




MENTAL HEALTH MATTERS

SUPPORTING AMERICAN INDIAN/ALASKA NATIVE (AI/AN) YOUTH IN NEW MEXICO

HEALTHY MINDS, STRONG COMMUNITIES

ABOUT THE DATA

- Data come from the **2023 New Mexico Youth Risk and Resiliency Survey (NM-YRRS)**, a statewide, anonymous survey conducted every two years among middle and high school students.
- This fact sheet focuses on the **mental health experiences, strengths, and needs** of AI/AN students in New Mexico.

WHO ARE THE STUDENTS?

MIDDLE SCHOOL: Most are **12-13 years old**; about **47% female / 53% male**; represented across grades 6-8.

HIGH SCHOOL: Most are **15-17 years old**; about **50% female / 50% male**; represented across grades 9-12.

HOW ARE STUDENTS DOING?

Most AI/AN students reported feeling mentally well in the month before the survey.

Middle school: About **8 in 10** (78%) reported good mental health.



High school: About **8 in 10** (77%) reported good mental health.



WHY MENTAL HEALTH MATTERS

- Mental health supports how youth **learn, connect, and thrive**.
- Many AI/AN youth show **resilience** by balancing **school, culture, and community responsibilities**.
- Challenges like **anxiety** or **depression** can disrupt **learning, relationships, and future goals**.

CALL TO ACTION:

Support AI/AN youth by fostering emotional safety and connection at home, in school, and in the community.

NOTE: The survey asked how often students felt their mental health was "not good." Here, we use "good mental health" to share results through a strengths-based lens.

MENTAL HEALTH SNAPSHOT

MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS



3 in 10 did show signs of depression (31%) or anxiety (31%)

7 in 10 did NOT show signs of depression (69%) or anxiety (69%)



1 in 10 (13%) did attempt suicide.*

9 in 10 (87%) did NOT attempt suicide.*

HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS



1 in 4 did show signs of depression (25%) or anxiety (26%)

3 in 4 did NOT show signs of depression (75%) or anxiety (74%)



1 in 10 (12%) did attempt suicide.**

9 in 10 (88%) did NOT attempt suicide.**

These findings remind us that behind each number is a young person who may be struggling and in need of care, connection, and culturally grounded support.

WHAT STRENGTHS SUPPORT MENTAL HEALTH

	Middle School	High School
Hopeful about the future	65%	66%
Confident in achieving goals	65%	65%
Feel good about self	62%	61%
Sense of direction and purpose	60%	62%
Engaged in daily activities	59%	58%
Copes well with stress	44%	46%

Personal strengths and resilience are key protective factors for AI/AN youth. They help safeguard youth mental well-being.

WHAT IS THE CONNECTION?

Most AI/AN students are doing well, though some still struggle. Personal strengths—like hope, confidence, and coping skills—strongly protect against mental health challenges.

MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS

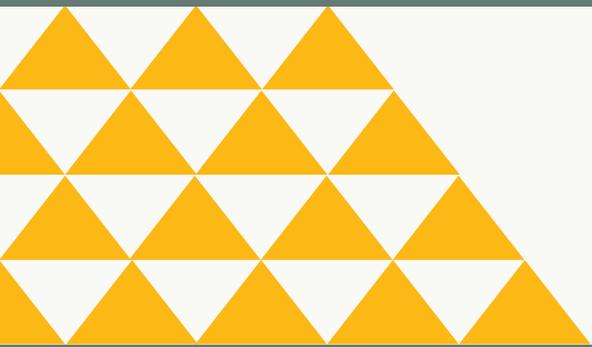
Among AI/AN middle school students, those with strong personal strengths are about **50–80% less likely** to screen positive for **depression or anxiety**, or to report **ever attempting suicide***, compared with peers who report fewer strengths.

HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

Among AI/AN high school students, those with strong personal strengths are about **60–85% less likely** to screen positive for **depression or anxiety**, or to report **ever attempting suicide****, compared with peers who report fewer strengths.

NOTE: The depression (PHQ-2) and anxiety (GAD-2) items in the 2023 NM-YRRS are brief screening tools that help identify students who may be showing signs of concern. They are not diagnostic and cannot determine mental health conditions.

**In their lifetime. **In the past 12 months.*



STUDENT CIRCLE OF WELLNESS

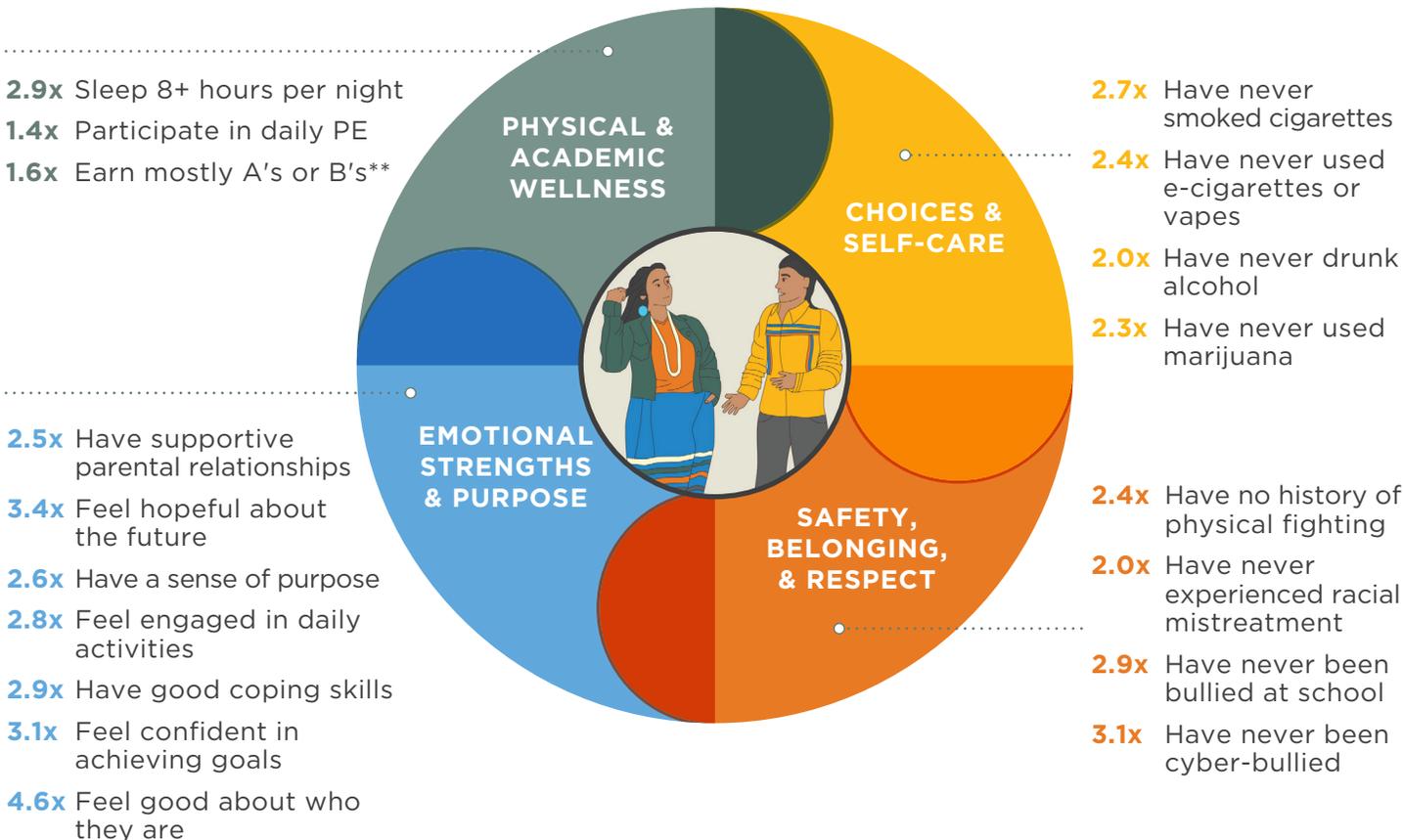
MIDDLE SCHOOL

This section shows how everyday experiences relate to students' likelihood of reporting **good mental health**. The information on this page (Middle School) and the next page (High School) highlights strengths, healthy routines, and protective experiences that support well-being—while also recognizing the benefits of avoiding harmful or stressful exposures.

HOW TO READ THESE FINDINGS

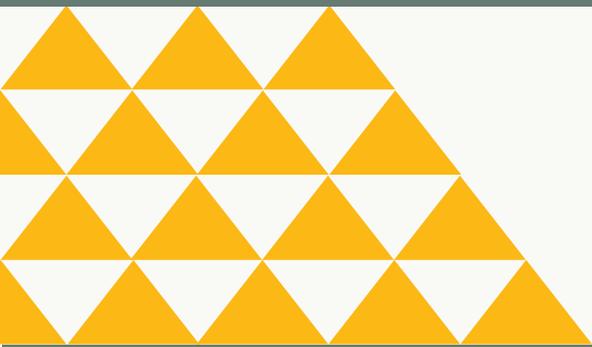
Format: "About [**X times**] more likely to report good mental health when students [**experience**]."

Example: "About [**2.9x**] more likely to report good mental health when students [**sleep 8+ hours per night**]."



These findings show that mental health is shaped by the **whole child**—a dynamic blend of daily routines, emotional strengths, relationships, choices, and lived experiences. No single factor stands alone. Instead, **multiple strengths across different parts of life work together** to support student well-being. When students experience **supportive environments, positive self-beliefs, and healthy daily habits**, and **avoid harmful exposures**, they are consistently more likely to report good mental health.

NOTE: All results adjust for sex and grade and reflect associations, not cause-and-effect.
**In the past 12 months.



STUDENT CIRCLE OF WELLNESS HIGH SCHOOL

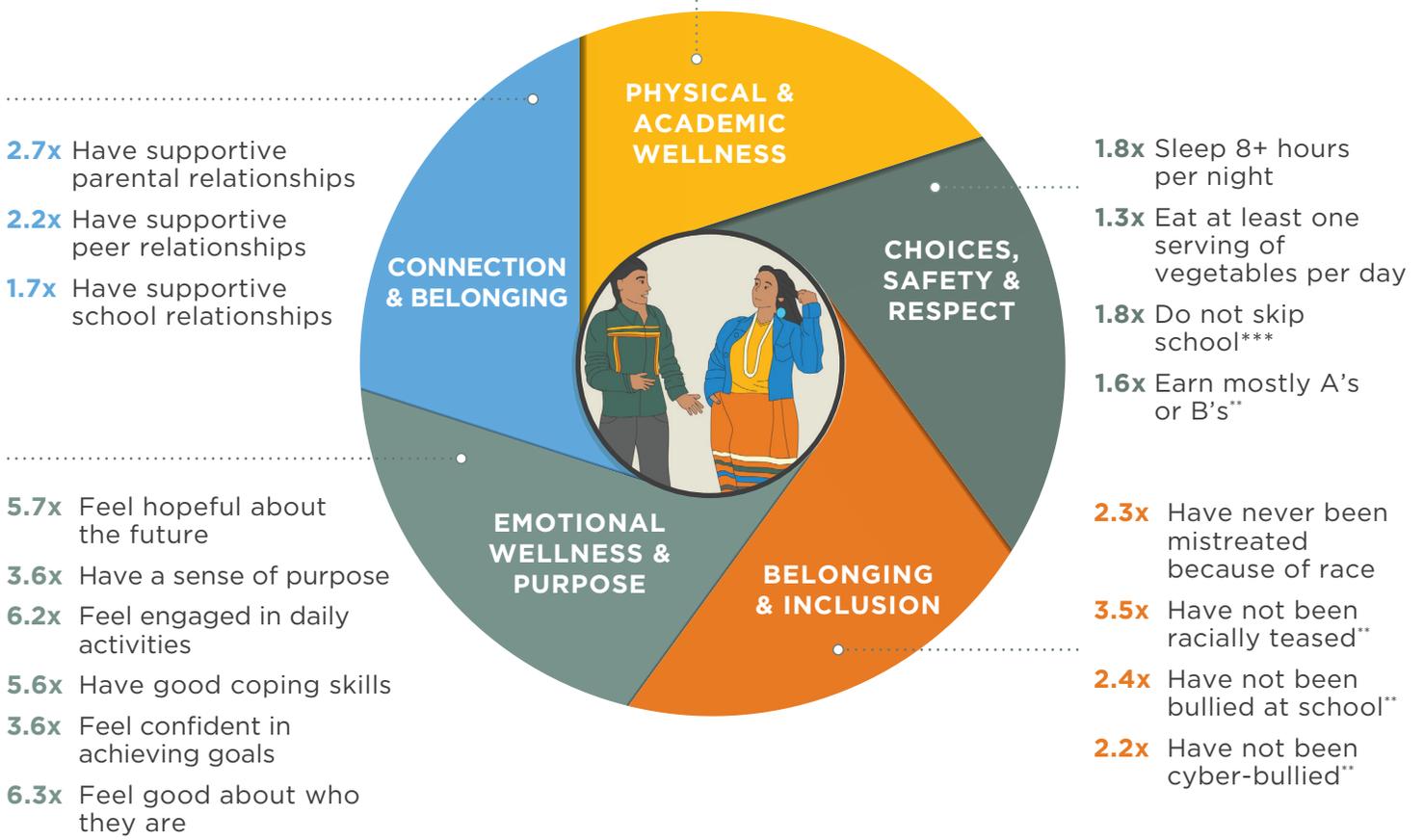
HOW TO READ THESE FINDINGS

Format: “About [**X times**] more likely to report good mental health when students [**experience**].”

Example: “About [**1.8x**] more likely to report good mental health when students [**sleep 8+ hours per night**].”

- 2.0x** Have never smoked cigarettes
- 2.4x** Have never used e-cigarettes or vapes
- 2.1x** Have never drunk alcohol
- 2.3x** Have never used e-cigarettes or vapes

- 3.7x** Have never used non-marijuana drugs
- 3.2x** Have no history of physical fighting**
- 2.8x** Have not experienced sexual violence**



High school results show that mental health is shaped by a **complex, interconnected set of experiences**. As adolescents move toward adulthood, their well-being depends on how **emotional strengths, daily habits, personal choices, and social environments** influence one another. Students who feel **supported, grounded in their identity, confident in their abilities, and protected from harmful exposures** are consistently more likely to report good mental health.

*NOTE: All results adjust for sex and grade and reflect associations, not cause-and-effect.
In the past 12 months. *In the past 30 days.*

BUILDING A CULTURE OF WELLNESS

SUPPORT MAKES A DIFFERENCE

Supportive adults at home (parents or other caregivers)

Linked to lower depression and anxiety for both middle and high school students.

Supportive adults at school (teachers, coaches, or staff)

Associated with lower depression and anxiety, with stronger effects in high school students.

Supportive friends (same-age peers)

Helped reduce depression and anxiety in middle school, and linked mainly to lower depression in high school.

Supportive community adults (elders, mentors, or other trusted adults outside home and school)

Connected to lower anxiety in middle school and lower depression in high school.

TALK

openly and regularly about emotions and mental health in families

STRENGTHEN

cultural identity through language, traditions, and ceremony

FOSTER

trust, connection, and support at home

EXPAND

school programs that reflect AI/AN students' lived experiences

TRAIN

staff in culturally responsive care

ENSURE

classrooms are safe and inclusive

INVEST

in youth mental health services in tribal communities

SUPPORT

programs that blend traditional healing with clinical care

CHAMPION

efforts to reduce stigma around mental health

RESOURCES FOR SUPPORT

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline — Call or text 988

AASTEC CHERP Program

<https://www.aaihb.org/cherp/>

New Mexico Native American Resource Directory

<https://nativeamericanresourcesnm.org/>

Mental Health | Indian Health Service (IHS)

<https://www.ihs.gov/mentalhealth>

National Indian Child Welfare Association (NICWA)

<https://www.nicwa.org>

JOIN THE MOVEMENT FOR MENTAL WELLNESS

Together—**families, schools, communities, and tribal nations**—we can create a future where AI/AN youth in New Mexico feel **seen, supported, and empowered to thrive.**



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