

# **Dane County Exec: 2018 Dane County youth survey results show gains; however, emotional health challenges persist**

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MADISON - The Dane County Youth Commission released the results from the 2018 Dane County Youth Assessment (DCYA) today. The assessment, administered every three years to keep pace with youth trends, shows encouraging declines in high school alcohol use, however, troubling increases in emotional health issues persist.

This year, more than 21,000 students in seventeen school districts completed the survey. The DCYA asks 7-12<sup>th</sup> grade youth about their attitudes, behaviors, and experiences across life domains to provide educators, policy-makers, and funding bodies data to inform grant writing, program development and public policy.

The survey has been administered since 1980 and includes topics related to health and nutrition, alcohol and other drug use, emotional and mental health, sexual activity and knowledge, bullying experience, out-of-school time activities, employment, and many other risk and positive behaviors engaged in by youth in the Dane county community.

Among positive trends is that high school youth report a decline in alcohol use in the past 30 days, decreasing to 22% in 2018 from 32.6% in 2015. Reported alcohol use among high school youth over a 12-month time frame has continued to decline with 31% reporting use in 2018, compared to 35% in 2015, and 43% reporting use in 2012.

Additional positive indicators include a decrease in high school bullying and use of tobacco cigarettes, regular youth participation in volunteer activities and exercise, high parent interest and support, and increasing opportunities for high school youth who want to work being able to find employment.

“The Dane County Youth Assessment reports some promising improvement in areas related to alcohol abuse, tobacco cigarettes, and high school bullying, among others,” said Dane County Executive Joe Parisi. “However, we cannot ignore the persistent emotional health concerns that our youth report struggling with, particularly among young women, LGBTQ, and low-income youth. The results speak to the continued need for school based mental health services that Dane County has supported and expanded over the years.”

In the 2018 DCYA, high school youth report increased rates of anxiety, and suicidal thoughts or ideation from previous surveys. High school females, youth who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bi-Sexual, or Questioning their sexual orientation (LGBQ), and youth living in low-income households report higher incidences of emotional health issues when compared to their peers.

Responding to survey questions about persistent worrying, feeling on edge or anxious, and that problems felt so high they could not be handled, 35.6% of high school youth report feeling anxious “often or always” compared to 25.7% of youth in 2012. Considering the same cluster of anxiety questions:

- 47% of high school females compared to 23.6% of high school males report feeling anxious often or always;
- Youth who identify as gay or lesbian (63%) report higher levels of anxiety compared to youth who identify as heterosexual (30.8%);
- Low-income youth report more anxiety (69.5%) compared to higher income peers (28.8%).

Reported suicidal ideation in the past 30 days for middle and high school youth has increased to 20.7% in 2018, up from 12% in 2012. High school females (26%), high school youth who identify as gay or lesbian (42%), and low-income high school youth (46%) report having suicidal thoughts at higher rates than their peers.

Reported depression, defined as sustained sadness that interfered with their activities in the past 12 months, remains in a 4% range for high school youth from 19.4% in 2012 to 23.5% in 2018. Reported rates of depression are higher for high

school females (34%), youth who identify as gay or lesbian (52%), and low-income youth (62%).

An emerging issue raising concern is the use of e-cigarettes by Dane County high school youth, with 19% reporting use of vapor electronic cigarettes in the last 30 days (compared to 16% in 2015). In addition, 55% of high school youth believe there is “slight to no risk” to e-cigarette use, compared to 18% of youth who perceive little risk in using tobacco products. According to the Surgeon General, there is evidence showing that young people who use e-cigarette products are more likely to switch to regular cigarettes in the future.

“The Youth Commission thanks our partners in making this important community project possible” said Commission Chair, Meghan Benson. “The results of this survey will be used extensively to understand the needs of youth in our community and plan effectively and collaboratively to meet these needs.”

The cost of the DCYA is \$31,571, paid for by the Dane County Youth Commission and Dane County Department of Human Services (\$7,411), Public Health Madison & Dane County (\$4,000), United Way of Dane County (\$4,000), the City of Madison (\$4,000) and participating school districts (\$12,160).

The Youth Commission plans to hold a conference in November 2019 inviting national researchers who have analyzed DCYA data to share published research results.

The 2018 Dane County Youth Assessment Overview Report and Middle and High School Grade Reports are available at [https://www.danecountyhumanservices.org/yth/yth\\_asmt\\_2018.aspx](https://www.danecountyhumanservices.org/yth/yth_asmt_2018.aspx).