

# 2020 YOUTH RISK BEHAVIOR SURVEY

Prepared For  
 Emerson Hospital

March, 2021

# Emerson Hospital Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS)

**Since 1997, Emerson Hospital and public school districts within Emerson Hospital's service area have collaborated to conduct the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS):**

- Comprehensive survey of students in 6<sup>th</sup> grade, 8<sup>th</sup> grade, and high school
- Questions based on Centers for Disease Control & Prevention's YRBS (federal) and Massachusetts YRBS (state)
- Topics range from mental health and well-being to bullying, sexual activity, alcohol, tobacco, and drug use, and other risk behaviors
- 2020 YRBS, completed in March, 2020 included N=6,866 students



For more information, please contact:

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## Participating YRBS School Districts

- Acton-Boxborough Regional School District
- Carlisle Middle School/Carlisle Public Schools
- Concord-Carlisle High School/Concord Public Schools
- Groton-Dunstable Regional School District
- The Bromfield School (Harvard Public Schools)
- Littleton High School/Littleton Public Schools
- Maynard Public Schools
- Nashoba Regional School District



# Changes over Time: Most Risks Remained Constant or Declined

## Stayed about the same:

- Experiences with bullying, cyberbullying, sexual harassment
- Use of illegal drugs
- Misuse of prescription drugs
- Sexual experiences
- Indicators of emotional well-being

## Decreased Somewhat in 2020:

- Cigarette use and recent vaping
- Risk behaviors and the internet
- Exposure to impaired driving
- Recent marijuana use
- Alcohol use



# Mental Health: Stress and Depression

# School is Students' Biggest Source of Stress

For adults in the U.S., work is consistently the top source of stress

For students, school is the top source of stress:

- Stress crosses gender, racial/ethnic, and demographic differences. School-related stress is high for all students
- School-related stress has increased for 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders since 2018
- For high schoolers, academic workload is a top concern
- More high school students are reporting stress due to events in school
- ***Not all students know how to cope with stress***

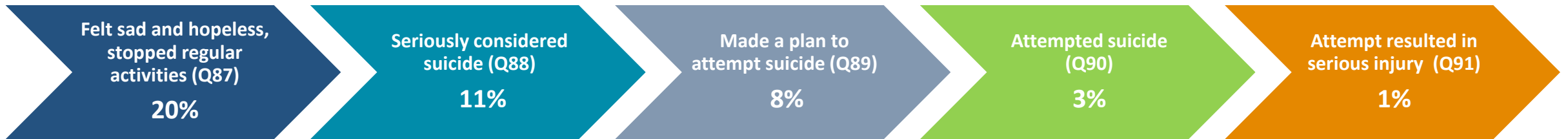


# Experiences with Mental Health: Self-Injury, Depression, Suicide

**These findings have not changed significantly from 2018 to 2020.**

- Between 13% (6<sup>th</sup> grade) and 23% (HS) have felt so sad or hopeless in the past year that they stopped doing some usual activities.
- Smaller proportions actively considered suicide (7% 6<sup>th</sup> grade to 13% HS), made a plan to attempt suicide (4% 6<sup>th</sup> grade to 9% HS), or attempted it (3% 6<sup>th</sup> grade to 3% HS).
- The proportion of 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders who are worried that someone they know at school will hurt themselves or is considering suicide declined from 2018 to 2020 (although roughly 1 in 10 are still worried about this.)

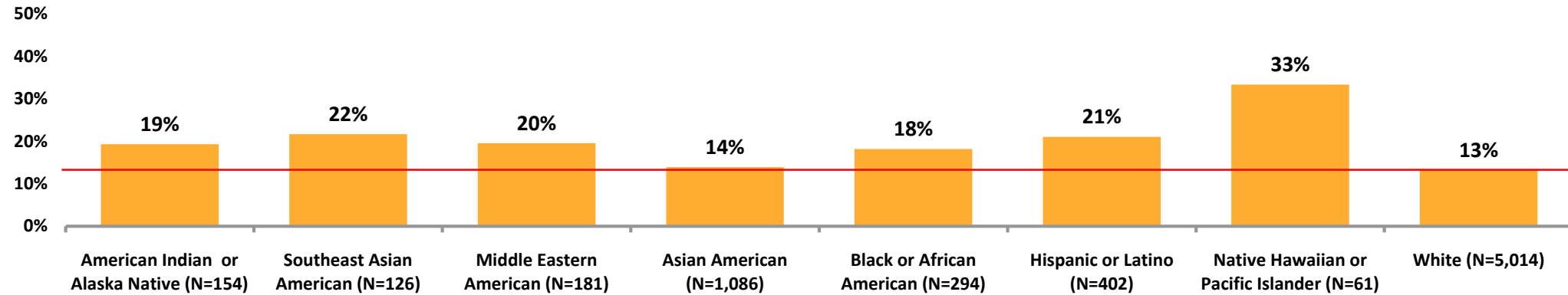
## Symptoms of Depression, 2020 Total All Grades



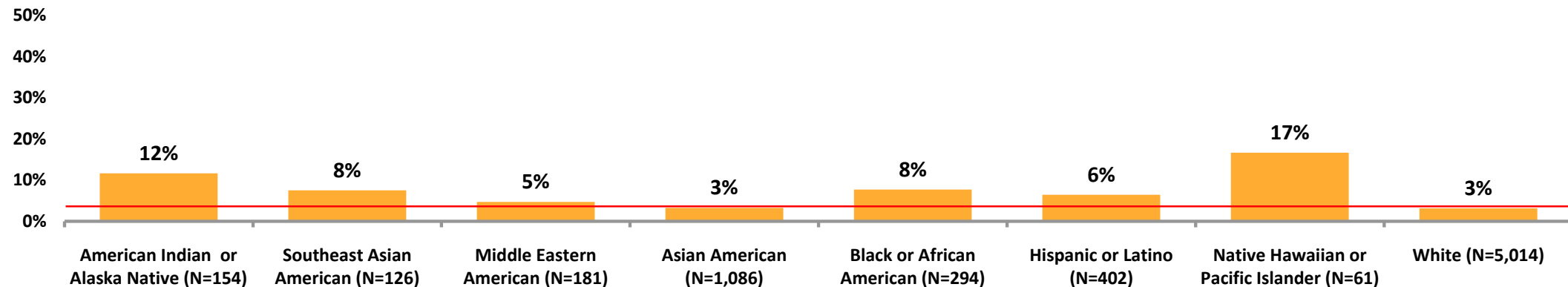
# Differential Experiences with Mental Health

Native Hawaiian-Pacific Islander students are at much greater risk

### SELF-INJURY IN PAST YEAR - 2020 Emerson YRBS

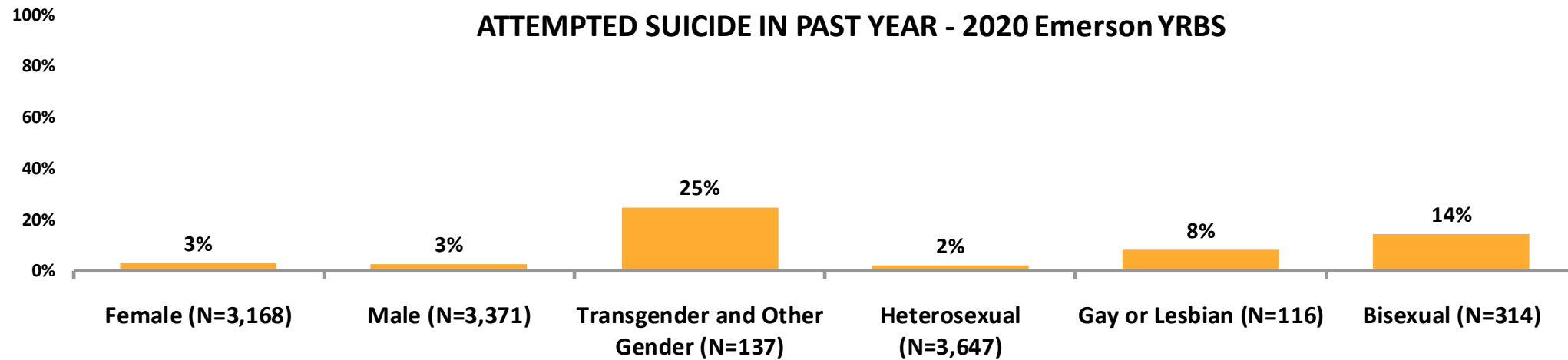
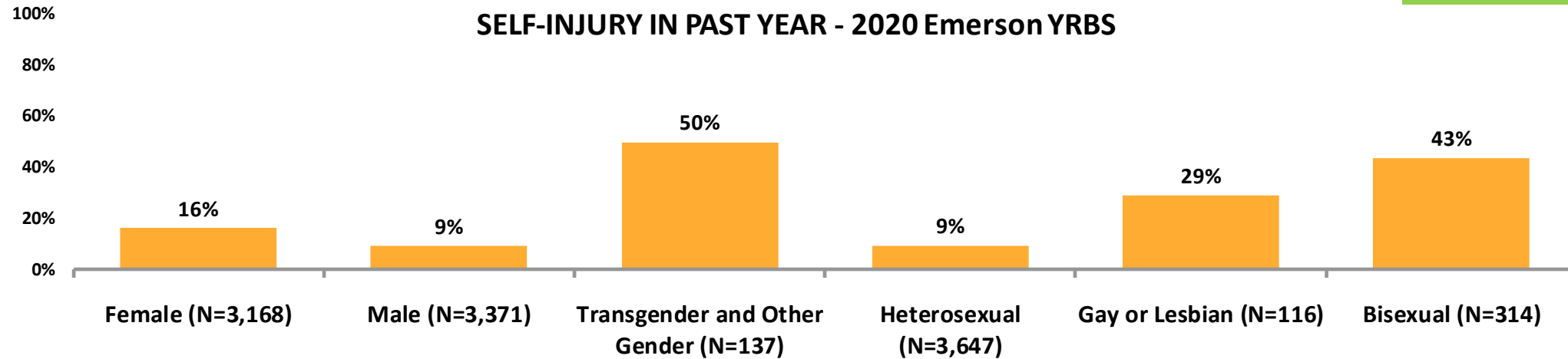


### ATTEMPTED SUICIDE IN PAST YEAR - 2020 Emerson YRBS



# Gender and Orientation: Self-Injury, Attempted Suicide

LGBTQ students are at much higher risk



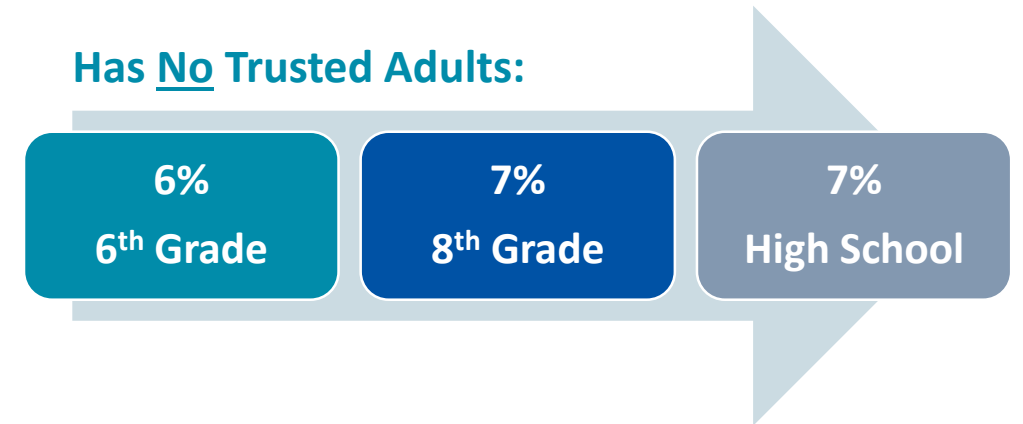


# Trusted Adults are a Crucial Resource for Students

Not having a trusted adult to talk to is significantly associated with most other risk behaviors examined in the YRBS.

Students who have **no trusted adults** (at school or at home) who they can talk to if they have a problem are **much more likely** to:

- Experience high levels of stress at school
- Be bullied, cyberbullied, or sexually harassed
- Be depressed to the point of considering or attempting suicide
- Experience violence (physical or sexual)
- Engage in harmful coping strategies (self-injury, smoking, drinking, using drugs, unsafe sexual behaviors)

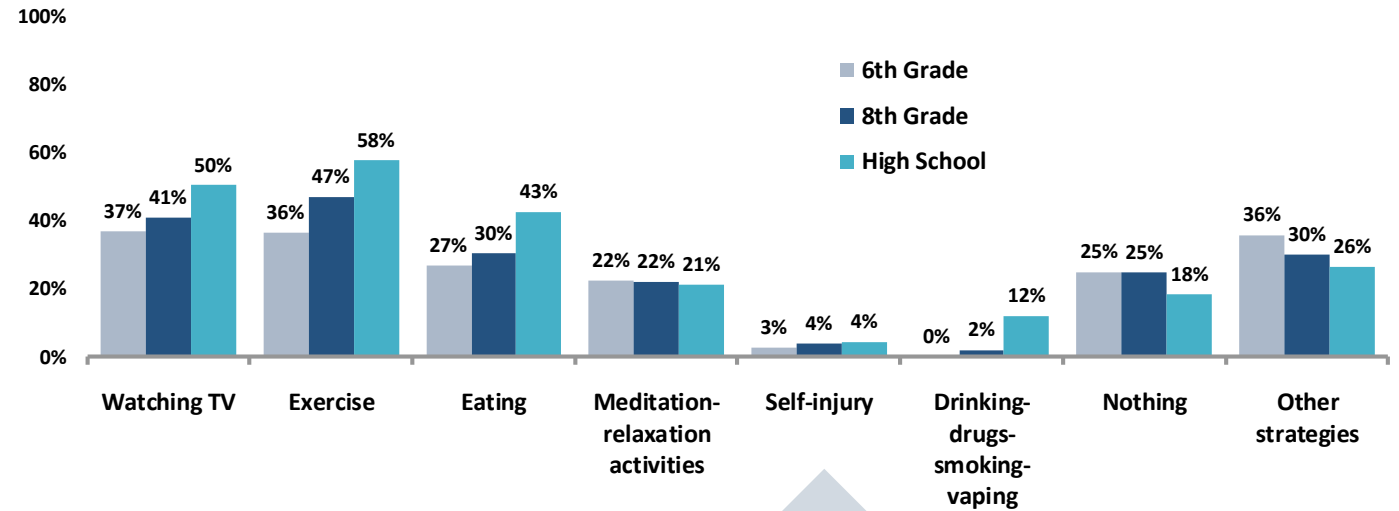


# Students Need Strategies for Coping with Stress

**Who is most likely to use negative coping strategies such as self-injury, drug and alcohol use, or bullying or cyberbullying others?**

- Students who have been bullied, cyberbullied, or sexually harassed
- Students who aren't strongly engaged in school (low grades, not involved)
- Students who lack trusted adults in their lives who they can talk to if they need help
- Students who experience the highest rates of depression:
  - Students of color
  - LGBTQ students

Strategies for Dealing With Stress, 2020 (Q78)



**High school students have more strategies at their disposal to use if they experience stress**

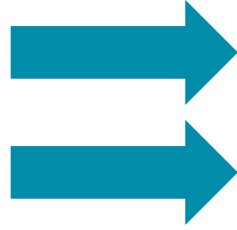
**At the same time, problematic strategies for dealing with stress increase as students age**



# Behaviors that Harm Others

# Behaviors that Harm Others

*Relatively common  
and big potential  
impact on others*



- **Bullying, cyberbullying**
- **Sexual violence (rape, date rape, sexual harassment)**
- **Bringing weapons to school**
- **Negative behaviors enhanced by alcohol or drugs (impaired driving, buying or selling drugs at school, impaired judgment during sexual encounters)**

*Not very common, but  
big potential impact*



*Long-standing issues – the  
biggest risk is actually drivers  
impaired by cell phones*



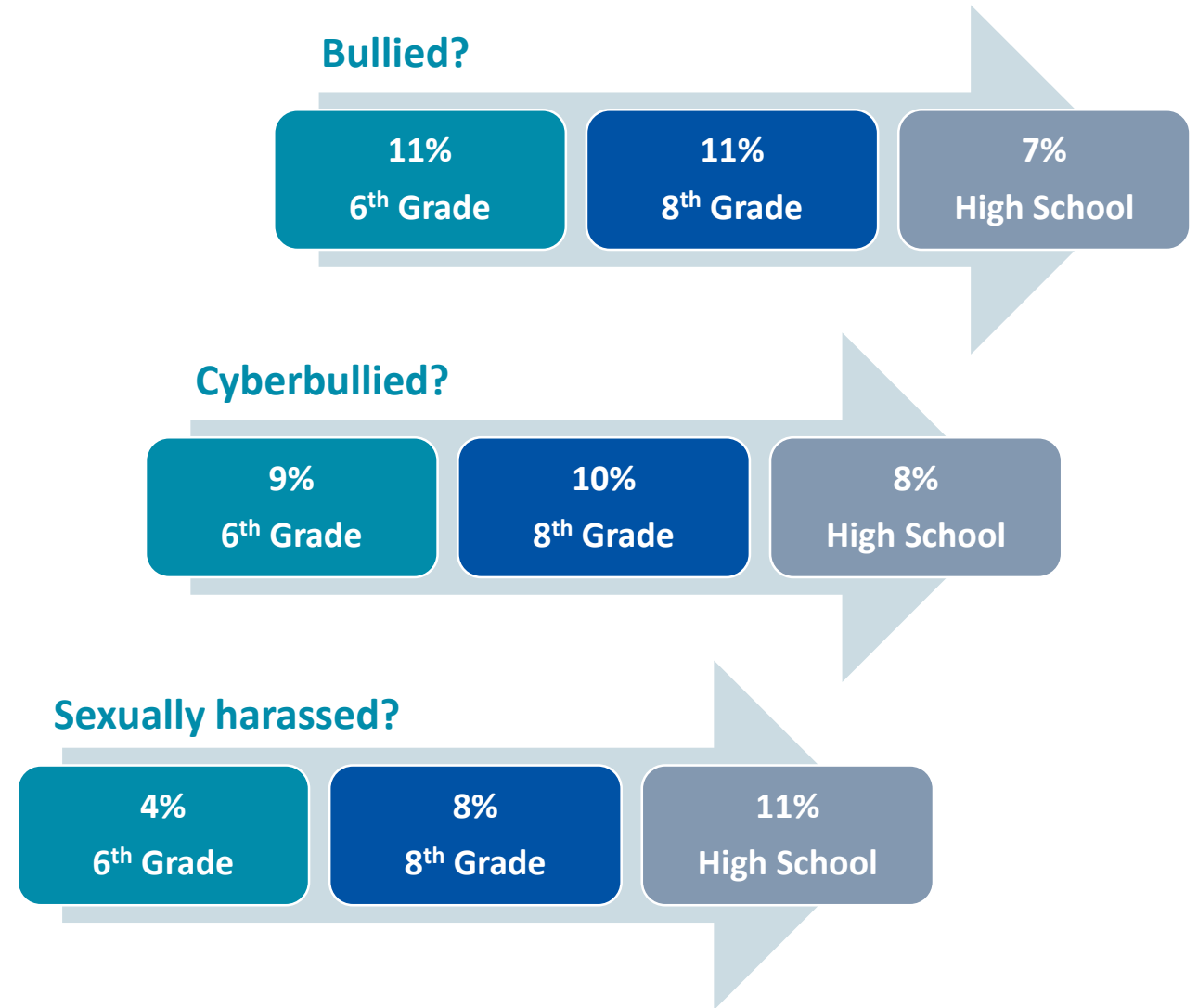
# Bullying, Cyber-Bullying, Sexual Harassment

Not all students feel safe at school.

Between 5% and 7% of students stayed home from school at least 1 day in the previous month because they didn't feel safe, either at school or to and from school.

- **Bullying** is most prevalent in 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade and diminishes in high school
- **Cyberbullying** happens most in 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade and diminishes in high school
- Students who bully are highly likely to have been bullied themselves
- **Sexual harassment** increases with age: by high school, 12% of students have experienced it

Rates of bullying, cyberbullying, and sexual harassment did not change from 2018 to 2020



# Bullying, Cyber-Bullying, Sexual Harassment (cont.)

Between 5% and 7% of students surveyed in 2020 said they stayed home from school at least 1 day in the previous month because they didn't feel safe, either at school or to and from school.

## Most Common Responses to Bullying, All Grades, Among Those Bullied, 2020

### Cyberbullying (Q29)

- **Nothing (32%)**
- Told a friend or peer at school (34%)
- Told parent/guardian/other adult at home (33%)
- Told adult at school (15%)
- Reported to website administrator (11%)
- Reported to police (4%)

### Bullying (Q61)

- **Nothing (41%)**
- Told the person to stop (31%)
- Walked away (29%)
- Told adult at home (25%) or at school (18%)
- Resisted with physical force (8%)

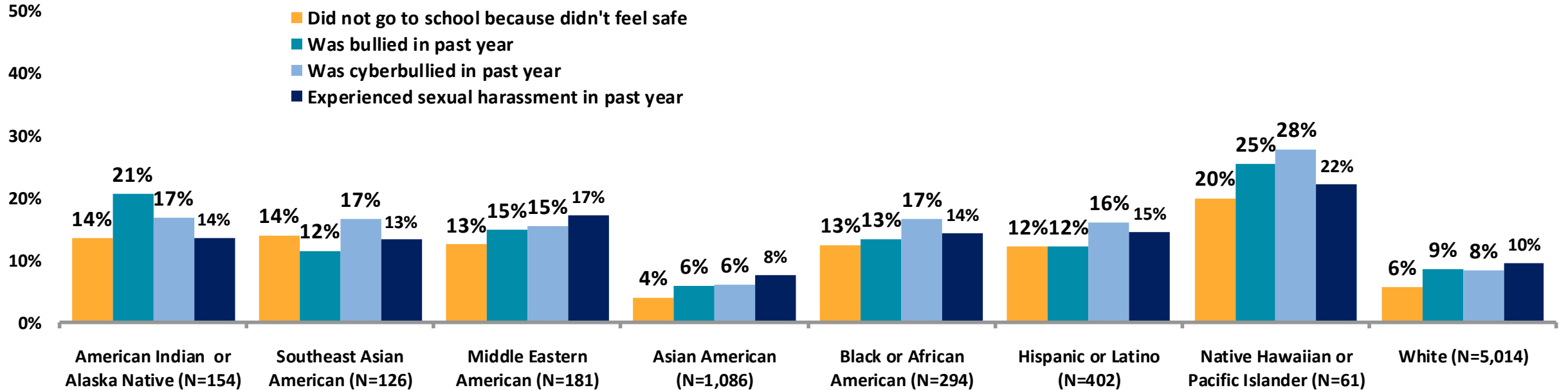
### Sexual harassment (Q68)

- **Nothing (51%)**
- Walked away (27%)
- Told person to stop (26%)
- Told an adult at home (10%) or at school (6%)
- Resisted with physical force (4%)



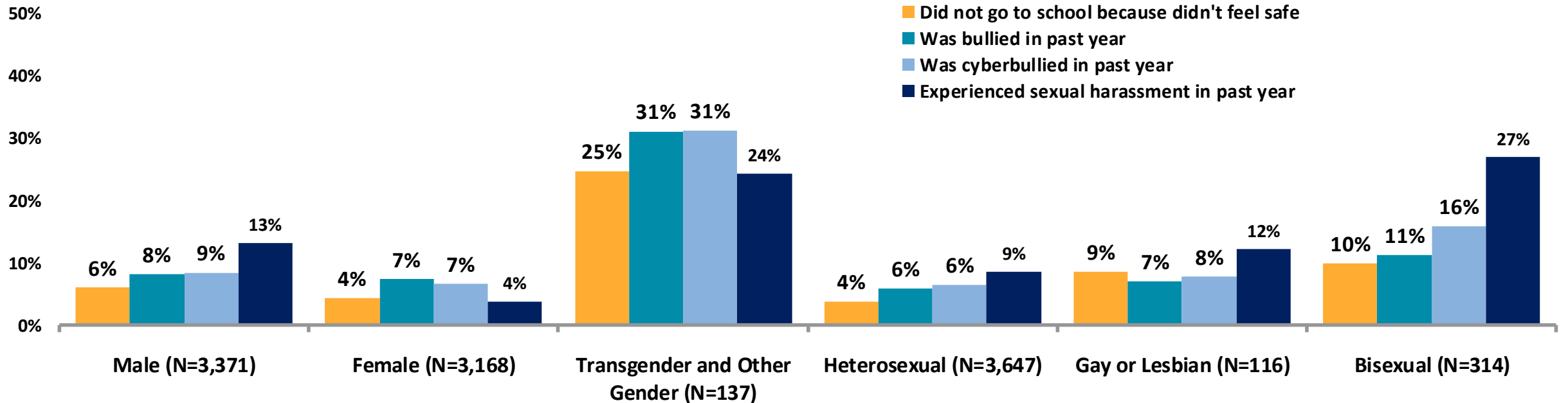
# Who is Most At Risk? Results by Race/Ethnicity

## BULLYING, CYBERBULLYING, NOT GOING TO SCHOOL - 2020 Emerson YRBS



# Who is Most At Risk? Results by Gender/Orientation

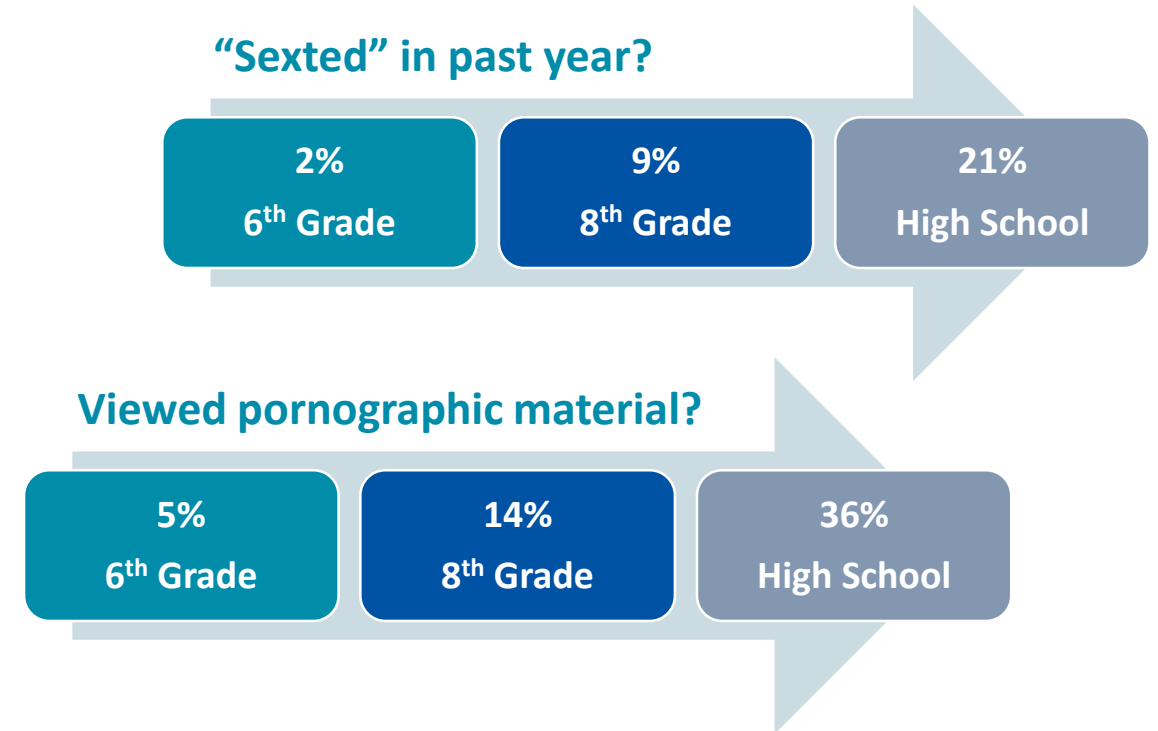
## BULLYING, CYBERBULLYING, NOT GOING TO SCHOOL - 2020 Emerson YRBS





# Sexting, Pornography

- High schoolers are most likely to engage in “**sexting**” (sending or received sexually explicit messages/photos via email, internet, social media, etc.), but it starts in 6<sup>th</sup> grade
- High schoolers are also most likely to look at **pornography** regularly but again, it starts in 6<sup>th</sup> grade
- Rates of sexting and viewership of pornography haven’t changed significantly from 2018 to 2020



# Why Do Cyberbullying, Sexting, Sexual Harassment Happen?

One contributing factor is **unsupervised access to the internet and social media**: e.g., students cyberbully because they can.

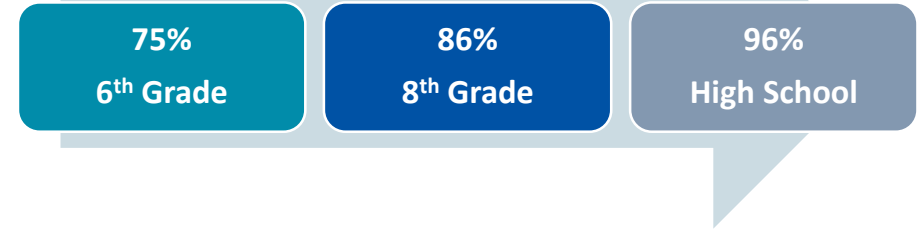
By the time students reach high school, nearly all have access to social media (e.g., Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram, TikTok, etc.).

Risky behavior involving the internet is more common as students age, but even 6th graders find themselves in situations they did not anticipate when engaging with social media.

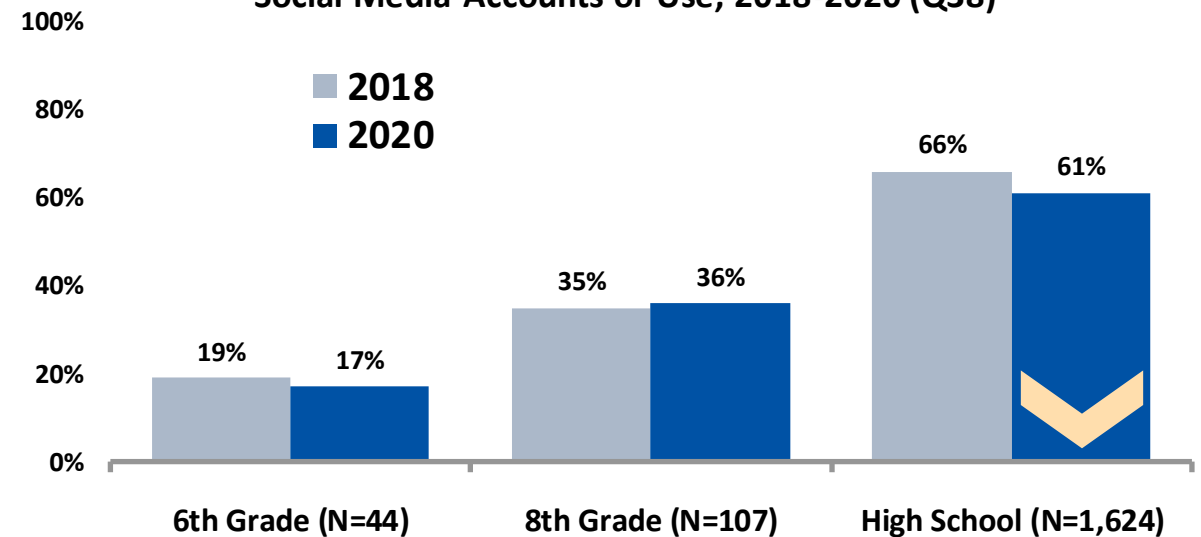
Depending on grade level:

- 6% to 22% of students have social media accounts that their parents or guardians don't know about.
- 8% to 19% have had face-to-face meetings with people they met online (usually not "dates")
- 14% to 24% of students have found themselves in risky or unwanted situations because of information they shared electronically.

Has Access to Social Media in 2020



Students Whose Parents/Guardians Don't Monitor Social Media Accounts or Use, 2018-2020 (Q38)



# Exposure to Sexual Violence and Weapons in School

**Exposure to sexual violence:** Less than 10% of students report being hurt physically or sexually in any of the scenarios examined in the 2020 YRBS—but it does happen:

- The highest percentage in 2020 is for lifetime risk of having been molested, raped, or sexually violated, among high school students (9%).
- Sexual harassment is a problem: by high school, 12% of students have experienced it

**Bringing weapons to school:** For 2020, we changed the question about bringing weapons to school to include the word “intentionally,” since students sometimes inadvertently bring small pocket knives or other weapon-like objects to school that, while disallowed, are not of major concern:

- The change in the wording of the question did not appear to affect the results appreciably.
- The number of students reporting bringing guns to school was roughly the same in 2020 as in 2018 (20 vs. 17 students).
- Although students at all grade levels do intentionally bring large knives, guns, or other weapons to school, the behavior is most prevalent among high schoolers.



# Tobacco, Drugs, Vaping, Marijuana

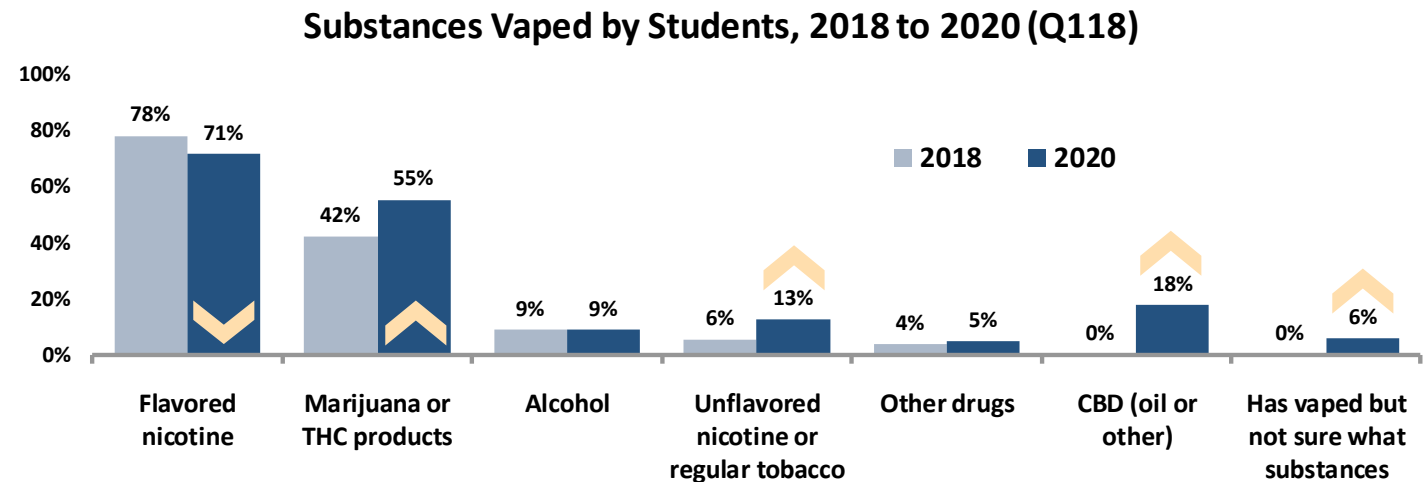
Very few students **smoke cigarettes**

Very few students use **illegal drugs** (cocaine, heroin, etc.), and while some **misuse prescription drugs**, this behavior remained stable from 2018 to 2020

**Vaping** is the “drug of choice” especially for high school students. Vaping has declined somewhat, recently.

Legalization of marijuana did not lead to an increase in students’ consumption of marijuana—in fact, high school students’ use of marijuana declined somewhat from 2018 to 2020. It did, however, increase students’ vaping of marijuana products. The shift has been away from flavored nicotine in favor of marijuana

A new question for 2020 is where are students getting vaping products? The answer is primarily peers and unrelated adults. About 9% buy these products from stores and 7% get them online



# Perceived Risks of Tobacco, Alcohol, and Drug Use

Perceived Relative Risks of Alcohol and Substance Use, 2020

