

2022

Cambridge Public Schools

Teen and Middle Grades Health Survey

Executive Summary – Middle Grades



2022

In partnership with John Snow, Inc.

The Cambridge Middle Grades Health Survey was administered in May 2022 in all five of Cambridge's Upper School settings: Amigos, Cambridge Street, Putnam Ave., Rindge Ave., and Vassal Lane. Overall, 918 middle grades students in grades 6, 7, and 8 participated, accounting for 76% of Cambridge's total middle grades student population. Results from the 2022 data indicate that many risk behaviors and health-related factors improved over the past decade, while others worsened. The following is a summary of leading findings organized by key topic area. It highlights trends for the student body as a whole and calls attention to segments of the school student population that are most at-risk. The full report is available on the Cambridge Public School Department and the Cambridge Public Health Department websites.

MENTAL HEALTH (Depression, stress, self-harm, and suicidal ideation)

- **General.** The percentage of Cambridge middle grades students who described their mental health as not good increased from 2021 to 2022. This differs from the high school findings for which there was a decrease in the percentage of students who described their mental health as not good during this time period. Nearly half of all middle grades students (45%) reported that their mental health was not good sometimes, most of the time, or always in the past 30 days. More than three-quarters (77%) of middle grades students who identified as gender-nonconforming and 59% of students who reported receiving special education services described their mental health as not good.
- **Stress.** The percentage of Cambridge middle grades students who worried about school issues has increased from 2021 to 2022. 36% of all middle grades students reported worrying fairly often or very often about school issues in the past 30 days. The percentage of students who worried about school issues increased as students advanced in grade. Students in 8th grade were most likely to worry about school issues (42%). Once again, students who identified as gender-nonconforming and students receiving special education services were most likely to report being worried about school issues (48% and 46%, respectively).
- **Depression.** The percentage of Cambridge middle grades students that reported experiencing depression decreased between 2021 and 2022. In 2022, 22% of all middle grades students felt so sad or hopeless almost every day for two or more weeks in a row that they stopped doing some of their usual activities during the past 12 months, compared to 27% of all middle grades students in 2021. Students who identified as gender-nonconforming and students receiving special education services were most likely to report being depressed (51% and 43%, respectively).
- **Self-Harm.** The percentage of Cambridge middle grades students who have engaged in self-harm has decreased since 2019. Overall, 12% of middle grades students hurt or injured themselves on purpose during the past 12 months, compared to 18% in 2019.
- **Suicide.** The percentage of Cambridge middle grades students who have considered attempting suicide has remained relatively consistent since 2019 but increased from 2021 to 2022. Note that in 2021, this question was changed from asking students if they "seriously considered attempting suicide" to "considered attempting suicide".

AFTERSCHOOL ACTIVITIES AND SOCIAL SUPPORTS

- **Afterschool Activities.** The percentage of Cambridge middle grades students who participated in afterschool activities decreased by over 50% from 2019 to 2021, but post-pandemic levels recovered slightly from 2021 to 2022. In 2022, Multi-Racial students were most likely to participate in afterschool activities (49%), followed by White students, female students, Asian students, male students, students of another race, gender non-confirming students, Hispanic/Latino students, and/or Black students (46%, 42%, 37%, 36%, 34%, 33%, 31%, and 24%, respectively).

- **Social Supports (Friendship).** The percentage of Cambridge middle grades students who reported having three or more close friends decreased from 2018 to 2021, but has increased from 2021 to 2022. Seventy-eight percent of middle grades students have 3 or more close friends.
- **Social Supports (Teachers or Other Adults in School).** The percentage of Cambridge middle grades students who reported having a teacher or other adult at school to talk to about a problem decreased significantly from 2018 to 2021. The percentage increased from 2021 to 2022, although it is still lower than pre-pandemic percentages. Forty-five percent of middle grades students reported having at least one teacher or another adult in school to talk to about a problem.

DISCRIMINATION, SAFETY, AND BULLYING

- **Discrimination (Race/Ethnicity).** The percentage of Cambridge middle grades students who reported bad or unfair treatment in school because of their race or ethnicity has increased by 300% since 2021. In 2022, 64% of middle grades students reported witnessing discriminatory actions by students and 22% witnessed discriminatory actions by teachers or other school staff.
- **Discrimination (Sex/Gender Identity).** The percentage of Cambridge middle grades students who reported bad or unfair treatment in school because of their sex or gender identity increased by almost 50% since 2021. Gender nonconforming students were most likely to report bad or unfair treatment in school because of their sex or gender identity (36%), followed by female and male students (17% and 5%, respectively).
- **Safety.** The percentage of Cambridge middle grades students who stayed home from school for fear of their safety has increased since 2017 to its highest percentage in 2022. Asian students and students of another race were most likely to stay home from school for fear of their safety (18%), followed by students who identified as gender non-conforming (16%), Hispanic/Latino (15%), and/or female (14%).
- **Bullying.** The percentage of Cambridge middle grades students who reported being bullied in school has decreased since 2013 to its lowest percentage in 2022. In 2022, 21% of all middle grades students reported being bullied in school in the past 12 months, compared to 36% in 2013 and 32% in 2019. The percentage of Cambridge middle grades students who reported being bullied electronically has been consistent since 2013.

SUBSTANCE USE

- **Lifetime Use.** The percentage of all Cambridge middle grades students who reported ever using illicit substances has decreased across all substances since 2013. For example, in 2013, 20% of all middle grades students reported having ever drunk alcohol, compared to 9% of middle grades students in 2022. In 2022, Hispanic/Latino students were the segment of the school population who were most likely to report ever drinking alcohol.

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND NUTRITION

- **Physical Activity.** The percentage of Cambridge middle grades students who engaged in physical activity has remained stable since 2013. In 2013, 18% of middle grades students were not physically active in the past week, compared to 17% of middle grades students in 2022. Similarly, in 2013, 14% of middle grades students reported engaging in 60 minutes of physical activity on all 7 days of the week, compared to 14% of middle grades students in 2022.
- **Nutrition.** The percentage of Cambridge middle grades students who ate breakfast on 6 of the past 7 days has remained stable since 2013. In 2013, 55% of middle grades students ate breakfast on at least 6 of the past 7 days, compared to 56% of middle grades students in 2022.

● Improvement

● Worsening

● No change

SLEEP

● **Sleep.** The percentage of Cambridge middle grades students who reported sleeping 8 or more hours on a regular school night decreased by more than 50% from 2019 to 2021 and continued to decrease in 2022. In 2022, only 26% of all middle grades students reported sleeping 8 or more hours on a regular school night, compared to 64% of middle grades students in 2019. Note that 40% of middle grades students reported checking their phone after they go into bed to go to sleep.