The Minnesota Student Survey (MSS) is an anonymous voluntary survey conducted every three years. The MSS is a major source of information about the thoughts and experiences of Minnesota’s young people. The survey findings provide an in depth look at the overall attitudes, behaviors and wellness of our youth. Topics include: attitude towards school, activities, family and relationships, health and safety, mental health, substance use and sexual health. Topics include: attitude towards school, activities, family and relationships, health and safety, mental health, substance use and sexual health.

In 2016, 85% of Minnesota school districts with nearly 169,000 students in regular public schools took the survey. In Scott County, 6,169 surveys were completed by 5th, 8th, 9th and 11th graders in all school districts in the county.

The survey findings provide an in depth look at the overall attitudes, behaviors and wellness of our youth. By identifying both positive findings and areas of concern, as a community we can better respond to the changing needs of our youth. Many of the trends revealed by the 2016 survey appear to be moving in the right direction, but some are not. Some indicators of emotional health problems appear to be dramatically increasing. Social and economic conditions continue to shape the health of young people, particularly students of color who are more likely to have worse outcomes for several health indicators. Some particular trouble spots for Scott County youth include substance use and mental health.

Health and safety are fundamental to students’ well-being and ability to learn and thrive. Engaged students perform better academically and supportive school environments and caring relationships can foster student motivation. The MSS data helps us to identify the issues that young people are facing so we can address them to strengthen student achievement.
Information in this publication includes Minnesota Student Survey data from 2010, 2013 and 2016. Student participation is voluntary. Ninth-grade data is used to monitor trends because these students historically have a high response rate and have been surveyed consistently across all years. One question sometimes raised about student surveys is whether students’ responses are honest and accurate. Researchers use a variety of data analysis techniques to examine the accuracy of anonymous surveys and these were applied to the student survey as well. Additionally, results are consistent over time with state and National trends. Survey results provide information about youth assets and risk behaviors and can be used as a tool for initiating conversation about youth health.

ALCOHOL USE

While there has been a general decline in the proportion of male and female students who used alcohol in the 30 days preceding the survey, this change was much less pronounced between the years 2013 and 2016. The proportion of females was also greater than that of males by a few percentage points for each of the three survey years.

Female students fared worse than their male counterparts in drinking, including binge drinking. Both these student groups improved from 2013 to 2016 though the reduction in the proportion of drinkers was greater in males. Additionally, although seeing a decrease since 2010, 15.9% of 11th grade girls and 11.2% of 11th grade boys report drinking one or more drinks in the past 30 days (not shown).

In general, less female students than male students think that binge drinking is harmless. From 2013 to 2016, there was an increase in the proportion of students holding the view that binge drinking was harmless and this increase was steeper in the male students. Also, in 2016, 15% of 11th graders reported binge drinking in the past 30 days, where they had five or more drinks in a row within a couple of hours (not shown).

HEALTHY EATING

Overweight/obese weight status is more prevalent in male students as opposed to female students. However, the proportion of overweight/obese male students has decreased each of the three survey years with the 2010—2013 change being more dramatic than the 2013—2016 change. On the other hand, there is fairly consistent upward trend in overweight/obese weight status in female students.

On average, approximately twice as many male students reported not having eaten green salad, potatoes, carrots or other vegetables the week before taking the survey. Both male and female students were better off in 2013 than in 2016 with respect to this nutrition-based behavior.

Students generally fared better with fruit consumption than with vegetable consumption. The gap between male and female students is also narrower and there was a drop from 2013 to 2016 in the proportion of students reporting having gone 7 days without consuming fruits. This is true for both male and female students.

The proportion of students who reported eating food from a fast food restaurant within the 7 days prior to taking the survey is quite high for both males and females. Both these groups increased slightly from 2013 to 2016 though the increase among male students was slightly higher.
Between 2013 and 2016, the proportions of male and female students who seriously considered attempting suicide during the last year or more than a year before the survey increased. The proportion of female students was higher in both time frames and this difference was even more pronounced for the group that attempted suicide within the year preceding the survey.

Additionally, the percentage of 11th grade girls who said they seriously considered committing suicide in the past year nearly doubled from 8% in 2013 to 15% in 2016 (not shown).

The percentage of 11th grade students who reported long-term mental health, behavioral or emotional problems (lasting six months or more) rose from 9% in boys and 14% in girls in 2013 to 12% of boys and 27% of girls in 2016. Similar increases were seen in other grades (not shown).

The proportions of students who actually attempted suicide (whether within the year preceding the survey or earlier) were less than those of students who seriously considered suicide within the specified time frames. There was an upward trend for both male and female students between 2013 and 2016 though the proportions were higher for the female students.

Use of non-prescribed prescription drugs decreased for both male and female students from 2013 to 2016. The proportion of female students in this category was more than that of the male students. Both, however, were low.

Use of marijuana by male students decreased with each successive survey from 2013 to 2016. For female students, the proportion increased during 2013 and then went down again in 2016. Overall all grades, 10.3% responded they have used marijuana or hashish, which exceeds the state rate of 7%. Additionally, 7% of students who have used reported that they were 10 or younger when they first tried marijuana or hashish (not shown).

Significantly more male students think smoking marijuana once or twice a week is harmless. However, the proportions of both male and female students holding this view increased from 2013 to 2016.

Between 2013 and 2016, the proportions of both male and female students who don’t think using unprescribed prescription drugs are harmless increased. The increase in the proportion for male students was steeper than that of female students.
TOBACCO USE

Smoking one or more days in the 30 days preceding the survey was more prevalent in female students. The proportions, however, decreased through each consecutive survey year though the decline was steeper between 2010 and 2013.

A higher percentage of male students smoked cigars, cigarillos or little cigars on one or more days in the 30 days preceding the survey. The proportion decreased through each consecutive survey year though the decline was steeper for male students between 2010 and 2013 as well as 2013 and 2016.

The proportion of male students who used chewing tobacco, snuff or dip on or more times in the 30 days preceding the survey was significantly higher than that of female students. There is a general downward trend in this measure from 2010 to 2016.

The proportion of male and female students who believe smoking one or more packs of cigarettes per day is harmless increased from 2013 to 2016. This proportion is higher for males with twice as many students holding this view in 2016 as did in 2013.

MENTAL HEALTH (GENERAL)

Between 2013 and 2016, there was an increase in the proportions of both male and female students who don’t feel in control of their life and future. This increase was far more dramatic in female students. The proportion of female students who don’t feel in control of their life and future was also greater than that of male students.

More female students don’t feel good about themselves as compared to male students. This measure was also higher in 2016 than it was in 2013. The change in the proportion of male students who don’t feel good about themselves was negligible though it was higher by approximately 50% in female students from 2013 to 2016.

While the proportion of male students who don’t feel good about their future remained fairly constant between 2013 and 2016, that of female students expressing the same sentiment almost doubled in the same time frame.

Between 2013 and 2016, the proportions of both male and female students who reported doing something to purposely hurt or injure themselves 12 months prior to the surveys, without wanting to die, increased. However, the increase was far more dramatic in female students whose proportion increased by a factor of approximately 5.