



Partners for a Healthier
Community, Inc.

Youth Health in Springfield, MA

Highlights from the 2015 Youth Health Survey of Eighth Graders



Gándara Center
Culturally Sensitive Care



MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.
family services

Community centered. Spirit inspired.

Background

In February and March 2015, Partners for a Healthier Community led the implementation of the Youth Health Survey (YHS) to eighth graders enrolled in Springfield Public Schools. This survey was administered in collaboration with Springfield Public Schools, Springfield Department of Health and Human Services, Gandara Mental Health Center, Stop Access Springfield Coalition, Martin Luther King Jr. Family Services Drug Free Coalition and with the support of many volunteers from the community and other local agencies.

The YHS asks about physical activity, diet, mental health, drugs and alcohol, violence and bullying, as well as questions about family support and perception. Seventy-six percent (1,389) of the 1,822 eighth graders enrolled in Springfield Public Schools completed this survey. It is important to remember that all of this information was self-reported by the students, and it is anonymous. Data in this report is compared to the 2013 Massachusetts Youth Health Survey. As with all self-reported data, some responses may not accurately reflect health status.

This data allows us to better understand the health and well-being of our students and identifies areas that need action. We hope this data report will contribute to a dialogue among school staff, community based organizations, health care providers and the students themselves about strategies to promote the well-being of our young people.

This brief report only highlights a few selected items. We invite you to view the full report at www.PartnersForAHealthierCommunity.org/youth-survey.

Demographics

The Youth Health Survey was completed by 1,389 of the 1,822 eighth graders enrolled in the Springfield Public School system. The majority of respondents were between the ages of 13 to 15 years. Forty-eight percent were female, and fifty-two percent were male.

The majority of students in the Springfield Public Schools are youth of color with the largest proportion Hispanic or Latino. The 8th grade students reflected these demographics with 69% of survey respondents identifying as Hispanic/Latino. Statewide, the majority of students are White with only 13% of 8th grade Youth Health Survey respondents identifying as Hispanic or Latino. The following table (Table 1) shows the race and ethnicity of survey respondents from the 2015 Springfield YHS and the 2013 Massachusetts YHS.

Table 1: Comparison of the Race/Ethnicity of Survey Respondents in Springfield and Massachusetts

Race/Ethnicity*	Percent of 2015 Springfield YHS Respondents	Percent of 2013 MA YHS Respondents
American Indian or Alaskan Native, Non-Hispanic	—	—
Asian or Pacific Islander, Non-Hispanic	5%	5%
Black or African American, Non-Hispanic	14%	—
Hispanic or Latino	69%	13%
Multiple Races, Non-Hispanic	5%	3%
White, Non-Hispanic	7%	72%
TOTAL	100%	100%

*If student indicated Hispanic/Latino, whether alone or in combination with any race, the student was categorized as Hispanic/Latino. Note: In the MA YHS, percent estimates with a coefficient of variation of 0.25 or greater were presented as (—) due to questionable reliability. In the Springfield YHS, categories with counts of 5 or less were suppressed and presented as (—).

Drugs, Alcohol, and Tobacco

Underage drinking, drug, and tobacco use is a major public health concern. Youth who drink are more likely to experience problems in school such as bad grades, social issues, health issues, unintentional injuries, disruption of growth, and changes in brain development.¹ Youth who start drinking before age 15 are five times more likely to develop alcohol dependence or abuse later in life compared to those who wait to drink until age 21.¹ National survey data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) showed that students who drank and used drugs were more likely to perform poorly in school than students who did not.² Fortunately, most of Springfield's eighth grade students are saying no to drugs, alcohol, and tobacco.

- ◆ **83% of Springfield eighth graders have never tried smoking a cigarette, compared to 86% statewide.**
- ◆ **75% of Springfield eighth graders have never used marijuana, compared to 86% statewide.**
- ◆ **70% of eighth graders have never had a drink of alcohol, both in Springfield and statewide.**
- ◆ **80% of Springfield eighth graders did not use marijuana or alcohol during the past thirty days.**
- ◆ **96% of Springfield eighth graders said their parent(s) would be upset if they discovered that their child regularly drank alcohol, compared to 99% statewide.**

Lifestyle

Our lifestyle choices significantly impact our health. Eating a healthy diet and engaging in regular physical activity is linked to academic achievement in youth.³ According to the CDC, regular physical activity reduces your risk of cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes and improves your mental health and mood.⁴ Eating fruits and vegetables is also associated with a decreased risk of chronic disease.⁵ Sedentary activities such as watching TV or playing videogames may reduce the time we would otherwise be physically active.

- ◆ **Almost half (45%) of Springfield eighth graders did not eat *any* vegetables the day before the survey, compared to 23% statewide. This percentage was even higher among Hispanic and Black students at 51% and 42%, respectively.** Teens need anywhere from 2-3 cups of vegetables per day depending on their age, sex, and level of physical activity.⁶



Figure 1: Build a Healthy Eating Style
Source: United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)

To add more vegetables to your diet, the USDA suggests you fill half of your plate with fruits and vegetables.

- ◆ **20% of Springfield eighth graders were physically active for at least 60 minutes every day during the previous week, compared to 23% statewide.** The CDC recommends children and adolescents get 60 minutes or more of physical activity *daily*.⁷

- ◆ **82% of Springfield eighth graders reported 3 or more hours of “Screen Time” on school days.** "Screen Time" includes television, video games, computer games, and using the computer for activities other than school work. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) reports that digital media can negatively impact sleep, and poor sleep is associated with obesity and poor academic performance⁸. However, it is important to note that not all “screen time” is equal, and some digital media can help promote learning and social interactions.⁸ The AAP has a variety of recommendations for parents to maximize the benefits of digital media, including setting limits, engaging in using digital media together, and protecting time for conversation, play, and creativity that might otherwise be displaced by digital media.⁸

On an average school night, only 1 out of 6 Springfield eighth graders meet the CDC’s recommendation for hours of sleep.

- ◆ **Only 16% of Springfield eighth graders get 9 or more hours of sleep on an average school night.** The CDC reports that teens should get 9-10 hours of sleep per night.⁹ Insufficient sleep is associated with a number of chronic diseases and conditions including diabetes, cardiovascular disease, obesity, and depression.¹⁰

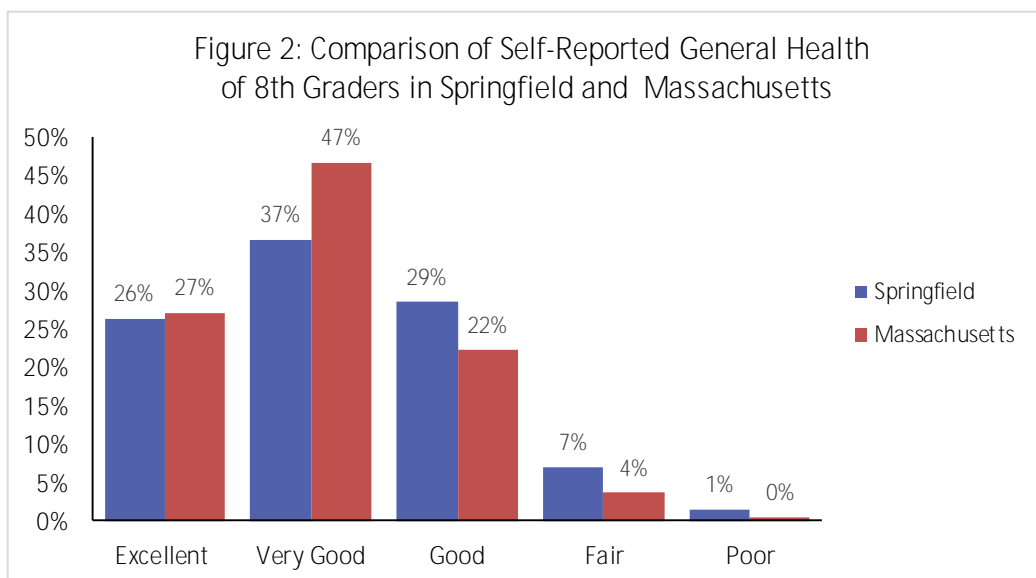


Health

- ◆ **80% of Springfield eighth graders have been examined by a dentist or dental hygienist within the past year compared to 93% across the state. 36% reported having a cavity during the year.** Oral Health is essential for general health.

8 out of 10 Springfield eighth graders have been examined by a dentist or dental hygienist within the past year.

- ◆ **91% of Springfield eighth graders ranked their general health as good, very good, or excellent compared to 96% across the state** (Figure 2). Feeling healthy is an important component of well-being. However, this finding is in contrast to the high rates of chronic conditions such as asthma and obesity experienced by Springfield students.

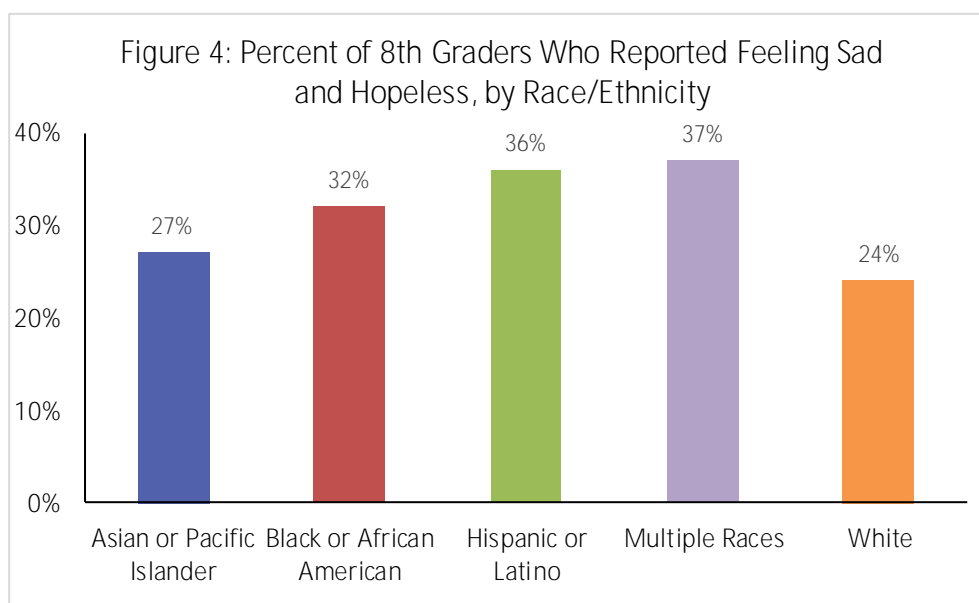
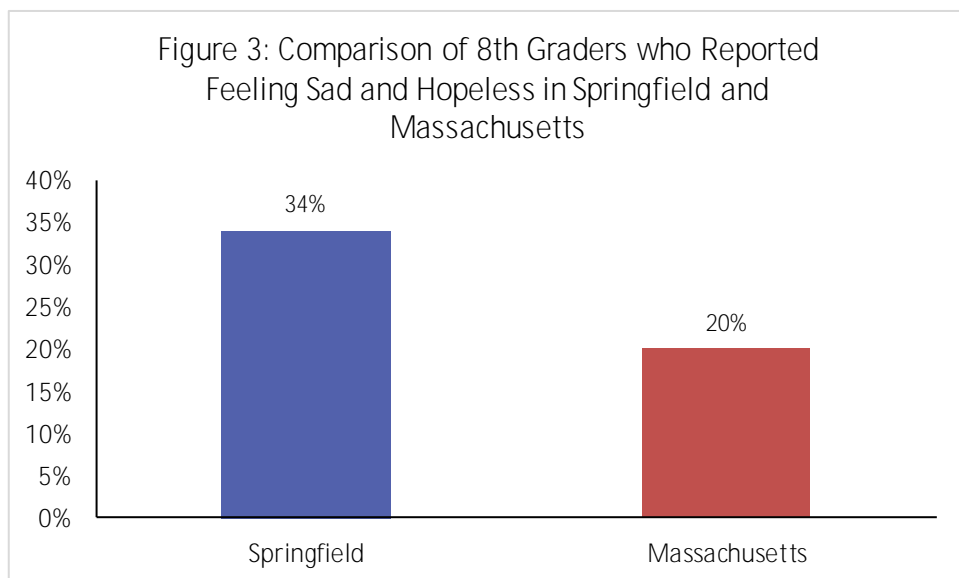


Mental Health

Mental health is an essential part of our overall health. Mental health is not just the absence of mental disorders, but rather “a state of well-being in which an individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and is able to make a contribution to his or her community.”¹¹ Adolescence can be a difficult time, and it is not unusual for youth to feel sad from time to time. However, feeling sad or hopeless for more than two weeks at a time can be a sign of depression.¹² According to the CDC, depression is associated with behaviors like smoking, alcohol consumption, physical inactivity, and sleep disturbance, all of which are linked to other chronic diseases.¹² Teens need guidance from adults to help them understand the emotional and physical changes they are experiencing.

- ◆ **34% of Springfield eighth graders felt so sad or hopeless that they stopped doing some of their usual activities. Statewide levels were lower than Springfield, at 20%.** Students who answered yes to this question reported feeling sad or hopeless almost every day for at least two weeks in a row over the past year.

- ◆ **Reports of feeling sad or hopeless varied by race and ethnicity, and were higher among Multiracial youth (37%) and Hispanic or Latino youth (36%).** The chart below (Figure 4) illustrates these responses by race and ethnicity:



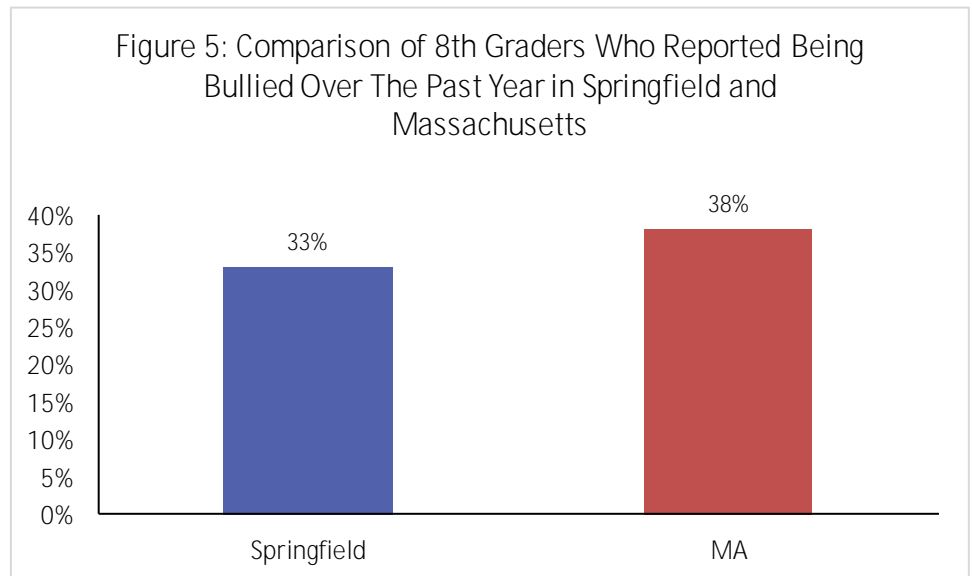
Note: American Indian or Alaskan Natives were not included in this chart because of low counts.

- ◆ **Among the 35% of eighth graders who felt they needed to speak to an adult about how they were feeling or problems in their life, 75% reached out and communicated with an adult.** This includes adult family members, school psychologists, school counselors, school nurses, teachers, medical professionals outside of school, or some other adult in the community. The percentage of students who felt they needed to speak to an adult was comparable to statewide levels (37%).

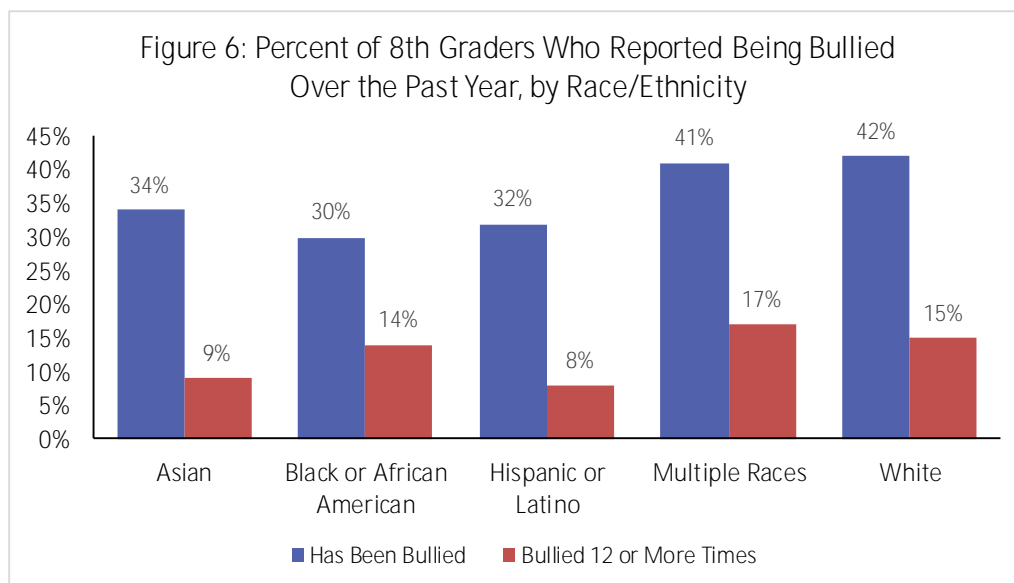
Bullying

Keeping our youth safe at home and in school is a major public health concern. Youth violence can take many different forms, ranging from physical fights to bullying. According to the CDC, violence is the leading cause of death and injuries to young people aged 10-24.¹³ Bullying threatens an individual's well-being as well as their social, emotional, and physical health,¹⁴ and it is generally underreported.

- ◆ **33% of Springfield eighth graders have been bullied at school at least once over the past year compared to 38% across the state.** 10% of Springfield eighth graders reported being bullied twelve or more times over the year. The survey defined being bullied as being repeatedly teased, threatened, hit, kicked, or excluded by another student or group of students.



- ◆ **The experience of being bullied varies by race and ethnicity. White students (42%) and Multi-Racial students (41%) reported experiencing the highest rates of bullying within the past year.**
- ◆ **12% of Springfield eighth graders have been electronically bullied over the past year, compared to 17% statewide.** Electronic bullying can take place through e-mail, chat rooms, instant messaging, websites, or texting.



Safety

Motor vehicle accidents are another major threat to the safety of our youth. The CDC reports that nationally for older children and adults, wearing a seatbelt reduces the risk of death and serious injury by half.¹⁵

- ◆ **61% of Springfield eighth graders wear a seatbelt. This is significantly lower than Massachusetts as a whole (82%).** Wearing a seatbelt was defined as those students who always, or at least a majority of the time wear one. 7% of Springfield students reported rarely wearing a seatbelt.

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