

MEDIA RELEASE | 11th February 2020

Fraser East adolescents less likely to be active or eating breakfast but still hopeful for the future

McCreary Centre Society today released the Fraser East regional results of the 2018 BC Adolescent Health Survey. The survey was completed by over 38,000 of the province's Grade 7–12 students, including all four school districts in Fraser East.

Results showed that Fraser East youth were less likely to participate in organized sports; informal sports; and dance, yoga, and exercises classes than local students five years earlier. Consistent with the rest of the province, being too busy was the most common barrier to participation (46%).

Also reflecting the pattern across BC, mental health results were concerning, particularly for girls. There was a decrease in local females reporting good or excellent mental health (from 73% in 2013 to 60%), and an increase in females who had seriously considered suicide (from 20% to 26%). However, rates of attempting suicide were similar to 2013 (8% of females).

One in five local youth had missed out on accessing mental health services they felt they needed in the past year (vs. 13% in 2013). The majority of these students reported they did not access services because they did not want their parents to know.

McCreary's Executive Director Annie Smith explained: "*The mental health results across BC have been a lot less positive than in previous years and the fact that 1 in 5 local youth did not get mental health care that they felt they needed is obviously worrying.*"

Smith went on to say "*We do see some positives in terms of the support available to youth in this region, as youth are more likely than local youth five years earlier to feel an adult in their community really cares about them. Also most young people feel hopeful for their future and are happy with their current life.*"

A copy of the report, *Balance and connection in Fraser East: The health and well-being of our youth*, can be obtained at www.mcs.bc.ca.

A Power Point presentation is also available at www.mcs.bc.ca.

McCreary Centre Society is a non-government, non-profit organization committed to improving the health of BC youth through research, evaluation and community-based projects.

Founded in 1977, our vision is that all youth are supported to be healthy and connected.

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BACKGROUND

The 2018 BC Adolescent Health Survey (BC AHS) was conducted in 58 of BC's 60 school districts and is the sixth time students have been asked to complete the comprehensive health survey since 1992.

Participation was the highest since the survey began, and the results are considered representative of over 95% of mainstream public school students in Grades 7–12 in the province.

Fraser East HSDA is comprised of four school districts: Chilliwack (SD 33), Abbotsford (SD 34), Mission (SD 75), and Fraser-Cascade (SD 78). This was the first time all four school districts in this region took part in the survey. The survey provides essential information about health trends, and about risk and protective factors that can influence young people's healthy transitions to adulthood.

The 2018 survey included 140 questions asking youth about their perceptions of their current physical and mental health, their engagement in health promoting and health risk behaviours, and about factors that can contribute to a healthy transition to adulthood.

Some key findings from the report:

The cultural make up of Fraser East is changing. The percentage of youth who identified as European decreased, while those of Indigenous, Latin/South/Central American, and West Asian heritage increased. Also, 40% of local students spoke a language other than English at home, including 17% who did so most of the time.

The percentage of students who slept for at least eight hours decreased locally, from 52% in 2013 to 48%. Around 4 in 10 students (39%) reported going offline after their expected bedtime (e.g., turning off their phone, putting it in silent mode, or putting it in another room). These students were more likely to wake up feeling rested.

There was an increase in the percentage of Fraser East students who never ate breakfast on school days (from 14% in 2013 to 22%). Local students were less likely than those across BC to eat breakfast and to eat three meals a day (31% vs. 37%).

Reflecting the provincial trend, there was an increase in the percentage of local youth who reported they had vomited on purpose after eating in the past year. This increase was seen for both males (from 6% in 2013 to 12%) and females (from 10% to 15%).

Locally, 20% of youth had a family member who had attempted or died by suicide (vs. 16% provincially), and 33% had a close friend who had done so (vs. 29% provincially). Fraser East youth who had a close friend or family member who had attempted or died by suicide were more likely to have attempted suicide themselves.

There was an increase in local youth who had missed out on mental health services they felt they needed (from 13% in 2013 to 20%). Six out of 10 of these students (61%) did not access needed mental health care because they did not want their parents to know.

Around a fifth of students (21%) had vaped with or without nicotine in the past month, and 14% had done both.

Twenty-two percent of Fraser East youth who had tried alcohol engaged in binge drinking on the Saturday before taking the survey, which was a decrease from 30% in 2013.

Similar to the provincial picture, 16% of Fraser East youth had been physically abused and 13% had been sexually abused. For females, this represented an increase in physical abuse (from 15% in 2013 to 19%) and sexual abuse (from 15% to 21%).

Fraser East youth were more likely to report feeling deprived of items their peers had than youth across BC (28% vs. 25%). The more items youth were deprived of, the more likely they were to go to bed hungry; and the less likely they were to report positive physical or mental health, and to feel connected to their school or community.

Most Fraser East students (86%) planned to finish Grade 12 but they were less likely than five years earlier to plan to do so (90% in 2013). They were also less likely than their peers across BC to plan to attend post-secondary (79% vs. 83%), and less likely than five years earlier to plan to do so.

Fraser East youth generally felt positively about their quality of life. For example, most indicated they had a good life (77%), their life was going well (72%), and they felt hopeful for their future (66%). Also, 58% of youth usually felt good about themselves. Students who felt good about themselves were more likely than those who did not feel this way to feel hopeful for their future (87% vs. 27%).

Reflective of the picture across the province and local rates five years earlier, 70% of Fraser East students had an adult inside their family they could talk to if they had a serious problem. Also, most had an adult in their life who helped them with making and getting to appointments, homework, preparing for post-secondary, and finding employment.

Around two thirds of Fraser East youth (66%) felt there was an adult in their neighbourhood or community (outside their family or school) who really cared about them. This reflected a local increase from 63% in 2013.

Nearly two thirds (65%) of local youth felt they had the right amount of time to do what they wanted on their own, whereas 23% felt they did not have enough time, and the remainder felt they had too much time. Students who felt they had the right amount of time on their own were more likely to report positive mental health and well-being, and were less likely to experience extreme stress in the past month.

The most common topics Fraser East youth identified wanting to learn more about were mental health and sexual health.