

Supporting youth and preventing substance use

September 10, 2026

Rebecca Hunt, MS

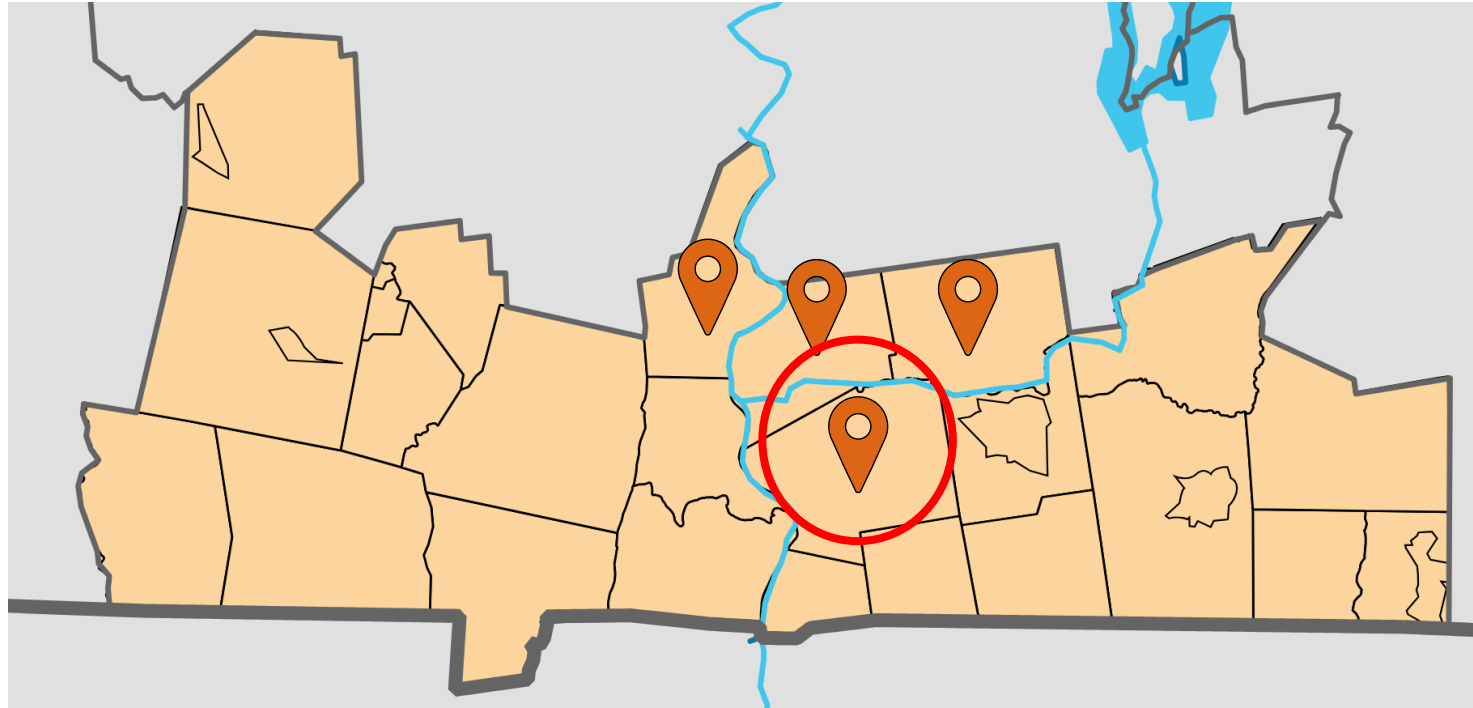
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**PUBLIC HEALTH INSTITUTE
OF WESTERN MASSACHUSETTS**
PARTNERS FOR HEALTH EQUITY

What are the Youth Health Surveys?

- Since 2015, PHIWM has administered surveys to Springfield 8th, 10th, and 12th graders in collaboration with Springfield Public Schools and community organizations
 - Since 2024: Administer surveys in Chicopee, Holyoke, and Ludlow
- We modify widely used surveys to fit local needs



Today, we'll focus on data from Springfield!

About the surveys

- 2025 surveys administered online in December 2025
- Students were asked questions on a wide range of health topics and behaviors:
 - Diet and physical activity
 - Mental health
 - Gambling
 - Sexual activity and sexual violence
 - Social media and news sources
 - Substance use
 - And more!



A snapshot of data from Springfield

- The following slides contain data from the 2025 Prevention Needs Assessment Survey (PNAS)
- 2025 participation:

Grade	Participation rate	Number of students
Overall	51%	2613 of 5089
8 th grade	68%	1044 of 1538
10 th grade	50%	994 of 1844
12 th grade	38%	730 of 1707

Some notes about the data

- This data shares the **voices**, and valuable insights, of over 2,600 students
 - However, it only shows the responses of those who took the survey
- Behind each graph and percentage point is a human whose lived experience cannot fully be captured by a survey.

Youth mental health in Springfield

47% of students who took the survey felt **depressed or sad** most days in the past year.

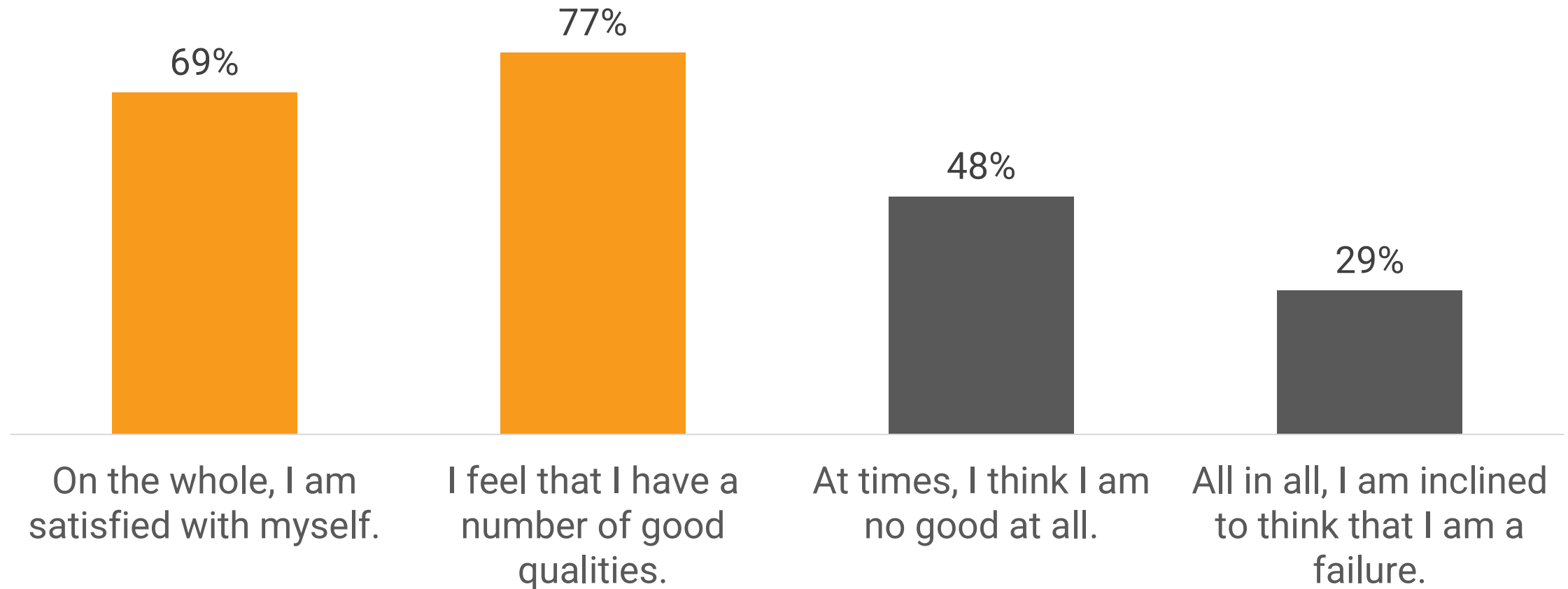


54% of students who took the survey felt **anxious or worried** most days in the past year.



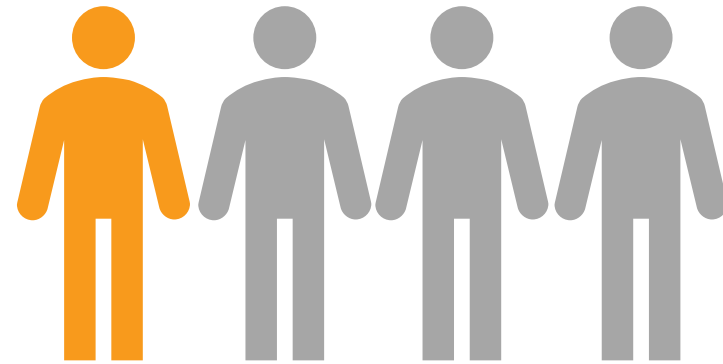
Youth mental health in Springfield

Measures of self-esteem



Youth substance use in Springfield

- **Just over one in four (28%)** students surveyed reported ever using substances
- Most common substances:
 - **Alcohol (20%)**
 - **E-cigarettes (17%)**
 - **Cannabis (16%)**



Reasons for substance use

- Young people who reported using substances were asked *why* they used them.
- Of the students who reported using ...

Alcohol



29% for fun

E-cigarettes



24% curiosity

Cannabis



37% to help with a
mental health issue

The intersection between mental health and substance use

- **We know** that mental health struggles and substance use often go hand in hand
- Among Springfield youth, we see similar trends, like an association between substance use and...
 - Depressive symptoms
 - Feeling anxious
 - Considering suicide
 - Negative self-esteem

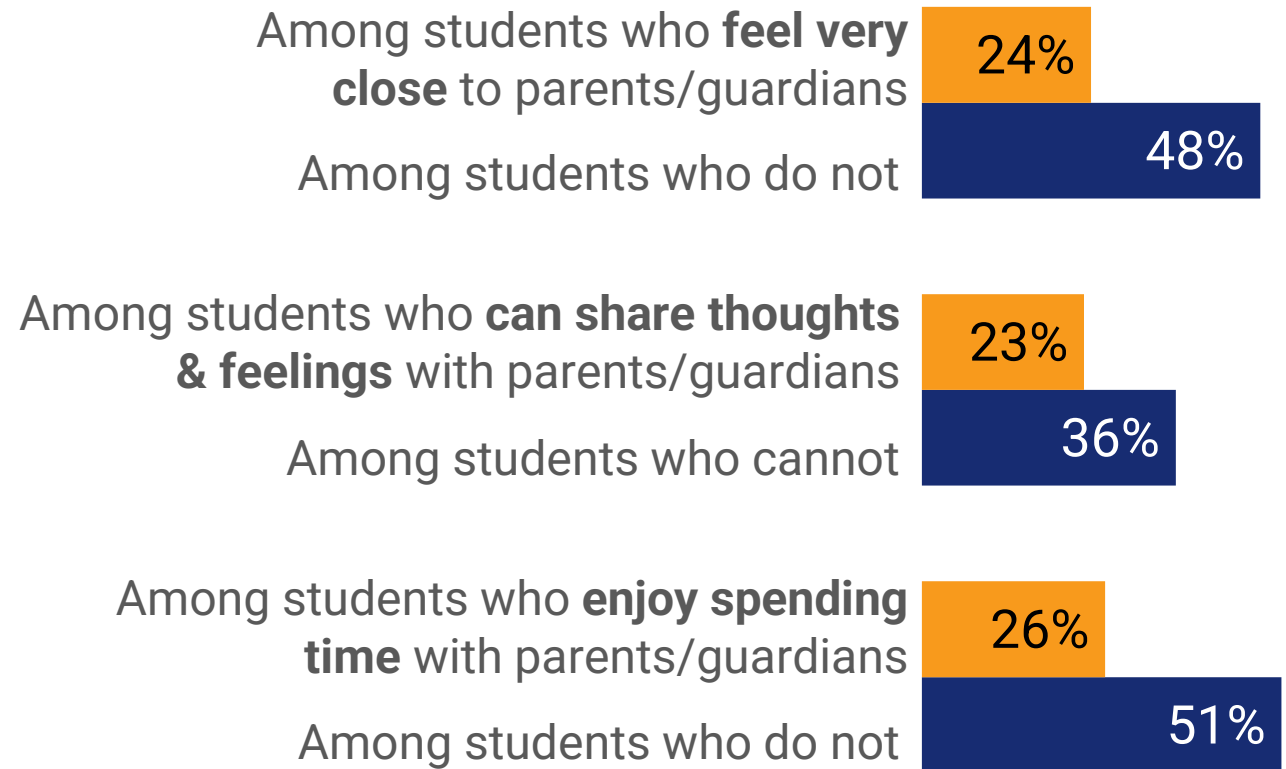
So...what can you do?

Build strong connections

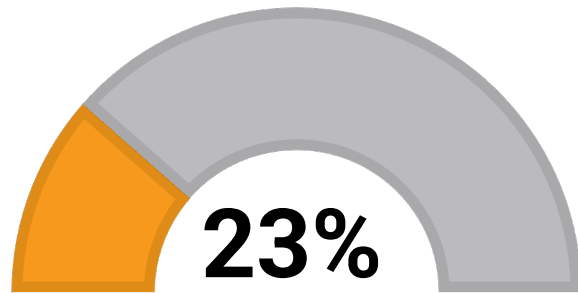
Students were less likely to report ever using substances when they had a parent or guardian whom they:

- Felt very close to
- Could share thoughts and feelings with
- Enjoy spending time with

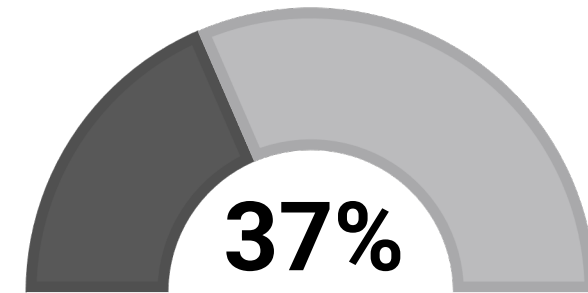
% of students who reported ever using substances



Listen & include youth



Substance use rates among students whose parents/guardians asked their thoughts before making family decisions



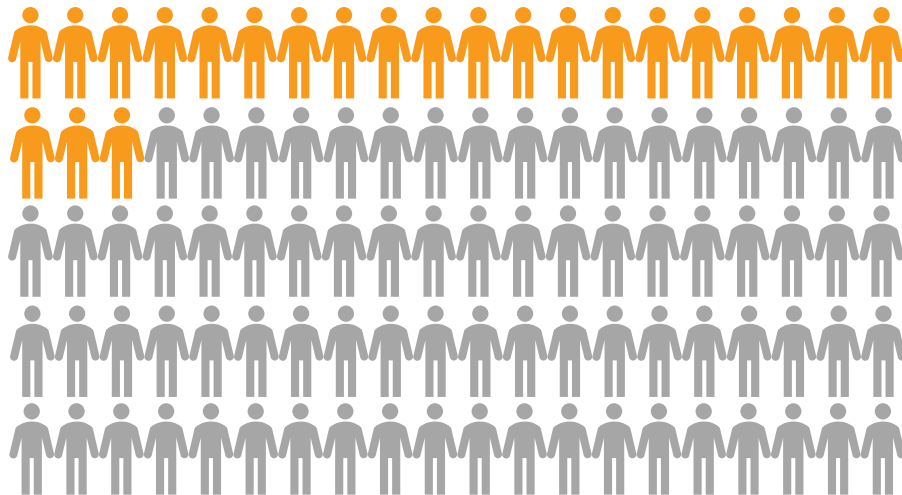
Substance use rates among students whose parents/guardians did not ask their thoughts before making family decisions

Students were less likely to report substance use when **they felt included in family decisions that impacted them.**

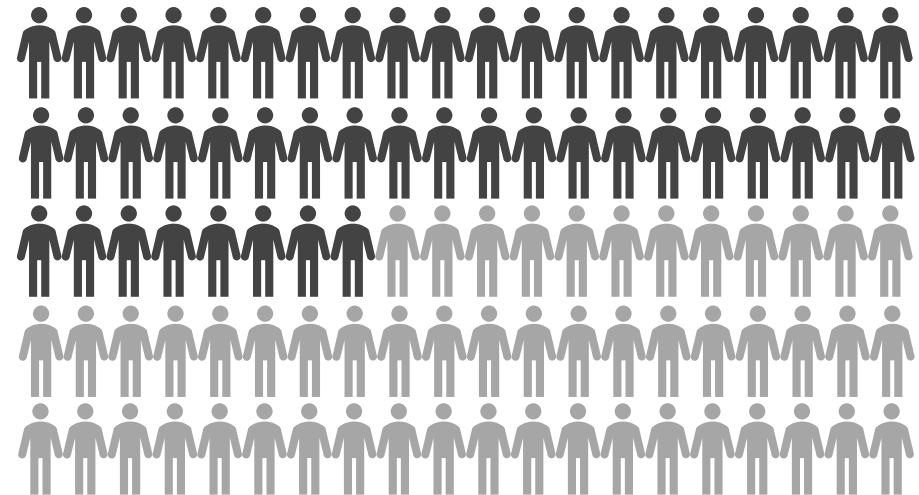
Set clear expectations

Students were less likely to report substance use when they reported **clear rules in their family**, though this conversation is nuanced.

24% of students with clear rules in their family reported ever using substances



48% of students without clear rules in their family reported ever using substances





Support young people's mental health

Students were less likely to report substance use when they reported traits indicative of **positive self-esteem**:

- **Feeling satisfied with themselves**
- **Feeling that they have a number of good qualities**

Among students who **feel satisfied with themselves**, **24%** have used substances



Among students who **DON'T feel satisfied with themselves**, **37%** have used substances

Among students who **feel they have a number of good qualities**, **25%** have used substances



Among students who **DON'T feel they have a number of good qualities**, **38%** have used substances

What we do with the data

- Share back the data with SPS, who uses it internally
- Publish the overall data tables on our website for public use
- Present to the Massachusetts Gaming Commission on gambling data
 - Other presentations upon request
- Continual analysis of the data to help inform policy advocacy
- Inform coalitions, including the Youth Mental Health Coalition and Beat the Odds, who can use this data to help make decisions to support youth health
- Use the data in community reports, such as the Baystate Health Community Health Needs Assessments

Who else might benefit from this type of data presentation?

What we do with the data

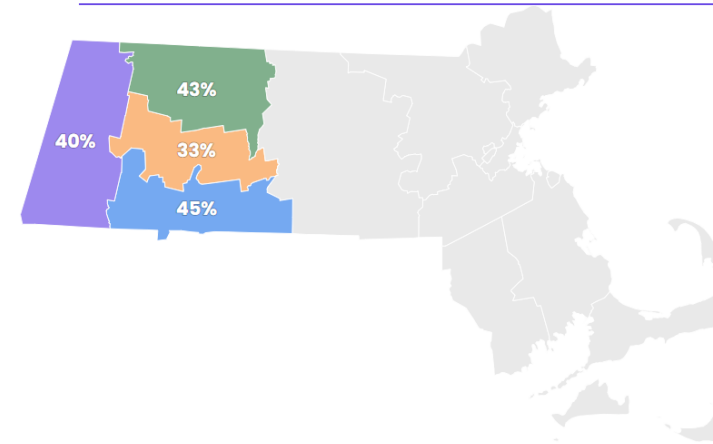
- We also share data on the Youth Health Data Hub, **launching this fall!**
- The Hub will include data from all four Western MA counties, disaggregated by different student experiences
- Alongside the data will be resources and strategies to improve youth wellbeing!

Data

How common is it for students to feel sustained sadness?

Click on the map below to explore data about our young people by **grade, gender, sexual orientation, and race/ethnicity**. Results are organized by county, although participating school districts do not always align with county boundaries.

Percent of students who felt depressed or sad most days in the past year



Trends & Comparisons

Rates of sustained sadness and hopelessness have recently declined:

- In **Hampshire County**, rates peaked in 2019 for 8th graders (44%) and in 2021 for 10th and 12th graders (51% and 49%) and have since decreased.
- **Franklin County/North Quabbin** increased from 2012 to 2022 and has since decreased.
- Although **the state** uses a meaningfully different question, their data also shows a decrease in sadness and reflects a higher burden among girls and LGBTQ+ students.



Strategies & Research to Promote Youth Wellbeing

Q Search...



What we do with the data

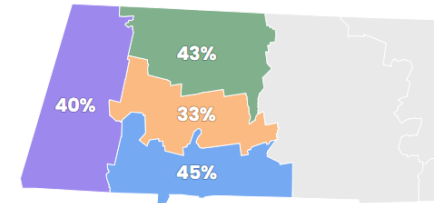
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Data

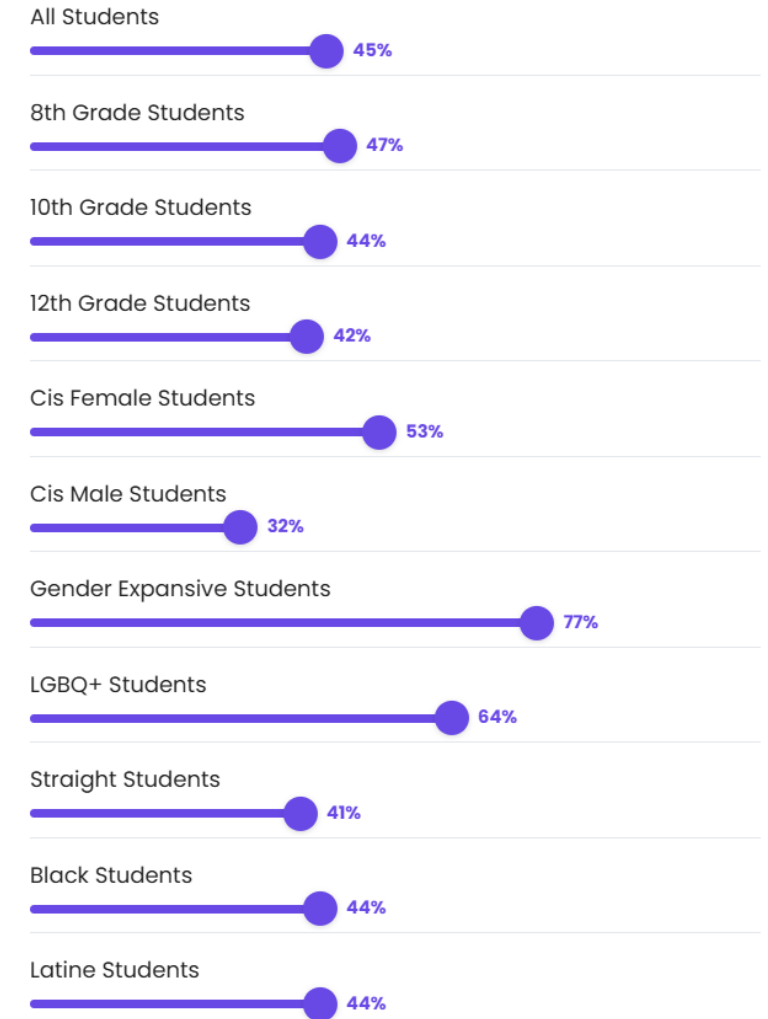
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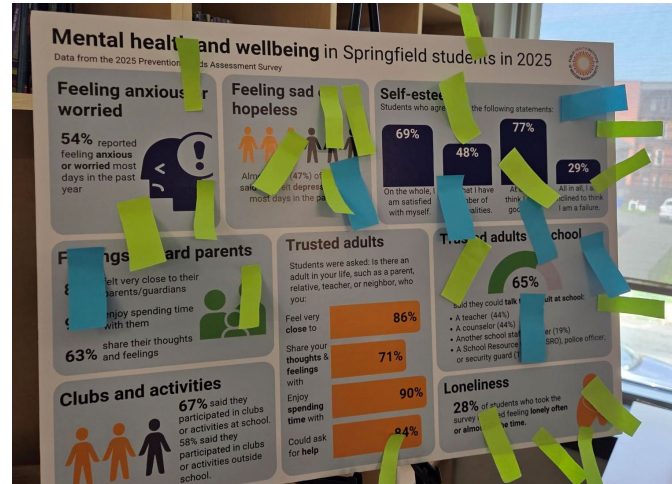
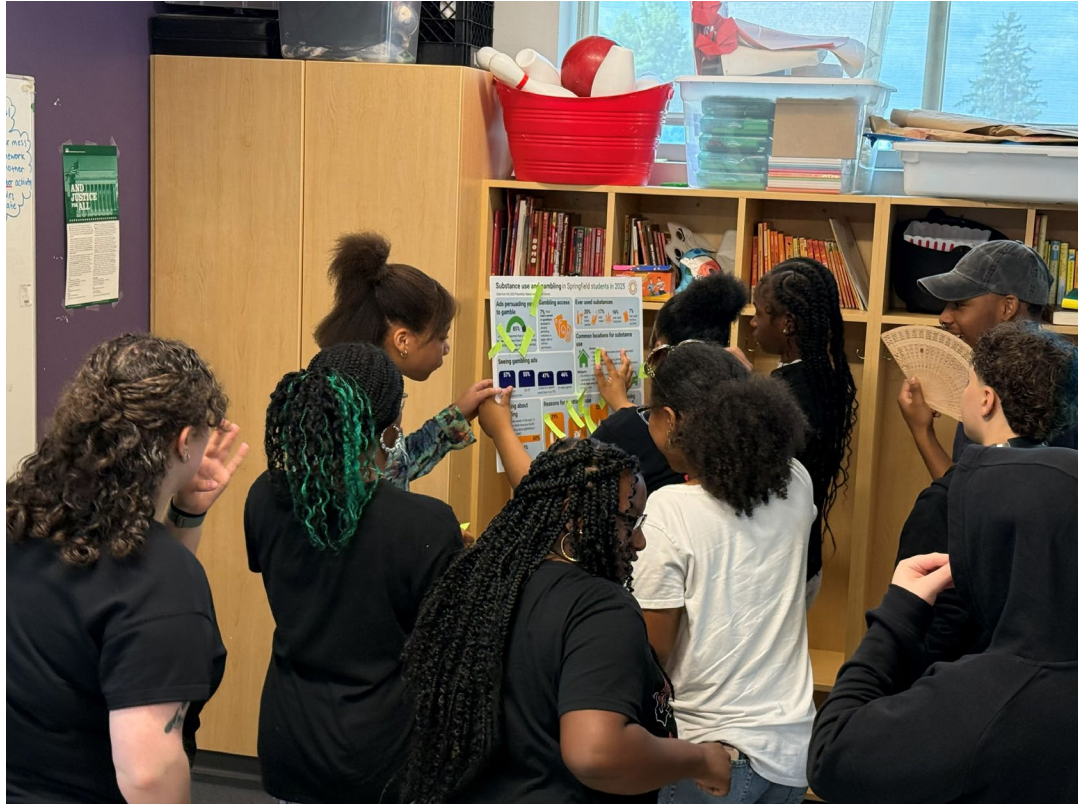
Percent of students who felt **comfortable coming out** days in the past year



Hampden County



What we do with the data



Photos from the Summer Leadership Academy in August 2026, hosted by the Springfield Youth Mental Health Coalition and Beat the Odds

Next steps for the 2025 data and beyond

- Preparing the 2026 data for analysis
- Sharing overall survey results
- Prioritizing and planning data analysis

- Gearing up for the 2027 surveys
- Data analysis
 - Topics TBD

Sept. –
Dec.
2026

- Town Hall (today!)
- Gearing up for the 2026 surveys
- Data analysis
 - Gambling, mental health, technology, and more!
- Sharing our Youth Health Data Hub

Jan. –
Mar.
2027

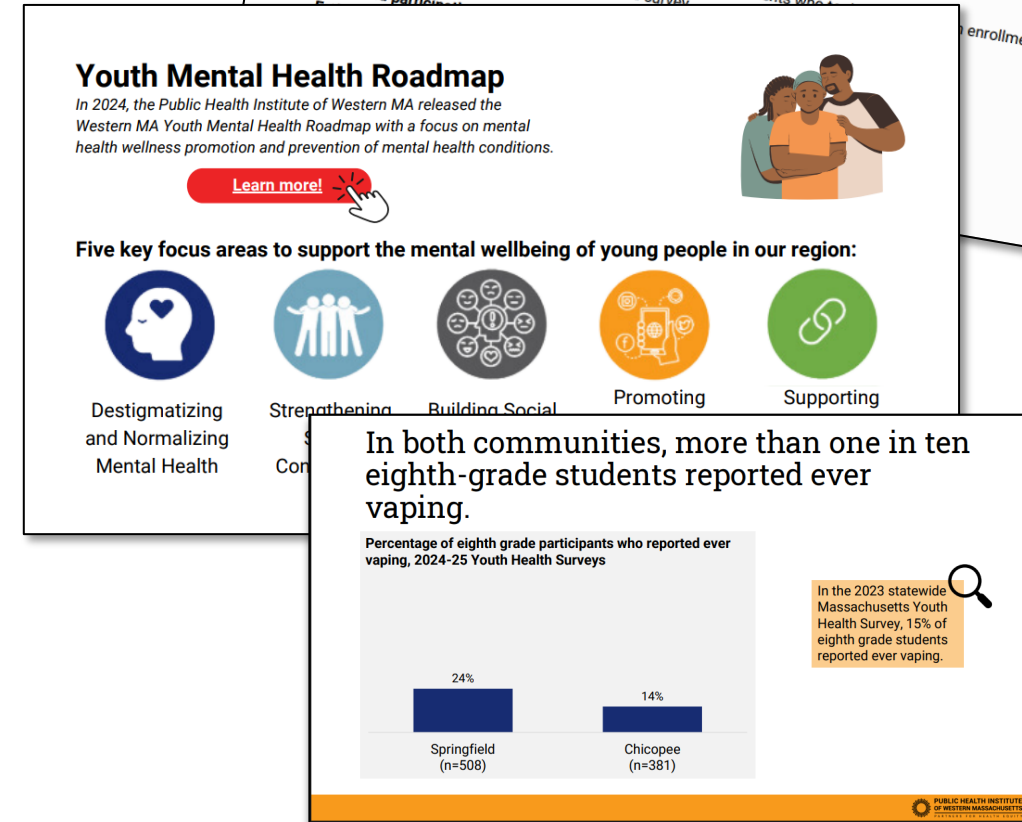
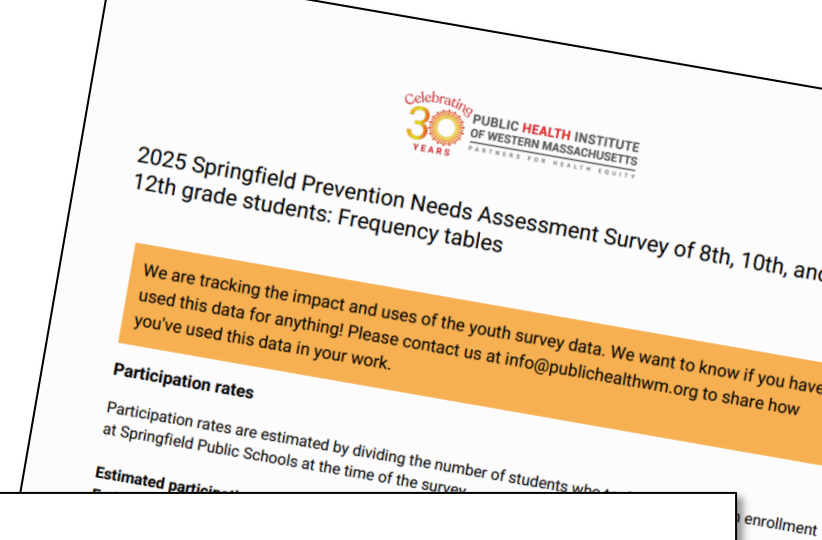
Apr. –
June
2027

- Exploration of the 2026 data
- Begin to plan the 2027 surveys
- Sharing 2025 data on the Youth Health Data Hub

July –
Sept.
2027

Thank you!

- Visit the PHIWM site at qrco.de/SYHS
Learn more about the Youth Health Survey Initiative
 - View our other data products
 - Read the Youth Mental Health Roadmap for Western Massachusetts
 - And more!
- Sign up for the PHIWM newsletter at qrco.de/PHIWMnews
 - Be the first to know about Youth Health Data Hub updates!



What questions do you have?