

# Introduction and Instructions for “Measures of Health and Educational Equity: Grades 5, 8, 9, and 11, Statewide, 2016 Minnesota Student Survey”

## Introduction

The Minnesota Department of Health has created an Excel file that provides detailed results on key measures of health and educational equity based on data from the Minnesota Student Survey. [Insert hyperlink to the Excel file] This write-up explains how the file is organized and how to use it.

## What is the Minnesota Student Survey?

The Excel file is based on responses by students in grades 5, 8, 9, and 11 to questions on the 2016 Minnesota Student Survey, which was conducted by the Minnesota Departments of Education, Health, Human Services, and Public Safety. There are three age-appropriate versions of the survey. Students at the high school level receive the full version. The somewhat shorter version given to 8<sup>th</sup> grade students does not contain questions about sexual activity, sexual dating violence, sexual orientation, and some drug-related behaviors. The version for 5<sup>th</sup> grade students is much shorter and does not cover many of the topics addressed in the other versions.

Most public school districts in the state (85%) participated in the 2016 survey. In participating schools, all students in grades 5, 8, 9, and 11 were invited to take the survey. Students can choose not to take the survey, and parents can deny permission for their child to participate. In 2016, 66 percent of all 5<sup>th</sup> graders, 73 percent of all 8<sup>th</sup> graders, 71% of all 9<sup>th</sup> graders, and 61 percent of all 11<sup>th</sup> graders enrolled in regular public schools in Minnesota took the survey. Students who were absent from school on the survey date or who have dropped out are not included in the results. Also, students in area learning centers, alternative schools, and juvenile correctional facilities are surveyed separately, and their results are not included in the Excel file. Statewide and county results from the survey can be found on the web at [Minnesota Student Survey \(http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/chs/mss\)](http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/chs/mss).

## Measures

For grades 9 and 11, this file presents results for 253 measures. (There are fewer measures for grades 5 and 8.) Each measure has its own row. The file does not present all possible responses to each question, but rather selects the response that is likely to be of greatest interest. For example, there are six possible responses to the question that asks “During the last 30 days, on how many days did you smoke a cigarette?” The options are 0 days, 1-2 days, 3-9 days, 10-19 days, 20-29 days, or all 30 days. The Excel file reports the percentage of students who smoked cigarettes on one or more of the last 30 days, by combining the last five response options. In some cases, two measures are presented for the same question. For example, in addition to the measure of drinking alcohol on one or more days in the past 30 days, we present a measure for drinking alcohol on three or more days.

Each grade has its own tab or sheet in the Excel file. The measures are organized in topic areas. For grades 9 and 11, these topics appear in the order below. The number in parentheses is the number of

measures in each topic area. For grades 5 and 8, some of these topic areas will be missing and/or will have fewer measures.

- Future plans, special education, moving to another school, and academic grades (4)
- Educational engagement (7)
- Teacher and school relationships (6)
- Skipping school (2)
- Time away from class (5)
- Feelings of safety (4)
- Being bullied or harassed online or at school (14)
- Reasons for being bullied or harassed (10)
- Bullying or harassing other students at school (12)
- Places students go after school (7)
- Organized activities after school (9)
- General health (9)
- Health care access (6)
- Physical activity (3)
- Healthy eating (9)
- Vehicle safety (5)
- Screening for depression (3)
- Suicide and self-harming behavior (6)
- Perceptions of caring and communication (8)
- Social competency (9)
- Positive identity (7)
- Empowerment (4)
- Relationship violence (6)
- Problematic or anti-social behavior (10)
- Gambling (6)
- Adverse childhood experiences (12)
- Tobacco use (9)
- Alcohol use (7)
- Marijuana use (6)
- Drug use (13)
- Prescription drug use (1)
- Perceptions of risk (4)
- Perceptions of parent disapproval (4)
- Perceptions of peer disapproval (4)
- Sexual activity (9)
- Living arrangements (4)
- Location (5)
- Economic hardship (4)

## Demographic and Economic Groups

Results for all the measures mentioned above are shown for several demographic and economic groups. Each group has its own column in the Excel file. The demographic and economic groups are described below.

### Race

The survey asks: “In addition, what is your race? (If more than one describes you, mark ALL that apply).” Results are presented in the Excel files for four groups:

- American Indian or Alaskan Native
- Asian
- Black, African or African American
- White

Many students do in fact choose more than one group. For example, more than two-thirds of students who marked American Indian also checked one or more other groups, usually White. (See Appendix A for more details.)

For each group, data is presented for all students who marked that group, even if they also marked one or more other groups. The strength of this method is that it does not leave out or discard anyone from the groups that they checked. The weakness of this method is that some students will be counted within multiple columns and the columns are not mutually exclusive.

### Ethnicity

The survey asks: “Are you a member of any of the following ethnic or cultural groups?” Results are presented for three groups:

- Hispanic or Latino/Latina
- Hmong
- Somali

As with race, data is presented for all students who marked that group, even if they also marked another group. These three groups were included in the survey because Spanish, Hmong and Somali are by far the most common languages outside of English represented among Minnesota public school students (as measured by school data on the primary language spoken at home).

### Economic Hardship

The survey contains three measures of economic hardship, described below:

- Receiving free or reduced-price school lunch: The survey asks, “Do you currently get free or reduced-price lunch at school?” Responses are “yes” or “no”. A free or less costly school lunch is available to students whose household income is less than 185 percent of the federal poverty level.

- Skipping meals for economic reasons: The survey asks, “During the last 30 days, have you had to skip meals because your family did not have enough money to buy food?” Responses are “yes” or “no”.
- Being homeless in the past year: The survey asks, “During the past 12 months, have you stayed in a shelter, somewhere not intended as a place to live, or someone else’s home because you had no other place to stay? (Mark ALL that apply)” Students were considered homeless if they answered “Yes—I was with my parents or an adult family member” or “Yes—I was on my own without any adult family members”. Note that the question about homelessness was not asked of grade 5 students.

The Excel file presents both the “yes” and “no” responses to each of these three questions, so that students experiencing economic hardship can be easily compared to students who did not experience that hardship.

In addition, a measure of “severe economic hardship” has been created by combining the questions on skipping meals and homelessness. Students are considered to be facing severe economic hardship if they have had to skip meals in the past 30 days or if they have been homeless at some time in the past 12 months.

### Sexual Orientation

The survey asks 9<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grade students only: “Which of the following best describes you?” and then provides four options describing sexual orientation:

- Heterosexual (straight)
- Bisexual
- Gay or lesbian
- Not sure (questioning)

### Gender Identity

The survey asks 9<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grade students only: “Do you consider yourself to be transgender, genderqueer, genderfluid, or unsure about your gender identity?” Responses are “yes” and “no”.

### How to read the Excel data file

The first row titled “Number of Students” shows the total number of surveys from each demographic or economic group. For example, we received surveys from 2,786 ninth grade students who marked “American Indian” on the survey, from 3,650 students who marked “Asian”, and so forth.

The next row shows the number of students providing surveys as a percentage of all students in that grade who provided surveys. When looking at data on health or educational disparities, it can be helpful to know not only the size of the disparity (e.g. Black students were twice as likely as White students to report being homeless) but also how many students are in population groups affected by disparities (e.g. students who marked Black, African or African American account for 10 percent of the ninth grade surveys).

The rest of the Excel file shows the percent of students in each demographic or economic group who met the definition of the indicator. For example, the file shows that 2,786 ninth grade students marked American Indian, and that 66.8 percent of these American Indian students reported that they planned to go to a two-year or four-year college after high school. In contrast, 3,650 ninth grade students marked Asian, and 82.9 percent of these Asian students said they planned to go to a two-year or four-year college.

**Contact Information:**

For further information about this health and educational equity data file, contact:  
[Healthstats@state.mn.us](mailto:Healthstats@state.mn.us)

**Appendix A**

The 2016 Minnesota Student Survey follows general guidelines from the Census Bureau when asking about race and ethnicity. A question about ethnicity is asked first followed by a question about race.

The ethnicity question reads: “Are you a member of any of the following ethnic or cultural groups?” Students are presented with three options – Hispanic or Latino/a, Somali, and Hmong – and are asked to respond “yes” or “no” to each.

The race question reads: “In addition, what is your race? (If more than one describes you, mark ALL that apply)”. The options available for students to mark are:

- American Indian or Alaskan Native
- Asian
- Black, African or African American
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific islander
- White

Students can mark all groups that they feel apply to them, and in fact many students do indicate more than one group. Table 1 shows the percent of students who marked more than one race group on the 2016 MSS. Two-thirds of students who checked American Indian also checked one or more additional race groups. (The most typical combination was American Indian and White.) Similarly, nearly one-third of those who checked African American and one-fourth of those who checked Asian also marked one or more additional groups. Only about 9 percent of White students indicated that they were also of some other race.

**Table 1. Percent of students who marked more than one race group, 2016.**

Of all students who marked the specified group .....	Percent marking more than one race group				
	Grade 5	Grade 8	Grade 9	Grade 11	Total
• American Indian	54.8%	70.1%	71.4%	70.8%	66.1%
• Asian	25.8%	27.2%	23.5%	20.3%	24.3%

• Black, African or African American	21.1%	32.5%	33.2%	32.5%	29.4%
• Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	54.8%	62.0%	64.1%	58.6%	59.8%
• White	8.8%	10.7%	9.5%	7.4%	9.2%

Source: Minnesota Student Survey, 2016

While the survey asked about Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islanders, results for this group are not reported in the Excel file because the number of such students is very small.

In the Excel file on educational and health disparities, we use an “inclusive” definition of race and ethnic groups when reporting results. With this method, all students who checked American Indian are counted and tabulated with the American Indian data, even if they also checked one or more other groups. The same is done for Asian, Black, and White students. The drawback of this method is that some students are counted two or more times. The strength of this method is that it doesn’t leave out or discard anyone from the groups that they checked. Combining all students who checked two or more groups into a “multiracial” category is an unsatisfactory solution that would pull these students out of all the specific groups they indicated.

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