



**Public Health**  
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

**Meeker McLeod Sibley**  
Community Health Services

## *Meeker-McLeod-Sibley Community Health Services*

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### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

TO: All newspapers and radio stations in Meeker, McLeod and Sibley Counties

FROM: Allie Freidrichs, CHS Director

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### **A majority of teens report healthier behaviors and thriving at school** *Trouble spots include e-cigarettes and mental health*

ST. PAUL, Minn. – A majority of Minnesota students feel highly engaged in school, believe their school provides a supportive place for learning, report good health, and feel safe in their homes, neighborhoods and schools according to a new report on results of the 2016 Minnesota Student Survey (MSS).

The survey results continue a trend ongoing since the 1990s of teens making healthier choices related to drinking, smoking and sexual activity. However, the survey also provides important evidence that Minnesota’s generally positive results hide health gaps suffered by economically disadvantaged teens and teens of color.

Every three years, Minnesota’s fifth-, eighth-, ninth- and 11th-grade students complete this voluntary, anonymous survey. It includes questions on school climate, bullying, out-of-school activities, healthy eating, emotional health, substance use, connections with school and family, and many other topics. State agencies use the survey to identify important trends and target effort and resources to more efficiently improve the well-being of the state’s youth.

The Minnesota Department of Education summarized some of the survey data in [“Snapshots on Minnesota Youth: 2016 Minnesota Student Survey Whole Child Report.”](#) This report looks at four of five indicators of student well-being as viewed through the Whole Child framework perspective. The Whole Child framework is an educational approach that focuses on fully preparing students for college and career by ensuring that each student is healthy, safe, engaged and supported.

**“There are many factors outside of school that can prevent children from succeeding,”** said Minnesota Education Commissioner Brenda Cassellius. **“That is why the Minnesota Student Survey is so valuable. Schools, districts, community organizations, local and state agencies rely on MSS data to identify the issues young people are facing, so that we can address those issues to strengthen student achievement.”**

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.

**Below are highlights of how Minnesota students say they are doing.**

**Healthy:** Sixty-nine percent of Minnesota students surveyed reported excellent or very good health. Teens are engaging in fewer risky behaviors. Student smoking rates have fallen to an all-time low, though a gap continues to persist with children of color and economically disadvantaged students smoking at higher rates. Alcohol use, sexual activity and marijuana use have also fallen.

**Safe:** Eighty-seven percent of students say they feel safe at home, at school, in their neighborhood and going to and from school. However, 18 percent of students surveyed reported being bullied or harassed weekly in at least one way during the last 30 days. Economically disadvantaged students and LGBT students report higher rates of bullying.



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**Engaged:** Seventy-eight percent of students feel highly engaged in school. Sixty-five percent are engaged in out-of-school time activities at least three days a week.

**Supported:** Seventy-five percent of students believe their school provides a supportive place for learning.

**“This year’s survey highlights the success of some recent public health actions focused on our youth,”** said Minnesota Health Commissioner Dr. Ed Ehlinger. **“It shows our actions to curb youth smoking and indoor tanning are reducing risky behaviors. However, it also identifies the growing threat of e-cigarettes and shows more must be done ensure all youth, regardless of race, sexual orientation or economic status, are getting a healthy start.”**

The Minnesota Department of Health has released fact sheets focusing on the survey results, including a general health overview and others focusing on tobacco and indoor tanning. Additional health highlights include the fact that use of tobacco, alcohol, and marijuana declined between 2013 and 2016. But among 11th grade students, 17.1 percent reported using electronic cigarettes in the past 30 days, twice as many as those who smoked regular cigarettes (8.4 percent).

In Meeker County, 90% of 11<sup>th</sup> grade males and 88% of 11<sup>th</sup> grade females reported not having smoked a cigarette in the last 30 days. In McLeod County 86% of 11<sup>th</sup> graders have not smoked a cigarette in the last 30 days. In Sibley County, finally, 77% of male 11<sup>th</sup> graders and 82% of 11<sup>th</sup> grade female students had not smoked a cigarette in the last month.

Indoor tanning among teens declined significantly. Some teens still report doing it though, despite a statewide ban on teen-use of tanning beds. Indoor tanning can result in harm, such as melanoma, a dangerous form of skin cancer. The Minnesota Department of Health estimates that over 2,000 11th grade females used indoor tanning beds in 2016.

In the area of mental health, about one in five students showed signs of depression, and 12 percent of 11th grade students reported that they seriously considered suicide in the past year, up from 9.7 percent in 2013. The percentage of students who were overweight or obese also increased.

### **Download the Reports**

Download a copy of the “Snapshots on Minnesota Youth: 2016 Minnesota Student Survey Whole Child Report” at and complete MSS data tables from the [Minnesota Department of Education’s Minnesota Student Survey webpage](http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/dse/health/mss/index.htm) at <http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/dse/health/mss/index.htm>. The department’s [Data Center](#) also provides a tool for running addition reports at <http://w20.education.state.mn.us/MDEAnalytics/DataTopic.jsp?TOPICID=242>.

Summaries of elements of the survey are also available from the [Minnesota Department of Health website](http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/chs/mss/) at <http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/chs/mss/>.

### **About the Minnesota Student Survey**

The MSS is a voluntary, anonymous survey completed by Minnesota fifth-, eighth-, ninth- and 11th-grade students. Nearly 169,000 students participated in the 2016 survey.

The Minnesota Departments of Education, Health, Human Services and Public Safety collaborate with schools to administer the MSS. The MSS is the primary source of comprehensive data on youth at the state, county and local level in Minnesota and is the only consistent source of statewide data on the health and well-being of youth from smaller population groups, such as racial or ethnic groups.

All school districts are invited to participate in the survey. In 2016, 85.5 percent of Minnesota’s school districts participated. Schools administered the surveys from January through May of 2016.