

# Highlights from the MetroWest Adolescent Health Survey

*Informing data-driven school and community health policies and practices*

2016 | Ashland  
Middle School

GRADES 6-8



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# Highlights from the 2016 MetroWest Adolescent Health Survey

## Ashland Middle School

### Background and Methodology

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The 2016 MetroWest Adolescent Health Survey (MWAHS) marks the beginning of a new decade in monitoring trends in adolescent health behaviors to advance school and community prevention efforts. Since 2006, the MWAHS has been administered every other year in communities served by the MetroWest Health Foundation, with the goal of supporting data-driven improvements in health programs and policies at the local and regional levels. Ashland Middle School has participated in the MWAHS since 2006.

The 2016 middle school survey was administered to a census of students in grades 7 and 8 in all 24 school districts containing middle schools in the region served by the MetroWest Health Foundation. 18 school districts also chose to survey 6<sup>th</sup> grade students. In total, 16,387 middle school students in grades 6 through 8 in the region participated in this voluntary and anonymous survey. In Ashland, 561 students in grades 6 through 8 participated in the 2016 MWAHS, representing 95% of students.

As in previous survey waves, local procedures were followed to inform parents of the survey and give them the choice to opt out their child(ren). Students were also informed that their participation was voluntary and that no names or other identifying information were being collected. Data collection at each school was guided by a protocol that protected the privacy of students' responses.

Findings from the MWAHS are used by schools and communities to improve health education, inform prevention efforts, and set priorities for achieving a healthier youth population. Highlights from your district's data in the areas of substance use, violence, bullying, unintentional injury, mental health, physical activity, and protective factors are provided.

## Key Findings: Substance Use

### Cigarette Smoking and Use of Electronic Cigarettes

- 2016 Patterns (Grades 6-8)** » **4% of students have smoked a cigarette in their lifetime, and 1% smoked recently (in the past 30 days).**
- » More males (5%) than females (2%) have tried smoking in their lifetime.
  - » By 8<sup>th</sup> grade, 7% of middle school youth have smoked a cigarette.
  - » 4% of middle school youth have tried an electronic cigarette or other electronic vapor product in their lifetime, and 2% have used one in the past 30 days. Consistent with use of conventional cigarettes, more males than females have tried electronic cigarettes (6% compared with 2%). By 8<sup>th</sup> grade, 10% of youth have used electronic cigarettes.
- 2006-2016 Trends (Grades 7-8)** » **Youth smoking has declined substantially: Reports of lifetime smoking decreased from 12% in 2006 to 4% in 2016.**
- » During the same time period, recent smoking decreased from 5% to 2%.
  - » Cigarette smoking decreased considerably among both males and females.
  - » Lifetime use of electronic cigarettes or other electronic vapor products was steady from 2014 to 2016 at 6%. (2014 was the first year that data on electronic cigarette use was collected.)
  - » In the MetroWest region, cigarette smoking among middle school youth declined by more than two-thirds since 2006.

### Alcohol Use and Drinking and Driving

- 2016 Patterns (Grades 6-8)** » **8% of students drank alcohol in their lifetime, and 3% drank in the past 30 days.**
- » 1% of youth report recent binge drinking (defined as consuming 4 or more drinks in a row for females, or 5 or more drinks in a row for males in the past 30 days).
  - » More males than females initiate alcohol use during the middle school years (10% compared with 6%), though current drinking is similar by gender.
  - » Alcohol use increases substantially by grade: Lifetime use increases from 4% in 6<sup>th</sup> grade to 14% in 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Current drinking increases from 1% in 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grades to 6% in 8<sup>th</sup> grade.
  - » 1% of students report ever being a passenger in a car driven by a high school student who had been drinking alcohol.
- 2006-2016 Trends (Grades 7-8)** » **Fewer middle school youth are drinking alcohol: From 2006 to 2016, lifetime alcohol use decreased from 20% to 10%, and current use decreased from 10% to 3%.**
- » Binge drinking is also lower in 2016 (1%) compared with 2006 (4%).
  - » Drinking declined among both males and females. For example, lifetime drinking decreased from 13% in 2006 to 8% in 2016 among females, and from 29% to 12% among males.
  - » Drinking among middle school youth declined by more than half in the MetroWest region from 2006 to 2016.

## Marijuana Use

- 2016 Patterns (Grades 6-8)** » **2% of middle school youth have used marijuana in their lifetime, and 1% used marijuana in the past 30 days.**
- » Reports of lifetime marijuana use are slightly higher among males (3%) compared with females (1%).
  - » There are no reports of any marijuana use among students in 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grades, whereas 5% of 8<sup>th</sup> grade students have used marijuana in their lifetime, and 3% of 8<sup>th</sup> grade students have used marijuana in the past 30 days.
- 2006-2016 Trends (Grades 7-8)** » **Lifetime marijuana use decreased from 6% in 2006 to 3% in 2016.**
- » Reports of lifetime use are lower among both females and males.
  - » Current marijuana use is also lower in 2016 (1%) compared with 2006 (3%), though reports have ranged from 5% to less than 1% over the six surveys.
  - » Marijuana use in the MetroWest region decreased slightly from 2006 to 2016.

## Inhalant Use

- 2016 Patterns (Grades 6-8)** » **3% of youth have used inhalants in their lifetime (defined as sniffing glue, breathing the contents of spray cans, or inhaling any paints or sprays to get high).**
- » Inhalant use is similar among females and males.
  - » By 8<sup>th</sup> grade, 6% of middle school students report having used inhalants in their lifetime.
- 2006-2016 Trends (Grades 7-8)** » **Use of inhalants decreased substantially from 10% in 2006 to 3% in 2016.**
- » Reports of inhalant use are lower among both females and males.
  - » There has also been a substantial decrease in inhalant use among MetroWest region middle school youth since 2006.

## Key Findings: Violence

### Physical Fighting

- 2016 Patterns (Grades 6-8)** » **30% of youth have been in a physical fight in their lifetime, and 11% have been in a fight on school property.**
- » Many more males than females report fighting overall (45% compared with 16%) and on school property (18% compared with 5%).
  - » The proportion of youth who have engaged in physical fighting in their lifetime ranges from 26-33% by grade.
- 2006-2016 Trends (Grades 7-8)** » **Many fewer youth are involved in fighting: Reports of lifetime physical fighting decreased from 45% in 2006 to 31% in 2016.**
- » Lifetime reports of fighting on school property decreased from 24% in 2006 to 11% in 2012 and remained similar at 10-11% over the two most recent surveys.
  - » The decrease in fighting was greater among males (from 69% in 2006 to 47% in 2016) than among females (from 22% to 18%).
  - » In the MetroWest region, physical fighting among middle school youth also decreased substantially since 2006.

### Weapon Carrying

- 2016 Patterns (Grades 6-8)** » **13% of youth have carried a weapon in their lifetime, and 1% have carried a weapon on school property.**
- » Consistent with gender patterns for physical fighting, many more males (20%) than females (6%) report carrying weapons in their lifetime.
  - » Lifetime reports of carrying weapons increase from 8% in 6<sup>th</sup> grade to 17% in 8<sup>th</sup> grade.
- 2006-2016 Trends (Grades 7-8)** » **Lifetime reports of weapon carrying on school property are lower in 2016 (1%) compared with 2006-2008 levels (3-4%).**
- » Overall reports of weapon carrying are slightly lower in 2016 (15%) compared with 2006 (17%), with reports ranging from 14-23% over the course of the MWAHS.
  - » In the MetroWest region, weapon carrying has remained somewhat similar since 2006.

## Key Findings: Bullying and Cyberbullying

### Bullying

- 2016 Patterns (Grades 6-8)** » **27% of middle school youth have been bullied in the past 12 months, and 24% have been bullied on school property. 9% of students report bullying other students.**
- » School bullying victimization is slightly higher among males (26%) than females (22%), though overall reports of bullying are more similar (28% among males, 26% among females).
  - » Reports of school bullying range from 21-26% by grade.
  - » Among students who were bullied at school in the past 12 months, 36% talked to a school adult about being bullied, and 56% talked to a parent or other adult outside of school.
  - » 13% of youth reported being verbally harassed in the past 12 months due to their race, ethnicity or culture, 4% due to their sexual orientation, 5% due to a disability, and 28% due to their appearance (height, weight, or how they look). This data was first collected in 2016.
- 2006-2016 Trends (Grades 7-8)** » **Fewer students are being bullied at school: Victimization on school property decreased steadily from 44% in 2006 to 25% in 2014 and remained at that level in 2016.**
- » Reports of overall bullying victimization in the past 12 months also decreased, from 48% in 2006 to 27% in 2016.
  - » There were considerable declines in bullying among both females (from 46% in 2006 to 25% in 2016) and males (from 42% to 25%).
  - » Reports of bullying also decreased substantially in the MetroWest region from 2008 to 2016.

### Cyberbullying

- 2016 Patterns (Grades 6-8)** » **17% of youth report being victims of cyberbullying in the past 12 months, and 6% report cyberbullying someone else.**
- » Females are slightly more likely to be victims of cyberbullying than males (18% vs. 15%).
  - » Cyberbullying victimization nearly doubles from 6<sup>th</sup> grade (12%) to 8<sup>th</sup> grade (23%).
  - » The majority of cyberbullying victims do not seek help from adults: Among youth who were cyberbullied in the past 12 months, only 19% talked to an adult at school and 28% talked to a parent/adult outside of school.
  - » 14% of youth spend three or more hours daily on social media (18% of females and 9% of males). Youth who spend more time online and on social media are more likely to also report being involved in cyberbullying.
- 2006-2016 Trends (Grades 7-8)** » **Reports of cyberbullying victimization in 2016 (20%) are similar to 2006 reports (19%), but have ranged from 16-21% over the six surveys.**
- » From 2014 to 2016, cyberbullying decreased from 30% to 21% among females, but increased from 12% to 17% among males.
  - » Cyberbullying victimization is higher in the MetroWest region in 2014-2016 than in prior years.

## Key Findings: Mental Health

### Stress

- 2016 Patterns (Grades 6-8)** » **15% of middle school students report that their life was very stressful in the past 30 days.**
- » Females are more likely to report this level of stress than males (18% compared with 12%).
  - » Reports of stress increase substantially by grade, from 10% in 6<sup>th</sup> grade to 22% in 8<sup>th</sup> grade.
  - » The most common source of stress is worrying due to school issues (43%), followed by appearance issues (16%), social issues (15%), and family issues (14%).
- 2006-2016 Trends (Grades 7-8)** » **After remaining steady at 12% from 2006 to 2012, reports of stress increased steadily to 18% in 2016.**
- » Since 2006, reports of stress have increased more among females (from 13% in 2006 to 22% in 2016) than among males (from 11% to 13%).
  - » In the MetroWest region, stress has also increased in recent years.

### Depressive Symptoms, Self-Injury, and Suicidality

- 2016 Patterns (Grades 6-8)** » **10% of students report depressive symptoms in the past 12 months (defined as feeling sad or hopeless for two or more weeks in a row).**
- » 5% of youth report self-injury (defined as cutting, burning, or bruising oneself on purpose) in the past 12 months.
  - » 7% of youth report that they had considered suicide in their lifetime, and 2% had made a suicide attempt.
  - » Females are more likely than males to report mental health problems. For example, 12% of females and 7% of males report depressive symptoms in the past 12 months.
  - » 2% of middle school youth missed school in the past 30 days due to feeling sad or hopeless, or having thoughts about hurting themselves.
  - » Reports of depressive symptoms and self-injury in the past 12 months increase from 6<sup>th</sup> grade to 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Lifetime reports of suicidal thoughts also increase by grade.
- 2006-2016 Trends (Grades 7-8)** » **After increasing from 15% in 2006 to 18% in 2014, reports of depressive symptoms are lower in 2016 (11%). Self-injury and suicidality are also lower in 2016 than in 2014.**
- » For example, lifetime reports of suicidal thoughts ranged from 9-13% over the first five waves of the MWAHS, and returned to 9% in 2016.
  - » There are recent declines in reports of mental health problems among both females and males.
  - » There has also been a recent decrease in depressive symptoms among MetroWest region middle school youth, and reports of suicidality have remained similar since 2006.



# Key Findings: Physical Activity, Sleep, and Overweight/Obesity

## Physical Activity

- 2016 Patterns (Grades 6-8)** » **78% of youth report engaging in vigorous physical activity.** (Vigorous physical activity is defined as exercising for at least 20 minutes that makes you sweat and breathe hard on three or more of the past seven days).
- » Males are more likely than females to report this level of physical activity (84% compared with 73%).
  - » Reports of vigorous physical activity decrease from 84% in 6<sup>th</sup> grade to 73% in 8<sup>th</sup> grade.
- 2006-2016 Trends (Grades 7-8)** » **The proportion of youth who exercised vigorously on at least 3 days per week increased gradually from 78% in 2006 to 81% in 2014, but was slightly lower in 2016 at 76%.**
- » Physical activity among MetroWest region youth has been similar since 2006.

## Sleep

- 2016 Patterns (Grades 6-8)** » **71% of middle school youth get 8 or more hours of sleep on an average school night.**
- » More males than females get 8 hours of sleep per night (74% compared to 68%).
  - » Reports of getting 8 or more hours of sleep decrease substantially as students get older, from 85% in 6<sup>th</sup> grade to 55% in 8<sup>th</sup> grade.
- 2006-2016 Trends (Grades 7-8)** » **The proportion of youth sleeping 8 or more hours per night is similar in 2014 and 2016 at 65-66%.** (2014 was the first year that sleep data was collected.)
- » Youth in the MetroWest region report slightly less sleep over the last two surveys.

## Overweight/Obesity

- 2016 Patterns (Grades 6-8)** » **19% of youth are overweight or obese.** (Reports are based on self-reported height and weight, which is used to calculate body mass index. Overweight/obesity is defined as being in the 85<sup>th</sup> percentile or above for body mass index by age and gender.)
- » Overweight/obesity is similar among females and males and increases from 15% in 6<sup>th</sup> grade to 26% in 8<sup>th</sup> grade.
- 2006-2016 Trends (Grades 7-8)** » **Overweight/obesity was similar in 2016 (21%) compared with 2006 (20%) and has ranged from 17-24% over the course of the MWAHS.**
- » In the MetroWest region, overweight/obesity has not changed notably over the six surveys.

## Key Findings: Protective Factors

### School Attachment and Engagement

- 2016 Patterns (Grades 6-8)** » **About three-quarters of youth report being engaged in and connected with their school.** This is indicated by agreement with statements such as “I feel close to people at this school” (73%), “I am happy to be at this school” (73%), and “I feel safe in my school” (85%).
- » Reports of school attachment are higher among females than males.
  - » School attachment is lower in 8<sup>th</sup> grade compared with 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grades.
- 2006-2016 Trends (Grades 7-8)** » **Overall reports of school attachment have not changed substantially since 2006.**
- » School attachment has also been similar among MetroWest region middle school students since the beginning of the MWAHS.

### Adult Support

- 2016 Patterns (Grades 6-8)** » **71% of youth have at least one teacher or other adult at school to talk to if they have a problem, and 94% of youth have a parent or other adult outside of school to talk to about things that are important to them.**
- » Adult support at school is higher among females (76%) than males (66%) and ranges from 69-74% by grade.
  - » Adult support outside of school is similar by gender and ranges from 92-96% by grade.
- 2006-2016 Trends (Grades 7-8)** » **More youth are reporting adult support at school. Reports of having an adult at school in 2016 (72%) were higher than in 2006 (61%), though reports have ranged from 61-82% over the six surveys.**
- » Adult support outside of school has ranged from 90-96%.
  - » In the MetroWest region, adult support at school has also increased since 2006.

## Conclusions

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For more than a decade, the MWAHS has monitored trends in adolescent health, informing local decisions and strategies to improve education, policy, and prevention efforts across the MetroWest region. Each survey that is administered provides new data to highlight areas of progress as well as to draw attention to emerging risks and continued areas for concern. The 2016 data show that Ashland is making important advances in some behavioral health areas, such as cigarette smoking, alcohol use, and school bullying. While these demand continued attention, the data also highlight other areas of concern, including cyberbullying, stress, and mental health. Continued use of the MWAHS data to identify priorities and drive local decisions will help to address the greatest challenges to adolescent health and lead to safer and healthier communities.



## Ashland Middle School (Grades 7-8)

### 2006-2016 Trends in Key Indicators

*MetroWest Adolescent Health Survey*

	Year of Survey (%)					
	2006 (369)	2008 (387)	2010 (362)	2012 (336)	2014 (349)	2016 (388)
<b>SUBSTANCE USE</b>						
Lifetime cigarette smoking	12.0	6.5	8.4	7.3	5.5	3.6
Current cigarette smoking (past 30 days)	5.2	3.7	3.1	2.1	1.2	1.6
Lifetime alcohol use	20.4	18.2	13.9	11.9	12.5	9.7
Current alcohol use (past 30 days)	9.8	7.3	7.2	4.8	4.0	3.2
Binge drinking (past 30 days)*	3.5	2.6	1.1	1.2	0.6	1.3
Lifetime marijuana use	6.0	5.2	5.3	5.1	3.2	2.6
Current marijuana use (past 30 days)	3.0	3.7	3.3	4.8	0.3	1.3
Lifetime inhalant use	9.5	8.1	5.0	5.1	4.9	2.9
<b>VIOLENCE</b>						
Physical fighting (lifetime)	45.1	45.5	41.9	34.1	35.7	31.3
Physical fighting on school property (lifetime)	24.2	21.9	19.8	11.4	10.4	11.4
Carried a weapon (lifetime)	17.4	20.9	14.0	22.5	18.3	15.0
Carried weapon on school property (lifetime)	2.7	4.2	1.7	1.5	1.7	1.3
<b>BULLYING VICTIMIZATION</b>						
Bullying victim (past 12 months)	48.2	44.5	40.0	35.6	30.3	27.1
Bullying victim on school property (past 12 months)	44.1	37.6	34.6	28.7	25.2	25.1
Cyberbullying victim (past 12 months)	18.7	15.6	16.9	20.8	21.4	19.5
<b>MENTAL HEALTH</b>						
Life "very" stressful (past 30 days)	12.0	11.9	12.2	12.3	13.7	17.7
Depressive symptoms (past 12 months)	15.2	16.4	14.8	16.2	18.2	10.9
Self-injury (past 12 months)	7.3	8.1	5.6	8.4	12.5	5.8
Considered suicide (lifetime)	10.6	9.1	9.2	11.9	13.4	9.1
Attempted suicide (lifetime)	3.5	2.9	3.3	3.9	3.2	1.6
<b>PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND BODY WEIGHT</b>						
Exercised for ≥20 minutes on 3 or more days/week	78.1	78.5	78.7	79.0	80.9	75.7
Overweight or obese <sup>†</sup>	20.2	23.9	24.2	16.6	18.9	21.2

\* From 2006 to 2014, binge drinking was defined as 5 or more drinks in a row on one or more occasion for all students. In 2016, binge drinking was defined as 4 or more drinks in a row for females and 5 or more drinks in a row for males.

† Students who were ≥85th percentile for body mass index by age and gender, based on reference data

## Ashland Middle School (Grades 6-8) 2016 Gender Patterns for Key Indicators

*MetroWest Adolescent Health Survey*

	Gender (%)		Total (%)
	Female (289)	Male (267)	(561)
<b>SUBSTANCE USE</b>			
Lifetime cigarette smoking	2.4	5.0	3.6
Current cigarette smoking (past 30 days)	0.3	1.9	1.1
Lifetime alcohol use	5.9	10.1	7.8
Current alcohol use (past 30 days)	2.4	2.7	2.6
Binge drinking (past 30 days)*	1.0	0.8	0.9
Lifetime marijuana use	0.7	3.1	1.8
Current marijuana use (past 30 days)	0.3	1.6	0.9
Lifetime inhalant use	3.1	2.3	2.7
<b>VIOLENCE</b>			
Physical fighting (lifetime)	15.6	45.4	29.7
Physical fighting on school property (lifetime)	4.9	17.6	11.0
Carried a weapon (lifetime)	6.3	19.8	12.8
Carried weapon on school property (lifetime)	1.0	1.1	1.3
<b>BULLYING VICTIMIZATION</b>			
Bullying victim (past 12 months)	26.0	28.3	27.2
Bullying victim on school property (past 12 months)	21.9	25.7	23.8
Cyberbullying victim (past 12 months)	18.3	15.4	17.2
<b>MENTAL HEALTH</b>			
Life "very" stressful (past 30 days)	18.5	11.8	15.3
Depressive symptoms (past 12 months)	12.2	6.5	9.6
Self-injury (past 12 months)	5.2	3.8	4.5
Considered suicide (lifetime)	8.3	5.6	7.0
Attempted suicide (lifetime)	1.1	2.0	1.5
<b>PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND BODY WEIGHT</b>			
Exercised for ≥20 minutes on 3 or more days/week	73.2	84.1	78.2
Overweight or obese <sup>†</sup>	18.4	20.3	19.3

\* From 2006 to 2014, binge drinking was defined as 5 or more drinks in a row on one or more occasion for all students. In 2016, binge drinking was defined as 4 or more drinks in a row for females and 5 or more drinks in a row for males.

† Students who were ≥85th percentile for body mass index by age and gender, based on reference data

## Ashland Middle School (Grades 6-8)

### 2016 Grade Patterns for Key Indicators

*MetroWest Adolescent Health Survey*

	Grade (%)			Total (%) (561)
	6 <sup>th</sup> (173)	7 <sup>th</sup> (194)	8 <sup>th</sup> (194)	
<b>SUBSTANCE USE</b>				
Lifetime cigarette smoking	3.6	0.5	6.7	3.6
Current cigarette smoking (past 30 days)	0.0	0.0	3.1	1.1
Lifetime alcohol use	3.6	5.8	13.5	7.8
Current alcohol use (past 30 days)	1.2	0.5	5.7	2.6
Binge drinking (past 30 days)*	0.0	0.0	2.6	0.9
Lifetime marijuana use	0.0	0.0	5.2	1.8
Current marijuana use (past 30 days)	0.0	0.0	2.6	0.9
Lifetime inhalant use	2.4	0.0	5.7	2.7
<b>VIOLENCE</b>				
Physical fighting (lifetime)	26.2	32.6	29.9	29.7
Physical fighting on school property (lifetime)	10.0	13.1	9.8	11.0
Carried a weapon (lifetime)	7.7	13.0	17.1	12.8
Carried weapon on school property (lifetime)	1.2	0.5	2.1	1.3
<b>BULLYING VICTIMIZATION</b>				
Bullying victim (past 12 months)	27.3	27.5	26.8	27.2
Bullying victim on school property (past 12 months)	20.9	26.4	23.8	23.8
Cyberbullying victim (past 12 months)	11.8	16.2	22.8	17.2
<b>MENTAL HEALTH</b>				
Life "very" stressful (past 30 days)	10.1	13.0	22.4	15.3
Depressive symptoms (past 12 months)	6.5	8.9	13.0	9.6
Self-injury (past 12 months)	1.8	4.2	7.3	4.5
Considered suicide (lifetime)	2.4	6.5	11.7	7.0
Attempted suicide (lifetime)	1.2	0.0	3.3	1.5
<b>PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND BODY WEIGHT</b>				
Exercised for ≥20 minutes on 3 or more days/week	83.9	77.9	73.5	78.2
Overweight or obese <sup>†</sup>	14.6	16.1	25.8	19.3

\* From 2006 to 2014, binge drinking was defined as 5 or more drinks in a row on one or more occasion for all students. In 2016, binge drinking was defined as 4 or more drinks in a row for females and 5 or more drinks in a row for males.

† Students who were ≥85th percentile for body mass index by age and gender, based on reference data

This report was prepared by  
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For information about EDC, visit our website at [www.edc.org](http://www.edc.org).