



*Results of the*  
**MetroWest  
Adolescent Health Survey**

**Ashland Middle School**  
*Grades 7 and 8*  
**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**



**2008**

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**EDC**

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# Ashland Middle School (Grades 7 and 8)

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Results from the 2008 MetroWest Adolescent Health Survey

#### INTRODUCTION

In 2006, the MetroWest Community Health Care Foundation embarked on a ten-year initiative to provide communities with timely, local data on the health and risk behaviors of youth. To accomplish this goal, the **MetroWest Adolescent Health Survey (MWAHS)** is being administered every other year to middle and high school students in the MetroWest region. The current report provides data from the second administration of the MWAHS in the Fall of 2008.

The 2006 survey was initially targeted only to district high schools. However, at a meeting with district representatives, many expressed interest in better understanding the early initiation of risk behaviors and the health needs of middle school students. In response, middle school surveys were offered as an optional addition. In 2006, 13 of 25 districts in the region decided to conduct middle school surveys. In 2008, the number of participating middle school districts increased to 19 (76%). This increase shows a strong commitment to using data to drive community-level decision-making, programming, and policy change. It also allows for the creation of a highly representative regional MetroWest dataset to which individual school districts can compare their results.

For the first time, the report provides information on trends from the 2006 and 2008 survey waves. As subsequent waves of surveys are conducted, communities across the region will be able to monitor emergent issues and trends, identify priorities, and measure progress towards achieving a healthier adolescent population.

The MWAHS development, coordination of survey administration, analysis, and reporting were carried out by the Health and Human Development Division at Education Development Center, Inc.

#### METHODS

Middle school students in 19 MetroWest districts participated in the 2008 survey. All schools surveyed grades 7 and 8; at four school districts, including Ashland, administrators chose to survey students in 6<sup>th</sup> grade as well.\* Rather than surveying a sample of students, a census was conducted of all students in the participating grades who were present on the days of the survey. Therefore, the results in this report reflect the range of students in the region.

The MWAHS is an anonymous and voluntary survey. Parents/guardians are informed of the survey in advance and given the opportunity to opt out their child(ren). Students are also informed of the voluntary nature of the survey and can decide whether or not to participate. Very few students (2.4%) did not participate for either of these reasons. In addition, the survey administration protocol takes numerous steps to protect students' anonymity and provide privacy. Such steps have been shown to result in valid and reliable youth reporting.<sup>1,2,3</sup>

This report includes regional data from 10,650 students in grades 7 and 8 (93% of the eligible students in the 19 participating school districts). In Ashland, 387 students in grades 7 and 8 participated, representing 94.0% of students. To make use of all data and provide a foundation for future analyses, we have included all 19 participating districts when examining trends from 2006 to 2008.†

\* Due to the relatively small number of schools surveying 6<sup>th</sup> grade, findings are reported in a separate supplement.

† We explored whether it was necessary to restrict the trend analysis to the 13 districts that participated in both surveys. Analyses showed that the differences between the original cohort of 13 districts and the current group of 19 districts were minimal and did not impact the overall findings.

*The MWAHS is largely based on the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS), a program of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).<sup>4</sup> The YRBSS monitors national and state trends in the prevalence of risk behaviors contributing to the leading causes of morbidity and mortality among youth, including:*

- ◆ Tobacco, alcohol and drug use
- ◆ Unhealthy dietary behaviors
- ◆ Inadequate physical activity
- ◆ Suicide
- ◆ Violence.

*In addition, the MWAHS incorporates topics of particular interest to the MetroWest (MW) communities. Based on feedback from school district personnel, the MWAHS also assesses:*

- ◆ Prescription drug misuse
- ◆ Stress and mental health
- ◆ School attachment and adult support
- ◆ Bullying.

*The middle school MWAHS is designed specifically for middle school youth in terms of length, reading level, and developmental appropriateness. Questions generally focus on the initiation of risk behaviors that are known to increase over the middle school years.*

*Massachusetts administered a middle school risk behavior survey for the first time in 2007. When possible, this report will compare data from the MW region and the state. No national comparison data is available, although efforts are underway to expand the CDC middle school survey to a nationally representative sample of youth.*

## SUBSTANCE USE

### OVERALL PATTERNS

One in four middle school youth in Ashland (21%) have experimented with alcohol or other substances in their lifetime. Alcohol is the most commonly used substance: 18% of students have had at least one drink of alcohol in their lifetime and 7% report drinking in the past 30 days. 8% of youth report having a drink before they were 11 years of age, and current drinking more than doubles from 4% in 7<sup>th</sup> grade to 9% in 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Middle school students who use alcohol are far more likely to also smoke cigarettes or use marijuana or inhalants.

Fewer students smoke cigarettes than use alcohol: 7% of youth have smoked cigarettes in their lifetime, and 4% have smoked in the past 30 days. Marijuana use is still relatively rare, with 5% reporting lifetime use and 4% reporting current use. Many students initiate use in middle school: from 7<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> grade, cigarette smoking increases from 4% to 8% and marijuana use increases from 2% to 7%. While cigarette smoking is more prevalent than marijuana use in middle school, this pattern reverses in high school, where students are more likely to use marijuana than smoke cigarettes.

The proportion of youth who report lifetime cigarette smoking (7%) is similar to the proportion who have ever used inhalants (8%). While other substance use typically increases as students get older, inhalant use often decreases in high school.

Males are more likely to use alcohol than females. For example, more males than females report alcohol use (22% vs. 15%). However, other drug use is similar between males and females; for example, inhalant use is similar for males and females at 8%, and cigarette use is similar at about 6-7%.

### OVERALL TRENDS FROM 2006 TO 2008

Overall, use of alcohol, marijuana, inhalants, steroids, and prescription drugs has remained similar since 2006. There is a decrease in lifetime cigarette smoking (from 12% to 7%), but current smoking and other measures of cigarette use did not change substantially.

*Alcohol is the substance most frequently used by middle school students in MetroWest: 20% of students have had a drink of alcohol in their lifetime, and 9% consumed alcohol in the past 30 days. This does not include drinking a few sips of wine for religious purposes.*

*8% of MW youth have smoked cigarettes in their lifetime, and 5% have smoked marijuana.*

*Lifetime inhalant use is reported by 7% of youth, defined as sniffing glue, breathing the contents of spray cans, or inhaling paints or sprays to get high.*

*There were no substantial changes in use of tobacco, alcohol, marijuana, or other substances among middle school students in the MW region.*

### CURRENT PATTERNS

- ◆ **Cigarettes are used by a small proportion of middle school youth.** 7% of students smoked cigarettes in their lifetime, and 4% have smoked in the past 30 days.
- ◆ **Experimentation with cigarettes increases over the middle school years.** Only 3% of students smoked a whole cigarette before the age of 11. From 7<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> grade, lifetime smoking increases from 4% to 8%, and current smoking increases from 2% to 4%.
- ◆ **A very small number of middle school youth smoke regularly.** Only 1% of 7<sup>th</sup> grade students and 3% of 8<sup>th</sup> grade students smoked at least one cigarette every day for 30 days at some point in their lifetime.
- ◆ **Smoking on school property is rare.** Only 2% of youth smoked at school in the past 30 days.
- ◆ **Cigarette smoking is similar among males and females.** For example, similar numbers of males (6%) and females (7%) report lifetime smoking.

*Cigarettes are the second most commonly used substance in middle school after alcohol. In MW, 8% of youth smoked in their lifetime, and 4% smoked in the past 30 days. 2% have smoked regularly for at least 30 days in their lifetime.*

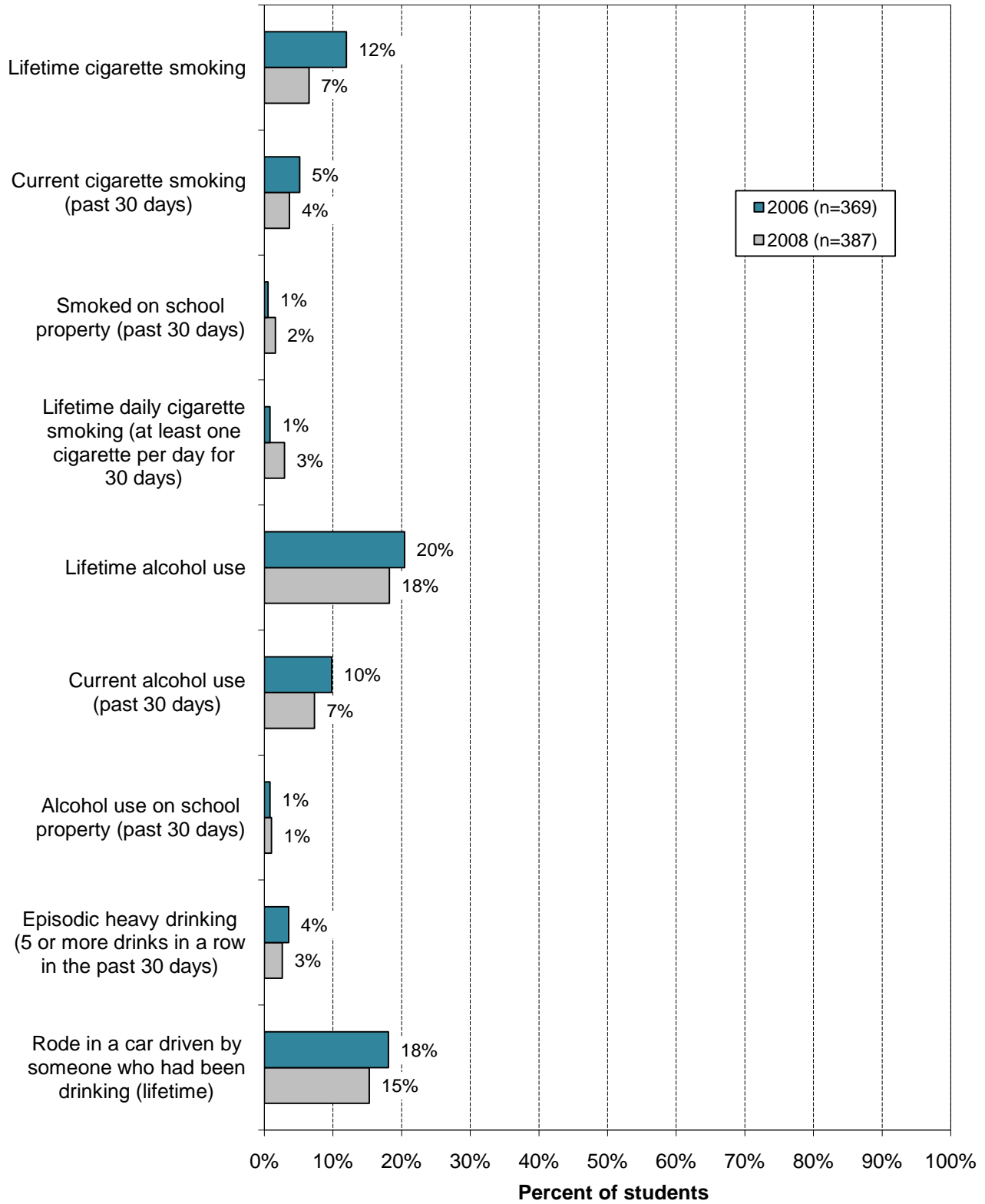
*Youth smoking in MW is substantially lower than in MA. For example, in 8<sup>th</sup> grade, lifetime smoking among MW youth (12%) is half that of MA youth (23%). Current smoking is also lower in 8<sup>th</sup> grade in MW compared with the state (5% vs. 8%).*

### TRENDS FROM 2006 TO 2008

- ◆ **Cigarette smoking may be declining.** Lifetime use decreased from 12% to 7%, but current use remained similar at about 4-5%. Other measures of cigarette smoking did not change substantially.

*In the MetroWest region, cigarette smoking in middle school has not changed substantially in the past two years.*

**Tobacco Use, Alcohol Use, and Riding With Impaired Drivers in 2006 and 2008**  
**Ashland Middle School - Grades 7 and 8**  
*MetroWest Adolescent Health Survey, 2008*



### CURRENT PATTERNS

- ◆ **Alcohol is the most frequently used substance among middle school youth.** 18% report lifetime use, and 7% consumed alcohol in the past 30 days.
- ◆ **A substantial number of youth experiment with alcohol early.** 8% of all youth had their first drink prior to age 11. Current drinking increases from 4% in 7<sup>th</sup> grade to 9% in 8<sup>th</sup> grade, and “binge” drinking increases from 1% to 3%.
- ◆ **A small number of middle school students report episodic heavy (“binge”) drinking.** 3% of students report “binge” drinking in the past 30 days, and 4% report being “drunk” in the past 30 days. “Binge” drinking is defined as having five or more drinks in a row on one occasion.
- ◆ **Alcohol use on school property is rare.** Only 1% of students used alcohol on school property in the past 30 days.
- ◆ **One in seven youth (15%) report they have been a passenger in a car with a driver who had been drinking.** *Note: this could have happened only once, and the driver could have been a parent, other adult, sibling or older peer.*
- ◆ **Males are more likely to report drinking than females.** 22% of males and 15% of females have had a drink of alcohol in their lifetime. Males also initiate alcohol use earlier: nearly twice as many males as females (11% vs. 5%) consumed alcohol prior to age 11. It is notable that by high school, drinking among males and females is similar.

### TRENDS FROM 2006 TO 2008

- ◆ **Alcohol use is steady over the past two years.** 18-20% of middle school students report lifetime drinking at both time points, and 3-4% report “binge” drinking.

*Alcohol use is substantially lower among MW youth compared with MA youth. For example, in 8<sup>th</sup> grade, fewer MW youth report lifetime use (26% vs. 34%), current use (12% vs. 17%), and “binge” drinking (2% vs. 8%).*

*In the MW region, 21% of middle school youth have been passengers in a car with a driver who had been drinking. Data for MA is not available.*

*MW males are more likely than females to drink alcohol in middle school. For example, more males than females report lifetime use (24% vs. 16%) and early initiation (9% vs. 5%). By early high school, similar proportions of males and females are drinking.*

*Recent drinking in MW more than doubles from 7<sup>th</sup> grade (5%) to 8<sup>th</sup> grade (12%).*

*Alcohol use has not changed in MetroWest. Current use is steady at 9%, and “binge” drinking remains at 3% in the region.*



## MARIJUANA USE

### CURRENT PATTERNS

- ◆ **One in twenty middle school students (5%) used marijuana in their lifetime,** and 4% used marijuana in the past 30 days.
- ◆ **Experimentation with marijuana begins in middle school.** Only 2% of youth used marijuana prior to age 11. From 7<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> grade, lifetime use triples from 2% to 7%. Similarly, current use rises from 2% to 4%.
- ◆ **Marijuana use is similar among males and females.** 6% of males and 4% of females have used marijuana in their lifetime. Current use is also similar among males (3%) and females (4%).

*5% of MW youth have used marijuana in their lifetime, and 3% report current use. Males are about twice as likely as females to have used marijuana at least once (7% vs. 3%).*

*Marijuana use is lower in MW than in MA. For example, in 8<sup>th</sup> grade, fewer MW youth report lifetime (8% vs. 14%) and current use (5% vs. 8%) compared with MA youth.*

### TRENDS FROM 2006 TO 2008

- ◆ **Marijuana use in middle school remains steady.** At both time points, 5-6% of youth report they have used marijuana at least once in their lifetime, and about 3-4% report current use.

*Marijuana use in MW has not changed in recent years. Lifetime use has been steady at 5%, and current use has stayed at 3%.*



## INHALANT USE

### CURRENT PATTERNS

- ◆ **After alcohol inhalants are the substance most often used in middle school.** 8% of students have used inhalants in their lifetime. *This includes sniffing glue, breathing the contents of aerosol spray cans, or inhaling any paints or sprays to get high.*
- ◆ **Lifetime inhalant use remains similar in 7<sup>th</sup> grade (7%) and 8<sup>th</sup> grade (8%).**
- ◆ **Inhalant use is similar among males and females (8% for each).**

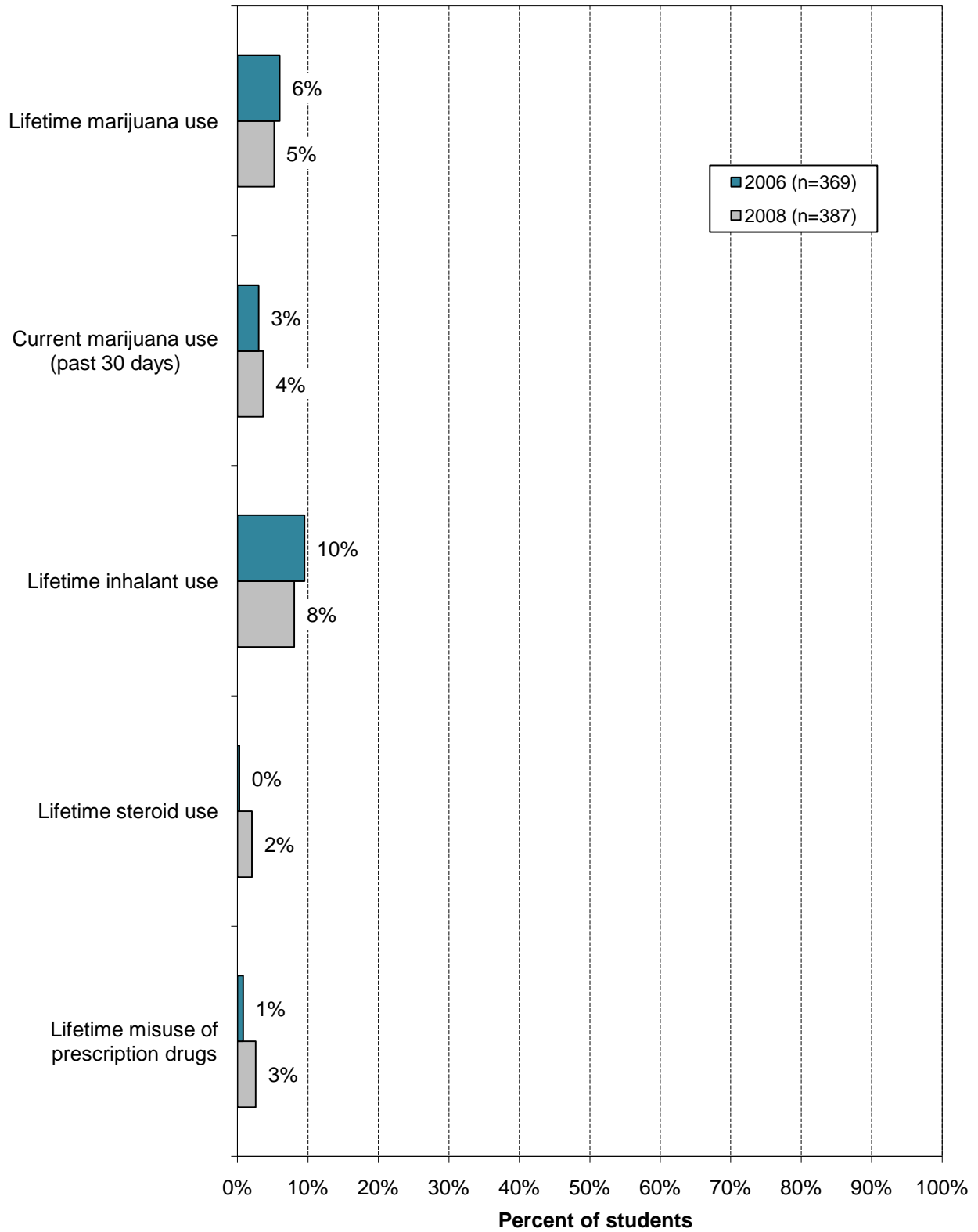
*In the MW region, lifetime inhalant use (7%) is reported by about the same proportion of youth who report lifetime cigarette smoking (8%).*

### TRENDS FROM 2006 TO 2008

- ◆ **There are no changes in lifetime inhalant use.** At both time points, 8-10% of middle school students say they have experimented with inhalants at least once.

*In MW, lifetime inhalant use has remained similar.*

**Marijuana and Other Substance Use in 2006 and 2008**  
**Ashland Middle School - Grades 7 and 8**  
*MetroWest Adolescent Health Survey, 2008*



## PRESCRIPTION DRUG AND STEROID MISUSE

### CURRENT PATTERNS

- ◆ **Misuse of prescription drugs and steroids occurs infrequently in middle school.** 3% of students have misused prescription drugs in their lifetime, and 2% misused steroids. *This means using them without a doctor's prescription.*
- ◆ **While the prevalence of steroid use increases only slightly after middle school, prescription drug misuse increases substantially in the high school years.**

*Very few MW youth have misused prescription drugs (2%) or steroids (1%) in their lifetime.*

### TRENDS FROM 2006 TO 2008

- ◆ **Reports of lifetime misuse of prescription drugs and steroids are steady over the past two years.**

*Prescription drug and steroid misuse have remained steady in MW in the past two years.*

## AVAILABILITY OF SUBSTANCE ON SCHOOL PROPERTY

### CURRENT PATTERNS

- ◆ **A small number of youth have access to substances on school property.** 2% were offered, sold, or given tobacco or alcohol on school property in the past 12 months, and 3% were offered, sold, or given marijuana, pills, or other drugs during this time.
- ◆ **Males and females are equally likely to have access to illegal substances at school.** For example, 2% of males and 2% of females were offered, sold, or given tobacco or alcohol in the past year. This pattern is the same for marijuana, pills, and other drugs.
- ◆ **The availability of substances on school property remains similar from 7<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> grade.** Availability of tobacco and alcohol stays at 2% from 7<sup>th</sup> grade and 8<sup>th</sup> grade. For marijuana, pills, and other drugs, availability also remains steady at 3%, from 7<sup>th</sup> grade to 8<sup>th</sup> grade.

*In MW middle schools, availability of tobacco and alcohol on school property is the same as that of marijuana, pills, or other drugs on school property (both 4%).*

### TRENDS FROM 2006 TO 2008

- ◆ **The availability of substances on school property is similar over time.**

*The availability of substances on middle school property has not changed substantially in the region in the past two years.*

## VIOLENCE AND RELATED BEHAVIORS

### OVERALL PATTERNS

Violence, including physical fighting, bullying, weapon carrying, and other threats to personal and school safety, often increases during the middle school years. Bullying – defined as being repeatedly teased, threatened, hit, kicked, or excluded by another student or group of students – is the most common form of violence experienced by Ashland middle school youth. 45% of all students were bullied in the past 12 months, 38% were bullied on school property, and 16% were bullied electronically, defined as using the Internet, phone, or other electronic communications to bully, tease or threaten.

Along with bullying, physical fighting and weapons also pose a serious concern in middle school: 30% of youth have been in a fight in the past 12 months, and 11% of youth say they have carried a weapon, such as a gun, knife, or club, in the past 30 days. Slightly more 7<sup>th</sup> grade students than 8<sup>th</sup> grade students engage in these behaviors. Physical fighting is highest in middle school and early high school; in the MetroWest regional high school survey, reports of physical fighting decrease steadily after 9<sup>th</sup> grade.

Males are far more likely to engage in violence-related behaviors. Three times as many males as females report being in a physical fight in the past year, and males are four times as likely to report carrying a weapon in the past 30 days. Males are also more likely to self-report that they are bullying perpetrators (37% compared to 26%). However, females are more likely to report being victimized by bullying (48% vs. 42%), and especially electronic bullying (19% vs. 12%).

### OVERALL TRENDS FROM 2006 TO 2008

There are some indicators that bullying may be decreasing, particularly among females. Bullying victimization at school decreased from 44% in 2006 to 38% in 2008, while victimization in general decreased slightly from 48% to 45%. When looking at the genders separately, bullying victimization decreased for females (from 53% to 47%) while it remained similar among males at about 42-44%. Electronic bullying victimization may also be decreasing, from 19% to 16%.

Despite the apparent decrease in bullying, there are no changes in physical fighting or weapon carrying.

*Bullying is prevalent among middle school youth in MW: 49% were bullying victims and 43% were bullied on school property in the past 12 months. 16% of MW youth were victims of electronic bullying during this time.*

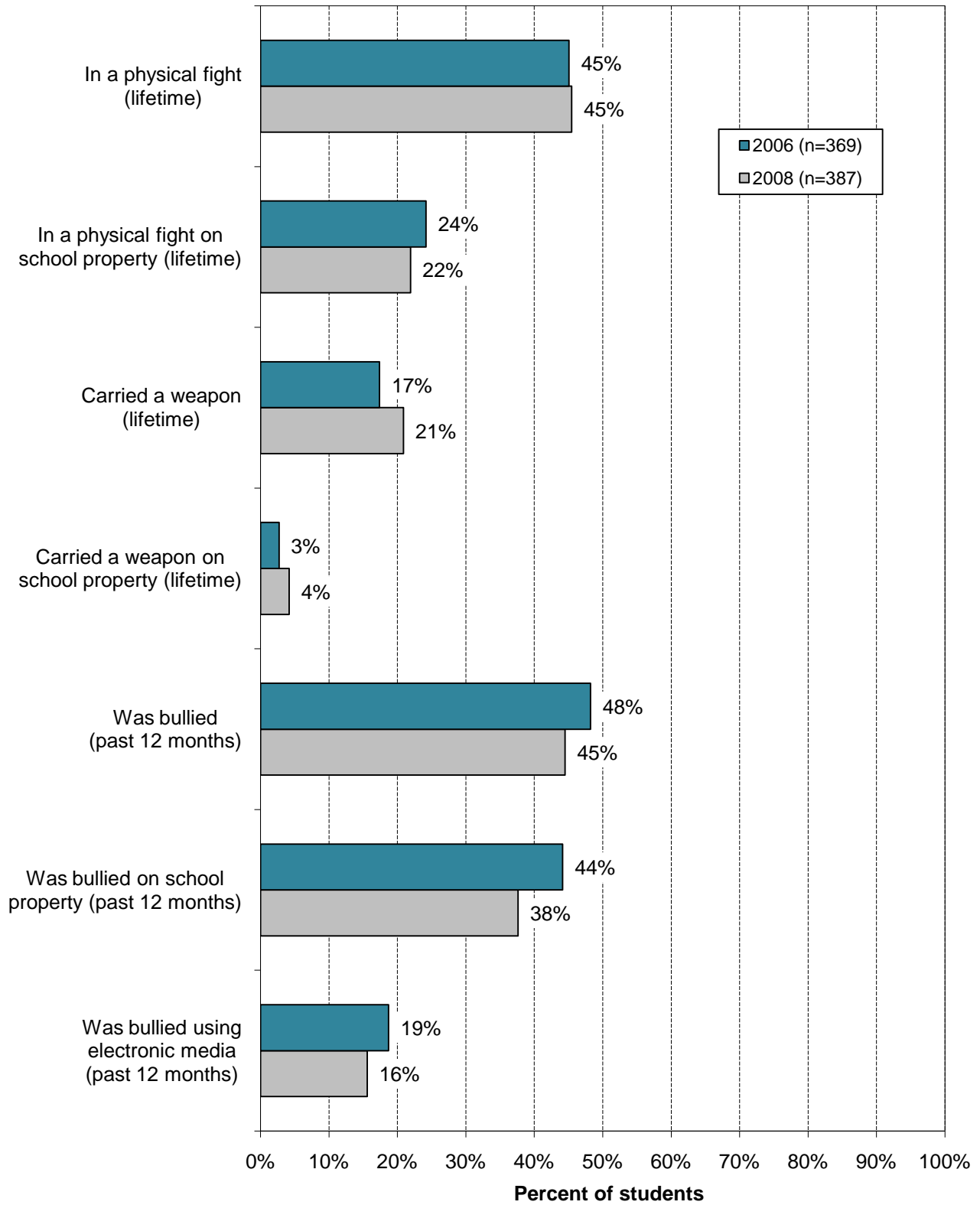
*Physical fighting is also common in middle school. One in four MW youth (26%) were in a physical fight in their lifetime, and 8% carried a weapon in the past 30 days.*

*Males are more likely than females to be in fights, to carry weapons, and to be perpetrators of bullying.*

*There are increases in reports of bullying in the region over the past two years, both in general and on school property. Electronic bullying has not changed in the region.*

*Physical fighting and weapon-carrying have remained steady in MetroWest.*

**Physical Fighting, Weapon Carrying, and Bullying in 2006 and 2008**  
**Ashland Middle School - Grades 7 and 8**  
*MetroWest Adolescent Health Survey, 2008*



## PERSONAL SAFETY AT SCHOOL

### CURRENT PATTERNS

- ◆ **Theft and damage of personal property at school are common occurrences.** 28% of students had their property (such as clothing or books) stolen or deliberately damaged at school in the past 12 months. More males report this (33%) than females (23%). There is no difference by grade.
- ◆ **Fears about safety at school impact attendance for a small group of youth.** 3% of students didn't attend school on at least one occasion in the past 30 days because they felt they would be unsafe at school or on the way to or from school.

*Most MW youth feel safe at school: Only 3% said they didn't attend school once or more in the past month due to safety concerns.*

*However, nearly a quarter (23%) had their property stolen or damaged at school in the past 12 months.*

### TRENDS FROM 2006 TO 2008

- ◆ **Property damage and theft at school has remained similar in Ashland,** even though regional data shows a general increase.
- ◆ **Absence from school due to safety concerns has not changed.**

*In the MW region, there was an increase in property damage/theft at school, from 19% to 23%. Absence from school due to safety concerns remained steady at 3%.*

## PHYSICAL FIGHTING

### CURRENT PATTERNS

- ◆ **Physical fighting is common among middle school students.** 45% of students were in a physical fight in their lifetime, and 30% were in a fight in the past 12 months.
- ◆ **A substantial amount of fighting occurs on school property.** 22% of youth were in a physical fight on school property in their lifetime, and 10% were in a fight at school in the past 12 months.
- ◆ **Fights can sometimes result in serious consequences.** 5% of youth have received medical treatment as a result of an injury suffered in a fight.
- ◆ **Males are far more likely than females to engage in physical fighting.** Substantially more males (44% vs. 14%) were in a physical fight in the past 12 months, and more males were in a fight on school property (17% vs. 3%).
- ◆ **Fighting is slightly higher among younger students.** 32% of 7<sup>th</sup> grade students and 28% of 8<sup>th</sup> grade students were in a fight in the past 12 months.

*Physical fighting among middle school youth is common, particularly among males. Nearly half of MW youth were in a physical fight in their lifetime (45%), and 26% were in a fight in the past 12 months (38% of males and 14% of females). 27% of males and 6% of females were in a fight on school property in the past 12 months.*

### TRENDS FROM 2006 TO 2008

- ◆ **Reports of physical fighting are similar.** At both time points, 45% of students were in a physical fight at least once in their lifetime, and about 22-24% were in a fight on school property at least once.

*In MetroWest, physical fighting has not changed in recent years: lifetime fighting has remained steady at 45%.*

## WEAPONS

### CURRENT PATTERNS

- ◆ **A small, but concerning, proportion of youth report they have carried a weapon.** 21% carried a weapon, such as a gun, knife, or club, in their lifetime, and 11% carried a weapon in the past 30 days.
- ◆ **A small number of youth (4%) have carried a weapon on school property in their lifetime.**
- ◆ **Males are far more likely to carry weapons than females.** 31% of males and 10% of females carried a weapon in their lifetime. 18% of males and 4% of females carried a weapon in the past 30 days.
- ◆ **Weapon-carrying decreases from 7<sup>th</sup> grade to 8<sup>th</sup> grade.** Lifetime weapon carrying decreases from 23% to 18%, and 30-day weapon carrying decreases from 15% to 7%.

*Weapon-carrying is a concern among middle school youth in MW, particularly among males. In MW, 16% of youth have carried a weapon in their lifetime, and 8% have done so in the past 30 days (13% of males and 2% of females).*

### TRENDS FROM 2006 TO 2008

- ◆ **Reports of weapon-carrying are similar.** For example, at the two time points, about 3-4% have carried a weapon on school property at least once in their lifetime.

*There have been no substantial changes in weapon-carrying in MW.*

## BULLYING

### CURRENT PATTERNS

- ◆ **Nearly half of all middle school youth have been victims of bullying.** 45% were bullied in the past 12 months, and 38% were bullied on school property. One in three youth (32%) report they have bullied others.
- ◆ **A smaller, but still considerable, proportion of youth are victims of electronic bullying.** 16% of youth were bullied electronically in the past 12 months. 9% were perpetrators of electronic bullying.
- ◆ **Females are somewhat more likely to report being a victim of bullying.** Overall, bullying victimization is higher among females (47%) than males (42%). There is a greater gender difference in electronic bullying victimization, which is reported by 19% of females and 12% of males.
- ◆ **Males are more likely to self-report they have been bullying perpetrators.** 37% of males and 26% of females said they bullied someone else in the past 12 months. However, females and males report more similar levels of electronic bullying perpetration (8% and 10% respectively).
- ◆ **Reports of bullying are similar in 7<sup>th</sup> grade (43%) and 8<sup>th</sup> grade (44%).**

*Bullying is the most common form of violence in MW. 49% of youth in the region have been bullied in the past 12 months (51% of females and 46% of males). During the same time, 16% of youth were bullied electronically (20% of females and 12% of males).*

### TRENDS FROM 2006 TO 2008

- ◆ **The overall prevalence of bullying may be decreasing, particularly among females.** Bullying victimization in the past 12 months decreased from 48% in 2006 to 45% in 2008. Looking at males and females separately, there was a notable decrease among females (from 53% to 47%) while males remained similar at about 42-44%. Bullying on school property decreased from 44% to 38%, with equal decreases among females and males.
- ◆ **Reports of electronic bullying may also have decreased,** from 19% to 16%. This is notable because it is consistent with the possible decrease in bullying overall. More data is necessary to determine if this constitutes a trend.

*Bullying victimization increased in MW, from 44% to 49%. Similarly, bullying on school property increased, from 39% to 43%. While bullying increased among both males and females, the increase was greater among females.*

*Despite media attention, student reports of electronic bullying did not change substantially in the region.*

## BEHAVIORS RELATED TO UNINTENTIONAL INJURY

### OVERALL PATTERNS

Although the vast majority of youth wear seatbelts regularly (91% wear seatbelts all or most of the time), many middle school youth fail to wear helmets when rollerblading, skateboarding, or bicycling, increasing their risk of unintentional injury. Over half of those who rollerblade or skateboard (47%) never or rarely wear a helmet, and 36% of students who ride a bicycle never or rarely wear a helmet. Males are more likely than females to skate without helmets, and all helmet use decreases from 7<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> grade. This is a concern, since rates continue to fall during high school.

Risk of unintentional injury also may increase when youth ride in cars driven by individuals who have been drinking alcohol. At least once in their lifetime, 15% of students were passengers in a car with a driver who had been drinking. *Note: the driver could have been a parent, other adult, or an individual under the age of 21.*

*The majority of MW youth wear seatbelts: only 4% never or rarely wear one. However, fewer youth wear helmets. 37% of MW youth never or rarely wear a helmet when riding a bicycle, and 51% never or rarely wear a helmet when rollerblading or skateboarding.*

*In MW, 21% of students rode in a car with a driver who had been drinking in their lifetime.*

### OVERALL TRENDS FROM 2006 TO 2008

Student reports of safety-related behaviors are similar at the two time points.

*Over the past two years, helmet use among youth who rollerblade or skateboard in MW decreased slightly in the region, while helmet use on bicycles and seatbelt use did not change.*

*Riding with a driver who had been drinking also did not change in the region.*



## SEATBELT AND HELMET USE

### CURRENT PATTERNS

- ◆ **Most students (91%) wear seatbelts most or all of the time.** Only 3% never or rarely wear a seatbelt when riding in a car driven by someone else.
- ◆ **Many students put themselves at risk of injury by not wearing helmets.** 36% of bicycle riders never or rarely wear a helmet. 47% of students who rollerblade or skateboard never or rarely wear a helmet.
- ◆ **Both males and females at risk of unintentional injury.** Slightly fewer males than females never or rarely wear helmets rollerblading or skateboarding (44% vs. 50%). However, males are more likely to never or rarely wear seatbelts (4% vs. 2%).
- ◆ **Helmet and seatbelt use decline as students get older.** 28% of 7<sup>th</sup> grade students and 43% of 8<sup>th</sup> grade students never or rarely wear helmets when bicycling. Lack of helmet use when rollerblading or skateboarding also increases from 7<sup>th</sup> grade (41%) to 8<sup>th</sup> grade (52%).

*89% of MW youth wear seatbelts all or most of the time when riding in cars.*

*Substantially fewer youth in MW wear helmets, and males are especially at risk of unintentional injury. MW males are more likely than females to never or rarely wear helmets when bicycling (42% vs. 32%) and rollerblading or skateboarding (59% vs. 44%).*

### TRENDS FROM 2006 TO 2008

- ◆ **Use of helmets and seatbelts is similar at the two time points.**

*In recent years, helmet use among MW youth who rollerblade or skateboard in MW decreased slightly: the proportion of youth who never or rarely wear a helmet increased from 48% to 51%. Helmet use among bicyclists did not change.*

*Seatbelt use in MW also remained steady.*



## DRIVING AFTER DRINKING

### CURRENT PATTERNS

- ◆ **At least once in their lifetime, 15% of youth rode in a car with a driver who had been drinking.** This is similar for males and females, and the driver could be a parent, other adult, or someone else.
- ◆ **As students get older, they are slightly more likely to report they rode in a car with a driver who had used alcohol.** 13% of 7<sup>th</sup> grade students and 17% of 8<sup>th</sup> grade students have ridden with a driver who had been drinking.

*In their lifetime, 21% of MW youth rode in a car with a driver who had been drinking. This increases from 7<sup>th</sup> grade (16%) to 8<sup>th</sup> grade (25%), but does not vary by gender in the region.*

### TRENDS FROM 2006 TO 2008

- ◆ **Riding with a driver who had been drinking is similar at the two time points,** with about 15-18% reporting this behavior.

*In MW, the proportion of students who have ever ridden in a car with a driver who had been drinking has not changed.*

# STRESS, MENTAL HEALTH, AND SUICIDE

## OVERALL PATTERNS

Mental health is a concern for a substantial proportion of middle school youth. Stress is common, with 12% reporting their life was “very” stressful in the past 30 days. A slightly higher proportion of youth (16%) experienced symptoms of depression in the past 12 months, defined as feeling sad or hopeless for two or more weeks in a row. 9% of students report that they have seriously considered suicide in their lifetime, and 3% say they have made a suicide attempt.

Consistent with gender differences in national data, females are more likely than males to experience stress, depressive symptoms, and suicidality. 7<sup>th</sup> grade students are also more likely to report that they have experienced these mental health issues in their lifetime, although prevalences increase again during the high school years.

## OVERALL TRENDS FROM 2006 TO 2008

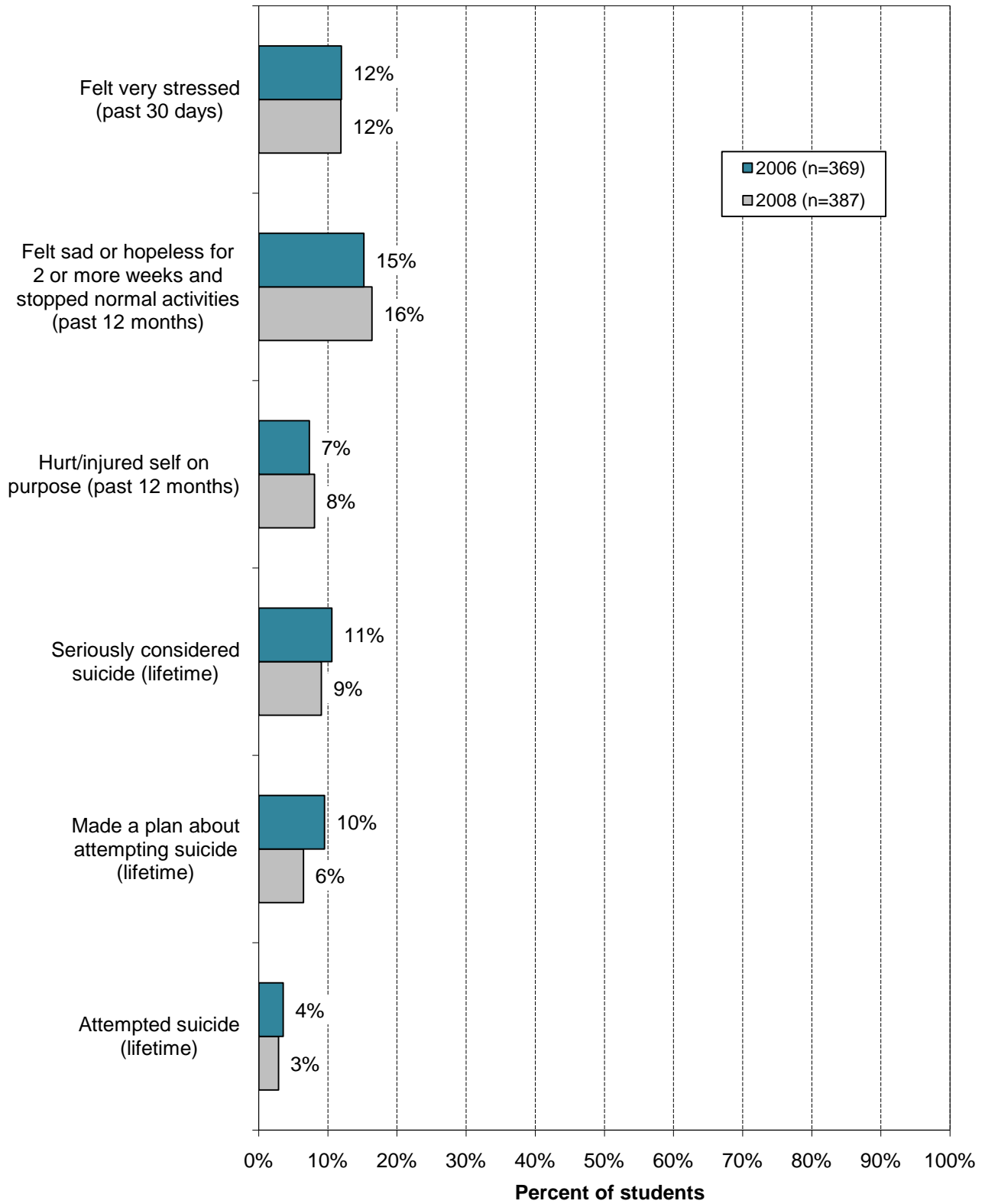
Similar proportions of students report stress, depressive symptoms, self-injury, and suicidality at both time points.

*Stress and poor mental health are a concern among middle school students in the region. In MW, 14% of youth reported that their life was very stressful in the past 30 days, 15% felt symptoms of depression in the past 12 months, and 8% hurt or injured themselves on purpose in the past 12 months.*

*In their lifetime, 11% of MW seriously considered suicide, 7% made a plan about committing suicide, and 3% actually attempted suicide.*

*In MW, there have not been any changes in stress, depression, self-injury, and suicidality.*

**Stress, Mental Health, and Suicide in 2006 and 2008**  
**Ashland Middle School - Grades 7 and 8**  
*MetroWest Adolescent Health Survey, 2008*



## STRESS

### CURRENT PATTERNS

- ◆ **Stress is common among middle school youth**, with 23% reporting that their life was “somewhat” stressful, and 12% reporting their life was “very” stressful in the past 30 days.
- ◆ **More females experience stress than males.** 14% of females and 10% of males said their life was “very” stressful.
- ◆ **Younger students are more likely to experience stress.** Reports of recent stress are lower in 7<sup>th</sup> grade (13%) than 8<sup>th</sup> grade (9%).

*14% of MW youth report that their life was very stressful in the past 30 days. This is higher among females than males (17% vs. 11%) and among 8<sup>th</sup> grade students than 7<sup>th</sup> grade students (16% vs. 11%).*

### TRENDS FROM 2006 TO 2008

- ◆ **About one in eight students report their lives are “very” stressful at both time points.**

*Reports of stress have not changed in MW in the past two years.*

## MENTAL HEALTH AND SUICIDE

### CURRENT PATTERNS

- ◆ **A substantial number of youth report depressive symptoms.** 16% of youth felt sad or hopeless almost every day for two or more weeks in the past 12 months.
- ◆ **Suicidal ideation is also prevalent.** 9% of students seriously considered suicide, and 6% made a plan about attempting suicide in their lifetime.
- ◆ **Many youth engage in self-injury.** 8% have deliberately injured themselves in the past 12 months. *This includes hurting or injuring themselves on purpose by cutting, burning, or bruising themselves.*
- ◆ **A concerning number of middle school youth (3%) have attempted suicide in their lifetime.**
- ◆ **Females are more likely to report depressive symptoms, self-injury, and suicidal ideation.** For example, more females than males report symptoms of depression (20% vs. 14%) and self-injury (12% vs. 4%) in the past 12 months. In their lifetime, more females seriously considered suicide (13% vs. 6%), although suicide attempts are similar (2% vs. 3%).
- ◆ **Depressive symptoms and self-injury are higher in 7<sup>th</sup> grade.** More 7<sup>th</sup> grade students (20%) than 8<sup>th</sup> grade students (12%) report depressive symptoms in the past 12 months. Similarly, self-injury is more common among 7<sup>th</sup> grade students (9%) than 8<sup>th</sup> grade students (5%). However, suicidality and suicide attempts are similar in 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade.

*In MW, females are more likely than males to report symptoms of depression in the past 12 months (18% vs. 13%). In their lifetime, females are more likely to consider suicide (13% vs. 9%) and to make an actual suicide attempt (4% vs. 2%).*

*While reports of depressive symptoms are similar for youth statewide and in the MW region, self-injury is substantially lower in MW (9% vs. 16% among 8<sup>th</sup> grade students). Comparison data is not available for suicidality and suicide attempts.*

### TRENDS FROM 2006 TO 2008

- ◆ **Reports of depressive symptoms, self-injury, and suicidality are similar in 2006 and 2008.** At the two time points, about one in six youth report having experienced depressive symptoms, one in ten have seriously considered suicide in their lifetime, and 3-4% have attempted suicide.

*There have been no notable changes in depressive symptoms, self-injury, and suicidality in the region.*

# WEIGHT, NUTRITION, AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

## OVERALL PATTERNS

Ashland youth are less likely to be overweight or obese than youth in Massachusetts. 16% are overweight, *defined as being in the 85<sup>th</sup> to 95<sup>th</sup> percentile for body mass index (BMI) by age and gender*, and 8% are obese, *defined as being in the 95<sup>th</sup> or above percentile*. BMIs are calculated from self-reported height and weight.

Males and females report relatively similar levels of overweight (16% vs. 17%) and slightly fewer females than males are obese (9% vs. 6%). Females are more likely to be trying to lose weight (43% vs. 30%). Additionally, more females than males have dieted or fasted in their lifetime to lose weight or keep from gaining weight.

Males are somewhat more likely to engage in physical activity: 85% of males, compared with 72% of females, exercised vigorously on 3 or more of the past 7 days.

## OVERALL TRENDS FROM 2006 TO 2008

Overall, there have not been any notable changes in weight, nutrition, and physical activity. There may have been a slight increase in consumption of fast food, from 24% to 32%, and a decrease in exercising to lose weight, from 61% to 56%. Other measures have remained steady in the past two years.

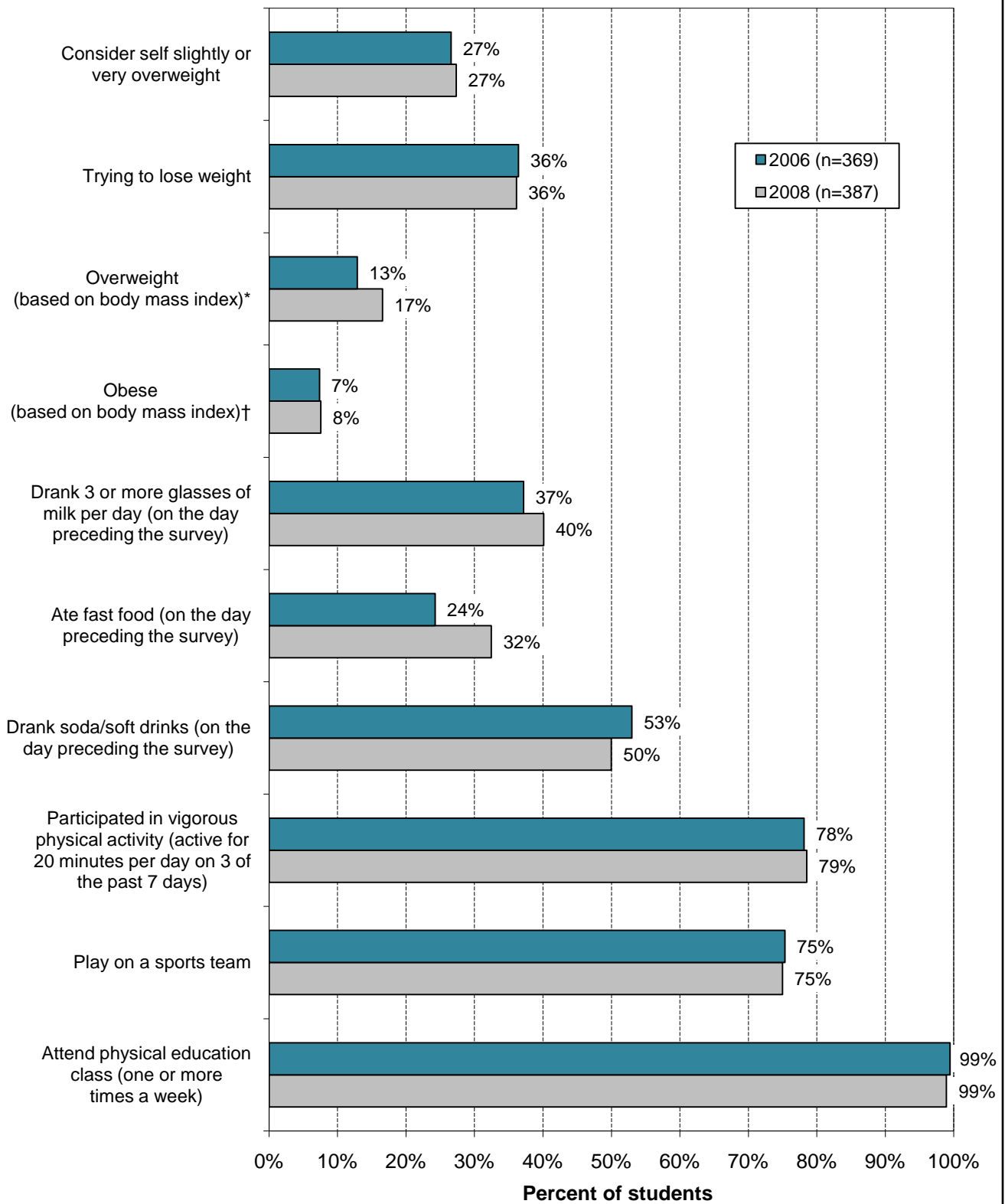
*In the MW region, 20% of students are overweight or obese. This is lower than in MA, where 28% of youth are classified this way based on BMI.*

*29% of MW youth ate fast food and 47% drank non-diet soda on the day before the survey.*

*79% of youth in the region engaged in vigorous physical activity on at least 3 of the past 7 days. 94% attended physical education class at least once in the past week.*

*Overweight/obesity, weight control, nutrition, and physical activity have remained steady in MW in the past two years.*

**Weight Perception, Body Weight, Nutrition, and Physical Activity in 2006 and 2008**  
**Ashland Middle School - Grades 7 and 8**  
*MetroWest Adolescent Health Survey, 2008*



\*Students who were ≥85th percentile but <95th percentile for body mass index by age and sex, based on reference data  
 †Students who were ≥95th percentile for body mass index by age and sex, based on reference data

## OVERWEIGHT, WEIGHT PERCEPTION, AND WEIGHT CONTROL

### CURRENT PATTERNS

- ◆ **One in five students (24%) are overweight or obese.** 16% are overweight (85<sup>th</sup> to 95<sup>th</sup> percentile BMI for age and sex), and 8% are obese (95<sup>th</sup> or higher percentile BMI). This information is based on self-reported height and weight data.
- ◆ **Similar proportions of males and females are overweight.** 16% of males and 17% of females are overweight; slightly more males (9%) than females (6%) are obese.
- ◆ **Females more frequently perceive themselves as overweight.** While 22% of females are classified as overweight or obese, 29% describe themselves as “slightly” or “very” overweight, and 43% are trying to lose weight. Among males, overweight/obesity (25%) is more similar to the proportion who perceive they are overweight (26%) and who are trying to lose weight (30%).
- ◆ **Many youth exercise or diet to control their weight.** 56% have exercised in their lifetime to lose weight or keep from gaining weight, and 35% have dieted in their lifetime.
- ◆ **Females are also more likely to engage in weight control behaviors.** In their lifetime, females are more likely to diet (41% vs. 29%), fast (9% vs. 6%), and take laxatives/vomit (4% vs. 2%).

*In MW, 13% of youth are overweight, and 7% are obese. Altogether, overweight/obesity is substantially lower in MW (20%) than the state (28%).*

*MW males are more likely than females to be overweight (14% vs. 12%) or obese (8% vs. 5%). Yet, MW females are more likely to be trying to lose weight (42% vs. 26%). They are also more likely to diet, fast, and vomit or take laxatives.*

### TRENDS FROM 2006 TO 2008

- ◆ **Overall, weight has been similar over the past two years.** There may have been a slight increase in overweight in the past two years, from 13% to 16%, but obesity remained steady at about 7-8%. Future data will determine whether this data is indicative of a trend.
- ◆ **Most weight control behaviors have remained steady.** However, there may have been a decrease in exercising to lose weight or keep from gaining weight, from 61% to 56%.

*Overweight and obesity have remained similar in MW in the past two years. There have also been no substantial changes in weight perception and weight control behaviors.*

### CURRENT PATTERNS

- ◆ **Most students consume some fruits and vegetables.** 82% ate fruit or drank 100-percent fruit juice and 83% ate vegetables the day prior to the survey.
- ◆ **Only 40% of students consume the recommended three glasses of milk per day,** though 85% consume dairy products one or more times.
- ◆ **A substantial number of youth report drinking non-diet soda and eating fast food.** 50% drank non-diet soda and 32% consumed fast food on the day prior to the survey.
- ◆ **Males are more likely to consume non-diet soda.** More males than females drank non-diet soda (54% vs. 46%) on the day prior to the survey
- ◆ **Most consumption patterns are similar in 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades.**

*A majority of MW youth consumed fruit or fruit juice on the day before the survey (82%), and 80% consumed vegetables or green salad.*

*However, 29% ate fast food, and 47% drank non-diet soda the day before.*

### TRENDS FROM 2006 TO 2008

- ◆ **Overall, nutrition patterns remained steady at the two time points.** However, fast food consumption may have increased, from 24% to 32%.

*Nutrition patterns have not changed in the region in the past two years.*

## PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

### CURRENT PATTERNS

- ◆ **Most youth exercise vigorously at least three days per week.** 79% participated in vigorous activity for at least 20 minutes that made them sweat or breathe hard (such as basketball, soccer, running, swimming laps, fast bicycling, fast dancing, or similar aerobic activity) on three or more days in the past week.
- ◆ **A majority of students (75%) play on a sports team, and nearly all (99%) participate in physical education (PE) class at least once a week.**
- ◆ **Males are more likely to be physically active.** More males than females (85% vs. 72%) participated in vigorous physical activity on three days in the past week, and males are also more likely to play a team sport (79% vs. 71%). Participation in PE class is similar for males and females.
- ◆ **Physical activity is similar in 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade.**

*79% of MW youth participate in vigorous physical activity on 3 or more days per week (83% of males and 75% of females). 73% play a team sport (76% of males and 70% of females).*

*94% of MW youth attended physical education class at least once in the past week.*

### TRENDS FROM 2006 TO 2008

- ◆ **Participation in physical activity, sports teams, and PE class is similar at the two time points.** For example, the proportion of students who participate in vigorous activity at least three days a week is steady at 78-79%.

*Reports of physical activity and PE participation have not changed in the past two years.*

# SCHOOL ATTACHMENT AND ADULT SUPPORT

## OVERALL PATTERNS

Protective factors promote resiliency and healthy behaviors. Findings show that a majority of youth have positive school attachments, shown by their agreement with statements such as: “I feel like I am a part of this school” (76% agreement) and “I feel safe in this school” (77% agreement). Two out of three students (67%) report they have at least one teacher or other adult at school to talk to if they have a problem.

Outside of school, even more youth (90%) have an adult they can talk to about things that are important. Yet despite these high numbers, there is a small minority of students (7%) who do not have a supportive adult either at school or home. Analyses show that these individuals are far more likely to engage in multiple forms of risk behaviors, including substance use, violence, and suicide-related thoughts and behavior.

## OVERALL TRENDS FROM 2006 TO 2008

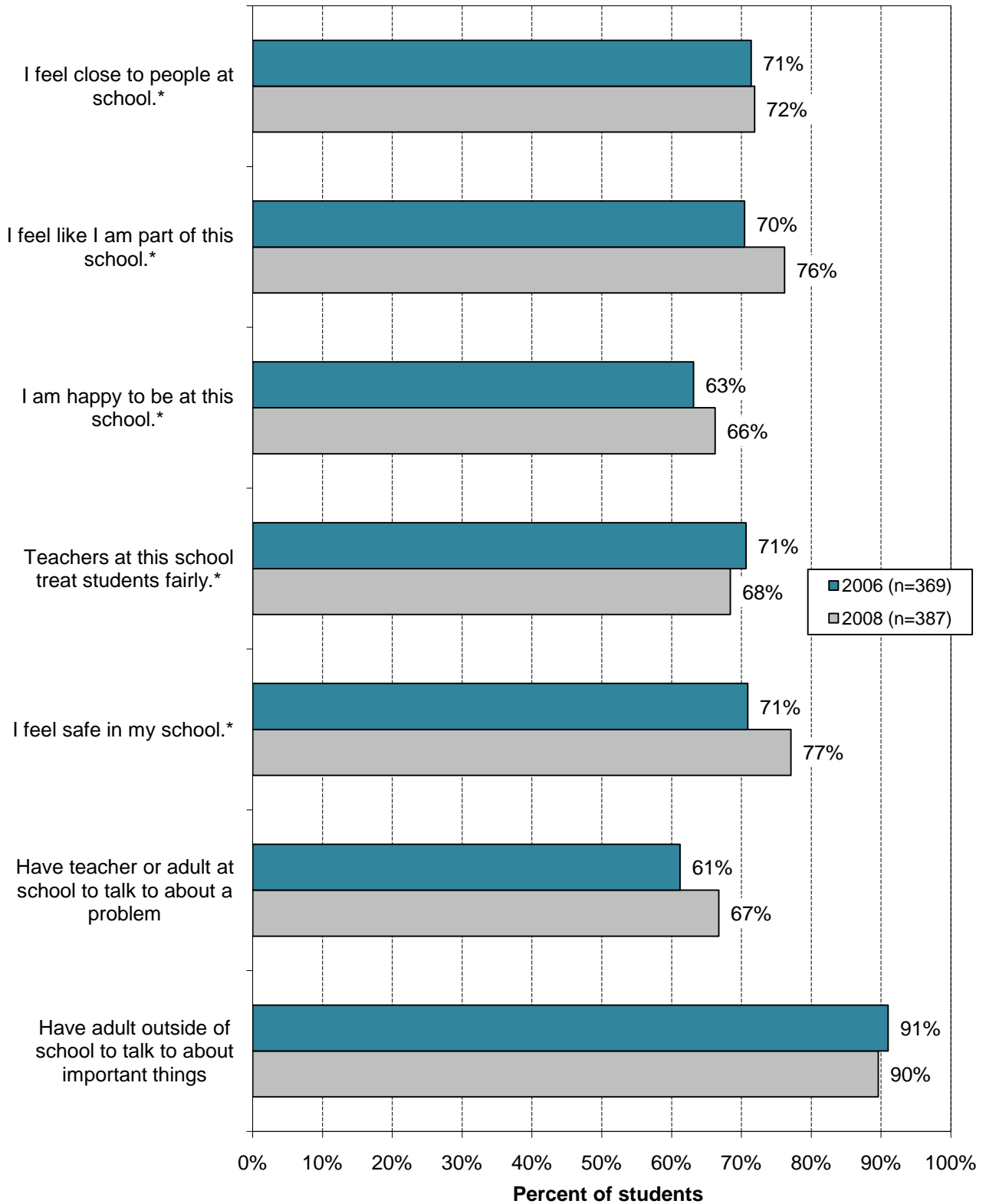
Overall school attachment and adult support outside of school are similar at both time points. There has been a slight increase in adult support at school, from 61% to 67%.

*Research literature shows that school attachment is associated with lower levels of deviant behavior, including less substance use, violence, and delinquency.<sup>5,6,7</sup> A majority of MW youth have positive school attachment. For example, 80% of MW youth feel safe in their schools, and 77% feel close to people at school.*

*Similarly, having a supportive adult is associated with fewer risks including less suicidality<sup>8</sup>, risky sexual activity<sup>9</sup> and substance use.<sup>10</sup> 61% of MW youth have an adult at school to talk to if they have a problem. 89% have at least one adult outside of school to talk to.*

*In MW, school attachment and adult support have not changed in recent years.*

**School Attachment and Adult Support in 2006 and 2008**  
**Ashland Middle School - Grades 7 and 8**  
*MetroWest Adolescent Health Survey, 2008*



\*Percent of students that agree or strongly agree with the statement

## SCHOOL ATTACHMENT

### CURRENT PATTERNS

- ◆ **The majority of middle school students feel positively connected with their schools, as measured by agreement with the following statements regarding school attachment:**
  - ◆ 77% feel safe in their school.
  - ◆ 72% feel close to people at school.
  - ◆ 76% feel like they are part of their school.
  - ◆ 66% are happy to be at their school.
  - ◆ 68% feel that teachers at their school treat students fairly.
- ◆ **There are no notable gender differences in overall school attachment.** This is based on a five-item school attachment scale combining responses to the statements above.
- ◆ **Overall school attachment increases as students get older.** For example, from 7<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> grade, there are slight increases in the proportion of youth who agree with the following statements: “I am happy to be at this school” (from 65% to 69%), “I feel close to people at my school” (from 71% to 75%), and “I feel safe in my school” (from 73% to 83%).

*School attachment in the MW region is similar among males and females, and decreases slightly from 7<sup>th</sup> grade to 8<sup>th</sup> grade.*

### TRENDS FROM 2006 TO 2008

- ◆ **Overall school attachment, as measured by the five-item scale, is similar in 2006 and 2008.** There may have been increases in some individual aspects of school attachment, such as “I feel like I am part of this school” (from 70% to 76%) and “I feel safe at my school” (from 71% to 77%).

*Overall school attachment has not changed in MW in recent years.*

## ADULT SUPPORT

### CURRENT PATTERNS

- ◆ **A majority of students have supportive adults in their lives.** 67% have at least one teacher or other adult at school to talk to if they have a problem, and even more (90%) have at least one adult outside of school they can talk to about things that are important to them.
- ◆ **Most students have a parent or other family member they can talk to.** 57% of youth have a parent or family member they can talk to, and 30% have adults both in and outside of their family that they can talk to.
- ◆ **Reports of adult support are slightly higher among females than males.** 69% of females and 65% of males have a supportive adult at school, and 92% of females and 88% of males have a supportive adult at home.
- ◆ **Adult support is high in both 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades, but slightly higher in 8<sup>th</sup> grade.** The proportion of youth with a supportive adult outside of school is 89% in 7<sup>th</sup> grade and 92% in 8<sup>th</sup> grade. 70% of 8<sup>th</sup> grade students have a supportive adult at school, compared with 64% in 7<sup>th</sup> grade.
- ◆ **A small minority of students have no supportive adults in their lives.** 7% of youth have neither an adult at school nor outside of school that they can talk to. These individuals are at far greater risk of engaging in many forms of risk behaviors.

*61% of MW youth have a supportive adult at school (63% of females and 59% of males). 89% of youth have at least one supportive adult outside of school (90% of females and 87% of males).*

### TRENDS FROM 2006 TO 2008

- ◆ **Adult support both outside of school is steady,** about 90%.
- ◆ **Adult support at school may have increased,** from 61% to 67%.

*Adult support has not changed in the region in the past two years.*

## CONCLUSIONS

The MWAHS initiative provides a valuable look into the risk and health behaviors of youth across MetroWest, and the 2008 data has provided a first glimpse at trends in risk behaviors in the region. While most behaviors in Ashland have remained steady since 2006, bullying appears to have decreased, despite increases at the regional level. There may also be a decrease in lifetime cigarette smoking. Other topic areas—alcohol and other substance use, fighting and weapon-carrying, unintentional injury, and physical activity—showed minimal or no change over time.

Initiation of substance use occurs in middle school for a notable proportion of youth, with alcohol being the most commonly used substance. While some youth may be experimenting infrequently, a small number of youth are beginning to drink more often. Use of tobacco and inhalants are also reported by a small proportion of students in middle school, and lifetime use of these two substances is similar. While marijuana use is less common in middle school, it becomes the second most commonly used substance in high school, after alcohol.

Behaviors related to violence, such as bullying, physical fighting, and weapon-carrying are common throughout middle school. The decrease in bullying from 2006 to 2008 in Ashland is especially notable because bullying has increased in the region. Yet, physical fighting, weapon-carrying, and related threats have remained steady in the past two years.

Data from future administrations of the MWAHS will allow us to further explore these areas, and additional patterns will likely emerge as we are able to examine the data over a longer period of time.

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