



WELLNESS NEEDS ASSESSMENT ANALYSIS

2023-2024 SCHOOL YEAR

FINAL RESEARCH REPORT

Prepared by

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The HCPS Office of Research collaborated with the Department of Student Support Services for the 2023-2024 WNA, reviewing scope, questions, and plans. Results were summarized on the data dashboard. Hanover Research partnered with the HCPS Office of Research and Program Evaluation for further analysis. HCPS intends to acknowledge the efforts of Hanover's researchers and appreciates Hanover's efforts. The final report that HCPS publishes will incorporate many of the findings provided by Hanover, but with some modifications. The HCPS division of Student Support Services leadership team responded to the report's recommendations.

INTRODUCTION

OVERVIEW

The Harford County Public Schools (HCPS) Division of Student Support Services (SSS) is prioritizing the well-being and wellness of its students. In the 2023-2024 school year, SSS administered a Wellness Needs Assessment (WNA) to all students in grades 3-12. The HCPS Department of Research and Program Evaluation developed a [Data Dashboard](#) accessible to school counselors, administrators, and central office leaders in real-time, to monitor live results as students completed the needs assessment.

School and district administrators can utilize the data presented in the dashboard to formulate interventions that address the specific and presenting needs identified among students. These results can serve as valuable insights to guide school and district planning initiatives, aiding in the prioritization of support for students, families, and teachers.

The HCPS Wellness Needs Assessment aimed to gain a better understanding of the well-being and wellness (physical and mental) of each student. Through this understanding, HCPS seeks to enhance students' overall school experience.

To support this priority, the HCPS Department of Research and Program Evaluation has collaborated with the HCPS Division of Student Support Services and Hanover Research to complete an analysis of the student responses of the 2023 – 2024 Wellness Needs Assessment. This analysis will be presented as a written narrative report and will include key findings and recommendations, as well as provide a district-level breakdown of results by overall constructs - social/emotional, learning skills and habits, elementary climate and culture, secondary climate, culture, support, and mental health, physical health and activity, personal care, and Healthy Outcomes from Positive Experiences (HOPE) questions.

KEY OBJECTIVE

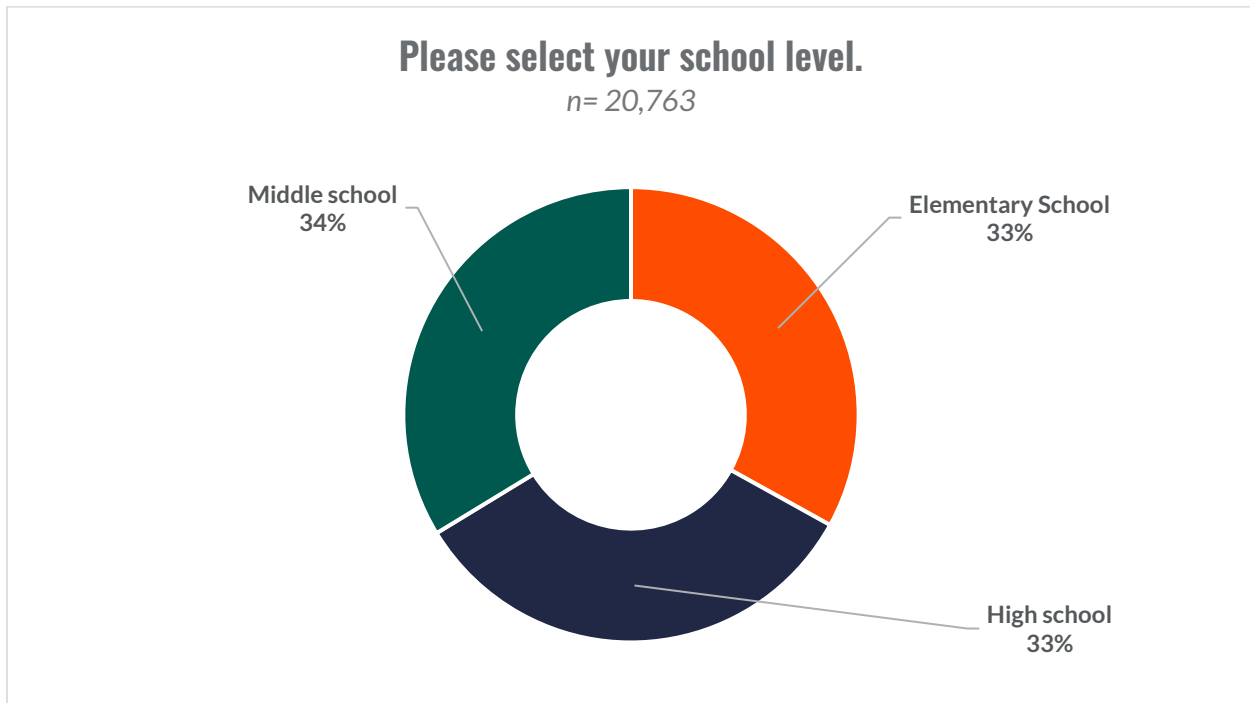
Through an analysis of closed-ended responses, this report addresses the following research questions:

- **What are areas of strength and areas for continued growth, as it relates to the following constructs:**
 - Social/Emotional Wellbeing
 - Learning Skills and Habits
 - Elementary Climate and Culture
 - Secondary Climate, Culture, Support, and Mental Health
 - Physical Health and Activity
 - Personal Care
 - Healthy Outcomes From Positive Experiences (HOPE)
- **What actionable recommendations can be made to address the area for continued growth?**

METHODOLOGY

This report presents high-level findings from an analysis of closed-ended responses to HCPS' 2023-2024 Wellness Needs Assessment. The assessment had **20,763** unique respondents across elementary, middle, and high school students. **Executive Summary Table 1** and **Executive Summary Table 2** below shows the sample size by school and grade levels. The total number of respondents displayed in the [Data Dashboard](#) is **20,774**.

Executive Summary Table 1: Student Respondents by School Level



Executive Summary Table 2: Student Respondents and Response Rate by Grades

GRADE LEVELS	ENROLLMENT (SEPT 30 TH)	SAMPLE SIZE	RESPONSE RATE	PERCENT OF TOTAL
Elementary (Grades 3-5)	8,394	6,862	82%	33%
Grade 3	2,819	2,293	81%	11%
Grade 4	2,857	2,337	82%	11%
Grade 5	2,718	2,232	82%	11%
Middle School (Grades 6-8)	8,493	6,998	82%	34%
Grade 6	2,822	2,306	82%	11%
Grade 7	2,844	2,370	83%	11%
Grade 8	2,827	2,322	82%	11%
High School (Grades 9-12)	11,754	6,903	59%	33%
Grade 9	3,217	1,940	60%	9%
Grade 10	3,027	1,767	58%	9%
Grade 11	2,820	1,243	44%	9%
Grade 12	2,690	1,953	73%	6%
TOTAL	28,641	20,763	73%	100%

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this report, HCPS should consider implementing the following recommendations:



Continue and expand implementing school programming that integrates emotional intelligence, self-regulation skills, and student engagement strategies. Given the prevalent levels of student boredom in classes as well as students' challenges with expressing and regulating their emotions, HCPS could enhance its social-emotional curricula to build up students' emotional wellbeing and interest in school activities.



Provide supplementary academic support services and strategies to boost students' confidence in their learning abilities. Needs Assessment responses indicate a decline in students' confidence to do well in school as the complexity of schoolwork escalates. Therefore, HCPS should consider enhancing access to tutoring or study group opportunities so students can build their learning confidence amongst peers. Additionally, teachers may integrate strategies aimed at enhancing student confidence, such as establishing attainable goals, providing positive feedback, and instructing growth mindsets.



Enhance secondary school climate through various efforts to improve school safety, belonging, and future student outcomes, such as gathering qualitative feedback directly from students. To address concerns regarding preparation for future careers and education, HCPS might enhance career counseling services, provide more comprehensive information about college and career pathways, and integrate real-world learning experiences. In response to the lower perceptions of safety and satisfaction among secondary students, HCPS could both increase school-wide community-building events and gather secondary student feedback directly on their reasons for feeling unsafe at and around school.

KEY FINDINGS



While most students report strong, supportive relationships with family and friends, needs assessment responses indicate that students struggle with regulating their emotions and engaging at school. For example, while most students agree they can treat others with acceptance and respect, only half of the students can explain their feelings to others or calm themselves down when stressed. **Additionally, a significant number of students experience boredom at school, with nearly all students citing feeling bored often (54%) or sometimes (37%).** This suggests a need for more engaging and stimulating activities or curriculum to reduce boredom and enhance positive emotions.



Students express mixed feelings about their learning skills and habits. While over three-quarters of respondents believe they can do well in school (78%), this confidence drops to 60 percent when asked if they can handle the hardest work. These needs assessment responses indicate that as the complexity of schoolwork increases, students may be experiencing a loss in self-efficacy and confidence.



Students generally have confidence in their school's ability to support them as current HCPS students; however, secondary students share less confidence in HCPS's ability to support them in post-secondary environments. Most students indicate that they know of and receive support from adults in their school environment (e.g., school counselor, teachers). However, secondary students show slightly less confidence in HCPS's ability to prepare them for a career, college, or the future. While HCPS schools may provide supportive environments, there may be room for improvement in preparing students for their future careers and education.

- **While recognizing HCPS' efforts to provide a welcoming, engaging environment, secondary students report lower levels of personal satisfaction and belonging with their schools than elementary students, with only 37 percent agreeing with the statement, "I like school."**



Elementary students report higher perceptions of safe school environments than secondary students. Nearly 80 percent of elementary students generally feel safe in their environments in school and while commuting, whereas only around two-thirds of secondary students feel safe at school (60%), feel safe at school-sponsored activities (67%), and believe their school provides a safe learning space for all students (66%). However, most secondary students (86%) do not have any concerns over their mental health or emotional well-being. Notably, nearly all students (both elementary and secondary) indicate feeling safe at home (93%).



HCPS students generally exhibit healthy habits, with over half going to bed between 9:00pm and 11:00pm and nearly two-thirds consuming fruits and protein regularly during the school week. However, many students frequently stay up past their designated bedtime and report high levels of screen time outside the school day, indicating potential areas for improvement in sleep habits and screen time management.

- **While most students engage in physical activity on their own time, fewer participate in organized physical activity during class time. Students also note that they receive less frequent encouragement from their teachers to be physically active than their teachers,**

suggesting a potential opportunity for schools and teachers to increase and promote structured physical activity within the school day.



According to the Healthy Outcomes from Positive Experiences (HOPE) construct, HCPS students are generally experiencing positive outcomes. While areas of improvement include non-family adult support and students' senses of belonging at school, more than two-thirds of students generally report strong support from their family, friends, and home environments.

SECTION I: CLOSED-ENDED NEEDS ASSESSMENT

QUESTION RESULTS

This section of the report analyzes closed-ended responses from the needs assessment. The green box at the beginning of the section indicates which of the original needs assessment constructs are included in each section. This report provides a light narrative on the high-level results of the needs assessment, then provides accompanying data visualizations.

SOCIAL/EMOTIONAL WELLBEING



Constructs Included in this Section:

- Social Wellbeing – Being Social
- Social Wellbeing – Relationships
- Emotional Wellbeing – Emotions
- Emotional Wellbeing – Feelings

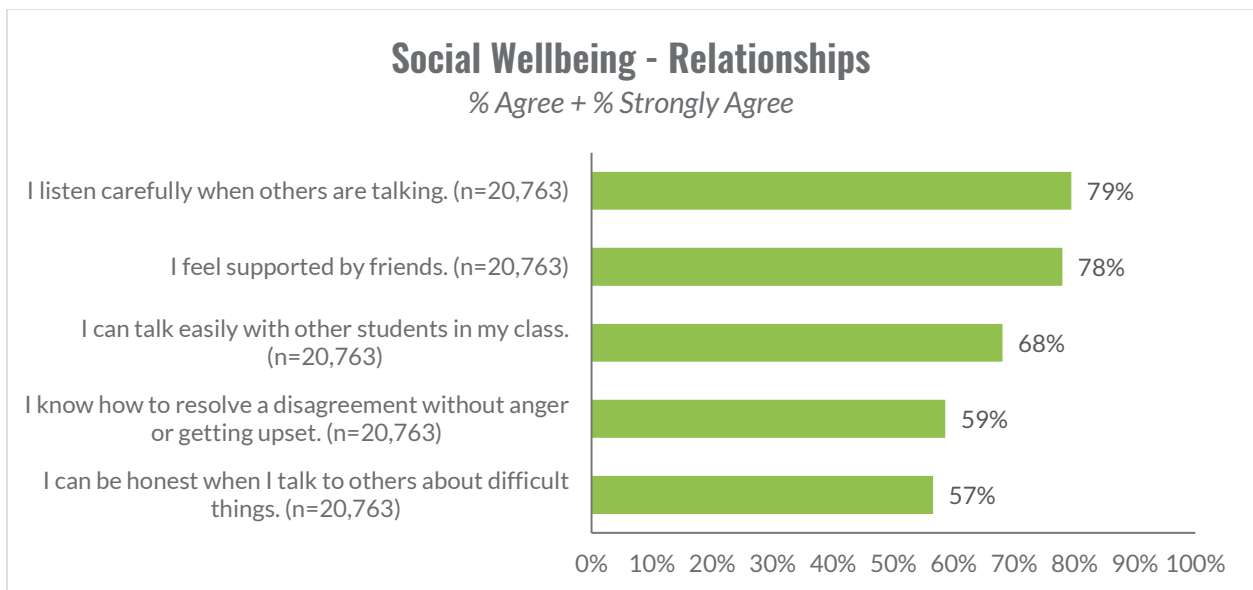
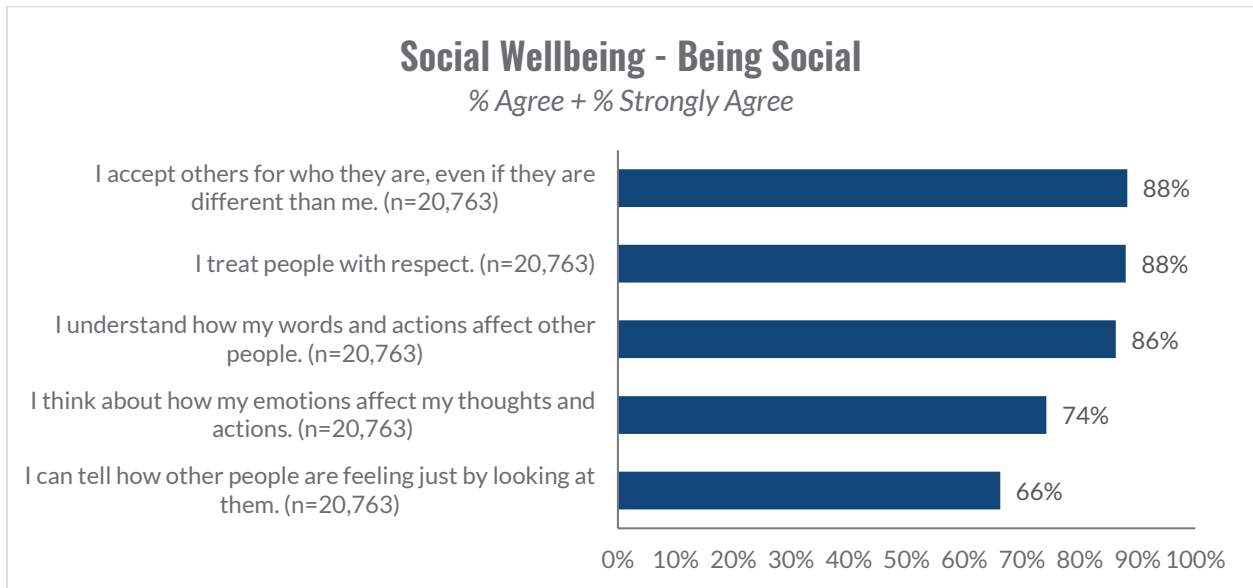
The needs assessment results indicate that most students have strong, positive relationships with family and friends. The statements with the highest agreement percentages reference students' ability to treat others with *respect* (88%) and *acceptance* (88%), including *understanding how words and actions may impact others* (86%) and *listening to when others speak* (79%). Students also indicate that their social networks are positive and beneficial, with 78-82 percent of students indicating they feel *supported by friends and families* (respectively).

While three-quarters of the student respondents indicate they can *identify emotions* (75%), only around half of the students have the *ability to explain their feelings to others* (51%) or *calm themselves down when stressed* (54%). Around 60 percent of students can *control their actions when angry or frustrated* (61%), but less than 60 percent of students say they *can be honest when talking about something difficult* (57%) or *resolve disagreements without getting upset* (59%). **These needs assessment results indicate that while students have developed largely positive social networks, they have room to grow their self-regulation skills.**

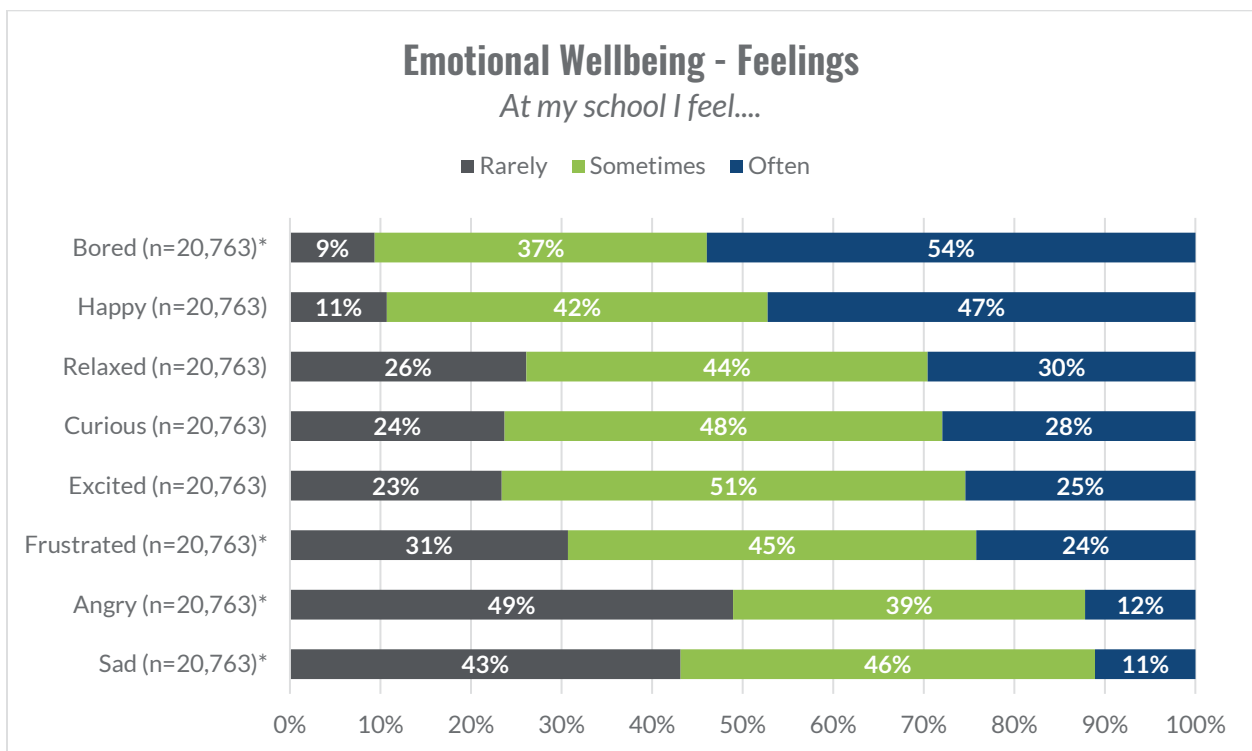
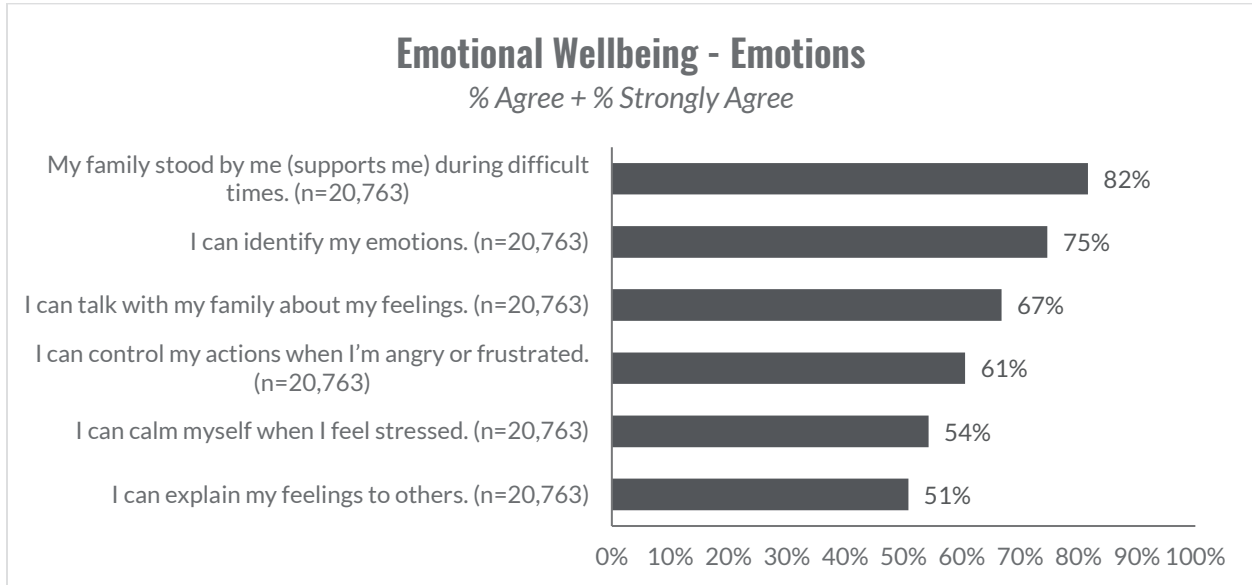
Finally, while students do feel a range of positive emotions at school, their most frequently experienced emotion is boredom. Over half of all students cite feeling bored *often* (54%), and 37 percent cite feeling bored *sometimes* (37%); only nine percent of all students *rarely* experience boredom. **However, the next most-frequently cited emotions are positive ones: happy, relaxed, curious, and excited.** Nearly half of the students say they *often* feel happy (47%) or *sometimes* feel happy (42%).

The following figures depict the four constructs and respective needs assessment questions included within this section, including social wellbeing and emotional wellbeing. Researchers sorted the needs assessment data in the first three charts by highest percentage of agreement (*% agree plus % strongly agree*) to lowest percentage of agreement. The last chart sorts the needs assessment data by highest frequency levels ("often") to lowest frequency levels ("rarely").

SOCIAL WELLBEING



EMOTIONAL WELLBEING



LEARNING SKILLS AND HABITS



Constructs Included in this Section:

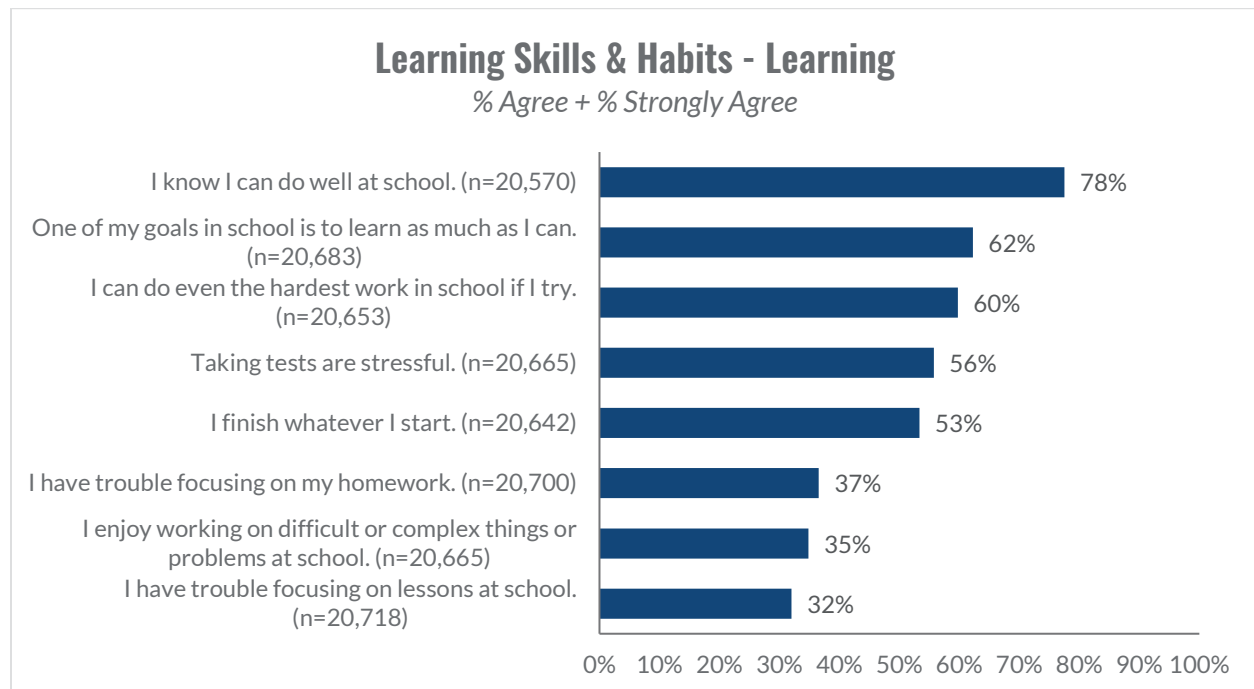
Learning Skills & Habits - Learning

Learning Skills - Career, College, & Adult Support

LEARNING SKILLS AND HABITS

Students share mixed statements on their learning skills and habits. For example, over three-quarters of respondents *know they can do well in school* (78%); however, this confidence dips to 60 percent when students are asked if they *believe they can do the hardest work in school if they try*. Just over half of all students agree that they *finish whatever they start* (53%), and only 35 percent *enjoy working on difficult or complex things at school*. Yet only 32-37 percent of students *have trouble focusing on lessons or homework* (respectively). These diverse responses indicate that students' self-efficacy and effective learning practices may wane as the complexity of schoolwork increases, leading to a loss of confidence and healthy study habits.

The chart below depicts the needs assessment results within this construct; researchers sorted the needs assessment data by highest percentage of agreement (*% agree plus % strongly agree*) to lowest percentage of agreement.

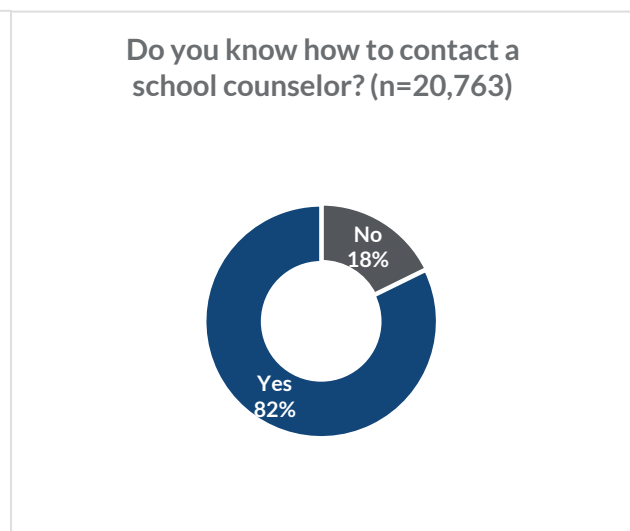
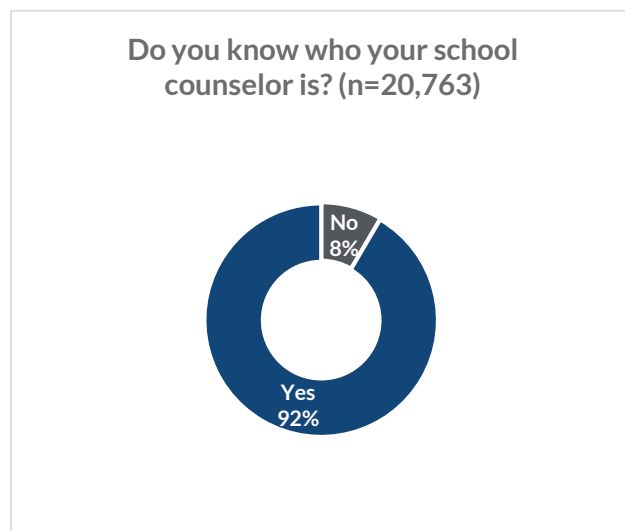
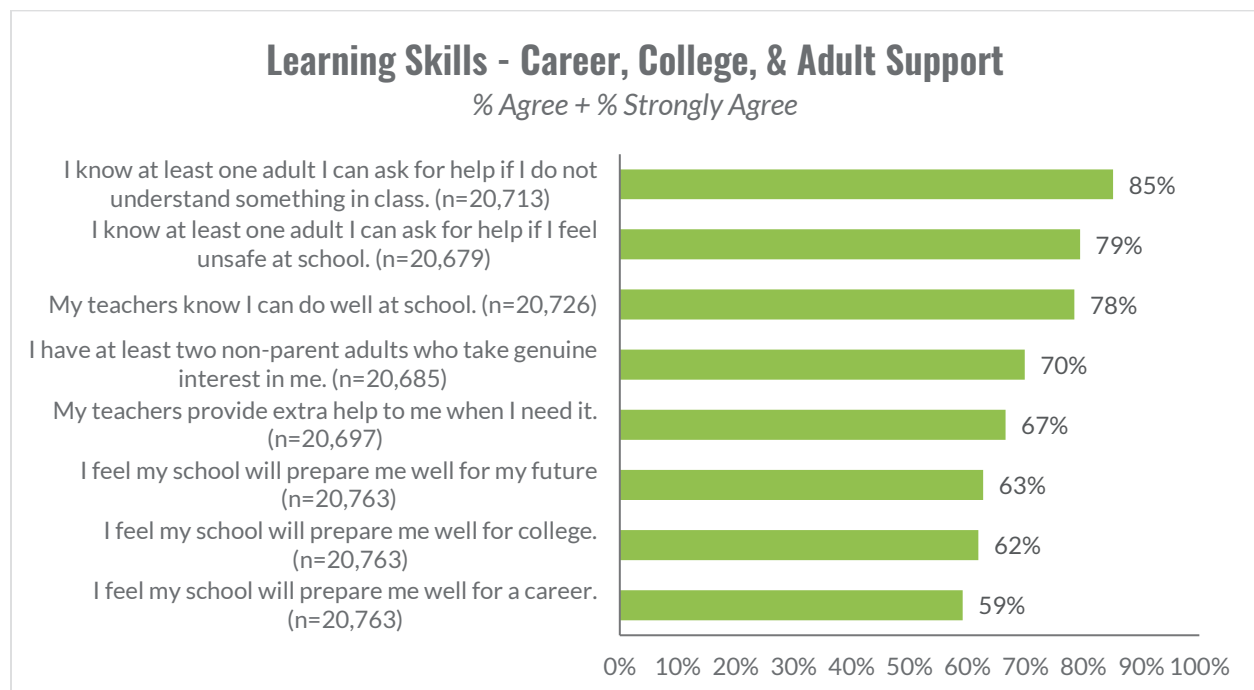


LEARNING SKILLS – CAREER, COLLEGE, AND ADULT SUPPORT

On the other hand, students indicate confidence in their school’s ability to support them, especially while they are currently enrolled at HCPS. For example, most students indicate they *have at least one adult to ask for help if they do not understand something in class* (85%) or *if they feel unsafe at school* (79%). Teachers are perceived as *believing in students’ ability to do well in school* (78%) and *being willing to provide students with extra help* (67%). Finally, most students *know who their school counselor is* (92%), with slightly fewer students indicating they *know how to contact a school counselor* (82%).

Notably, students show slightly less confidence in HCPS’s ability to prepare them for a career (59%), college (62%), or the future (63%).

The chart below depicts the needs assessment results within this construct; researchers sorted the first chart of needs assessment data by highest percentage of agreement (*% agree plus % strongly agree*) to lowest percentage of agreement. The following two charts on student knowledge of school counselors represent percentages of “Yes” or “No” responses.



ELEMENTARY CLIMATE AND CULTURE

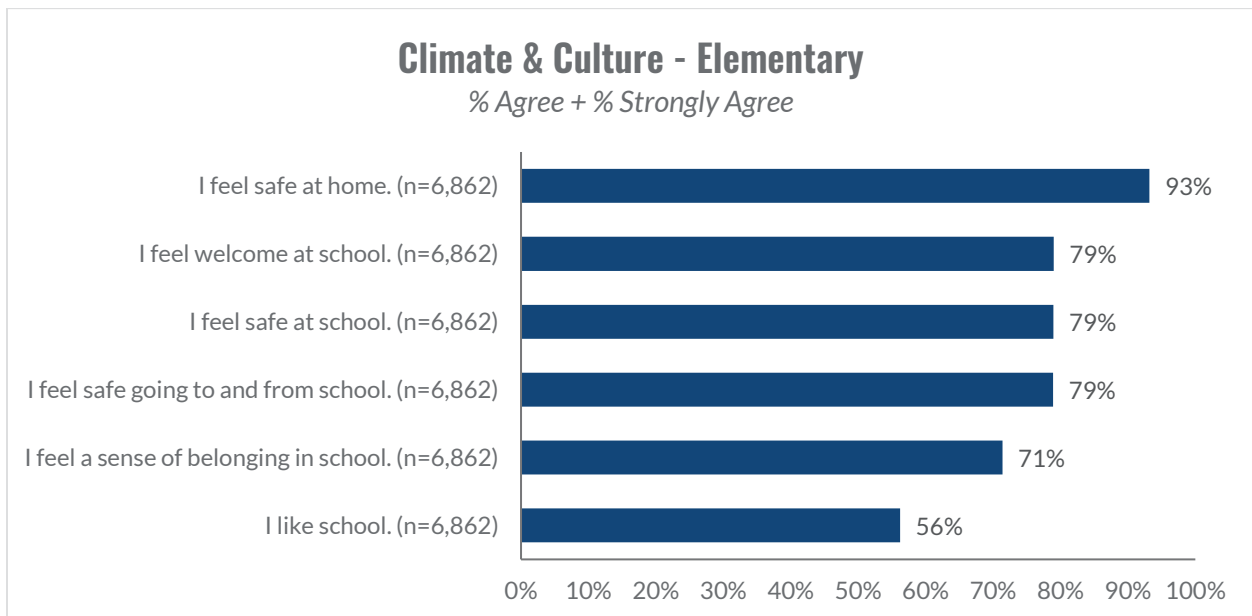


Constructs Included in this Section: Climate & Culture - Elementary

Most elementary students experience safe environments at home, in school, and around school. Nearly all students indicate feeling *safe at home* (93%), while 79 percent of students feel *safe in school* and *safe going to and from school*.

While nearly 80 percent of students *feel welcome at school*, slightly fewer students *feel a sense of belonging in school* (71%). This dip may relate to the low level of agreement among students who like school; only 56 percent of students indicate that they *like school*.

The chart below depicts the needs assessment results within this construct; researchers sorted the needs assessment data by highest percentage of agreement (*% agree plus % strongly agree*) to lowest percentage of agreement.



SECONDARY CLIMATE, CULTURE, SUPPORT, AND MENTAL HEALTH



Constructs Included in this Section:

Climate & Culture - Secondary Schools (Part 1)

Climate & Culture - Secondary Schools (Part 2)

Mental Health Concerns - Secondary Schools

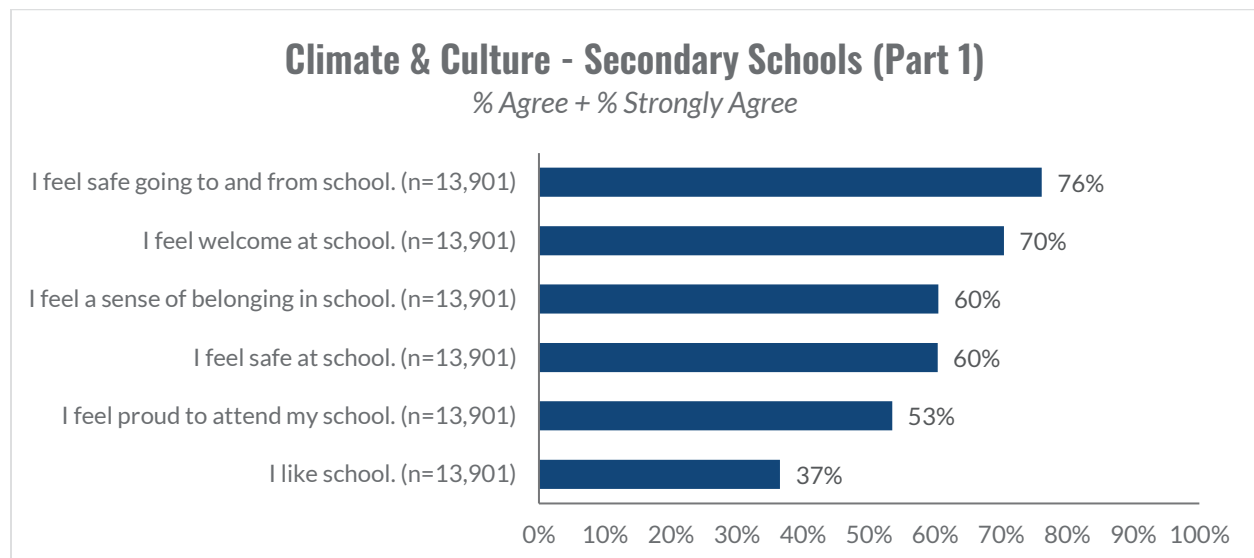
Secondary students feel less safe with school than their elementary counterparts. Compared to nearly 80 percent of all elementary students, only around two-thirds of secondary students *feel safe at school* (60%), at *school-sponsored activities* (67%), and that their *school provides a safe learning space for all students* (66%). Only one-third of students believe their *school does not have issues with violence* (34%), indicating that most students may have some safety concerns. Notably, secondary students have the highest levels of agreement with the statements, “*I feel safe at home*” (93%) and “*I feel safe going to and from school*” (76%), indicating that they perceive their environments outside of school to be relatively safe.

Secondary students also have lower levels of personal satisfaction with their schools than elementary students, with only 37 percent agreeing with the statement, “*I like school.*” About half of all secondary students *feel proud to attend their school* (53%) and less than two-thirds feel a *sense of belonging* (60%). However, secondary students seemingly recognize the basic efforts of their schools to provide a welcoming, engaging environment, as many students *feel welcome at school* (70%) and over three-quarters of the students *know how to get involved with school activities if they wish* (76%).

Finally, most secondary students (86%) do not have any concerns over their mental health or emotional well-being.

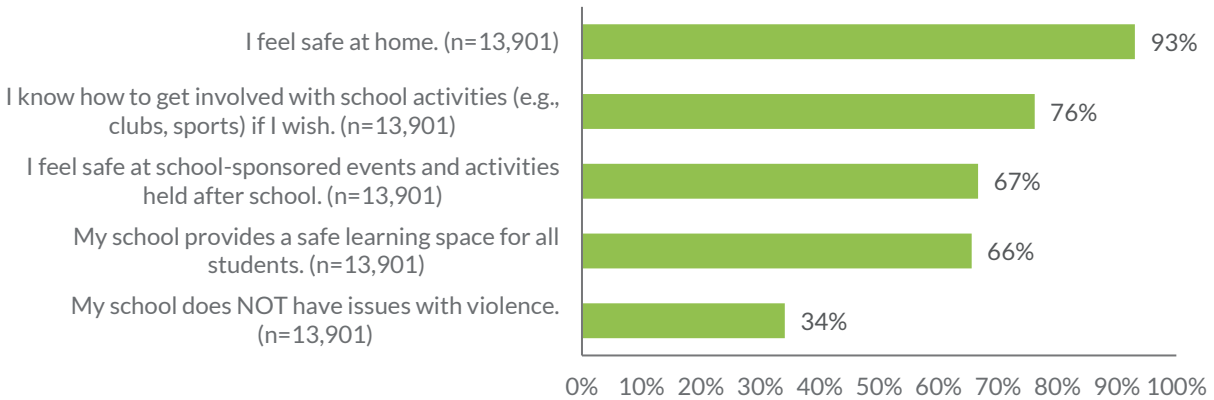
The chart below depicts the needs assessment results within this construct; researchers sorted the first chart of needs assessment data by highest percentage of agreement (*% agree plus % strongly agree*) to lowest percentage of agreement. The following chart on student mental health concerns uses percentages of “Yes” or “No” responses.

CLIMATE AND CULTURE - SECONDARY



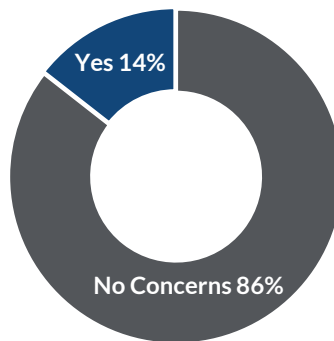
Climate & Culture - Secondary Schools (Part 2)

% Agree + % Strongly Agree



MENTAL HEALTH CONCERNS – SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Do you have any concerns regarding your experiences with mental health or emotional well-being. (n=13,901)



CRUCIAL NOTICE: Exclusive access to the roster of students expressing concerns about their mental health or emotional well-being was granted solely to Secondary School Counselors for specific students on their case load. It is the responsibility of School Counselors (Secondary Schools only), as outlined by the HCPS Division of Student Support Services, to reach out to each student who answered affirmatively and offer the necessary support.

PHYSICAL HEALTH AND ACTIVITY



Constructs Included in this Section:

- Sleep - Physical Health (Part 1)
- Sleep - Physical Health (Part 2)
- Nutrition - Physical Health
- Physical Activity (Part 1)
- Physical Activity (Part 2)
- Physical Activity (Part 3)
- Screen Time

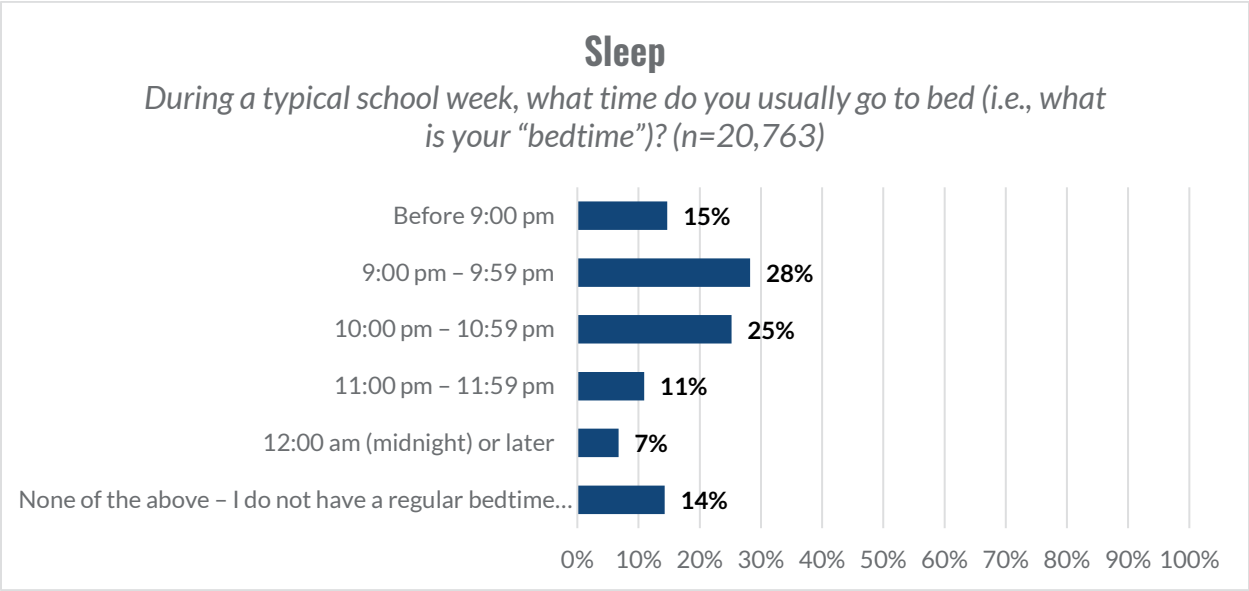
SLEEP

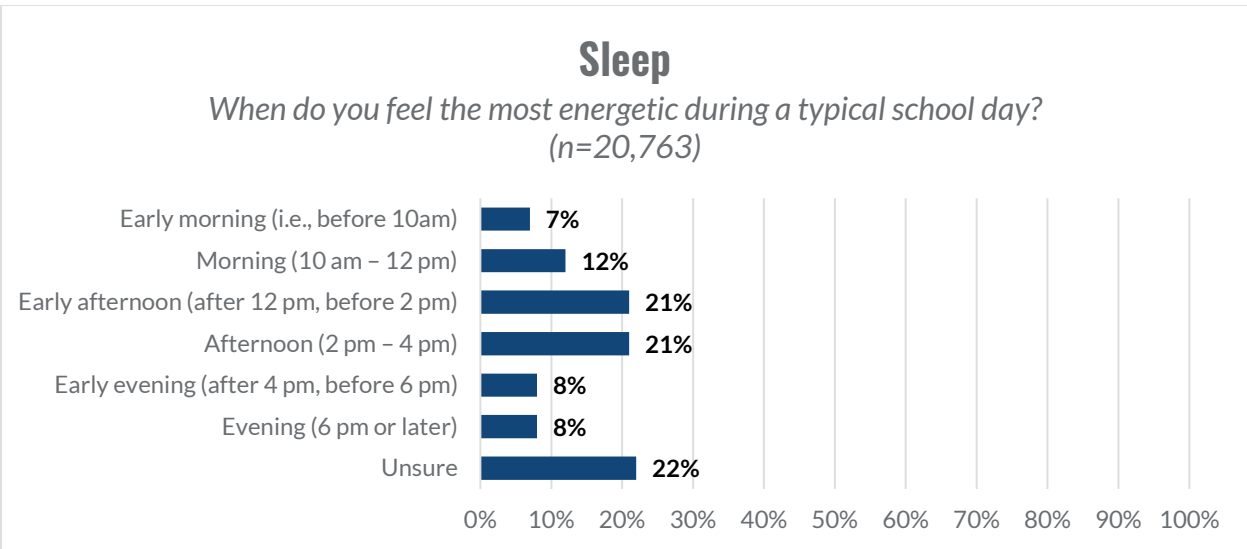
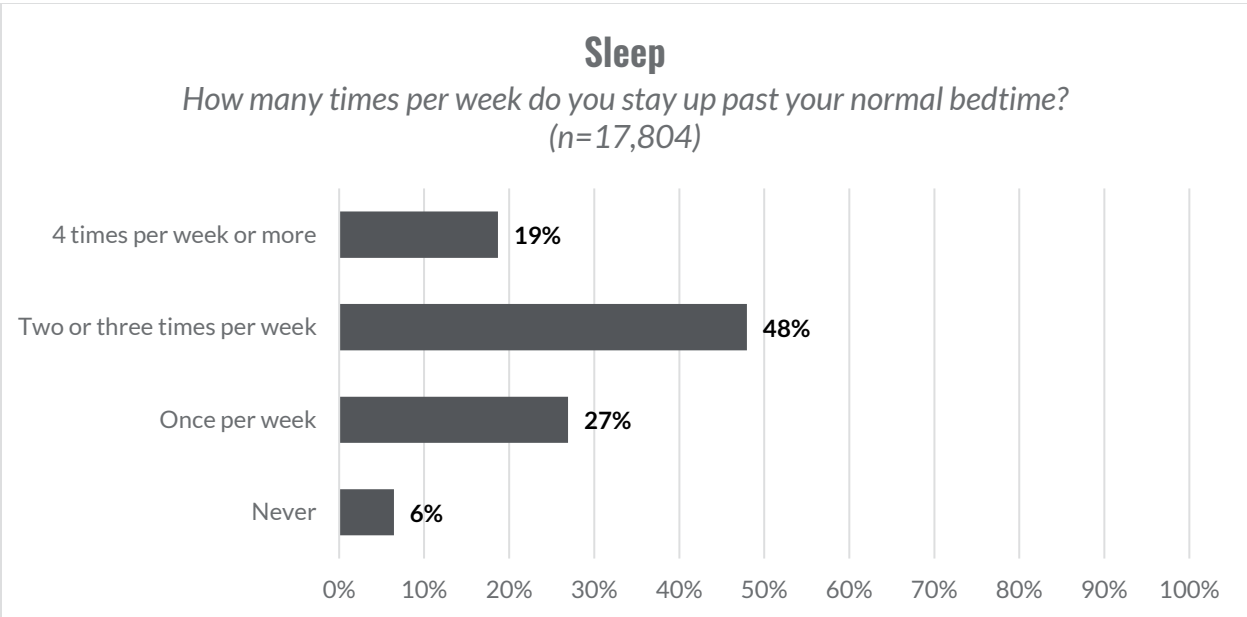
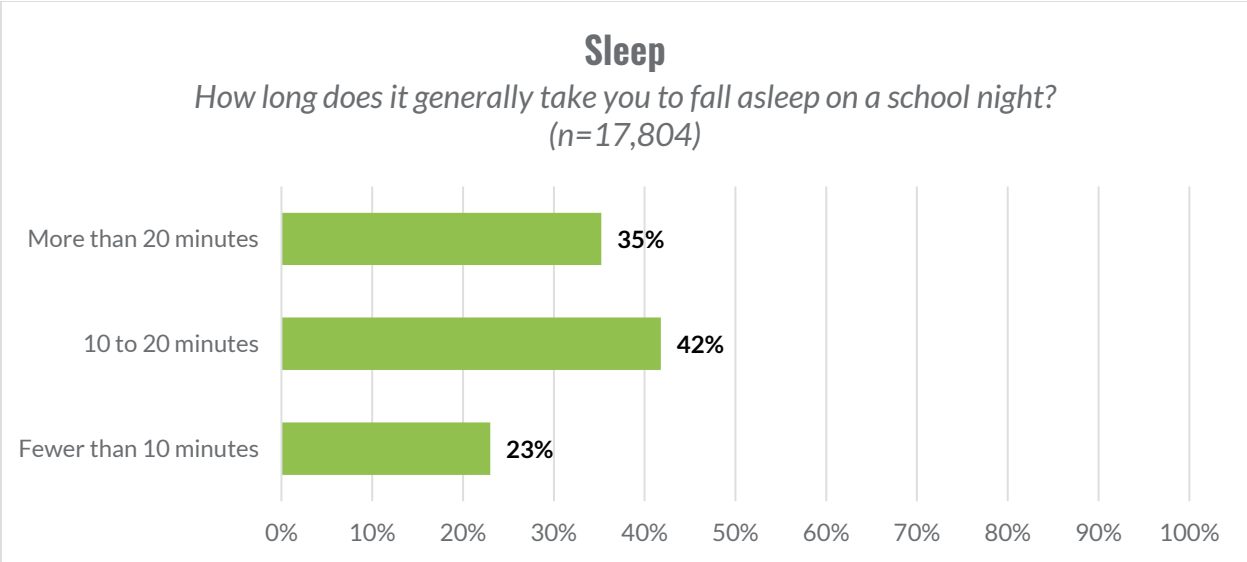
More than half of HCPS students go to bed between 9:00pm and 11:00pm during the school week. Fifteen percent of students go to bed before 9:00pm, 18 percent of students go to bed later than 11:00pm, and 14 percent of students do not have a regular bedtime. **However, students frequently stay up past their designated bedtime.** Nearly half of all students stay up later than usual two to three times per week, and over one-quarter of the students stay up at least once per week. Nineteen percent stay up past their bedtime four or more times per week.

Students vary in the amount of time it takes for them to fall asleep; forty-two percent take 10 to 20 minutes, 35 percent take more than 20 minutes, and 23 percent take fewer than 10 minutes.

Students indicate they feel most energetic in the afternoon during a typical school day, between 12:00-2:00pm (21%) and 2:00pm-4:00pm (21%). Only between 7 and 12 percent indicate they feel most energetic in the morning before 12:00pm.

The charts below depict the needs assessment results within this construct based on the frequency of responses for each needs assessment response option.

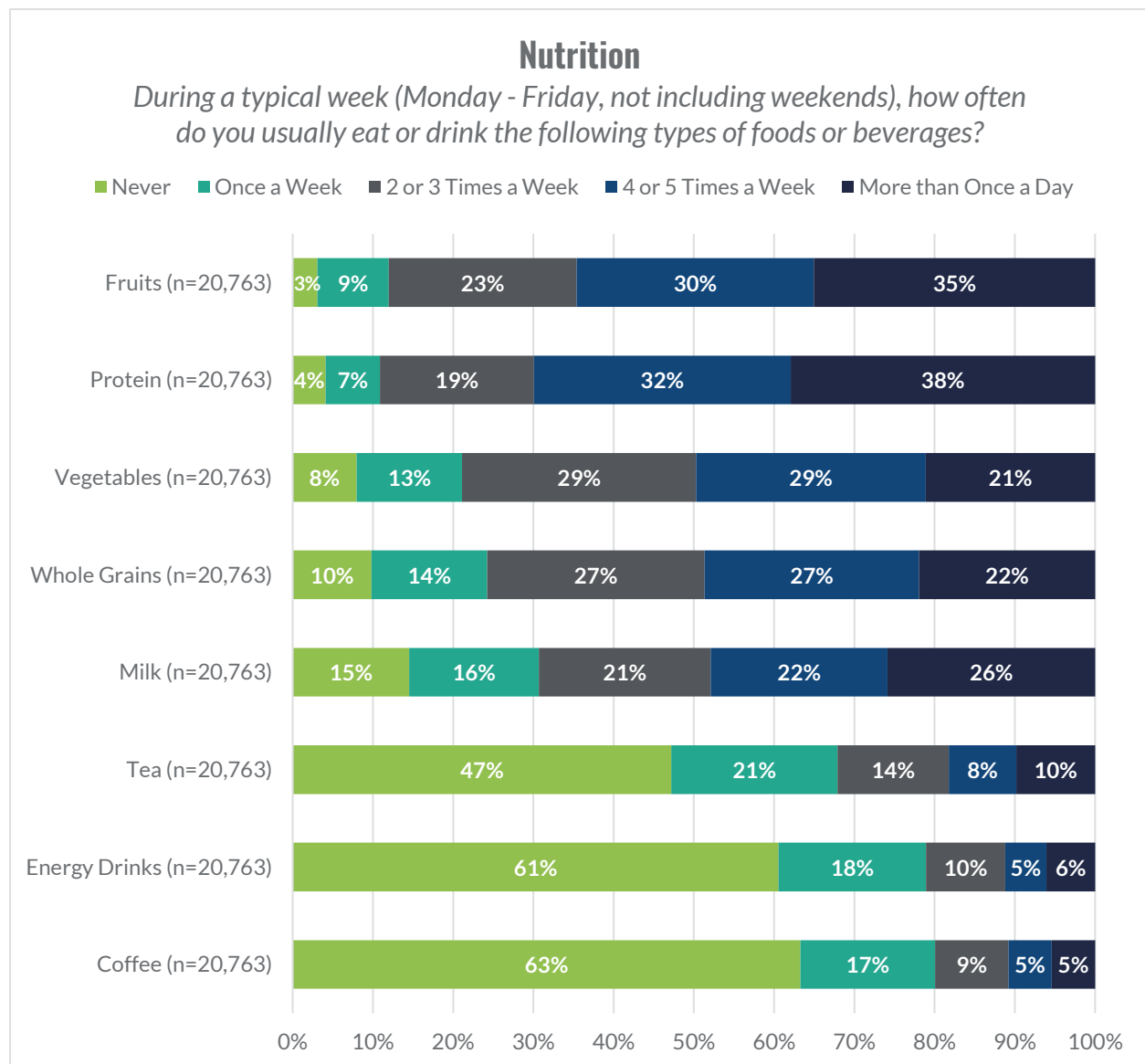




NUTRITION

HCPS students indicate generally healthy eating habits during the school week. Nearly two-thirds of students report consuming fruits and protein at least four to five times a school week, including more than once a day. On the other end, over 60 percent of students *never* drink coffee or energy drinks during the school week.

The charts below depict the needs assessment results within this construct based on the frequency of responses for each needs assessment response option.

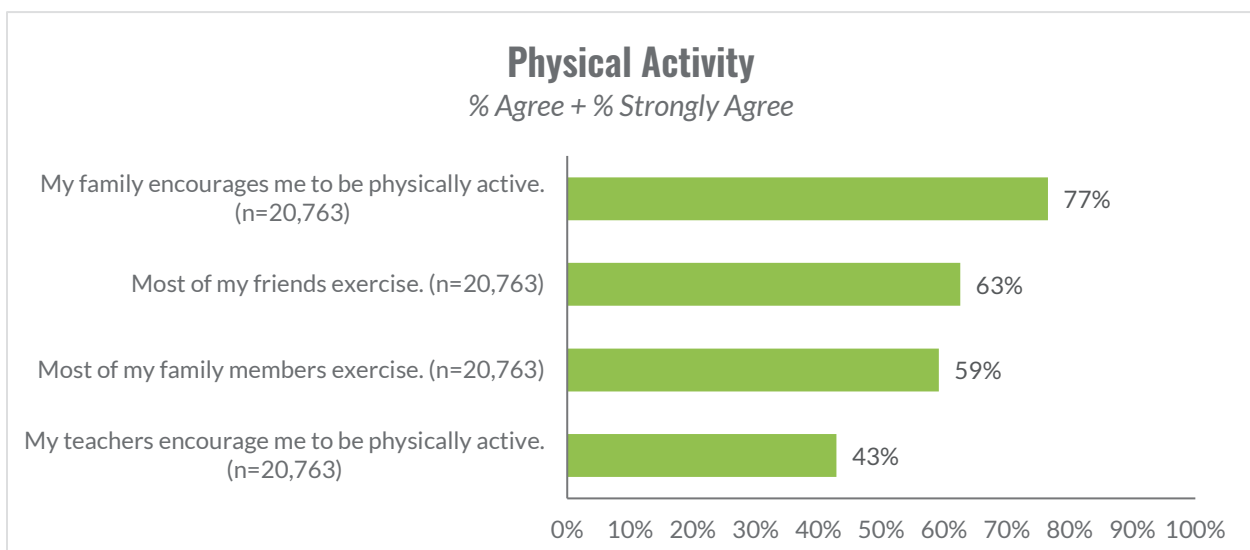
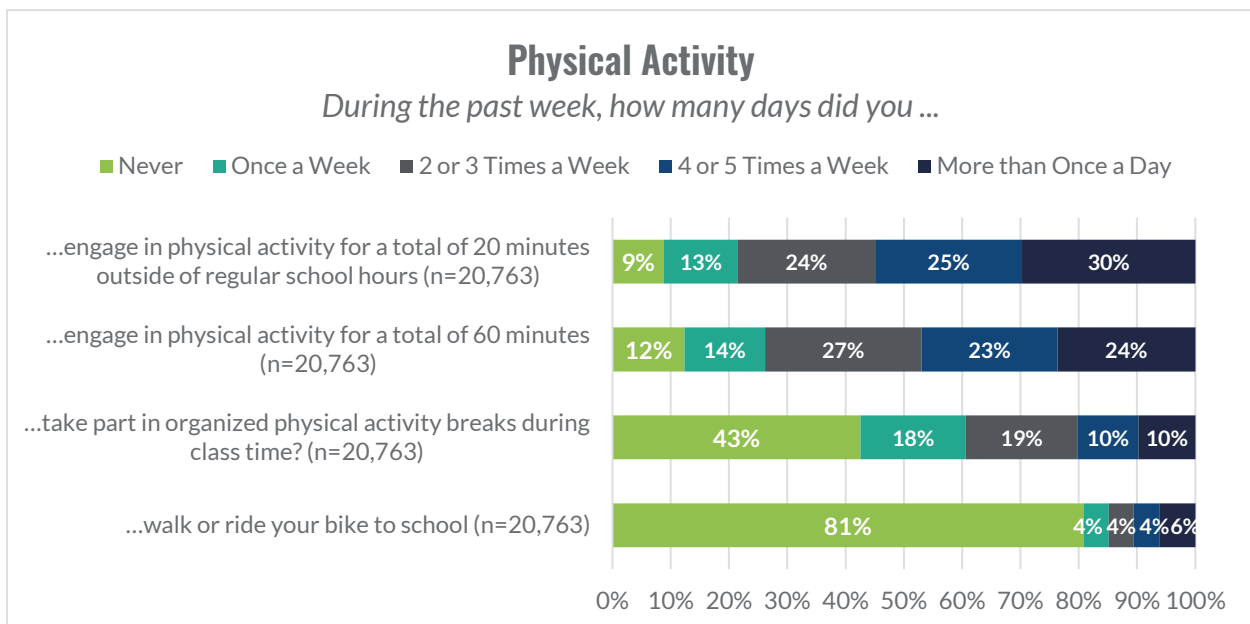


PHYSICAL ACTIVITY (PARTS 1-3)

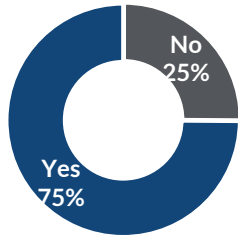
Students indicate relatively healthy levels of physical activity and engagement. While most students do not walk or ride their bike to school (81%), most do engage in some type of physical activity for 20 minutes on their own time at least two to three times a week (79%). Nearly three-quarters (74%) of all students engage in physical activity for a total of 60 minutes at least two to three times a week. Notably, significantly fewer students take part in *organized physical activity breaks during class time* (43% report “Never”). **Additionally, students report a significant difference between the frequent encouragement they receive from their family to be physically active (77%) and the less frequent encouragement from their teachers (43%).**

More than half of all students participate in activities after school (60%), and exactly half of all students participate in a sports team run by an organization outside of HCPS. Indeed, many of these students participate in *more than one* sports team outside of HCPS (18-28%). Beyond sports teams, students also indicate that they enjoy participating in community traditions like volunteering (75%).

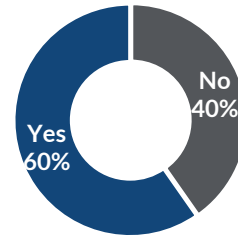
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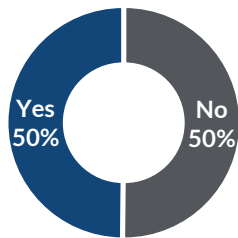
I enjoy participating in community traditions (ex. Volunteering, family traditions, etc.) (n=20,763)



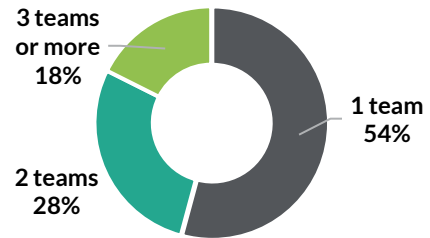
Do you participate in any activities after school? (n=20,763)



Do you participate in sports teams run by organizations outside of your school? (n=20,763)



In how many sports teams run by organizations outside of your school do you participate? (n=10,347)

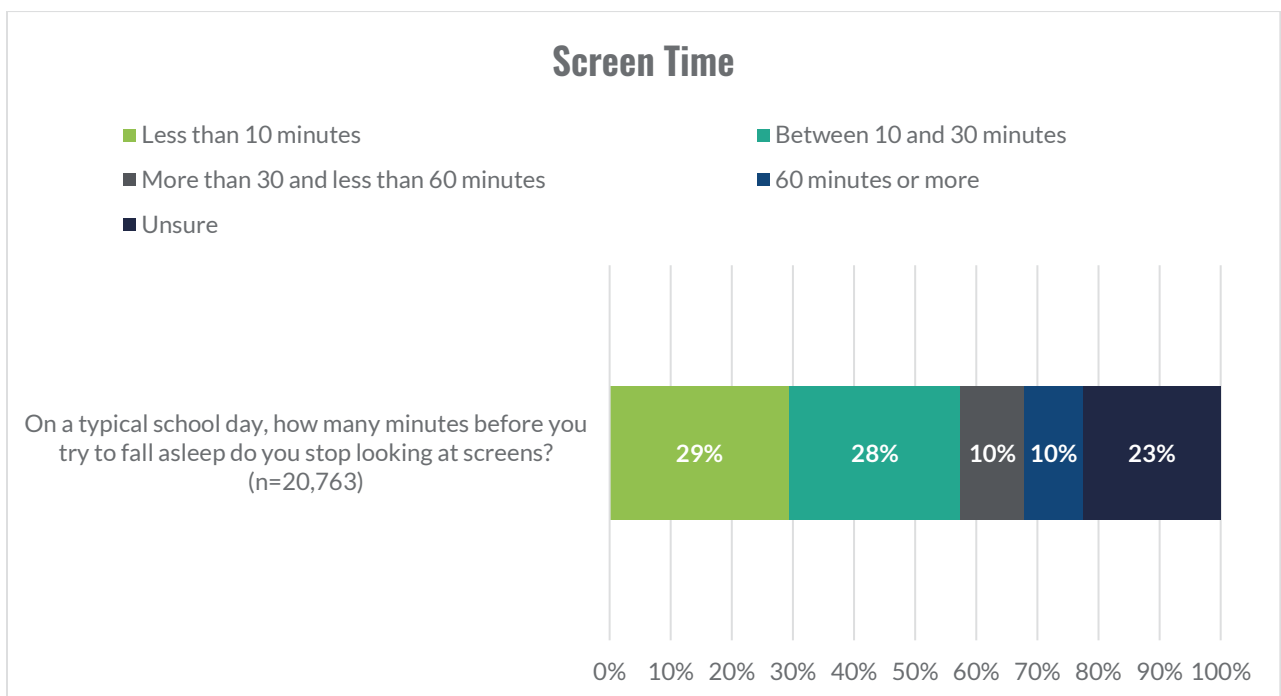
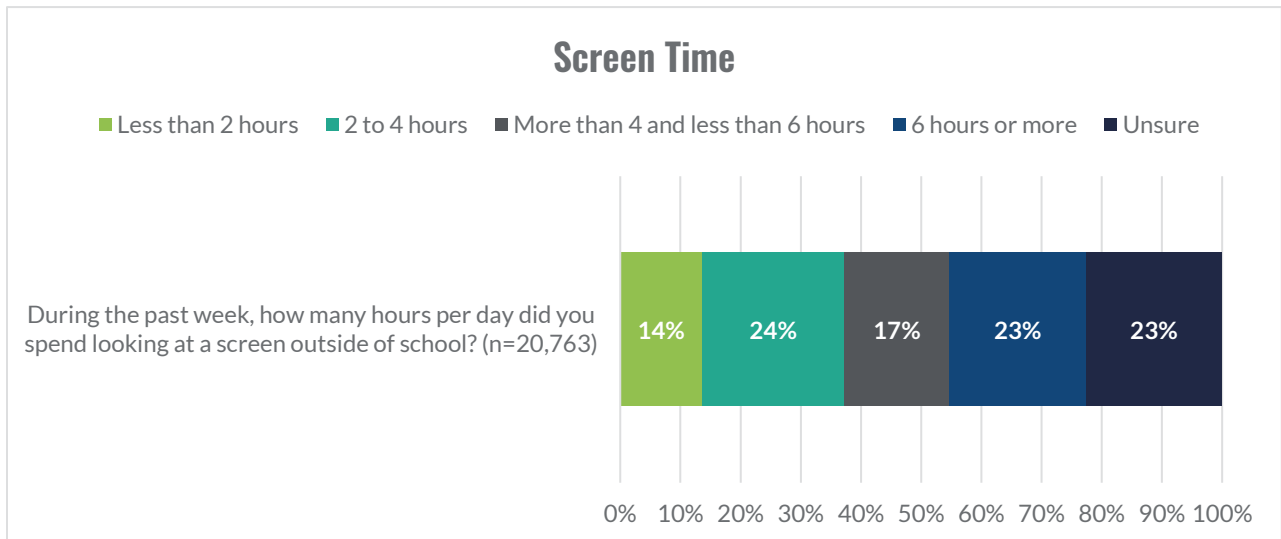


SCREEN TIME

While some students remain unsure of their screen time *outside the school day* (23%) or *before bed* (23%), many students do report high levels of screen time. Over forty percent of student respondents indicate spending between *two hours and six hours* looking at a screen outside the school day. Nearly one-quarter of students report spending *more than six hours* outside the school day looking at screens (23%). Only 14 percent of students look at screens for *less than two hours* outside the school day.

Before attempting to fall asleep, only ten percent of students report not looking at screens *60 minutes* prior to bedtime. Otherwise, **more than half of the student respondents (57%) look at screens 30 minutes or fewer prior to trying to fall asleep**, with over one-quarter of these respondents reporting “*less than 10 minutes.*”

The charts below depict the needs assessment results within this construct based on the frequency of responses for each needs assessment response option.



PERSONAL CARE

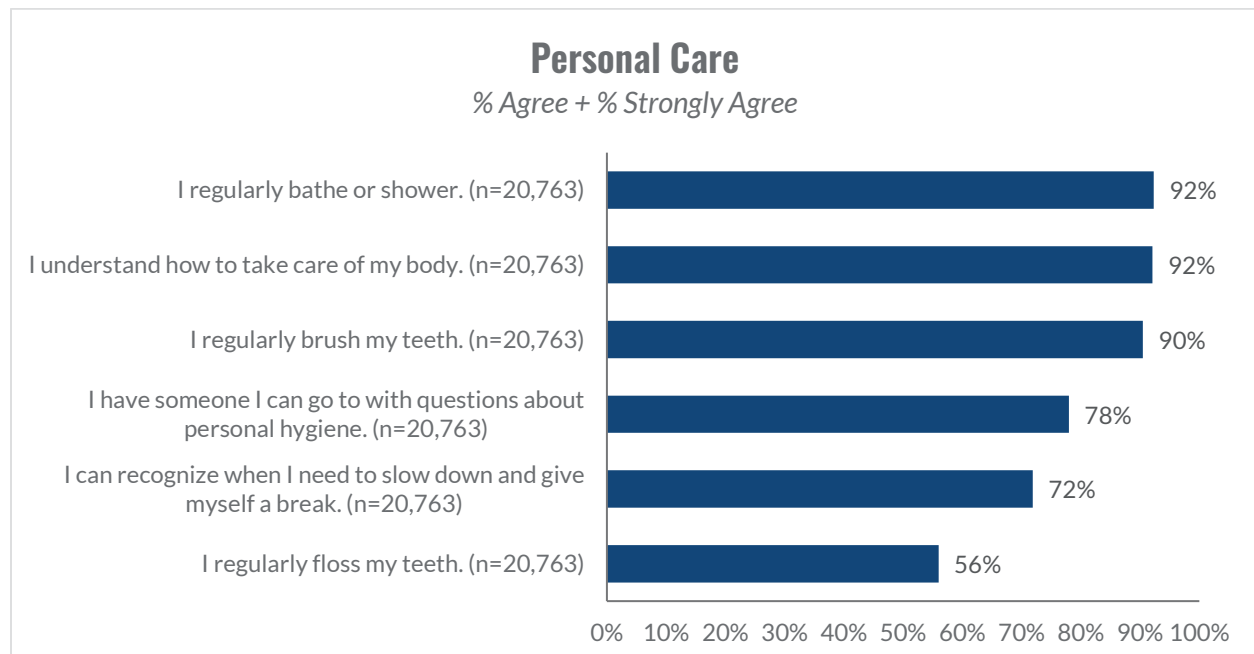


Constructs Included in this Section: Personal Care (Part 2)

Students indicate high levels of comfort with personal hygiene routines. Ninety percent or more of all students report *regularly bathing or showering* (92%), *understanding how to take care of their body* (92%), and *regularly brushing their teeth* (90%). However, just over half of the student respondents say they regularly floss their teeth (56%).

Student confidence dips slightly in personal care when asked if they had *someone who they could go to with questions about personal hygiene* (78%) and if they could *recognize when they need to slow down and give themselves a break* (72%). The latter statistic recalls the earlier section of this report, *Social/Emotional Wellbeing*, in which student responses indicate a need to improve their self-calming skills.

The chart below depicts the needs assessment results within this construct, sorted by highest percentage of agreement (*% agree plus % strongly agree*) to lowest percentage of agreement.



HOPE: HEALTHY OUTCOMES FROM POSITIVE EXPERIENCES



Healthy Outcomes from Positive Experiences (HOPE)

HCPS has identified the following seven needs assessment statements that indicate Healthy Outcomes From Positive Experiences (HOPE):

1. I feel supported by friends.
2. I can talk with my family about my feelings.
3. My family stood by me during difficult times.
4. I have at least two non-parent adults who take genuine interest in me.
5. I feel a sense of belonging in school (Elementary and Secondary).
6. I feel safe at home (Elementary and Secondary).
7. I enjoy participating in community traditions.

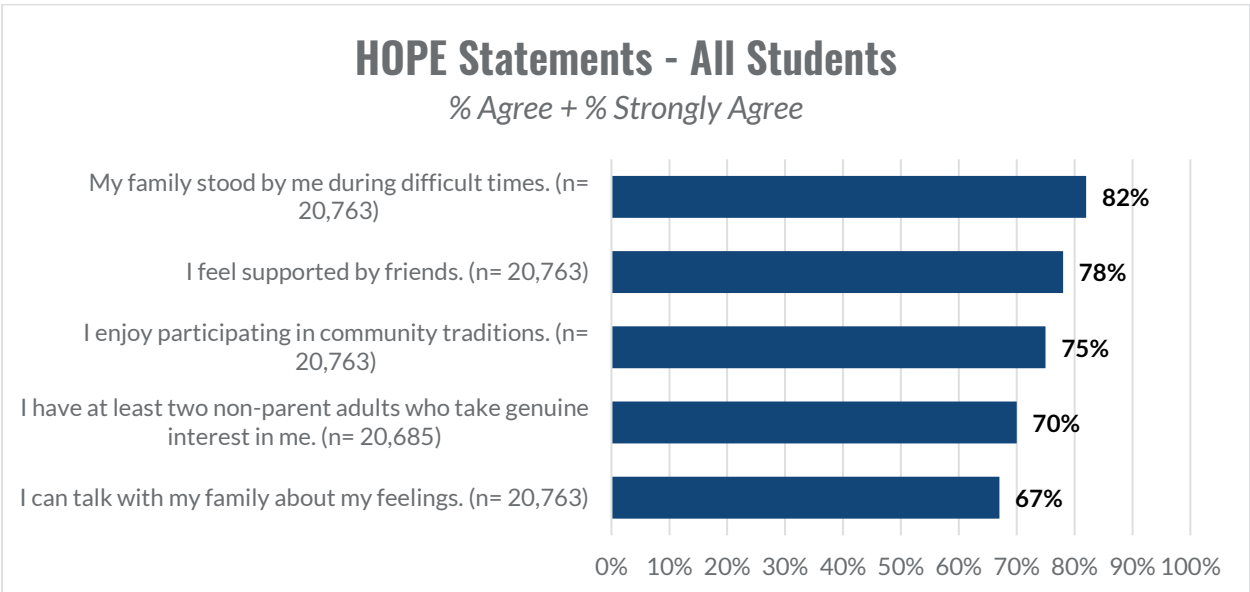
Students most often agree with statements about their family (82%) or friends' support (78%), especially during difficult times. Similarly, both elementary and secondary students strongly agree that they feel safe at home (93%, respectively). About three-quarters of all students enjoy participating in community traditions, including family traditions and volunteer-work. These statements show that most students experience positive environments and social networks in and around their home.

Interestingly, students' level of agreement dips slightly with statements about people and places outside the home. For example, compared to 82 percent of students who report family support, *non-family adults' support and genuine interest in students* drops to 70 percent. Similarly, 71 percent of elementary students and only 60 percent of secondary students feel a *sense of belonging at school*.

Still, more than two-thirds of students agree with these statements, indicating that HCPS students are on track for healthy outcomes from these positive experiences.

The charts below depict the needs assessment results within this construct, sorted by highest percentage of agreement (*% agree plus % strongly agree*) to lowest percentage of agreement.

HOPE STATEMENTS – ALL STUDENTS



HOPE STATEMENTS – ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY

