



ND HOPES

Data Brief

Introduction

With support from North Dakota Health and Human Services (ND HHS), ND HOPES created the following data brief on LGBTQIA2S+ student mental health in North Dakota. ND HOPES is a 5-year initiative funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) working to reduce suicide attempts and deaths in the state. ND HOPES delivers suicide prevention programs, resources, and supports, with tailored initiatives for populations disproportionately affected by suicide, including LGBTQIA2S+ youth.

All data presented in this brief were derived from the 2023 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS). The YRBS is a national school-based survey conducted by the CDC that monitors health-related behaviors in school-aged children, including mental health and substance use. North Dakota middle (7th – 8th grade) and high school (9th – 12th grade) students complete this voluntary, anonymous survey on odd-number years, with the most recent YRBS conducted in 2023.

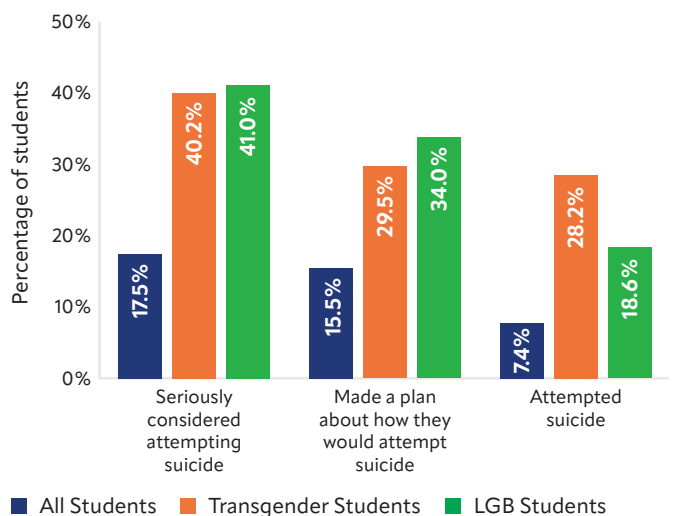
It is our hope that this data brief will increase awareness of LGBTQIA2S+ youth suicide risk in the state and provide schools, public health professionals, and other organizations with key information to tailor programming, policies, and suicide prevention efforts for LGBTQIA2S+ youth.

Suicidal Thoughts and Behaviors by Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation

Past-year suicidal thoughts and behaviors were higher among transgender and lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) high school students compared to the total high school population. Among ND transgender high school students, 40% seriously considered suicide, 30% made a suicide plan, and 28% attempted suicide within the past year. Among ND LGB high school students, 41% seriously considered suicide, 34% made a suicide plan, and 19% attempted suicide within the past year. See Figure 1.

From 2021 to 2023,¹ the percentage of LGB and transgender high school students who seriously

Figure 1: Past-year suicidal thoughts and behaviors among North Dakota high school students

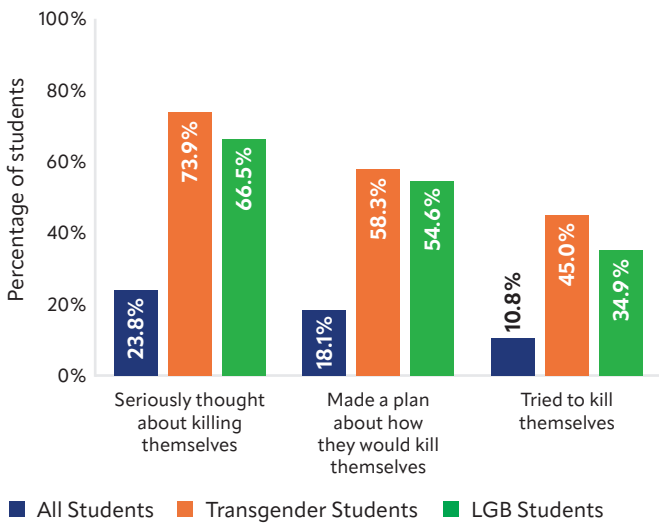


¹The ND YRBS administered a transgender gender identity question beginning with the 2021 YRBS survey. As such, analysis of trend data is limited to survey years 2021 and 2023.

considered attempting suicide and who made a plan about how to attempt suicide in the past year decreased. The percentage of LGB high school students who attempted suicide in the past year also decreased; however, **the percentage of transgender high school students who attempted suicide in the past year increased from 22.9% in 2021 to 28.2% in 2023.**

Lifetime suicidal thoughts and behaviors were higher among transgender and LGB middle school students compared to the total middle school population. Among ND transgender middle school students, 74% reported ever seriously thinking about killing themselves, 58% ever making a plan about how they would kill themselves, and 45% ever trying to kill themselves. Among ND LGB middle school students, 67% reported ever seriously thinking about killing themselves, 55% ever making a plan about how they would kill themselves, and 35% ever trying to kill themselves. See Figure 2.²

Figure 2: Lifetime suicidal thoughts and behaviors among North Dakota middle school students



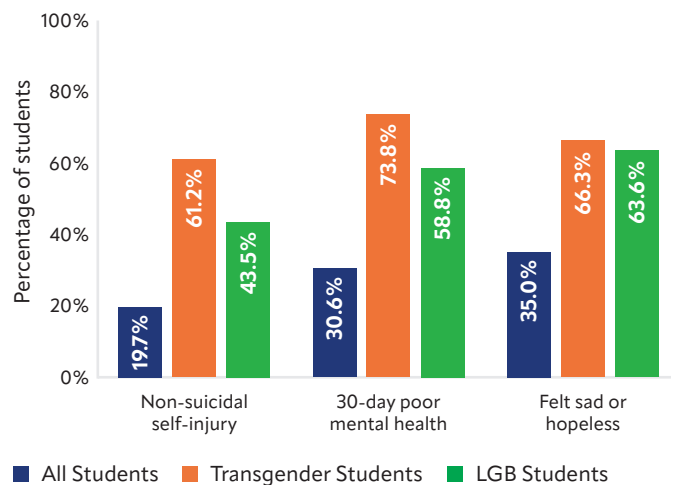
From 2021 to 2023, the percentage of LGB and transgender middle school students reporting lifetime suicidal thoughts, planning, and attempt all increased. For example, **the percentage of transgender middle school students who ever tried to kill themselves**

increased from 35.9% in 2021 to 45.0% in 2023. Similarly, the percentage of LGB middle school students who ever tried to kill themselves increased from 25.6% in 2021 to 34.9% in 2023.

Other Mental Health Outcomes by Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation

Transgender and LGB high school students were more likely to report negative mental health outcomes compared to the total high school population. Most ND transgender high school students reported past-year non-suicidal self-injury (i.e., doing something to purposely hurt themselves without wanting to die such as cutting or burning themselves) and almost three-quarters reported that their mental health was most of the time or always not good in the 30 days prior to the survey. Almost half of ND LGB high school students reported past-year non-suicidal self-injury and nearly 60% reported that their mental health was most of the time or always not good in the 30 days prior to the survey. Over half of ND LGB and transgender students also reported feeling sad or hopeless almost every day for at least 2 weeks in a row and stopped doing some usual activities during the past year. See Figure 3.

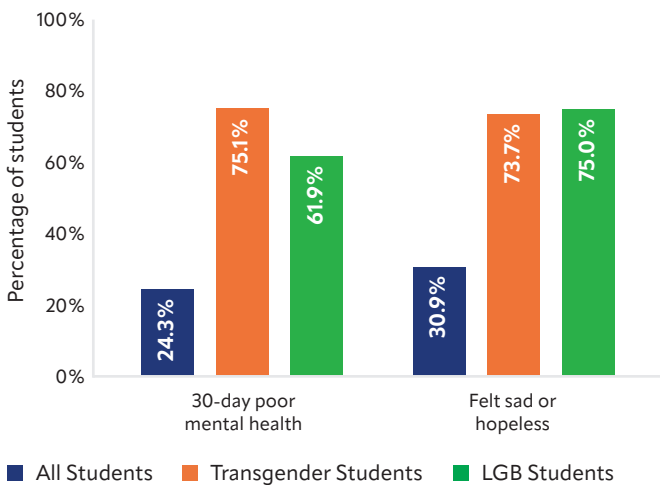
Figure 3: Mental health outcomes among North Dakota high school students



² The YRBS questionnaires for middle and high school students differ in their questions assessing suicide. The high school questionnaire asks about past-year suicidal thoughts and behaviors, while the middle school questionnaire asks about lifetime suicidal thoughts and behaviors. The high school questionnaire uses the term "suicide," while the middle school questionnaire uses the phrase "kill themselves."

Transgender and LGB middle school students were more likely to report negative mental health outcomes compared to the total middle school population. Three-quarters of ND transgender middle school students indicated that their mental health was most of the time or always not good in the 30 days prior to the survey. Approximately 75% also felt sad or hopeless almost every day for at least 2 weeks in a row and stopped doing some usual activities. Among ND LGB middle school students, over 60% reported that their mental health was most of the time or always not good in the 30 days prior to the survey. Three-quarters felt sad or hopeless almost every day for at least 2 weeks in a row and stopped doing some usual activities during the past year. See Figure 4.³

Figure 4: Mental health outcomes among North Dakota middle school students



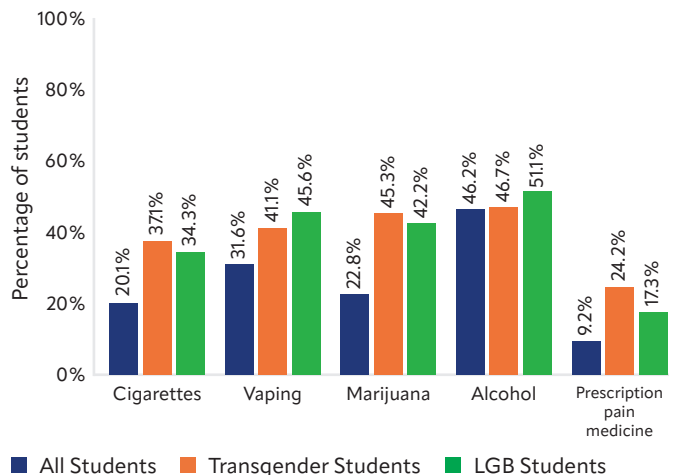
Mental Health Risk Factors by Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation

A variety of factors may increase risk of suicide among LGBTQIA2S+ youth. Substance use⁴ and bullying⁵ are well-established risk factors for suicide and other mental health outcomes.

Substance Use by Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation

All forms of substance use were higher among transgender and LGB high school students compared to the total high school population. ND transgender high school students reported the following lifetime substance use, in descending order: 47% alcohol, 45% marijuana, 41% vaping, 37% cigarettes, and 24% prescription pain medicine. ND LGB high school students reported the following lifetime substance use, in descending order: 51% alcohol, 46% vaping, 42% marijuana, 34% cigarettes, and 17% prescription pain medicine. See Figure 5.

Figure 5: Lifetime substance use among North Dakota high school students



All forms of substance use were higher among transgender and LGB middle school students compared to the total middle school population. ND transgender middle school students reported the following lifetime substance use, in descending order: 31% alcohol, 29% vaping, 24% prescription pain medicine, 23% cigarettes, and 20% marijuana. ND LGB middle school students reported the following lifetime substance use, in descending order: 35%

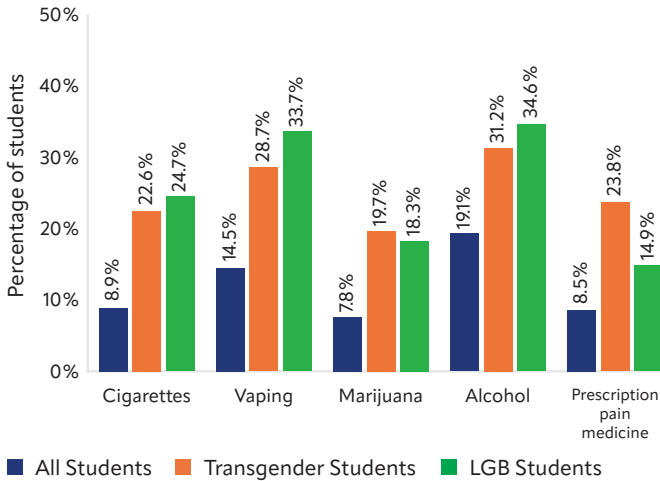
³The middle school YRBS questionnaire does not include items related to non-suicidal self-injury.

⁴Wang PW, Yen CF. Adolescent substance use behavior and suicidal behavior for boys and girls: a cross-sectional study by latent analysis approach. BMC Psychiatry. 2017;17(1):392. Published 2017 Dec 8. doi:10.1186/s12888-017-1546-1

⁵Baiden P, Tadeo SK. Investigating the association between bullying victimization and suicidal ideation among adolescents: Evidence from the 2017 Youth Risk Behavior Survey. Child Abuse Negl. 2020;102:104417. doi:10.1016/j.chiabu.2020.104417

alcohol, 34% vaping, 25% cigarettes, 18% marijuana, and 15% prescription pain medicine. See Figure 6.

Figure 6: Lifetime substance use among North Dakota middle school students

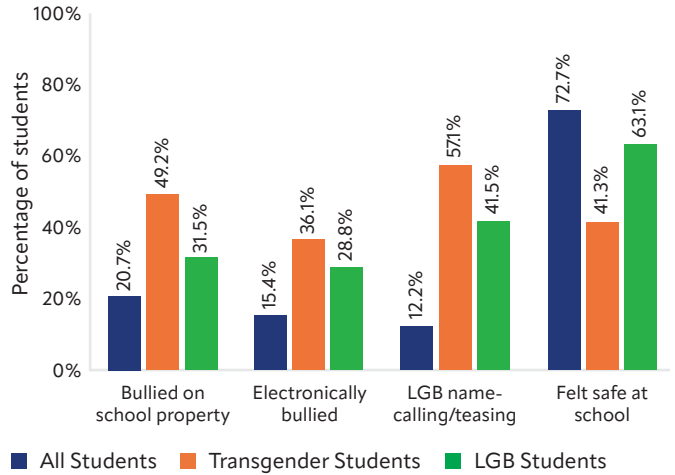


Bullying and School Safety by Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation

Past-year bullying was higher, and perceived school safety lower, among transgender and LGB high school students compared to the total high school population. Among ND transgender high school students, within the past year, half were bullied on school property, over one-third were bullied electronically, and over half were the victim of teasing or name calling because someone thought they were LGB. Among ND LGB high school students, within the past year, nearly one-third were bullied on school property, approximately 30% were bullied electronically, and over 40% were the victim of teasing or name calling because someone thought they were LGB. Transgender and LGB students were also less likely to feel safe and secure at school than the total high school population. See Figure 7.

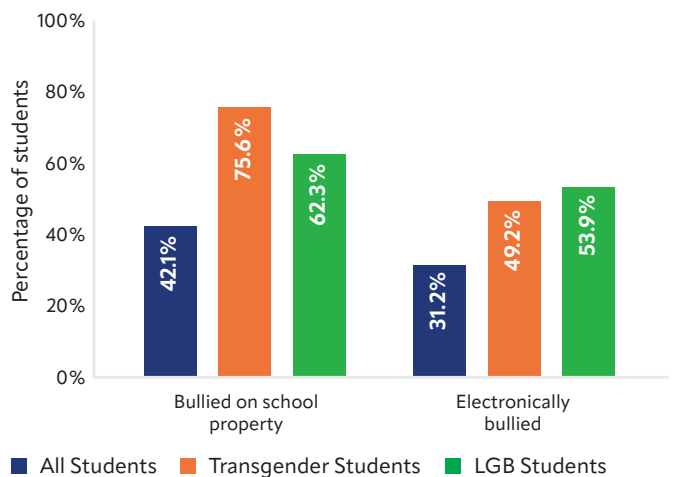
Lifetime bullying was higher among transgender and LGB middle school students compared to the total

Figure 7: Past-year bullying and school safety among North Dakota high school students



middle school population. Among ND transgender middle school students, over three-quarters were ever bullied on school property and approximately half were bullied electronically in their lifetime. Among ND LGB middle school students, over 60% were ever bullied on school property and over half were bullied electronically in their lifetime. See Figure 8.⁶

Figure 8: Lifetime bullying among North Dakota middle school students



⁶ The YRBS questionnaires for middle and high school differ in their questions assessing bullying. The high school questionnaire asks about past-year bullying, while the middle school questionnaire asks about lifetime bullying. The middle school questionnaire does not ask about bullying due to being perceived as LGB nor about school safety.

Key Takeaways

- Transgender and LGB students in North Dakota reported higher rates of suicidal ideation, suicide planning, and suicide attempt than the total student population.
- Rates of suicide attempt increased for transgender high school students between 2021 and 2023; suicidal thoughts, planning, and attempt increased for transgender and LGB middle school students from 2021 to 2023.
- Mental health was consistently poorer for transgender and LGB students compared to the total student population.
- Transgender and LGB students also had higher rates of all forms of substance use, including alcohol, vaping, cigarettes, marijuana, and prescription pain medicine misuse.
- Bullying was higher, and perceived school safety lower, among transgender and LGB students.

Overall, the YRBS data presented in this data brief indicate that LGBTQIA2S+ students in North Dakota are at higher risk for suicide, substance use, and other negative mental health outcomes, highlighting the need for comprehensive mental health promotion and suicide prevention approaches specifically tailored for LGBTQIA2S+ North Dakotan youth. Despite these challenges, LGBTQIA2S+ youth demonstrate remarkable strength and resilience in navigating adversity.

We are grateful for our many community partners delivering programming and resources to strengthen the resilience and well-being of LGBTQIA2S+ youth. Parents, educators, healthcare providers, and community leaders all play a vital role in creating supportive environments where LGBTQIA2S+ youth can thrive. We encourage you to explore the resources below so that together we can create an affirming environment for the LGBTQIA2S+ youth in our state.

Additional Resources

To learn more about mental health promotion and suicide prevention among LGBTQIA2S+ youth in North Dakota, we recommend our [LGBTQIA2S+ Toolkit](#). You can also use the [Harbor Health Initiative LGBTQ+ directory](#) to connect with LGBTQIA2S+ organizations and healthcare practitioners in North Dakota and neighboring Minnesota.

Additionally, ND HOPES offers education, training, and consultation to schools in Western North Dakota. ND HOPES partnered with the SAMHSA-funded ND THRIVES project and local partners to develop the STARS Program for North Dakota Schools. STARS is a comprehensive, evidenced-based substance use and suicide prevention training package for schools. For more information about the STARS Program and for access to our informational flyer, please email SuicidePreventionTraining@norc.org and visit ndhopes.com/schools.

If you or someone you know needs help, there are LGBTQIA2S+ affirming resources available:

- Call or text 988, or chat online at 988lifeline.org to connect with a trained crisis counselor 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. For LGBTQIA2S+ youth (under age 25), press 3 when calling 988 or text Q when texting 988 to access LGBTQIA2S+ specific support.
- [Trans Lifeline](#) is a peer support phone service run by trans people for trans and questioning peers. You can speak to someone by calling 1-877-565-8860.
- [The Trevor Project](#) has trained counselors available for LGBTQIA2S+ youth feeling lonely, thinking about suicide, or just needing support. Call 1-866-488-7386, text START to 678-678, or [chat](#) from your computer.

Conclusion

ND HOPES produces quarterly data briefs. You can find prior data briefs on [our website](#). If you would like to explore the results of the North Dakota YRBS in greater detail, you can visit [ND HHS](#) or [Youth Online](#). ND HOPES would like to thank ND HHS Analyst Matt Schmidt, MPH and consultant Faye Seidler for their assistance with this data brief.

Please visit our website and follow us on LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram (@nd_hopes), and Twitter/X (@NDHOPES). If you have any questions or would like more information, please contact us at info@ndhopes.com.

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