



GRAND TRAVERSE REGIONAL
community foundation

Youth Wellness Initiative

Phase 1 (of 2) Final Report



This project was funded by a grant to the Grand Traverse Regional Community Foundation from the Michigan Health Endowment Fund

Key Takeaways



Following are key research findings that informed student recommendations:

1. High school students in northwest lower Michigan are experiencing significant mental wellness challenges today including anxiety and depression.
2. Many students, especially those experiencing anxiety and depression, do not have anyone they would feel comfortable talking to if they were feeling sad, anxious or hopeless.
3. Because mental health issues and ways of addressing them are not “normalized,” many students do not know how to address their mental health and are reluctant to seek help when they need it.
4. Students would feel more comfortable talking to friends and family, rather than teachers and coaches, if they were feeling sad, anxious or hopeless.
5. Time spent outside in nature helps the vast majority of students to de-stress.
6. Students in large numbers would use chill out rooms/spaces, opportunities to learn techniques to center and de-stress, more opportunities to talk to counselors or therapists, a school buddy system and other approaches if they were stressed out, anxious or down.



Summary of Recommendations

Eleven recommendations were developed by YWI students in response to research findings. See the end of this report for full recommendations. Recommendations focused on three main categories:

- **Mental Health Education**

- School districts should begin mental health education in elementary and middleschools; schools should invite therapists or counselors to teach students specific emotional regulation and organization techniques.

- **Facilitating Interactions**

- Schools should have counselors or therapists come into classrooms; counselors and teachers should make time to connect 1-on-1 with students and have the training to help them with mental health issues; schools should consider school “buddy systems” to connect students

- **Use Safe Spaces and Nature to Alleviate Stress**

- Schools should provide quiet “chill spaces” where students can decompress: teachers should incorporate the outdoors and possibly field trips as much as they can into course curricula.

YWI Project Overview



YWI By the Numbers



- **Student Researchers:**
 - **14** high school students
 - **5** counties of Northern Michigan
- **Survey Respondents:**
 - **530** students
 - **20** different 5-county regional high schools
- **Recommendations:**
 - **11** recommendations for schools, policymakers and community leaders

Thank you! To all of the students who led this work and participated in the survey. To the community partners (LIFT, The Rock, Grow Benzie, and the Youth Advisory Council) who helped us find such amazing student leaders and otherwise supported the project. To the teachers and school administrators who helped promote the survey. To the Michigan Health Endowment Fund who provided the grant to make all of this work possible. We appreciate you all!



YWI Research Process



- **Stage 1:**
 - Learn survey research fundamentals
 - Brainstorm research topics
- **Stage 2:**
 - Brainstorm, revise, refine survey questions
 - Disseminate survey to community
- **Stage 3:**
 - Review and interpret survey findings
 - Brainstorm, revise, refine recommendations



Project Timeline



FEBRUARY/MARCH, 2023

FOUNDATIONS AND RESEARCH DESIGN

Gain research skills and collectively design survey

- Recruit high school student participants to lead this work while receiving a regular stipend for their substantial commitment of time
- Review research techniques, pros/cons
- Develop research questions (what we want to learn)
- Develop survey questions
- Develop, pre-test and finalize an online survey

Outputs:

- Final programmed survey

APRIL/MAY, 2023

DATA COLLECTION, ANALYSIS & REPORTING

Field a survey, interpret results and develop recommendations

- Gather insight from high school students across Antrim, Benzie, Grand Traverse, Kalkaska and Leelanau Counties
- Interpret findings and develop recommendations
- Develop a presentation with findings and recommendations

Outputs:

- (April/May) Present to Community Foundation Board of Directors
- (June-Aug) Disseminate to Michigan Health Endowment Foundation program staff and broad list of media, community leaders, policymakers and other stakeholders

PHASE 2

SHARE INSIGHTS AND IMPLICATIONS

Tell the story of youth mental health to raise awareness and action

- Work with a journalist from Interlochen Public Radio to develop audio stories featuring key findings and recommendations
- Share stories with the community to build awareness and spur action

Outputs

- Audio stories



YWI Study Results



Research Respondents

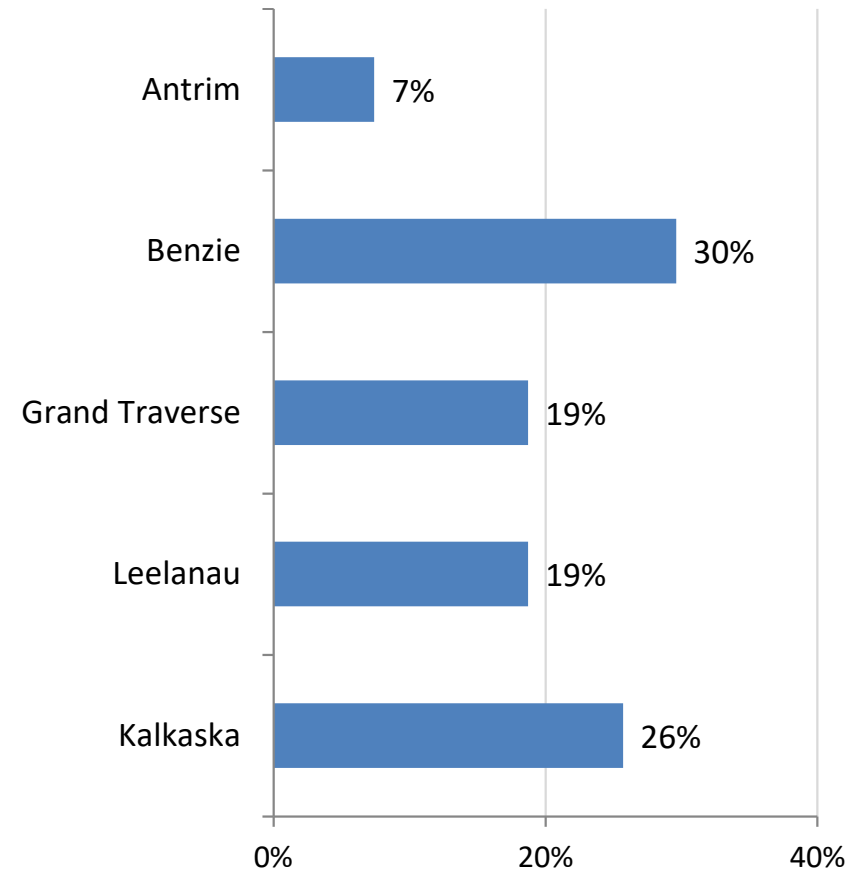


530 respondents from 20 regional high schools participated in the study

Participating Schools

School	#	School	#
Frankfort	155	Elk Rapids	3
Kalkaska	133	Benzie Central	2
Suttons Bay	64	Mancelona	2
TC Central	59	TC High	2
Ellsworth	33	Buckley	1
TC West	29	Central Lake	1
Northport	13	Forest Area	1
Glen Lake	11	Interlochen AA	1
Leland	11	Kingsley	1
TC St. Francis	6	TC Greenspire	1

Totals By County

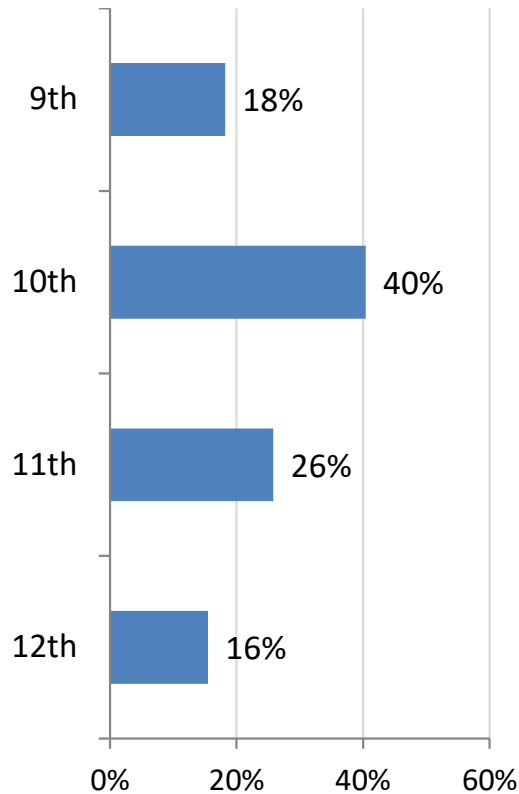


Respondent Demographics



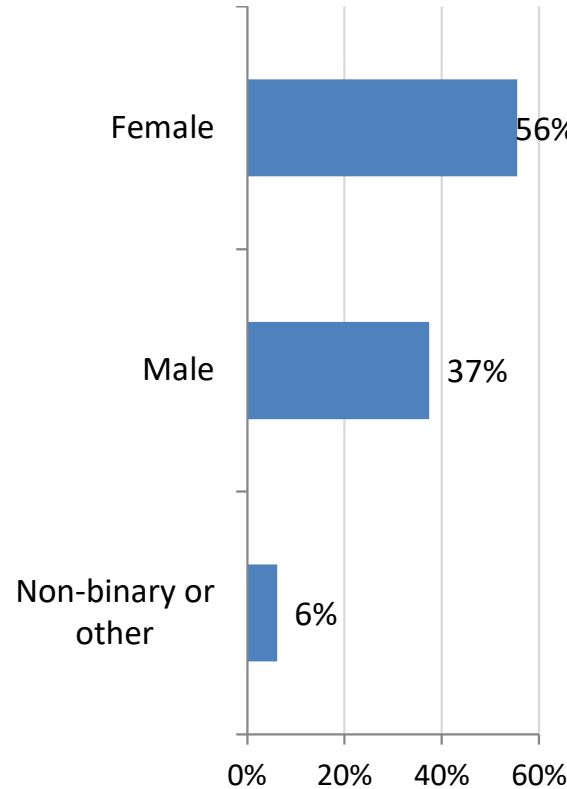
The survey results include voices and opinions from a wide variety of students

Grade



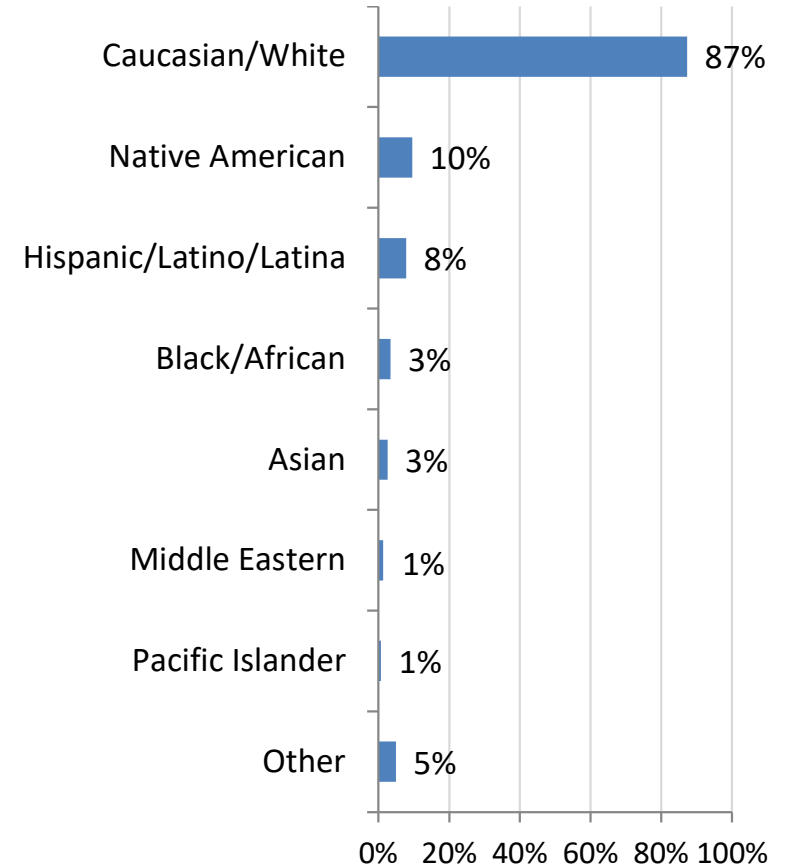
Question: What grade are you currently in?

Gender Identity



Question: How do you identify your gender?

Ethnic/Racial Identity (Select All That Apply)



Question: How do you identify your ethnicity? Please select all that apply.

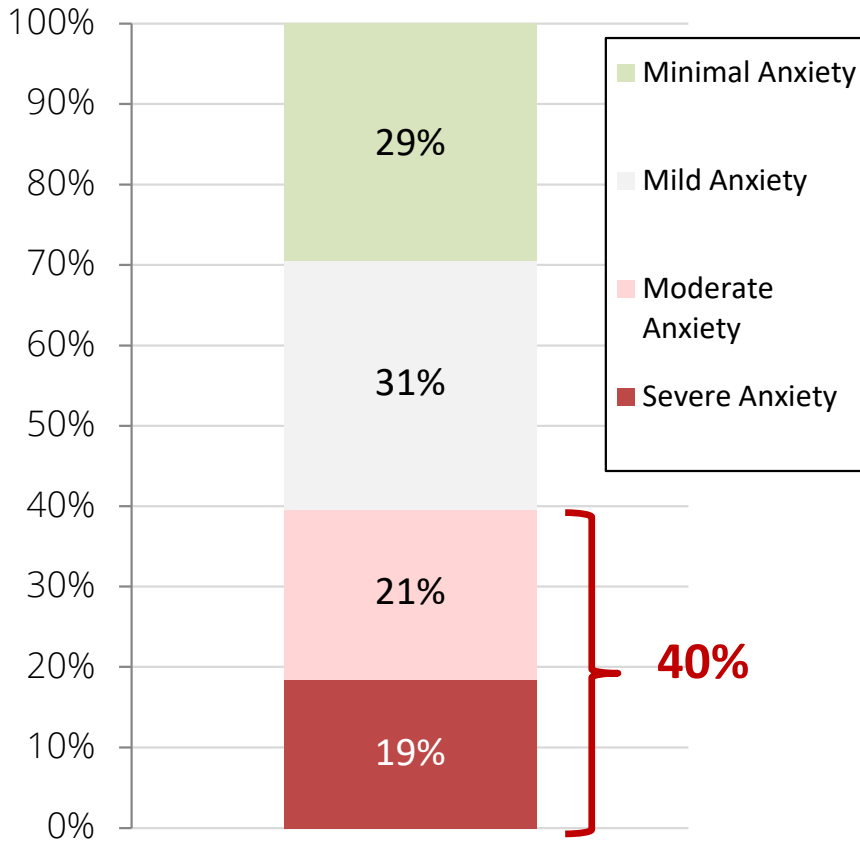


Anxiety and Depression

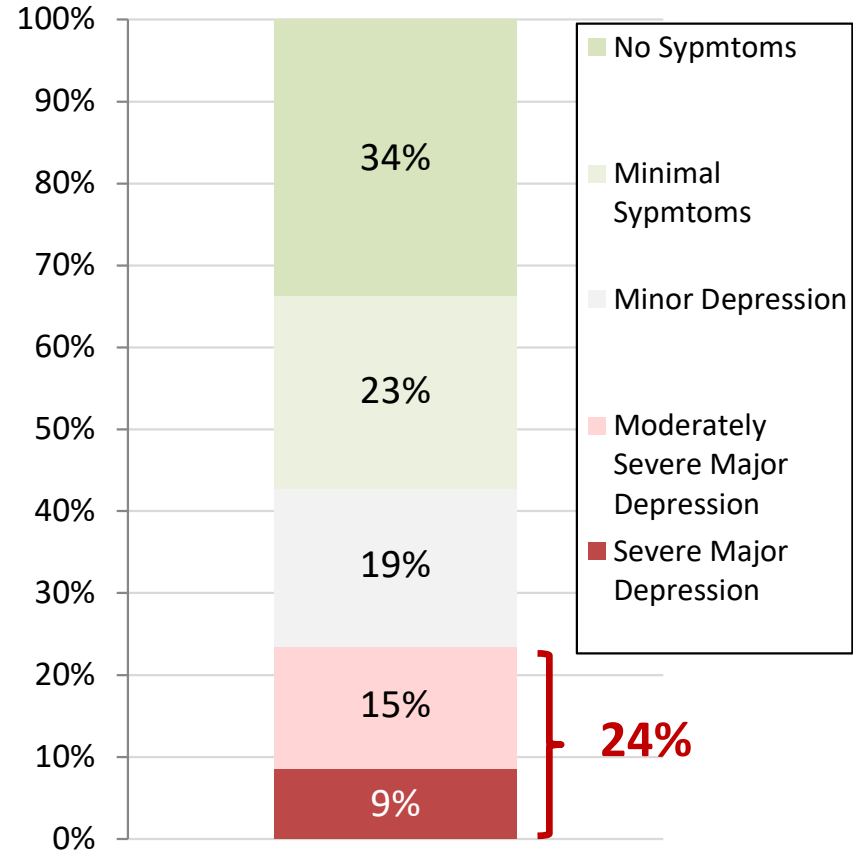


Today, 40% of these high school students are experiencing moderate or severe anxiety and 24% are experiencing moderate or severe major depression

Anxiety (GAD7) Ratings*



Depression (PHQ9) Ratings**



Question: Over the last 2 weeks, how often have you experienced the following?

* The GAD-7 (General Anxiety Disorder-7) a seven-item diagnostic tool validated in both the primary care setting and the general population to assess anxiety. ** The PHQ9 (Patient Health Questionnaire) is a nine-question tool similarly used to assess depression. In this case the students who led the research design added a 10th questions, but the scores are normalized to compare to outside benchmarks.



Anxiety in Detail



Large numbers of regional high school students are experiencing one or more dimensions of anxiety over half the time

GAD7* (Generalized Anxiety Disorder) Scores – All Respondents: “Over the last 2 weeks, how often have you been bothered by the following problems?”

	Not At All	Several Days	Over Half the Days	Nearly Every Day
Becoming easily annoyed or irritable	20%	34%	25%	22%
Worrying too much about different things	22%	30%	25%	23%
Feeling nervous, anxious or on edge	23%	37%	21%	20%
Trouble relaxing	35%	34%	18%	13%
Not being able to stop or control worrying	36%	32%	18%	16%
Being so restless it’s hard to sit still	37%	31%	17%	15%
Feeling afraid as if something awful might happen	46%	30%	13%	12%

* The GAD-7 (General Anxiety Disorder-7) a seven-item diagnostic tool validated in both the primary care setting and the general population to assess anxiety.



Depression in Detail



Large numbers of these high school students regularly experience one or more dimensions of depression, and more than a quarter have thoughts of self harm

PHQ9* (Patient Health Questionnaire) Depression Scores – All Respondents: “Over the last 2 weeks, how often have you been bothered by the following problems?”

	Not At All	Several Days	Over Half the Days	Nearly Every Day
Feeling tired or having little energy	18%	37%	23%	22%
Trouble falling asleep or staying asleep or sleeping too much	33%	27%	18%	22%
Feeling bad about yourself - or that you are a failure or have let yourself or your family down	41%	27%	18%	15%
Trouble concentrating on things, such as reading the newspaper or watching television	41%	28%	17%	14%
Poor appetite or overeating	41%	25%	17%	17%
Little pleasure or interest in doing things	42%	33%	15%	10%
Feeling down, depressed or hopeless	44%	30%	12%	13%
Moving or speaking so slowly that other people have noticed Or, the opposite - being so fidgety or restless that you have been moving around a lot more than usual	59%	22%	10%	9%
Feeling like you wished you weren't here anymore**	68%	18%	8%	7%
Thoughts that you would be better off dead or of hurting yourself in some way***	74%	15%	6%	5%

The PHQ9 (Patient Health Questionnaire) is a nine-question tool used to assess depression. ** In response to pretest feedback an additional depression question was asked. ***The overall PHQ rating was normalized by assigning 0.5 of the score from each of the questions on the last two lines of the table on this slide.

2023 Grand Traverse Regional Community Foundation, Youth Wellness Initiative Survey: 530 Respondents

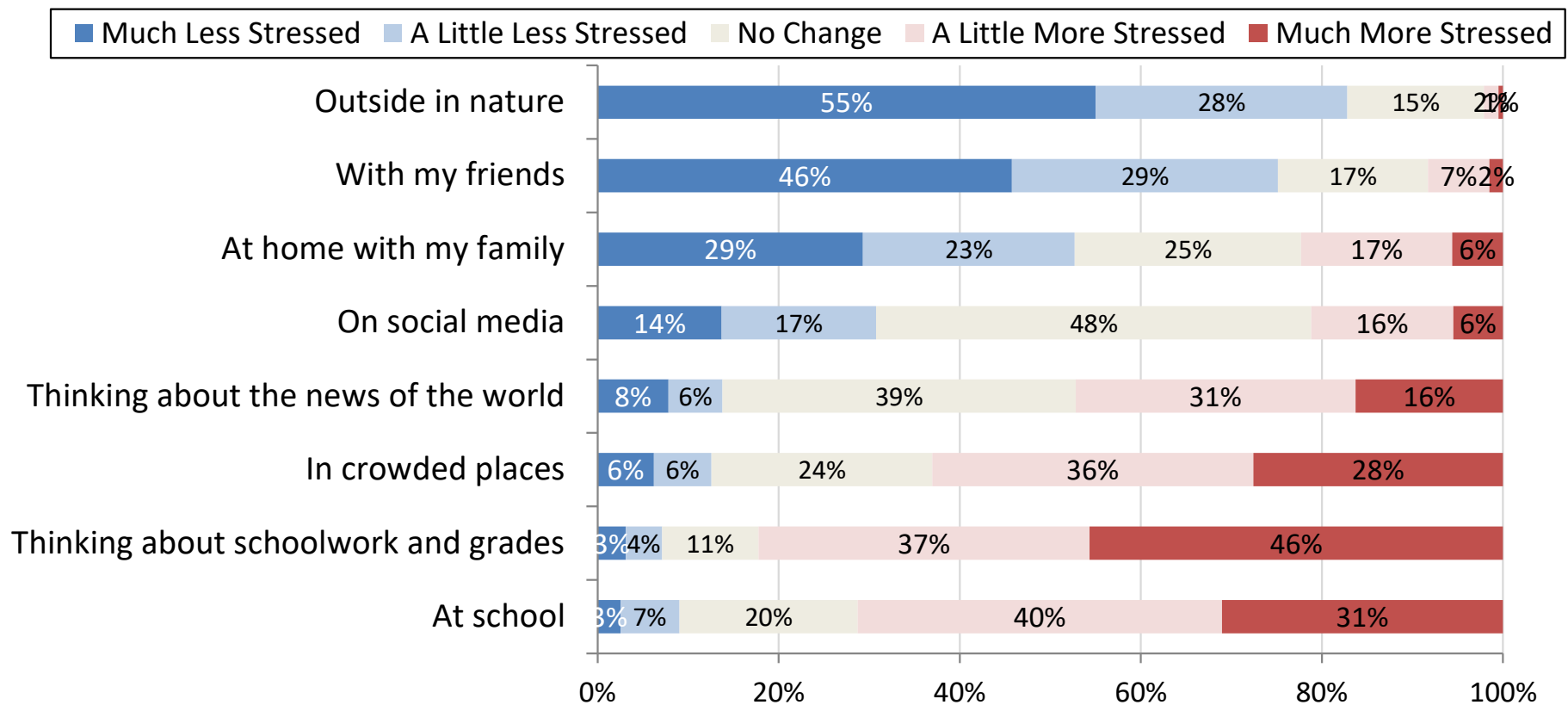


Stressors and De-Stressors



School, schoolwork/grades and crowds are stressful for most. Nature, friends and family tend to alleviate stress.

Situations That Generally Make You More or Less Stressed



Question: Do these situations generally make you feel more or less stressed? If any of these don't apply, answer "no change."

2023 Grand Traverse Regional Community Foundation, Youth Wellness Initiative Survey: 530 Respondents

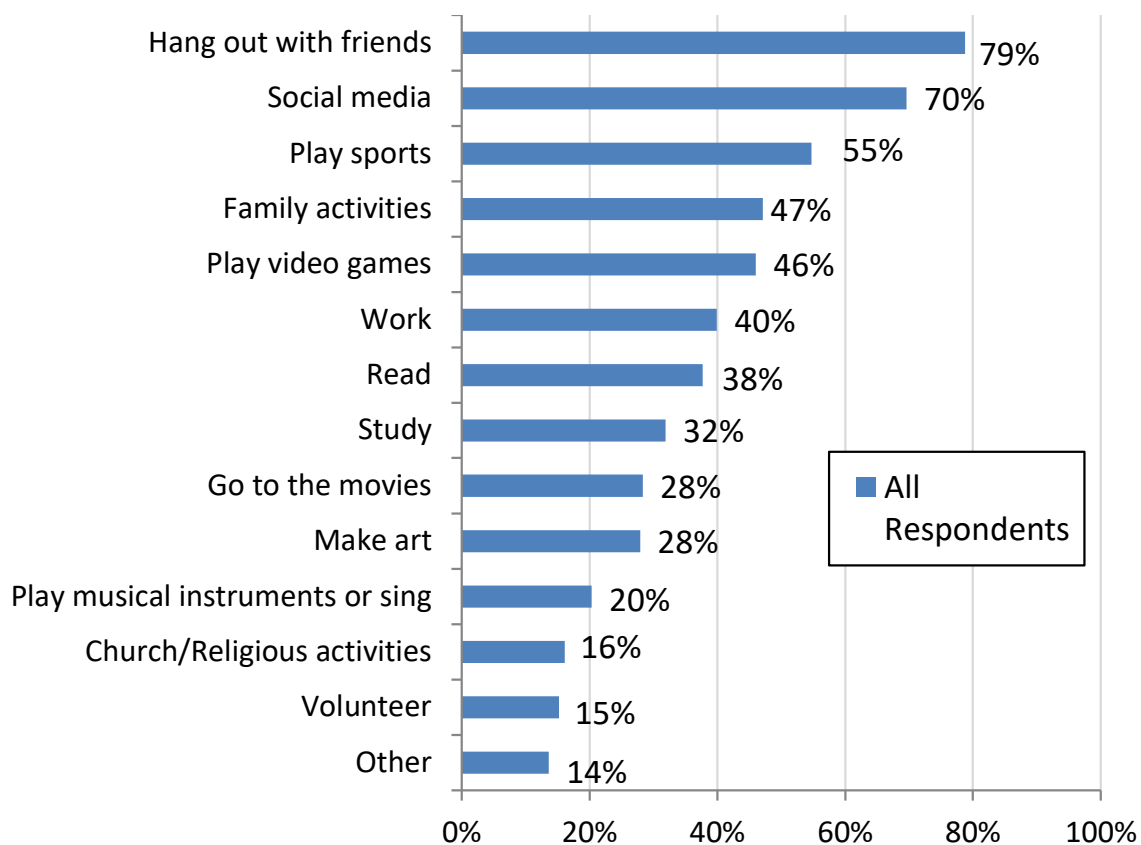


Activities (all respondents)



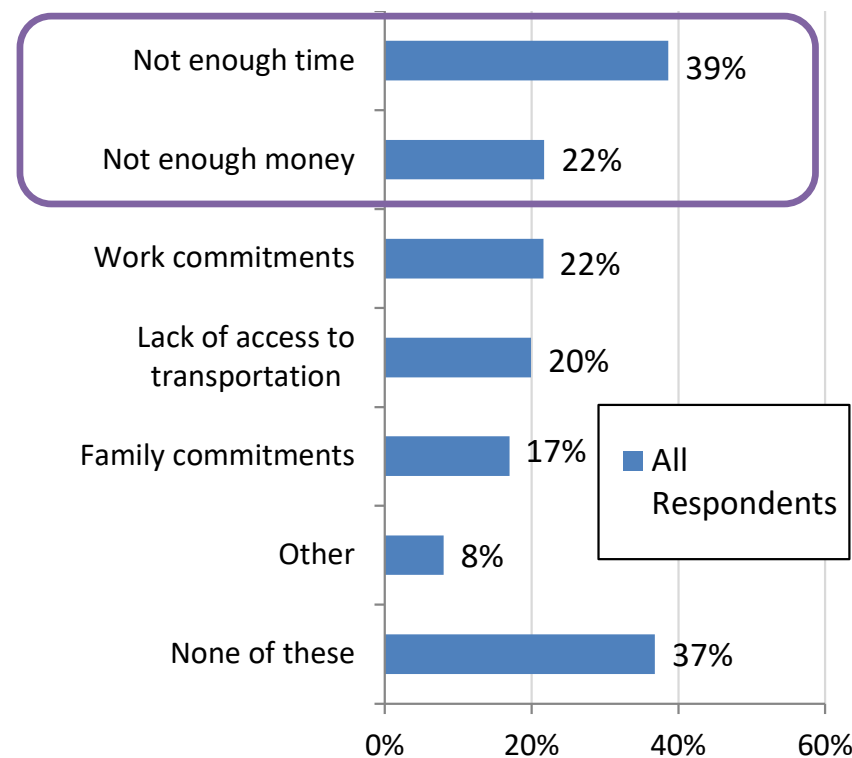
Though most students participate in one or more activities that may be affirming, many experience barriers of not enough time and not enough money

Activities – All Respondents (Select All That Apply)



Question: What do you currently do during your free time? Please select all that apply

Barriers to Participation In After School and Weekend Activities – All Respondents (Select All That Apply)



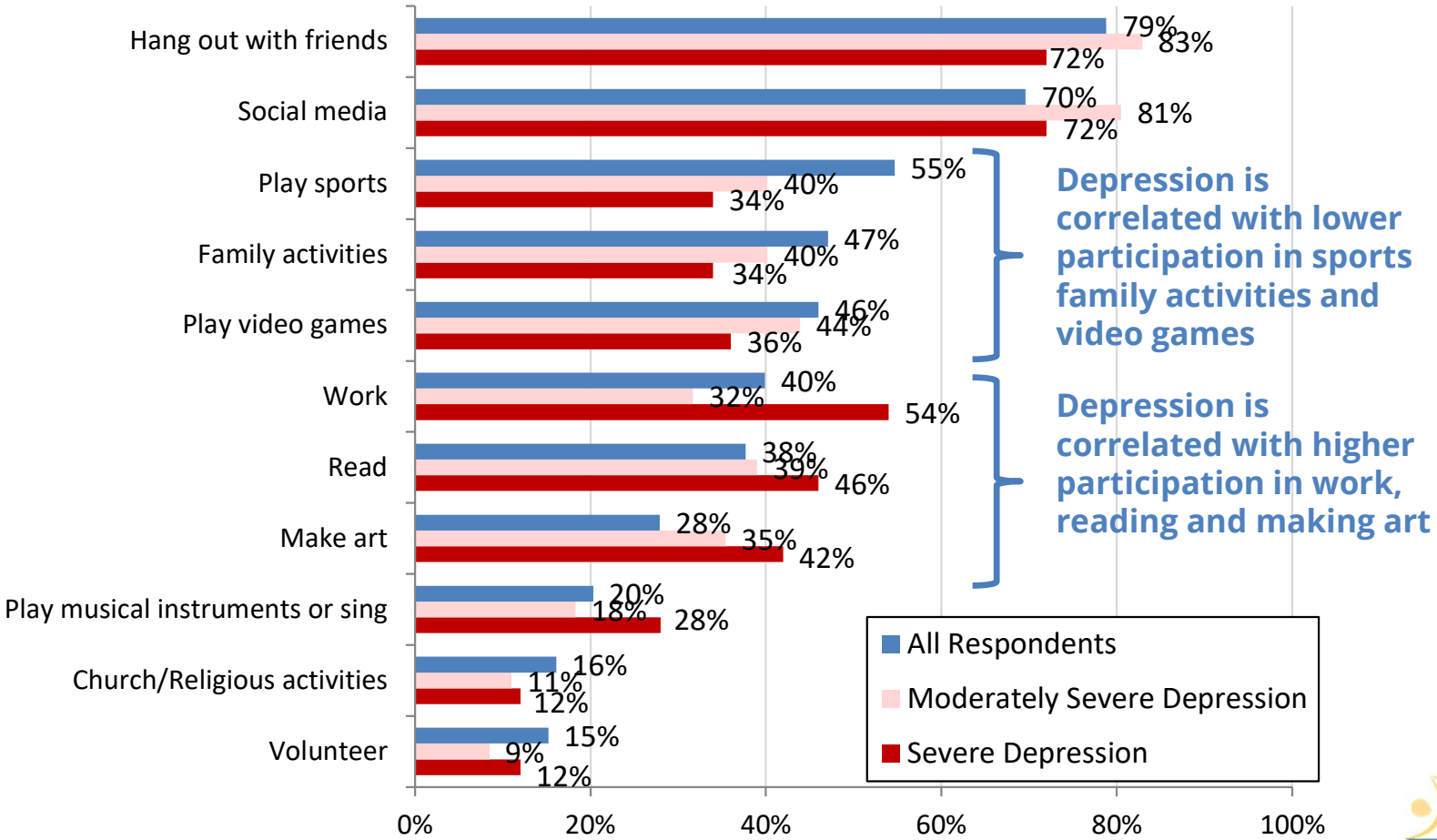
Question: Do any of the following keep you from taking part in after school or weekend activities? Please select all that apply



Activities (comparisons)

Correlation is not causation, but depression among these students is correlated with participation in some key activities

Activities – All Respondents Compared to Those With Moderately Severe and Severe Depression
 (select response categories)



Question: What do you currently do during your free time? Please select all that apply



Comfortable Being Yourself



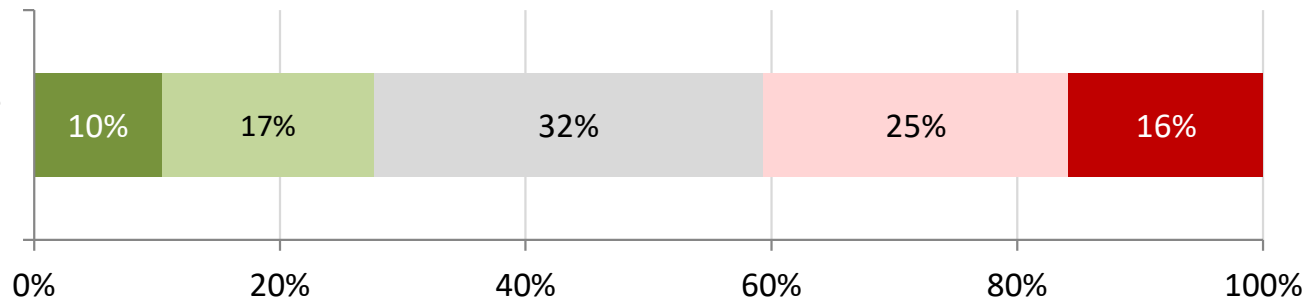
Many of these students are not comfortable being themselves and feel out of place with people they know

Are These Statements Accurate? – All Respondents

← “BETTER” SCORE

■ Extremely Accurate ■ Very Accurate ■ Somewhat Accurate ■ Not Very Accurate ■ Not At All Accurate

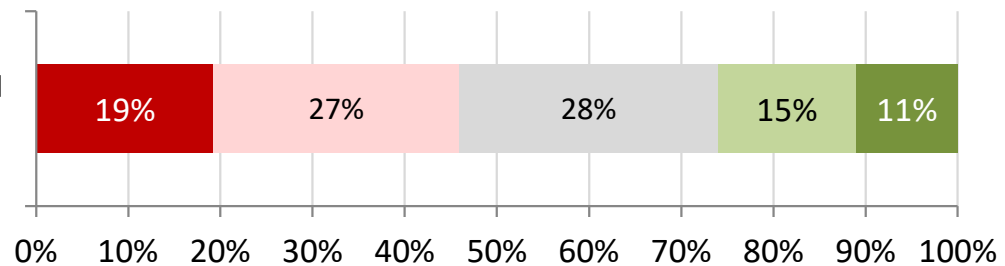
I am comfortable enough to “be myself” at school



“BETTER” SCORE →

■ Extremely Accurate ■ Very Accurate ■ Somewhat Accurate ■ Not Very Accurate ■ Not At All Accurate

I often feel out of place in groups of friends or people I know



Question: Are these statements accurate? Please use a 1 to 5 scale where 1 indicates “not at all” and 5 indicates “extremely”

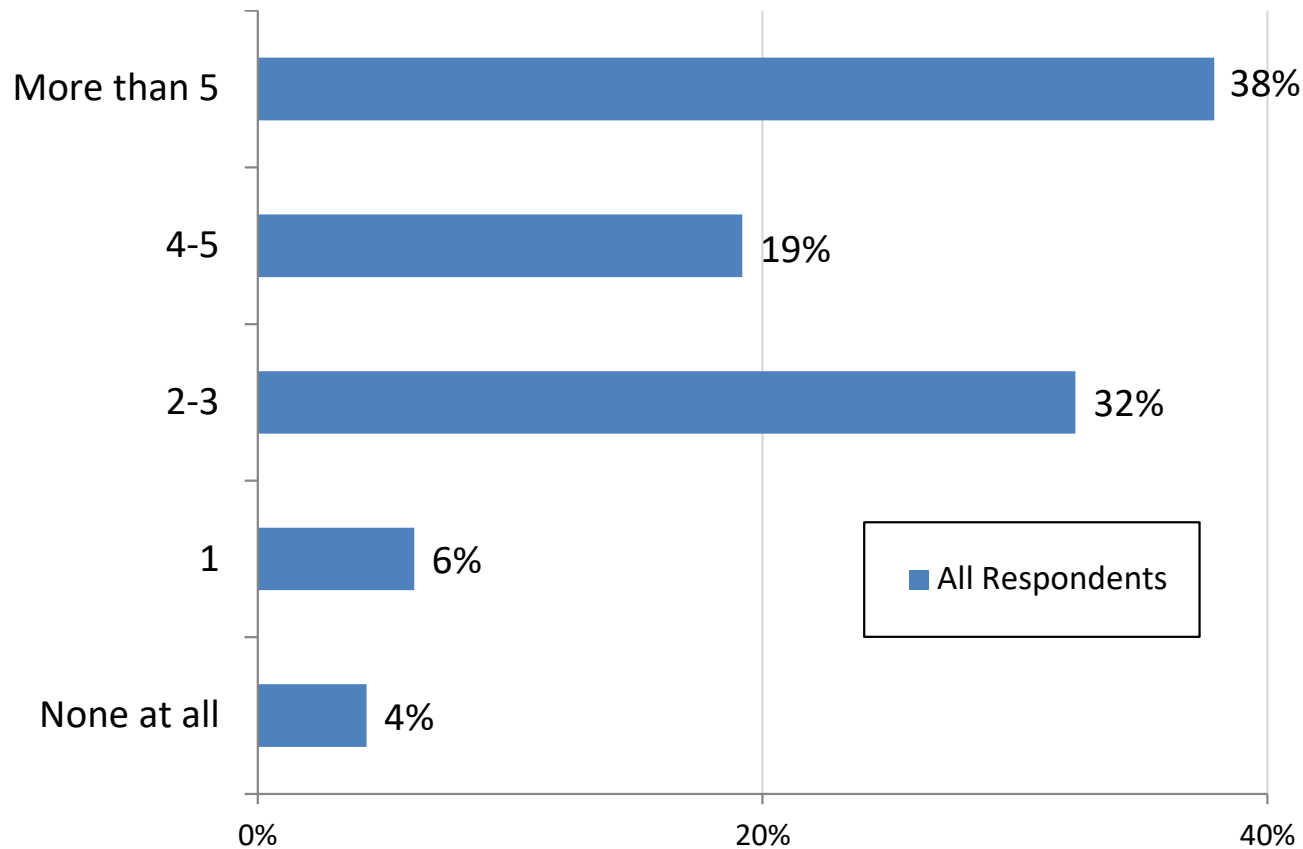
2023 Grand Traverse Regional Community Foundation, Youth Wellness Initiative Survey: 530 Respondents



Supportive People

Most students have at least a few supportive people in their lives they would be willing to talk to in general about their feelings

Number of Supportive People In Your Life – All Respondents



Question: How many supportive people do you have in your life? That is, people you would be able to talk to about what you are feeling (good and bad)

2023 Grand Traverse Regional Community Foundation, Youth Wellness Initiative Survey: 530 Respondents

Supportive People (cont.)



Many of those with severe anxiety and moderate/severe depression do not feel they have supportive people in their lives

Number of Supportive People In Your Life – All Respondents Compared to Those Experiencing Anxiety or Depression

	All Respondents	Experiencing Anxiety		Experiencing Depression		
		Moderate Anxiety	Severe Anxiety	Minor Depression to Mild Major Depression	Moderately Severe Major Depression	Severe Major Depression
More than 5	38%	26%	17%	22%	14%	20%
2-3	32%	43%	44%	50%	51%	38%
4-5	19%	19%	14%	17%	16%	13%
1	6%	6%	15%	8%	11%	18%
None at all	4%	7%	9%	3%	8%	13%

Question: How many supportive people do you have in your life? That is, people you would be able to talk to about what you are feeling (good and bad)

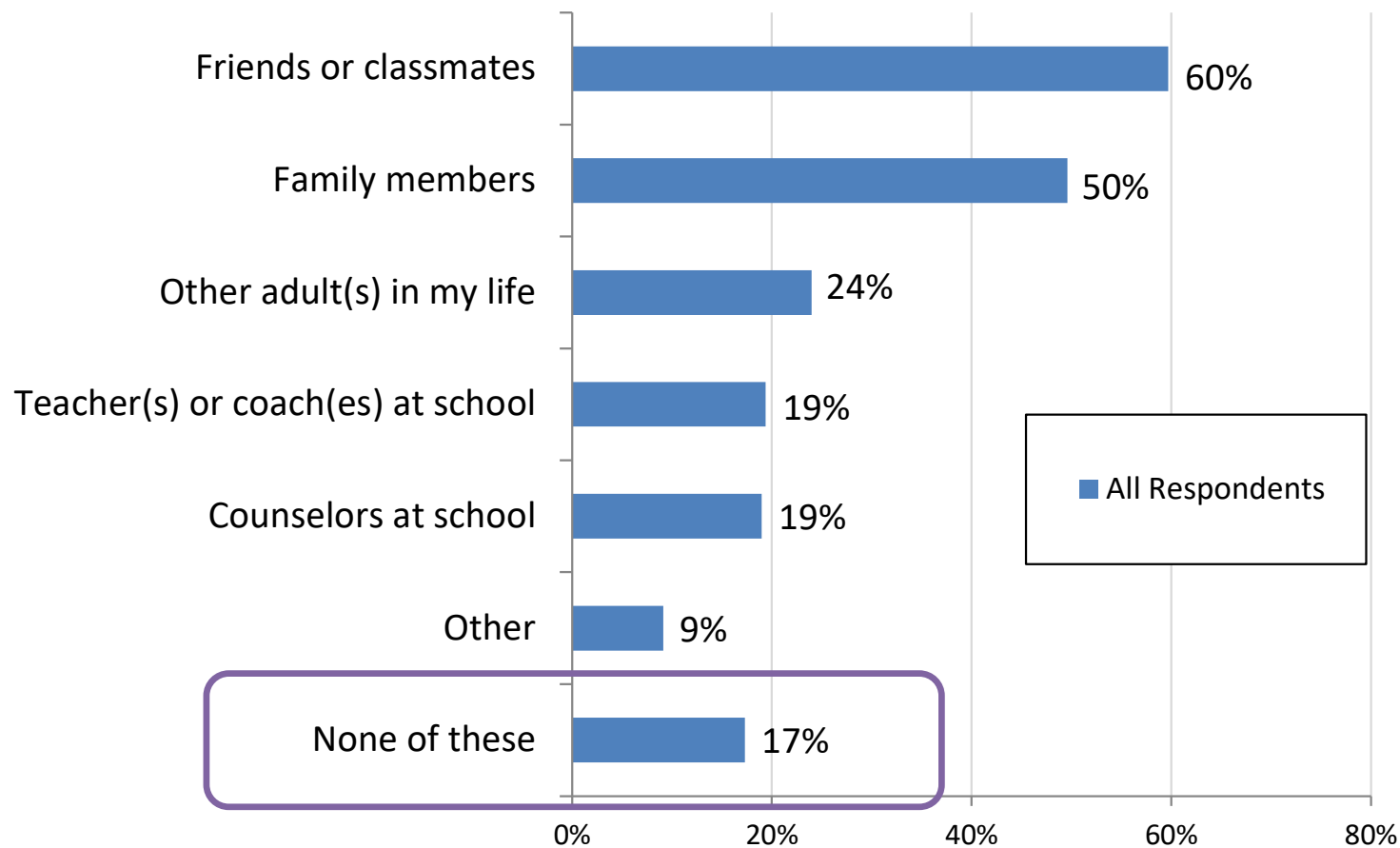
2023 Grand Traverse Regional Community Foundation, Youth Wellness Initiative Survey: 530 Respondents



Who would you talk to?

If feeling sad, anxious or hopeless most students would not feel comfortable talking to teachers or counselors in school and 17% would not be willing talking to any of these types of people.

People You Would Feel Comfortable Talking To (Select All That Apply)



Question: *If you were feeling sad, anxious or hopeless, would you be comfortable talking to any of the following people?*

2023 Grand Traverse Regional Community Foundation, Youth Wellness Initiative Survey: 530 Respondents



Who would you talk to? (cont.)



Many of those with anxiety and depression would not feel comfortable talking to friends, family, teachers, coaches or counselors

People You Would Feel Comfortable Talking To – All Respondents Compared to Those Experiencing Anxiety or Depression (Select All That Apply)

	All Respondents	Experiencing Anxiety		Experiencing Depression		
		Moderate Anxiety	Severe Anxiety	Minor Depression to Mild Major Depression	Moderately Severe Major Depression	Severe Major Depression
Friends or classmates	60%	57%	56%	51%	53%	60%
Family members	50%	40%	28%	32%	28%	18%
Other adult(s) in my life	24%	19%	16%	18%	12%	15%
Teacher(s) or coach(es) at school	19%	19%	7%	11%	9%	15%
Counselors at school	19%	11%	18%	12%	15%	18%
Other	9%	12%	14%	11%	13%	10%
None of these	17%	19%	22%	25%	24%	28%

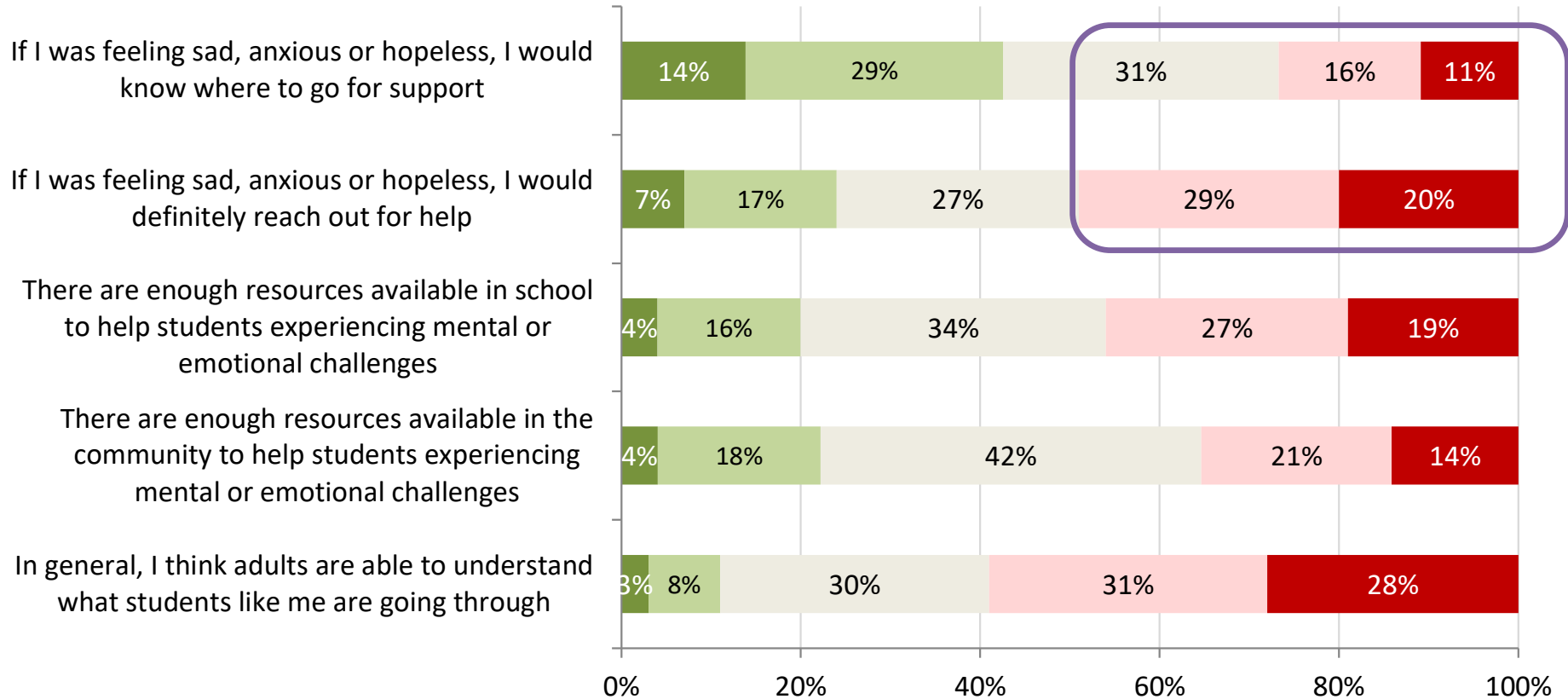
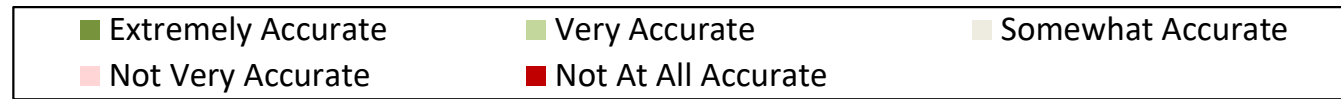
Question: *If you were feeling sad, anxious or hopeless, would you be comfortable talking to any of the following people?*

Reaching Out For Help



Many students would not reach out for help if feeling sad, anxious or hopeless, and many would not know where to go for support

Are These Statements Accurate? – All Respondents



Question: Are these statements accurate?

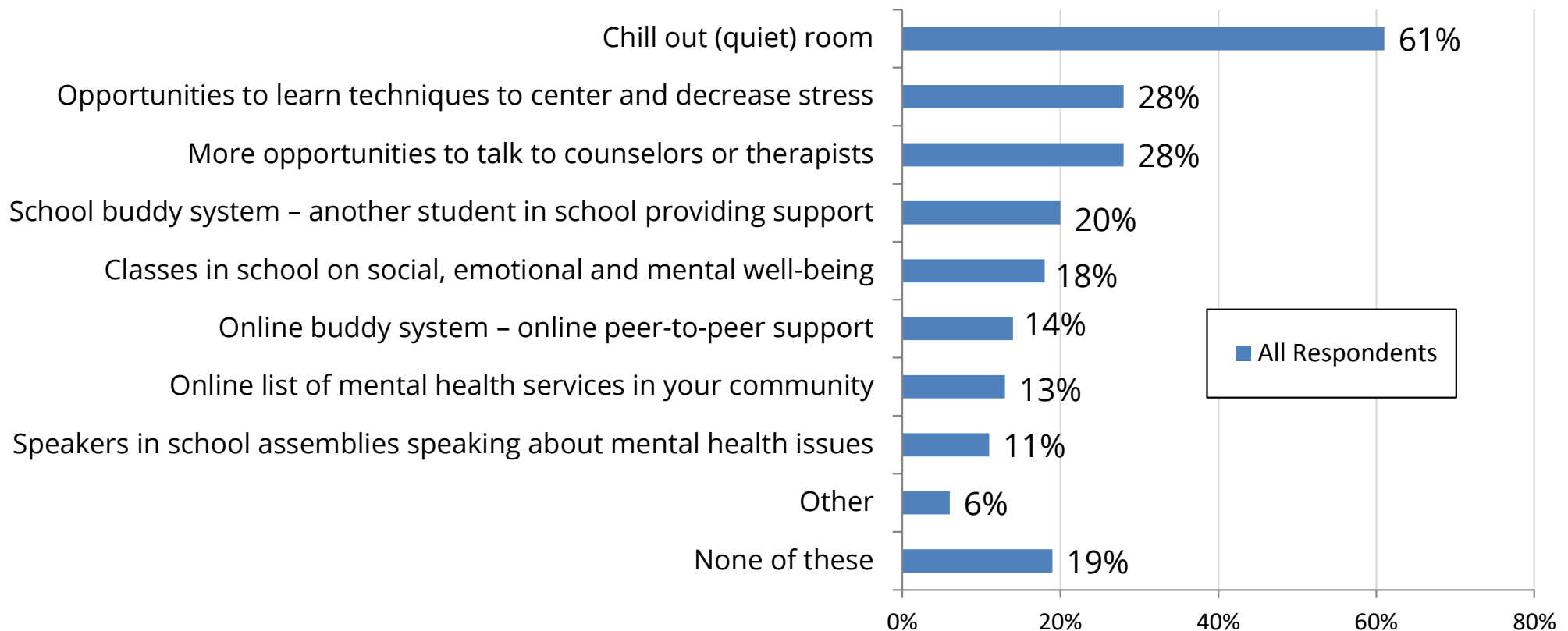
2023 Grand Traverse Regional Community Foundation, Youth Wellness Initiative Survey: 530 Respondents

Potential Resources



If feeling sad, anxious or down students would like access to a variety of supports and resources from a “chill out room” to opportunities for counseling and therapy

“If you were stressed out, anxious or down, which of these would you personally use?” (Select All That Apply)



Question: *If you were stressed out, anxious or down, which of these, if any, would you personally use?*

Potential Resources (cont.)



Potential Resources and Supports – All Respondents Compared to Those Experiencing Anxiety or Depression (Select All That Apply)

	All Respondents	Experiencing Anxiety		Experiencing Depression		
		Moderate Anxiety	Severe Anxiety	Minor Depression to Mild Major Depression	Moderately Severe Major Depression	Severe Major Depression
Chill out (quiet) room	61%	66%	70%	65%	67%	68%
Opportunities to learn techniques to center and decrease stress	28%	31%	30%	19%	25%	28%
More opportunities to talk to counselors or therapists	28%	32%	26%	25%	27%	33%
School buddy system – another student within your school providing support	20%	17%	30%	22%	23%	20%
Classes in school on social, emotional and mental well-being	18%	28%	22%	21%	23%	20%
Online buddy system – online peer-to-peer support from someone at a different U.S. school	14%	13%	23%	10%	28%	15%
Online list of mental health services in your community	13%	14%	13%	8%	13%	18%
Speakers in school assemblies speaking about mental health issues	11%	9%	15%	10%	11%	23%
Other	6%	7%	7%	6%	8%	5%
None of these	19%	16%	16%	25%	13%	15%

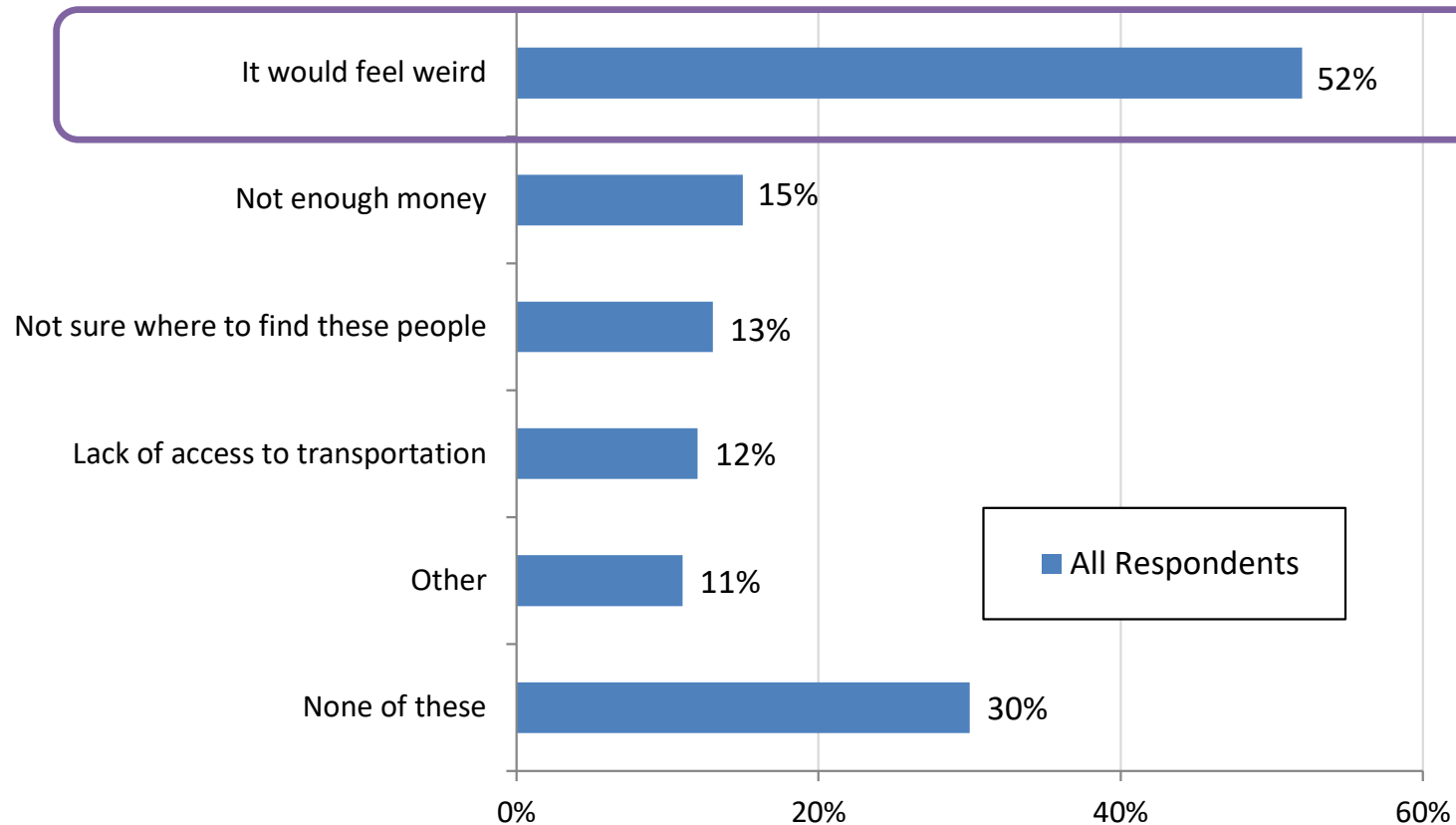
Question: *If you were stressed out, anxious or down, which of these, if any, would you personally use?*

2023 Grand Traverse Regional Community Foundation, Youth Wellness Initiative Survey: 530 Respondents

Barriers to Talking to Therapists

The most widespread barrier that would prevent these students from seeking outside counseling or therapy is a belief that “it would feel weird”

Barriers to Talking to Counselors or Therapists Outside of School – All Respondents (Select All That Apply)



Question: Which of these, if any, would keep you from talking to counselors or therapists outside of school if you were stressed out, anxious or down? Please select all that apply

2023 Grand Traverse Regional Community Foundation,
Youth Wellness Initiative Survey: 530 Respondents



Barriers to Talking to Therapists (cont.)

The barriers that would keep students from talking to counselors or therapists outside of school are higher for those experiencing anxiety and/or depression

Barriers to Talking to Counselors or Therapists Outside of School – All Respondents
Compared to Those Experiencing Anxiety or Depression (Select All That Apply)

	All Respondents	Experiencing Anxiety		Experiencing Depression		
		Moderate Anxiety	Severe Anxiety	Minor Depression to Mild Major Depression	Moderately Severe Major Depression	Severe Major Depression
It would feel weird	52%	60%	59%	60%	57%	70%
Not enough money	15%	22%	24%	19%	21%	30%
Not sure where to find these people	13%	16%	17%	13%	19%	13%
Lack of access to transportation	12%	17%	18%	12%	19%	25%
Other	11%	16%	18%	14%	12%	20%
None of these	30%	21%	16%	23%	20%	10%

Question: Which of these, if any, would keep you from talking to counselors or therapists outside of school if you were stressed out, anxious or down? Please select all that apply

2023 Grand Traverse Regional Community Foundation,
 Youth Wellness Initiative Survey: 530 Respondents



YWI Student Recommendations



Student Recommendations



The following recommendations were developed by YWI students in response to research findings:

1. School districts should begin **implementing mental health education when students are in elementary school** to build acceptance for mental health discussions at a young age.
2. Schools should **have counselors, therapists or psychiatrists come into classrooms** and spend time with students so that they know who to go to if they have problems later on and feel more comfortable asking for help.
3. Schools should **make sure counselors are meeting with every student individually**, outside of yearly class scheduling, to ensure students are presented the opportunity to get help for any social/emotional issues.
4. Schools should provide seminars or classes for **teachers to learn how to help students with mental health challenges and issues**.
5. **Teachers should schedule one-on-one conversations with students** to better understand how school affects their mental health and what can be done to combat any negative issues or to increase positive behaviors.



Student Recommendations (cont.)

The following recommendations were developed by YWI students in response to research findings (continued):

6. Therapists/counselors/psychiatrists should **teach students specific emotional regulation and organization techniques** they can use when navigating different situations regarding their mental health. This could be done in smaller groups of students at a time so that they feel more comfortable.
7. Teachers should take advantage of the positive impacts that nature can have on mental health and try to **incorporate the outdoors and possibly field trips as much as they can into course curricula.**
8. Schools and student groups should **establish outdoor excursion clubs** where people can get together to go on hikes or do other outdoor activities.
9. Schools should **increase** the number of tables, benches, and other **seating spaces outside** to encourage students to use courtyard spaces in free time.
10. Schools should create or **expand safe areas such as “chill spaces”** where students can go if they need to relax and decompress.
11. Schools should **experiment with a school buddy system** so that students have at least one other student within their school providing support.

