

Wisconsin Office of Children's Mental Health

2025 Annual Report Briefing

Belonging
2025 Annual Report

WISCONSIN OFFICE OF
Children's
Mental Health

YOUTH BELONGING
Belonging is the feeling of being welcomed, accepted, respected and valued within one's social environments including family, friends, school, and community.

Belonging Increases When Youths:

- Are actively engaged in positive relationships
- Feel welcome, safe, cared for, and supported
- Feel connected and that their voice is heard.

Belonging in School Belonging
Belonging in school is the feeling of being welcomed, accepted, and supported in school. It is important for students to feel a sense of belonging in school to succeed academically and emotionally. Belonging in school is linked to positive outcomes such as improved academic performance, reduced behavior problems, and increased mental health.

Belonging Bright Spots
Positive moments that help build belonging in school. These moments are shared by students and staff in the classroom, hallway, and cafeteria. These moments are shared by students and staff in the classroom, hallway, and cafeteria.

Why Belonging Matters
Having a sense of belonging and being socially connected is critical to both physical and mental health and foundational to child well-being.

Belonging is a Protective Factor
What protects the child from the challenges they face?

- More family involvement and support
- More positive peer relationships
- More positive school experiences
- More positive school climate
- More positive school culture
- More positive school environment
- More positive school leadership

Lessons Learned
Lessons learned from the report on the importance of belonging in school.

- More positive school culture
- More positive school climate
- More positive school leadership
- More positive school environment
- More positive school experiences
- More positive peer relationships
- More positive family involvement and support

Scan the QR code to access the report ↓

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Presented on January 9, 2026

Today's Briefing

- Welcome
- Overview
- Data Highlights
- Youth Speakers
- Questions



Belonging

2025 Annual Report



Overview

Linda Hall, Director

Wisconsin Office of Children's Mental Health

Wisconsin OCMH

- Coordinate mental health initiatives and improve integration across state agencies
- Establish and track children's mental health data points to direct these efforts

Our Vision:

Wisconsin's children are safe, nurtured, and supported to achieve their optimal mental health and well-being.

Systems are family-friendly, easy to navigate, equitable, and inclusive of all people.

OCMH Staff



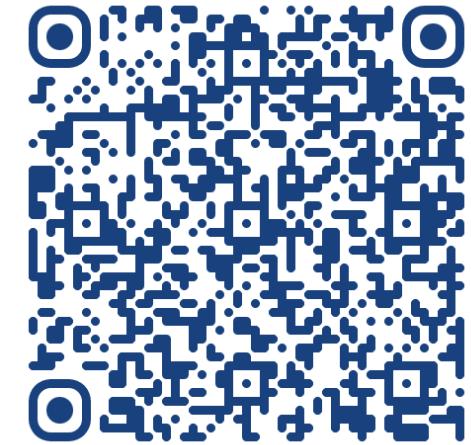
Linda Hall
Director

Karen Katz
Operations Lead

Amy Marsman
Senior Research Analyst

Andrea Turtenwald
Family Relations Coordinator

Connect With Us



Email

OCMH@wi.gov

Resources

<http://children.wi.gov>

Newsletters

<https://children.wi.gov/Pages/OCMHNewsletters.aspx>

Annual Reports

<https://children.wi.gov/Pages/ResearchData/AnnualReport.aspx>



LEARN:

- WHY THIS MATTERS
- WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS
- WHAT'S HAPPENING IN WISCONSIN
- WHAT HELPS
- WHAT WE CAN DO

SUPPORTING CHILD WELL-BEING

DATA BITES

INSIGHTS ON CHILD WELL-BEING

FEELINGS THERMOMETER

How do you feel?

ANGRY, FURIOUS, EXPLOSIVE
► Yelling, Stomping, Meltdown

FRUSTRATED, ANNOYED, IRRITABLE
► Arguing, Refusing, Shutting down

ANXIOUS, WORRIED, UNSETLED
► Pacing, Avoiding, Clingy

SAD, NEGATIVE, LONELY
► Crying, Withdrawn, Slowed/Disengaged

HAPPY, CALM, CONTENT
► Smiling, Laughing, Engaged

What can you do about it?

- Vigorous physical exercise
- Breathe deep breaths
- Take a warm shower or bath
- Meditate/pray
- Listen to favorite music
- Take a fast-paced walk
- Talk to a family member/friend
- Pay attention to each of your 5 senses
- Focus on what you can control
- Set a positive goal for the day
- Call a friend or relative
- Journal about your feelings
- Help someone else
- Notice and enjoy your positive mood
- Engage in an enjoyable activity

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WHAT TO DO WHILE YOU WAIT FOR CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

AT THE DOCTOR'S OFFICE

- Ask for a mental health screening for your child.
- If you don't think your doctor is understanding you, say "I'm not sure you're hearing me."
- Consider a parent-only appointment with the doctor.
- Can you contact the doctor in different ways - call later, electronic message?
- Send pictures or videos that demonstrate your child's issues.

FOR THERAPY

- Is there a therapy group for your child? Search other therapists' websites or social media.
- Ask the therapist you have been referred to for resources - podcasts, books, etc.
- Parent's employer may have an Employee Assistance Program (EAP).
- Is telehealth for mental health services an option?

AT YOUR SCHOOL

- Are there school-based mental health services or resources at your school?
- Actively communicate with school staff - your child's teacher, counselor, office staff, etc. Let them know what to expect with your child.

AT HOME, IN YOUR FAMILY

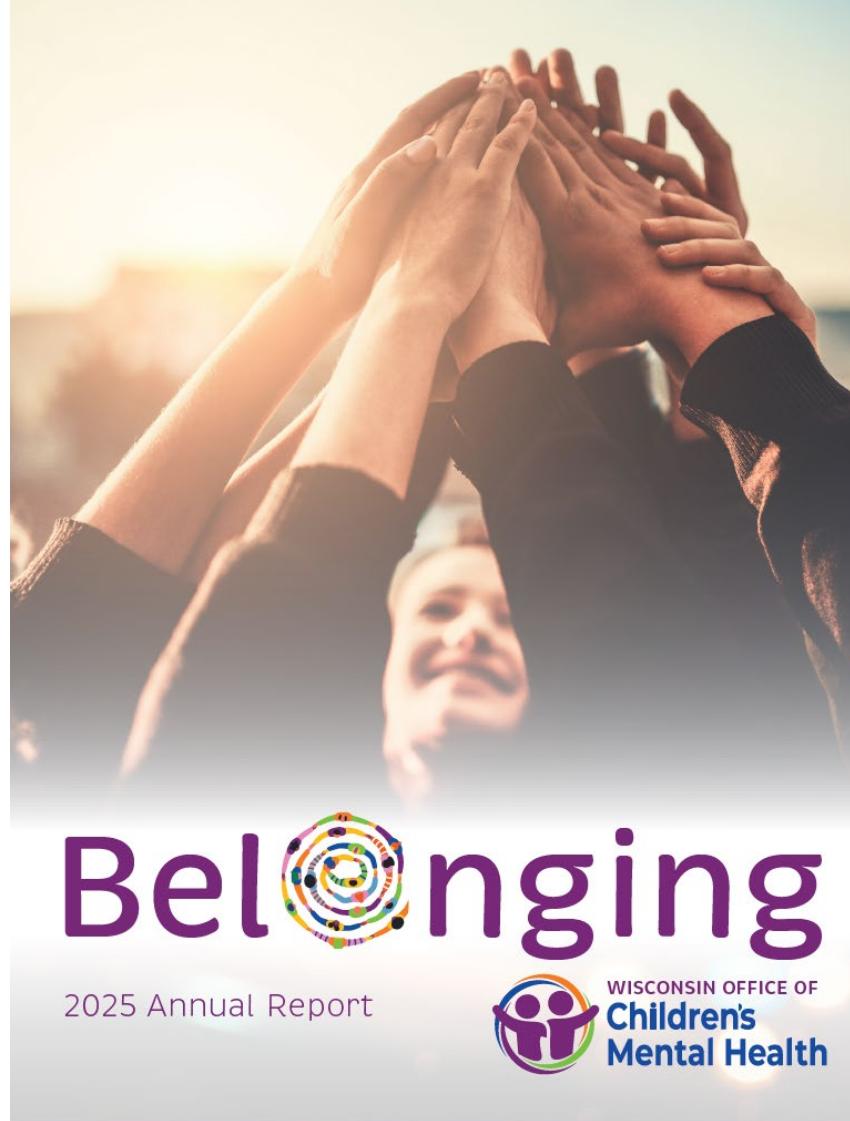
- Look at the basics - is your child getting enough sleep, eating well, going to school?
- Search for online support groups.
- Seek out people who will understand your situation.
- Could a parent coach help?
- Sometimes you need to monitor your child 24/7.
- Practice self-care and regulate your own emotions as necessary.
- Remember to find moments to enjoy your child and being a parent.

Are there telehealth options?

Are there good behaviors to encourage?

Are you sure you're hearing me?

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Report Overview

<https://children.wi.gov/Pages/ResearchData/AnnualReport.aspx>

**Belonging is the key to wellness,
unlocking solutions to mitigate
the youth mental health crisis.**



Why Belonging Matters

<https://children.wi.gov/Pages/ResearchData/AnnualReport.aspx>

Belonging Data

Amy Marsman, Senior Research Analyst
Wisconsin Office of Children's Mental Health

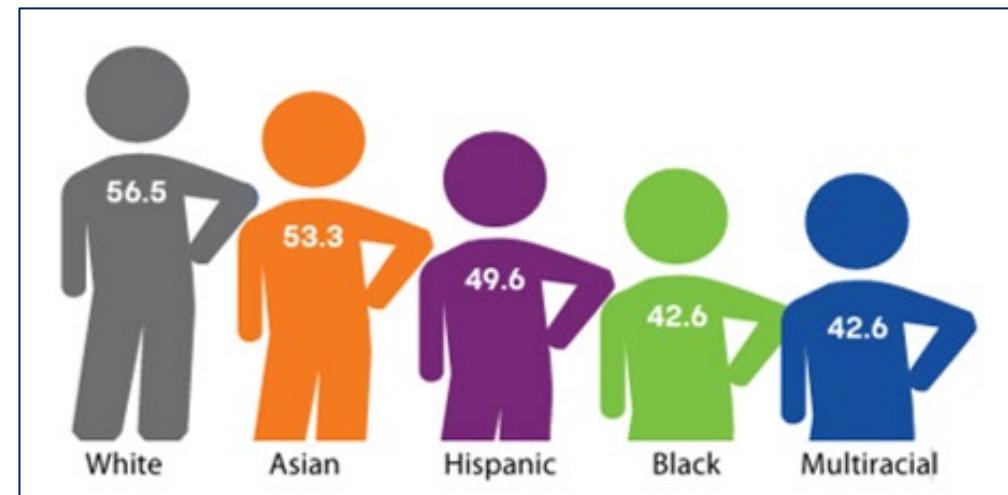
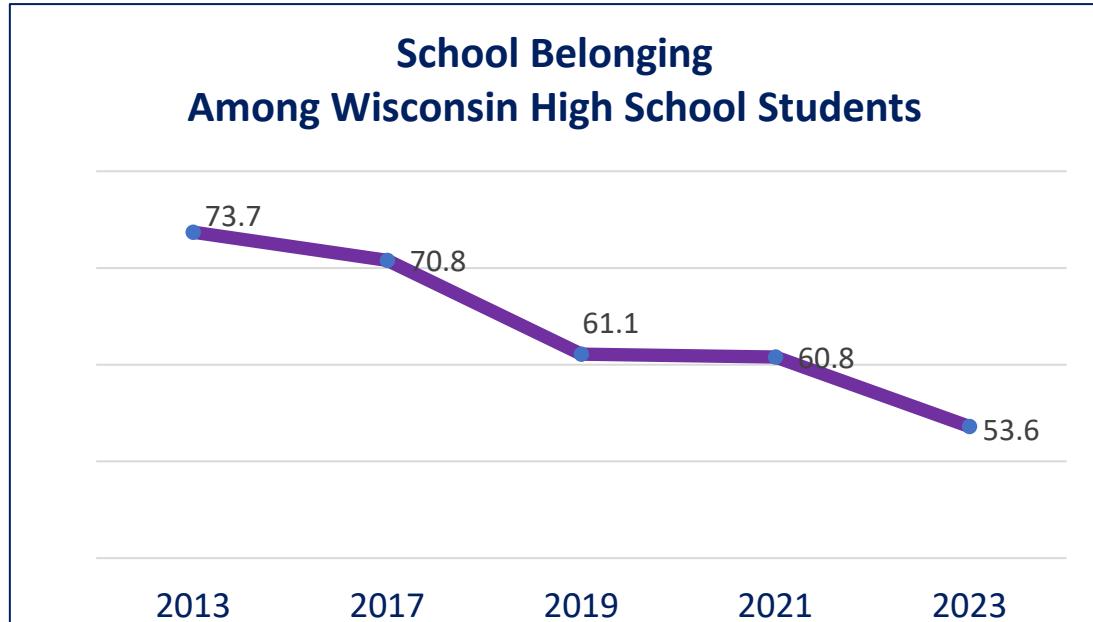
Belonging is a Protective Factor

- ✓ Improves mental and physical health
- ✓ Less emotional distress and suicidality
- ✓ Less likely to misuse substances
- ✓ Helps to build trusting relationships
- ✓ Improves academic outcomes
- ✓ Higher income after graduation

Why Belonging Matters



Belonging Trends



Data Highlights

<https://children.wi.gov/Pages/ResearchData/AnnualReport.aspx>

Belonging Increases When Youth...

- ✓ Are actively engaged in positive relationships.
- ✓ Feel welcome, safe, cared for, and supported.
- ✓ Feel they matter and their voice is heard.



Why Belonging Matters

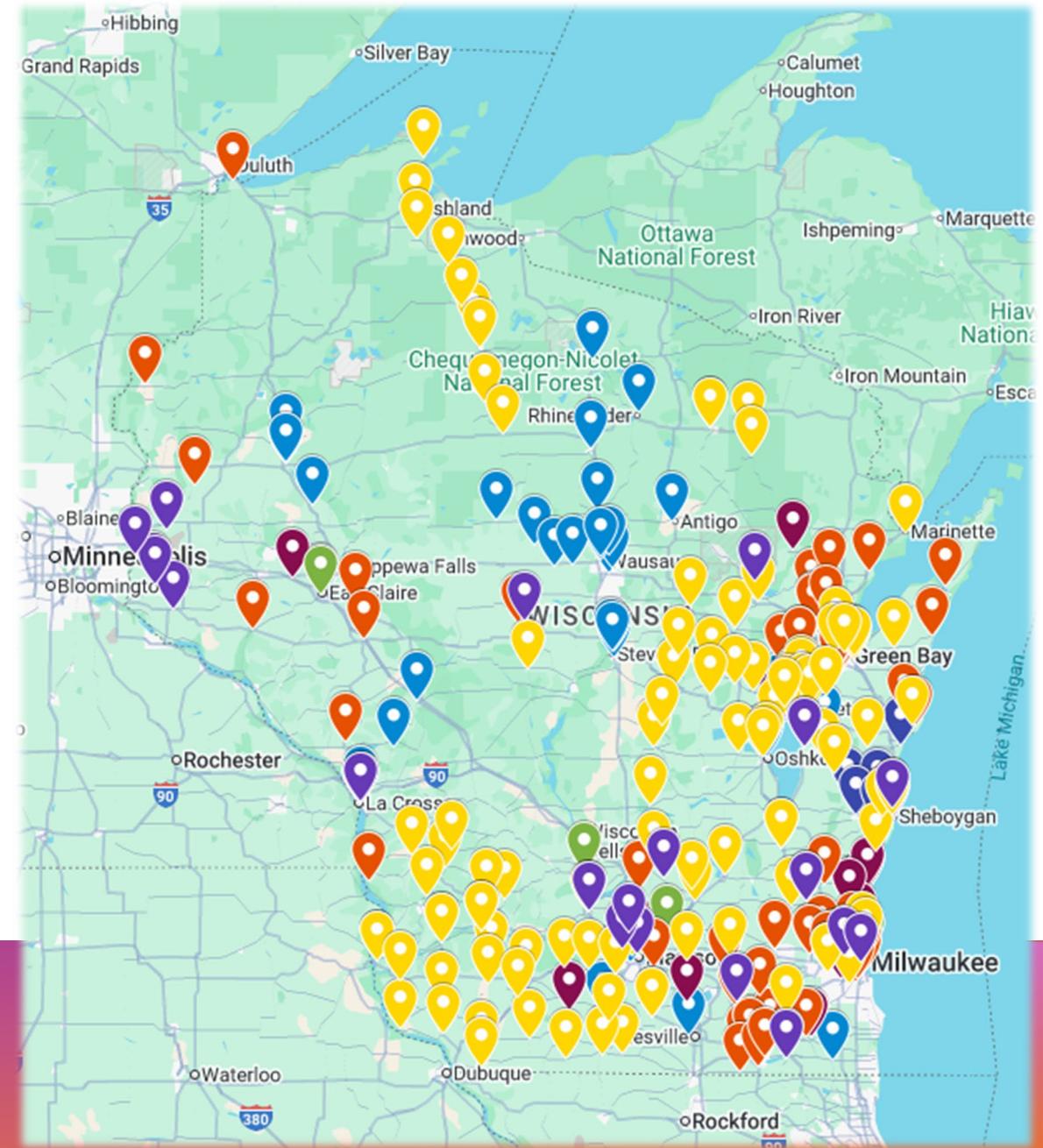
Belonging Strategy: **Peer-Led Mental Health Groups**



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Building Belonging

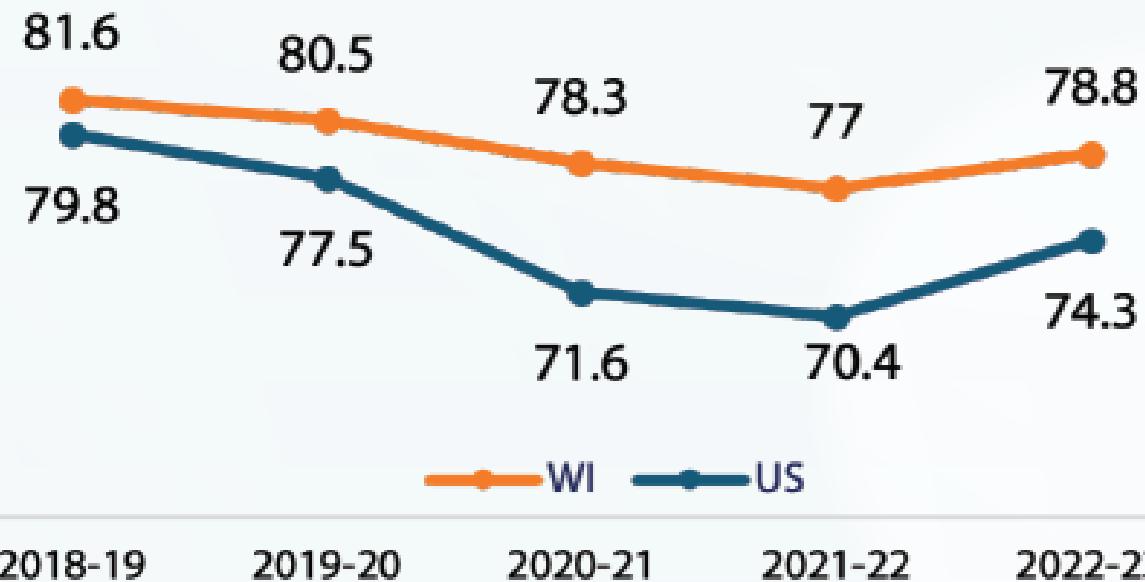


Youth Speaker

Dean Swanlund, McFarland High School
OCMH Wellness Champion

Belonging Strategy: Extracurricular Activities

BELONGING TRENDS EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES (AGES 6-17)



Building Belonging

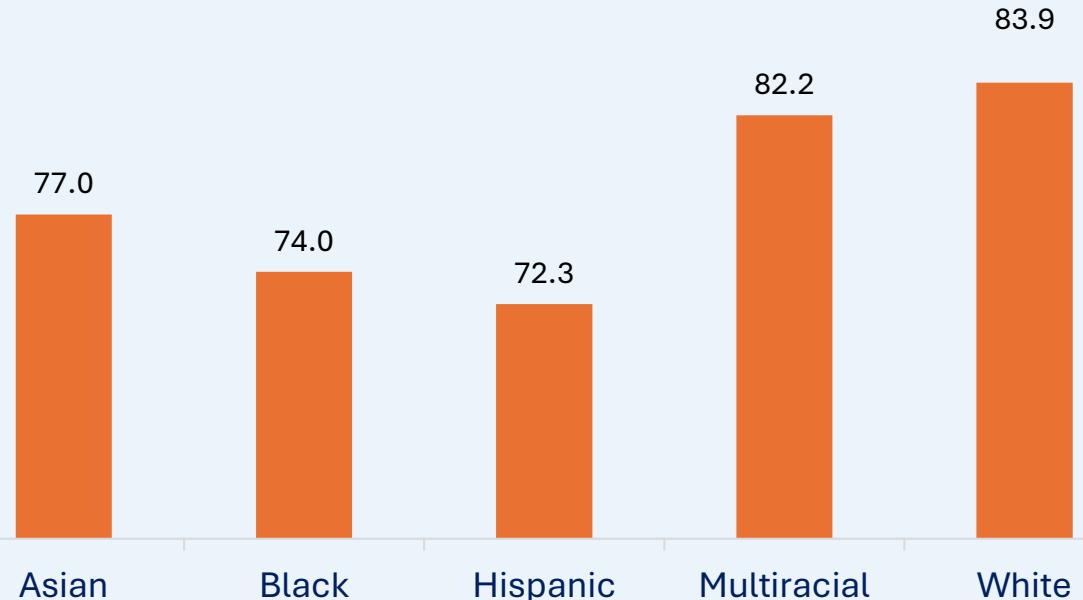


Youth Speaker

Alivia Miller, Chippewa Falls High School
OCMH Wellness Champion

Belonging Strategy: Supportive Adults

Supportive Adults Besides Parent
Among Wisconsin High School Students



Building Belonging



Youth Speaker

Gavin Merriam, Wausau East High School
OCMH Wellness Champion



Building Belonging

Well-Being Dashboard

Amy Marsman, Senior Research Analyst
Wisconsin Office of Children's Mental Health

About the Data

Indictors (42 total)

- Quality of Life
- Social & Economic Factors
- Clinical Care
- Health Behaviors

-  Wisconsin is going in the wrong direction.
-  Wisconsin seems to be headed in the wrong direction.
-  This indicator did not meaningfully change.
-  Wisconsin seems to be headed in the right direction.
-  Wisconsin is going in the right direction.

About the Data

Provides national context

Generally, 5 years prior to current

Most recent available data

QUALITY OF LIFE		US CURRENT	WI BASELINE	WI CURRENT
INDICATOR				
Two or more ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences)	18%	17%	17%	
Children who have emotional, behavioral, or developmental conditions (ages 3-17)	26%	25%	27%	
Youth experiencing a major depressive episode (ages 12-17)	19%	16%	18%	
LGBTQ youth seriously considering suicide	39%	42%	39%	
High school students with anxiety	NA	49%	52%	
High school students feeling sad or hopeless	40%	29%	35%	
Teens seriously considering suicide	20%	16%	19%	
Suicide attempts	10%	7%	9%	
Young adults experiencing any mental illness (ages 18-25)	35%	29%	41%	

Areas of Improvement

Compared to 5 years prior:

- ✓ Adults with a **college degree** has increased
- ✓ **Foster care placements** have decreased
- ✓ **Teen birth rate** has decreased

Areas of Improvement

Compared to 5 years prior:

- ✓ **Psychiatrists** have increased
- ✓ **School Nurses** have increased
- ✓ **School Social Workers** have increased
- ✓ **School Counselors** have increased
- ✓ **School Psychologists** have increased

Positive News



74% of HS kids **don't drink**

77% of HS kids are **not sexually active**

84% of HS kids **don't use marijuana**

96% of HS kids **don't use other illegal drugs**

99% of HS kids **don't smoke cigarettes**

Areas of Concern

Compared to 5 years prior:

- ✓ Children with an **emotional, behavioral, or developmental condition** increased.
- ✓ Youth experiencing a **major depressive episode** increased.
- ✓ **Young adults experiencing a mental illness** increased.

Areas of Concern

Compared to 5 years prior:

- ✓ Those who had **difficulty receiving treatment for child** with mental conditions increased.
- ✓ Doctors who **did not ask about parental concerns** with learning, development, or behavioral problems (ages 0-5) increased.
- ✓ **Early developmental screen** given to less than half of parents to complete.

Areas of Concern

Compared to 5 years prior:

- ✓ Enrollment in **4K** declined.
- ✓ Parents who often **attend child's activities** declined.
- ✓ **Screen use** (beyond schoolwork) increased.
- ✓ **Sufficient sleep** declined.

Mixed News

- ✓ **Seclusion & Restraint** data show a decline from 5 years ago (baseline), but an increase from 1 year ago.
- ✓ **Vaping** data show a third of HS students have tried vaping. While those who vape frequently (7.1%) is lower than 5 years ago, it has increased since 2021.
- ✓ **LGBTQ** youth who seriously considered suicide declined in 2024, but recent national data show nearly half considered suicide in 2025.



Well-Being Dashboard

<https://children.wi.gov/Pages/ResearchData/AnnualReport.aspx>

Youth Voice

**Wisconsin Office of
Children's Mental Health**



**Youth Mental
Wellness Champions**

Youth Speaker

Kenai Volkman, Columbus Catholic High School
OCMH Wellness Champion



Belonging

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Legislative Perspective

Representative Pat Snyder

Wisconsin Legislative Children's Caucus

Questions



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