

Student Mental Health

Longitudinal Trends in YRBS Data

School Funding Interim Commission (SFIC)

June 17th and 18th, 2026

Prepared by

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What is the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS)?

The YRBS is a national survey, conducted by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) that includes high school students from both private and public schools within the U.S.

*The YRBS is part of the larger **Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS)**, a system of surveys that measure health-related behaviors and experiences that can lead to death and disability among youth and adults.*

Susan Court, former YRBS state coordinator and health enhancement specialist at the Montana Office of Public Instruction, explains the importance of CDC's Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) and how it sheds light on the health issues students are facing. She explains how YRBSS data can be used to improve adolescent health and well-being.



Mental Health Lens: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs



[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Maslow%27s_Hierarchy_of_Needs_Pyramid_\(original_five-level_model\).png](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Maslow%27s_Hierarchy_of_Needs_Pyramid_(original_five-level_model).png)



Mental Health

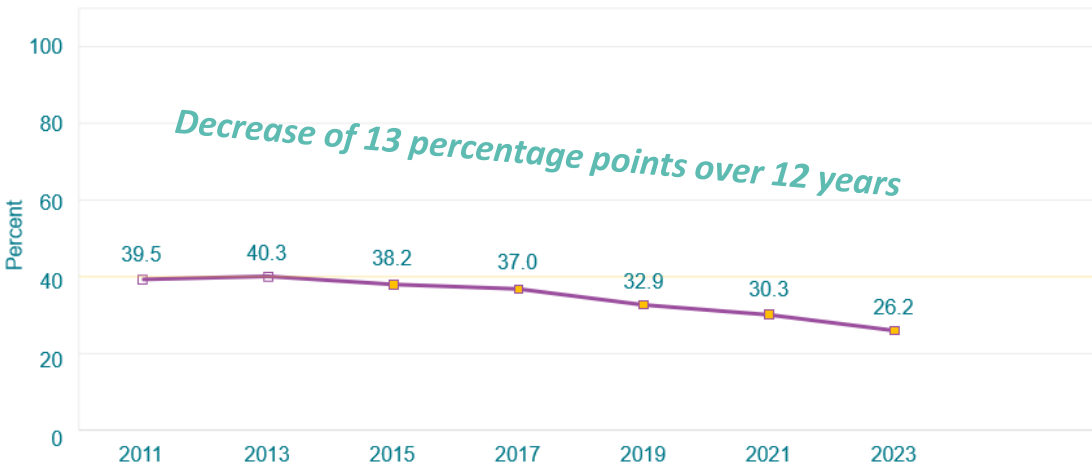
Physiological Needs



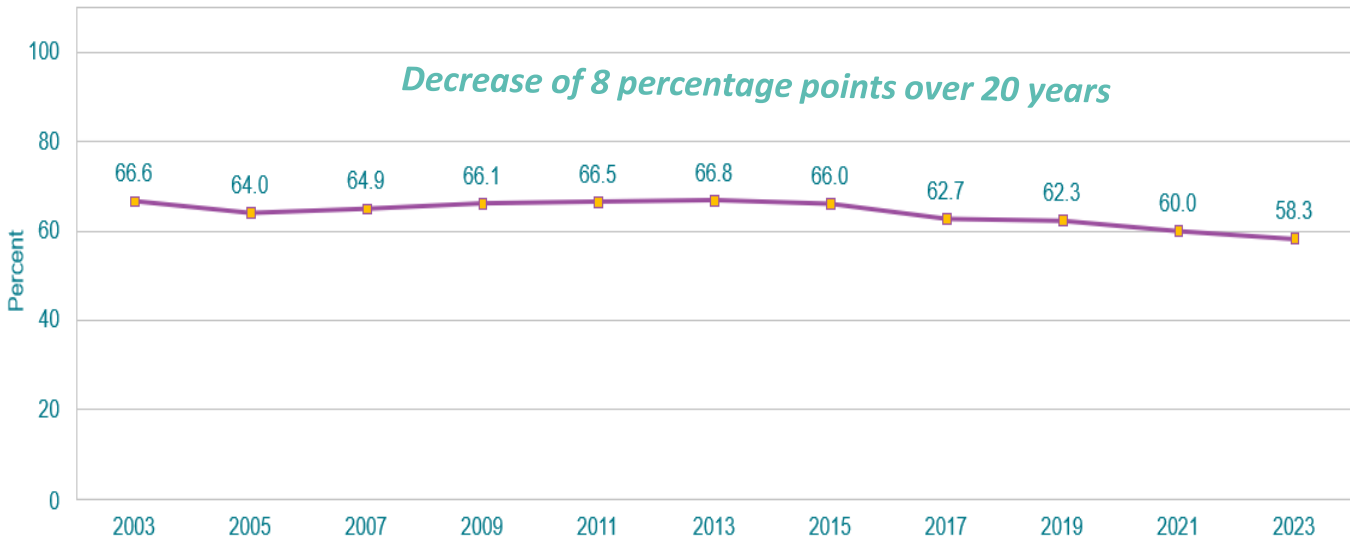
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Mental Health and Diet

Percentage of High School Students Who Ate Breakfast on All 7 Days,* 2011-2023†



Percentage of High School Students Who Ate Vegetables One or More Times Per Day,* 2003-2023†

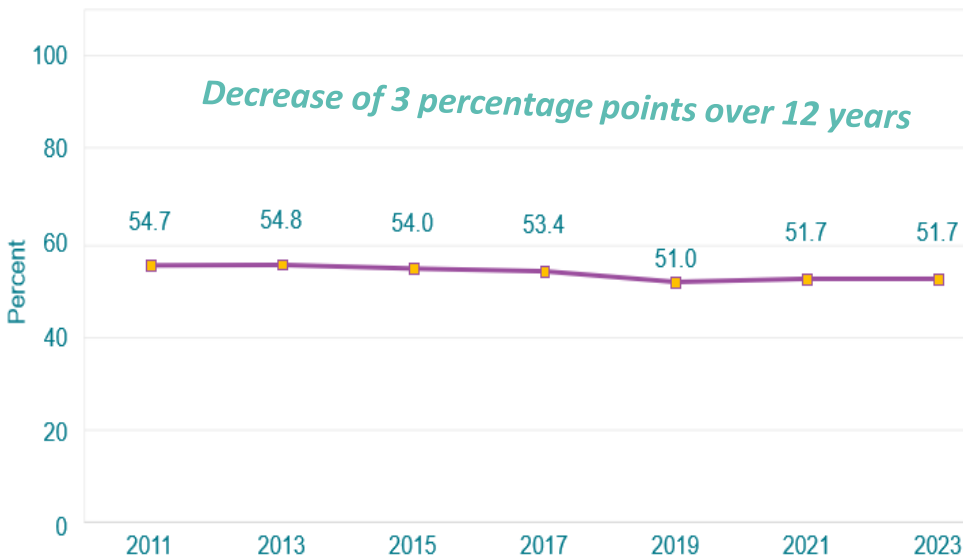


Takeaway:
Students report eating breakfasts and/or vegetables at lower rates than in the past.



Mental Health and Activity

Percentage of High School Students Who Were Physically Active at Least 60 Minutes Per Day on 5 or More Days,* 2011-2023†

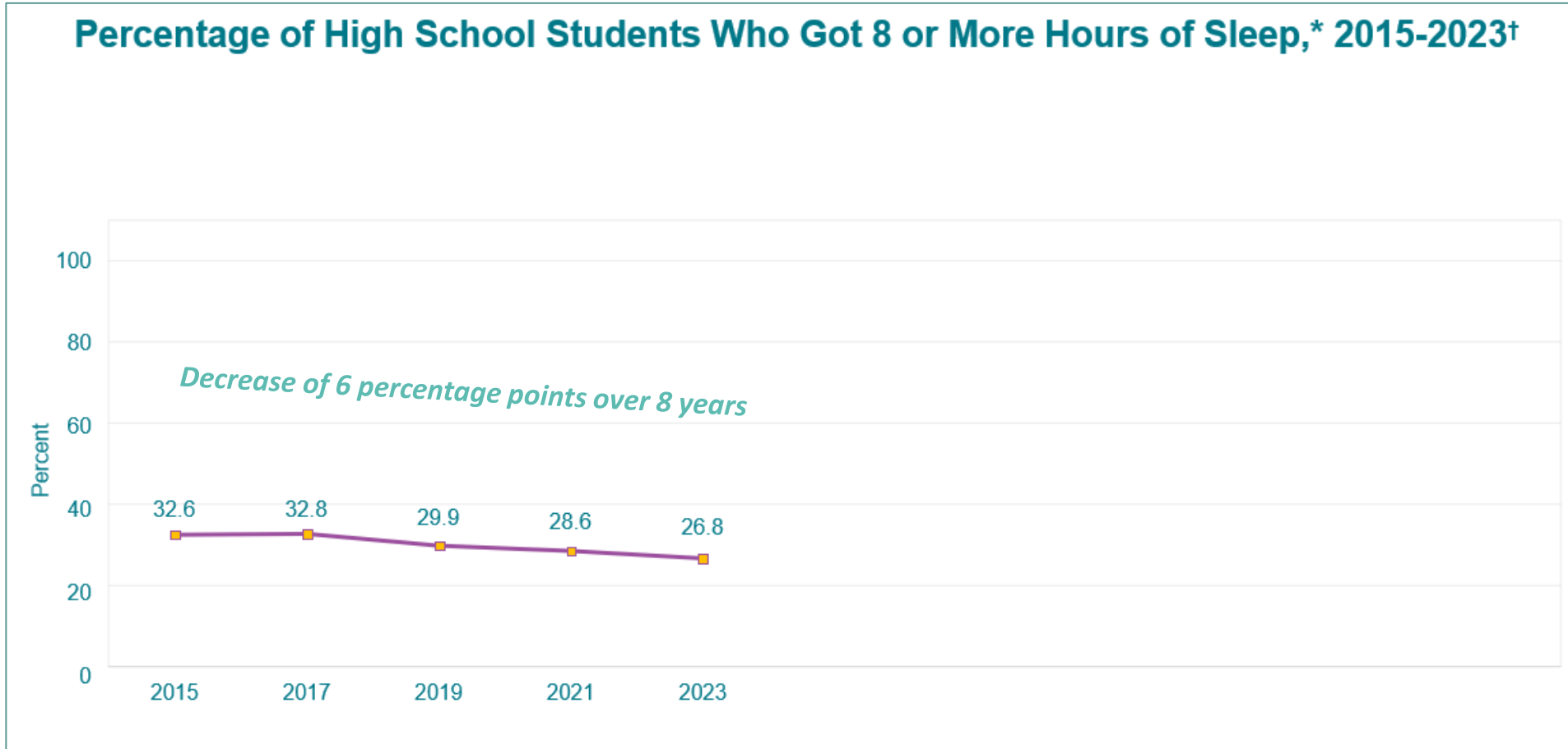


Takeaway:
Rates of physical activity and screen time have not changed substantially since YRBS began collecting the data.

Percentage of High School Students Who Spent 3 or More Hours of Screen Time,* 2021-2023†



Mental Health and Sleep



Takeaway:

Students report getting adequate sleep at lower rates than in the past.



YRBS data 1991-2023

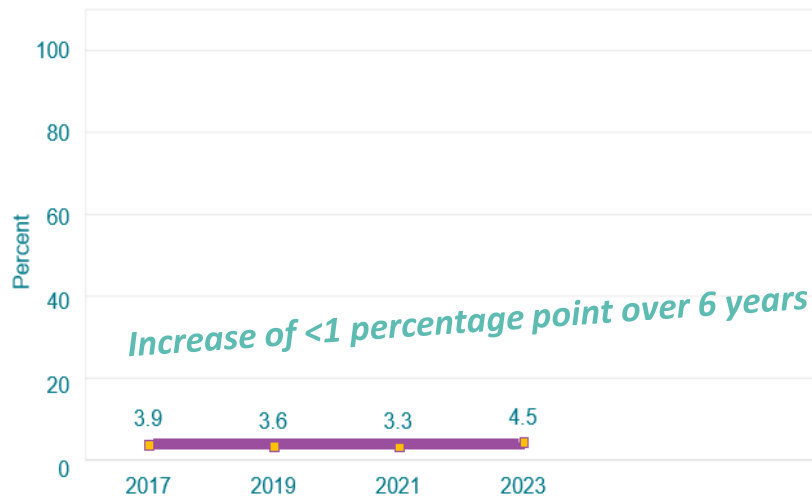
OPI webpage: <https://opi.mt.gov/Leadership/Data-Reporting/Youth-Risk-Behavior-Survey>

Note that some questions have been added since data collection began in 1991. Longitudinal analysis covers the entire timespan that each question has been asked on the YRBS.

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Mental Health and Shelter

Percentage of High School Students Who Experienced Unstable Housing,* 2017-2023†



Percentage of High School Students Who Have Ever Slept Away from Their Parents or Guardians Because They Were Kicked Out, Ran Away, or Were Abandoned,* 2021-2023†



Takeaway:

There has been a small increase in students experiencing housing instability in the few years since YRBS began collecting this data.



YRBS data 1991-2023

OPI webpage: <https://opi.mt.gov/Leadership/Data-Reporting/Youth-Risk-Behavior-Survey>

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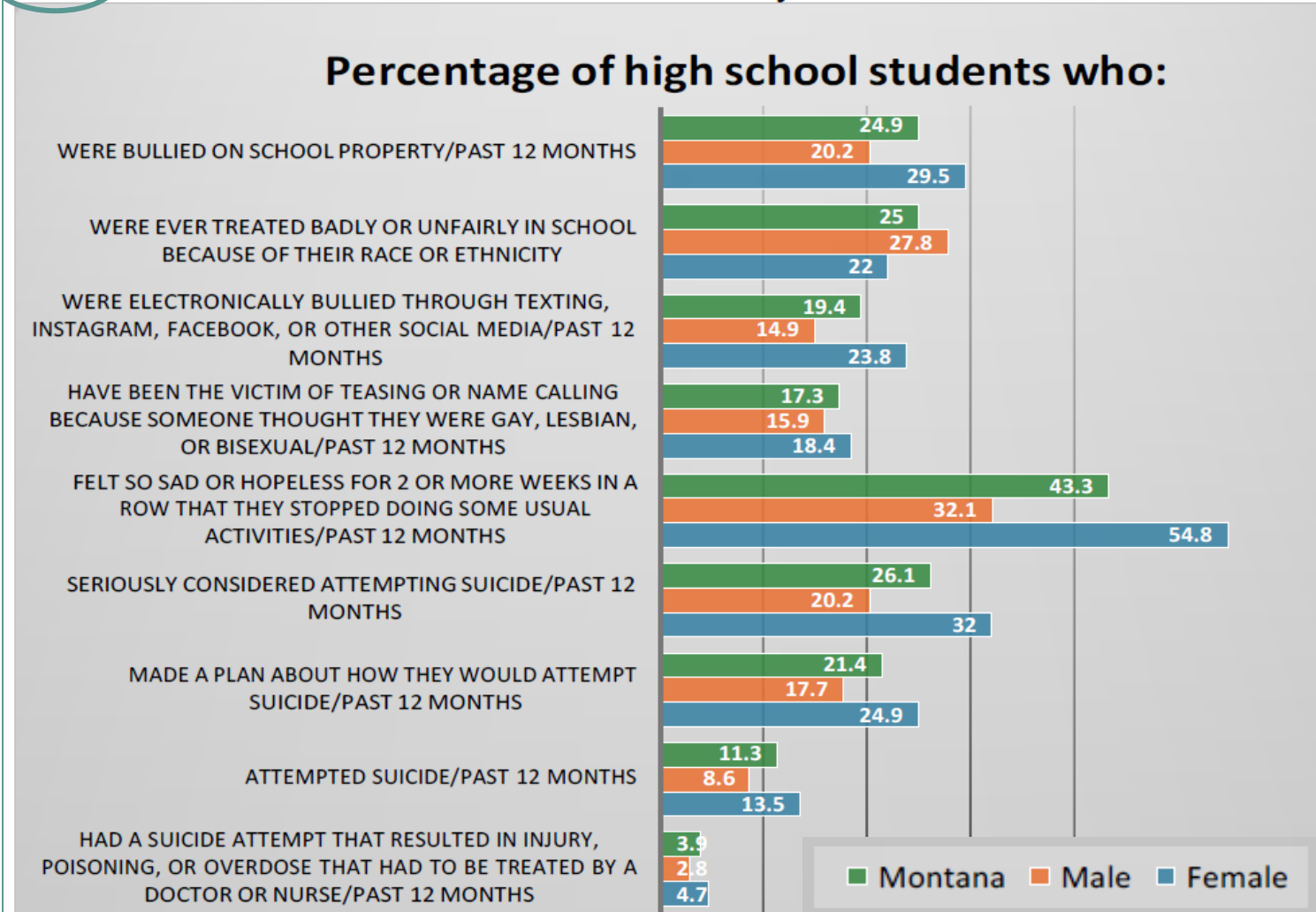
Mental Health Safety / Security Needs



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Mental Health – Bullying and Suicide

2023 Montana Youth Risk Behavior Survey



YRBS data 2023

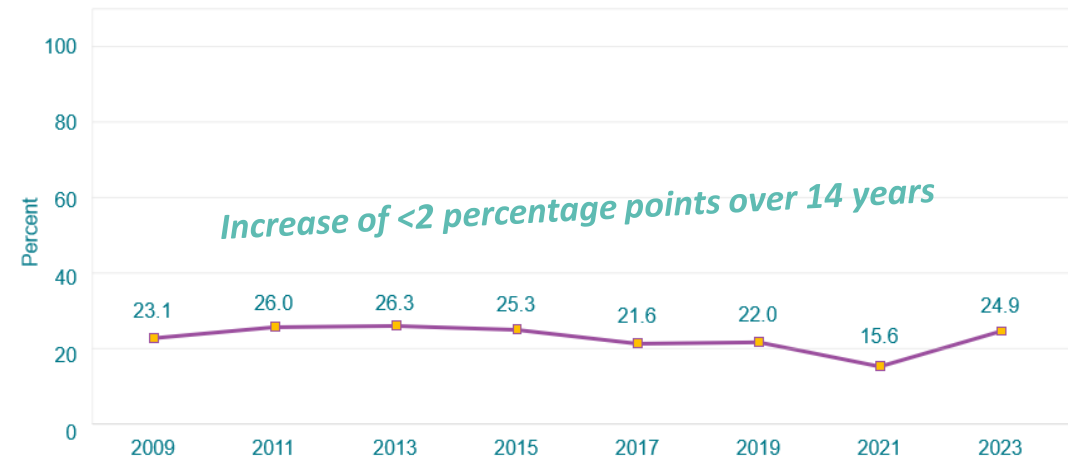
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Mental Health and Bullying

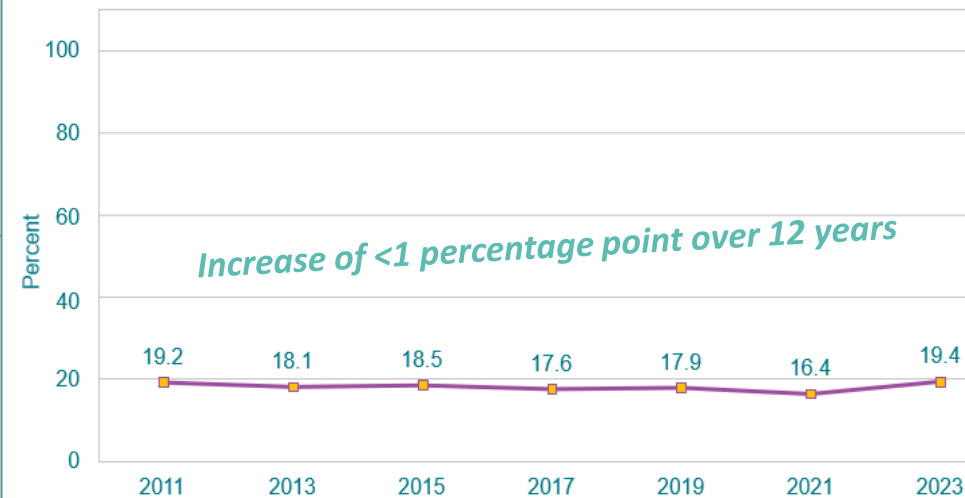
Percentage of High School Students Who Were Bullied on School Property,* 2009-2023†



Takeaway:

Rates at which students report being bullied have remained mostly the same since 2009.

Percentage of High School Students Who Were Electronically Bullied,* 2011-2023†



YRBS data 1991-2023

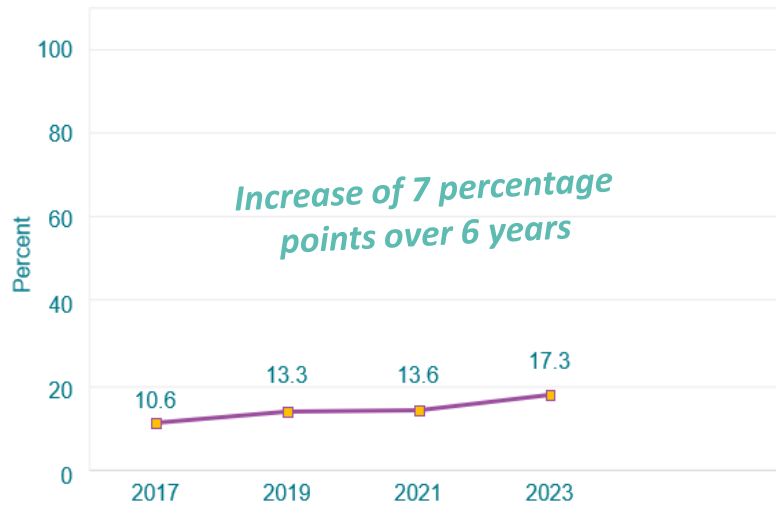
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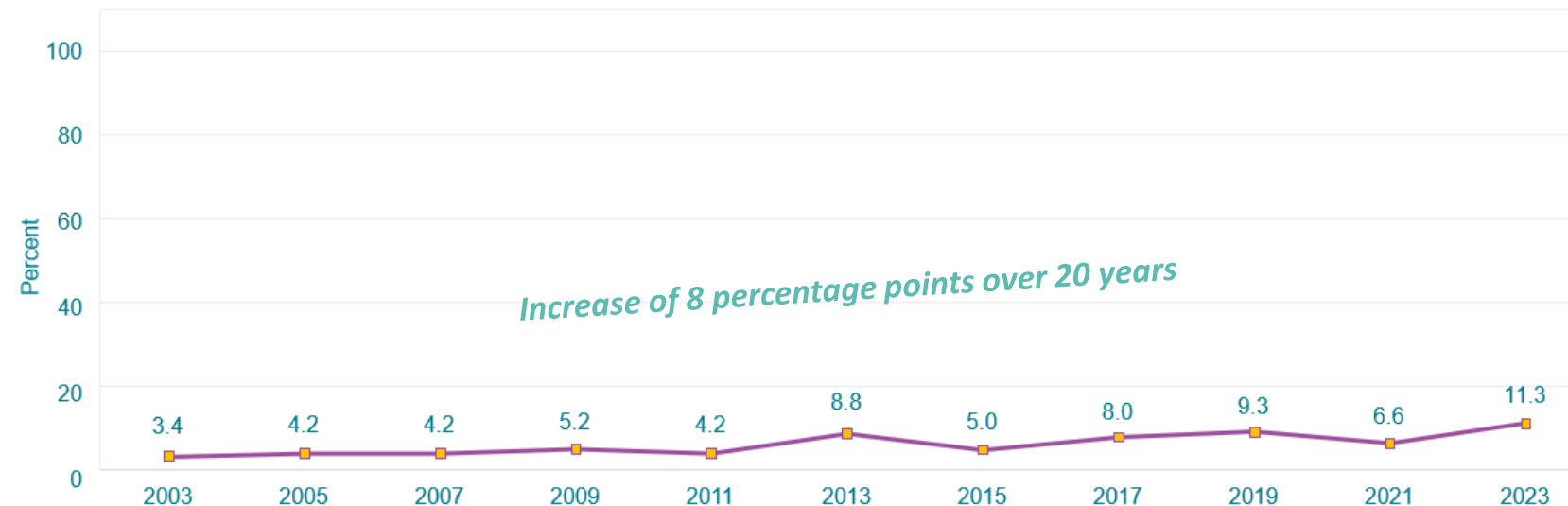
Mental Health and Safety

Percentage of High School Students Who Have Been the Victim of Teasing or Name Calling Because Someone Thought They Were Gay, Lesbian, or Bisexual,* 2017-2023†



Takeaway:
Students increasingly report experiencing teasing or feeling unsafe at school.

Percentage of High School Students Who Did Not Go to School Because They Felt Unsafe at School or on Their Way to or from School,* 2003-2023†



YRBS data 1991-2023

OPI webpage: <https://opi.mt.gov/Leadership/Data-Reporting/Youth-Risk-Behavior-Survey>

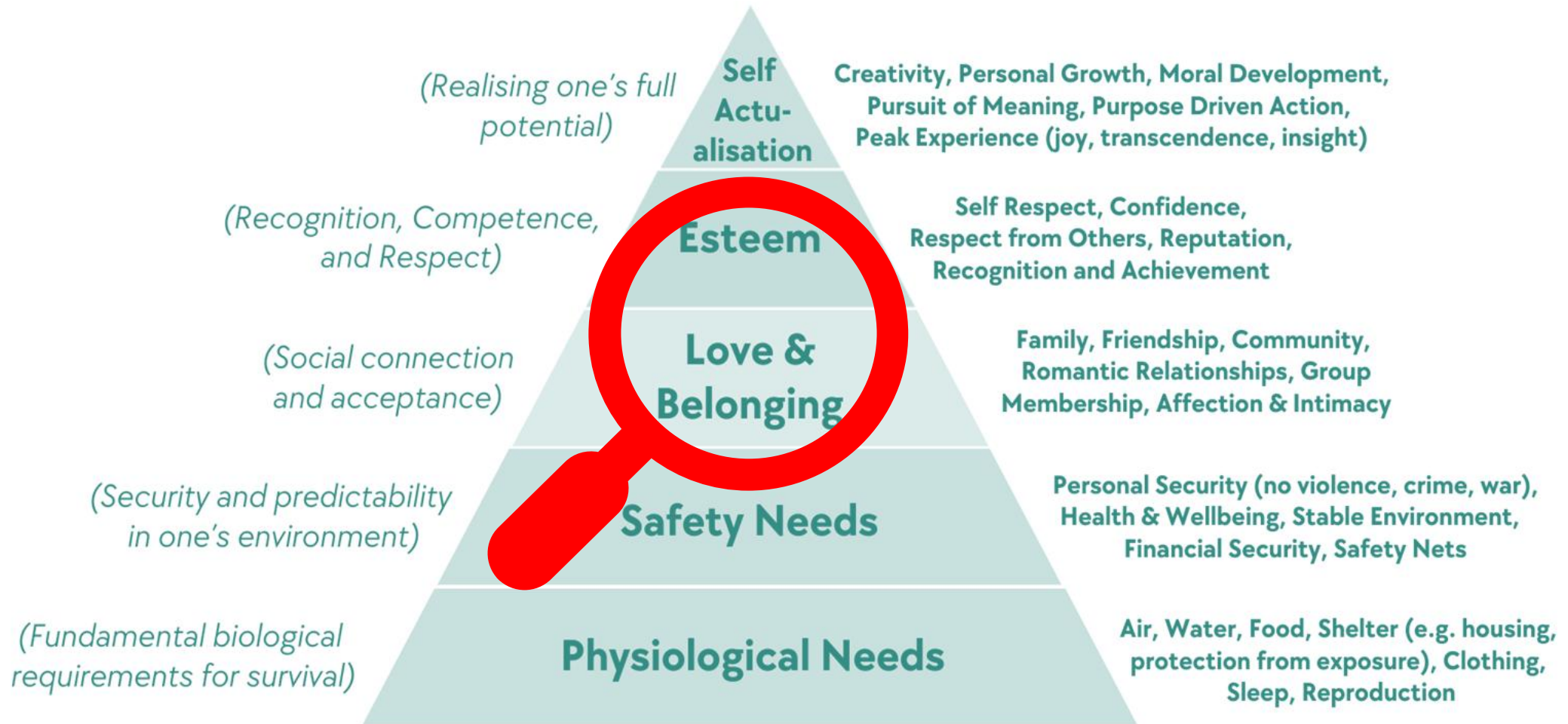
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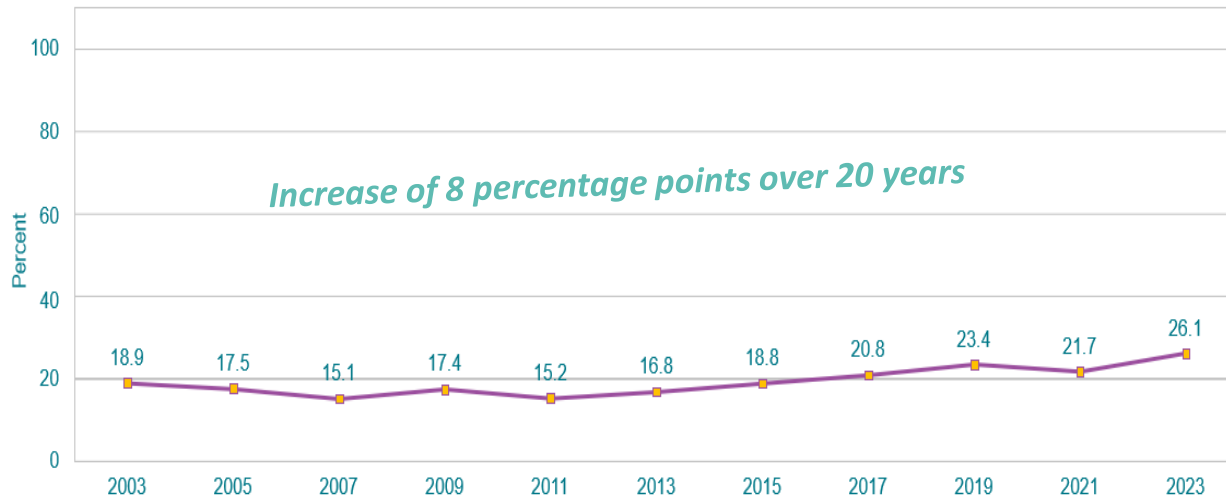
Social & Self Esteem Needs



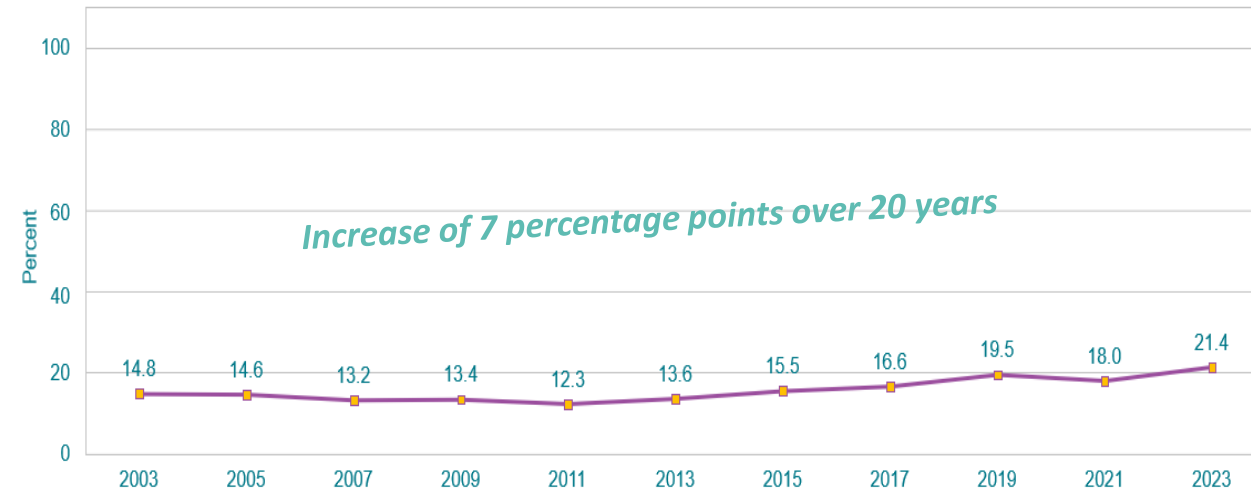
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Mental Health and Suicidal Ideation

Percentage of High School Students Who Seriously Considered Attempting Suicide,*
2003-2023†



Percentage of High School Students Who Made a Plan About How They Would Attempt
Suicide,* 2003-2023†



Takeaway:
Students increasingly report considering or making a plan to attempt suicide.



YRBS data 1991-2023

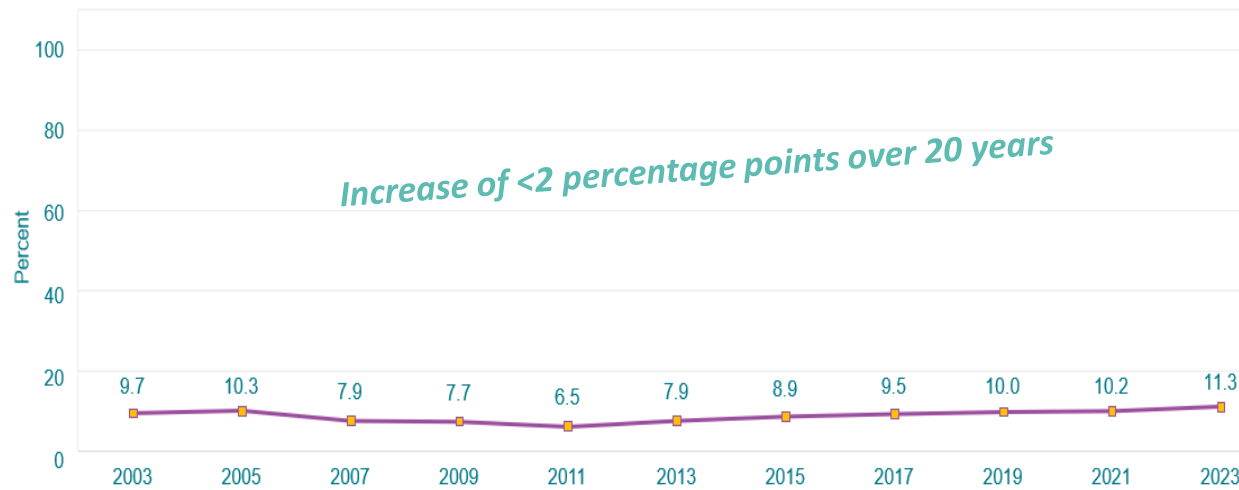
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Mental Health and Suicidal Attempts

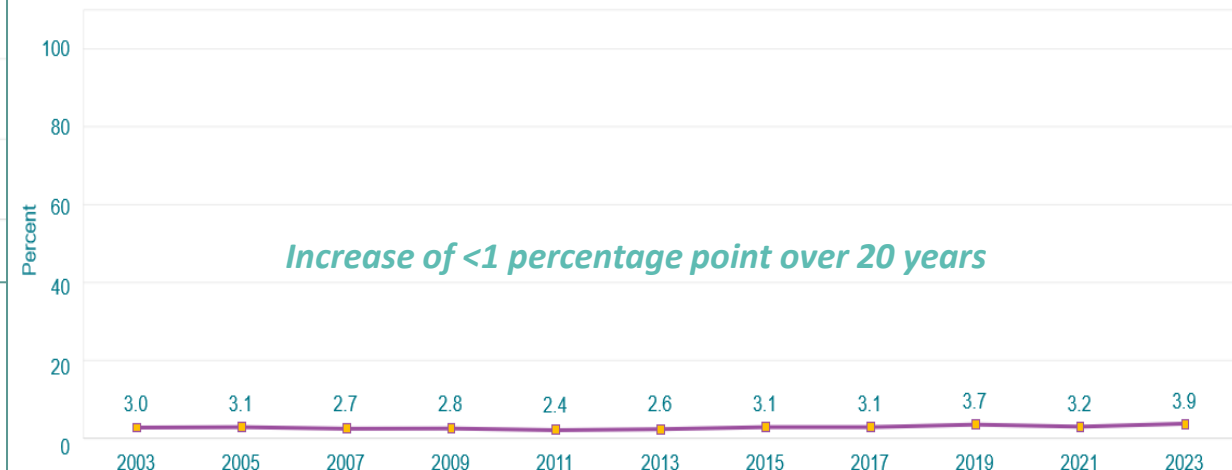
Percentage of High School Students Who Attempted Suicide,* 2003-2023†



Takeaway:

Students report a small increase in suicide attempts, including attempts that result in a medical visit.

Percentage of High School Students Who Had a Suicide Attempt That Resulted in an Injury, Poisoning, or Overdose That Had to Be Treated by a Doctor or Nurse,* 2003-2023†



YRBS data 1991-2023

OPI webpage: <https://opi.mt.gov/Leadership/Data-Reporting/Youth-Risk-Behavior-Survey>

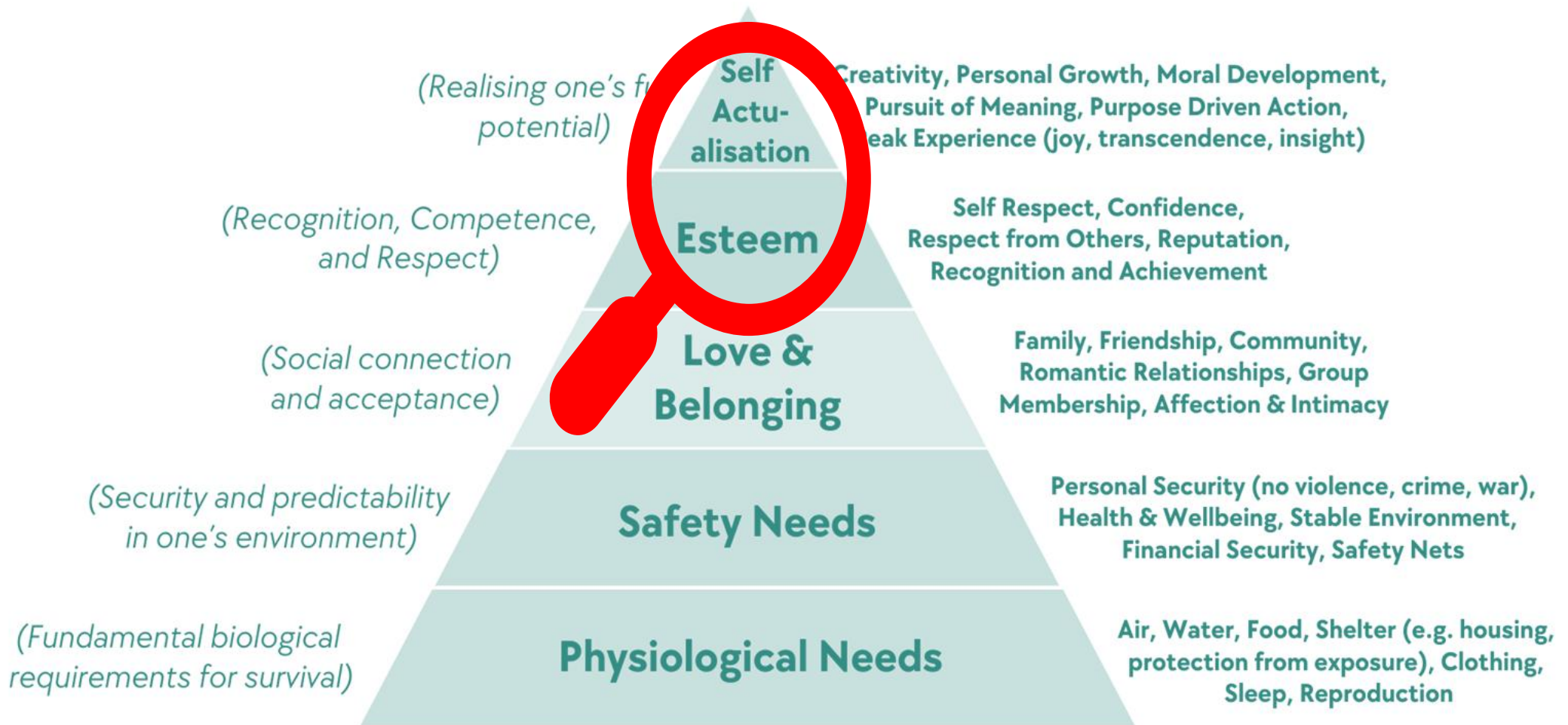
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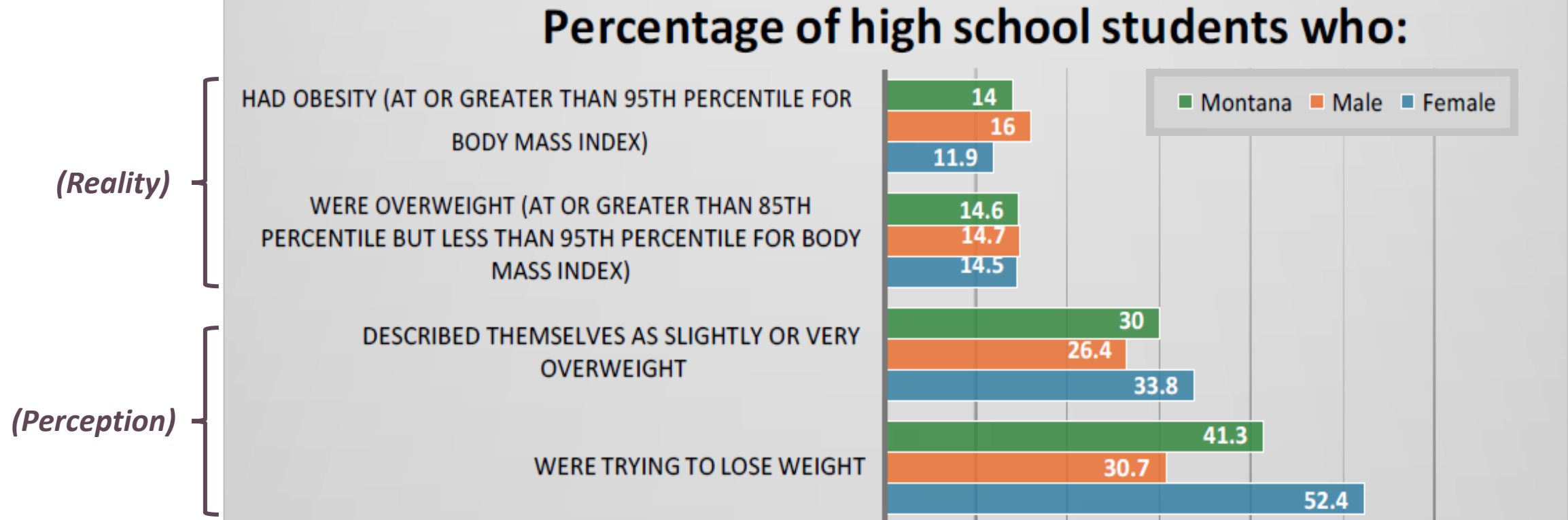
Self Esteem & Actualization Needs



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Mental Health – Negative Self Image

2023 Montana Youth Risk Behavior Survey



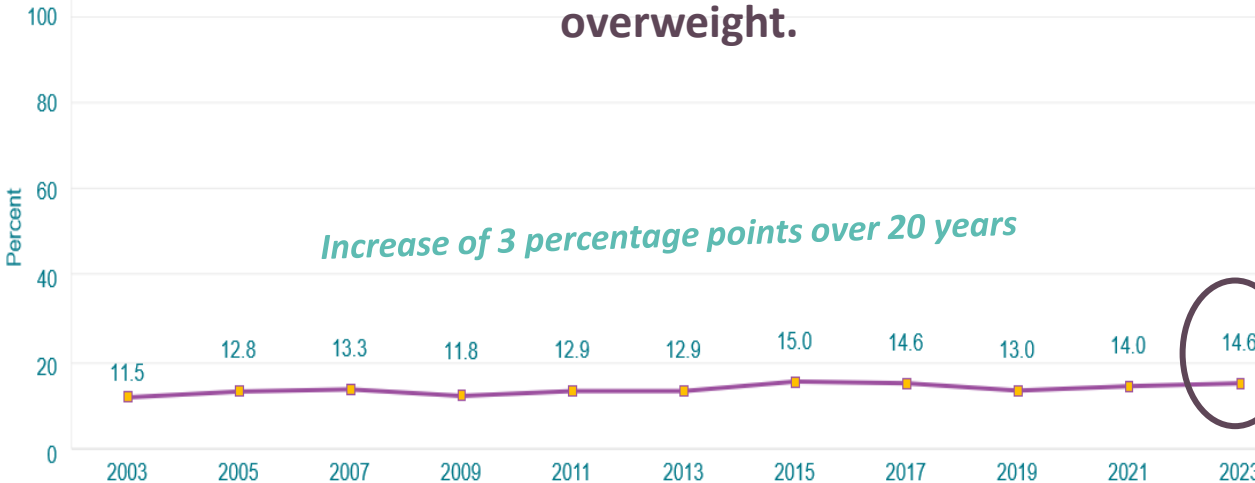
Mental Health and Negative Self-Image

Percentage of High School Students Who Were Overweight,* 2003-2023†

(Reality)

In 2023, 14.6% of students who took the YRBS were overweight.

Increase of 3 percentage points over 20 years

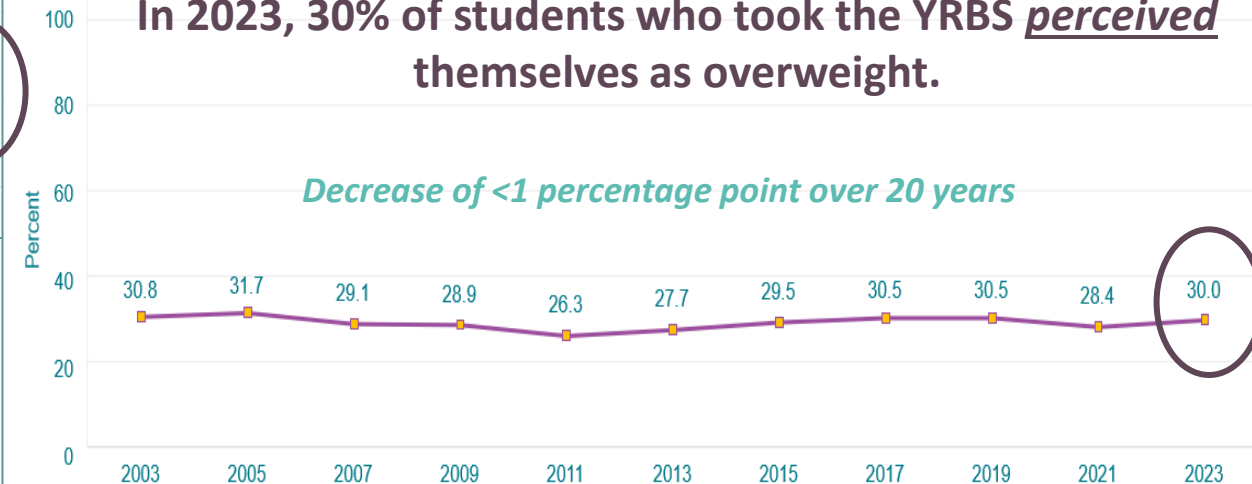


Percentage of High School Students Who Described Themselves As Slightly or Very Overweight, 2003-2023*

(Perception)

In 2023, 30% of students who took the YRBS perceived themselves as overweight.

Decrease of <1 percentage point over 20 years



Takeaway:

Students tend to have a more negative view of their own weight than what is medically classified as overweight.



YRBS data 1991-2023

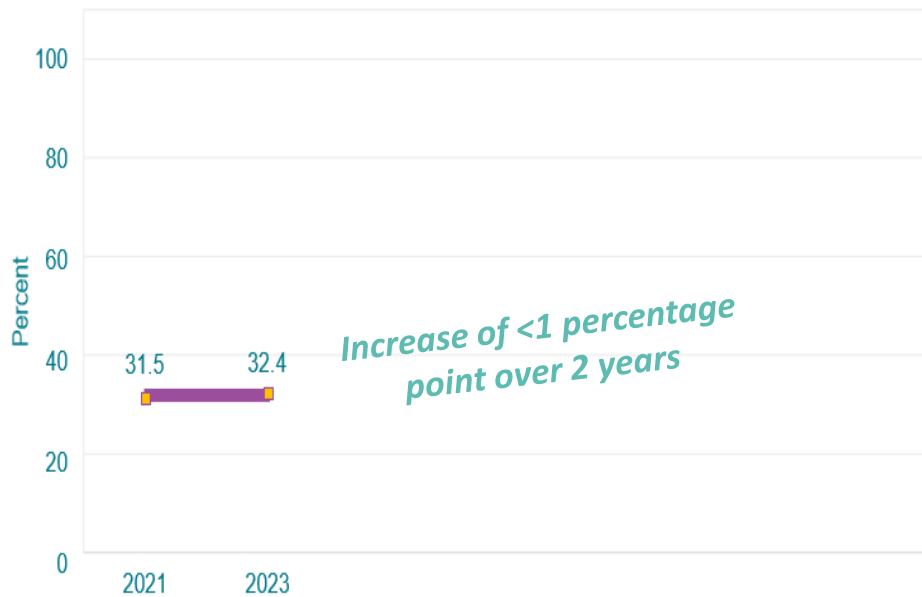
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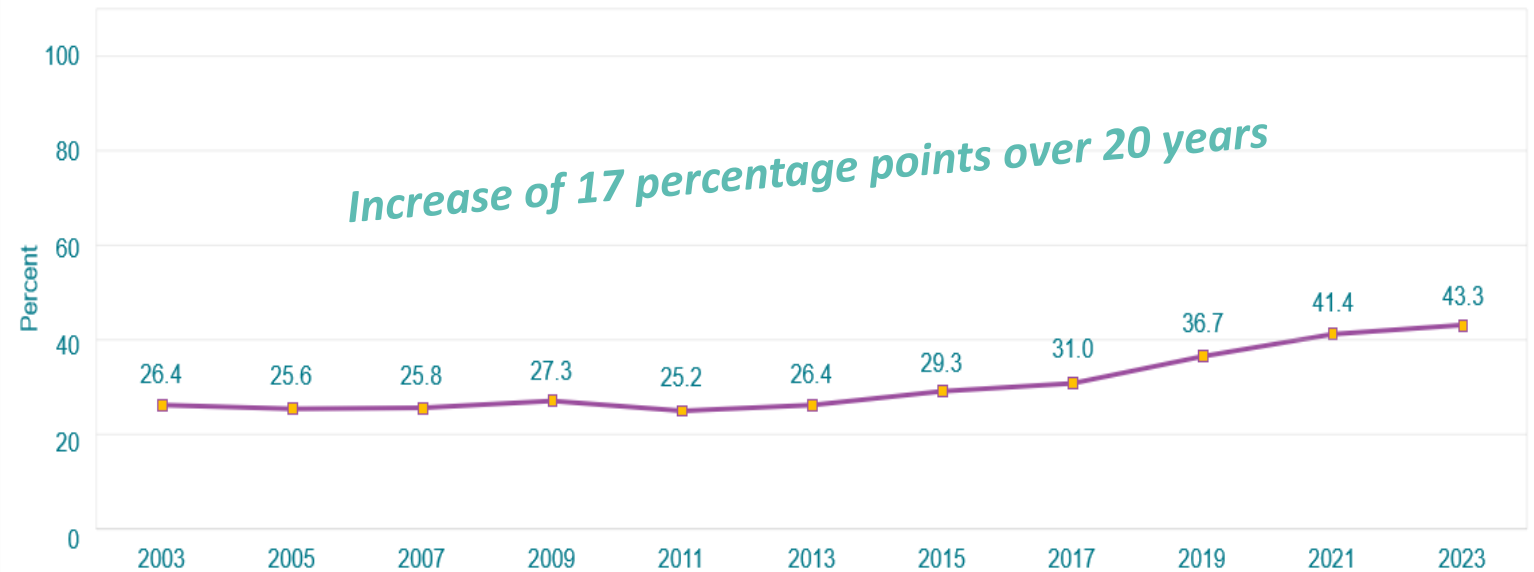
Mental Health as Self-Reported

Percentage of High School Students Who Reported That Their Mental Health Was Most of the Time or Always Not Good,* 2021-2023†



Takeaway:
Students increasingly report experiencing sadness, hopelessness, and negative mental health.

Percentage of High School Students Who Felt Sad or Hopeless,* 2003-2023†



YRBS data 1991-2023

OPI webpage: <https://opi.mt.gov/Leadership/Data-Reporting/Youth-Risk-Behavior-Survey>

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Mental Health Subpopulations

2023 MONTANA YOUTH RISK BEHAVIOR SURVEY

MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENT FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTIONS * FOR AMERICAN INDIAN STUDENTS ON OR NEAR A RESERVATION

The following frequency distributions are based upon surveys with 637 middle school American Indian students who live on or near a Reservation in Montana during February 2023. Frequency distributions may not total 637 due to nonresponses and percents may not total 100 percent due to rounding.

- 43% of students* felt so **sad or hopeless** almost every day for two weeks or more in a row that they stopped doing usual activities.
- Students* reported their **mental health** as "**not good**" by frequency:
 - Sometimes 24%
 - Most of the time 17%
 - Always 9%
- 62% of students* reported using **social media** several times a day, with 34% reporting their usage as *multiple times per hour*.
- 26% of students* reported having eaten **breakfast** every day for the past week.
- 28% of students* had seriously considered or made a plan to attempt **suicide** in the past 12 months.
- 22% of students* actually attempted **suicide** in the past 12 months.
- 8% of students* made a **suicide** attempt in the past 12 months that resulted in an injury, poisoning, or overdose that had to be treated by a doctor or nurse.

YRBS 2023 data – American Indian middle school students

- OPI YRBS webpage: <https://opi.mt.gov/Leadership/Data-Reporting/Youth-Risk-Behavior-Survey>

data summarized by SFIC staff



Mental Health Subpopulations

Unintentional Injuries and Violence – percentage of students																	
Were the victim of teasing or name calling because someone thought they were gay, lesbian, or bisexual, past 12 months																	
1993	1995	1997	1999	2001	2003	2005	2007	2009	2011	2013	2015	2017	2019	2021	2023	Linear change	2021-2023 Change
										13.2	14.7	10.7	13.2	14.8	15.6	No change	No change

Felt so sad or hopeless for two or more weeks in a row that they stopped doing some usual activities, past 12 months																	
1993	1995	1997	1999	2001	2003	2005	2007	2009	2011	2013	2015	2017	2019	2021	2023	Linear change	2021-2023 Change
			30.9	41.6	29.9	31.5	34.4	32.0	30.9	31.4	38.6	42.6	39.6	49.0	41.8	↓	↓

Seriously considered attempting suicide, past 12 months																	
1993	1995	1997	1999	2001	2003	2005	2007	2009	2011	2013	2015	2017	2019	2021	2023	Linear change	2021-2023 Change
19.7	18.4	20.3	17.2	28.2	21.0	19.7	20.6	19.5	21.2	23.2	24.3	28.2	26.1	26.7	26.2	No change	No change

Made a plan about how they would attempt suicide, past 12 months																	
1993	1995	1997	1999	2001	2003	2005	2007	2009	2011	2013	2015	2017	2019	2021	2023	Linear change	2021-2023 Change
20.6	19.1	20.1	11.9	23.0	14.5	17.4	15.8	16.6	15.1	19.2	20.6	18.6	20.4	20.7	20.8	No change	No change

Actually attempted suicide, past 12 months																	
1993	1995	1997	1999	2001	2003	2005	2007	2009	2011	2013	2015	2017	2019	2021	2023	Linear change	2021-2023 Change
10.4	11.9	11.5	9.1	20.8	15.5	19.3	16.5	18.1	11.9	15.5	15.6	18.3	15.4	17.6	25.7	↑	↑

*More than **double** the % of **all students** who attempted suicide*

Among students who attempted suicide, had a suicide attempt that resulted in injury, poisoning, or overdose that required medical treatment, past 12 months																	
1993	1995	1997	1999	2001	2003	2005	2007	2009	2011	2013	2015	2017	2019	2021	2023	Linear change	2021-2023 Change
34.2	32.5	27.3	35.1	35.9	30.6	30.4	34.2	38.3	36.4	32.9	36.0	32.6	36.6	31.7	30.1	No change	↓



YRBS 1993-2023 longitudinal data – **American Indian high school students**

- OPI YRBS webpage: <https://opi.mt.gov/Leadership/Data-Reporting/Youth-Risk-Behavior-Survey>

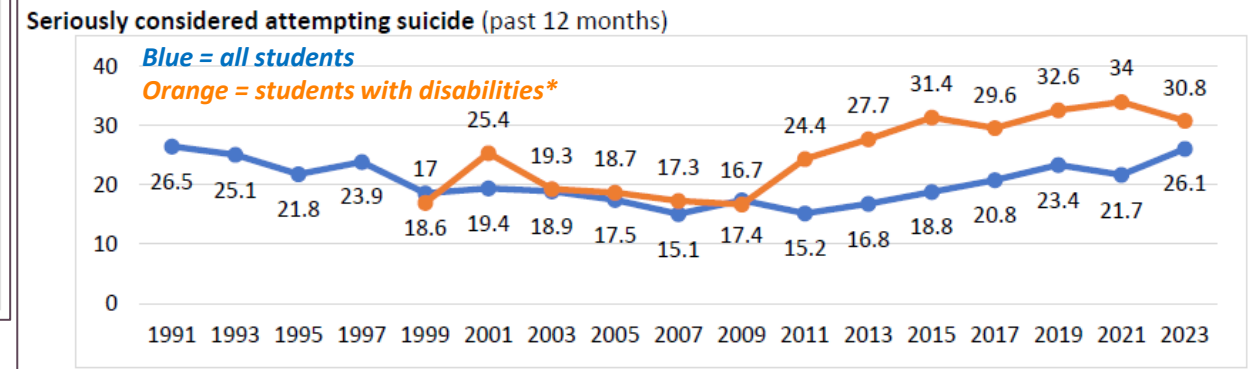
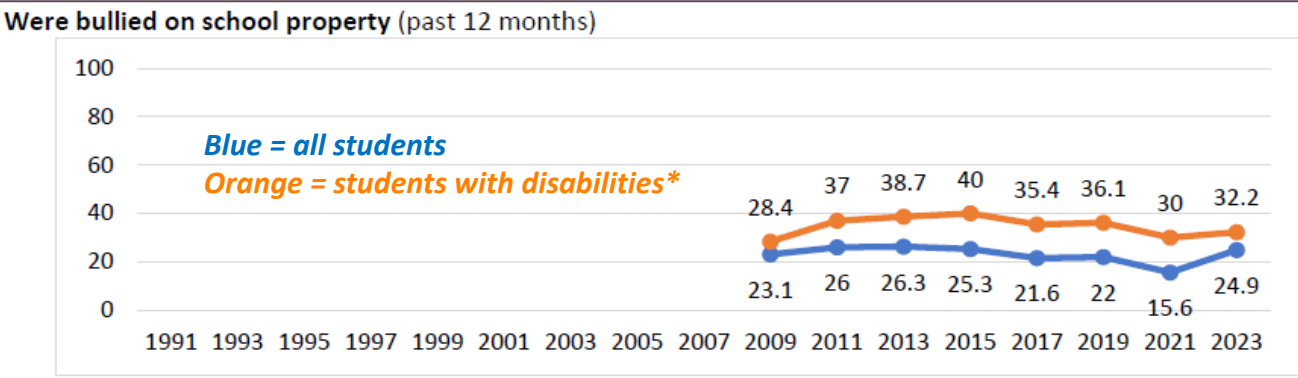
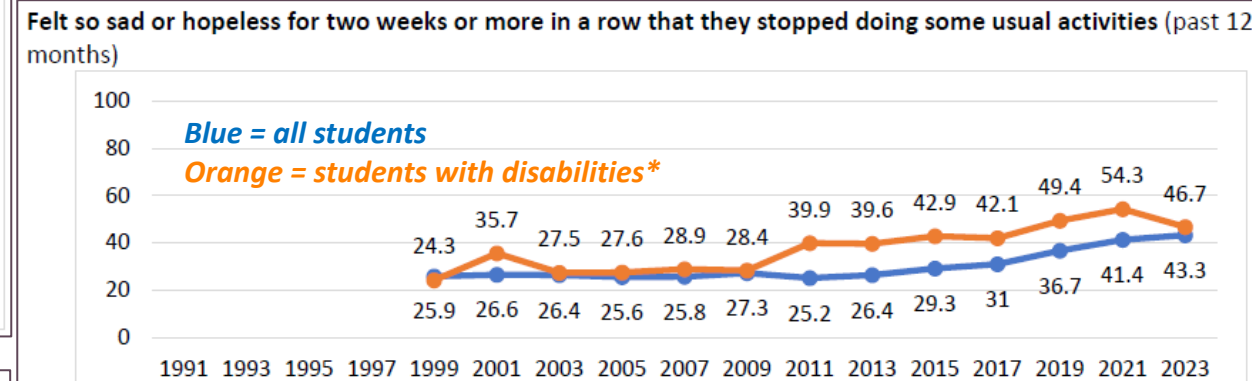
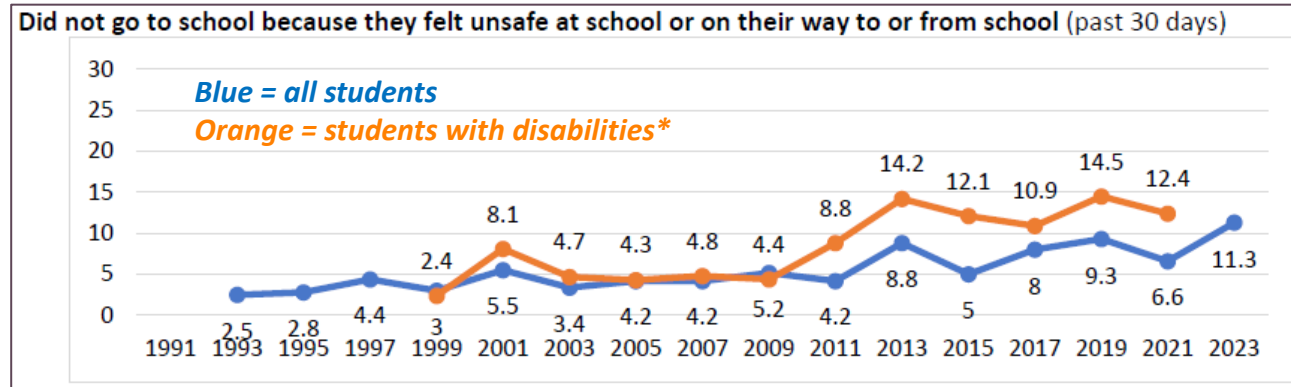


Mental Health Subpopulations

YRBS 1999-2023 longitudinal data – Students with disabilities*

*Based on student responses to YRBS question:

In the past 12 months, have you received help from a resource teacher, speech therapist, or other special education teacher?



Takeaway:
Students with disabilities tend to experience higher rates of bullying, hopelessness, and suicidal ideation than their peers.



YRBS 1993-2023 longitudinal data – Students with disabilities*

OPI webpage: <https://opi.mt.gov/Leadership/Data-Reporting/Youth-Risk-Behavior-Survey>

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Mental Health – Longitudinal Summary

Downward Trends:

- Students report getting **adequate sleep**, eating **breakfasts** and/or eating **vegetables** at lower rates than in the past.
- Students tend to have a more negative **perception of their own weight** than what is medically classified as overweight.

Stagnant or Little Change:

- Rates at which students report **being bullied** have remained mostly the same since 2009.
- Rates of **physical activity and screen time** have not changed significantly since YRBS began collecting the data.

Upward Trends:

- Students increasingly report experiencing **teasing** or **feeling unsafe at school**, or experiencing **sadness, hopelessness, and negative mental health**.
- Students increasingly report considering attempting or **making a plan** to attempt suicide. Data shows a small increase in reported **suicide attempts**, including attempts that result in a **medical visit**.
- There has been a small increase in students experiencing **housing instability** in the few (<6) years since YRBS began collecting this data.

Subpopulation Highlights:

- **Students with disabilities** tend to experience higher rates of bullying, hopelessness, and suicidal ideation than their peers.
- **American Indian high school students** report attempting suicide at more than double the rate of their peers.



Questions?

