

MEDIA RELEASE | March 25th 2020

Rise in racism a concern for Fraser South youth

McCreary Centre Society today released the Fraser South 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 three school districts in the Fraser South Health Service Delivery Area.

Results showed that compared to five years earlier, local youth were more likely to have experienced discrimination on the grounds of their race, ethnicity or skin colour, and they were also more likely to have experienced racism than youth across BC.

McCreary's Executive Director Annie Smith commented: "*While Fraser South was not unique in seeing an increase in youth reporting experiencing racism it is obviously worrying, as was the finding that local students feel less safe at school, in their community and on transit than in previous years.*"

"This may well be having a knock-on effect on mental health as we also saw a decrease in youth reporting they experienced positive mental health and more than 1 in 6 having seriously considered suicide in the past year. But we do also see local youth are really resilient with most of them satisfied with their quality of life, hopeful for their future, and making plans to graduate and go on to post-secondary."

Other Fraser South results showed that compared to youth across BC, local youth were less likely to have ever used substances, including tobacco, alcohol or marijuana, and were less likely to have vaped in the past month. Those who did use substances were more likely to wait until they were at least 15 years old to first try them than in previous years.

A copy of the report, *Balance and connection in Fraser South: The health and well-being of our youth*, and an accompanying Power Point of the results are 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 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 school students in Grades 7–12 in the province.

Fraser South HSDA is comprised of three school districts: Langley (SD 35), Surrey (SD 36), and Delta (SD 37). All three school districts participated in the survey in 2008 and 2013. However, Langley chose not to participate in 2018. The Conseil scolaire francophone school district (SD 93) participated for the first time in 2018.

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:

Students in Fraser South most commonly identified as South Asian (33% vs. 11% provincially) and/or European (30% vs. 46% provincially). Around 7 in 10 students (69%) spoke a language other than English at home (vs. 53% provincially).

Reflecting the provincial trend, there was a rise in the percentage of students who never ate breakfast on school days (18% vs. 12% in 2013), and in those who purged (vomited on purpose after eating) in the past year. The increase in purging was seen for both males (10% vs. 4% in 2013) and females (14% vs. 8%).

The percentage of students who rated their overall health as good or excellent decreased (from 87% in 2013 to 82%), as did the percentage who rated their mental health this positively (from 84% to 75%).

Similar to youth across BC, 16% of local youth had seriously considered suicide in the past year (vs. 11% in 2013). This was a local increase from five years earlier for both males (11% vs. 6%) and females (21% vs. 15%). However, there was a decrease in the percentage of females who had attempted suicide (6% vs. 8% in 2013).

There was an increase in local students who reported missing out on needed mental health services in the past year (17% vs. 10% in 2013). Local students were more likely than those across BC to miss out because they had no transportation (14% vs. 10% provincially).

Compared to youth across BC, local youth were less likely to have ever used tobacco (13% vs. 18%), alcohol (35% vs. 44%), or marijuana (20% vs. 25%), and to have vaped in the past month (24% vs. 27% provincially).

Among youth who had tried alcohol, 44% waited until they were 15 or older to have their first drink (compared to 37% across BC), which was an increase locally from five and ten years earlier. There was also an increase in the percentage who waited until they were at least 15 to first try marijuana (from 38% in 2008, to 47% in 2013, to 55%; among those who had tried it).

Eight percent of youth in Fraser South went to bed hungry at least sometimes because there was not enough money for food at home. This percentage was higher than in 2013 (6%) but still lower than across BC (10% provincially).

There was an increase from five years earlier in the percentage of youth who had experienced discrimination due to their race, ethnicity, or skin colour (18% vs. 14% in 2013), their gender/sex (10% vs. 6%), physical appearance (24% vs. 19%), and income or family income (7% vs. 4%). Local youth were more likely than youth across BC to experience racism (18% vs. 14% provincially).

Students were less likely to feel safe at school than five years earlier and were less likely to feel safe in their neighbourhood than youth across BC. For example, 66% of local males felt safe in their neighbourhood at night (vs. 73% provincially), as did 50% of local females (vs. 58%). Also, among youth who used public transit, 15% always felt safe (vs. 20% provincially).

Three quarters (75%) of youth had turned to a family member for help in the past year, and the majority of these students (95%) found this experience helpful. Local males were more likely than in 2013 to have approached a family member for help (75% vs. 69%), while the percentage among females was unchanged.

Local youth were more likely than youth across BC to have friends who would be upset with them if they dropped out of school (84% vs. 82% provincially), were involved in a pregnancy (76% vs. 73%) used marijuana (61% vs. 55%), and got drunk (54% vs. 45%).

Fraser South youth generally felt positively about their quality of life. For example, 80% indicated they had a good life and 73% felt their life was going well.

Two thirds (67%) felt quite a bit or very hopeful for their future (71% of males vs. 64% of females vs. 32%* of non-binary youth). Youth who felt hopeful were more likely than their peers to report positive mental health, including feeling happy, as well as lower rates of extreme stress and despair.

Most students in Fraser South felt that school staff expected them to do well (81%), they were treated fairly by school staff (73%), their teachers cared about them (68%), they were happy to be at school (64%), and they were a part of their school (63%).

The most common topics students wanted to learn more about were mental health and sexual health.