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RESILIENT YOUTH: STATE OF THE NATION REPORT

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REPORT CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Resilience is a dynamic, context-dependent process whereby an individual displays positive adaptation to challenging or adverse circumstances. It is believed that resilience is a skill that can be learned, as well as strengthened, and is a protective factor against negative mental health. This is one reason why it is important to examine both the outcomes and influences of child resilience - particularly in light of the pervasive challenges our society has faced in recent years such as the COVID-19 pandemic and other natural disasters. The Resilience Survey is a check-in on the status of wellbeing in students around Australia.

> **THE ESSENTIAL INGREDIENTS OF A RESILIENT LIFE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE INCLUDE:**
> **BEING CONNECTED TO YOURSELF AND OTHERS.**
> **PROTECTING YOURSELF AND BEING PROTECTED BY OTHERS.**
> **RESPECTING YOURSELF AND BEING RESPECTED BY OTHERS.**
> **WE CALL THIS THE CPR OF WELLBEING: 'CONNECTED, PROTECTED, RESPECTED'**
>
> **~RESILIENT YOUTH AUSTRALIA**

The Resilience Survey is an online survey which collects, analyses, and reports the wellbeing of young people at a cohort level in terms of their mental health, learning mindset, coping strategies, hopefulness, life satisfaction, in addition to further risk and protective behaviours. It engages directly with children aged 7 to 18 years, with the aim of capturing unique insights about aspects of their emotional lives and behaviour that are generally not visible to parents, carers or teachers. The Resilience Survey provides school principals and wellbeing staff a detailed profile of the mental health and wellbeing of their students.

The current report provides a summary of findings in a sample of Australian students in 2021, as well as comparing outcomes over the years 2019, 2020 and 2021.

RESEARCH CONTEXT

BACKGROUND

Data was collected using the Resilience Survey (Resilient Youth Australia). This survey was administered electronically online, and each school was given unique codes to allow school-based administration to students. The Resilience Survey is a student voice instrument, meaning that data is collected directly from students in a manner that ensures their confidentiality (i.e., their answers are not visible to parents, caregivers and/or teachers). The survey is anonymous and non-identified. In this way, the Resilience Survey aims to elicit honest answers from students, empowering them to share responsibility for developing and enhancing their own resilience, mental health and wellbeing.

PARTICIPANTS

Participating students consisted of 163,438 children of average age 12.4 years (SD = 2.64; range = 7-18 years). From the years collected, 61,565 children participated in 2019, 37,955 children in 2020, and 63,918 children in 2021. Overall, 53.8% of students were female, 43.1% male, 3.1% self-reported as "Other" and/or preferred not to report gender identity. 71,595 (43.8%) of students were in primary education (Gender: 48.3% female, 48.8% male, 2.9% Other; Age: M=9.89, SD=1.21), and 91,843 (56.2%) were in secondary education (Gender: 58.2% female, 38.6% male, 3.2% Other; Age: M=14.3, SD=1.67). Of those taking part specifically in 2021, 29,140 (45.6%) of students were in primary education (Gender: 48.1% female, 48.5% male, 3.5% Other; Age: M=9.81, SD=1.22), and 34,778 (54.4%) were in secondary education (Gender: 56.9% female, 39.3% male, 3.8% Other; Age: M=14.3, SD=1.69).

Students were represented across multiple states, including 68.5% from Victoria, 21.3% from Queensland, 5.9% from New South Wales, 1.8% from Western Australia, 1.2% from Tasmania, 1.1% from South Australia, and 0.1% from the Australian Capital Territory. From a cultural perspective, 71.1% of students considered themselves Australian, 2.3% Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander, 10.3% Asian, 5.1% European, 1.4% African, 1% Pacific Islander, 0.8% New Zealander, 0.2% Māori or Pasifika, and 7.8% consider themselves of another nationality.

Socio-economic conditions of participants were measured using the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS, 2016) Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) report. Postcode of the student was used to determine their corresponding Index of Relative Socio-economic Advantage and Disadvantage (IRSAD) score. The cohort of students represented the full range of socioeconomic status (SES) in the general population of Australia (i.e., percentile ranks ranging 1-100 as indicated by SEIFA), with a mean percentile rank of 63.92 (SD = 28.10). Within this report, SEIFA scores are classified as Low (SEIFA deciles 1-3), Middle (SEIFA deciles 4-7), and High (SEIFA deciles 8-10) SES.

SURVEY MEASUREMENTS

The following subset of factors were taken from the Resilience Survey and included in preliminary analyses:

MENTAL WELLBEING FACTORS	
DEPRESSIVE SYMPTOMS	Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-2), scores range from 2-8. Higher scores indicate more symptoms. A score below 4 is considered in the 'healthy range' or feeling good and functioning well in the world. A score of 4 or 5 is considered in the borderline range, or sometimes experiencing sadness, low mood, sleep difficulties, and withdrawn behaviour. A score of 6-8 is considered at risk of depression, or low mood and a persistent feeling of sadness and loss of interest that interferes with daily functioning.
ANXIETY SYMPTOMS	General Anxiety Disorder (GAD-2), scores range from 2-8. Higher scores indicate more symptoms. A score below 4 is considered in the 'healthy range' or feeling positive with few worries and functioning well in the world. A score of 4 or 5 is considered in the borderline range, or at times experiencing worries that prevent engagement in activities. A score of 6-8 is considered at risk of an anxiety disorder, or having difficulty managing fears and worries, becoming overwhelmed by anxious thoughts.
OPENNESS	Single item: "I can talk about things if they upset me"; scores range from 1-4. Higher scores indicate more openness.
LEARNERS' MINDSET FACTORS	
HOPEFULNESS	The Children's Hope Scale (CHS). Scores range from 6-36. Higher scores indicate greater hope.
AVOIDANCE COPING	The Coping Strategies Inventory-avoidance sub-scale (CSI). Scores range from 4-16. Higher scores indicate more avoidant coping behaviour/disengagement.

SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT	Single Items: "I try hard at school", "I care about my school", "I do my homework". "I enjoy learning things at school", "I am given useful jobs at school", "I am involved with at least 1 extracurricular activity" "I have fun at school". Scores range from 1-4. Higher scores indicate greater engagement.
LIFE SATISFACTION FACTOR	
LIFE SATISFACTION	Scores range from 1-8. Higher scores indicate greater life satisfaction. Scores 1-4 indicate struggling, scores 5-6 indicate doing OK, and scores 7-8 indicate thriving.
PHYSICAL PROTECTIVE FACTORS	
HEALTHY EATING	Single item: "I eat well to stay well". Scores range from 1-4. Higher scores indicate healthier eating.
ADEQUATE SLEEP	Single item: I get at least 8 hours sleep most nights". Scores range from 1-4. Higher scores indicate better sleep.
PHYSICALLY ACTIVE	Single item: "I keep myself fit". Scores range from 1-4. Higher scores indicate more activity.
SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT FACTORS	
SCHOOL SUPPORT	Single items: "I have a teacher at my school who cares about me", "I have a least one teacher who encourages me". Scores range from 1-4. Higher scores indicate greater support.
FAMILY SUPPORT	Single items: "I get love and support from my family", "I have parents/carers who encourage me to do well", "I have a parent/carer who listens to me". Scores range from 1-4. Higher scores indicate greater support.
PEER SUPPORT	Single items: "I spend time with friends", "I have a least one good friend at school", "I get along with people who are different from me". Scores range from 1-4. Higher scores indicate greater support.

SOCIAL IDENTITY FACTORS	
TRUSTWORTHINESS	Single item: "I am trustworthy". Scores range from 1-4. Higher scores indicate greater support.
FORGIVENESS	Single items: "I forgive others who are mean to me", "I forgive myself when I mess up". Scores range from 1-4. Higher scores indicate greater support.
RESPONSIBILITY	Single item: "I take responsibility for my actions". Scores range from 1-4. Higher scores indicate greater support.
HELPFUNLNESS	Single items: "I think it is important to help other people", "I give my time to help others". Scores range from 1-4. Higher scores indicate greater support.
SAFETY & RISK FACTORS	
SAFETY AT SCHOOL	Single item: "I feel safe at school". Scores range from 1-4. Higher scores indicate greater safety.
SAFETY AT HOME	Single items: "I feel safe at home", "I feel safe in the area where I live". Scores range from 1-4. Higher scores indicate greater safety.
BULLYING	Single items: "In the last school term I have been bullied at school", "In the last school term I have been bullied online". Scores range from 1-4. Higher scores indicate more bullying.
INTENT TO HURT OTHERS	Single item: "In the last school term I threatened to physically hurt someone". Scores range from 1-4. Higher scores indicate greater intention.
ALCOHOL OR ILLICIT DRUGS USE	Single items: "I drink alcohol", "I use illegal drugs" Scores range from 1-4. Higher scores indicate greater consumption.
SMOKE CIGARETTES OR VAPE	Single items: "I vape or use e-cigarettes", "I smoke cigarettes". Scores range from 1-4. Higher scores indicate greater consumption.
WHAT OUR KIDS/YOUTH SAY	
QUALITATIVE DATA	Single open-ended item: "If you could magically do anything, what is one thing that you would do to support the wellbeing of young people?"

PRIMARY STUDENT ANALYSES

KEY RESULTS:
PRIMARY STUDENTS

MENTAL WELLBEING

There has been an increase in poor mental health from 2019 to 2021, although children remain in a 'healthy' range on average. 23.4% of students report high levels of anxiety and/or depression. Female students report slightly lower levels of mental wellbeing compared to male students, and gender diverse students are most at risk.

LEARNERS' MINDSET

Most students are engaged at school, yet results show that children report poorer learning mindsets in 2021 compared to previous years. 28.5% of students show high levels of disengagement/avoidance coping, with this being most prevalent in gender diverse students. There has also been a significant decrease in hopefulness amongst primary school students.

LIFE SATISFACTION

45.7% of students considered themselves to be 'thriving', with the average report of life satisfaction being within the moderate, or 'Doing OK' category. Ratings from primary school children have not changed from 2019-2021. No large differences were seen between male or female students, although gender diverse students report lower life satisfaction. Students in higher SES areas report less 'suffering' relative to low and mid SES areas.

PHYSICAL PROTECTIVE FACTORS

Most primary school students engage in physical protective factors regularly - including healthy eating, obtaining adequate sleep, and keeping physically fit.

SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Primary school students feel connected within their social support structures. This includes the majority of students reporting frequent school support from teachers, frequent family support and encouragement, and peer support.

SOCIAL IDENTITY

Students report being trusting and forgiving towards themselves and others. Most students believe in the value placed upon helping others, although there is a discrepancy between that value and action towards helping people.
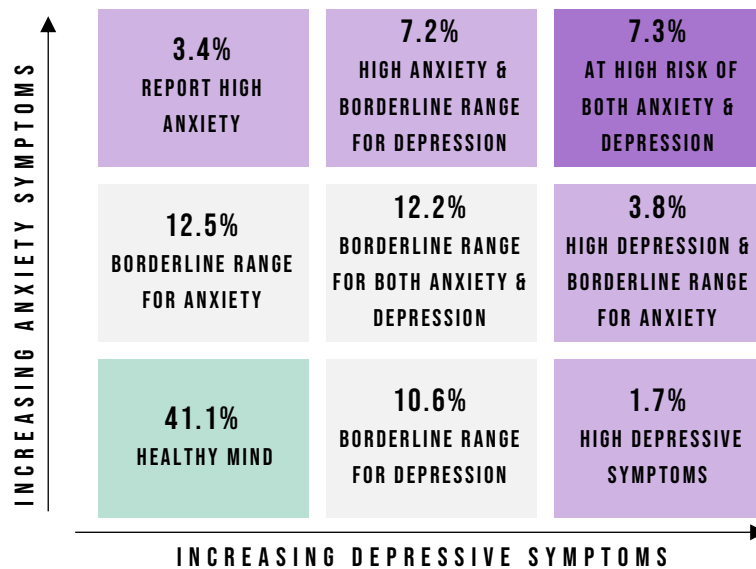
SAFETY FACTORS

Students feel protected, with approximately 70% reporting always feeling safe in their schools and homes. The majority of students report rarely being bullied at school or online, however approximately 3 in 10 students report being bullied at some point at school, and 2 in 10 online. 8% of surveyed students report threatening others within the last term.

MENTAL WELLBEING

To determine 2021 levels of mental wellbeing in 29,140 primary school students, measures of depression and anxiety were combined to show healthy students as those reporting low depression and anxiety, borderline students as those with mid-range reports of depression, anxiety, or both, and students at risk of mental wellbeing problems as those with high levels of depression, anxiety, or both.

FRAME OF MIND

3.4% REPORT HIGH ANXIETY	**7.2%** HIGH ANXIETY & BORDERLINE RANGE FOR DEPRESSION	**7.3%** AT HIGH RISK OF BOTH ANXIETY & DEPRESSION
12.5% BORDERLINE RANGE FOR ANXIETY	**12.2%** BORDERLINE RANGE FOR BOTH ANXIETY & DEPRESSION	**3.8%** HIGH DEPRESSION & BORDERLINE RANGE FOR ANXIETY
41.1% HEALTHY MIND	**10.6%** BORDERLINE RANGE FOR DEPRESSION	**1.7%** HIGH DEPRESSIVE SYMPTOMS

(Y-axis: INCREASING ANXIETY SYMPTOMS; X-axis: INCREASING DEPRESSIVE SYMPTOMS)

FIGURE 1. A graphical representation of student mental wellbeing during 2021, comprised of combinations of depressive and anxiety symptoms. 41.1% of students are of healthy mind (low anxiety + low depressive symptoms - pictured in green). 35% of students are in a borderline range (moderate anxiety and/or depressive symptoms - pictured in grey); **23.4% of students are in the high-risk categories for anxiety, depression or both (pictured in light purple).**

OPENNESS

As an indicator of openness, students were asked about how readily they can talk to others about things that upset them. Only 1 in 5 primary school students report feeling that they are always willing talk about things that upset them.

There was little gender difference in this finding, where around half of both female (48.4%) and male (49%) students report similar levels of openness.

DEPRESSIVE SYMPTOMS – GENDER

FIGURE 2. Percentage of responses for ratings of depressive symptoms in 2021 by gender. Male and Female students display similar response rates of depressive symptoms in the Low (green), Mid (blue) and High (purple) categories. Students' that identify as Other or prefer not to identify their gender show higher rates of Mid and High depressive symptoms.
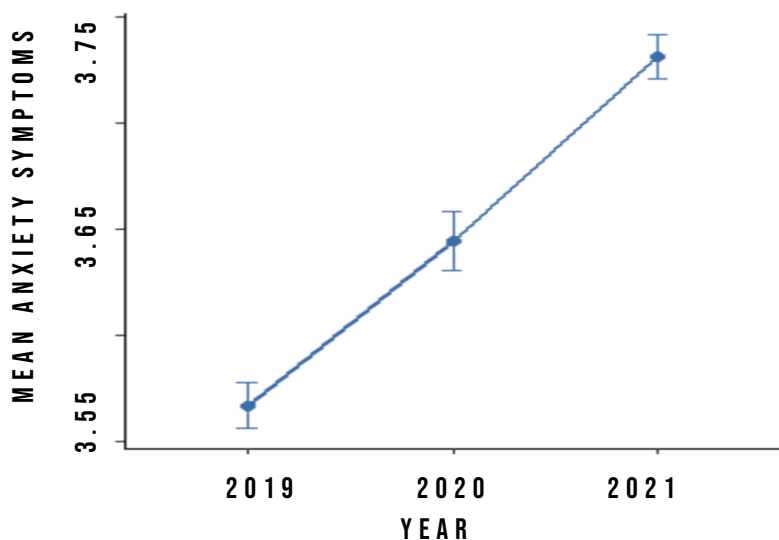
ANXIETY SYMPTOMS - GENDER

FIGURE 3. Percentage of responses for ratings of anxiety symptoms in 2021 by gender. Male students' response rates of anxiety symptoms in the Mid (blue) and High (purple) categories trend slightly lower compared to female students. Students that identify as Other or prefer not to identify their gender show higher rates of Mid and particularly High anxiety symptoms.

SES

Depressive and Anxiety symptoms were each considered regarding SES; however no meaningful differences were found across levels of SES.

YEARLY TRENDS IN MENTAL WELLBEING

Results show an increase in poor mental health symptoms, with this trend most apparent in 2021, although children on average remain in a 'healthy' range. Figure 4 displays a statistically significant increase in depressive symptoms from 2019 (M=3.47, SD=1.57) to 2020 (M=3.50, SD=1.61) and again to 2021 (M=3.54, SD=1.60). Figure 5 shows a statistically significant increase in anxiety symptoms from 2019 (M= 3.57, SD=1.74) to 2020 (M=3.64, SD=1.79), and again to 2021 (M=3.73, SD=1.81).
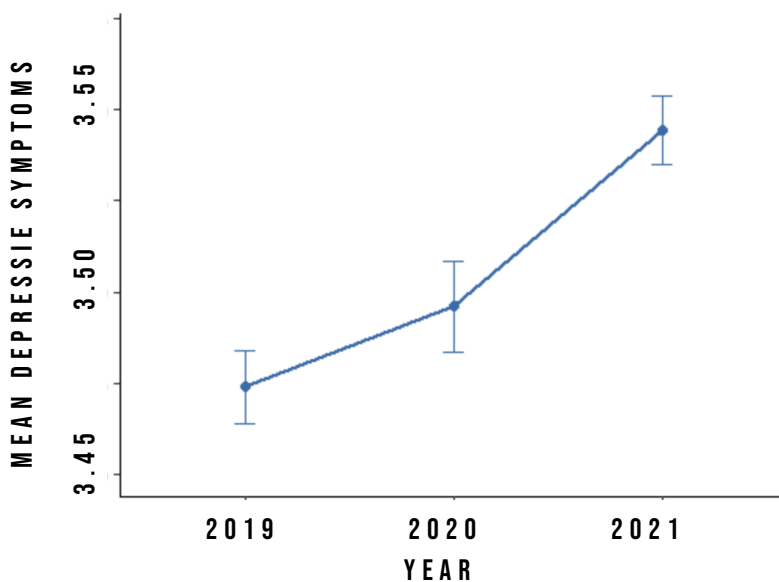
FIGURE 4. Mean scores of depressive symptoms for 2019, 2020, and 2021. Scores range from 2-8, with scores below 4 indicating a healthy range of symptoms. Points represent mean scores, with error bars represent standard error.


FIGURE 5. Mean scores of anxiety symptoms for 2019, 2020, and 2021. Scores range from 2-8, with scores below 4 indicating a healthy range of symptoms. Points represent mean scores, and error bars represent standard error.

LEARNERS' MINDSET

Beyond the mental wellbeing of students, the learning mindset explores factors that may influence resilience building and engagement in the classroom. The measure of hopefulness reflects the combination of agency (the child's belief that they can initiate and work towards a desired goal), and pathways thinking (which reflects the actions required to achieve goals). In contrast, avoidance coping reflects behaviour aimed at disengaging or avoiding thinking about, feeling, or doing difficult things. Student engagement represents factors demonstrating positive engagement with learning, and the Positive Learner's Mindset combines reports of anxiety and disengagement to create a unique indicator of a child's readiness to learn.

HOPEFULNESS

Data on Figure 6 displays a statistically significant decline in hopefulness from 2019 (M=24.6, SD=6.21), to 2020 (M=24.2, SD=6.38), and again to 2021 (M=23.7, SD=6.29). The differences between years represent small but meaningful change.
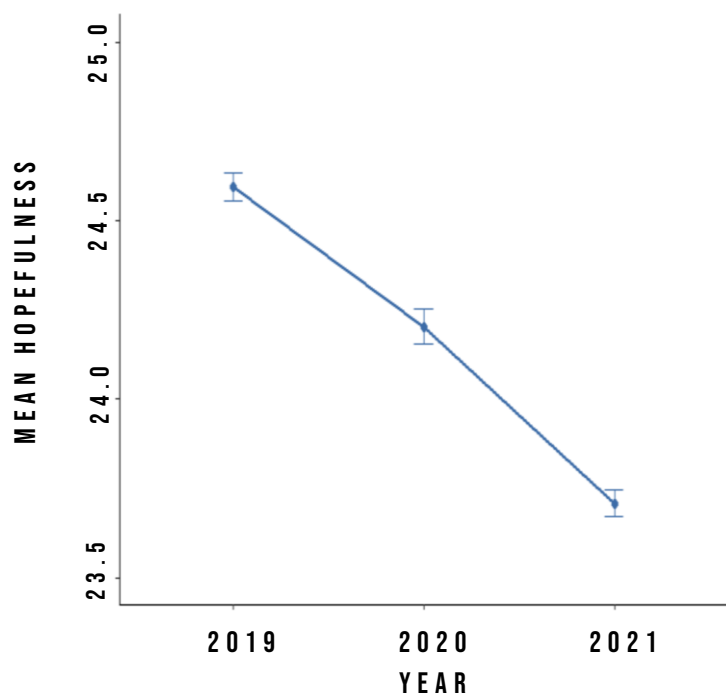
FIGURE 6. Mean scores of hopefulness across 2019, 2020, and 2021. Higher scores indicate greater hopefulness. Points represent mean group scores, with error bars representing standard error of the mean.

GENDER

FIGURE 7. Percentage of responses for ratings of hopefulness in 2021 by gender. Male students reported slightly higher rates of hopefulness compared to Female students. Students that identify as Other or prefer not to identify their gender demonstrated lower hopefulness responses compared to both Male and Female students.
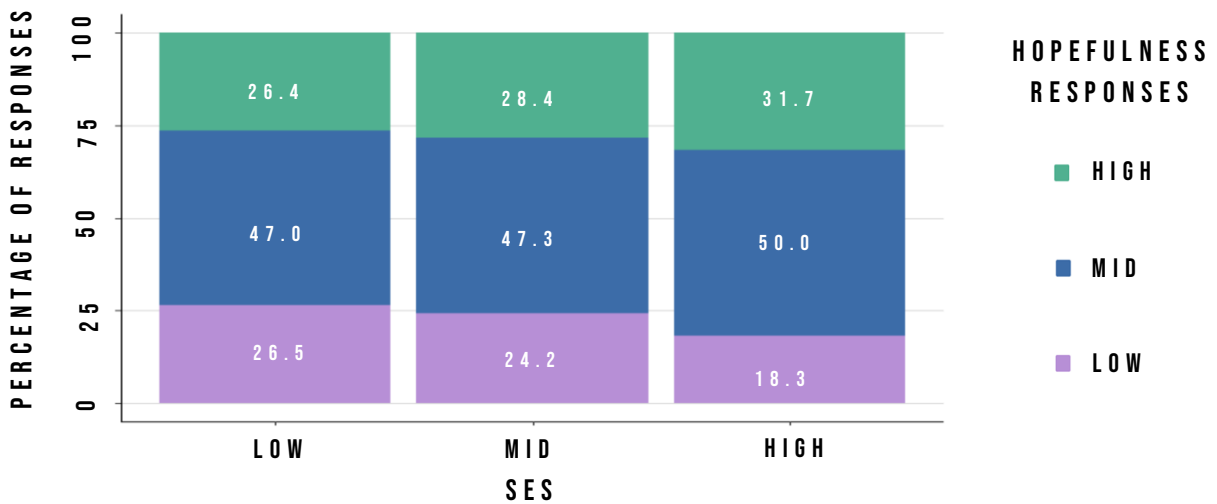
SES

FIGURE 8. Percentage of responses for ratings of hopefulness in 2021 by SES. There is a trend for students in High SES areas to report higher rates of hopefulness compared to Mid and Low areas.

DISENGAGEMENT

Avoidance coping/disengagement increased over time (see Figure 9). Students showed significantly more avoidance coping/disengagement behaviour in 2021 (M=9.08, SD=2.6), compared to 2020 (M=9.02, SD=2.64), which was significantly more than in 2019 (M=9.00, SD=2.54).
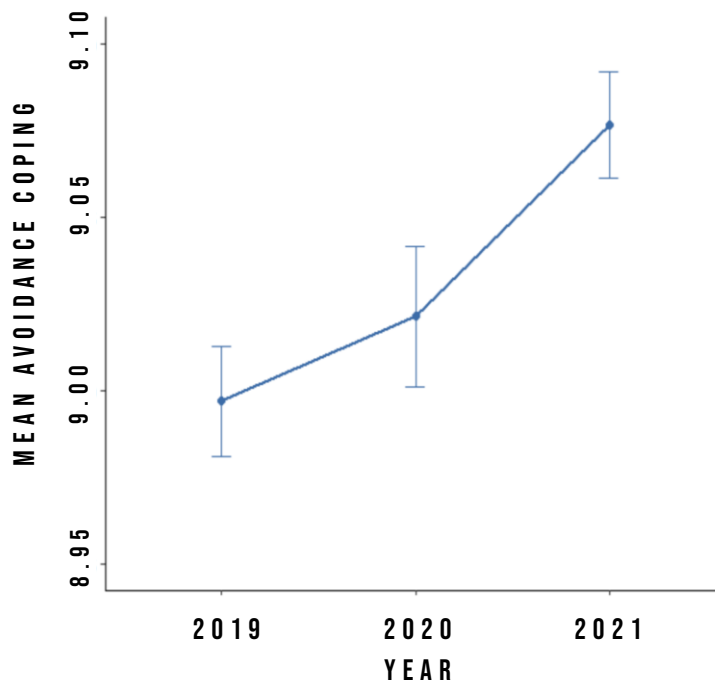
FIGURE 9. Mean scores of avoidance coping/disengagement across 2019, 2020, and 2021. Higher scores indicate greater levels of avoidance coping. Points represent mean group scores, with error bars representing standard error of the mean.
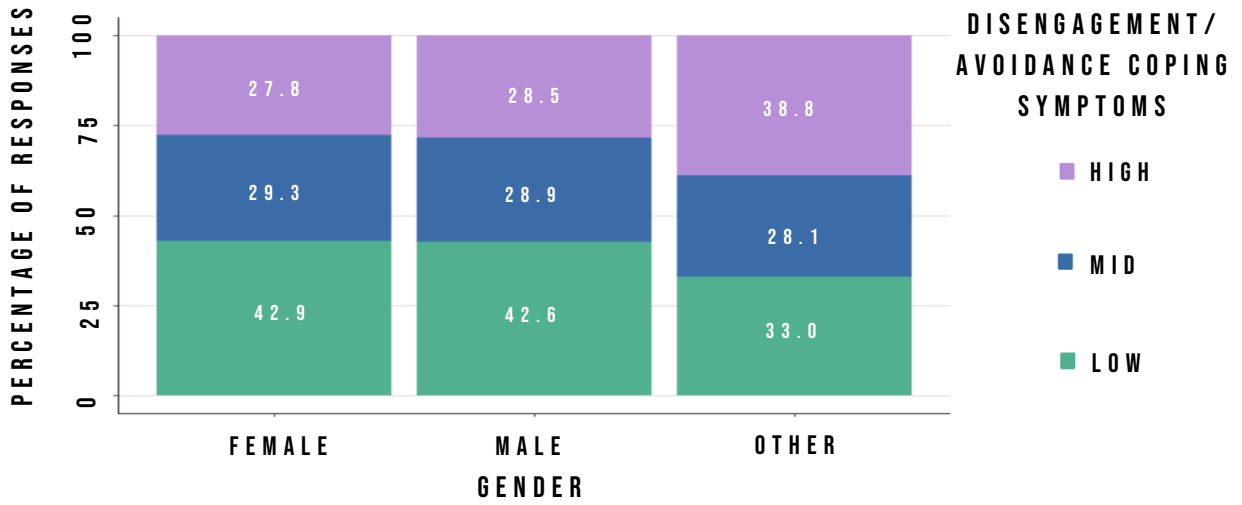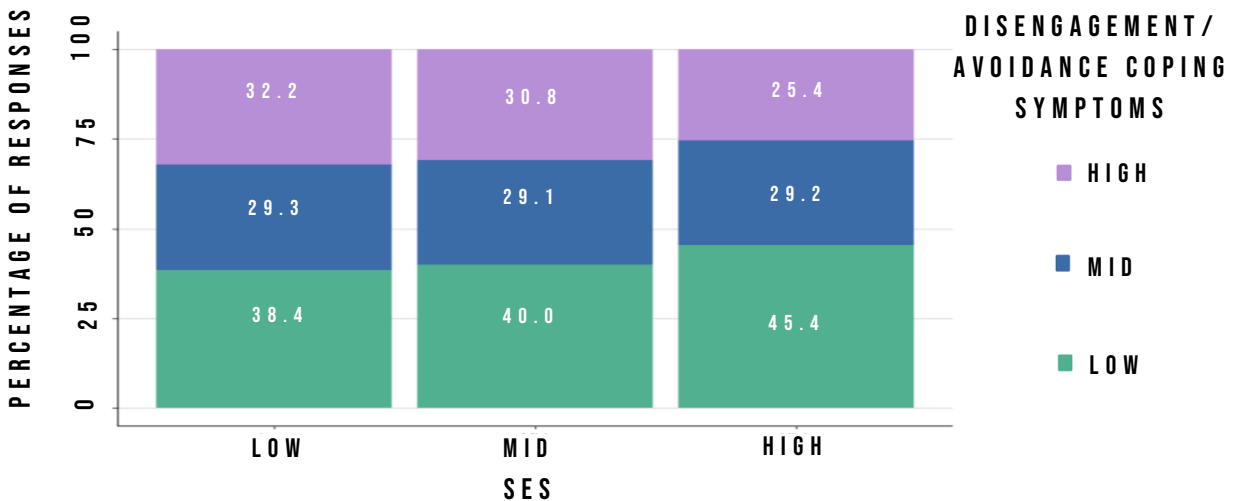
GENDER

FIGURE 10. Percentage of responses for ratings of avoidance coping/disengagement strategies in 2021 by gender. Female and male students have similar ratings of avoidance coping/disengagement. However, students that identify as Other or prefer not to identify their gender show a general pattern of higher avoidance coping/disengagement symptoms.

SES

FIGURE 11. Percentage of responses for ratings of avoidance coping/disengagement strategies in 2021 by SES. Students in Low and Mid SES areas have similar ratings of avoidance coping/disengagement. However, students from High SES areas show a general trend toward lower levels of avoidance coping/ disengagement symptoms.
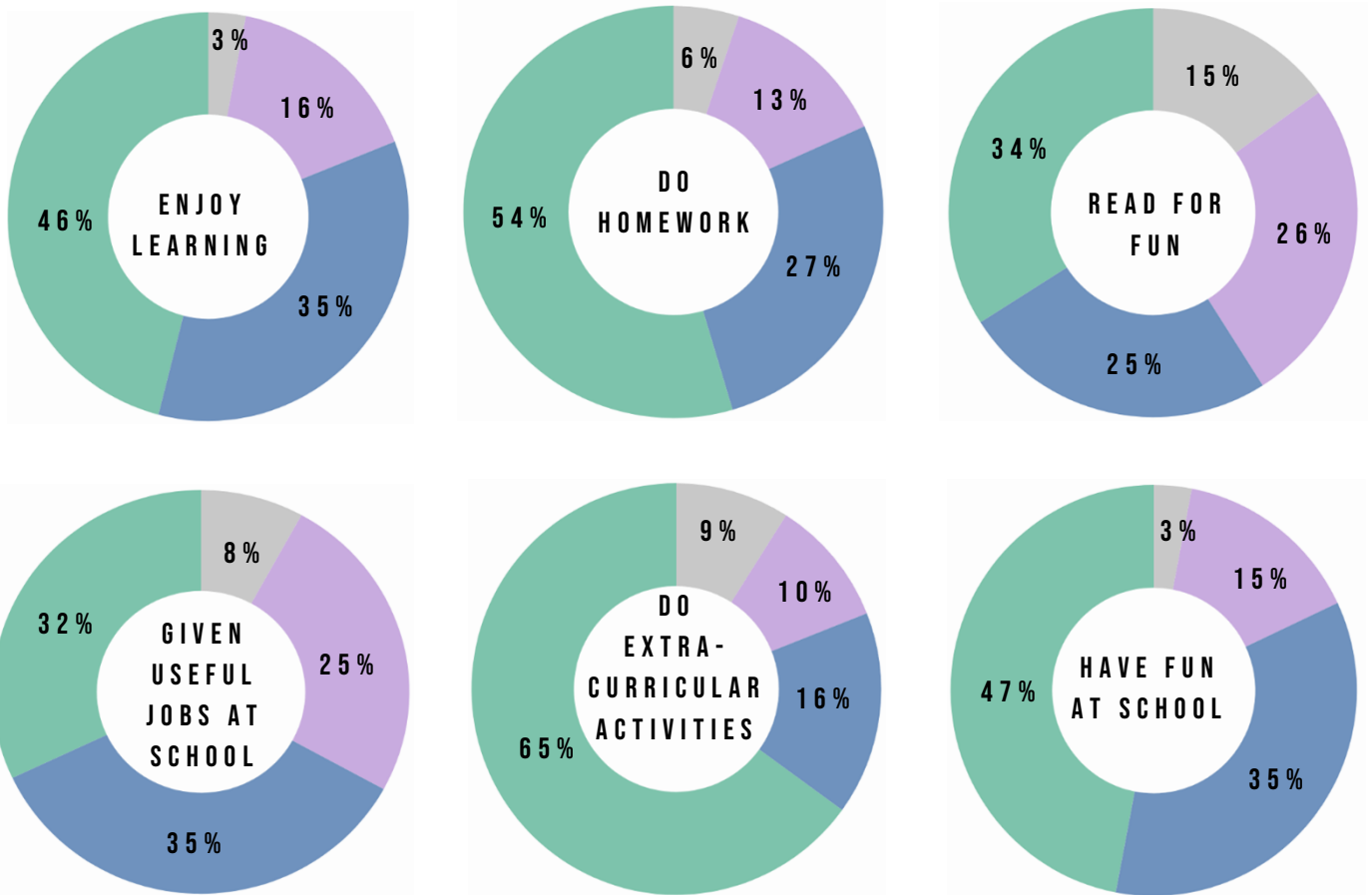
STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

Feeling engaged is likely to influence student self-esteem, respect for themselves and others, and have a positive impact on building resilience.

When students were asked about activities that foster engagement in a school environment 6 in 10 primary students report always trying hard at school and report that they care about their school.
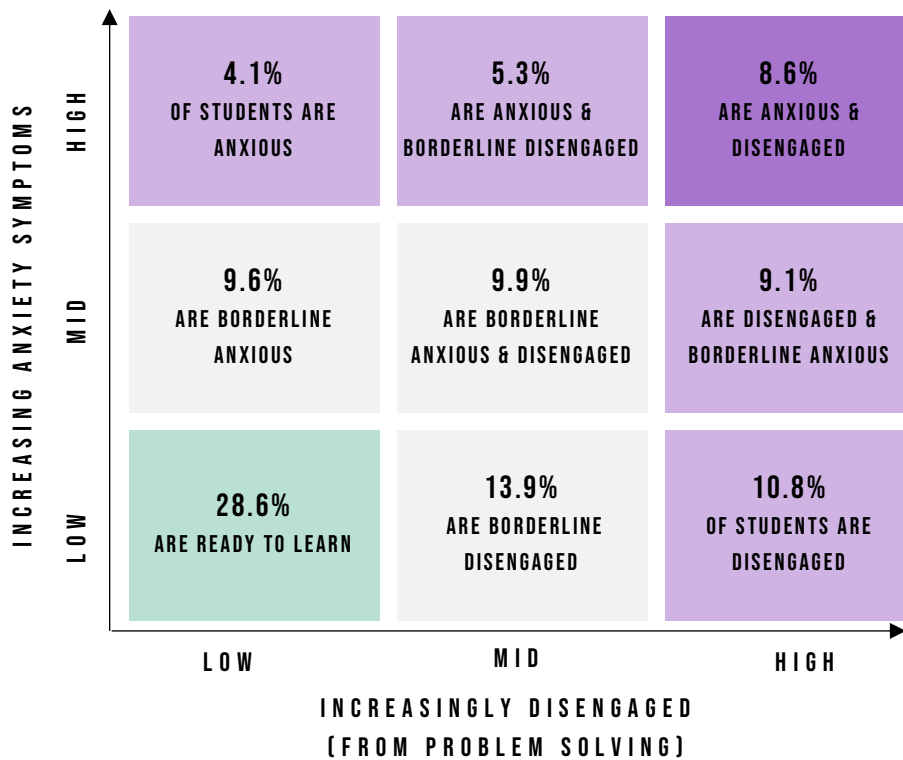
Students also reported their frequency of doing a range of other learning engagement behaviours:

- ● ALWAYS
- ● OFTEN
- ● SOMETIMES
- ● RARELY

ENJOY LEARNING
3 %
16 %
46 %
35 %

DO HOMEWORK
6 %
13 %
54 %
27 %

READ FOR FUN
15 %
34 %
26 %
25 %

GIVEN USEFUL JOBS AT SCHOOL
8 %
32 %
25 %
35 %

DO EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES
9 %
10 %
16 %
65 %

HAVE FUN AT SCHOOL
3 %
15 %
47 %
35 %

FIGURE 12. Across student engagement items, between 7-8 students out of 10 report often or always enjoying learning, doing homework, engaging in extra-curricular activity and generally having fun at school. In response to being given useful jobs to do at school a little over half of students reported often or always, with the remaining students reporting only sometimes or rarely. In contrast to the high engagement for other items, less than half of students' report reading for fun, and 15% report rarely reading.

POSITIVE LEARNERS' MINDSET

	LOW	MID	HIGH
HIGH	**4.1%** OF STUDENTS ARE ANXIOUS	**5.3%** ARE ANXIOUS & BORDERLINE DISENGAGED	**8.6%** ARE ANXIOUS & DISENGAGED
MID	**9.6%** ARE BORDERLINE ANXIOUS	**9.9%** ARE BORDERLINE ANXIOUS & DISENGAGED	**9.1%** ARE DISENGAGED & BORDERLINE ANXIOUS
LOW	**28.6%** ARE READY TO LEARN	**13.9%** ARE BORDERLINE DISENGAGED	**10.8%** OF STUDENTS ARE DISENGAGED

INCREASING ANXIETY SYMPTOMS (vertical axis)

INCREASINGLY DISENGAGED (FROM PROBLEM SOLVING) (horizontal axis)

FIGURE 13. A graphical representation of Positive Learners' Mindset domains during 2021, indicated by combining scores on avoidance coping/disengagement and anxiety. 28.6% of students have a 'ready to learn' mindset (low anxiety, low disengagement - pictured in green). 33.4% of students are in a borderline range (moderate anxiety and/or disengagement - pictured in grey). **37.9% of students are at risk (high anxiety, disengagement, or both - pictured in purple).**

LIFE SATISFACTION

As an indication of life satisfaction, students were asked to imagine a ladder where the top represents the best possible life, and the bottom represents the worst possible life.
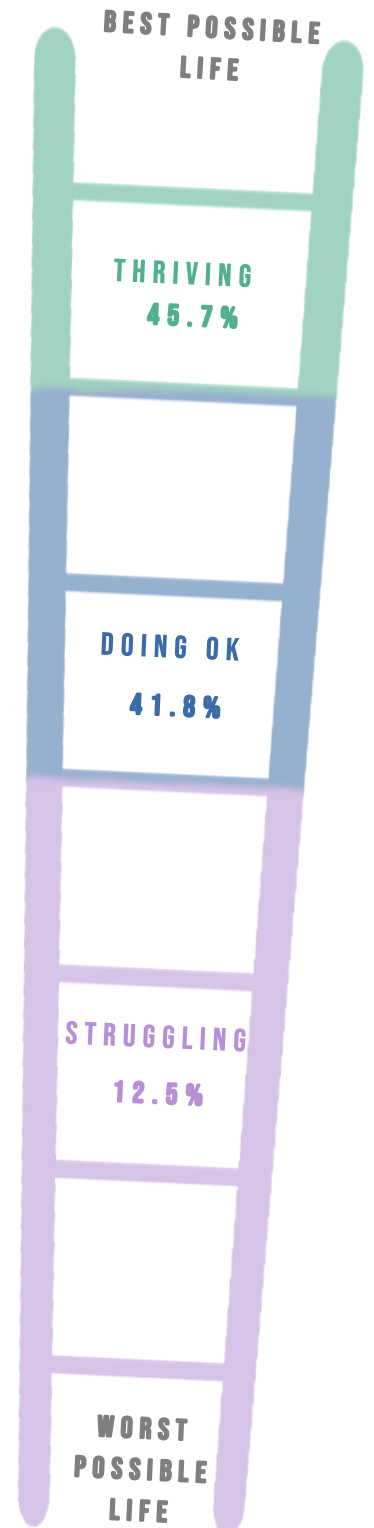
LIFE SATISFACTION

Data from 2021 indicates that many primary school students considered themselves to be thriving (45.7%), compared to those who were doing OK (41.8%) and struggling (12.5%) (see image pictured right).

GENDER

BEST POSSIBLE LIFE

THRIVING 45.7%

DOING OK 41.8%

STRUGGLING 12.5%

WORST POSSIBLE LIFE

FIGURE 14. Percentage of responses for each category of life satisfaction in 2021 by gender. Struggling (purple) refers to wellbeing that is at risk. Doing OK (blue) indicates wellbeing that is moderate or inconsistent. Thriving (green) reflects wellbeing that is strong, consistent, and progressing. Results indicate a majority of students report doing OK or thriving in 2021. Rates of life satisfaction are similar across male and female primary school students. However, there is a trend for students within the Other category (students that identify as Other or prefer not to identify their gender) to be more likely to rate themselves as having lower life satisfaction.

SES
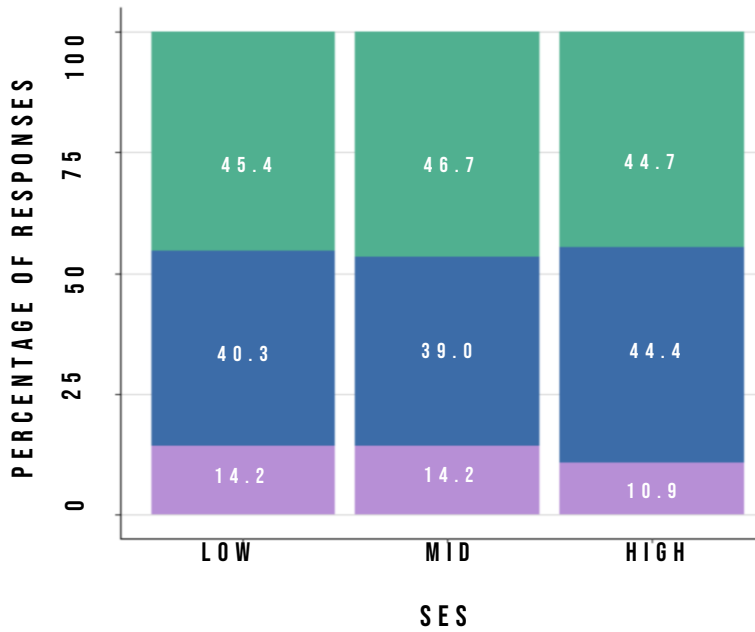
FIGURE 15. Percentage of responses for each category of life satisfaction for 2021 (thriving: green; doing OK: blue; struggling: purple) by SES. Trends are similar regarding life satisfaction across the range of SES levels. Students living in a High SES area report slightly less levels of 'struggling' relative to students from Low, and Mid SES areas.

YEARLY TRENDS

There was little difference in life satisfaction over the previous 3 years, with the average score reflecting that students were in the moderate range, or "doing OK" (See Figure 16).
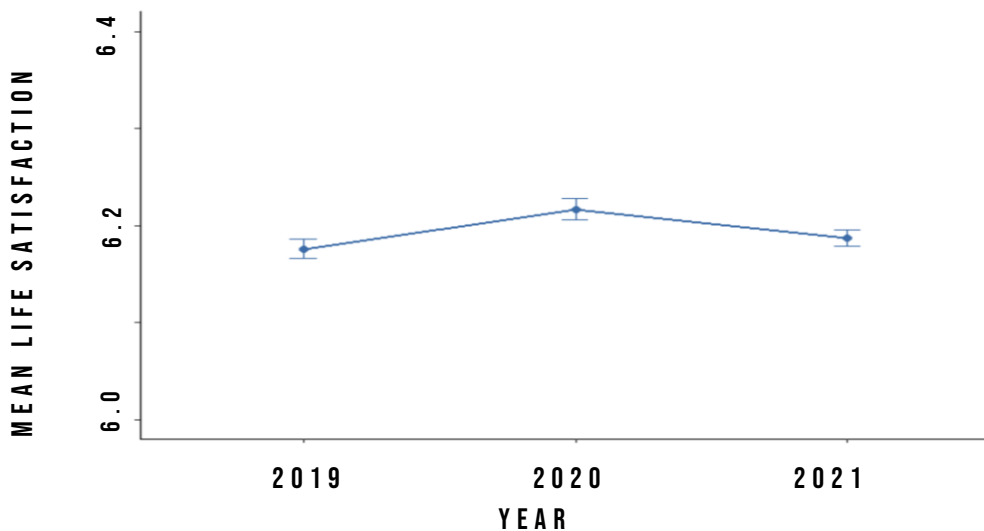
FIGURE 16. Student ratings of life satisfaction by year. Points represent mean scores, and error bars represent standard error. Despite an apparent slight increase in 2020, there was no statistically significant difference in mean life satisfaction scores between 2019 (M= 6.18, SD = 1.52), 2020 (M= 6.22, SD = 1.46), and 2021 (M= 6.19, SD= 1.48).

PHYSICAL PROTECTIVE FACTORS

The following are each descriptive analyses based on single items from the 2021 survey relating to key physical protective factors of resilience and wellbeing.

HEALTHY EATING

FIGURE 17. Percentage of student responses relating to frequency of healthy eating. 52.1% of students state they always (or almost always) eat well to stay well, compared to 34% who report this behaviour often, 12.2% sometimes, and 1.7% of students who report to rarely (or never) eat well to stay well.
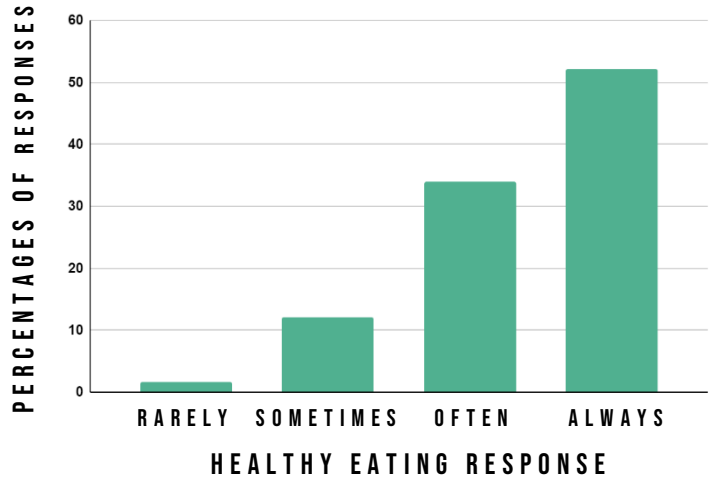
ADEQUATE SLEEP

FIGURE 18. Percentage of student responses relating to frequency of obtaining at least 8 hours of sleep most nights. Results suggest that 44.4% of students are obtaining adequate sleep daily, with 28.5% often, 19.1% sometimes and 8% of students saying they rarely get 8 hours of sleep most nights.
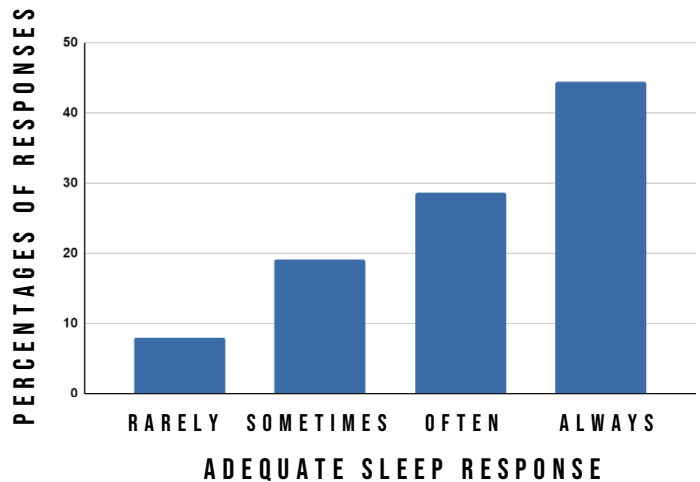
PHYSICALLY ACTIVE

FIGURE 19. Percentage of student responses relating to frequency of keeping physically fit. Results suggest that a majority 48% of students are always trying to keep fit, with 33.9% reporting this behaviour often or 15% sometimes. Only 3.1% of students rarely try to keep fit.
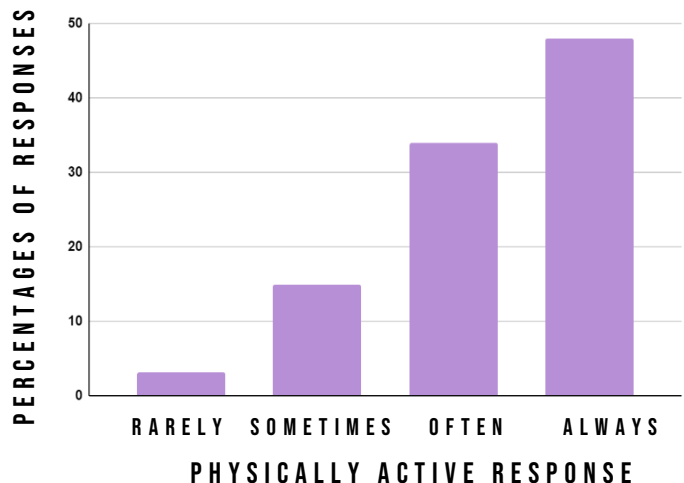
SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

The following are each descriptive analyses based on single items from the 2021 survey relating to aspects of social support. Feeling connected is associated with increased resilience and wellbeing.
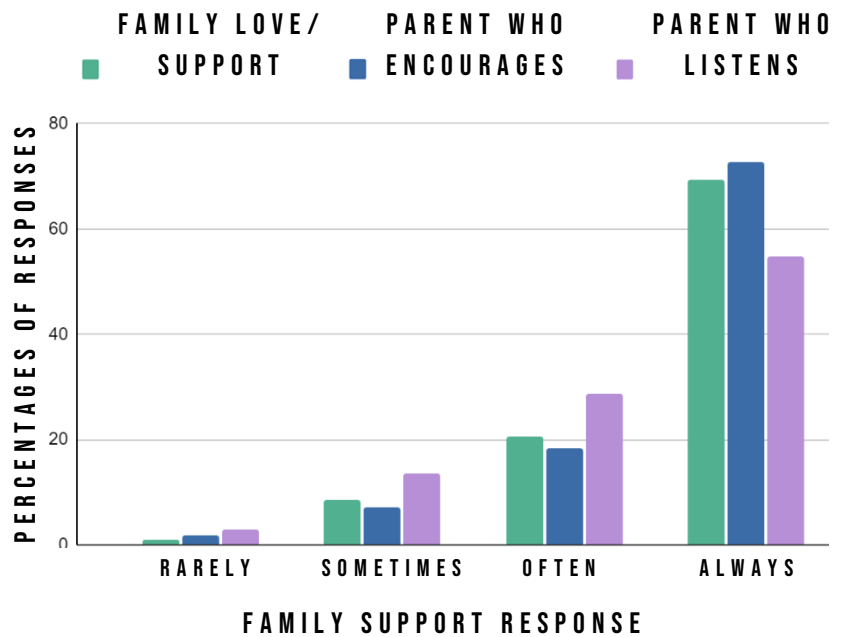
PERCEIVED SCHOOL SUPPORT

FIGURE 20. Percentage of student responses relating to frequency of perceived school support: Having a teacher that cares for (green) and/or encourages (blue) them. Results suggest that the majority of students always perceive to have some teacher support at school, being from a teacher who cares (60.3%) or encourages (55.6%).
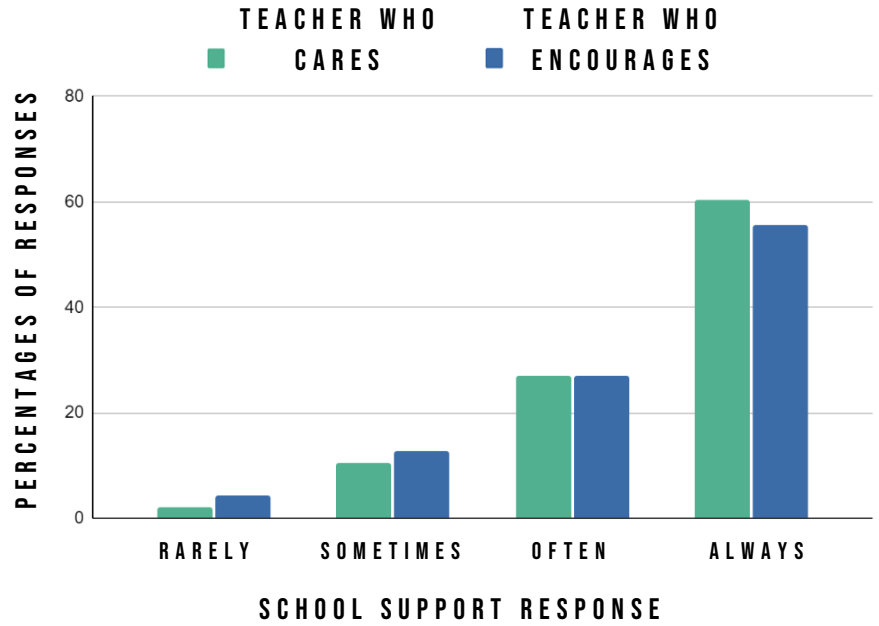

PERCEIVED FAMILY SUPPORT

FIGURE 21. Percentage of student responses relating to frequency of perceived family support: Having a parent/caregiver that supports (green), encourages (blue), and listens (purple). Results suggest that the majority of students always perceive to have a family member love/support (69.4%), encourage (72.7%), or listen to them (54.9%).

PERCEIVED PEER SUPPORT
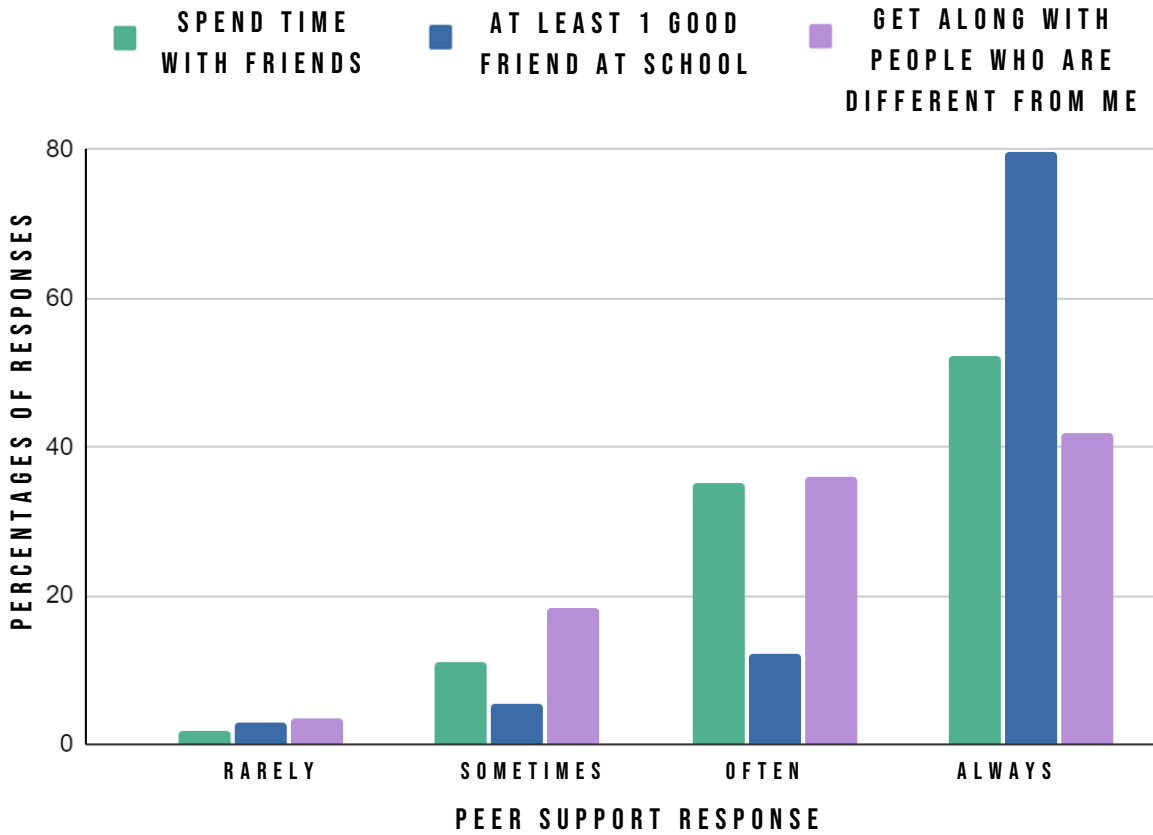
FIGURE 22. Percentage of student responses relating to frequency of perceived peer support: Spending time with friends (green), have at least one good friend at school (blue), and gets along with people who are different from them (purple). Results suggest that the majority of students always perceive to have at least one good friend at school (79.6%). Students feel as if they often (35.2%) or almost always get to spend time with friends (52.1%). Students similarly feel as if they often (36.1%) or almost always (42%) get along with people who may be different from them.

SOCIAL IDENTITY

The following are each descriptive analyses based on single items from the 2021 survey relating to feelings toward personal and social capabilities. These social identity factors are important for self-awareness and self-management that are associated with resilience building.

TRUSTWORTHINESS

FIGURE 23. Percentage of student responses relating to frequency of feelings of trustworthiness. 58.6% of students state they always feel they are trustworthy, and 47.9% of students report they always take responsibility for their actions.


FORGIVENESS

FIGURE 24. Percentage of student responses relating to frequency of feelings of forgiveness. Majority of students report often or always forgiving themselves (67.6%) when they 'mess up' and being forgiving towards others (67.3%)
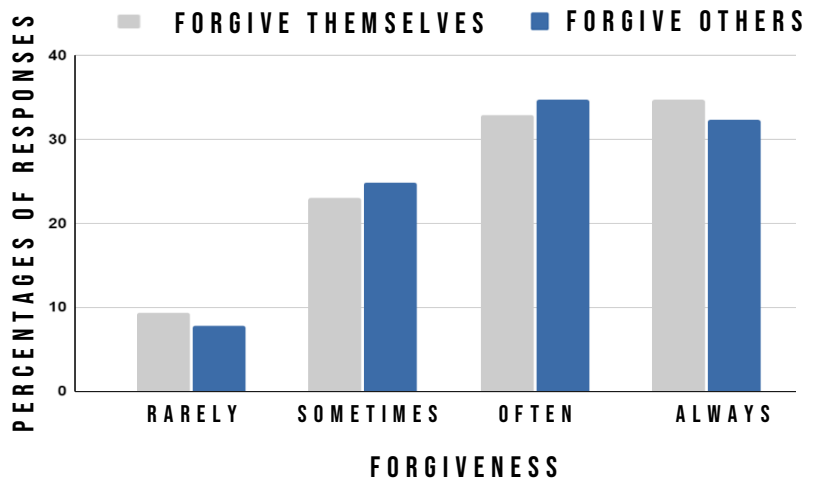

HELPFULNESS

FIGURE 25. Percentage of student responses relating to frequency of helping others, and the value placed on helping others. 75.5% of students believe it is always important to help other people in need. 35.4% of students report always and 42.4% report often giving their time to help others.
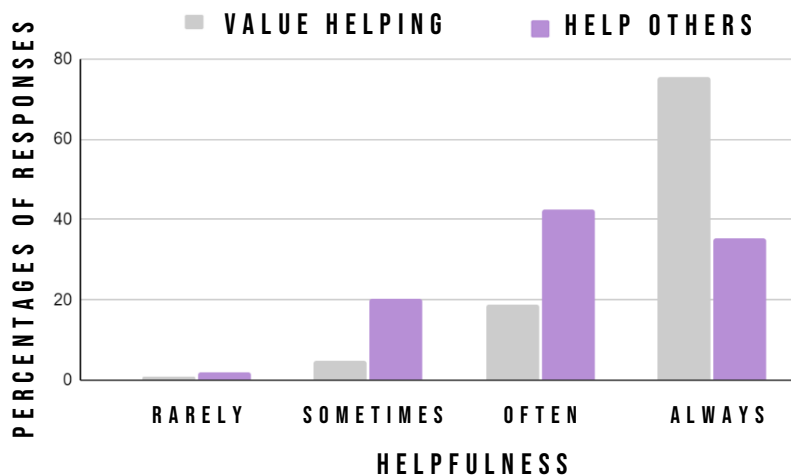
SAFETY FACTORS

The following are each descriptive analyses based on single items from the 2021 Resilience Survey items relating to safety factors in the student's environment and risky behaviours. Safety in different life contexts is essential to a sense of protection and resilience building.

SAFETY AT SCHOOL
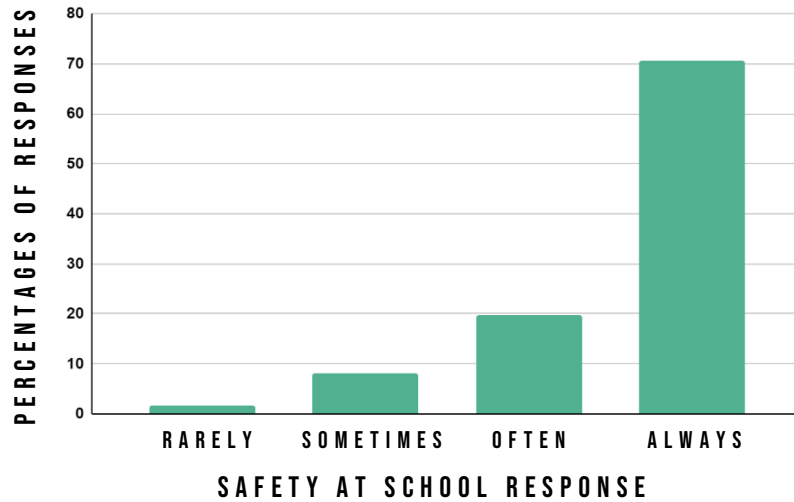
FIGURE 26. Percentage of student responses relating to frequency of feeling safe at school. Results suggest that a majority of 70.6% of students always feel safe, with 19.6% reporting feeling safe at school often or 8.1% sometimes. Only 1.7% of students rarely feel safe in school environments.

SAFETY AT HOME
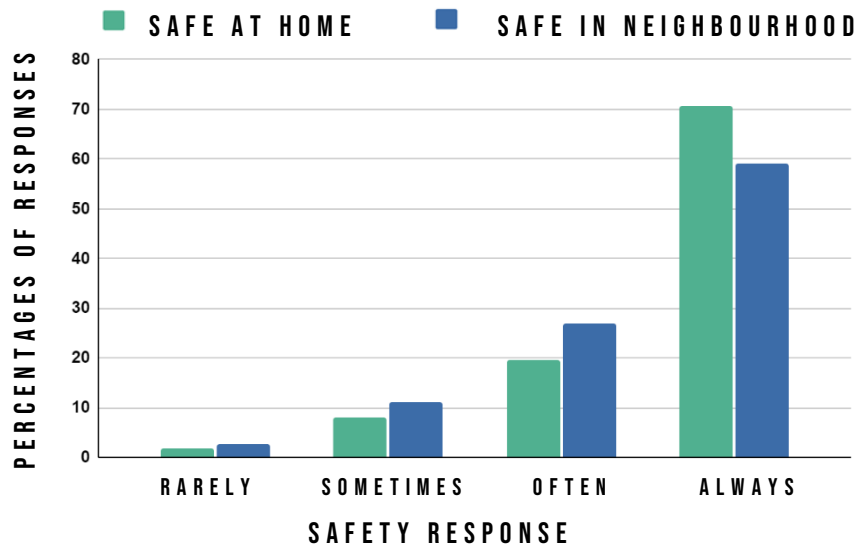
FIGURE 27. Percentage of student responses relating to frequency of feeling safe at home (green) and in their neighbourhood (blue). Results suggest that the majority of students always feel safe at home (70.6%) or in their neighbourhood (59.2%). 19.6% report feeling safe at home often or 8.1% sometimes; while 26.9% feel safe in their area often and 11.1% only sometimes. 1.7% of students say they rarely feel safe at home or 2.8% in their neighbourhood.

BULLYING
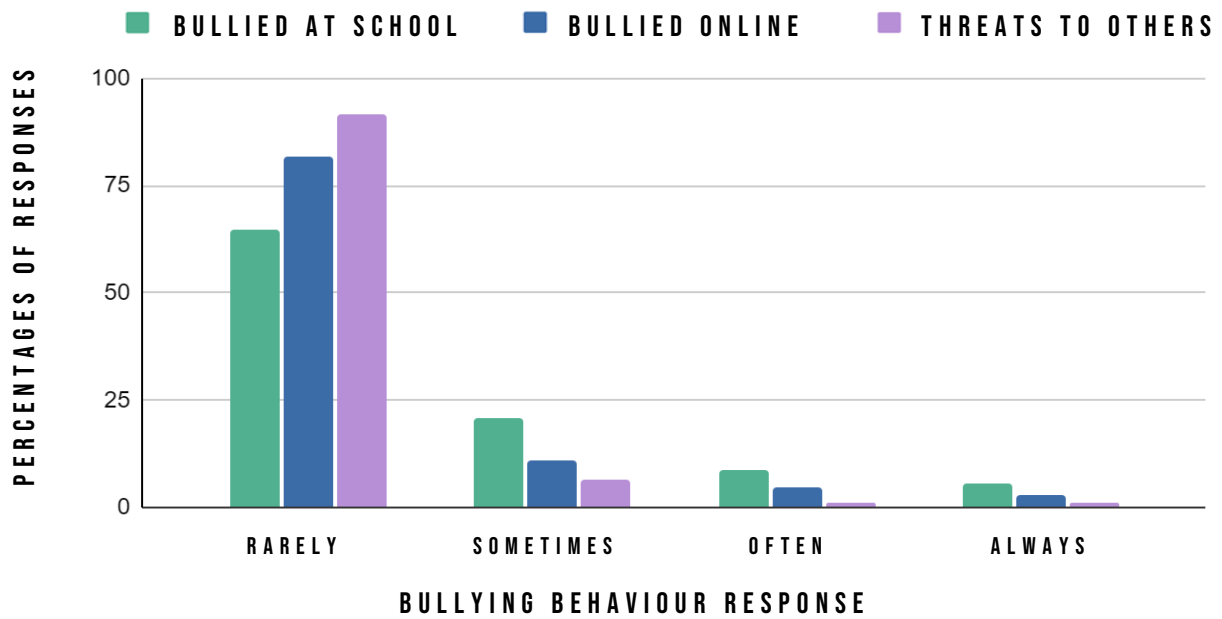
FIGURE 28. Percentage of primary school student responses relating to frequency of being bullied at school (green), being bullied online (blue), and threatening to physically harm someone (purple). Results suggest that the majority of primary students report rarely being bullied at school (64.5%), online (81.8%), or threaten to hurt others (91.5%). However, frequent bullying at school (Sometimes: 21%, Often: 8.7%, Always: 5.7%) and online (Sometimes: 10.9%, Often: 4.5%, Always: 2.8%) is still reported to occur in a minority of students. A minority of students also report threatening others (Sometimes: 6.4%, Often: 1.2%, Always: 0.8%)

FIRST NATIONS SNAPSHOT

The following provides a snapshot of data from the 2021 survey relating specifically to wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Of primary students surveyed in schools, 1.2% (332 students) identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (M=9.9 years, SD=1.19). 50.9% of these students identified as female, 44.0% identified as male, and 5.1% self-reported as "Other" and/or preferred not to report gender identity.

DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY

FIGURE 29. Percentage of responses relating to depressive (blue) and anxiety (purple) symptoms in 2021. Average scores for First Nations children show depressive symptoms (M=3.82, SD=1.76) are in the healthy range, and anxiety scores (M=4.06, SD=1.97) are in the mid-range.
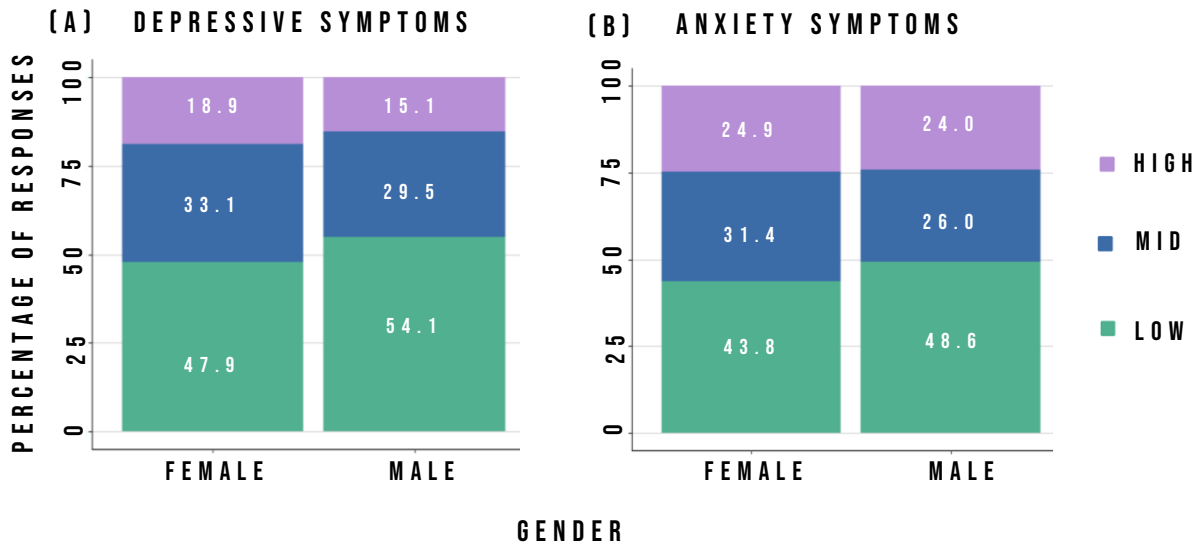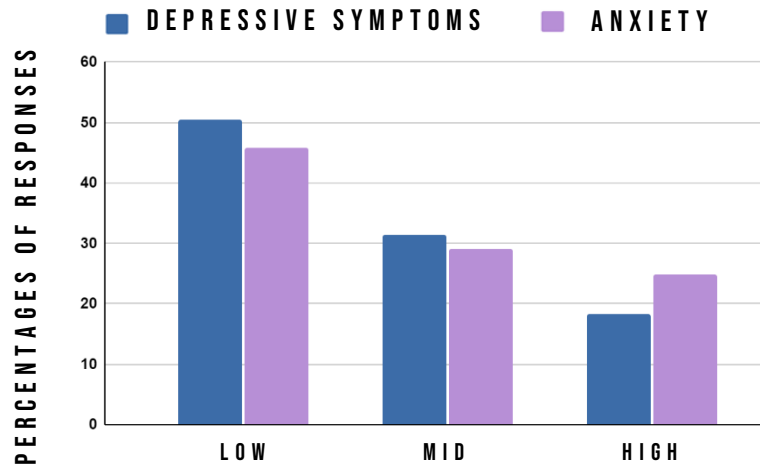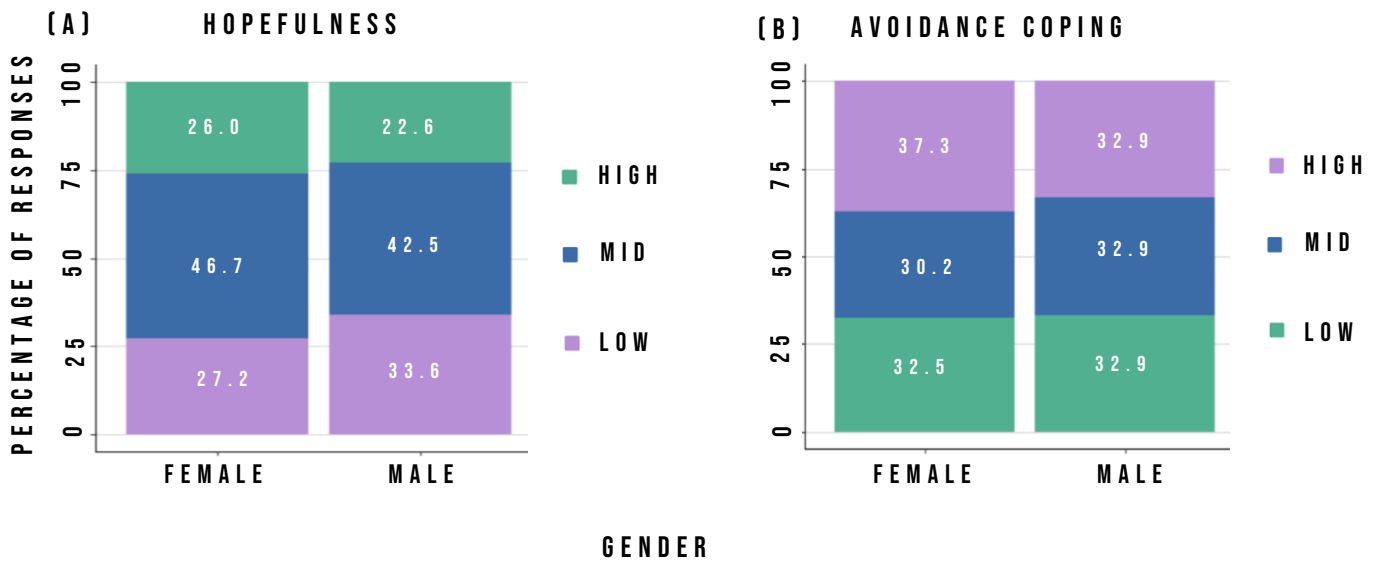

FIGURE 30. Percentage of responses relating to (A) depressive and (B) anxiety symptoms by gender in 2021. Female students display higher response rates of depressive symptoms in the Mid (blue) and High (purple) categories compared to male students. Female students display higher response rates of anxiety symptoms in the Mid (blue) range, although groups are roughly equivalent in the high (purple range). *N.B. As fewer than 20 students self-reported as 'Other' or preferred not to specify their gender, this category has not been included in these figures. This is to avoid misrepresentation of this group at a national level based on a small sample.*

HOPE AND COPING

FIGURE 31. Percentage of responses relating to hopefulness (green) and avoidance coping (grey) in 2021. Average scores for hopefulness (M=22.3, SD=6.56) and avoidance coping/disengagement (M=9.71, SD=2.75) are in the mid-range. *N.B. A higher hopefulness score is indicative of a more positive outcome, whereas lower avoidance coping represents a more positive outcome.*
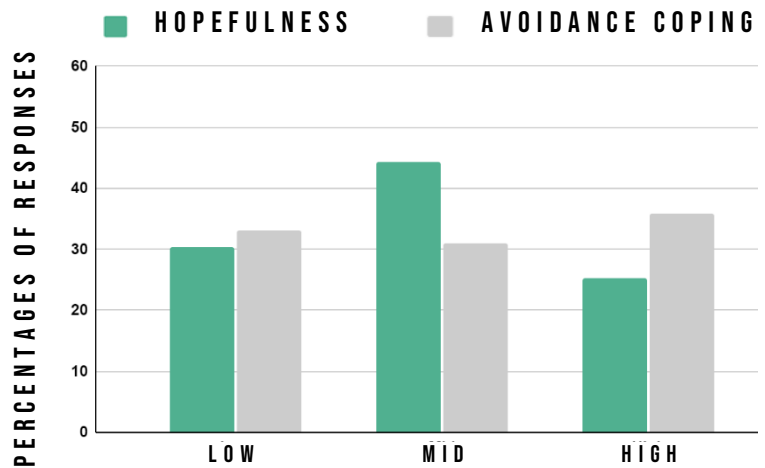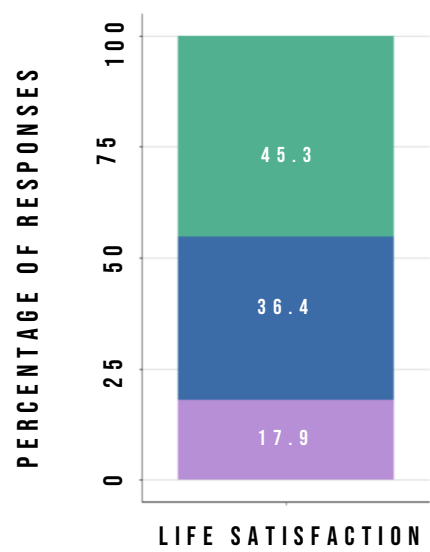

GENDER

FIGURE 32. Percentage of responses relating to (A) hopefulness and (B) avoidance coping/disengagement by gender in 2021. Female First Nations youth display higher response rates of hopefulness in the Mid (blue) and High (purple) categories compared to male students. However, female students also show higher rates of disengagement/avoidance coping in the High category (purple) than male students. *N.B. As fewer than 20 students self-reported as 'Other' or preferred not to specify their gender, this category has not been included in these figures. This is to avoid misrepresentation of this group at a national level based on a small sample.*

LIFE SATISFACTION

FIGURE 33. Percentage of responses for each category of life satisfaction in 2021. Struggling (purple) refers to wellbeing that is at risk. Doing OK (blue) indicates wellbeing that is moderate or inconsistent. Thriving (green) reflects wellbeing that is strong, consistent, and progressing. Results indicate a majority of First Nations students report thriving in 2021.

GENDER

FIGURE 34. Percentage of responses for each category of life satisfaction in 2021 by gender. Rates of life satisfaction are similar across male and female primary school students. However, male students report slightly higher life satisfaction in the thriving category (green). *N.B. As fewer than 20 students self-reported as 'Other' or preferred not to specify their gender, this category has not been included in these figures. This is to avoid misrepresentation of this group at a national level based on a small sample.*
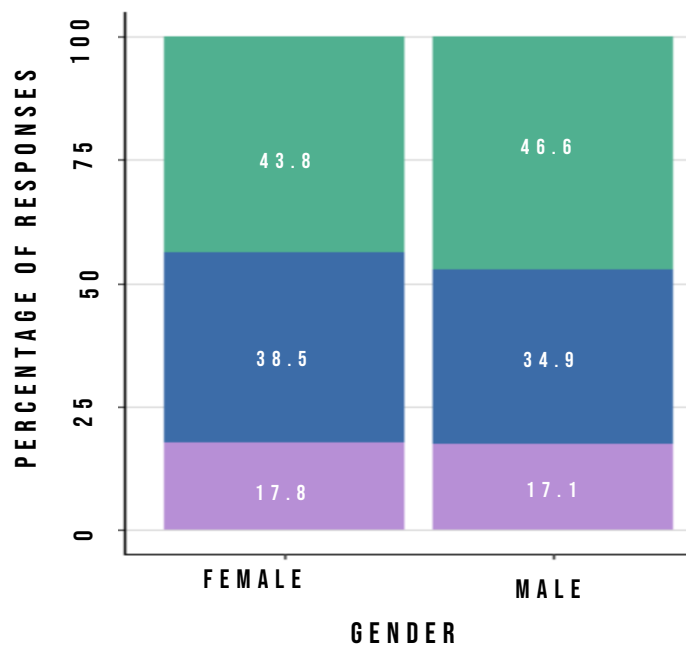
WHAT OUR KIDS SAY

When asked in 2021 "If you could magically do anything, what is one thing that you would do to support the wellbeing of young people?" 28,156 primary school students responded. The dominant themes from their responses were:

MENTAL HEALTH

16.7% of responses considered mental health an important topic in primary school students. Of these responses, the most common comments were to *"get rid of depression and anxiety"* and *"help people going through mental health problems"*. However, there was also a strong theme amongst responses of children to increase awareness of this topic. For example, *"I would spread more awareness about mental health seeing as it is a big issue. I would get parents to check up on their kids to see if they are doing alright"* and *"educate everyone about mental health and how to stop prevent any anxiety or depression"*. Children want to *"find a way for more parents and guardians to listen to their troubles"*. Helping children understand their emotions was also mentioned, with emphasis on *"help[ing] them with understanding mental health and that it's not always their fault"*.

BULLYING

Bullying was a main concern for primary school students, with approximately 22.7% of responses mentioning this topic.

Of these responses, the most common sentiment was that they want to *"stop bullying because it is a big problem"* and they want *"young children and teens to feel safer online and at school"*. Responses also often included wanting to *"stop cyber bullying"*, *"[online] trolling"*, and *"hate commenting"*.

Student comments often appealed for empathy and kindness as a response to bullying. For example, *"to stop bullying by showing bullies how it affects people everyday and show them how it feels"*, *"tell them to use... gratitude empathy mindfulness"*, and to *"spread kindness and help others when they need it"*.

SCHOOL

19.6% of responses discussed school. Many comments related to trying to *"make school more fun"* and make sure kids *"have a good time at school"*.

However, there was also a strong focus on wanting to make sure all kids could attend school and making sure they were safe. For example, *"I would make sure that [kids] feel safe and happy ... at school"*, *"I would help kids that can't go to school and help them get an education"*, *"make sure all kids get to school"* and *"make sure kids have the right equipment to go to school"*.

Responses also emphasized the want to help kids who are struggling in school. For example, *"help them improve in their learning and make them feel happy in school"*, *"get students more help at school"*, and *"help people with schoolwork"*.

ENVIRONMENT

Approximately 8.2% of responses from primary school students mentioned wanting to help the environment and animals.

Students think it is important to *"save the environment"*, *"keep the environment clean and healthy"* and *"help the environment so then younger kids can have a better future and so can the animals"*. They would like to *"teach people to care for the environment so our Earth doesn't get destroyed"*.

Many students want to *"stop global warming"*, and *"reduce pollution to make the earth cleaner and help animals and the environment"*. Other common sentiments included *"pick up all the rubbish"*, *"take out all the rubbish in all oceans"*, *"plant trees to get air"* and *"plant lots of native trees"*.

COMMUNITY

Approximately 23.9% of students want to tackle broad social issues. For example: *"end poverty"*, *"end world hunger"*, *"get rid of drugs, smoking and vaping"*, *"stop racism"*, *protect [children] from violence"*, *"find a cure for cancer and other illnesses"*. An additional 11% of students also mention wanting to donate money to causes that alleviate these issues.

However, 13.6% of students focus more on their social circles of parents, family, and friends. They want to *"spend more time with parents"* and *"have fun and spend time with family and friends"*. They think it is important to *"help kids with no parents or supporting adult figures"*, *"help [their] friends and support them"*, *"help kids make friends"*, and *"help others by including them"*.

COVID

Approximately 5.7% of primary school student responses suggested that COVID-19 was an important concern. The majority of statements conveyed that primary school students wanted to *"get rid of COVID-19"* and/or *"stop covid 19/corona virus so we can get back to our normal lives"*. Students also wanted to *"create a vaccine for corona virus and make sure everyone has it available to them"*.

SECONDARY STUDENT ANALYSES

KEY RESULTS:
SECONDARY STUDENTS

MENTAL WELLBEING

Average mental health scores in secondary students has declined between 2019-2021. 38.2% of students report high levels of anxiety and/or depression. Female students report slightly lower levels of mental wellbeing compared to male students, with gender diverse students most at risk.

LEARNING MINDSET

20% of secondary students report a positive learning mindset (i.e., low anxiety and low disengagement). However, 40.9% of students report high levels of avoidance coping and disengagement from problem solving. Students show a decrease in hopefulness and increased disengagement from 2019-2021. Female, gender diverse, and students living in low SES areas report lower levels of hopefulness and higher disengagement.

LIFE SATISFACTION

Life satisfaction of secondary school children has decreased steadily from 2019. The average report of life satisfaction suggests many students are within the 'doing OK' category. Female and gender diverse students report higher rates of 'struggling'. Students in higher SES areas are less at risk of poor life satisfaction.

PHYSICAL PROTECTIVE FACTORS

Physical protective behaviours such as healthy eating and keeping fit are being fostered in the majority of secondary school students. However, only around ¼ of students are consistently obtaining at least 8 hours of sleep per night.

SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Secondary school students generally feel supported by others. This includes the majority of students perceiving frequent school support from teachers, frequent family support and encouragement, and peer support.

SOCIAL IDENTITY

Students generally report they can trust and forgive others, as well as forgive themselves. Most students believe in the value of helping others, although there is a discrepancy between that value and action towards helping people.
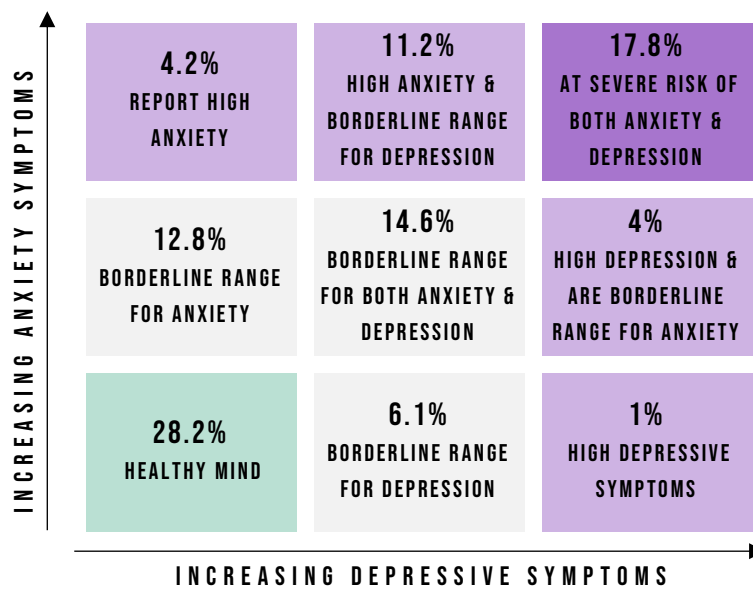
RISK & SAFETY FACTORS

Students feel protected in their schools and homes. Most students report rarely being subjected to bullying at school or online, however approximately 25% of students report being bullied at school, and 15% online. Approximately 14% of students report threatening others within the last term. Many students avoid harmful substances (e.g., vaping, smoking, drinking alcohol or using illegal drugs), although up to 10% of students engage often or frequently in at least one of these behaviors.

MENTAL WELLBEING

To determine 2021 levels of mental wellbeing in 34,778 secondary school students, symptoms of depression and anxiety were combined showing healthy students as reporting low depression and anxiety, borderline students as those with mid-range reports of depression, anxiety, or both, and students at risk of mental wellbeing problems as those reporting high levels of depression, anxiety, or both.

MENTAL WELLBEING

4.2% REPORT HIGH ANXIETY	**11.2%** HIGH ANXIETY & BORDERLINE RANGE FOR DEPRESSION	**17.8%** AT SEVERE RISK OF BOTH ANXIETY & DEPRESSION
12.8% BORDERLINE RANGE FOR ANXIETY	**14.6%** BORDERLINE RANGE FOR BOTH ANXIETY & DEPRESSION	**4%** HIGH DEPRESSION & ARE BORDERLINE RANGE FOR ANXIETY
28.2% HEALTHY MIND	**6.1%** BORDERLINE RANGE FOR DEPRESSION	**1%** HIGH DEPRESSIVE SYMPTOMS

(vertical axis: INCREASING ANXIETY SYMPTOMS; horizontal axis: INCREASING DEPRESSIVE SYMPTOMS)

FIGURE 35. A graphical representation of student mental wellbeing during 2021, comprised of combinations of depressive and anxiety symptoms. 28.2% of students are of healthy mind (low anxiety + low depressive symptoms - pictured in green). 33.5% of students are in a borderline range (moderate anxiety and/or depressive symptoms - pictured in grey); **38.2% of students are in the high-risk categories (high anxiety, depressive symptoms, or both - pictured in purple).**

OPENNESS

As an indicator of openness, students were asked about how readily they can talk to others about things that upset them. Only 1 in 6 secondary school students report they are always willing talk about things that upset them.

Female students more frequently reported being willing to discuss things that upset them (55%), compared to male students (42%).

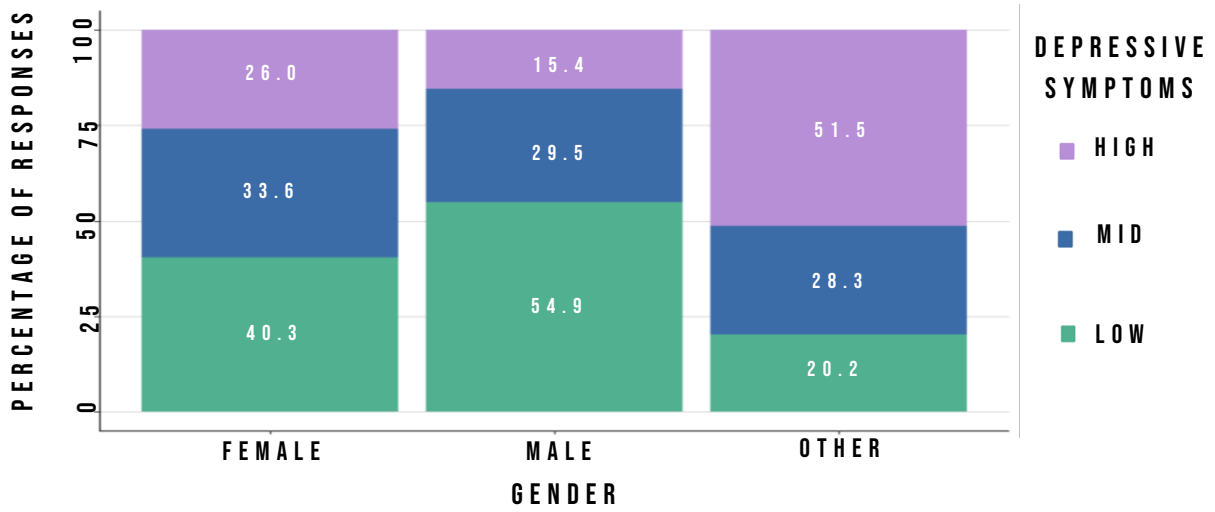## DEPRESSIVE SYMPTOMS – GENDER

FIGURE 36. Percentage of responses for ratings of depressive symptoms in 2021 by gender. Female students display higher response rates of depressive symptoms in the Mid (blue) and High (purple) categories compared to male students. Students' that identify as Other or prefer not to identify their gender show greatest rates of depressive symptoms in the High category.

ANXIETY SYMPTOMS - GENDER

FIGURE 37. Percentage of responses for ratings of anxiety symptoms in 2021 by gender. Half of male students report anxiety symptoms in the Low (green) category, compared to only about one quarter of females and just 17% of students' that identify as Other or prefer not to identify their gender. About 1 in 5 males report anxiety symptoms in the High (purple) category compared to 2 in 5 females, and 3 in 5 students' that identify as Other or prefer not to identify their gender.

SES

Depressive and Anxiety symptoms were each considered regarding SES; however no meaningful differences were found when comparing levels of SES.

YEARLY TRENDS IN MENTAL WELLBEING

There was an increase in poor mental health symptoms between 2019-2021. Figure 38 shows this statistically significant increase in depressive symptoms from 2019 (M=3.88, SD=1.76) to 2020 (M=4.00, SD=1.83), and again to 2021 (M=4.08, SD=1.86). Figure 39 shows a similar and statistically significant increase in anxiety symptoms from 2019 (M= 4.28, SD=2.00) to 2020 (M=4.40, SD=2.04), and again to 2021 (M=4.57, SD=2.06).
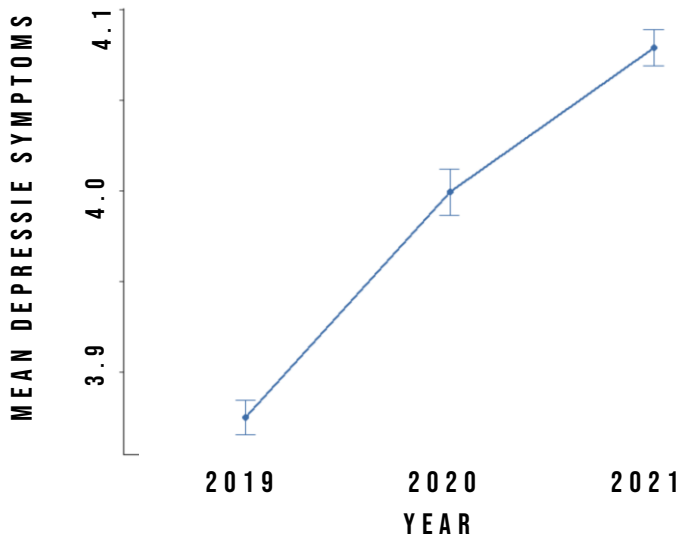
FIGURE 38. Mean scores of depressive symptoms for 2019, 2020, and 2021. Scores range from 2-8, with scores below 4 indicating a healthy range of symptoms, and scores above 4 indicating a borderline risk range for depressive symptoms. Points represent mean scores, with error bars represent standard error.
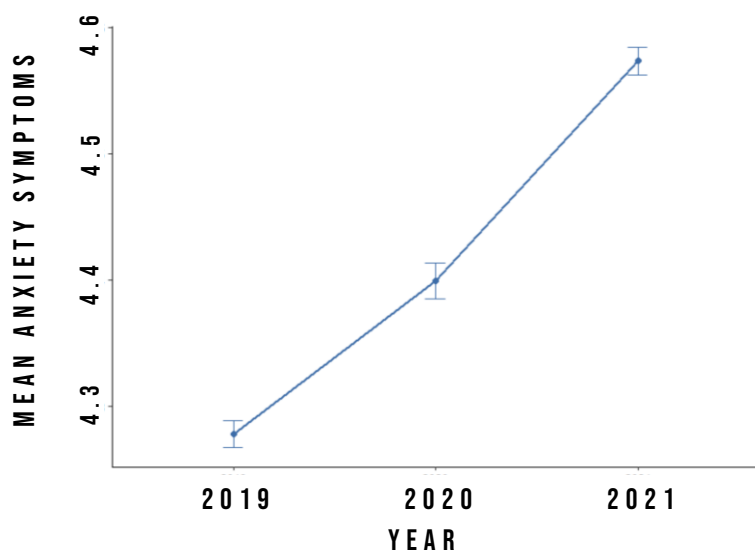

FIGURE 39. Mean scores of anxiety symptoms for 2019, 2020, and 2021. Scores range from 2-8, with scores below 4 indicating a healthy range of symptoms, and scores above 4 indicating a borderline risk range for anxiety symptoms. Points represent mean scores, and error bars represent standard error.

LEARNERS' MINDSET

Beyond the mental wellbeing of students, the learning mindset explores factors that may influence resilience building and engagement in the classroom. The measure of hopefulness reflects the combination of agency (the child's belief that they can initiate and work towards a desired goal), and pathways thinking (which reflects the actions required to achieve goals). In contrast, avoidance coping reflects behaviour aimed at disengaging or avoiding thinking about, feeling, or doing difficult things. Student engagement represents factors demonstrating positive engagement with learning, and the Positive Learner's Mindset combines reports of anxiety and disengagement to create a unique indicator of a child's readiness to learn.

HOPEFULNESS

Data in Figure 40 displays a pattern of statistically significant decline in hopefulness from 2019 (M=23.0, SD=6.29), to 2020 (M=22.7, SD=6.42), and again to 2021 (M=22.5, SD=6.34). The differences between years represent small but meaningful changes.
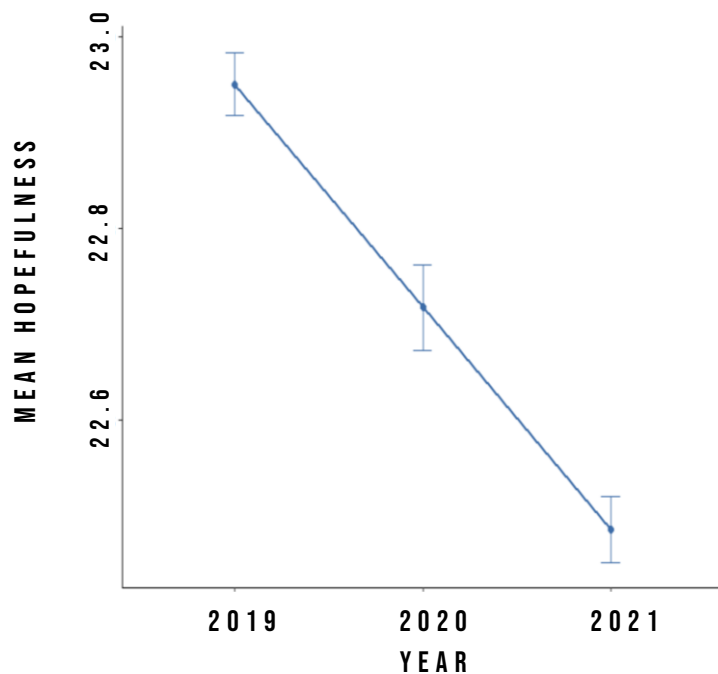
FIGURE 40. Mean scores of hopefulness across 2019, 2020, and 2021. Higher scores indicate greater hopefulness. Points represent mean group scores, with error bars representing standard error of the mean.
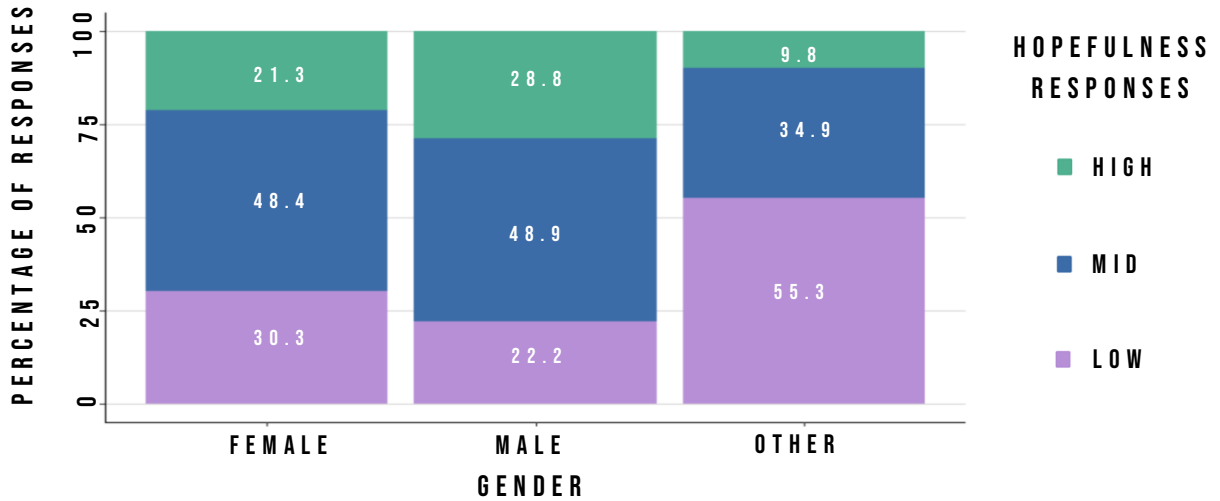
GENDER

FIGURE 41. Percentage of responses for ratings of hopefulness in 2021 by gender. Male students reported slightly higher rates of hopefulness in the High (green) and Mid (blue) categories compared to Female students. Students that identify as Other or prefer not to identify their gender reported lowest levels of hopefulness overall and demonstrated the largest proportion of responses (more than half these students) in the Low (purple) hopefulness category.
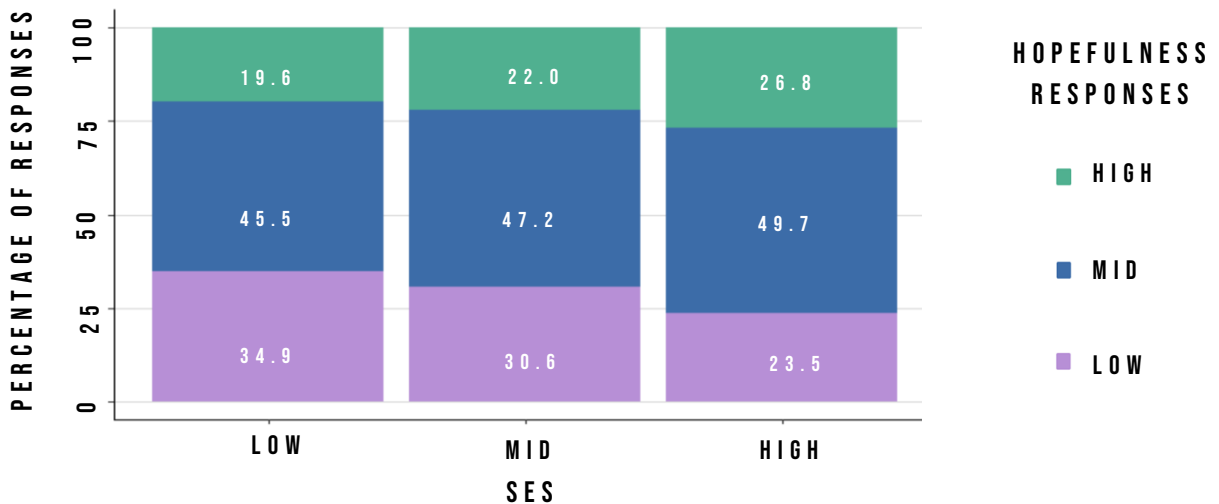
SES

FIGURE 42. Percentage of responses for ratings of hopefulness in 2021 by SES. Students in High SES areas report slightly higher rates of hopefulness in the High and Mid ranges compared to Mid and Low SES areas.
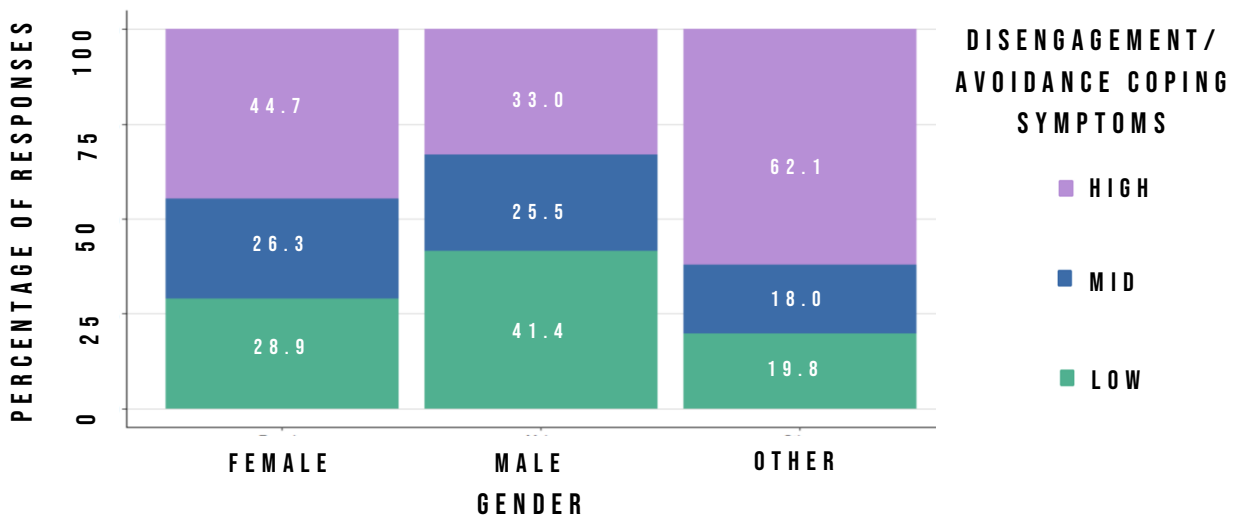
DISENGAGEMENT

Data on avoidance coping/disengagement shows a decline in wellbeing (see Figure 43). Students reported significantly more avoidance coping/disengagement in 2021 (M=9.81, SD=2.8) compared to 2020 (M=9.64, SD=2.83), and in 2020 compared to 2019 (M=9.42, SD=2.66). The differences between years represent small but meaningful changes.
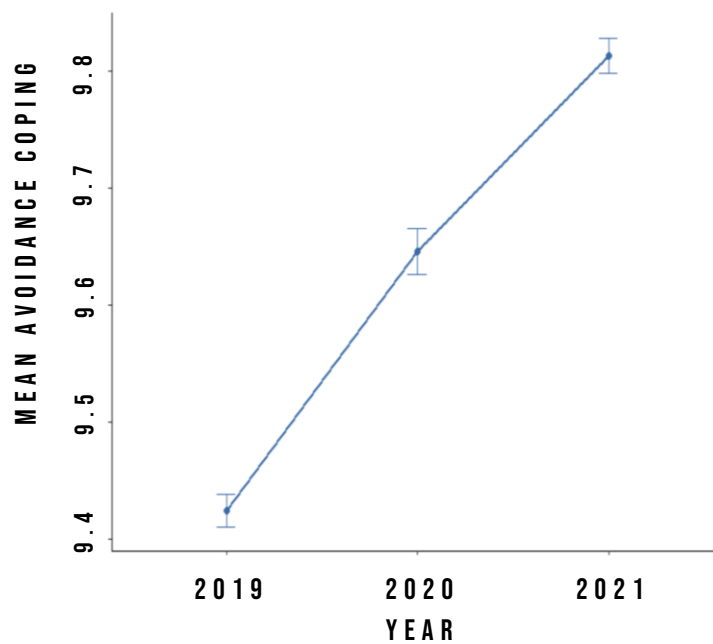
FIGURE 43. Mean scores of avoidance coping/disengagement across 2019, 2020, and 2021. Higher scores indicate greater levels of avoidance coping. Points represent mean group scores, with error bars representing standard error of the mean.
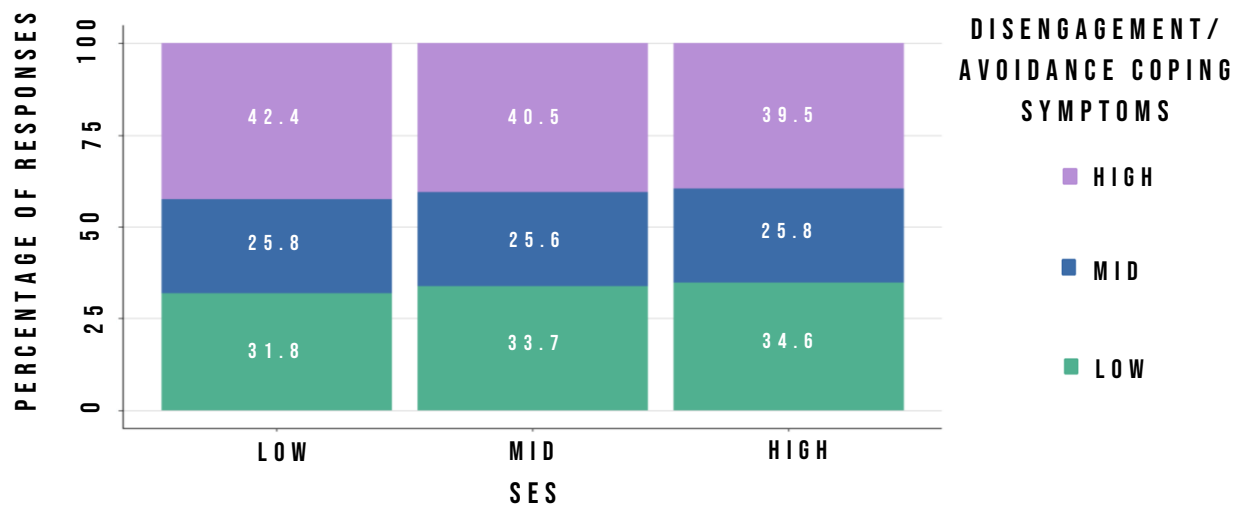
GENDER

FIGURE 44. Percentage of responses for ratings of avoidance coping/disengagement in 2021 by gender. More female students engage in higher avoidance coping/disengagement behaviours compared to males. However, students that identify as Other or prefer not to identify their gender show the greatest level of high avoidance coping/disengagement symptoms.

SES

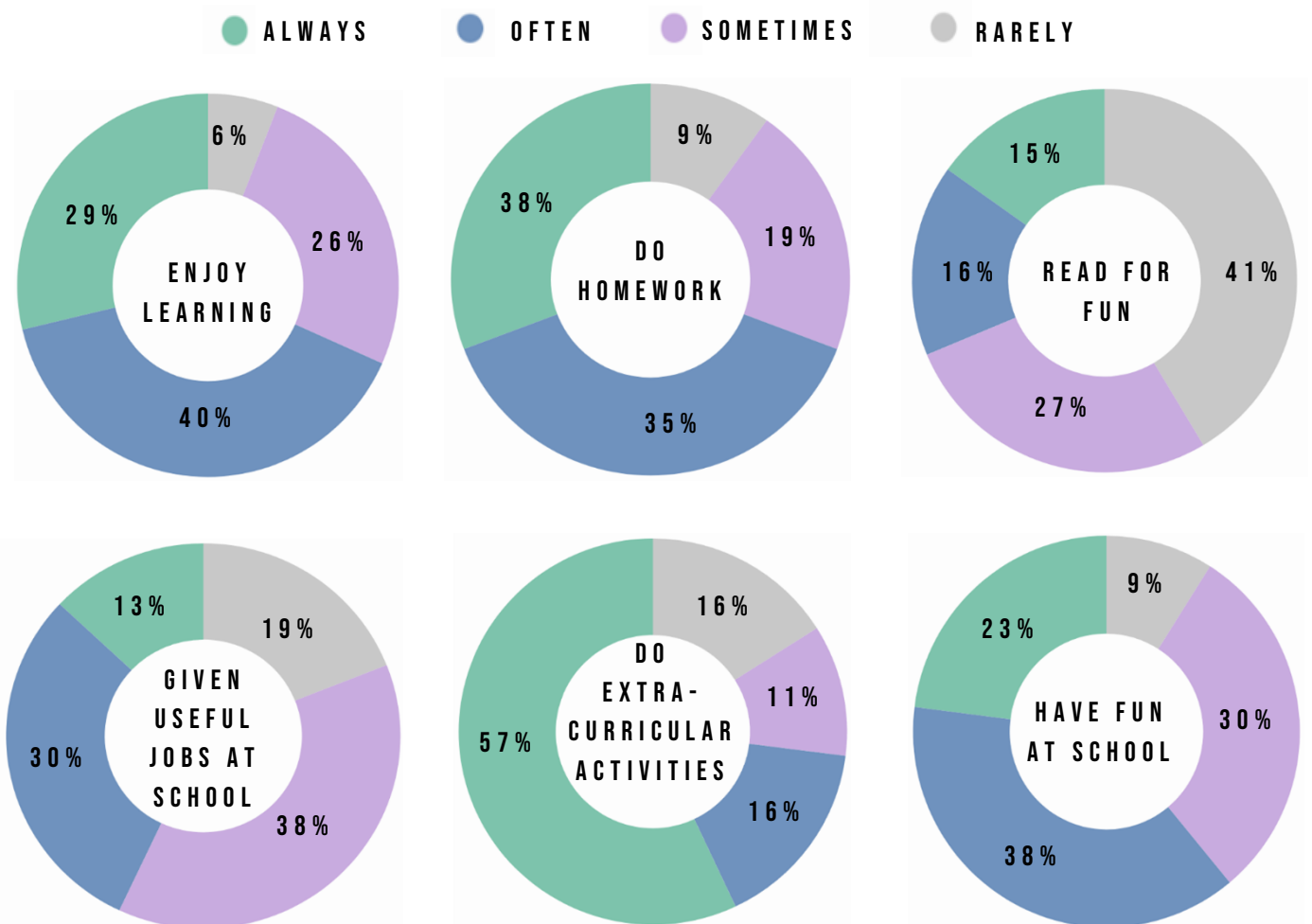Hopefulness and disengagement/avoidance coping were considered regarding levels of SES.

FIGURE 45. Percentage of responses for ratings of avoidance coping/disengagement in 2021 by SES. Levels of avoidance coping/disengagement remain relatively consistent across SES areas.

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

Feeling engaged is likely to influence student self-esteem, respect for themselves and others, and have a positive impact on building resilience. When secondary students were asked about engagement at school 4 in 10 report always trying hard at school and that they care about their school.
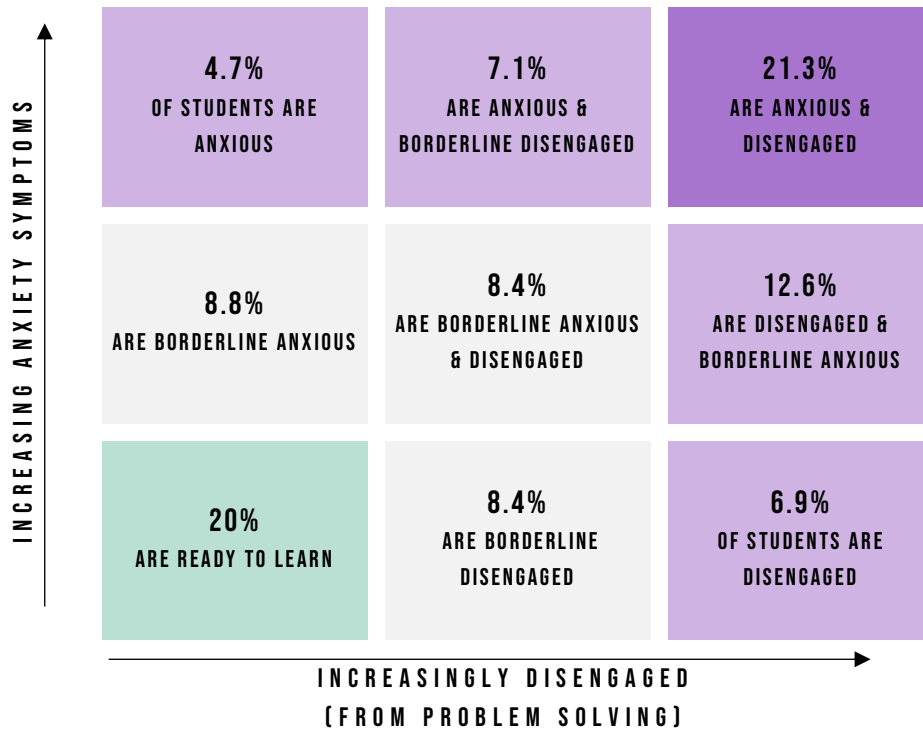
Students also reported their frequency of doing a range of other learning engagement behaviours:

● ALWAYS   ● OFTEN   ● SOMETIMES   ● RARELY

ENJOY LEARNING
- 6%
- 29%
- 26%
- 40%

DO HOMEWORK
- 9%
- 38%
- 19%
- 35%

READ FOR FUN
- 15%
- 16%
- 41%
- 27%

GIVEN USEFUL JOBS AT SCHOOL
- 13%
- 19%
- 30%
- 38%

DO EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES
- 16%
- 57%
- 11%
- 16%

HAVE FUN AT SCHOOL
- 9%
- 23%
- 30%
- 38%

FIGURE 46. Across student engagement items, 6-7 students out of 10 report often or always enjoying learning, doing homework, engaging in extra-curricular activity and generally having fun at school. In response to being given useful jobs to do at school over half of students reported often or always. In contrast to the high engagement for other items, less than a third of students' report reading for fun often or always, whereas 4 in 10 secondary students report rarely reading.

POSITIVE LEARNERS' MINDSET

4.7% OF STUDENTS ARE ANXIOUS	**7.1%** ARE ANXIOUS & BORDERLINE DISENGAGED	**21.3%** ARE ANXIOUS & DISENGAGED
8.8% ARE BORDERLINE ANXIOUS	**8.4%** ARE BORDERLINE ANXIOUS & DISENGAGED	**12.6%** ARE DISENGAGED & BORDERLINE ANXIOUS
20% ARE READY TO LEARN	**8.4%** ARE BORDERLINE DISENGAGED	**6.9%** OF STUDENTS ARE DISENGAGED

INCREASING ANXIETY SYMPTOMS ↑

INCREASINGLY DISENGAGED (FROM PROBLEM SOLVING) →

FIGURE 47. A graphical representation of Positive Learners' Mindset during 2021, indicated by combining scores on avoidance coping/disengagement and anxiety. 20% of students have a 'ready to learn' mindset (low anxiety, low disengagement - pictured in green). 25.6% of students are in a borderline range (moderate anxiety and/or disengagement - pictured in grey). **52.6% of students are at risk (high anxiety, disengagement, or both - pictured in purple).**
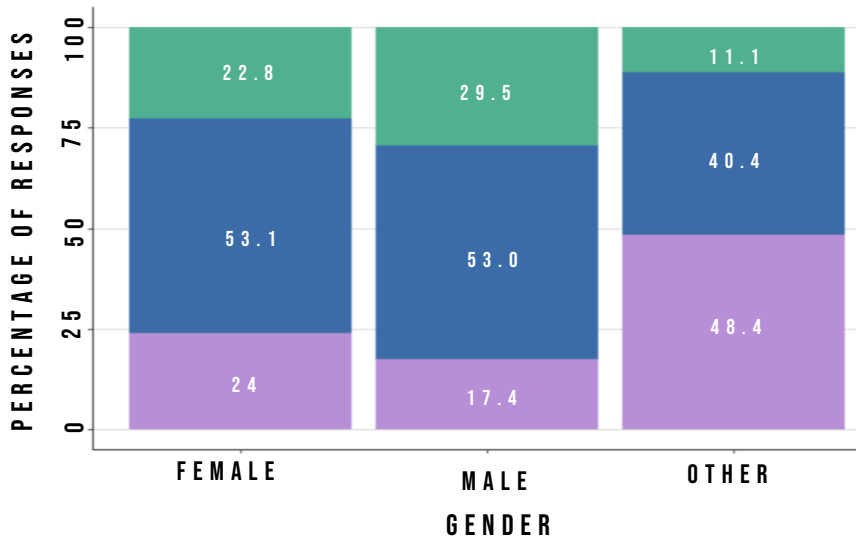
LIFE SATISFACTION

As an indication of life satisfaction, students were asked to imagine a ladder where the top represents the best possible life, and the bottom represents the worst possible life.
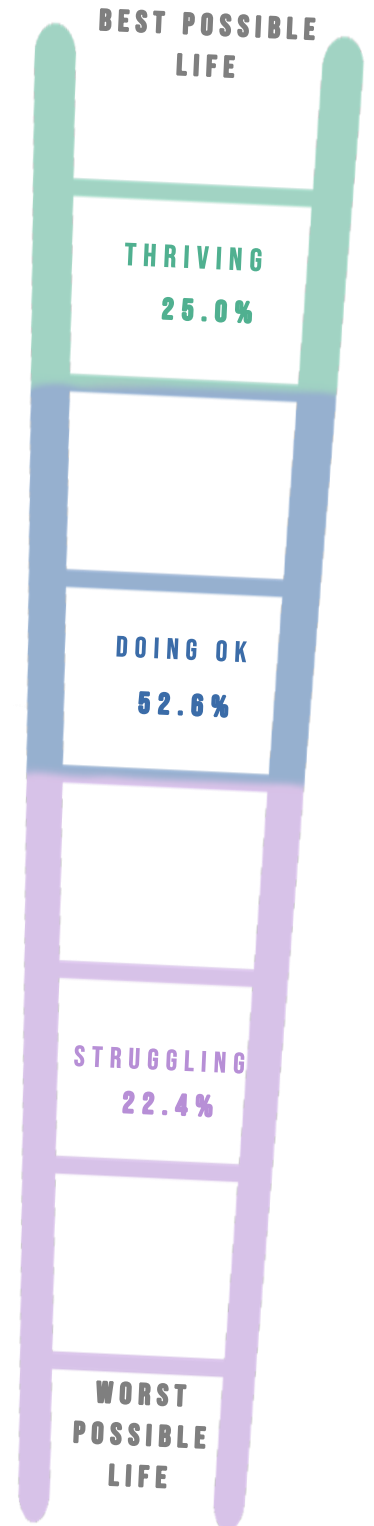
LIFE SATISFACTION

Data from 2021 indicates that over half of secondary school students considered themselves to be doing OK (52.6%), compared to those who were thriving (25.0%) and struggling (22.4%) (see image pictured right).

GENDER

FIGURE 48. Percentage of responses for each category of life satisfaction in 2021 by gender. Struggling (purple) refers to wellbeing that is at risk. Doing OK (blue) indicates wellbeing that is moderate or inconsistent. Thriving (green) reflects wellbeing that is strong, consistent, and progressing. Results indicate a majority of male and female secondary students report doing OK in 2021. However, there is a trend for students within the Other category (students that identify as Other or prefer not to identify their gender) to be more likely to rate lower life satisfaction overall, with around half in the struggling category and only around 1 in 10 of these students reporting life satisfaction in the thriving category.

BEST POSSIBLE LIFE

THRIVING
25.0%

DOING OK
52.6%

STRUGGLING
22.4%

WORST POSSIBLE LIFE

SES
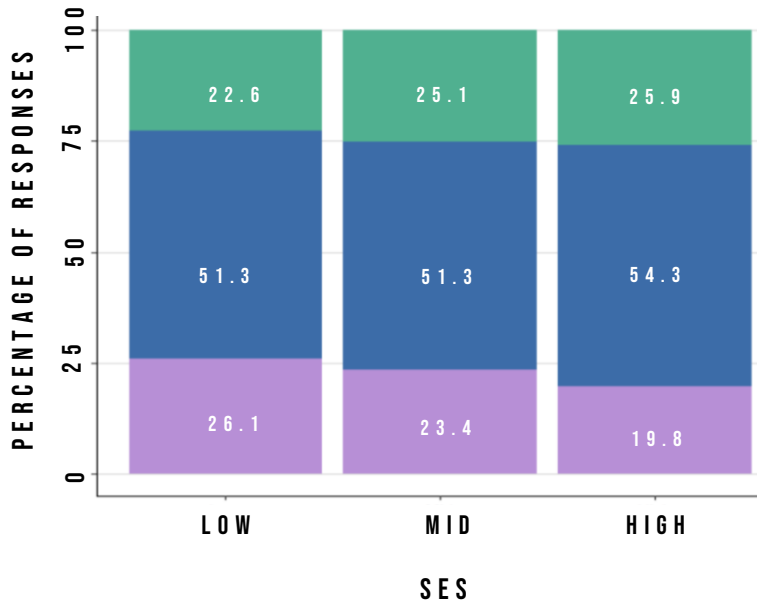
FIGURE 49. Percentage of responses for each category of life satisfaction for 2021 (thriving: green; doing OK: blue; struggling : purple) by SES. Trends are similar regarding life satisfaction across SES levels. Students living in a High SES area report slightly less levels of 'struggling' relative to students from Low, and Mid SES areas.

YEARLY TRENDS

Compared to both 2019 (M=5.66, SD=1.51) and 2020 (M=5.60, SD=1.45), students reported significantly lower life satisfaction in 2021 (M=5.52, SD=1.46). Differences between 2019 and 2020 were also statistically significant (See Figure 50).
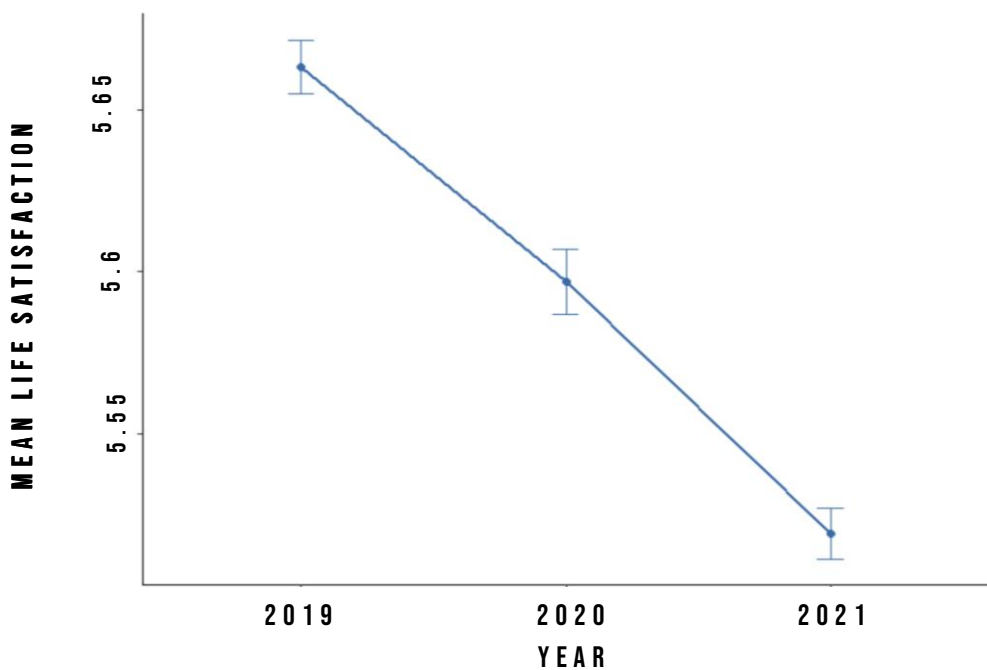

FIGURE 50. Student ratings of life satisfaction by year. Points represent mean scores, and error bars represent standard error. Mean scores indicate doing OK in each year (wellbeing that is moderate or inconsistent).

PHYSICAL PROTECTIVE FACTORS

The following are each descriptive analyses based on single items from the 2021 survey relating to key physical protective factors of resilience and wellbeing.

HEALTHY EATING

FIGURE 51. Percentage of secondary student responses relating to frequency of healthy eating. 38.5% of students state they always (or almost always) eat well to stay well, compared to 36.3% who report this behaviour often, 19.8% sometimes, and 5.4% of students who report to rarely (or never) eat well to stay well.
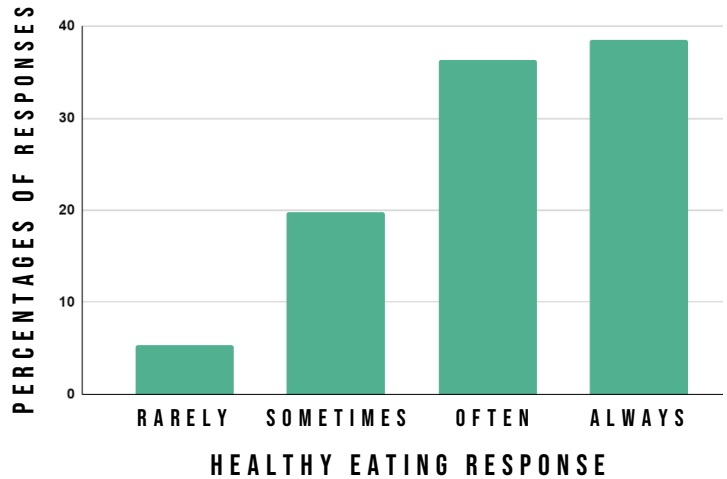

ADEQUATE SLEEP

FIGURE 52. Percentage of student responses to obtaining at least 8 hours of sleep most nights. Results suggest that only 25.3% of students are obtaining adequate sleep consistently per day, with 27.8% often, 29% sometimes, and 17.9% of students reporting they rarely get 8 hours of sleep most nights.
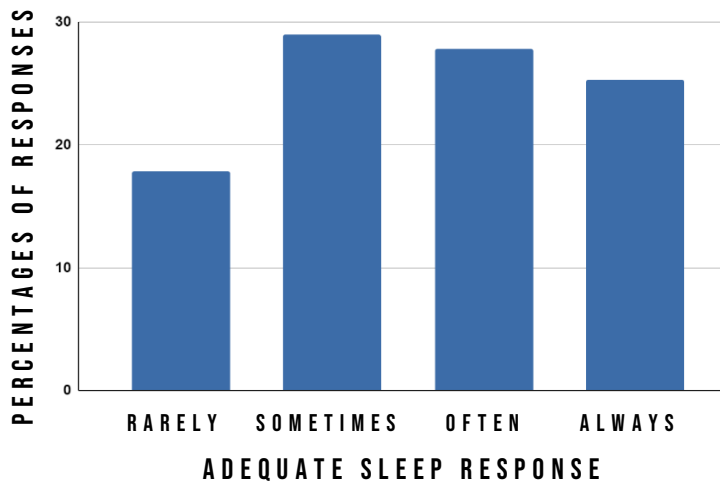
PHYSICALLY ACTIVE

FIGURE 53. Percentage of student responses relating to frequency of keeping physically fit. Results suggest that 33.7% of students are always trying to keep fit, with 35.3% reporting this behaviour often and 25.6% sometimes. 7.4% of students rarely try to keep fit.
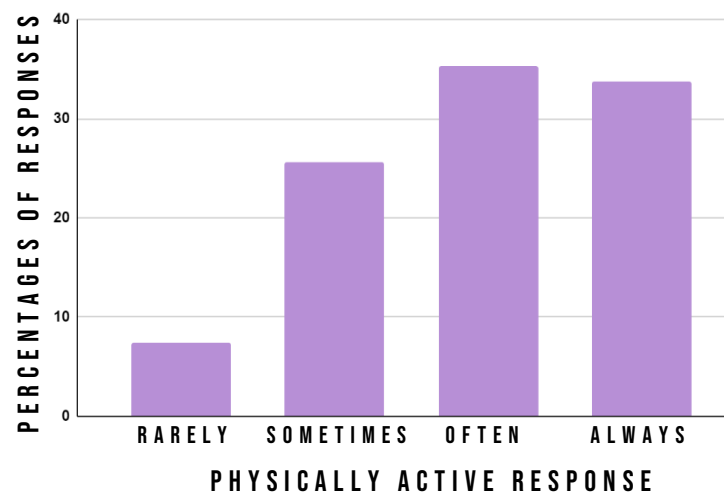
SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

The following are each descriptive analyses based on single items from the 2021 Resilience Survey relating to aspects of social support. Feeling connected is associated with increased resilience and wellbeing.
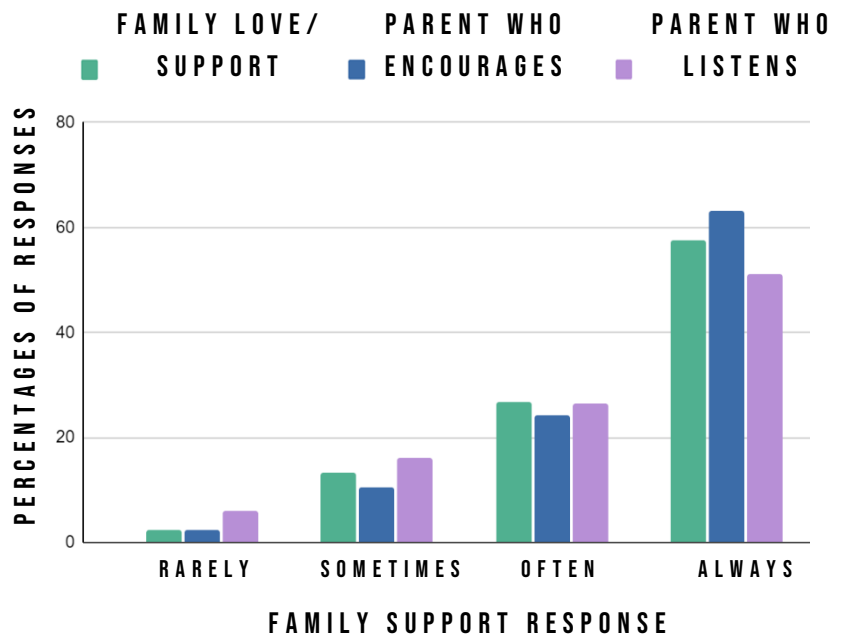
PERCEIVED SCHOOL SUPPORT

FIGURE 54. Percentage of student responses relating to frequency of perceived school support: Having a teacher that cares for (green) and/or encourages (blue) them. Results suggest that around one third of students always perceive to have some teacher support at school, being from a teacher who cares (29.8%), encourages (37.8%).
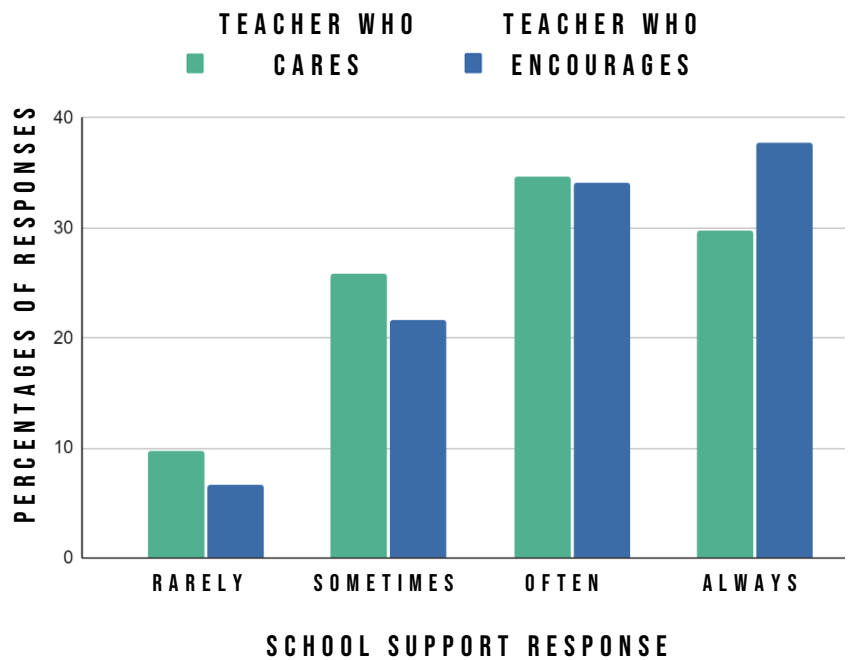
PERCEIVED FAMILY SUPPORT

FIGURE 55. Percentage of student responses relating to frequency of perceived family support: Having a parent/caregiver that supports (green), encourages (blue), and listens (purple). Results suggest that just over half of students always perceive to have a family member love/support (57.6%), encourage (63.1%), or listen to them (51.2%).

PERCEIVED PEER SUPPORT
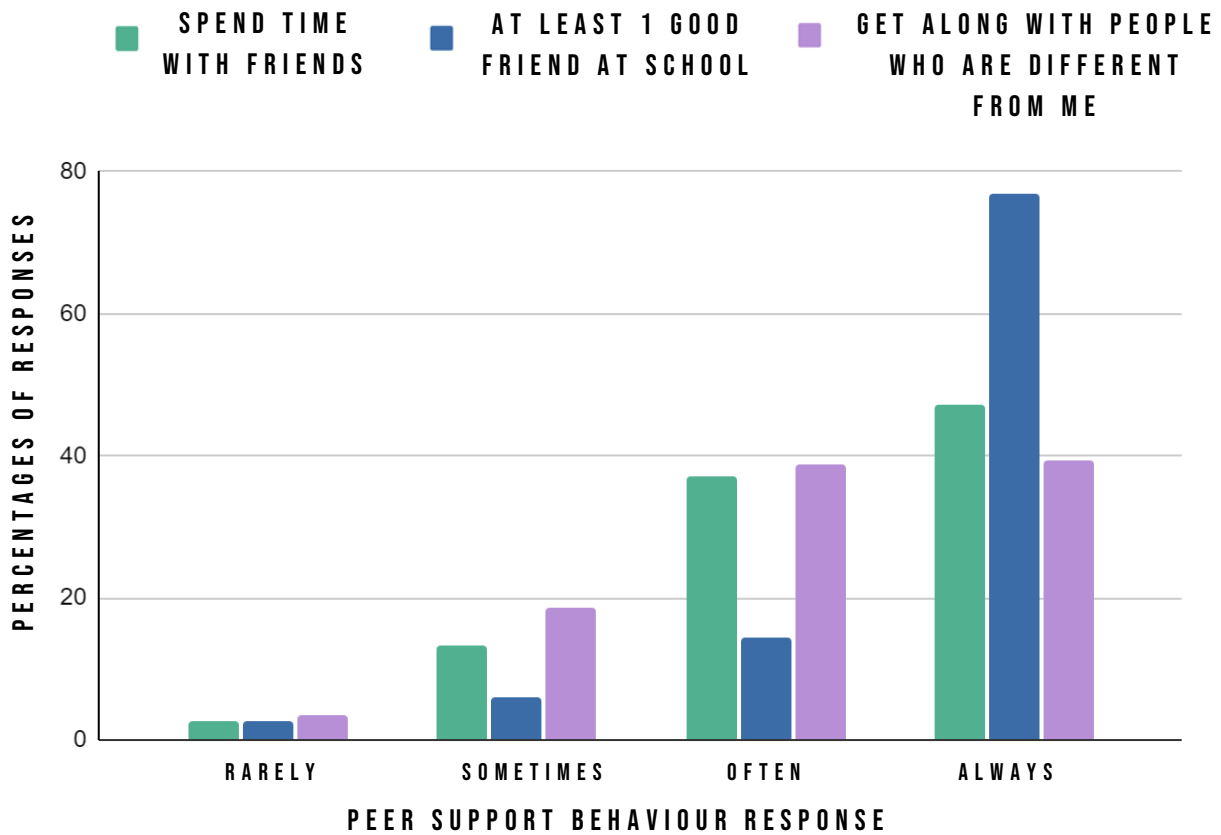
FIGURE 56. Percentage of student responses relating to frequency of perceived peer support: Spending time with friends (green), have at least one good friend at school (blue), and gets along with people who are different from them (purple). Results suggest that the majority of students always perceive to have at least one good friend at school (74.6%). Students mostly feel as if they often (38.6%) or almost always (42.9%) get to spend time with friends. Students also mostly feel as if they often (40.9%) or almost always (37.2%) get along with people who may be different from them.

SOCIAL IDENTITY

The following are each descriptive analyses based on single items from the 2021 survey relating to feelings of personal and social capabilities. These social identity factors are important for self-awareness and self-management that are associated with resilience building.

TRUSTWORTHINESS

FIGURE 57. Percentage of student responses relating to frequency of feelings of trustworthiness. 57% of students state they always feel they are trustworthy, and 37.3% of students report they always take responsibility for their actions.

FORGIVENESS

FIGURE 58. Percentage of student responses relating to frequency of feelings of forgiveness. Majority of students report often (32.5%) or sometimes (34.7%) forgiving themselves when they 'mess up', and report being forgiving towards others often (36.8%) or sometimes (32.4%).
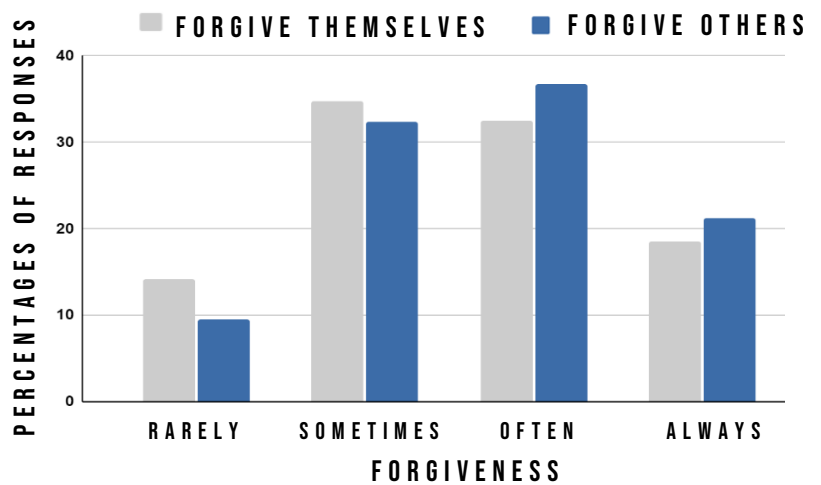

HELPFULNESS

FIGURE 59. Percentage of student responses relating to frequency of helping others, and the value placed on helping others. 90.5% of students believe it is important to always or often help other people in need. 69.2% of students report always or often giving their time to help others.

SAFETY & RISK FACTORS

The following are each descriptive analyses based on single items from the 2021 survey relating to safety factors in student environments and risky behaviours. Safety in different life contexts is essential to a sense of protection and resilience building.

SAFETY AT SCHOOL
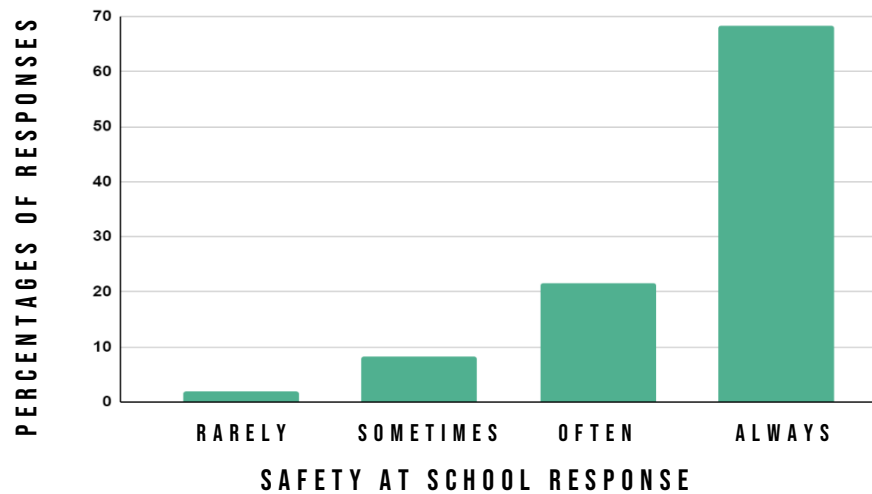
FIGURE 60. Percentage of student responses relating to frequency of feeling safe at school. Results suggest that a majority (68.4%) of students always feel safe, with 21.6% reporting feeling safe at school often or 8.2% sometimes. Only 1.8% of students rarely feel safe in school environments.

SAFETY AT HOME
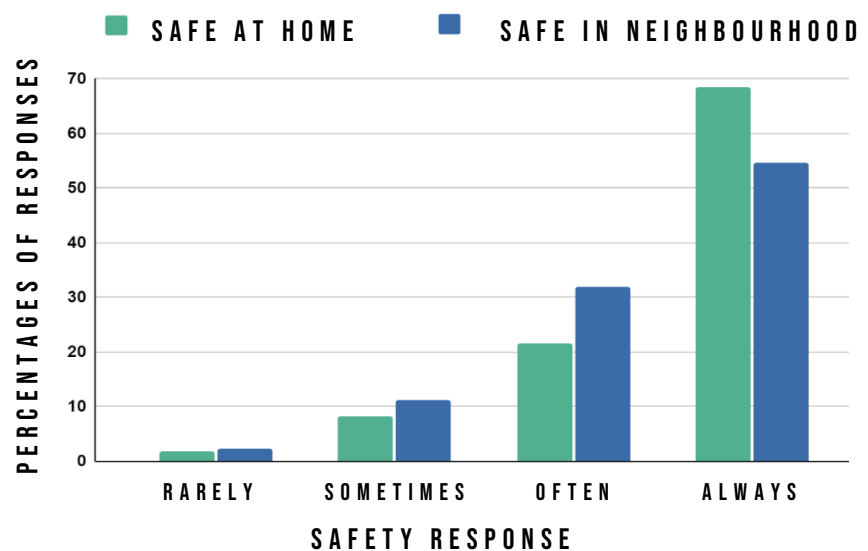
FIGURE 61. Percentage of student responses relating to frequency of feeling safe at home (green) and in their neighbourhood (blue). Results suggest that 68.5% students always feel safe at home, and 54.7% always feel safe in their neighbourhood. 21.6% report feeling safe at home often or 8.2% sometimes, and 31.9% in their neighbourhood often and 11.1% only sometimes. 1.8% of students say they rarely feel safe at home or 2.4% in their neighbourhood.

BULLYING
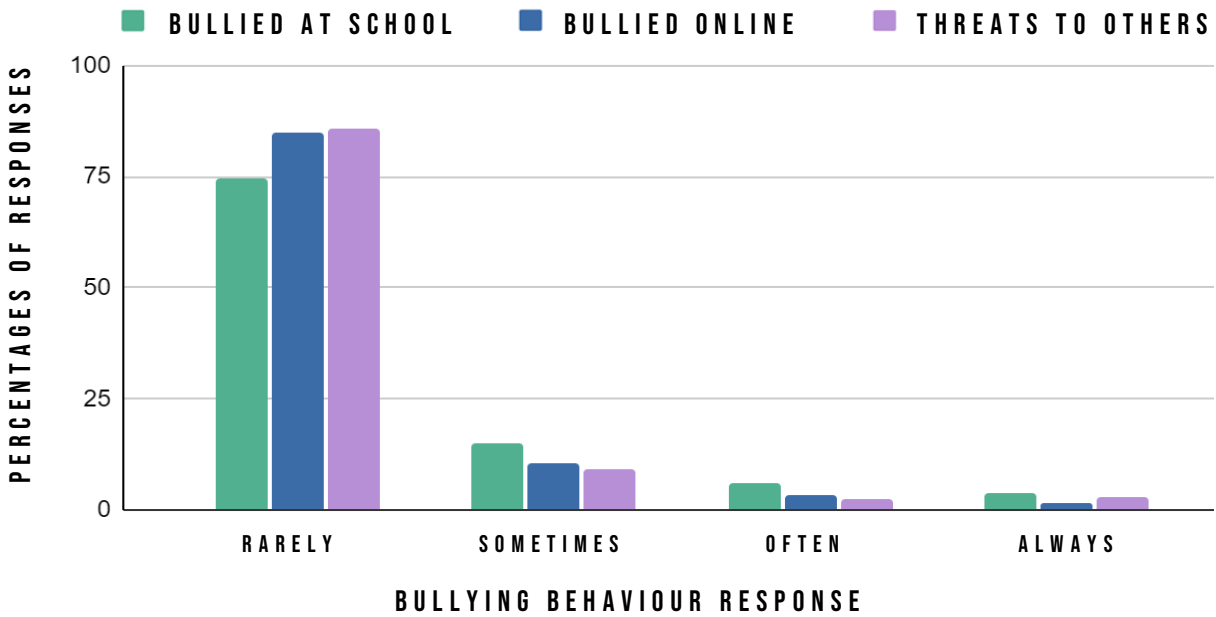
FIGURE 62. Percentage of student responses relating to frequency in the past term of being bullied at school (green), being bullied online (blue), and threatening to physically harm someone (purple). Results suggest that the majority of students report rarely being bullied at school (74.6%), online (84.7%), or threatening to hurt others (85.6%). However, more frequent bullying at school (Sometimes: 15.2%, Often: 6.1%, Always: 4%) and online (Sometimes: 10.3%, Often: 3.3%, Always: 1.7%) is still reported to occur in a significant proportion of secondary students. A minority of students also report threatening to physically harm others (Sometimes: 9%, Often: 2.6%, Always: 2.8%).

RISKY BEHAVIOURS

When asked whether students in secondary education used the following substances in 2021:

89%
Report never vaping or using an e-cigarette

94%
Report never smoking cigarettes

76%
Report never drinking alcohol

94%
Report never using illegal drugs

5%
Report often or frequently vaping or using an e-cigarette

3%
Report often or frequently smoking cigarettes

8%
Report often or frequently drinking alcohol

3%
Report often or frequently using illegal drugs

FIRST NATIONS SNAPSHOT

The following provides a snapshot of data from the 2021 survey relating specifically to wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth. Of secondary students surveyed in schools, 2.1% (703 students) identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (M=14.3 years, SD=1.59). 53.5% of these students identified as female, 43.0% identified as male, and 3.5% self-reported as "Other" and/or preferred not to report gender identity.

DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY

FIGURE 63. Percentage of responses relating to depressive (blue) and anxiety (purple) symptoms in 2021. Average scores for First Nations youth show depressive symptoms (M=4.24, SD=1.97) and anxiety scores (M=4.48, SD=2.11) are in the mid-range.
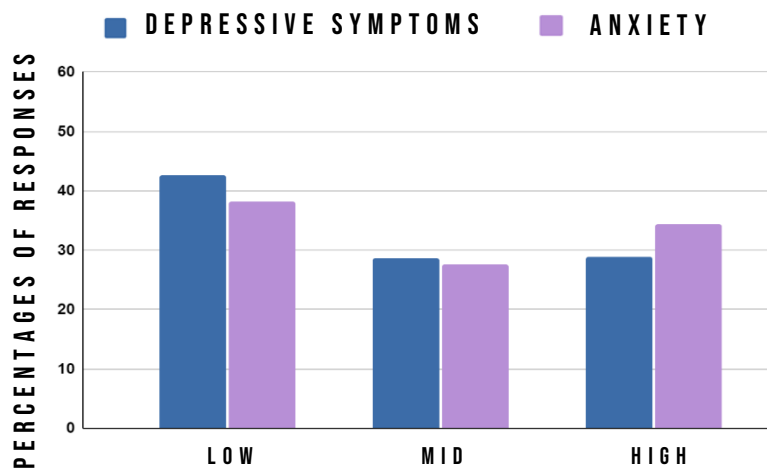
GENDER
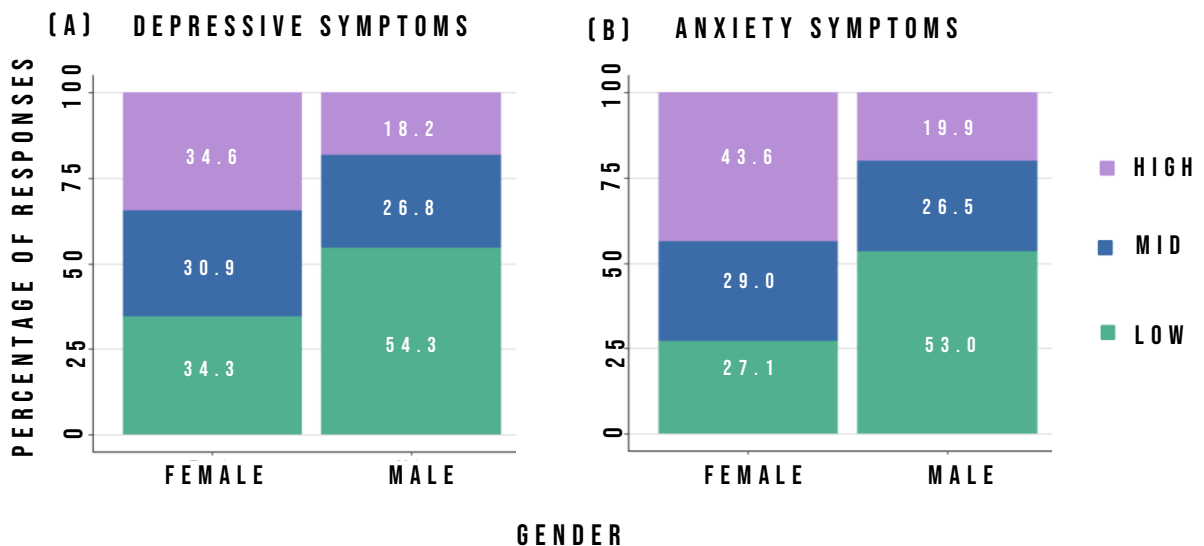
FIGURE 64. Percentage of responses relating to (A) depressive and (B) anxiety symptoms by gender in 2021. Female First Nations youth display higher response rates of depressive and anxiety symptoms in the Mid (blue) and High (purple) categories compared to male students. *N.B. As fewer than 30 students self-reported as 'Other' or preferred not to specify their gender, this category has not been included in these figures. This is to avoid misrepresentation of this group at a national level based on a small sample.*

HOPE AND COPING

FIGURE 65. Percentage of responses relating to hopefulness (green) and avoidance coping (grey) in 2021. Average scores for First Nations youth show hopefulness (M=20.6, SD=6.56) and avoidance coping/disengagement (M=9.94, SD=3.02) are in the mid-range. *N.B. A higher hopefulness score is indicative of a more positive outcome, whereas lower avoidance coping represents a more positive outcome.*
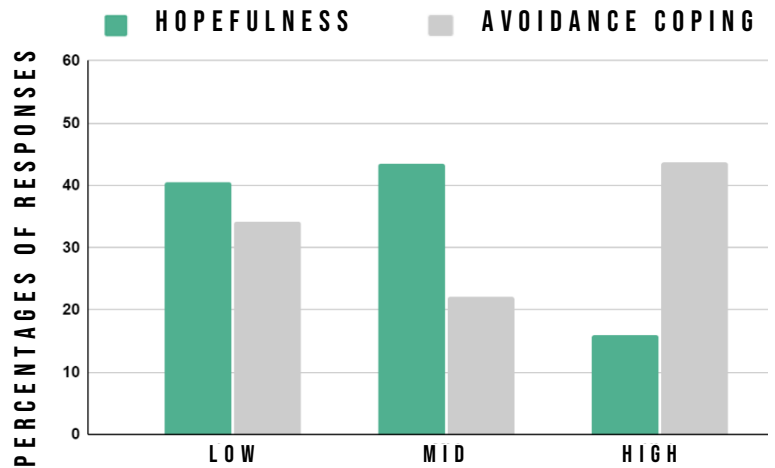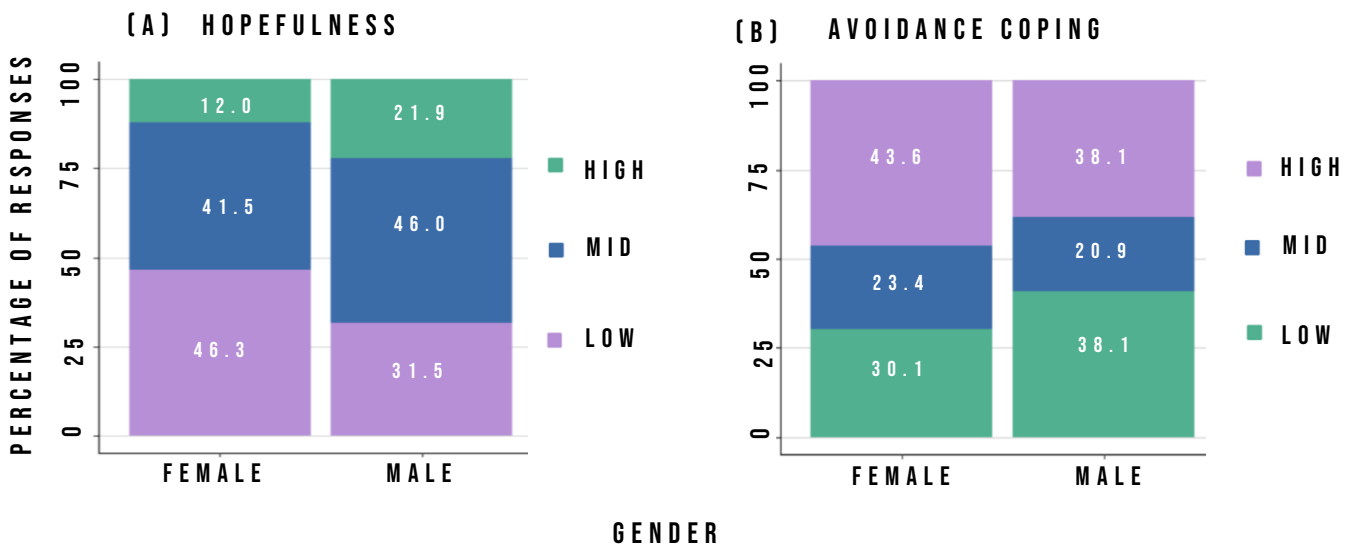
GENDER

FIGURE 66. Percentage of responses relating to (A) hopefulness and (B) avoidance coping/disengagement by gender in 2021. Female First Nations youth display lower hopefulness compared to male students. However, female students show higher rates of avoidance coping/disengagement in the Mid (blue) and High (purple) categories compared to male students. *N.B. As fewer than 30 students self-reported as 'Other' or preferred not to specify their gender, this category has not been included in these figures. This is to avoid misrepresentation of this group at a national level based on a small sample.*

LIFE SATISFACTION

FIGURE 67. Percentage of responses for each category of life satisfaction in 2021. Struggling (purple) refers to wellbeing that is at risk. Doing OK (blue) indicates wellbeing that is moderate or inconsistent. Thriving (green) reflects wellbeing that is strong, consistent, and progressing. Results indicate a majority of First Nations students report 'doing OK' in 2021.
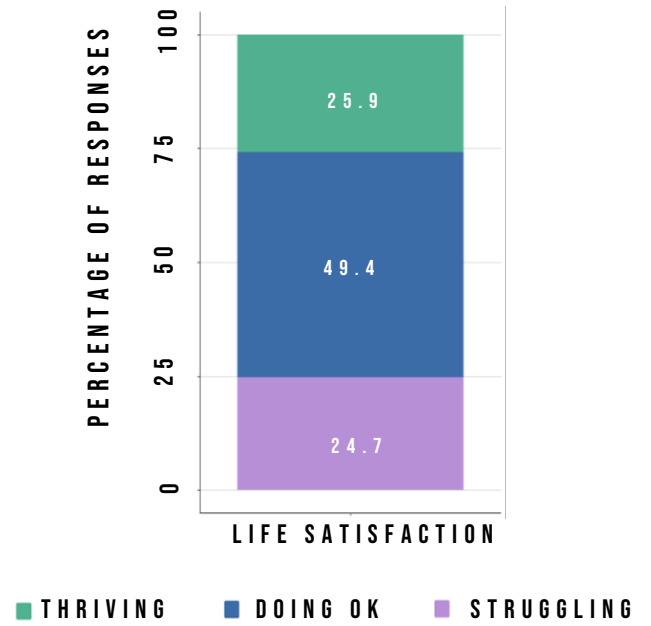
GENDER

FIGURE 68. Percentage of responses for each category of life satisfaction in 2021 by gender. Male First Nations youth in secondary school report higher rates of life satisfaction in the 'thriving' category compared to Female students. *N.B. As fewer than 30 students self-reported as 'Other' or preferred not to specify their gender, this category has not been included in these figures. This is to avoid misrepresentation of this group at a national level based on a small sample.*
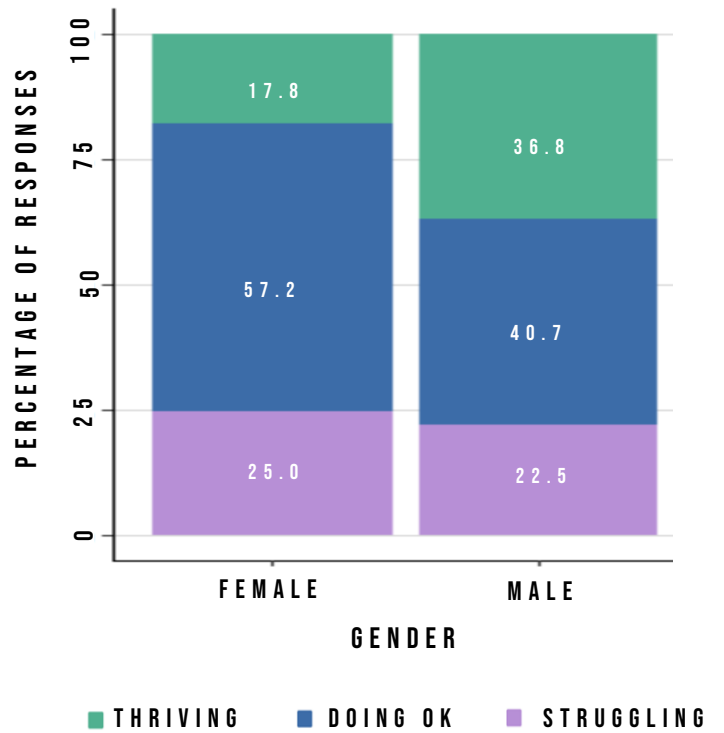
WHAT OUR YOUTH SAY

When asked in 2021 *"If you could magically do anything, what is one thing that you would do to support the wellbeing of young people?"*, 33,750 youth responded. The dominant themes from their responses were:

MENTAL HEALTH

Mental health was a leading concern in secondary students, with 41.4% of responses related to this topic. Of these responses, the most common themes were to reduce rates of depression, anxiety, eating disorders, abuse, stress, self-harm, and suicide/suicidal ideation. Emphasis was often placed on *"rais[ing] awareness on general mental health disorders [to remove] the stigma of mental illness"*. Students want to *"educate young people on mental health and ways of supporting/helping others"*. They want better *"[mental health] programs in schools"* and to *"make sure schools are more equipped for mental health"*. They think schools should *"provide better resources... in order to help them to refer students to different healthcare professionals."*

An additional 6.8% of responses focused on the importance of *"better access to"* and *"more confidential [from parents and teachers]"* therapy sessions with counsellors/psychologists. They also endorse coping strategies like *"resilience"*, *"mindfulness"*, *"self-care"*, and the need to *"create more safe spaces"*.

SCHOOL

33% of responses commented on school, and up to 56% commented on school related topics. Although comments varied substantially, around 7.5% discussed decreasing homework and *"the pressure of grades/expectations on young people to complete 4+ hours of homework a night"*. Approximately 3.6% believe that we should decrease pressure/expectations on students more broadly.

Other common comments identified flexible study arrangements (e.g., *"make school hours start later and make a learning environment suited for everyone, not just standard students"*), having a *"safe environment"* for learning, creating a more *"inclusive and progressive outlook on the nationwide curriculum to include the representation of all types of people, including LGBTIQ+, First Nations Australians etc."* and better *"consent education"*.

SOCIAL PRESSURES

Approximately 9.5% of responses mention bullying – with the majority of those wanting to *"get rid of bullying"*, *"encourage and support anyone who was … being bullied"* and would like to see *"more action against bullying in schools"*.

An additional 3.9% would want to *"get rid of social media"*, *"make sure young kids don't get too caught up in social media and unrealistic expectations"*, *"reiterate that social media is not reality"*, and generally educate youth about social media to *"stop toxicity online"*.

A further 11.7% of responses mention the importance of *"having supportive friendships"* and *"inclusivity"*. Students would like to decrease peer pressure, judgement, and *"stop discrimination, whether it is to do with gender, race, sexuality, or anything else"*.

COMMUNITY

A range of themes were identified relating to a strong sense of social responsibility.

Approximately 12% of students want to *"end poverty"* and *"food insecurity"/ "world hunger"*, in addition to wanting to *"cure cancer", "rid the world of illness and disease",* and end abuse and domestic violence. Students also mention wanting to donate money to causes that alleviate these issues, and *"make child safety, police, and domestic violence organizations more effective"*.

Around 7% of comments show that students would like to reduce use of drugs, cigarettes, and vapes, and provide *"more education in schools about drugs, alcohol, and violence"*.

2.4% mentioned wanting to *"educate people on [and reduce] homophobia, transphobia, racism, sexism. [They] want to get people to be more accepting and kind"*.

COVID-19

Approximately 5.2% of secondary school students thought COVID-19 was an important concern. The most common sentiments that students conveyed were *"to cure COVID-19 so our lives could go back to normal"* and/or *"be able to go back to school and not have to be online because of COVID."*

COVID-19 was frequently discussed in relation to mental health and the need for support.
For example:
"There has to be more focus on how to maintain your own mental health [and] providing coping mechanisms."
"With covid I feel as though mental health has sort of been pushed to the side."
"To provide students with tools to manage lack of motivation after covid-19, especially during online school."

ENVIRONMENT

Approximately 5.3% of responses from secondary school students mentioned the environment in relation to climate change, global warming, and sustainability. Students think it is important to *"teach people about the environment"* and *"fix global warming for a sustainable future".*

Students would also like to *"stop pollution"*, reduce *"plastic pollution"*, *"plant trees"*, *"make sure that all the countries in the world have net-zero emissions so that the future of this world is environmentally safe and sustainable"*, and *"make all vehicles and houses ... sustainable. No overfishing or hunting for fun."*

Students acknowledge the need for greater political action on this topic. For example: *"Make politicians and people with influence care about climate change and start taking it seriously and do something about it."*
"Eliminate the effects of global warming and allow younger people into political settings to allow young people's voices to be heard."

CONCLUSIONS

The Resilience Survey is a comprehensive evaluation of child and youth perspectives on many aspects of their resilience and wellbeing, including mental health, willingness and readiness to engage learning, coping, hope, life satisfaction, support from their surrounding environment, in addition to further risk and protective behaviours. The combined results from students show a consistent pattern. Despite a relatively healthy level of engagement and hope, as well as healthy lifestyles, and support by family, teachers and peers, a significant number of students experience concerning levels of anxiety and symptoms of depression, as well as low levels of life satisfaction.

Results from Australian primary school students indicate that close to one quarter experience high levels of anxiety and depressive symptoms as well as high general disengagement. This is despite relatively good engagement and enjoyment at school. Concerningly, only 1 in 5 primary students report being always being open to talk about things that upset them, meaning that the true severity of mental health symptoms in this age group is potentially going unnoticed. Reports of hopefulness have also declined across the 3 years preceding this survey, although fortunately levels of overall quality of life have remained moderate and stable across recent years. Bullying remains a concern for a significant number of primary students.

Amongst secondary school students in Australia, reports of high anxiety and depressive symptoms as well as disengagement are evident in around 4 in 10. Secondary students report moderate quality of life overall, however unlike primary students their ratings of quality of life, as well as mental wellbeing and hopefulness have all steadily declined across the 3 years preceding this survey. Although reported less than for primary students, at least half of secondary students find learning and school enjoyable. Mental health education and access to services is a common concern reported by secondary students.

Overall, the wellbeing of Australian students between the ages of 7 and 18 shows a steady decline across the three most recent years surveyed (2019-2021). Ratings also tend to be consistently worse for females and those not identifying as either male or female. Although ratings were similar amongst First Nations primary students, there was a pattern of reduced wellbeing in First Nations secondary students, and particularly for females.

Although not directly measured, it is difficult to overlook the challenges faced by students in the same timespan covered in this report – particularly noting the great amounts of uncertainty, disruption and potential periods of isolation for students due to public COVID-19 health concerns. For the current report, data from 2019 was collected before the impact of COVID-19 in Australia, whereas 2020 and 2021 represent consecutive years of this impact.

The results of this report demonstrate the need for approaches designed to ensure the wellbeing of Australian children and youth does not continue to decline and can even be improved. It is perhaps an opportune time to act, before the inherent advantages many of the protective behaviours, thoughts and environments also demonstrated here begin to follow a similar path of decline. The Resilient Youth State of the Nation Report will hopefully reflect such positive change in future years. It is critical that our young people feel connected, protected and respected to enjoy a productive, happy and resilient life.

“ **YOUNG PEOPLE THRIVE WHEN THEY FEEL CONNECTED, PROTECTED, RESPECTED.** ”