

COVID-Related School Closures and Student Mental Health and Wellness: Preliminary Data¹

Most school buildings in California closed in March 2020, and students were required to continue their schooling remotely for the remainder of the 2019/20 academic year and most of the 2020/21 academic year. COVID-related school closures reduced students' engagement in educational activities; reduced access to basic supports; disrupted students' interactions and relationships with their peers, teachers, and school staff; and adversely affected students' mental health and wellness.

This brief uses recently collected *California Healthy Kids Survey* data to examine students' sadness, suicidal thoughts, social and emotional distress, and sense of optimism during the 2020/21 academic year.

Key Takeaways



Chronic sadness and hopelessness increased substantially and students' sense of optimism declined in 2020/21.



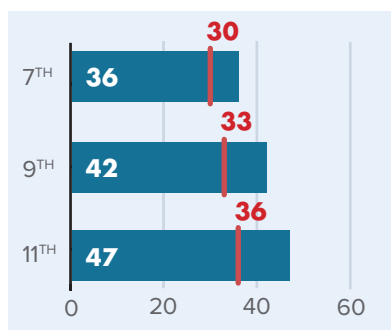
Contemplating suicide and past-month social and emotional distress (including both anxiety and depression symptoms) were similar to pre-COVID levels.

Student Mental Health and Wellness in 2020/21

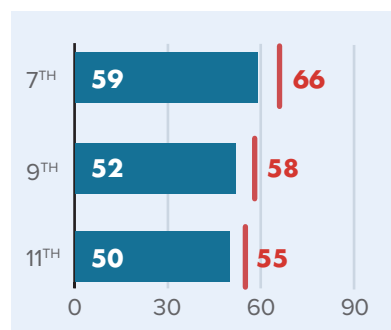
The charts below compare the percentage of students out of 270,000 (grades 7, 9, and 11) in 2020/21 with statewide data from 2017/19.

■ Student Answers (2020/21) ■ Pre-COVID State Average (2017/19)

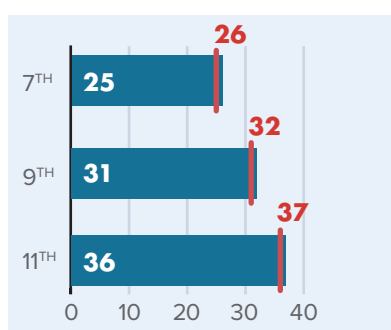
CHRONIC SADNESS



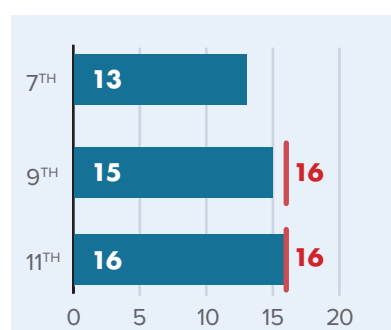
OPTIMISM



SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL DISTRESS



SUICIDAL IDEATION



How are they measured?

CHRONIC SADNESS

During the past 12 months, did you ever feel so sad or hopeless almost every day for two weeks or more that you stopped doing some usual activities?

OPTIMISM

How true is each statement for you?

- Each day I look forward to having a lot of fun.
- I usually expect to have a good day.
- Overall, I expect more good things to happen to me than bad things.

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DISTRESS

Over the past 30 days:

- Had a hard time relaxing
- Felt sad and down
- Was easily irritated
- Hard for me to cope and thought I would panic
- Hard for me to get excited about anything

SUICIDAL IDEATION

In the past 12 months, did you ever seriously consider attempting suicide?

¹ California Student Mental Health and Wellness Project, June 2021