesity, weight control, nutrition, and physical activity have remained steady in MW in the past two years.

Weight Perception, Body Weight, Nutrition, and Physical Activity in 2006 and 2008
Pollard Middle School, Needham - Grades 7 and 8
MetroWest Adolescent Health Survey, 2008



*Students who were ≥85th percentile but <95th percentile for body mass index by age and sex, based on reference data
 †Students who were ≥95th percentile for body mass index by age and sex, based on reference data

OVERWEIGHT, WEIGHT PERCEPTION, AND WEIGHT CONTROL

CURRENT PATTERNS

- ◆ **One in five students (13%) are overweight or obese.** 9% are overweight (85th to 95th percentile BMI for age and sex), and 4% are obese (95th or higher percentile BMI). This information is based on self-reported height and weight data.
- ◆ **More males than females are overweight or obese.** 13% of males and 4% of females are overweight; 6% of males and 2% of females are obese.
- ◆ **Females more frequently perceive themselves as overweight.** While 6% of females are classified as overweight or obese, 19% describe themselves as “slightly” or “very” overweight, and 35% are trying to lose weight. Among males, overweight/obesity (19%) is more similar to the proportion who perceive they are overweight (23%) and trying to lose weight (26%).
- ◆ **Many youth exercise or diet to control their weight.** 60% have exercised in their lifetime to lose weight or keep from gaining weight, and 35% have dieted in their lifetime.
- ◆ **Females are also more likely to engage in weight control behaviors.** In their lifetime, females are more likely to diet (40% vs. 31%), fast (9% vs. 6%), and take laxatives/vomit (3% vs. 1%).

In MW, 13% of youth are overweight, and 7% are obese. Altogether, overweight/obesity is substantially lower in MW (20%) than the state (28%).

MW males are more likely than females to be overweight (14% vs. 12%) or obese (8% vs. 5%). Yet, MW females are more likely to be trying to lose weight (42% vs. 26%). They are also more likely to diet, fast, and vomit or take laxatives.

TRENDS FROM 2006 TO 2008

- ◆ **There have been no changes in weight perception or weight control behaviors in the past year.** There may be a very slight decrease in the proportion of youth who are classified as overweight or obese, from 16% to 13%. However, given that other measures related to weight, nutrition, and physical activity are steady, additional data is needed to determine if the small change in overweight/obesity is indicative of a trend.

Overweight and obesity have remained similar in MW in the past two years. There have also been no substantial changes in weight perception and weight control behaviors.

NUTRITION

CURRENT PATTERNS

- ◆ **Most students consume some fruits and vegetables.** 83% ate fruit or drank 100-percent fruit juice and 85% ate vegetables the day prior to the survey.
- ◆ **Only 38% of students consume the recommended three glasses of milk per day,** though 88% consume dairy products one or more times.
- ◆ **A substantial number of youth report drinking non-diet soda and eating fast food.** 35% drank non-diet soda and 23% consumed fast food on the day prior to the survey.
- ◆ **Consistent with gender patterns in overweight and obesity, males are more likely to report unhealthy eating.** More males than females ate fast food (32% vs. 13%) and drank non-diet soda (44% vs. 25%) on the day prior to the survey
- ◆ **Most consumption patterns are similar in 7th and 8th grades.** However, consumption of three or more classes of milk a day increases from 35% in 7th grade to 41% in 8th grade.

A majority of MW youth consumed fruit or fruit juice on the day before the survey (82%), and 80% consumed vegetables or green salad.

However, 29% ate fast food, and 47% drank non-diet soda the day before.

TRENDS FROM 2006 TO 2008

- ◆ **Overall consumption patterns remained similar at the two time points.** However, there was a decrease in consumption of non-diet soda, from 42% to 35%.

Nutrition patterns have not changed in the region in the past two years.

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

CURRENT PATTERNS

- ◆ **Most youth exercise vigorously at least three days per week.** 83% participated in vigorous activity for at least 20 minutes that made them sweat or breathe hard (such as basketball, soccer, running, swimming laps, fast bicycling, fast dancing, or similar aerobic activity) on three or more days in the past week.
- ◆ **A majority of students (76%) play on a sports team, and nearly all (99%) participate in physical education (PE) class at least once per week.**
- ◆ **Males are more likely to be physically active.** Slightly more males than females (86% vs. 81%) participated in vigorous physical activity on three days in the past week, and males are also more likely to play a team sport (80% vs. 72%).
- ◆ **Physical activity is similar in 7th and 8th grade.**

79% of MW youth participate in vigorous physical activity on 3 or more days per week (83% of males and 75% of females). 73% play a team sport (76% of males and 70% of females).

94% of MW youth attended physical education class at least once in the past week.

TRENDS FROM 2006 TO 2008

- ◆ **Participation in physical activity, sports teams, and PE class is similar at the two time points.** For example, the proportion of students who participate in vigorous activity at least three days a week is similar at about 81-83%.

Reports of physical activity and PE participation have not changed in the past two years.

SCHOOL ATTACHMENT AND ADULT SUPPORT

OVERALL PATTERNS

Protective factors promote resiliency and healthy behaviors. Findings show that a majority of youth have positive school attachments, shown by their agreement with statements such as: “I feel like I am a part of this school” (80% agreement) and “I feel safe in this school” (81% agreement). Three out of five students (60%) report they have at least one teacher or other adult at school to talk to if they have a problem.

Outside of school, even more youth (88%) have an adult they can talk to about things that are important. Yet despite these high numbers, there is a small minority of students (9%) who do not have a supportive adult either at school or home. Analyses show that these individuals are far more likely to engage in multiple forms of risk behaviors, including substance use, violence, and suicide-related thoughts and behavior.

OVERALL TRENDS FROM 2006 TO 2008

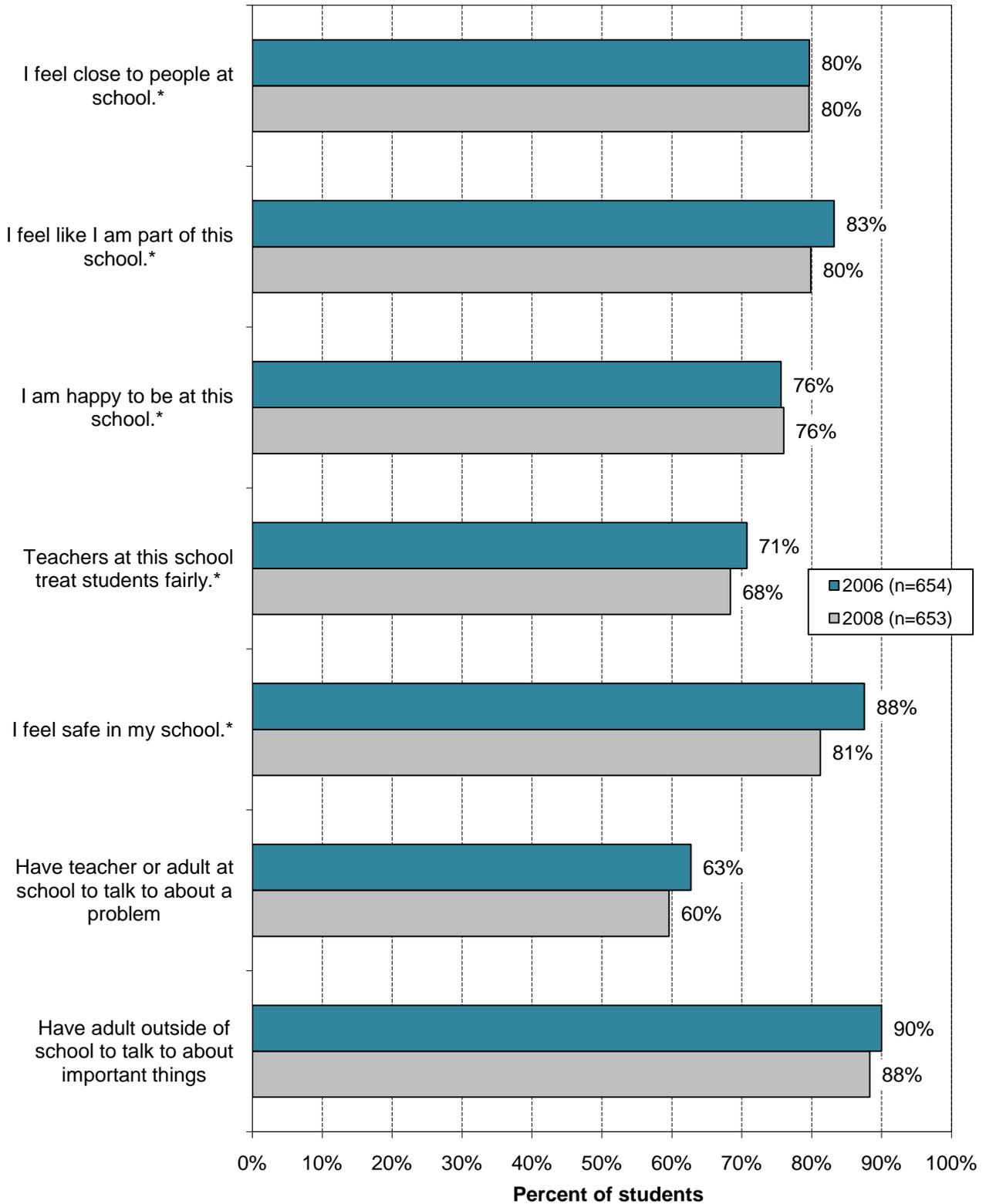
Overall school attachment and adult support (both in and outside of school) are similar at both time points.

Research literature shows that school attachment is associated with lower levels of deviant behavior, including less substance use, violence, and delinquency.^{5,6,7} A majority of MW youth have positive school attachment. For example, 80% of MW youth feel safe in their schools, and 77% feel close to people at school.

Similarly, having a supportive adult is associated with fewer risks including less suicidality⁸, risky sexual activity⁹ and substance use.¹⁰ 61% of MW youth have an adult at school to talk to if they have a problem. 89% have at least one adult outside of school to talk to.

In MW, school attachment and adult support have not changed in recent years.

School Attachment and Adult Support in 2006 and 2008
Pollard Middle School, Needham - Grades 7 and 8
MetroWest Adolescent Health Survey, 2008



*Percent of students that agree or strongly agree with the statement



SCHOOL ATTACHMENT

CURRENT PATTERNS

- ◆ **The majority of middle school students feel positively connected with their schools, as measured by agreement with the following statements regarding school attachment:**
 - ◆ 81% feel safe in their school.
 - ◆ 80% feel close to people at school.
 - ◆ 80% feel like they are part of their school.
 - ◆ 76% are happy to be at their school.
 - ◆ 68% feel that teachers at their school treat students fairly.
- ◆ **There are no notable gender differences in overall school attachment.** This is based on a five-item school attachment scale combining responses to the statements above.
- ◆ **Overall school attachment is similar throughout middle school.** For example, 69% of 7th grade students and 68% of 8th grade students agree with the statement that “the teachers treat student fairly,” and 82% of 7th grade students and 80% of 8th grade students agree that “I feel safe in my school.”

School attachment in the MW region is similar among males and females, and decreases slightly from 7th grade to 8th grade.

TRENDS FROM 2006 TO 2008

- ◆ **Overall school attachment, as measured by the five-item scale, is similar at both time points.**

Overall school attachment has not changed in MW in recent years.



ADULT SUPPORT

CURRENT PATTERNS

- ◆ **A majority of students have supportive adults in their lives.** 60% have at least one teacher or other adult at school to talk to if they have a problem, and even more (88%) have at least one adult outside of school they can talk to about things that are important to them.
- ◆ **Most students have a parent or other family member they can talk to.** 57% of youth have a parent or family member they can talk to, and 29% have adults both in and outside of their family that they can talk to.
- ◆ **Reports of adult support at school are relatively similar among males and females.** 58% of females and 61% of males have a supportive adult at school.
- ◆ **Reports of adult support outside of school are slightly higher among females.** 93% of females and 85% of males have a supportive adult at home.
- ◆ **Adult support is high in both 7th and 8th grades.** The proportion of youth with a supportive adult outside of school is 88% in both 7th grade and 8th grade. Having a supportive adult at school is slightly higher in 8th grade (63%) than 7th grade (57%).
- ◆ **A small minority of students have no supportive adults in their lives.** 9% of youth have neither an adult at school nor outside of school that they can talk to. These individuals are at far greater risk of engaging in many forms of risk behaviors.

61% of MW youth have a supportive adult at school (63% of females and 59% of males). 89% of youth have at least one supportive adult outside of school (90% of females and 87% of males).

TRENDS FROM 2006 TO 2008

- ◆ **Adult support both in and outside of school is similar.** At both time points, about six out of ten youth have a supportive adult at school, and about nine out of ten have a supportive adult outside of school.

Adult support has not changed in the region in the past two years.

CONCLUSIONS

The MWAHS initiative provides a valuable look into the risk and health behaviors of youth across MetroWest, and the 2008 data has provided a first glimpse at trends in risk behaviors in the region. While most behaviors in Needham have remained steady since 2006, inhalant use and fighting on school property may have decreased. Other topic areas—cigarette smoking, alcohol and other drug use, bullying, weapon-carrying, mental health, and physical activity—showed minimal or no change over time.

Initiation of substance use occurs in middle school for a notable proportion of youth, with alcohol being the most commonly used substance. While some youth may be experimenting infrequently, a small number of youth are beginning to drink more often. Use of tobacco and inhalants are also reported by a small proportion of students in middle school, and lifetime use of these two substances the same. While marijuana use is less common in middle school, it becomes the second most commonly used substance in high school, after alcohol.

Behaviors related to violence, such as bullying, physical fighting, and weapon-carrying are common throughout middle school. While there was an increase in bullying in the region, bullying victimization was steady in Needham. The prevalence of electronic bullying has not increased, despite the substantial attention it has garnered in the media. Overall reports of physical fighting, weapon-carrying, and related threats have also remained steady in the past two years.

Data from future administrations of the MWAHS will allow us to further explore these areas, and additional patterns will likely emerge as we are able to examine the data over a longer period of time.

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