

BOARD BRIEF

Date: December 15, 2023

BOARD INFORMATION: X

MEETING PREPARATION:

FROM: Jennifer Whitson, Ed.D., Evaluation and Assessment Analyst

THROUGH: Clinton Page, Ed.D., Chief of Accountability and Research
Marcia Jackson, Ed.D., Chief of Student Services and Equity
Melanie Kay-Wyatt, Ed.D., Superintendent of Schools

TO: The Honorable Michelle Rief, Chair, and
Members of the Alexandria City School Board

TOPIC: Youth Risk Behavior Survey Integrated 2019 and 2023 Report

ACPS 2025 STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL:

Goal 3: Student Accessibility and Support

SY 2023-2024 PRIORITY AREA:

Student Supports
CASEL Social Emotional Learning Competencies

FY 2024 BUDGET PRIORITY:

Increase Support for Social and Emotional Learning
Safety and Security Upgrades

SUMMARY: This YRBS administration represents a longstanding collaborative effort across local organizations/agencies to garner important youth behavior data dating back to 2006. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic closures occurring shortly after the 2019 survey was administered, this attached report encompasses both 2019 and 2023 administrations and provides insights into student behaviors both pre- and post-pandemic within ACPS. Trend data across five administrations are presented for this survey.

DETAILS: The Alexandria Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), based on the original Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, is a voluntary, anonymous, self-reported survey administered on a three-year cycle within ACPS to students in grades 8, 10 and 12.

The goal of the survey is to obtain information on youth behaviors in six areas identified as contributing to the leading causes of death, disability, and social problems among youth in the United States including: physical health; mental health; diet and exercise; behaviors that contribute to unintentional injuries and violence; substance use; and sexual behaviors. YRBS results are utilized across organizations within the city to focus programming and services on the needs of students, youth, and families.

Overall, results suggest a decline in many risk behaviors between 2019 and 2023 and a downward trend in reported substance use, sexual activity, and aggressive or violent behaviors over the past five survey administrations. Further, Alexandria results indicated lower or similar rates of risk behaviors relative to national averages in most comparative results. The report highlights significant differences in reported risk behaviors by respondents' grade level, sex/gender, race/ethnicity, and sexuality.

Reported substance use declined from 2019 to 2023 with the exception cigarette use by high school students, which increased slightly. Notably, the percentage of students who reported vaping has trended

BOARD BRIEF

upward between 2013 and 2023. A considerable increase was reported between 2016 and 2019 followed by a slight decrease in 2023 across all grade levels. Relative to 2011, substance use is lower in 2023 for alcohol, marijuana, and cigarette use across middle school and high school. Analyzing data by student groups, White students were significantly more likely to report using alcohol. Significantly higher percentages of high school students who identified as White or Multiracial reported ever using marijuana, e-cigarettes/vaping, and cigarettes relative to their peers who identified as Black or Hispanic.

A smaller percentage of students reported experiencing feelings of sadness or hopelessness and suicidal ideation between 2019 and 2023. Trend data suggest an overall downward trend in the percentage of 8th graders reporting mental health concerns over the last 10-12 years compared to high school students who reported increased anxiety, feelings of sadness or hopelessness, and suicidal ideation. An important finding probed in the 2023 survey was that students who identified as LGBTQIA+ and students assigned female at birth were significantly more likely to report experiencing suicidal ideation, sadness, hopelessness, and anxiousness compared to their peers who identified as straight/heterosexual or were assigned male at birth.

Compared to the last five administrations, a lower percentage of students reported being engaged in aggressive and violent behaviors in 2023. A higher percentage of eighth graders reported being bullied or being in a physical fight compared to high school students. On the other hand, compared to national and 2019 data, a much larger percentage (14-16 percentage points) of high school students in ACPS reported not attending school due to feeling unsafe at or on the way to school.

In the area of sexual behavior, the percentage of students who have ever had or are currently having sex increased from 2016 to 2019 and declined from 2019 to 2023. Sexually active high school students reported the lowest percentage of students indicating that they used no method to prevent pregnancy (7%) in 2023.

These findings reinforce the need for sustained and coordinated efforts of partners across the community to sustain positive trends and address continued needs. Continuing strong partnerships across the City is vital to improve health and wellness outcomes for the youth of Alexandria.

BACKGROUND: A wide range of academic, government, volunteer, and non-governmental organizations collaborated on administering the 2019 and 2023 YRBS, analyzing survey data, and drafting the attached report. The findings from the attached report will be shared with City officials, partners, community organizations and members. The collaborative efforts in administering the survey and disseminating results reflect a longstanding commitment to develop coordinated responsive strategies for supporting youth and families in and out of school.

RECOMMENDATION: The Superintendent recommends that the School Board review the attached YRBS Report for possible planning, procedural, programmatic, and/or budgetary changes.

IMPACT: Data on youth risk behaviors are used to inform student and youth supports and coordinated services delivered by ACPS and City partners that are responsive to current youth behaviors.

REFERENCES: 08/25/2017; 10/23/2015

ATTACHMENTS: 1. Alexandria Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) Report
2. 2023 YRBS High School Tables
3. 2023 YRBS Middle School Tables

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