



2025-2026 Fairfax County Youth Survey

Every Voice Counts

What Is the Fairfax County Youth Survey?



What?

An anonymous and voluntary survey on comprehensive topic areas including substance use, mental health, peer harm, physical activity, time use and protective factors.



Who?

All 6th, 8th, 10th & 12th grade students in Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) are invited to take the survey.



Why?

To guide schools, county agencies, and community leaders in crafting evidence-based prevention programs.



How Long?

Running since 2001, making it one of the county's longest-running youth studies.

Changes to This Year's Survey



The survey questionnaire has undergone a comprehensive revision in the 2025-2026 survey cycle to improve its relevance, clarity and effectiveness.

- **Structured, collaborative review process**
- **Question additions, updates, and removals**
- **Introduction of skip logic**



For questions that were updated, it is **not recommended to compare the results directly with data from previous years**, as the changes may influence how respondents interpret and respond to these questions.

Student Participation



39,437 69%

6th, 8th, 10th & 12th Grade
Participants



Online Survey: The survey is administered electronically in a classroom setting.



Multilingual Access: The survey is available in 8 languages — English, Arabic, Chinese, Farsi, Korean, Spanish, Urdu, and Vietnamese — ensuring broad community access.

Key Findings at a Glance

Subject	Areas of Strength	Challenges
Substance use	► Substance use among students is at ten-year lows ; 90% reported no substance use in the past month.	► Substance use increases with age , with 12 th graders reporting the highest rates (12%).
Mental health	► Mental health continues to improve post- pandemic.	► Mental health concerns remain higher among specific groups (younger students; female students; Hispanic and Black students; students of sexual and gender minorities; students with disabilities).
Social media use and online content	► Many Fairfax County youth use social media to connect with others (71%) or pursue hobbies (65%).	► Nearly half (42%) of students sometimes struggle to distinguish real from fake content online.
Sleep habits	► Most 6th graders (73%) get 8 or more hours of sleep on school nights.	► Approximately 35% of older students get 8 or more hours of sleep on school nights.

Key Findings at a Glance (Continued)

Subject	Areas of Strength	Challenges
Peer harm	▶ The vast majority of students (93%) report not receiving unwanted or hurtful messages online or through texts at school.	▶ Over 25% feel left out, have trouble making friends or have difficulty getting along at school.
Extracurricular activities	▶ Nearly 60% participate in extracurricular activities on a school day.	▶ Hispanic students show the lowest rate (44%) of extracurricular activity participation.
Nutrition	▶ The food insecurity rate is at 4%. There has been a slow and steady decline in the rates since 2018.	▶ About 1 in 11 students (9%) go without eating to lose weight or avoid gaining weight.

For full results and disaggregated data, visit fairfaxcountyyouthsurvey.com.

2025-2026 Fairfax County Youth Survey

Data Highlights



The following results are a high-level summary of the 2025-2026 survey findings.

For the full reports, visit the Fairfax County Youth Survey website:

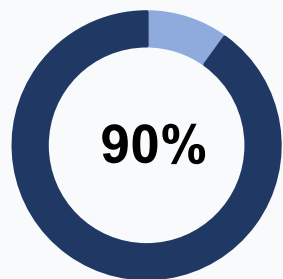
www.fairfaxcounty.gov/youthsurvey

For the interactive Data Explorer, visit: www.fairfaxcountyyouthsurvey.com

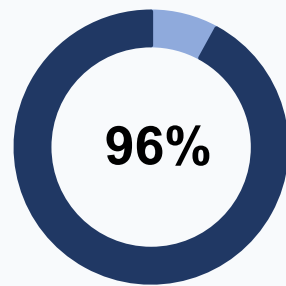
Substance Use

Past month use of substances among 8th, 10th, and 12th grade students....

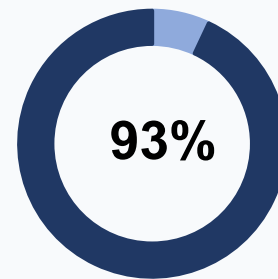
No use of any substances



No use of alcohol



No use of other substances*



* Excluding alcohol use.

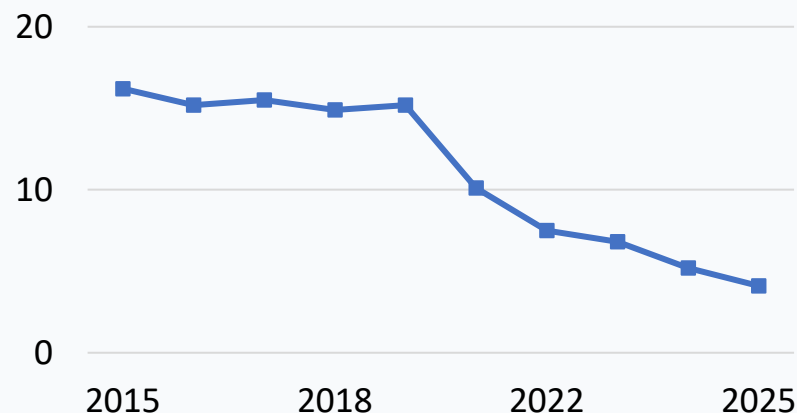
Most students report NO USE of any substances

Alcohol use is most common — 4% used in the past month.

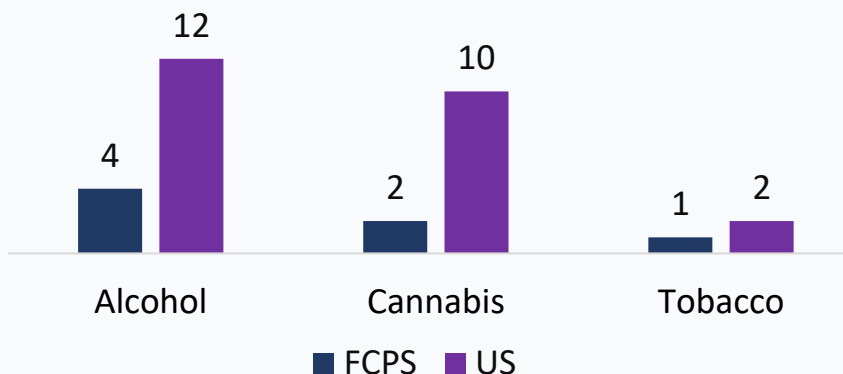
Reported use of most substances is at a 10 - year low.

Rates of use are below the national average.

Past month alcohol use ** (%)



Past month substance use (%)

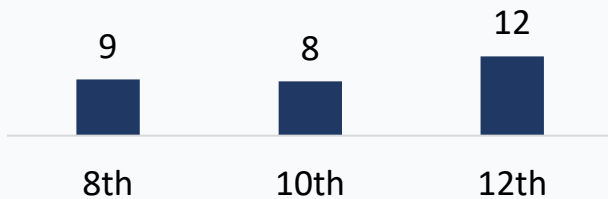


** Survey not conducted in 2020.

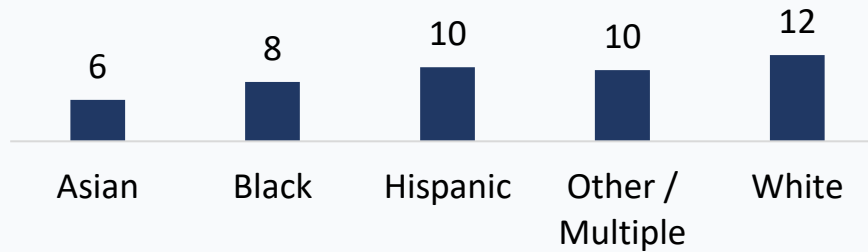
Substance Use (Continued)

Among 8th, 10th, and 12th grade students....

Past month substance use by grade (%)



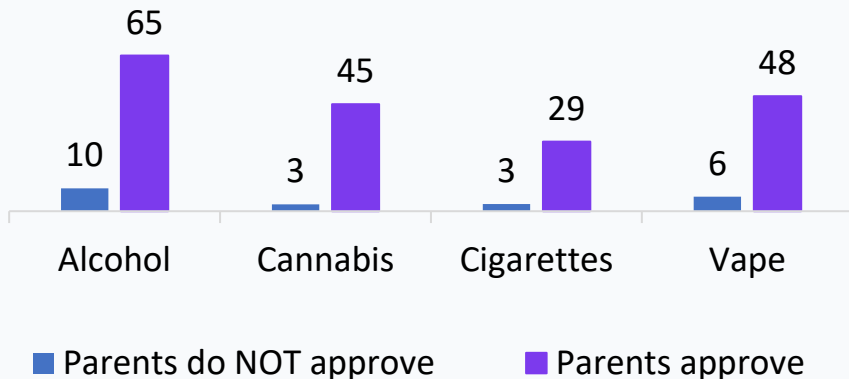
Past month substance use by race/ethnicity (%)



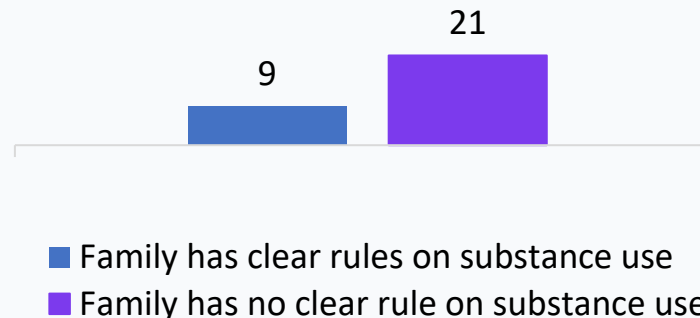
Among youth who have used alcohol, the average age of first use is 13.

Older students and White students are at a heightened risk.

Lifetime substance use by parent and caregiver approval (%)

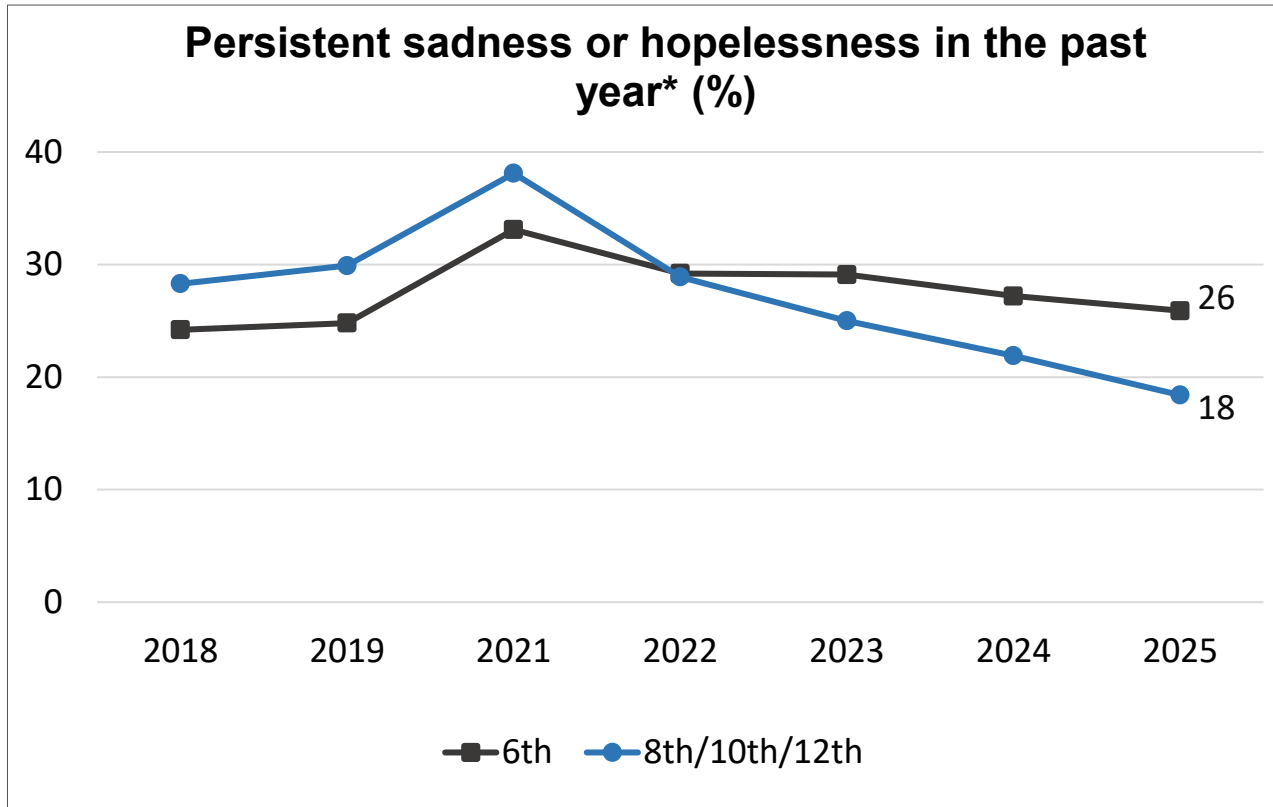


Past month substance use by family rules on substance use (%)

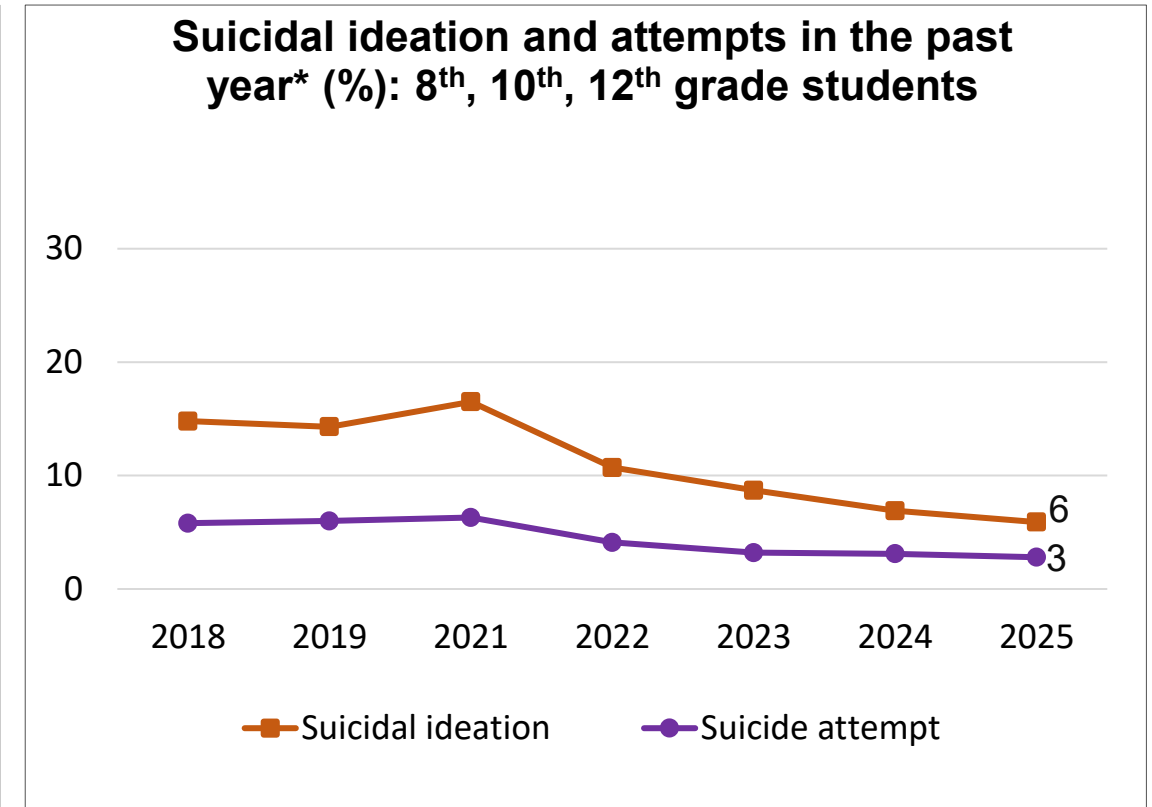


Parental and caregiver disapproval, along with clear family rules, are key to preventing substance use.

Mental Health



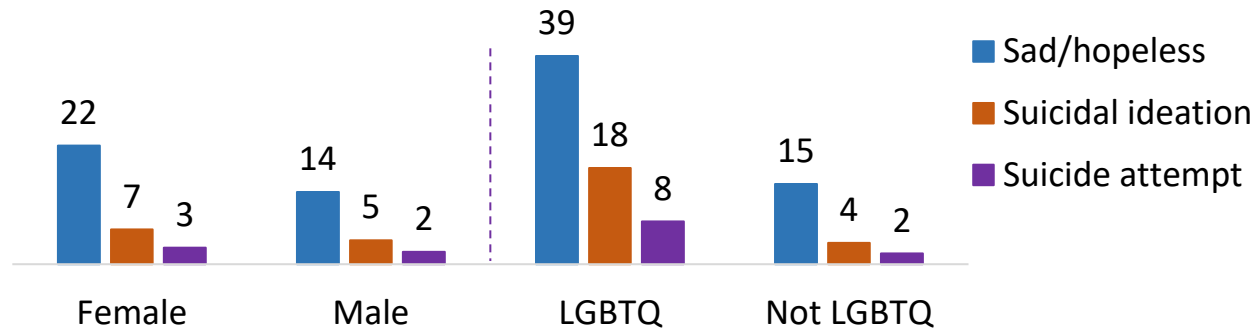
* Survey not conducted in 2020.



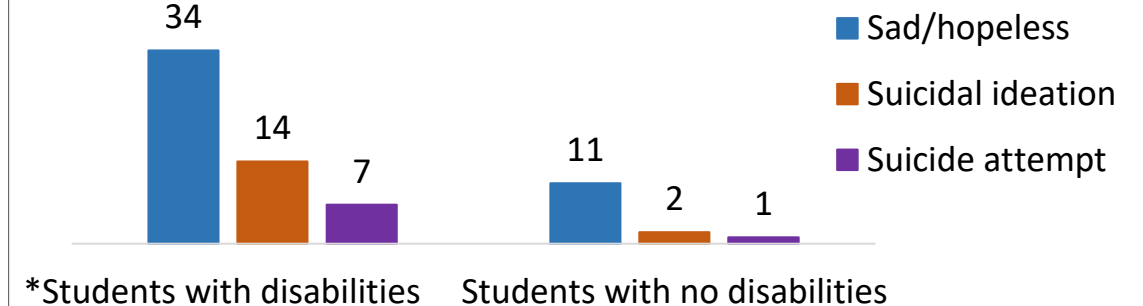
Students continue to report **improved mental health** since pandemic peaks. However, rates among **6th grade students** are **still higher** than pre-pandemic levels.

Mental Health (Continued)

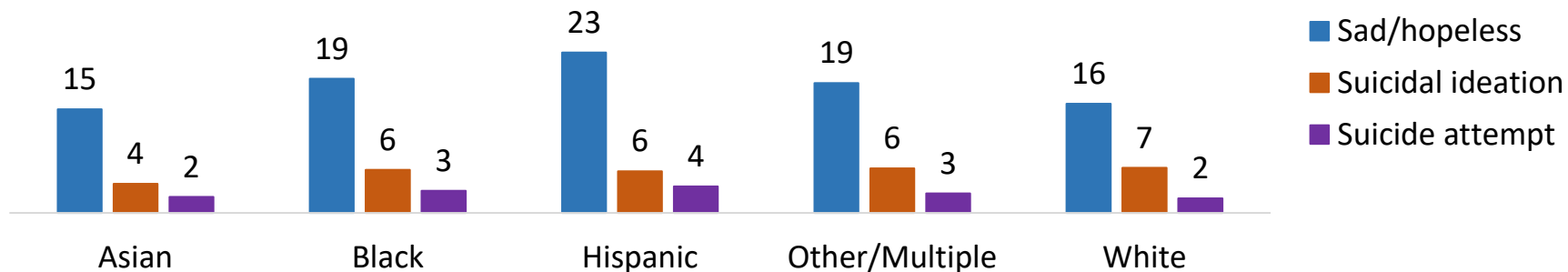
Mental health concerns by gender and LGBTQ status (%): 8th, 10th, 12th grade students



Mental health concerns by disability status (%): 8th, 10th, 12th grade students



Mental health concerns by race/ethnicity (%): 8th, 10th, 12th grade students



**Disabilities were self-reported and include mental or emotional challenges.*

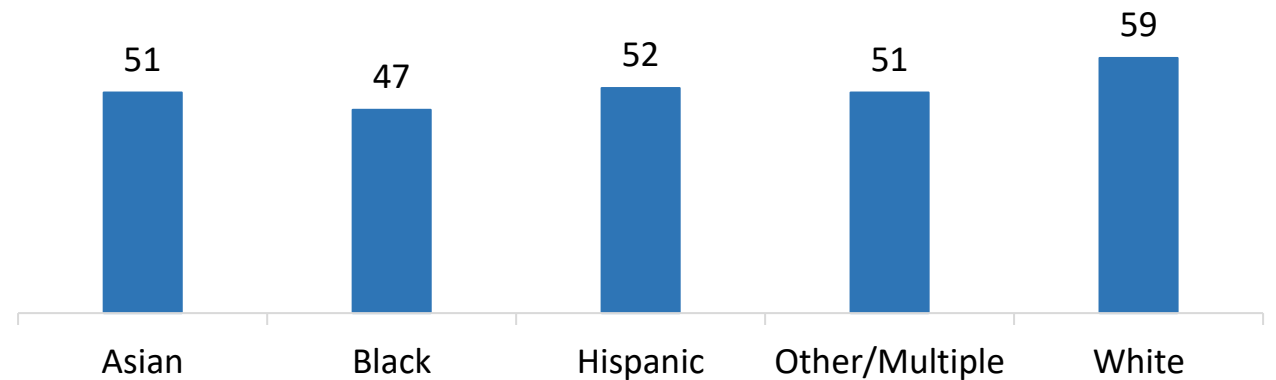
Even though the rates of **mental health concerns** are decreasing overall, they still vary across demographic groups. **Female** students, **LGBTQ** students, **Hispanic** students, and **students with disabilities** report the highest rates.

Mental Health (Continued)

53%

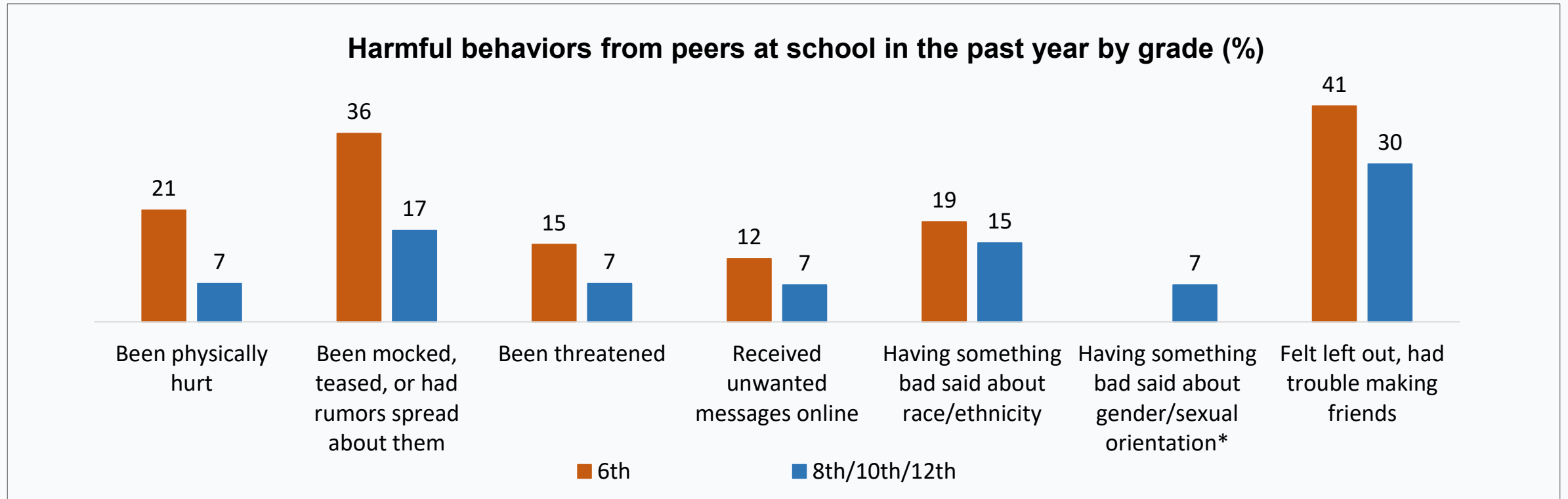
of 8th, 10th, 12th grade students who felt sad or hopeless reported getting help.

Able to get help by race/ethnicity (%): Among students who reported feeling sad or hopeless



Black students report **lower rates of receiving help** than other racial/ethnic groups, while White students are more likely to report getting help when needed. There is no meaningful difference in the rates by gender, gender/sexual identity and disability status.

Harmful Behaviors from Peers at School

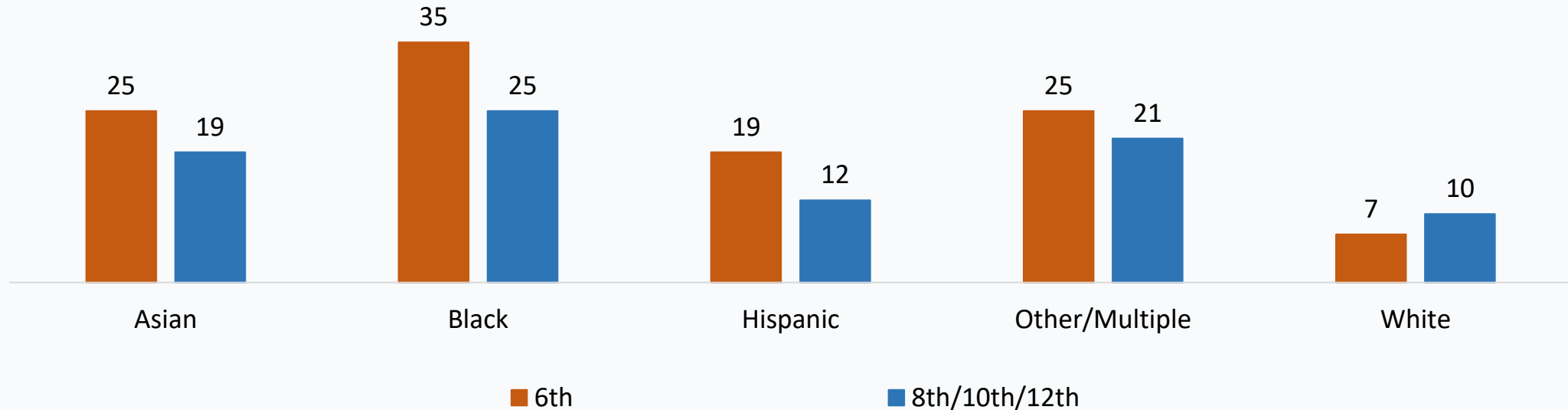


**Asked only among 8th, 10th, 12th grade students*

6th grade students report higher rates of **experiencing harmful behaviors** from peers at school than older students.

Harmful Behaviors from Peers at School (Continued)

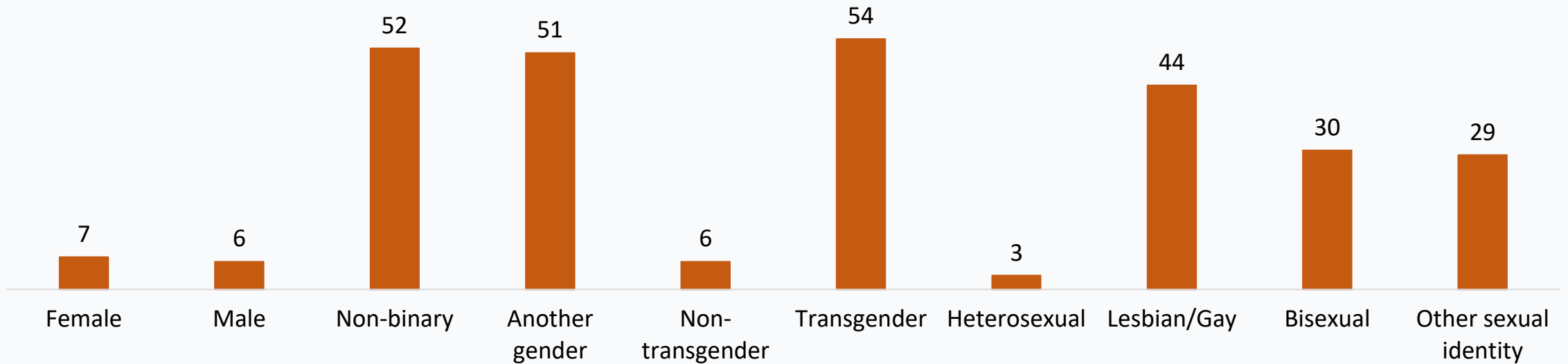
Derogatory remarks about race or culture in the past year by race/ethnicity (%)



Black students, especially 6th grade Black students, report the highest rate of receiving derogatory comments about their race or culture.

Harmful Behaviors from Peers at School (Continued)

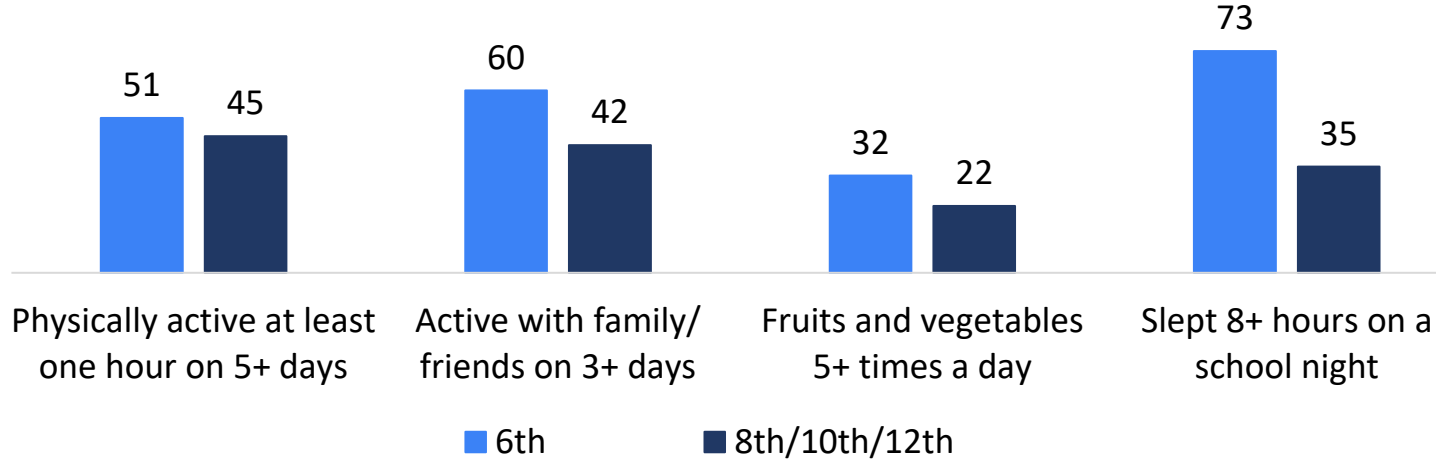
Derogatory remarks about gender or sexual orientation by gender/sexual orientation (%):
8th, 10th, 12th grade students(%)



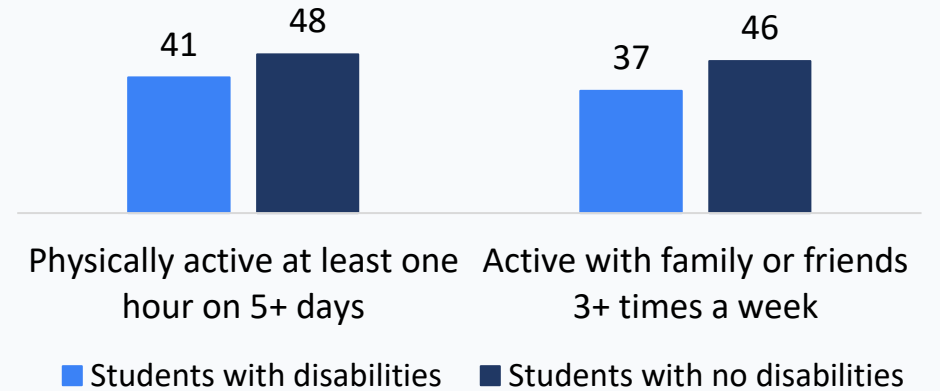
Students who are **gender or sexual minorities** experience **higher rates of receiving derogatory remarks about their gender or sexual orientation**, with transgender students reporting the highest rates.

Physical Activity, Nutrition & Sleep

Physical activity, nutrition and sleep by grade (%)

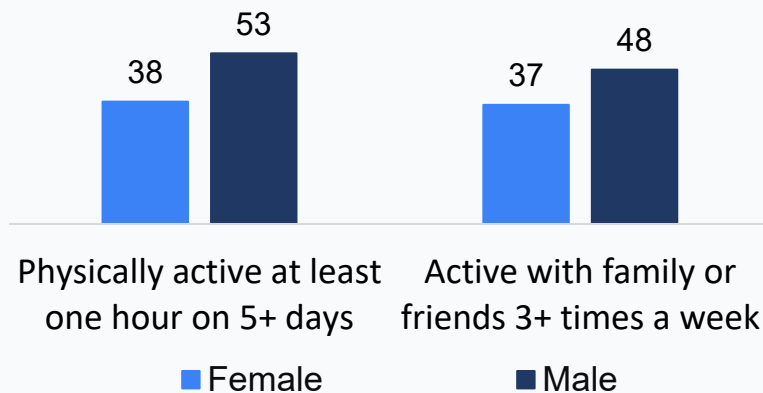


Physical activity by disability status (%): 8th, 10th, 12th grade students

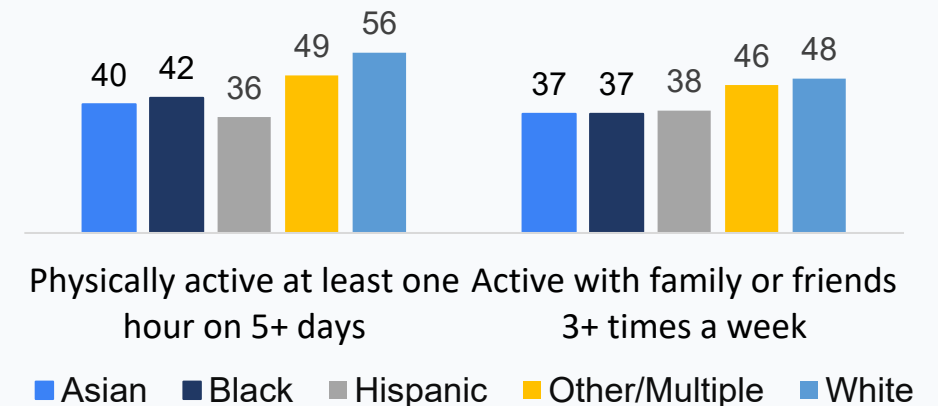


Older students report lower rates of physical activity, healthy eating, and adequate sleep than younger students. Hispanic students report the lowest rate of being physically active on five or more days.

Physical activity by gender (%): 8th, 10th, 12th grade students

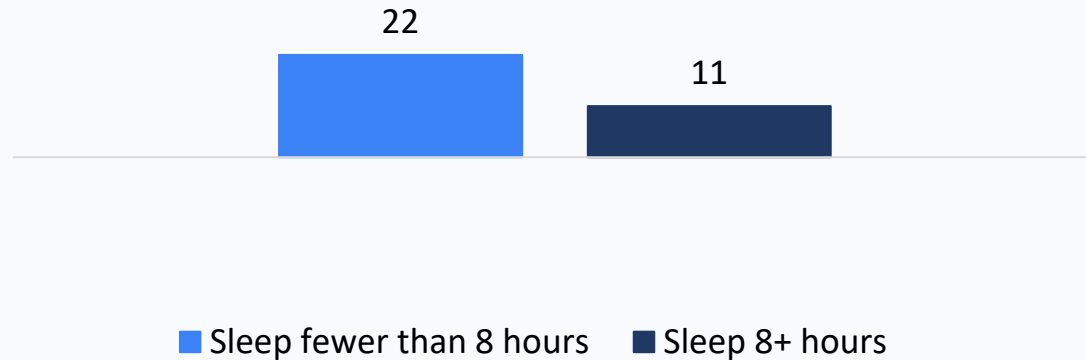


Physical activity by race/ethnicity (%): 8th, 10th, 12th grade students

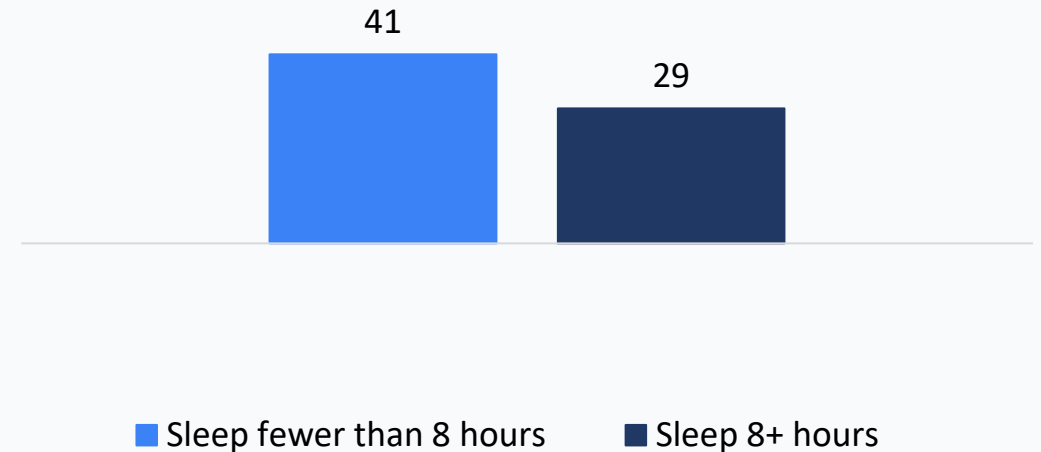


Physical Activity, Nutrition & Sleep (Continued)

Persistent sadness or hopelessness in the past year by hours of sleep (%): 8th, 10th, 12th grade students



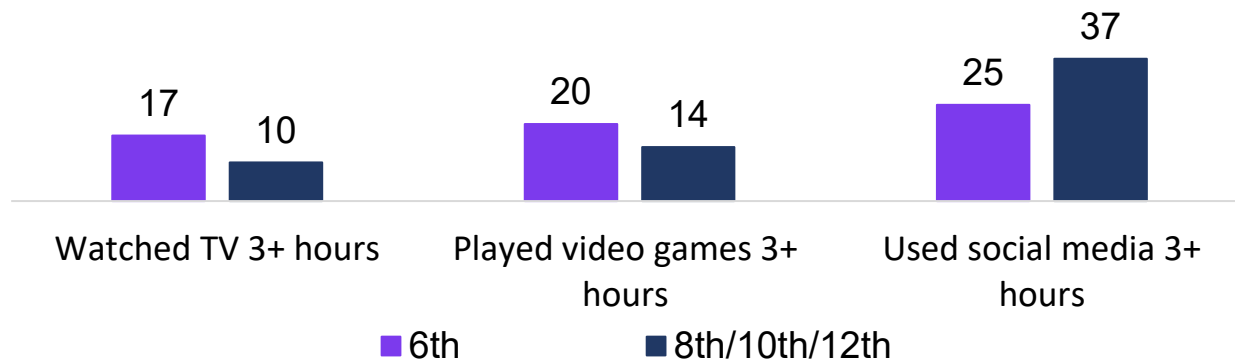
3+ hours of social media use by hours of sleep (%): 8th, 10th, 12th grade students



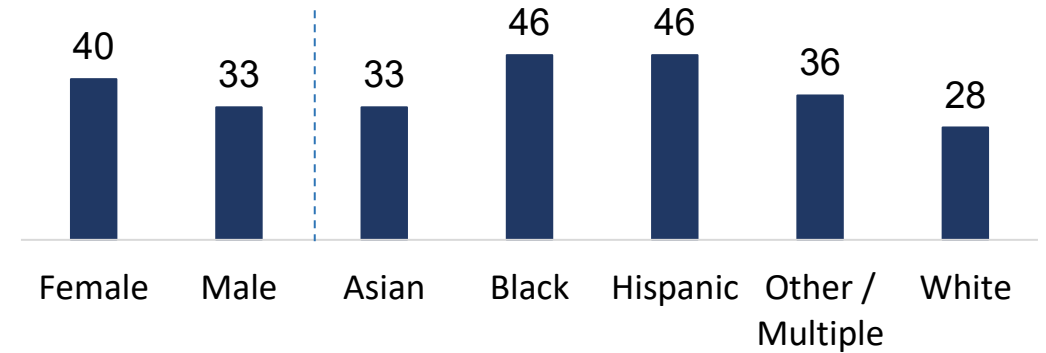
Students who get **8 or more hours of sleep** report **lower rates of feeling sad or hopeless** and **lower rates of excessive social media use (3+ hours a day)** than students who sleep fewer than 8 hours.

Social Media Use

Screen and social media use on an average school day by grade (%)

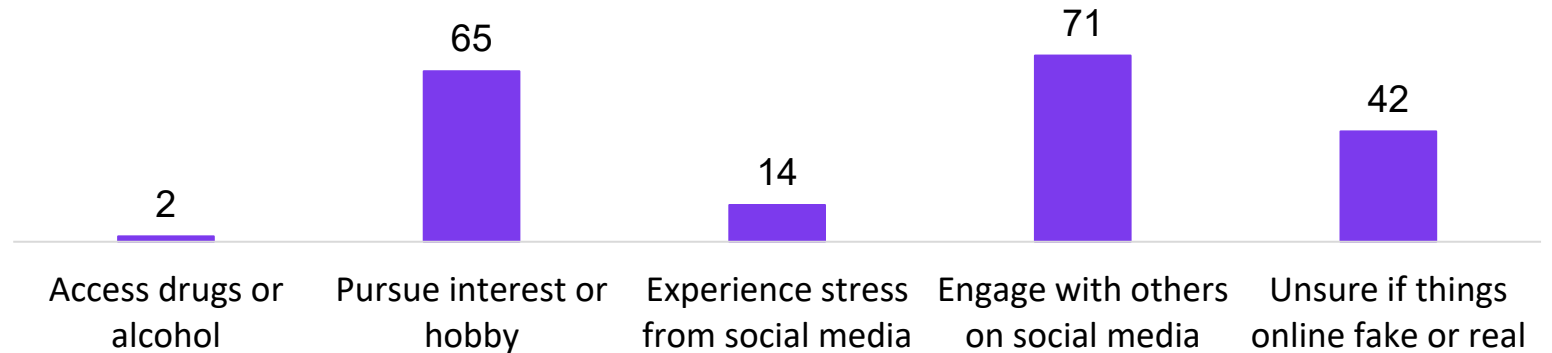


3+ hours of social media use on an average school day by gender and race/ethnicity: 8th, 10th, 12th grade students (%)



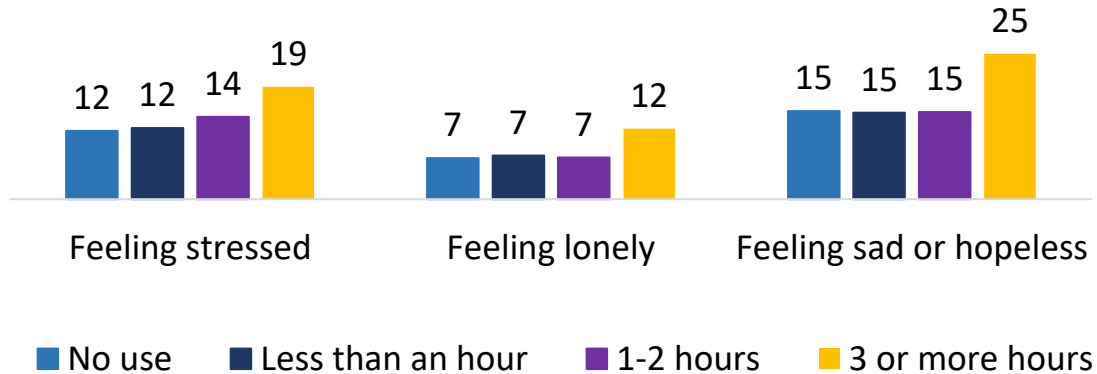
Some students have negative experiences with social media; however, many also use social media to engage with others or pursue hobbies.

Social media experiences: 8th, 10th, 12th grade students (%)

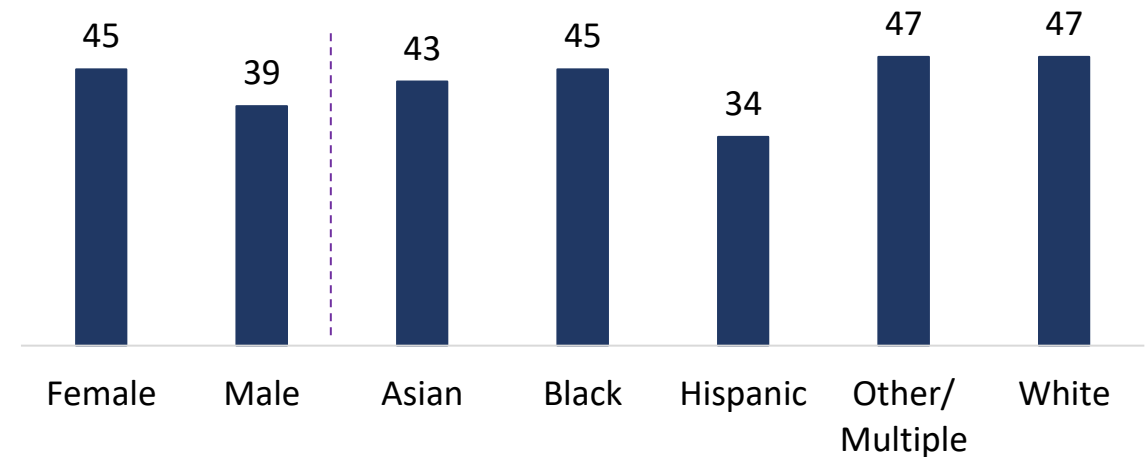


Social Media Use (Continued)

**Mental health concerns by social media use
(%): 8th, 10th, 12th grade students**



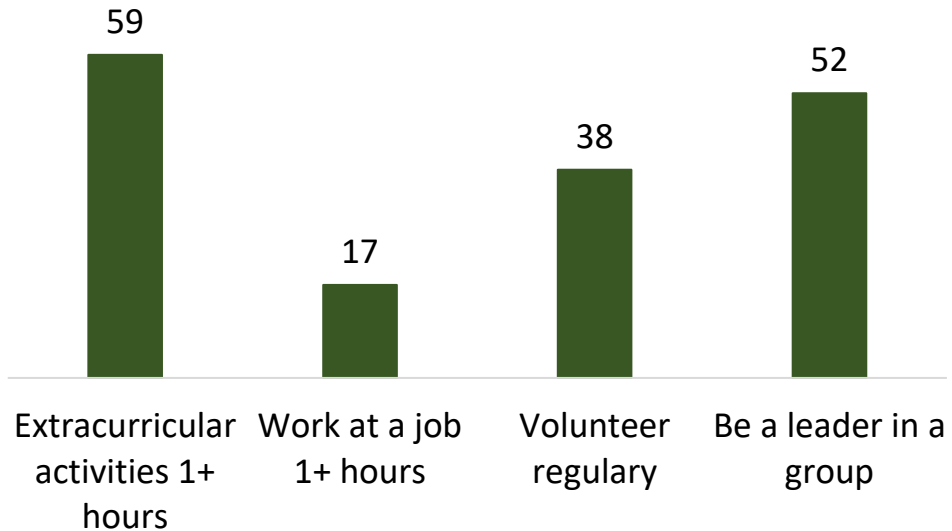
**Unsure if things online are fake or real by
gender and race/ethnicity (%):
8th, 10th, 12th grade students**



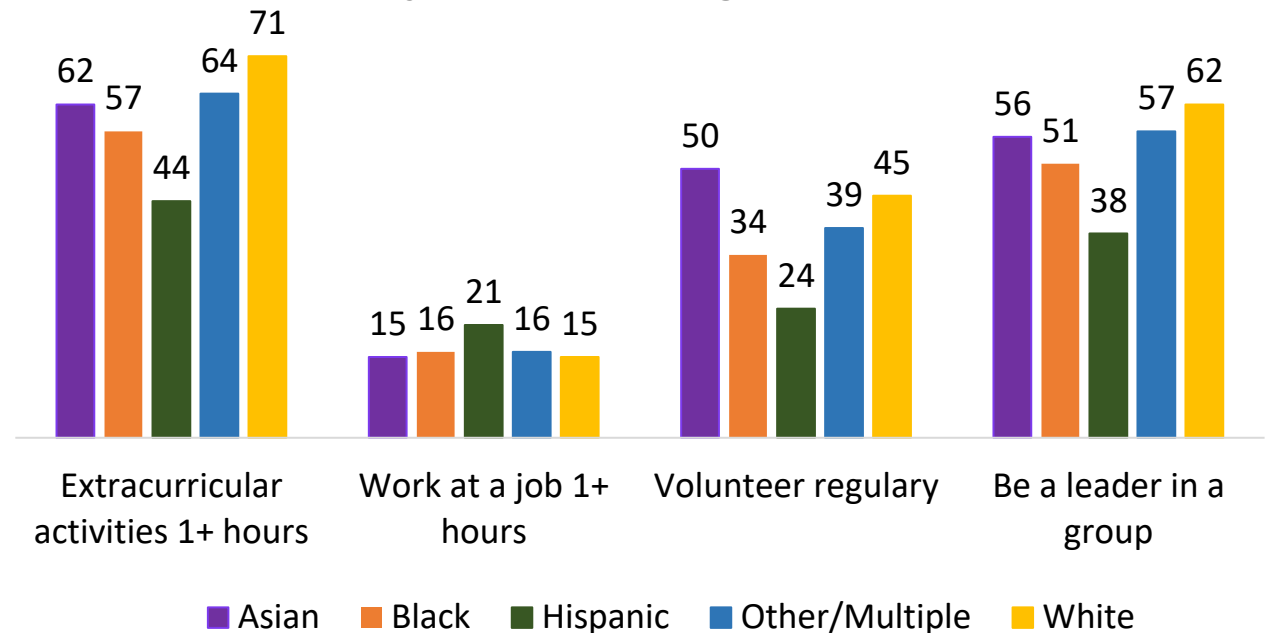
Students who use social media for 3 or more hours a day are more likely to feel stressed, lonely, and sad or hopeless than students who use it for fewer than 3 hours. Female students are also more likely than male students to report being unsure whether things online are real or fake.

Extracurricular Activities & Civic Engagement

Extracurricular activity and civic engagement: 8th, 10th, 12th grade students (%)



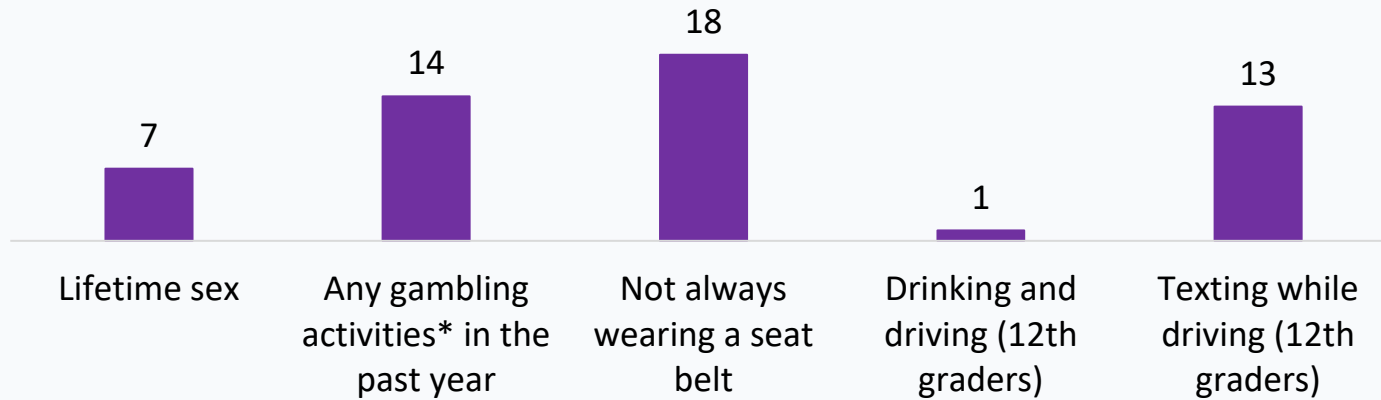
Extracurricular activity and civic engagement by race/ethnicity: 8th, 10th, 12th grade students (%)



Hispanic students are more likely to report working at a job than other racial or ethnic groups, but less likely to report participating in extracurricular and volunteer activities and serving as a leader in a group.

Risk & Safety Behaviors

Risk and Safety Behaviors: 8th, 10th, 12th grade students (%)



**Gambling activities include playing cards for money, shooting dice for money, sports betting, fantasy leagues or tournament brackets, buying lottery tickets or scratch-offs, online casino games or slot machines, or betting on video games.*

15 Years Old

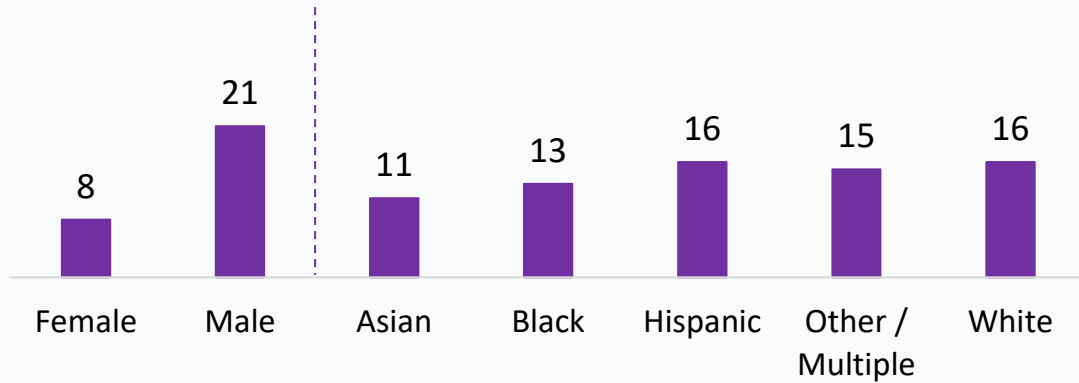
Average age of first sexual experience among students who have ever had sex

14 Years Old

Average age of first gambling among students who have ever gambled

Risk & Safety Behaviors (Continued)

Any gambling activities by gender and race/ethnicity (%): 8th, 10th, 12th grade students



Any gambling activities by past month substance use (%): 8th, 10th, 12th grade students

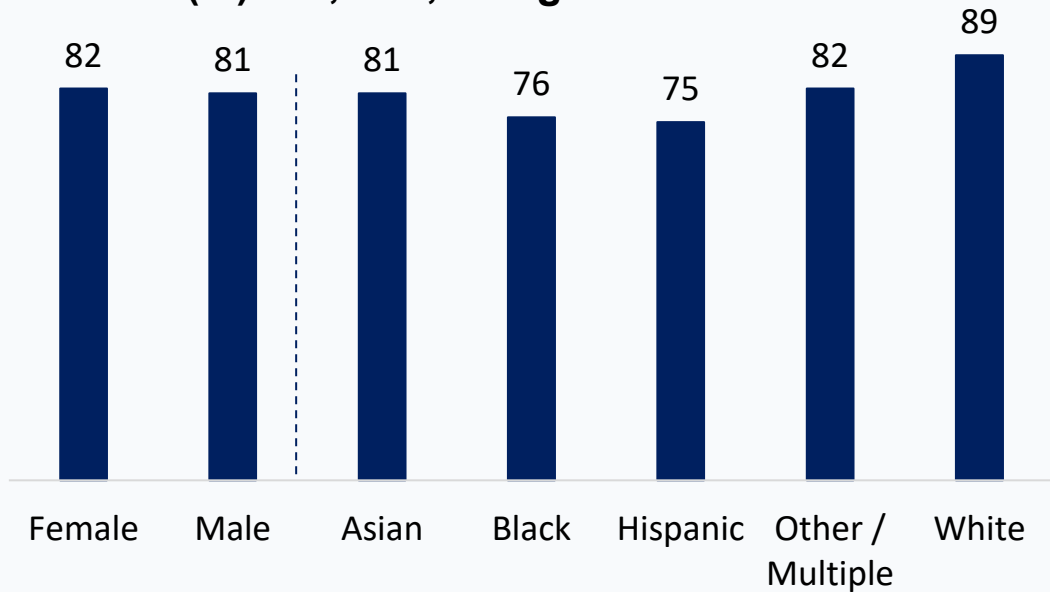


Betting on video games is the most common form of gambling activity, with just over 5% of Fairfax County youth reporting this behavior. **Playing cards for money (5%)** and **fantasy leagues or tournament brackets (4%)** follow.

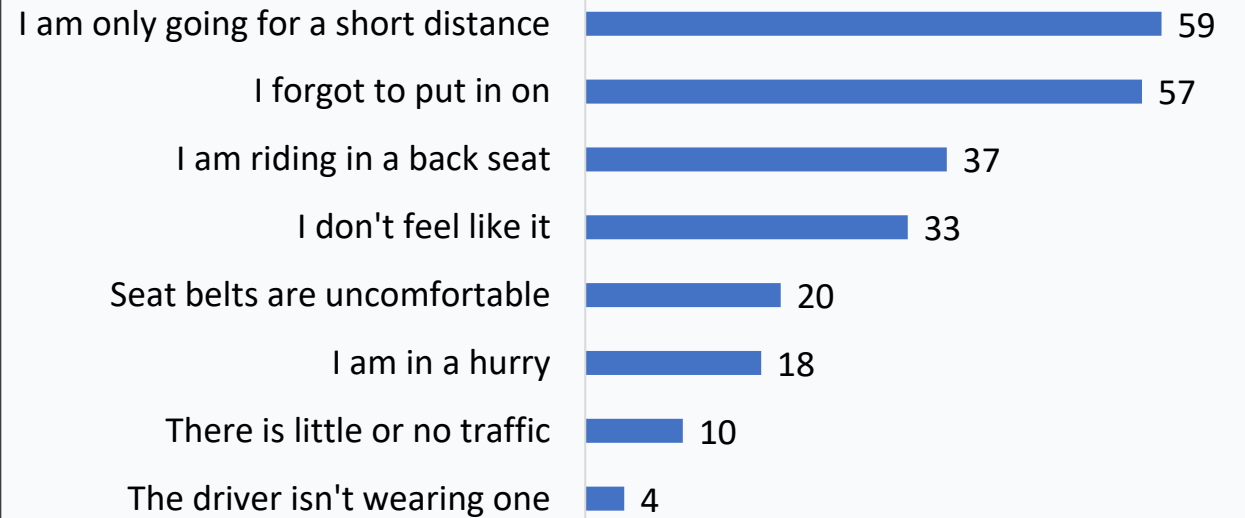
Male students are significantly more likely than female students to participate in gambling activities. **Students who report substance use** in the past month also report much **higher rates of gambling** than those who do not use substances.

Risk & Safety Behaviors (Continued)

Always wearing a seat belt when driving or riding in a car by gender and race/ethnicity (%) : 8th, 10th, 12th grade students



Reasons for not wearing a seat belt * (%): 8th, 10th, 12th grade students who reported not always wearing a seat belt



**This question lets students select multiple response options. As a result, percentages will not sum to 100%.*

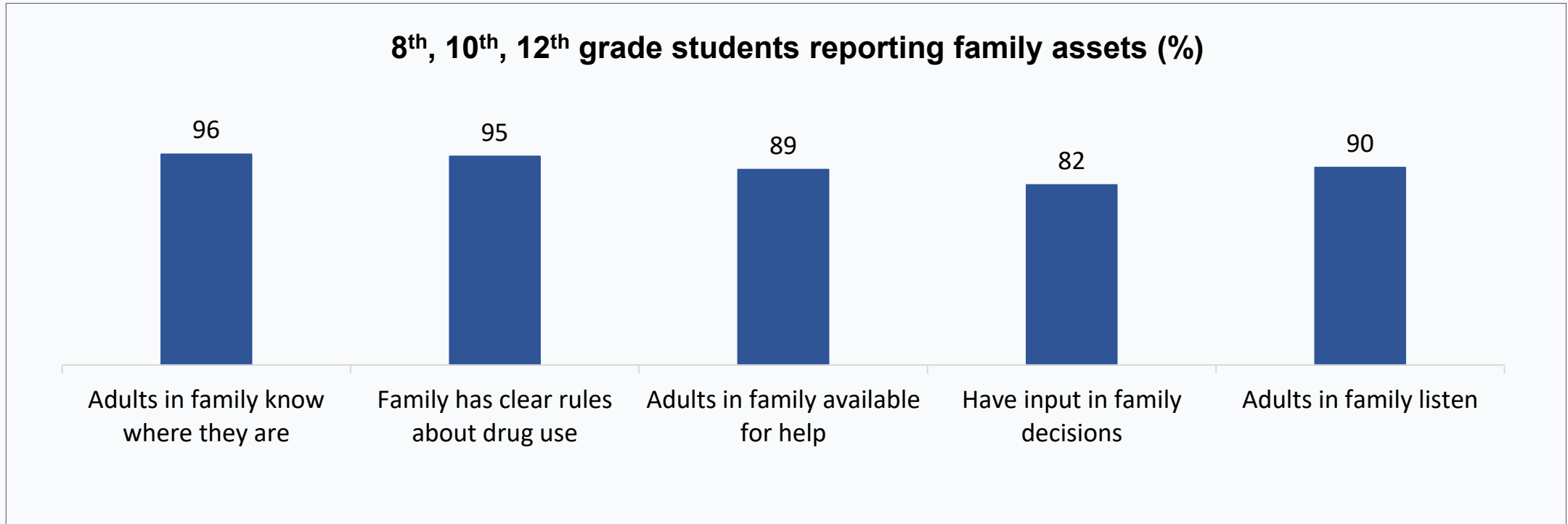
Assets That Build Resiliency

Protective Factors

Family • School • Community

The Fairfax County Youth Survey shows that children and teens with three or more positive, protective factors are more likely to manage stress, make better choices, and develop healthy habits.

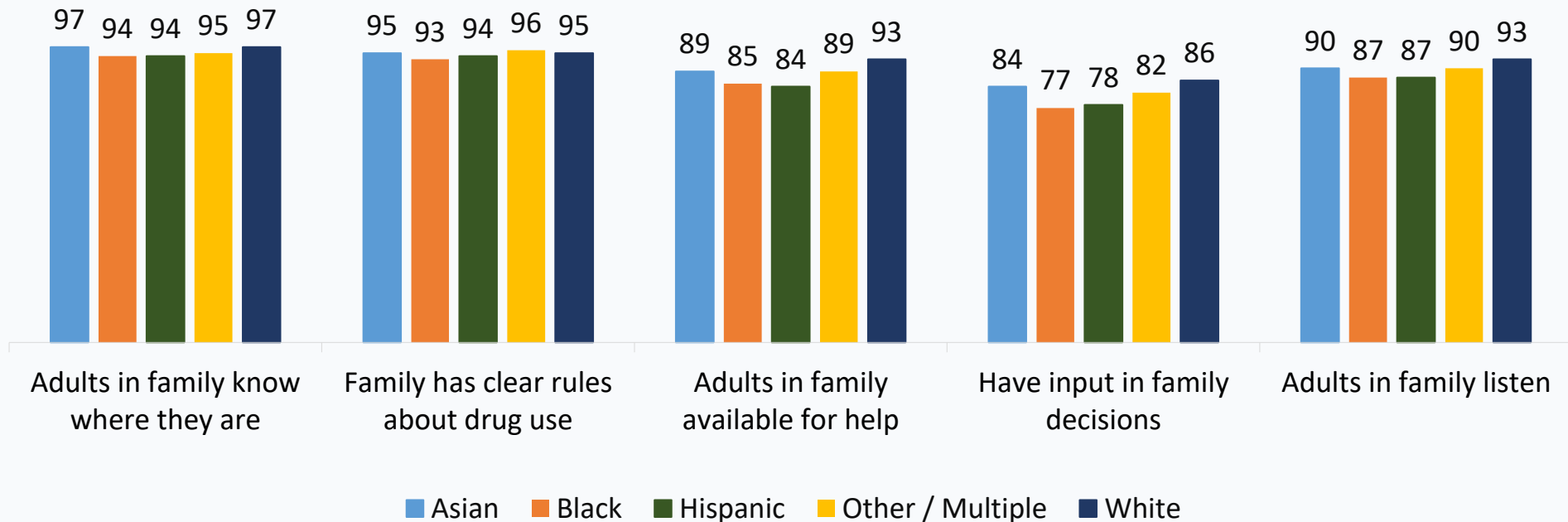
Family Support



Students **feel supported** by their parents, caregivers and other adults **in their families**.

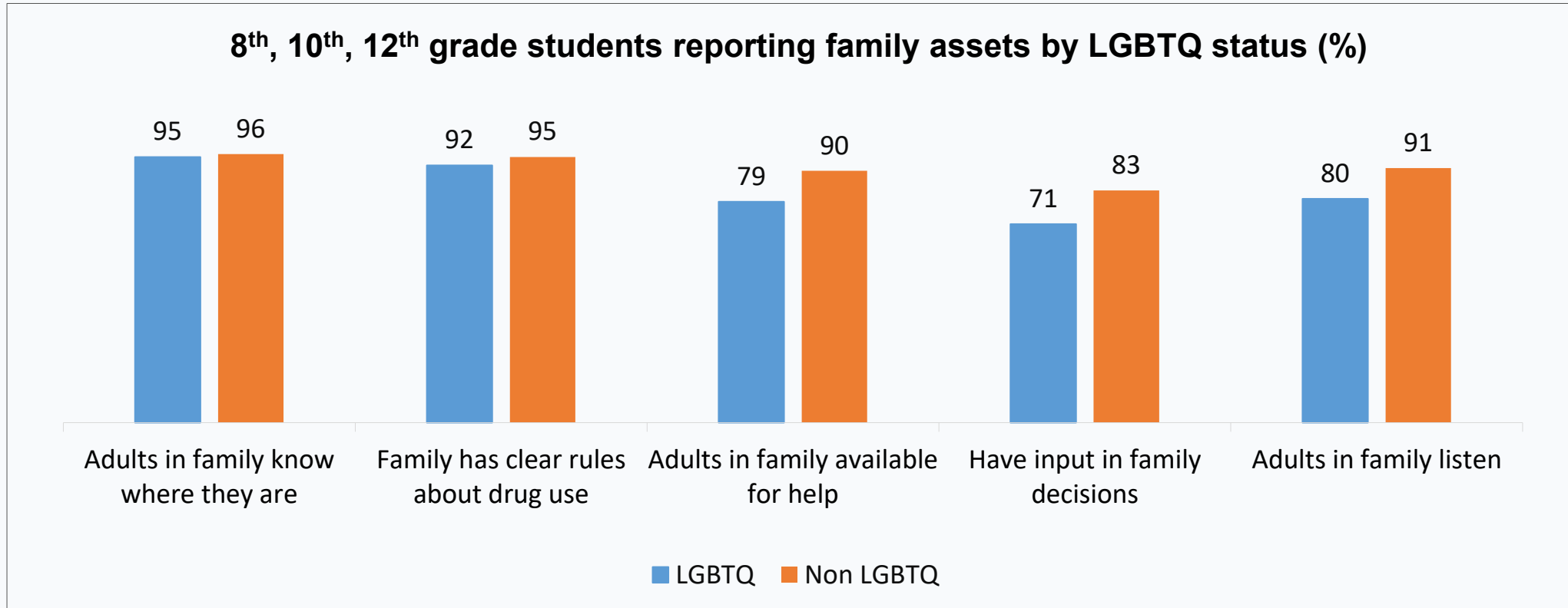
Family Support (Continued)

8th, 10th, 12th grade students reporting family assets by race/ethnicity (%)



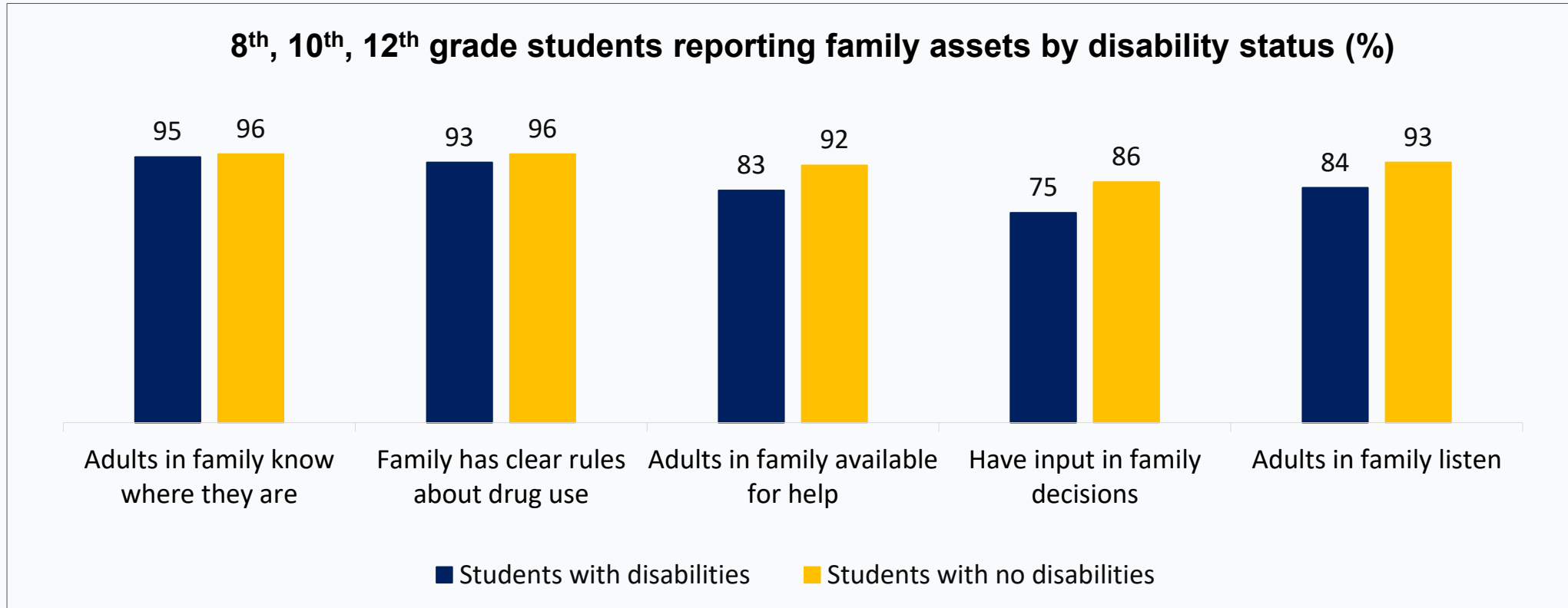
White and **Asian** students report **higher rates of having family support and assets** than other racial/ethnic groups. However, a majority of other racial and ethnic groups also report having family support.

Family Support (Continued)



LGBTQ students report **lower rates of having family assets** than non-LGBTQ students. The difference is largest in having input in family decisions.

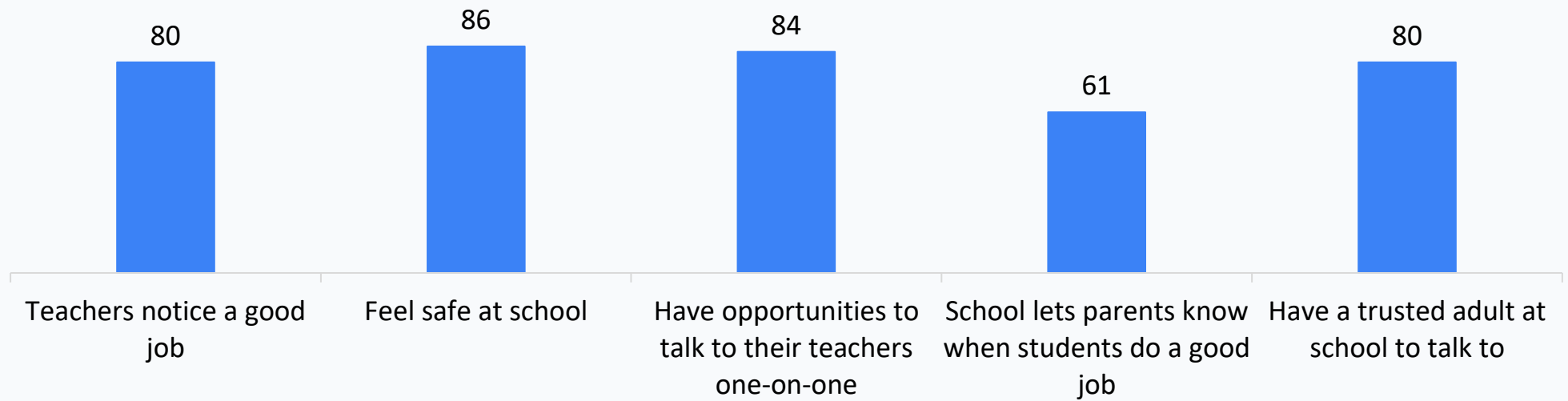
Family Support (Continued)



Students with disabilities report **lower rates of having family assets** than students with no disabilities. The difference is largest in having input in family decisions.

School Support

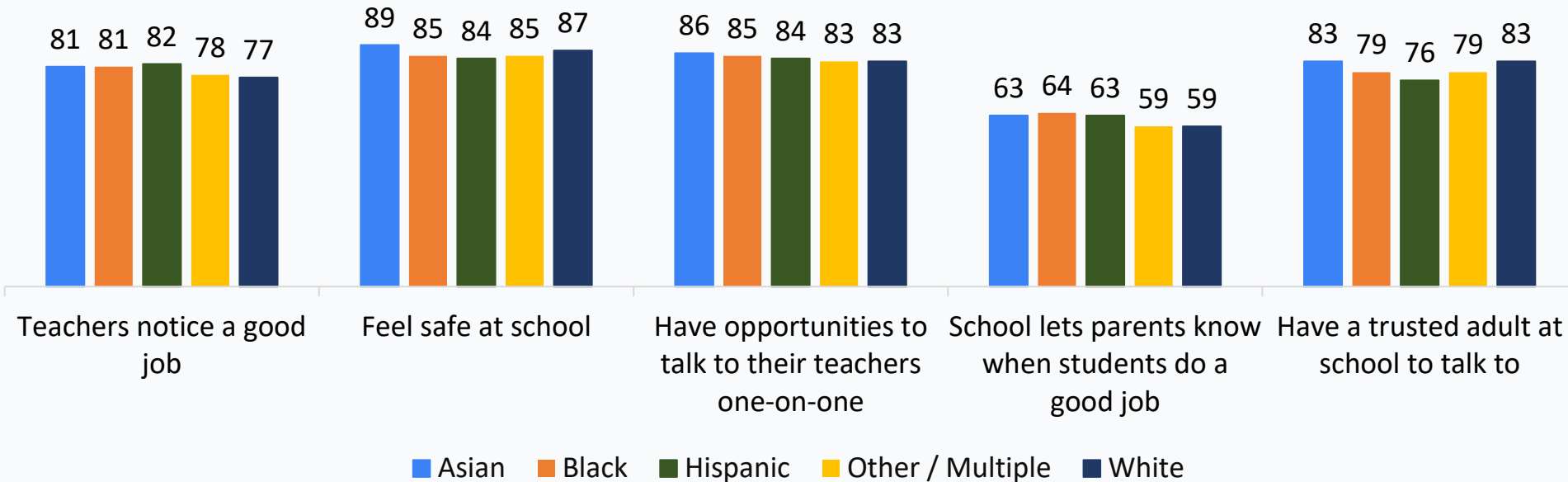
8th, 10th, 12th grade students reporting school assets (%)



Students feel safe and supported by their teachers and other adults **at school**. The lowest-rated area is schools letting parents know when students do a good job.

School Support (Continued)

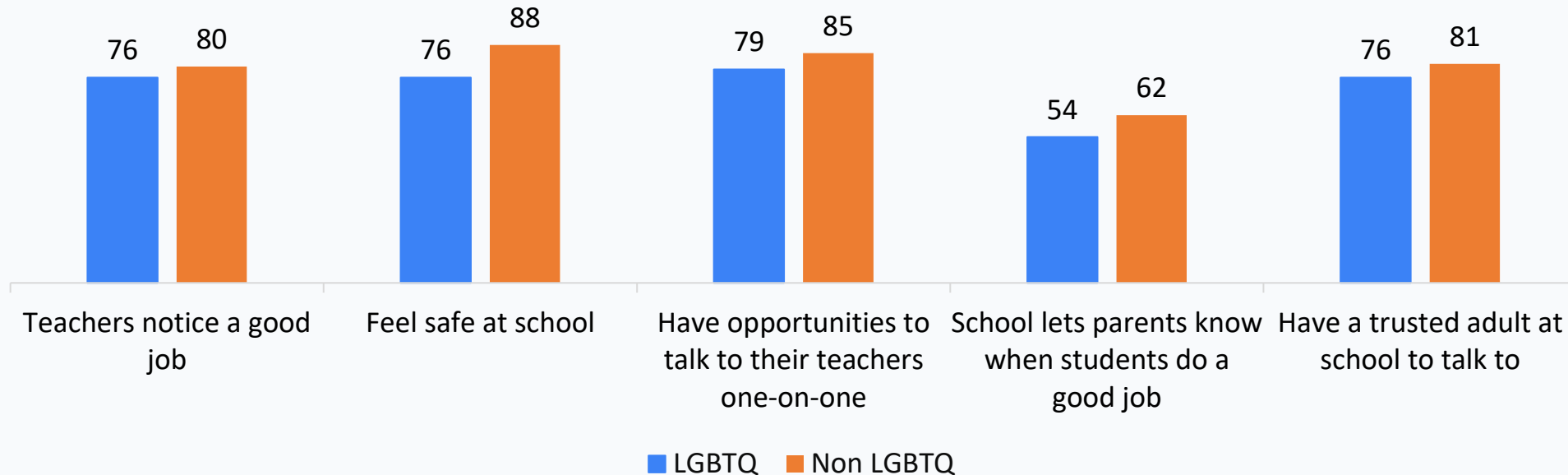
8th, 10th, 12th grade students reporting school assets by race/ethnicity (%)



Some racial and ethnic groups show **lower rates** of certain school assets. However, no single group consistently reports the lowest levels of support in school.

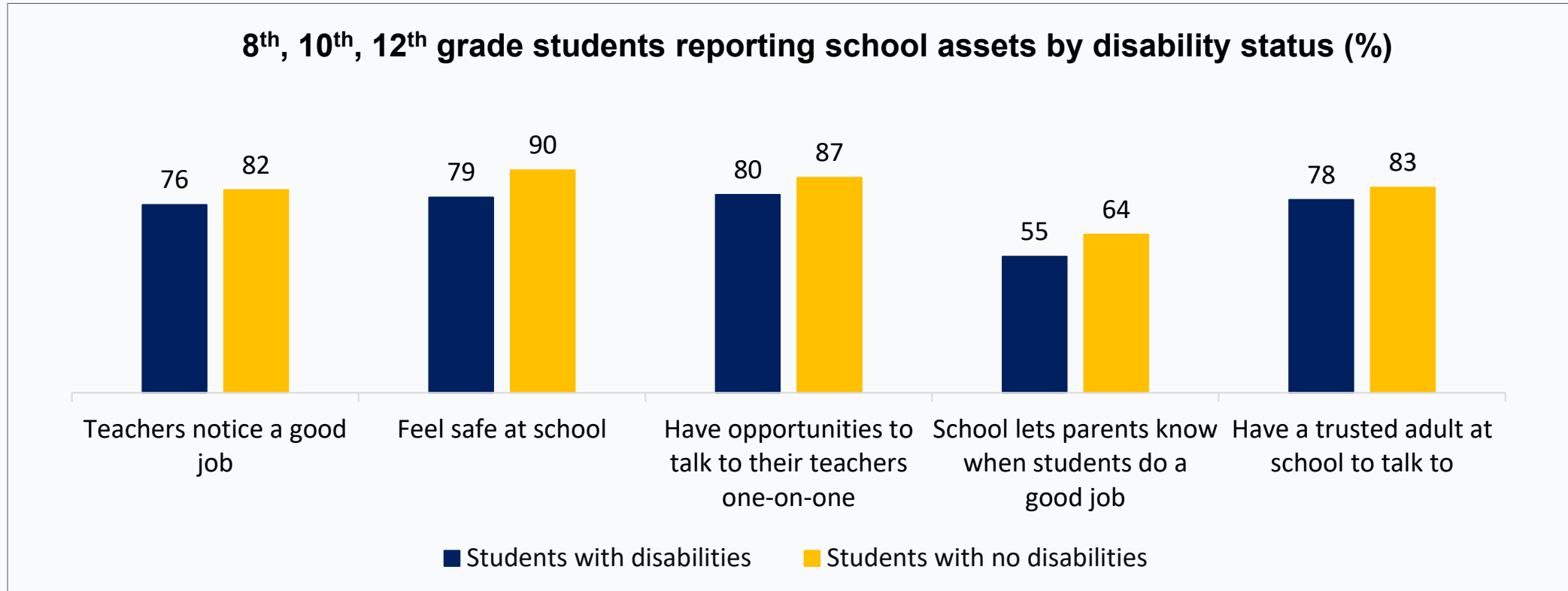
School Support (Continued)

8th, 10th, 12th grade students reporting school assets by LGBTQ status (%)



LGBTQ students report **lower rates of school assets** than non-LGBTQ students. The difference is largest in students' sense of **safety at school**.

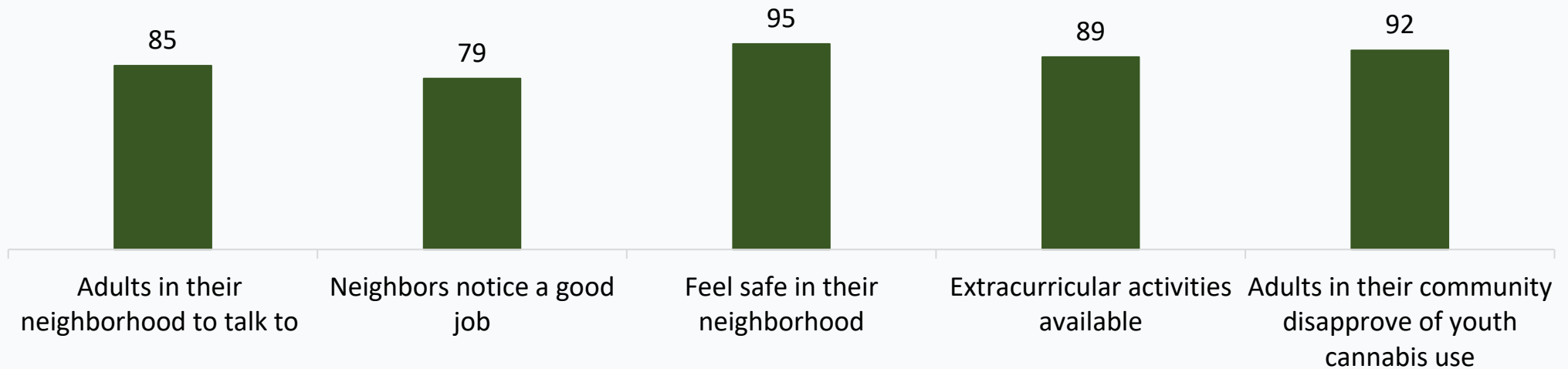
School Support (Continued)



Students with disabilities report **lower rates of school assets** than students with no disabilities. The difference is largest in students' sense of **safety at school**.

Community Support

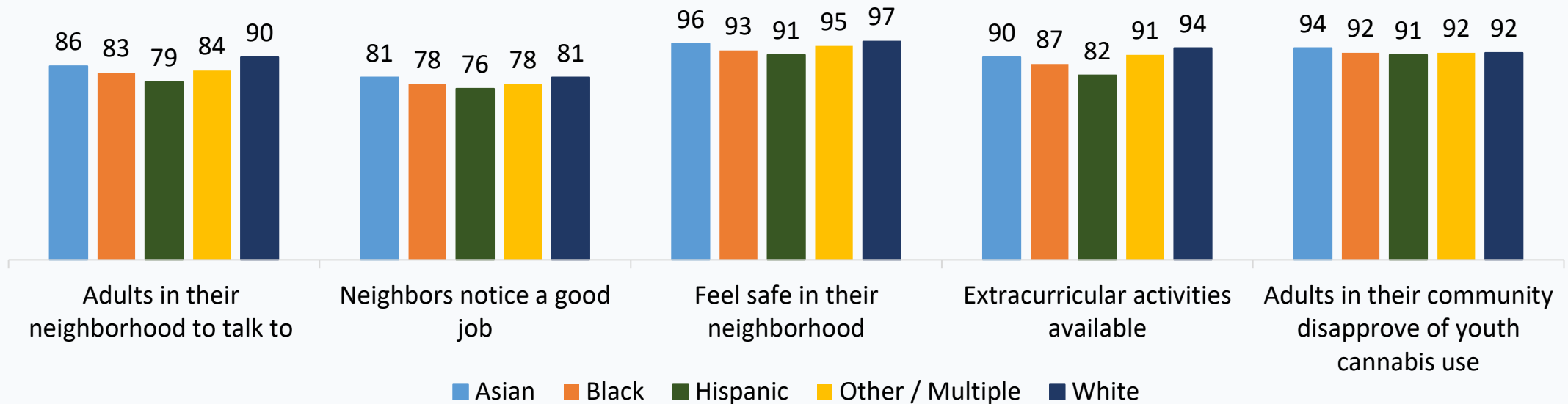
8th, 10th, 12th grade students reporting community assets (%)



Students report receiving **support from** adults, feeling safe, and having access to extracurricular activities in their **community**.

Community Support (Continued)

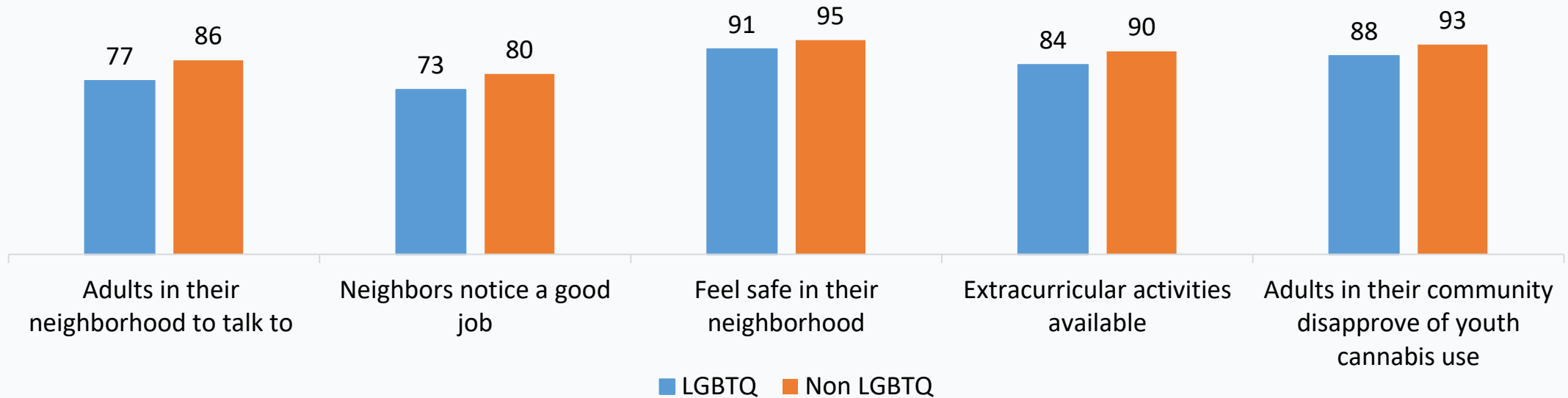
8th, 10th, 12th grade students reporting community assets by race/ethnicity (%)



Hispanic students show **lower rates of community support**. However, a majority still report having trusted adults and opportunities in their community.

Community Support (Continued)

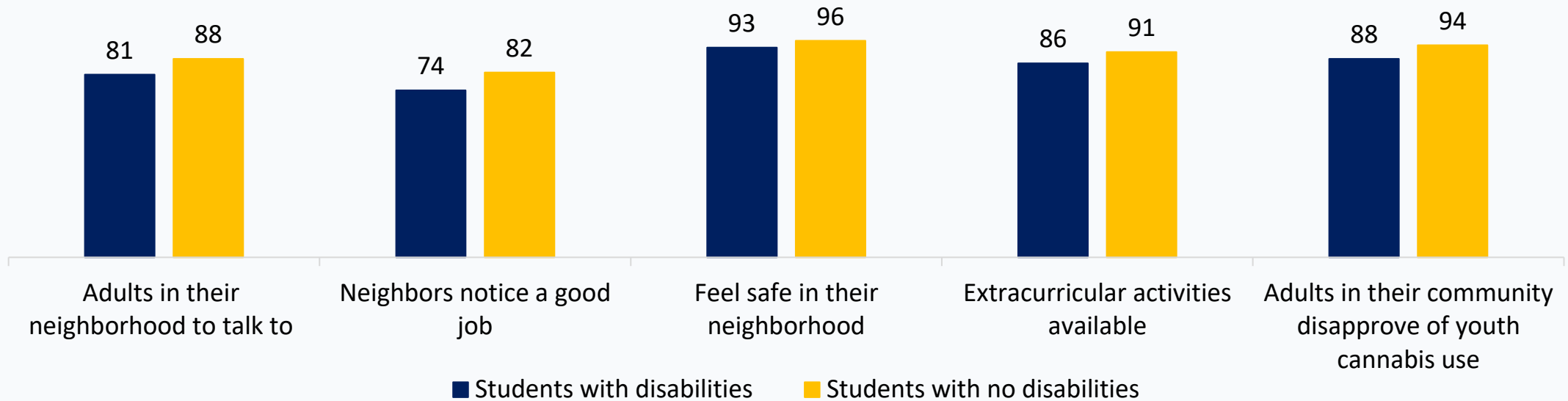
8th, 10th, 12th grade students reporting community assets by LGBTQ status (%)



LGBTQ students show **lower rates of community support**. The difference is largest in having adults in their neighborhood to talk to.

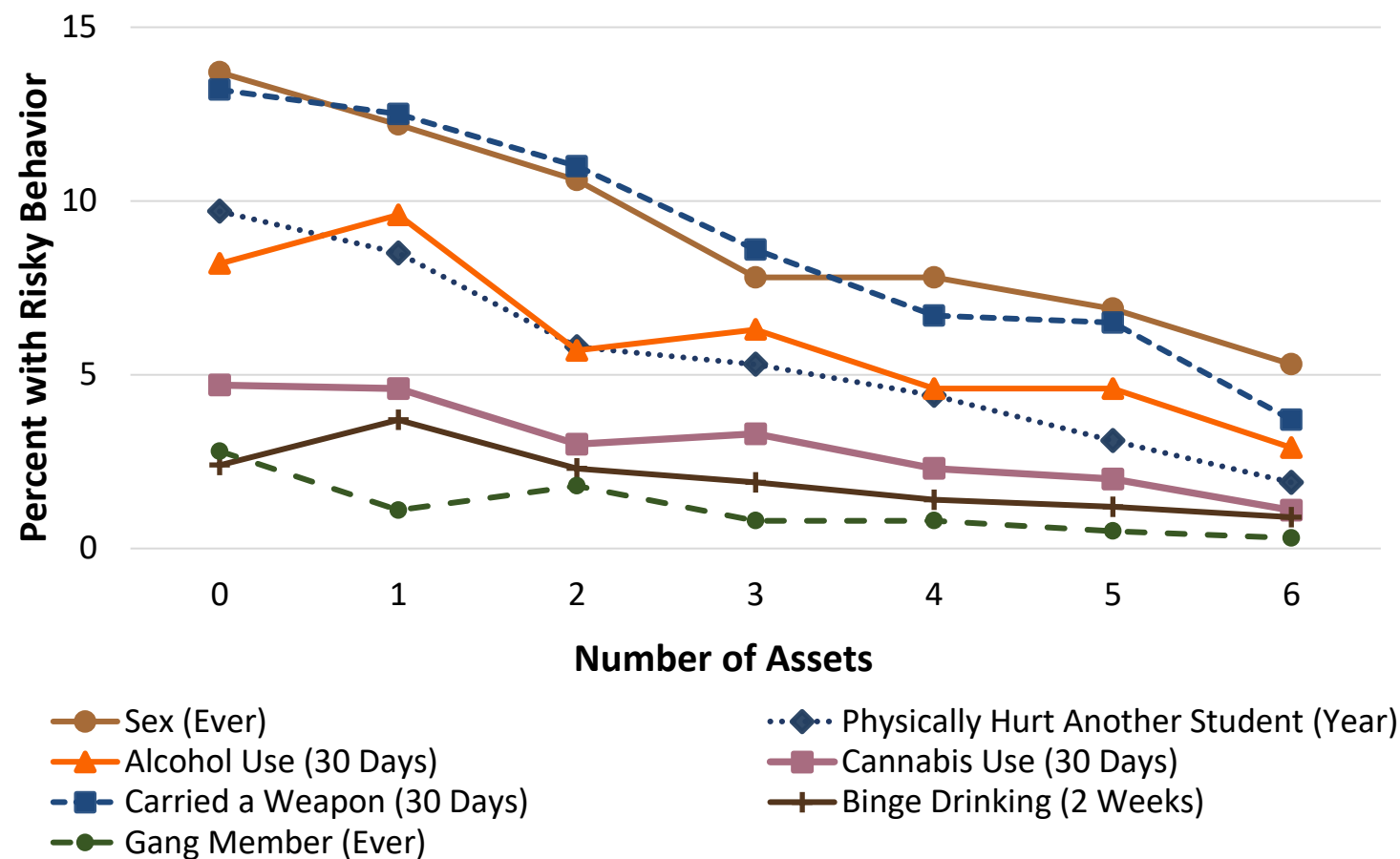
Community Support (Continued)

8th, 10th, 12th grade students reporting community assets by disability status (%)



Students with disabilities show lower rates of community support. The difference is largest in having neighbors who notice when they do a good job.

Protective Factors (Assets) & Risky Behavior



- Parents, caregivers, adults in family who can help
- Having input in family decisions
- Teacher noticing when they are doing a good job
- Having a trusted adult at school
- Having adults in community to talk to
- Adults in community noticing when they are doing a good job

The more protective factors youth have, the less likely they are to engage in risky behavior.

What YOU Can Do To Make a Difference

01 Listen to youth.

02 When they do well, provide specific feedback.

03 Provide opportunities for extracurricular activities, volunteering and mentoring.

04 Set and communicate high expectations.

05 Set clear and consistent boundaries.

Having a caring, trusted, and supportive adult relationship is vital for youth to build resiliency.



What YOU Can Do: Substance Use

► Participate in the **Talk, They Hear You campaign** to learn how to discuss alcohol and other drugs with children and youth. Download the app: bit.ly/CSB-TTHY

► Visit the **FCPS Substance Abuse Prevention Program** page for more resources:
bit.ly/SubstanceUsePreventionFCPS

► Make sure teens can't access alcohol without your knowledge. **Unmonitored alcohol** can be a temptation. When in doubt, lock it up.

► Advise teens to only take **pills** prescribed by your doctor from a licensed pharmacy. Never share medication or buy pills from social media, on the street, or from unlicensed pharmacies.

► Store and dispose of **prescription medicines** in a safe and secure manner:
fairfaxcounty.gov/health/drug-disposal

► Get **help from a professional** for substance use concerns:
fairfaxcounty.gov/community-services-board

► **Be a mentor.** Connect with a young person to provide encouragement to reach their potential:
bit.ly/BeAMentorFCPS

What YOU Can Do: Mental Health

▶ **Increase awareness** of risk factors and warning signs of mental health concerns.

bit.ly/CSBMentalHealth

▶ Become certified in **Mental Health First Aid**.

bit.ly/fairfaxMHFA

▶ **Connect** with a school counselor, psychologist, or social worker at your child's school.

▶ **Learn how to respond** to youth who are in crisis.

bit.ly/SuicidePreventFCPS

▶ Ensure the people you care about know about the **Suicide & Crisis Lifeline** at 988.

Call or Text: 988

Lifeline Chat: 988lifeline.org/chat

988 | **SUICIDE & CRISIS
LIFELINE**



What YOU Can Do: Bullying & Harmful Peer Behavior

- ▶ Visit the **FCPS Bullying Prevention and Intervention** page: bit.ly/BullyingPreventionFCPS
- ▶ Visit stopbullying.gov for tips and resources.
- ▶ Learn more about cyberbullying and digital literacy: bit.ly/InternetSafeFCPS



Access tip sheets in multiple languages and recorded videos about supporting students with digital citizenship.

What YOU Can Do: Physical Activity, Nutrition and Screen Time

- ▶ Encourage **outdoor play and physical activity**.
- ▶ Use **Healthy Eating Plate** as a guide for meal planning and creating healthy, balanced meals. To learn more, visit nutritionsource.hsph.harvard.edu/healthy-eating-plate/
- ▶ Limit **screen time** and talk with youth about what they see online, including how to recognize reliable information and unhealthy or misleading content.
- ▶ Establish a consistent bedtime routine, keep screens out of the bedroom and visit **FCPS Sleep Resources** for more healthy sleep tips: fcps.edu/sleep



What YOU Can Do: Support Engagement Activities and Service Learning

Encourage youth to join extracurricular and service-learning activities. Find more resources by visiting:

► **FCPS Middle School After School Activities Program:**
fcps.edu/activities/middle-school-student-activities

► **Volunteer Fairfax:** volunteerfairfax.org

► **Fairfax County Teen Centers:**
fairfaxcounty.gov/neighborhood-community-services/teen-centers

► **Fairfax County Library Events:**
librarycalendar.fairfaxcounty.gov/

► **Fairfax County Park Authority camps and classes:**
fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/partakes



To Learn More



Visit Fairfax County Youth Survey Website

fairfaxcounty.gov/youthsurvey



Learn More about Three to Succeed

bit.ly/3toSucceed



Visit the Prevention Toolkit

bit.ly/ffxprevkit

Questions? Contact Us!



**Visit the Fairfax County Youth Survey
Frequently Asked Questions Page**

fairfaxcounty.gov/data/youth-survey-frequently-asked-questions



**Fairfax County Data Analytics, Department
of Management and Budget**

DMBDataAnalytics@fairfaxcounty.gov



**Fairfax County Public Schools Office of
Communications**

OC@fcps.edu