



Cannabis use

Obesity

Mental health

Physical activity

Alcohol use

Smoking

Sedentary behaviour

Northwestern
Health Unit

2021-22



Thank you for your support of the 2021-22 COMPASS survey.

This is your public health unit's customized School Health Profile.

This report shows the 2021-22 COMPASS survey results from participating students enrolled at schools in your region. Please note that in some cases results may not add up to 100% due to rounding. Also, please note that **61%** of students participated in the online version of COMPASS this year.

Because schools in your region participated in the COMPASS survey starting in 2012-13, we have included comparisons from past year's data on the second-last page of this profile.. This comparison can allow you to see if certain behaviours are improving (indicated by green arrows), staying the same, or getting worse (indicated by red arrows) at your school. If you have questions about data that are not reported in the Profile, please contact the COMPASS Project Manager (see below).

Examples of action steps can be found in the recommendations section at the bottom of each page. A more detailed list of resources can be accessed on the [COMPASS website.](#)

For more information about this profile, additional resources, or the COMPASS project in general, visit www.compass.uwaterloo.ca or contact:

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Obesity Outcomes in schools in the Northwestern Region

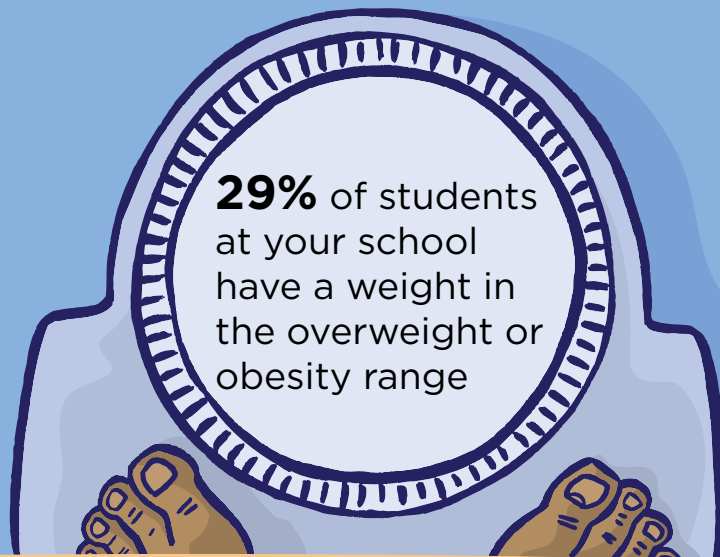
Among students at your schools:

69% are of healthy weight

51% describe themselves as being about the right weight

41% are trying to lose weight

29% of students at your school have a weight in the overweight or obesity range



WHY THIS IS AN ISSUE

Obesity is influenced by numerous factors, including biology, behaviours, mental health, and social/environmental factors (e.g., where someone lives, their income, social relationships). Excess body fat puts youth at risk of developing a range of preventable health problems, including type-2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, cancer, and joint problems. However, a focus on obesity and weight loss may have unintended harmful effects, including weight-based bullying, poor body image, and unhealthy weight-control behaviours. Research from COMPASS and elsewhere shows weight dissatisfaction and perceptions of being overweight predict lower engagement in health behaviours and poor mental health, regardless of actual body size.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Consider adopting a strength-based (vs. deficit-based) program and avoid weight-targeted messaging. See [Healthy Bodies, Healthy Minds](#) or the [National Eating Disorders Association Toolkit](#) for guidance on addressing body image, eating, fitness, and weight concerns in today's challenging environment
- The [Body Activism Activity Guide](#) provides guided activities inspired by [The Body Project](#) in an effort to promote body acceptance and prevent eating disorder onset
- The [National Eating Disorder Information Centre \(NEDIC\)](#) offers free online workshops and presentations to help youth prevent further development of food and body related concerns
- Model healthy behaviours and avoid weight and "fat talk" around students

Physical Activity Outcomes in schools in the Northwestern Region



Among students at your schools:



71% are meeting the National guideline of 60 min/day of physical activity

42% Ontario average*

*2020-21 COMPASS Survey



47% reported strength training at least 3 days/week



32% reported participating in intramural sports or non-competitive sports clubs



38% reported participating in varsity sports



34% reported their physical activity has decreased because of COVID-19

WHY THIS IS AN ISSUE

Being physically active is an effective way to improve and maintain physical and mental health, reduce the risk of chronic diseases (e.g., heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, some cancers), support growth and development, and help youth to concentrate, learn, and achieve academic success. Unfortunately, physical activity levels decline over adolescence, particularly among females. Teens report dropping out of sports and physical activities due to increased competition, not feeling “good enough”, and lack of time related to greater academic demands.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- If/when feasible within the current regulatory environment due to COVID-19, ensure students have open access to fitness facilities (e.g., gym, weight room) before, during, and after school
- Provide student leadership opportunities to coordinate peer physical activities (e.g., intramurals, non-competitive clubs, DPA) or have students supervise open fitness facility times
- Install privacy stalls or curtains in change rooms to increase participation in intramurals and varsity sports at school
- Consider creating a yoga room or yoga club, or designate female-only times in weight rooms to increase female participation in physical activity
- While students are at home more due to the pandemic, consider promoting virtual or at-home movement such as those provided by [ParticiPACTION](#) and [PHE Canada](#)

Healthy Eating Outcomes in schools in the Northwestern Region

Among students at your schools:



35% eat fruit 7 days per week



40% eat vegetables 7 days per week



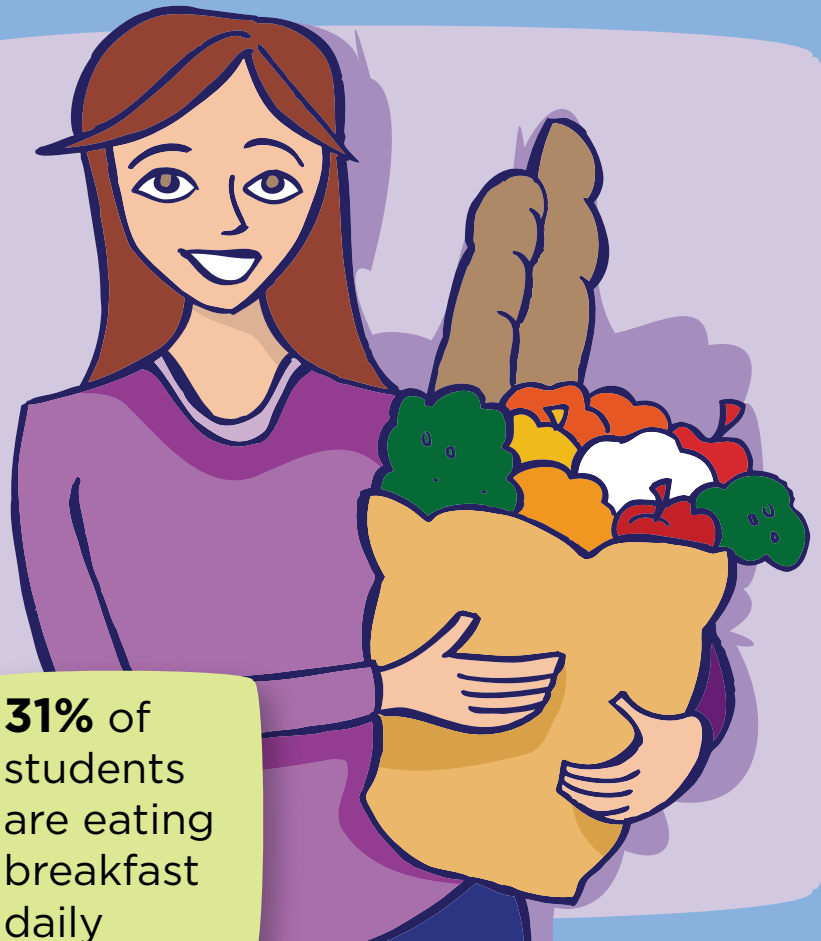
36% restrict/alter their food intake on 1 or more days per week with the intention of changing their weight/shape



80% drink plain water on 7 days per week



41% reported their consumption of salty snacks and sweet foods has increased because of COVID-19



31% of students are eating breakfast daily

WHY THIS IS AN ISSUE

Healthy eating is important for growth and development and helps youth to **learn and achieve academic success**. Eating a healthy diet is an important way for youth to achieve and maintain good health and reduce the risk of many chronic diseases such as heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, overweight/obesity, and some cancers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Encourage students to drink water throughout the day by making water more accessible (e.g., installing water bottle filling stations, allowing water bottles at desks)
- Provide and actively promote student nutrition programs, such as breakfast programs, that are available to students free of charge, every day, and ideally, throughout the day (not just before morning classes)
- Avoid using unhealthy food as a reward or in fundraising initiatives
- Given the risks of excessive caffeine intake among youth, consider implementing a policy to ban energy drinks on school property
- Establish a school nutrition committee, including students and community registered dietitians (RDs). Youth often voice a desire for healthier options in schools and to be involved in the decision making about what foods are offered for sale
- Encourage students to stay on campus for lunch by providing more youth friendly and less busy spaces to eat. Some schools have staggered lunch times to reduce congestion in the cafeteria

Screen Time Outcomes in schools in the Northwestern Region

Among students at your schools:

2% are meeting the National guideline of 2 hours or less of recreational screen time/day



Surfing the internet: **1.2** hours/day



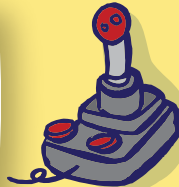
Texting, messaging, emailing: **1.3** hours/day



Browsing/scrolling social media: **2.0** hours/day



Watching/streaming TV shows or movies: **1.8** hours/day



Playing video/computer games: **1.5** hours/day



Video calling (e.g., Facetime, Skype, Zoom): **0.9** hours/day

57% reported their time spent surfing/posting on social media has increased because of COVID-19

63% reported their time spent communicating with their friends online has increased because of COVID-19

WHY THIS IS AN ISSUE

Youth spend a considerable amount of time sitting throughout the school day, often in front of screens or using devices. Studies suggest that the amount of time spent being sedentary increases physical and mental health risks, regardless of the amount of time spent being physically active.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Consider creating 'screen-free' spaces at your school to encourage students to actively engage without their phone
- Create a screen-time reduction challenge at your school to encourage students to set goals to reduce daily screen time
- Organize school-wide or classroom activity breaks to prevent students from sitting for extended periods
- Educators and parents can access information and tools at [Media Smart](#) to help youth develop the critical thinking skills they need to interact with media, and tackle internet safety concerns in a positive way
- Organizations such as [ParticipACTION](#) offer resources to promote healthy living and reduce sedentary behaviour

Sleep Outcomes in schools in the Northwestern Region

Among students at your schools:

51% are meeting the National guideline of 8+ hours of sleep per night

On average, students reported getting **7.7** hours of sleep per weekday night

On average, students reported getting **8.7** hours of sleep per weekend night

27% reported their sleep has increased because of COVID-19



WHY THIS IS AN ISSUE

Shorter sleep duration during adolescence has been associated with depressed mood, reduced motivation, lower academic achievement, and behavioral and physical health problems. Adequate sleep, both in quantity and quality, is shown to improve adolescents' cognitive functioning, alertness, and energy throughout the day. A natural shift in circadian rhythms occurs at puberty, causing adolescents to get tired and fall asleep later, which conflicts with early school start times. As a result, sleep durations decline over secondary school.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Promote adherence to [the Canadian sleep guidelines](#), which encourage those aged 14 - 17 years to get 8 - 10 hours of uninterrupted sleep, with consistent bed and wake-up times
- Promote healthy sleep hygiene in your school's Health and Physical Education curriculum, including behaviours aimed at mitigating sources of stress (e.g., completing schoolwork before dinner as opposed to late at night and avoiding phones in the bed)
- Ensure students are being physically active throughout the school day and get natural daylight, which can improve sleep quality and quantity
- Consider delaying school start times. [COMPASS research](#) found even minimal delays of 10 minutes are associated with increased sleep time, while 10-minute advances predicted reduced sleep

Tobacco Use and Vaping Outcomes in schools in the Northwestern Region

Among students at your schools:

35% have never smoked but are susceptible to begin smoking in the future



17% are current smokers

6% Ontario average*

31% of students have used an e-cigarette (vape) in the past 30 days



19% Ontario average*

*2020-21 COMPASS Survey

18% reported their vaping use has increased because of COVID-19



WHY THIS IS AN ISSUE

Nicotine delivery products including cigarettes and e-cigarettes/vapes are cause for concern due to youth experimentation and high-risk for addiction. Cigarettes and most e-cigarettes contain nicotine, which is highly addictive and can harm the developing adolescent brain and increase the risk for future addiction to other drugs. Emerging evidence suggests that vaping and cigarette use co-occur, raising further concern about the rise in vaping prevalence among adolescents. The perception among young people that they won't become addicted and nicotine use isn't really dangerous requires a constant effort by public health and community partners to educate and encourage youth to choose to be tobacco- and nicotine-free.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Maintain, enforce and **clearly communicate** (e.g., through your school's Student Handbook or Agenda) a comprehensive smoke and tobacco-free school policy. Such a policy should also prohibit e-cigarette use and any tobacco use (including cigarettes, cigarillos or little cigars, and smokeless tobacco) on school property
- Educate students on the risks of vaping. Educator resources and interactive games are available from initiatives such as [Not An Experiment](#)
- Consider implementing [CATCH My Breath](#), a vaping prevention program
- Continue the conversation with students regarding vaping risks by bringing [Health Canada's "Consider the Consequences" virtual awareness tour](#) to your school. Also available are [activity sheets and awareness posters](#) that can be shared with students
- Introduce the [Quash mobile app](#), developed by the Lung Health Association, to help students quit smoking or vaping. Access [facilitator training](#) for educators to deliver the program at school

Alcohol Use Outcomes in schools in the Northwestern Region

Among students at your schools:

26% reported binge drinking in the past month

14% Ontario average*

13% reported riding in a vehicle when the driver had been drinking alcohol, in the past month

22% reported their alcohol use has increased because of COVID-19



*2020-21 COMPASS Survey

WHY THIS IS AN ISSUE

Alcohol is the most common drug used by high school students. Research demonstrates delayed onset of alcohol use is vital to healthy brain development and good mental health. Alcohol use by youth increases dramatically between grades 9 to 12. Evidence from COMPASS has shown a clear link between drinking onset and declines in academic achievement. Alcohol impairs the decision-making process and is a major cause of early mortality among youth via accidents and self-harm. Early experience with alcohol use during adolescence is a serious risk factor for developing long-standing problems that continue into adulthood, including dependence and chronic disease.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Once COVID-19 restrictions are lifted, have sports team coaches discuss the dangers and misconceptions of heavy drinking, or combining alcohol and energy drinks - student athletes have been shown to be higher consumers of alcohol
- Share the [Drug Free Kids Canada](#) resources that educate, engage and empower parents and caregivers by providing tools, and resources to reduce harms of problematic substance use by youth, including alcohol use
- Incorporate into the curriculum the '[Low-Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines](#)' for youth and young adults as recommended by the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse (CCSA)
- Consider introducing the "[Saying When App](#)", a program created by the Centre of Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) that provides directions for youth to take charge of their drinking

Cannabis Use Outcomes in schools in the Northwestern Region



Among students
at your schools:

24% reported using cannabis in the past month

12% Ontario average*

16% reported using cannabis edibles in the past year

8% Ontario average*

18% reported riding in a vehicle when the driver had been using cannabis, in the past month

19% reported their cannabis use has increased because of COVID-19

*2020-21 COMPASS Survey

WHY THIS IS AN ISSUE

Cannabis is one of the most commonly used substances among young people. Evidence from COMPASS and elsewhere has shown that some students who use cannabis are more likely to report using other substances, report greater symptoms of anxiety and depression, and may experience a decrease in academic achievement over time. High-risk cannabis use (e.g., high frequency, high potency) among youth is an important issue to address as it has been shown to negatively impact a teen's perception, memory, judgment, reasoning, motivation, school performance, and risk-taking behaviour.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Create, implement and enforce a school policy on cannabis use on school property and cannabis intoxication while at school; involve students in this policy creation and implementation. Remember that strict disciplinary actions associated with non-adherence to cannabis policies may not be effective as intended. Create space for supportive and non-judgemental dialogue with your students
- Incorporate into the curriculum '[Canada's Lower-Risk Cannabis Use Guidelines](#)' as recommended by the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH)
- Provide or facilitate meaningful education-based programming, ideally in a small-group or individual setting, to help students learn about the risks associated with cannabis use in a safe, pragmatic, and non-stigmatizing way. Educator toolkits are available from [CAMH](#) and the [Canadian Students for Sensible Drug Policy](#) to assist in this programming
- Educators can use a [Cannabis Education guide](#) created by Ophea to activate discussion about cannabis with students

Bullying Outcomes in schools in the Northwestern Region

Among students at your schools, **within the past month:**

21% have been bullied

7% have bullied others

Types of Bullying



15% have been verbally attacked

6% have been victims of sexual harassment*



6% have been victims of cyber-attacks

7% have been victims of social bullying (e.g. being purposely excluded from a group)



3% have been physically attacked

Reasons for Bullying*



2% have been bullied for their race/ethnicity/culture*

1% have been bullied for their religion*



1% have been bullied because their family isn't as wealthy as others*

3% have been bullied for their sexual orientation*



3% have been bullied for their gender identity*

5% have been bullied for a physical, learning or an emotional challenge*

*New school climate measure added in 2021-2022

WHY THIS IS AN ISSUE

Adolescents who have been bullied are more likely to report detentions, suspensions, receiving a failing grade, carrying weapons, and skipping school. Weight-based bullying is still the most frequently reported cause of bullying. Students who are victims of bullying are also more likely to start bullying others. Bullying can have a lifelong impact on mental health and future relationships.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Educate teachers, students, and parents about cyberbullying and outline procedures to follow when cyberbullying occurs. Education should be implemented as part of the regular curriculum, instead of one-time workshops. See resources from [Media Smarts](#), [PREVNet](#), and [Common Sense](#) for ideas to incorporate into your curriculum
- Consider implementing a [peer mediation program](#) - in addition to empowering students to address issues of bullying, peer mediation programs have been shown to have a generally positive effect on school climate

Academic Achievement Outcomes in schools in the Northwestern Region

Among students at your schools:

67% would like to complete a post-secondary education

87% think getting good grades is important

61% are worried about getting behind in school work because of COVID-19

Average time spent doing homework: **1.0** hour/day



WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT

Academic achievement outcomes can be influenced by student engagement in a number of health behaviours (substance use (e.g. cannabis and alcohol use), physical inactivity, screen time and adherence to healthy eating recommendations). The [Pan-Canadian Joint Consortium for School health](#) recognizes the importance of taking a comprehensive approach to school health to support improvements in student's academic achievement outcomes. This approach incorporates addressing health through social and physical environments, teaching and learning, policy and partnerships and services.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The Pan-Canadian Joint Consortium for School Health provides a number of tool kits to assist schools in developing a healthy school environment, including a [healthy school planner](#)

Mental Health Outcomes in schools in the Northwestern Region

Among students at your schools:

52% feel they generally recover from setbacks easily

61% are optimistic about their future

74% feel competent and capable in activities that are important to them

59% feel engaged and interested in their daily activities

56% report their life is purposeful and meaningful

63% report supportive and rewarding social relationships



51% reported their loneliness has increased because of COVID-19



30% felt depressed most days in the last week



43% felt nervous, anxious, or on edge on most days in the last 2 weeks



51% reported their anxiety has increased because of COVID-19

WHY THIS IS AN ISSUE

Mentally healthy youth are better able to learn and manage life's challenges. Positive mental health is characterized by engagement and motivation, self-awareness, self-efficacy, hope for the future, and a sense of purpose and belonging. All students can benefit from learning self-regulation and social-emotional skills to better cope with negative emotions, reduce the probability of some mental disorders, and improve the management of disorders that may be biologically determined. Students' mental health and wellbeing can be impacted by a wide variety of social, cultural, structural, and systemic factors. Meaningful and trusting relationships with adults and feeling like one "matters" are among the strongest predictors of student mental health and wellbeing.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Use a comprehensive approach in teaching social emotional skills, positive mental health practices, and mental health literacy involving students, parents, staff, and community partners
- Help reduce the stigma associated with mental health by prioritizing it within the school environment and programming. Dedicate silent and safe space for relaxation, or facilitate a mental health awareness week
- Learn how to spot signs of distress among students, but also recognize that signs of struggle may not be obvious. Encourage open-door policies and equip staff with [mental health literacy](#) to recognize when students need support
- Use culturally-appropriate approaches when discussing mental health with minority groups. Some helpful resources include the [School Mental Health Action Kit](#) and the [We Matter Campaign](#)
- Mentally healthy school staff are important for mentally healthy students. See [TeachResiliency](#) for resources designed for teachers by teachers to promote healthy spaces for both students and educators

School Connectedness Outcomes in schools in the Northwestern Region

Among students at your schools:

66% feel they are part of their school

81% feel safe at school

88% feel that teachers treat them fairly

69% feel close to people at school



66% feel happy to be at their school

61% report feeling unwelcome or uncomfortable at school*:

9% due to their race*

5% due to their religion*

9% due to their sexual orientation*

8% due to their gender identity*

8% due to a physical, **8%** learning or **20%** emotional challenge*

34% due to other reasons*

*New school climate measure added in 2021-2022

WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT

School climate influences the experiences of students, teachers, and staff within a school. Creating a positive school climate can promote positive self-esteem and mental health in students, improve their attendance and academic success, and reduce the likelihood of engaging in risky behaviours (e.g., drugs, alcohol).

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Encourage **student-led** initiatives that promote inclusiveness and a positive school culture – student-led initiatives show more promise to be effective than those led by external groups
- Appreciate the impact of a welcoming, calm, and safe school environment with caring adults who listen and notice students. Use a student advisory model to ensure every student has at least one supportive adult in the school
- PHE Canada's [equity, diversity and inclusion report](#) provides information and guidance on addressing equity, diversity and inclusion in the classroom, particularly related to return to school during the pandemic

Key Findings by Gender for schools in the Northwestern Region

Among girls at your schools:

Among boys at your schools:



*Note: Other gender response options are collected, but to maintain student privacy due to small sample size, findings are presented here by boys and girls gender only

Year 1 to Year 10 Comparisons for schools in the Northwestern Region

2012-13

2020-21

2021-22



are eating breakfast daily

38%



34%



31%



met the National guideline for daily physical activity

78%



64%



71%



met the National guideline of 2 hours or less of recreational screen time per day

6%

no change

6%



2%



reported vaping in the past 30 days *first year is from 2013-14*

8%



26%



31%



reported binge drinking within the last month

34%



20%



26%



had used cannabis within the last month

25%



20%



24%



had been bullied within the last month

25%



17%



21%



felt they were a part of their school

72%



62%



66%



would like to complete a post-secondary education

73%



64%



67%



felt nervous, anxious or on edge most days in the last 2 weeks

N/A

41%



43%

green arrows indicate positive changes, red arrows indicate negative changes

Note: Discrepancies in numbers from previous year's reports are the result of changes in the number of schools (and students) that participated this year, compared to previous years

A Message from COMPASS Leadership

Thank you for involvement in the COMPASS survey. We hope you find this report informative and useful. School participation in COMPASS will help to shape future youth health research and practice across Canada and internationally for years to come. We have enjoyed working with schools in your region and hope to continue working with you to help make your schools the healthiest environment possible for students.



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