

Student health in BC:

Provincial and regional highlights

Executive summary

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Executive summary

Healthy Schools BC (HSBC), a key initiative of the Healthy Families BC strategy, aims to support improvements in students' health and learning. The *Student Health in BC* report presents provincial and regional student health data for seven priority areas identified by the Healthy Schools BC initiative: healthy eating, physical activity, tobacco use, healthy weight, mental health, learning to stay healthy at school, and school connectedness. The report presents changes in provincial data over time and highlights the most recent regional student health data for the 16 regional health service delivery areas (HSDAs) of British Columbia (B.C.). This information can be used to identify provincial and regional priorities and inform healthy school policies and programs.

Data sources

The *Student Health in BC* report presents data from the Ministry of Education's *Satisfaction Survey* and the McCreary Centre Society's *BC Adolescent Health Survey*.

- The Ministry of Education's *Satisfaction Survey* is an annual survey of B.C. students in Grades 3/4,¹ 7, 10, and 12, and it has been administered in B.C. public schools since 2002. The Ministry of Education reports survey results at the school district level, and this data was aggregated to the corresponding HSDAs. This report presents historical *Satisfaction Survey* data at provincial level over time, and highlights HSDA level data from the most recent survey (2014).²
- The McCreary Centre Society administers the *BC Adolescent Health Survey* every five years to B.C. students in Grades 7 through 12. Participation rates have increased steadily, from 45 districts in 2003, to 50 districts in 2008, to 56 districts in 2013. Over 29,000 students (70% of those sampled) participated in the survey in 2013. The sampling design was created to represent population-based estimates at the HSDA level. This report only presents data from the most recent cycle (2013) of the *BC Adolescent Health Survey*.

The *Student Health in BC* report is limited by the data sources available on student health. Due to different sampling methodologies, data from the *Satisfaction Survey* cannot be compared with data from the *BC Adolescent Health Survey*. The *Satisfaction Survey* is implemented annually and data is available at the school district and HSDA levels, but it does not include questions on mental health or healthy weight. *Satisfaction Survey* data from 2012² should be interpreted with caution due to low response rates (see Appendix A: Technical notes). The *BC Adolescent Health Survey* includes questions on all seven priority areas of Healthy Schools BC, but is implemented less frequently than the *Satisfaction Survey* (every five years) and data is not publically available at the school district level.

¹ Students in Grade 4 are surveyed. If the school does not have any students in Grade 4, Grade 3 students are surveyed instead.

² The *Satisfaction Survey* is administered between January and April each year. The dates in this report represent the year the data was collected. For example, data for the 2013/2014 school year is presented as 2014, because the data was collected between January and April 2014.

Highlights

Healthy eating:

- Student fruit and vegetable consumption (five or more servings per day) in Grades 3/4, 7, 10, and 12 increased between 2006 and 2014.
- Younger grades (Grades 3/4 and 7) reported eating fruit and vegetables and eating breakfast more often than older grades (Grades 10 and 12).
- Males reported “always” eating breakfast on school days more than females (61% versus 48%, respectively in 2013).
- The proportion of students who reported going to bed hungry because there is not enough money for food at home varied by geography – fewer students in the Lower Mainland reported going to bed hungry.

Physical activity:³

- The proportion of students who reported that they get exercise in school “many times” or “all of the time” declined from 2009 to 2014, most notably among Grade 10 students (14% decline) and Grade 12 students (9% decline).
- The majority of students in younger grades get exercise in school “many times” or “all of the time” (88% in Grade 3/4 and 80% in Grade 7 in 2014), while fewer students in older grades reported getting exercise in school “many times” or “all of the time” (59% in Grade 10 and 36% in Grade 12 in 2014).
- Only 44% of Grade 3/4 students and 33% of Grade 7 students reported meeting the Daily Physical Activity (DPA) requirement of 30 minutes of physical activity per day during school hours in 2014. The proportion of Grade 3/4 and 7 students meeting the DPA requirement has decreased slightly (2% and 3%, respectively) since the question was added to the survey in 2010.
- Similarly, in 2014, 44% of Grade 10 students and 40% of Grade 12 students reported meeting the DPA requirement for their age group - 150 minutes of exercise per week (inside or outside of school). The proportion of Grade 10 and 12 students meeting the DPA requirement has remained relatively static since 2010.
- Grade 7 students reported the lowest percentage of students meeting the Daily Physical Activity requirement in 2014 (33%, compared to 40-44% in other grades).

Tobacco use:

- Since 2010, an increasing proportion of students reported that they do not smoke cigarettes. In 2014, 97% of Grade 7 students reported that they do not smoke, dropping to 88% in Grade 10 and 85% in Grade 12.

³ In the *Satisfaction Survey*, student physical activity is measured in two ways. First, the survey reports the percent of B.C. students who get physical activity at school “many times” or “all of the time”. Second, the survey measures the amount of physical activity student get, inside or outside of school. This second measure can be used to assess whether or not students are meeting the Daily Physical Activity (DPA) requirements set by the BC Ministry of Education (www.bced.gov.bc.ca/dpa/dpa_requirement.htm).

Learning about how to stay healthy:

- The proportion of students who reported that, at school, they are learning about how to stay healthy “many times” or “all of the time” has declined between 2009 and 2014, most notably in Grades 10 and 12 (10% decline each).
- In 2014, a greater proportion of students in younger grades reported that they are learning about how to stay healthy in school (62% in Grade 3/4 and 54% in Grade 7) compared to students in older grades (39% in Grade 10 and 28% in Grade 12).

Healthy weight:

- In 2013, the proportion of students considered overweight or obese, based on self-reported measures, was higher among males (26%) than females (17%) and higher in the northern regions of the province (28-34%).
- In 2013, a greater proportion of males (73%) than females (64%) believed they were the right weight, and more females (59%) than males (50%) were trying to change their weight.

Mental health:

- In 2013, more males reported “good” or “excellent” mental health than females (87% versus 76%, respectively). Fifteen percent (15%) of females reported having a mental health or emotional condition and 17% had seriously considered suicide in the past year. Overall, 12% of B.C. students had seriously considered suicide in the last year.
- In the three mental health indicators included in this report (self-reported mental health, having a mental health or emotional condition, and suicide ideation), Grade 7 students demonstrated higher positive mental health than Grade 10 or 12 students.

School connectedness:

- In 2013, 68% of B.C. students appear to feel connected to their school, based on the Ministry of Health’s newly developed school connectedness measure derived from the B.C. public schools’ *Satisfaction Survey*. The new school connectedness measure assesses student responses to questions about liking school, feeling welcome and safe at school, having two or more adults at school who care about them, and wanting to go to a different school.

Summary

B.C. student health indicators related to healthy eating, physical activity, tobacco use, mental health, healthy weight, learning to staying healthy, and school connectedness were examined across grades, sex, and geography. Most student health measures have improved over time; however, some measures show a decline in healthy behaviours in recent years. Student health indicators tend to vary by grade, with a greater proportion of younger students reporting positive health behaviours and outcomes.