

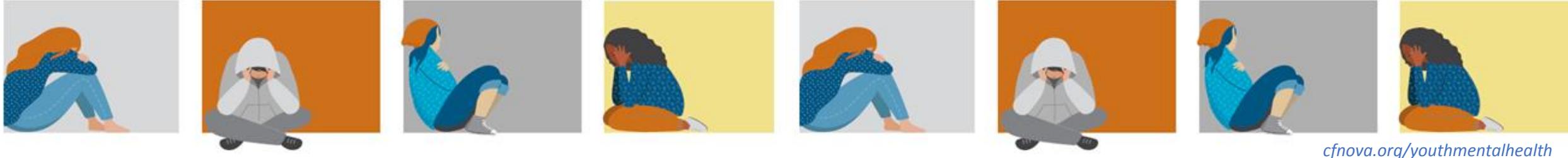
THE  
community  
foundation  
FOR NORTHERN VIRGINIA

## the shape of youth **MENTAL HEALTH**

*Finding a way back from sadness and stress  
for Northern Virginia's teens*

**An Insight Region® Special Report**

WiFi for in-person attendees: <https://its.gmu.edu/knowledge-base/guest-wi-fi-self-registration/>



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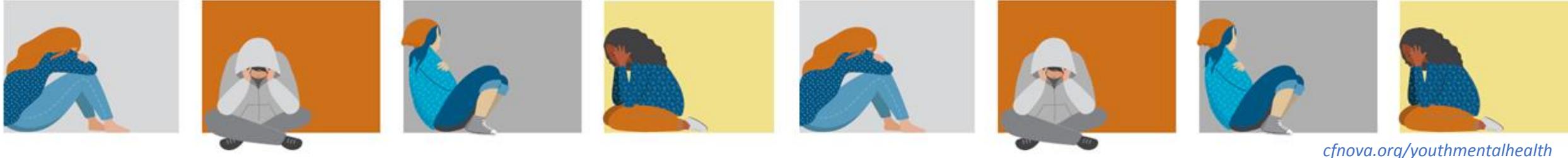


# WELCOME

**Megan Mocho**

Partner, Holland & Knight

Community Foundation for Northern Virginia  
Board Member



[cfnova.org/youthmentalhealth](https://cfnova.org/youthmentalhealth)



## INTRODUCTION

**Eileen Ellsworth**

President and CEO

Community Foundation for Northern Virginia



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# THE SHAPE OF YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH

**Elizabeth Hughes**

Senior Director, Insight Region®

Community Foundation for Northern Virginia



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> region™

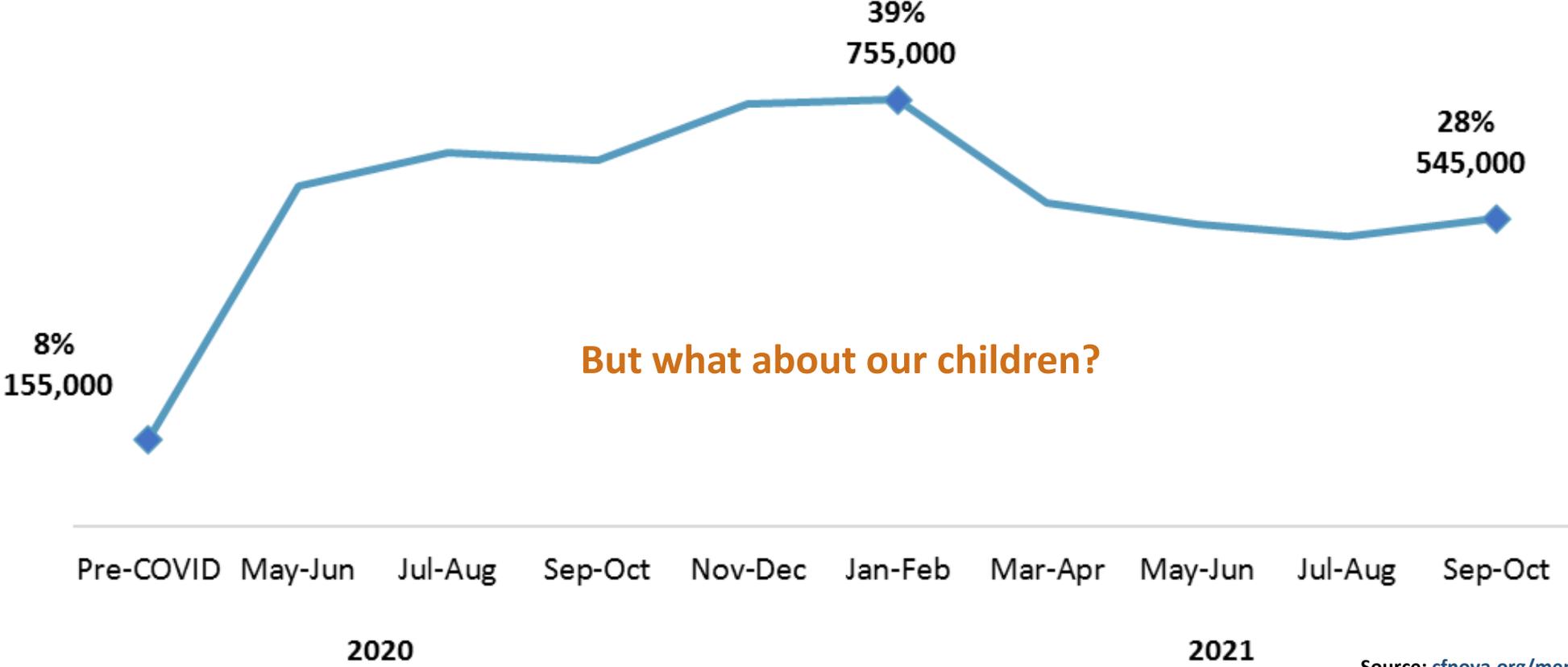
the center for  
community research

- Launched in 2020 as hub for well-researched, actionable data and analysis to help the region better understand its greatest opportunities and challenges
- Focus on Inclusive Prosperity, the expectation that **every resident**—regardless of gender, race-ethnicity, income, or family structure—can thrive in Northern Virginia
- One of my goals is to augment what we know about our community from stories and personal experience with data—to *quantify* need



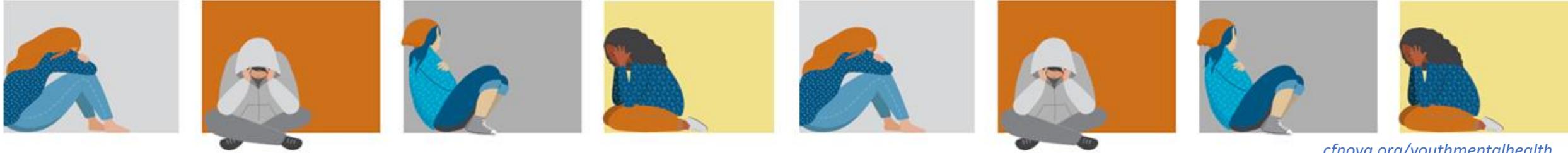
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Last March, we released a report on **adult mental health** in Northern Virginia, revealing that over half a million adults were experiencing recent, clinical levels of anxiety and depression (4x the pre-pandemic level).



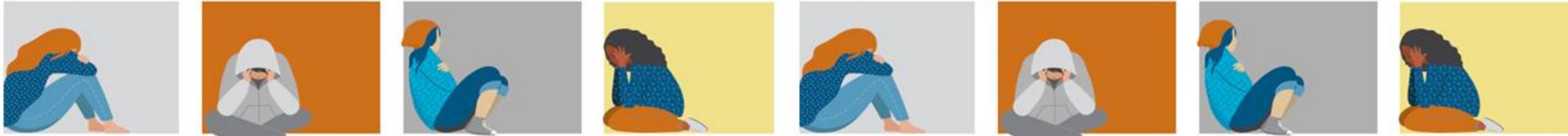
**But what about our children?**

Source: [cfnova.org/mental-health-report](https://cfnova.org/mental-health-report)



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# I. THE MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS OF OUR REGION'S CHILDREN & YOUTH

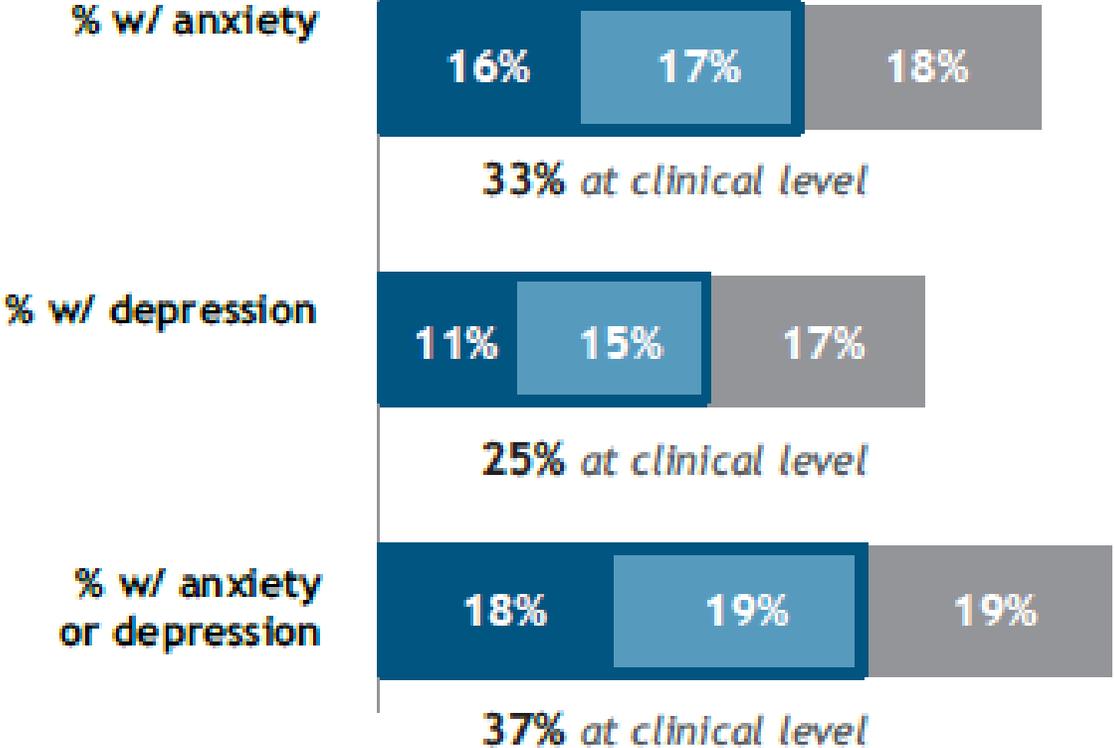


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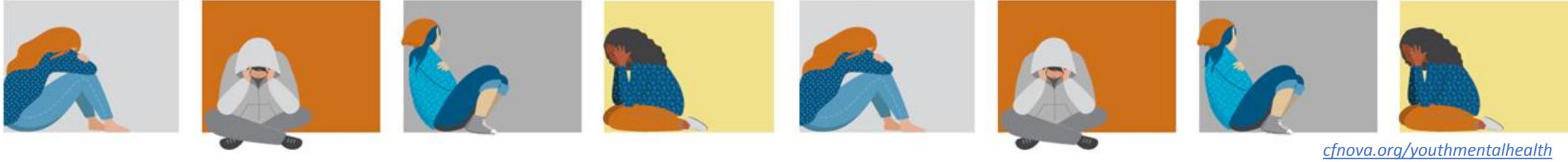
**In Feb 2022, 37% of the region’s public high school students experienced a recent mental health need.**

● clinical: severe (~every day in past 2 wks) ● clinical: moderate (> half the days in past 2 wks) ● mild (several days in past 2 wks)

- 33% felt nervous, tense, anxious and/or uncontrollably worried for more than half the days in the past two weeks – the clinical marker for anxiety **OR**
- 25% has lost interest or pleasure in things that once provided joy and/or reporting feeling down, depressed or hopeless for more than half the days in the past two weeks – the clinical marker for depression



Source: Insight Region analysis of data from Virginia School Survey of Climate and Working Conditions, 2022, obtained through FOIA request



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In Feb 2022, over a third of the region’s public high school students experienced a past-year mental health need.

- 34% reported feeling so sad or hopeless almost every day for 2+ weeks that they stopped doing some of their usual activities—**past-year persistent sadness OR**
- 10% seriously contemplated taking their own life—**past-year suicidal thinking**

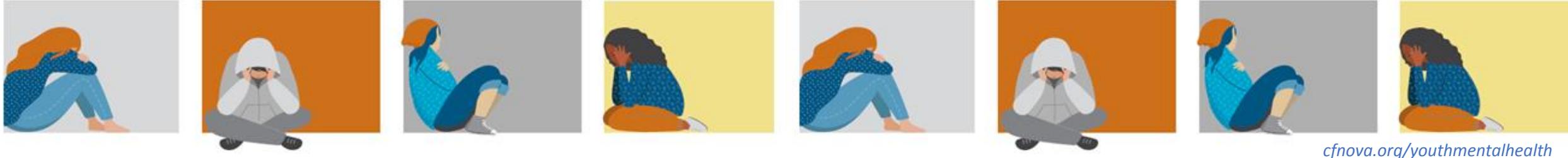
**% who felt persistent sadness/hopelessness**



**% who contemplated suicide**

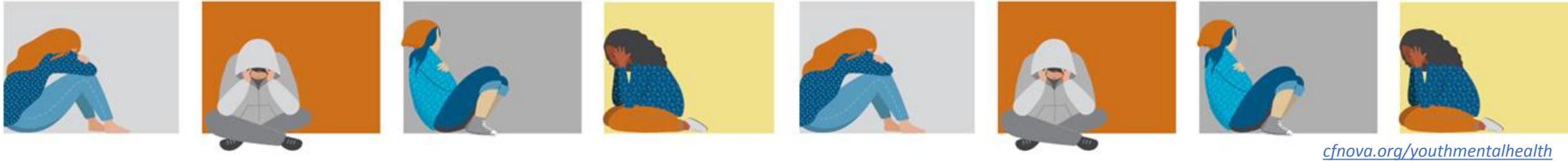


Source: Insight Region analysis of data from Virginia School Survey of Climate and Working Conditions, 2022, obtained through FOIA request



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All told, 47% of the region’s public high school students experienced a recent OR past-year mental health need.



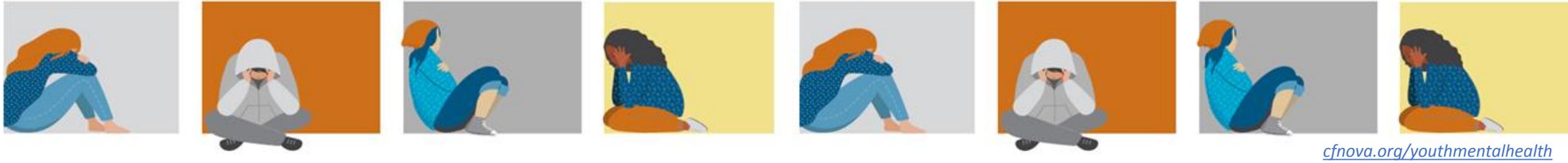
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Public middle school students also have high (but varied) rates of mental health needs across the region.

Mental health concerns among region’s middle schools, Jan-Mar 2021

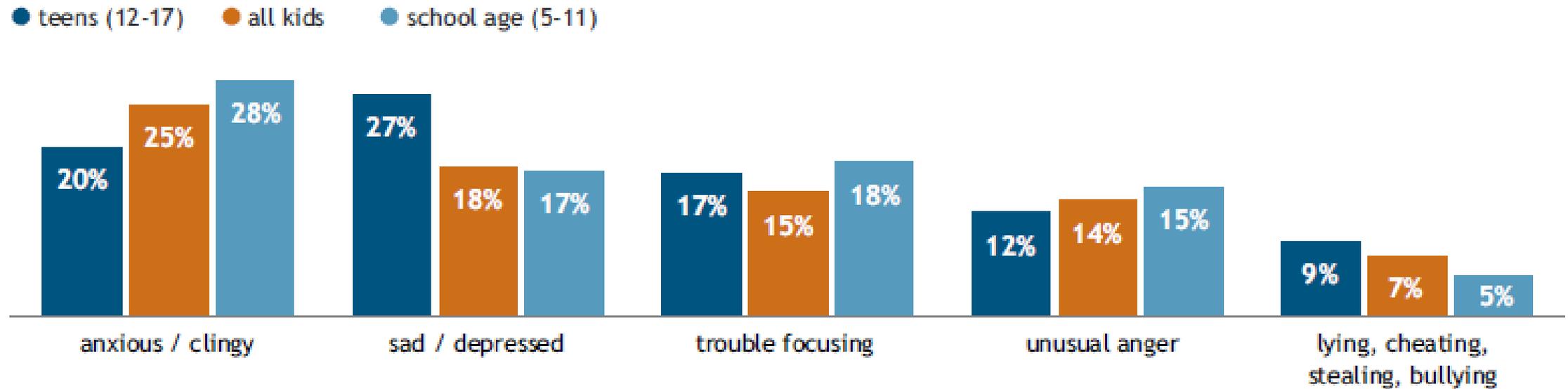
	PERSISTENT SADNESS			SUICIDAL THINKING		
	district average	lowest rate of any school	highest rate of any school	district average	lowest rate of any school	highest rate of any school
ALEXANDRIA	41%	26%	41%	12%	4%	13%
ARLINGTON	29%	23%	37%	8%	5%	14%
FAIRFAX	29%	16%	45%	8%	0%	19%
FALLS CHURCH	33%	33%	33%	9%	9%	9%
LOUDOUN	29%	23%	38%	6%	5%	9%
MANASSAS	31%	31%	31%	8%	8%	8%
MANASSAS PARK	42%	42%	42%	13%	13%	13%
PRINCE WILLIAM	38%	28%	46%	12%	7%	18%
NORTHERN VIRGINIA	--	16%	46%	--	0%	19%

Source: Virginia School Survey of Climate and Working Conditions, 2021



Parents of elementary school students have also noted high rates of anxiety/clinginess, difficulty focusing, and unusual anger.

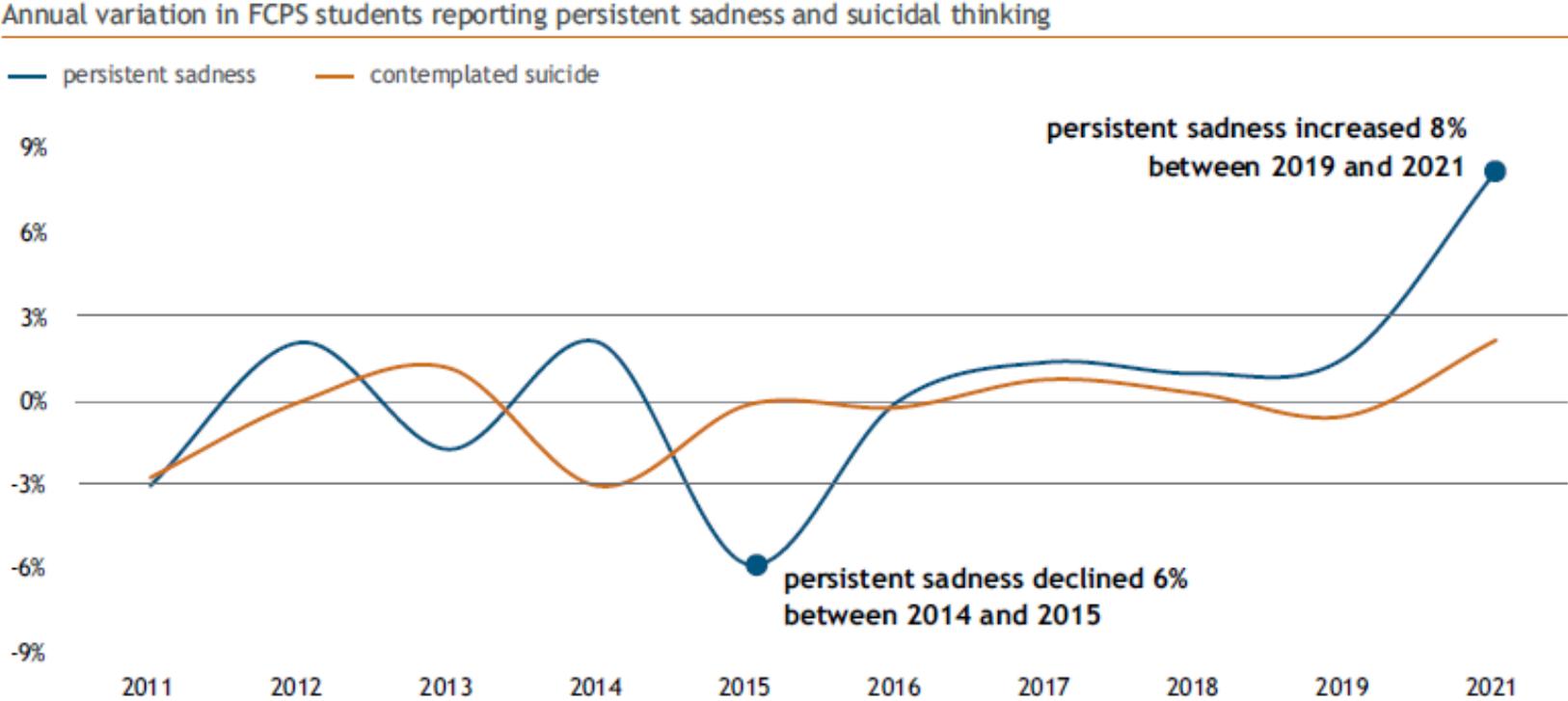
Percent of Northern Virginia households with children reporting mental health concerns



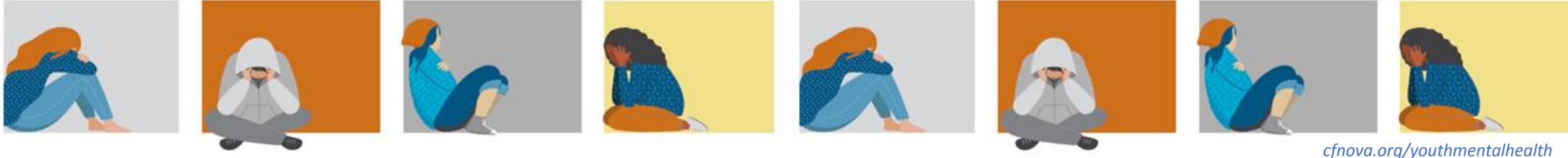


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As with adults, mental health needs *increased* during the pandemic, but nationally and across the region, these concerns have been trending upward for years.

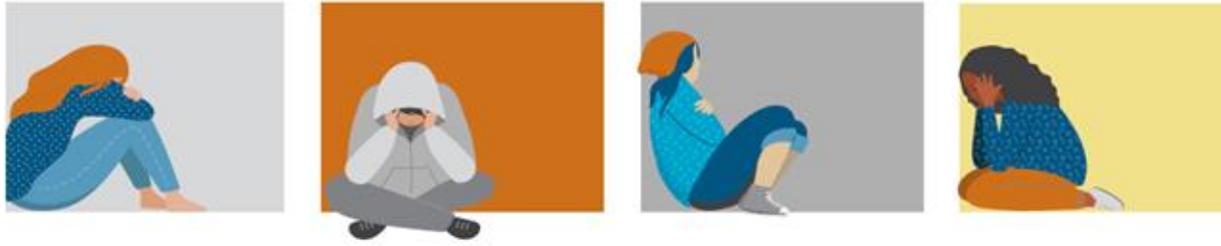


Source: Insight Region analysis of data from Fairfax County Youth Survey, 2011-2021



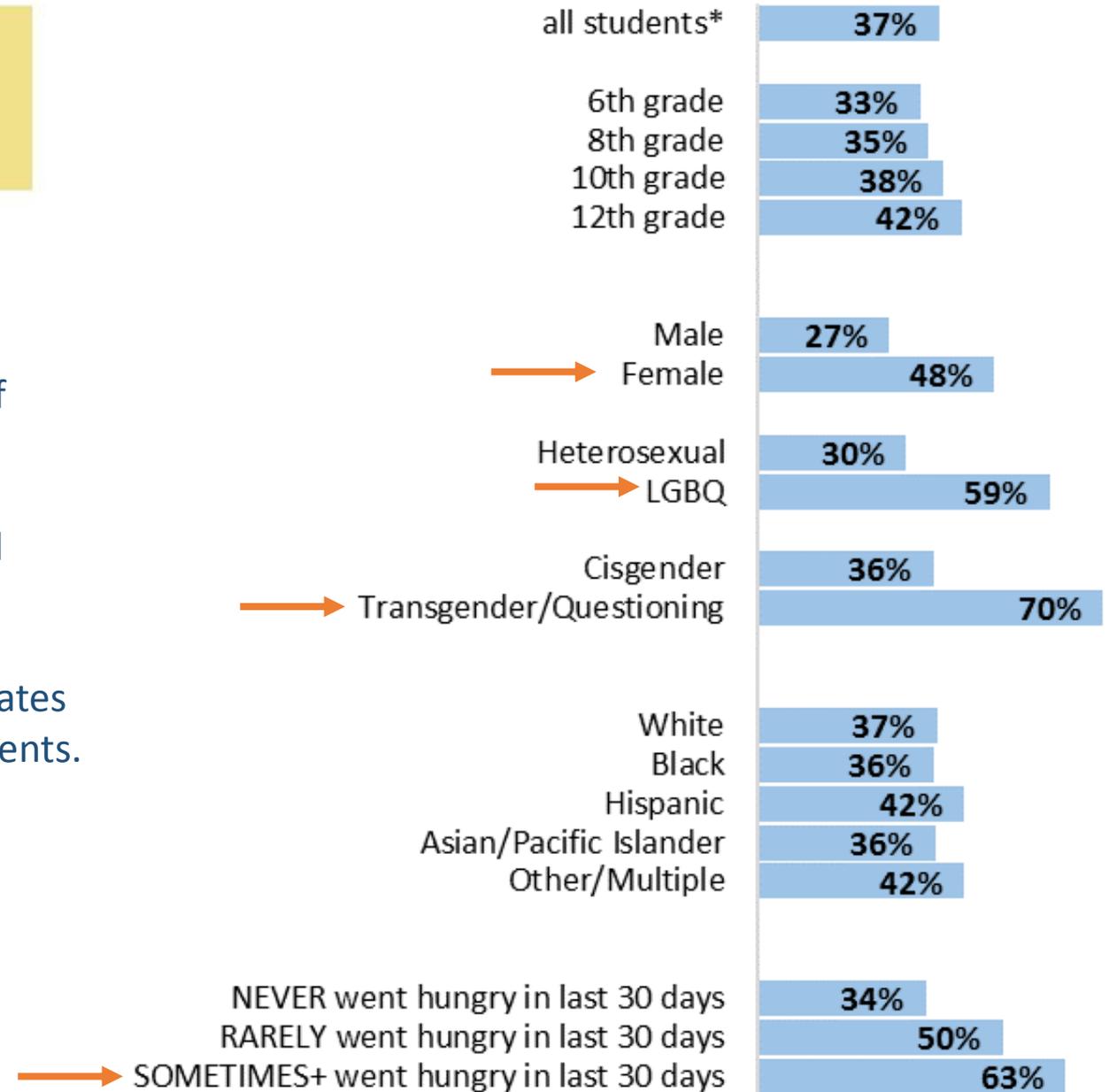
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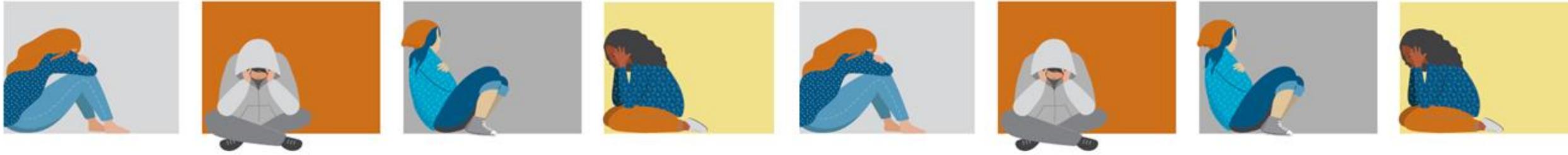
## II. WHO IS STRUGGLING



## by demographics

- Girls and students in the LGBTQ community had rates of persistent sadness that were double that of their peers.
- Students experience recent food insecurity also showed elevated rates of persistent sadness.
- Age and race-ethnicity showed modest variation, with rates slightly higher among upperclassmen and Hispanic students.

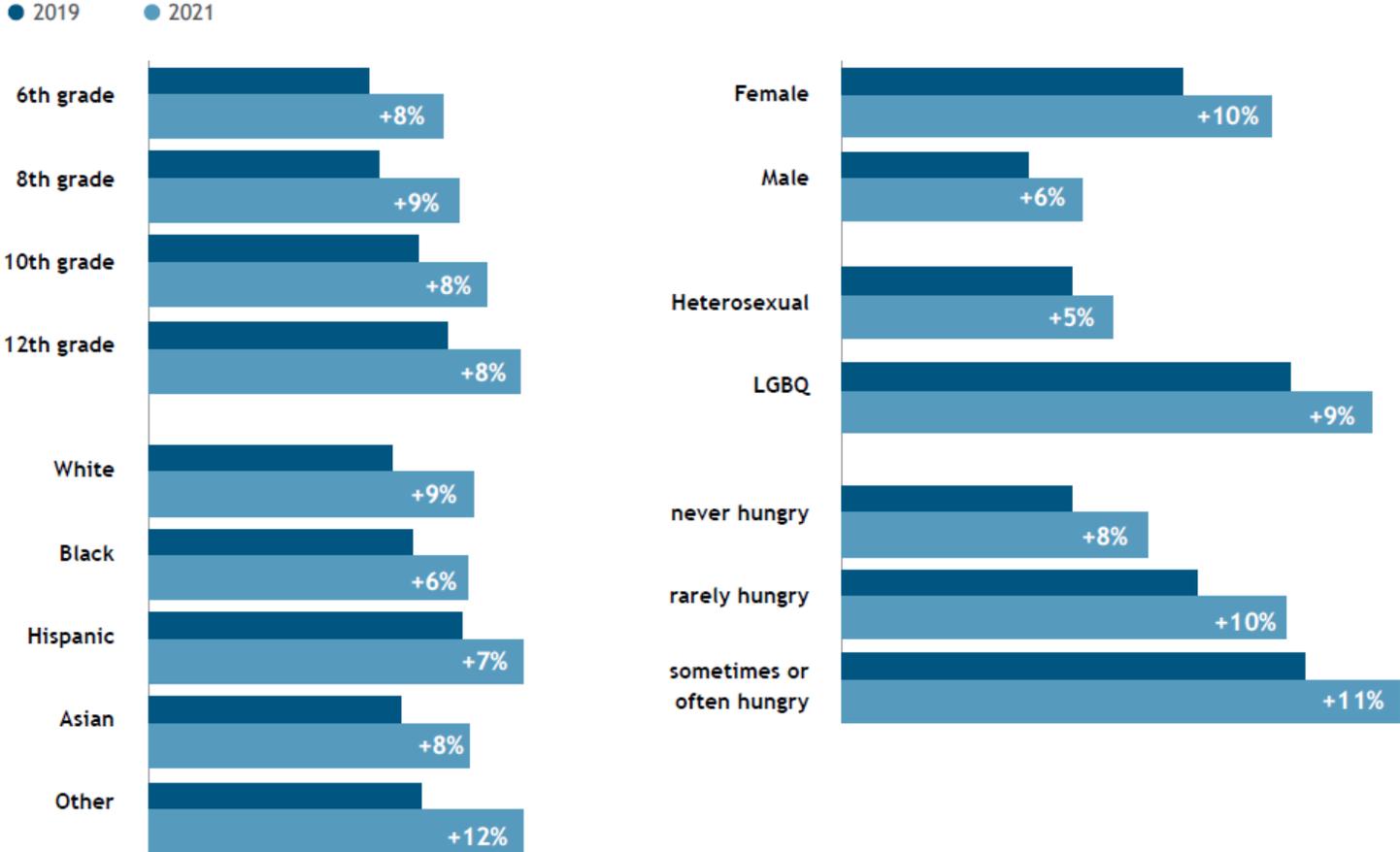




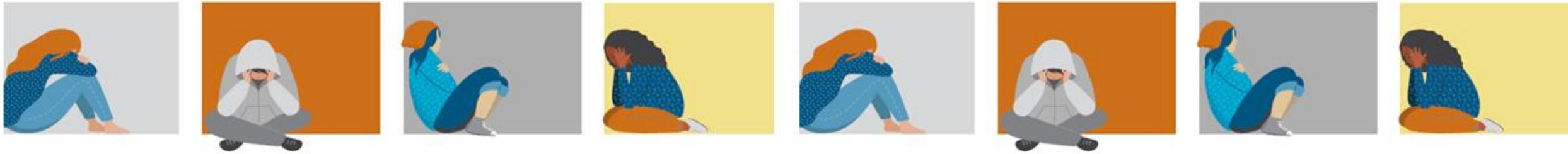
## by demographics

During the pandemic, the populations experiencing elevated rates of persistent sadness also saw the largest percentage point increase from their 2019 levels.

This finding suggests that the pandemic may have acted as a tipping point—those who were on the borderline of clinical needs or needed a light touch before are really struggling today.



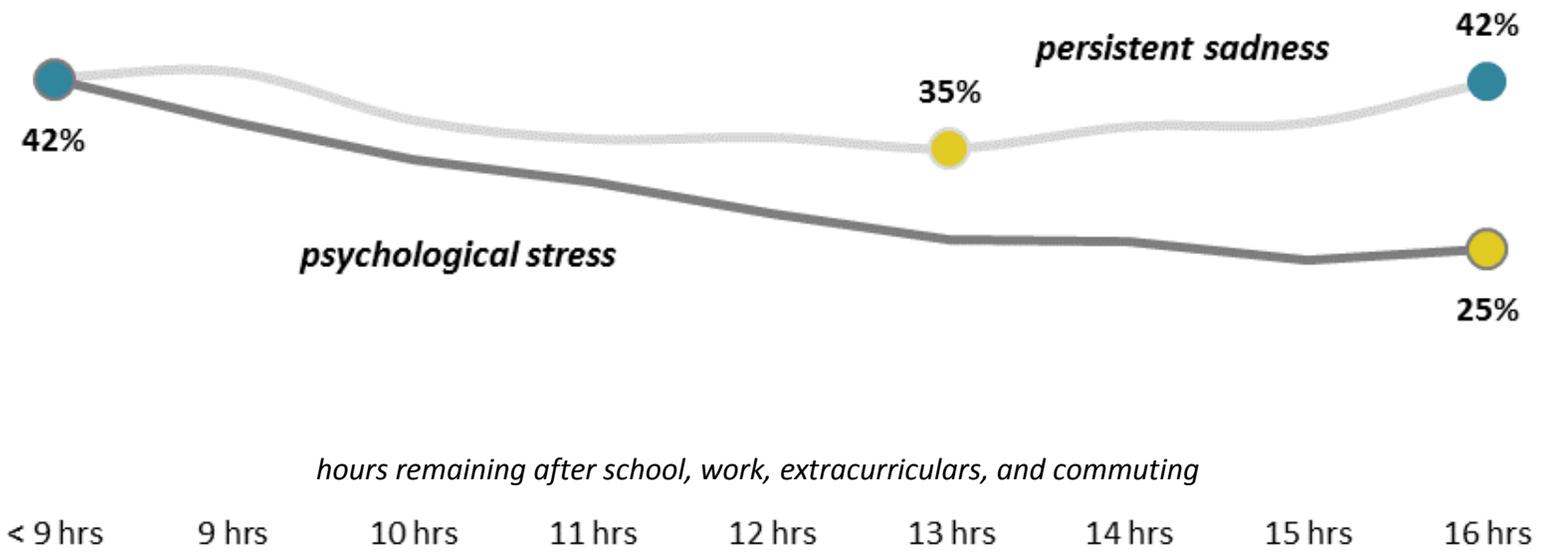
Source: Insight Region analysis of data from Fairfax County Youth Survey, 2021



## by time use

Local and national surveys suggests that “lack of downtime” represents one of the top causes of teenage stress/sadness.

The reality is more complex. While stress rates decline with downtime, sadness is lowest among those with a *balance* of downtime and productive time, suggesting that it is **how** students spend their time that matters more than the absolute number of hours “free”.

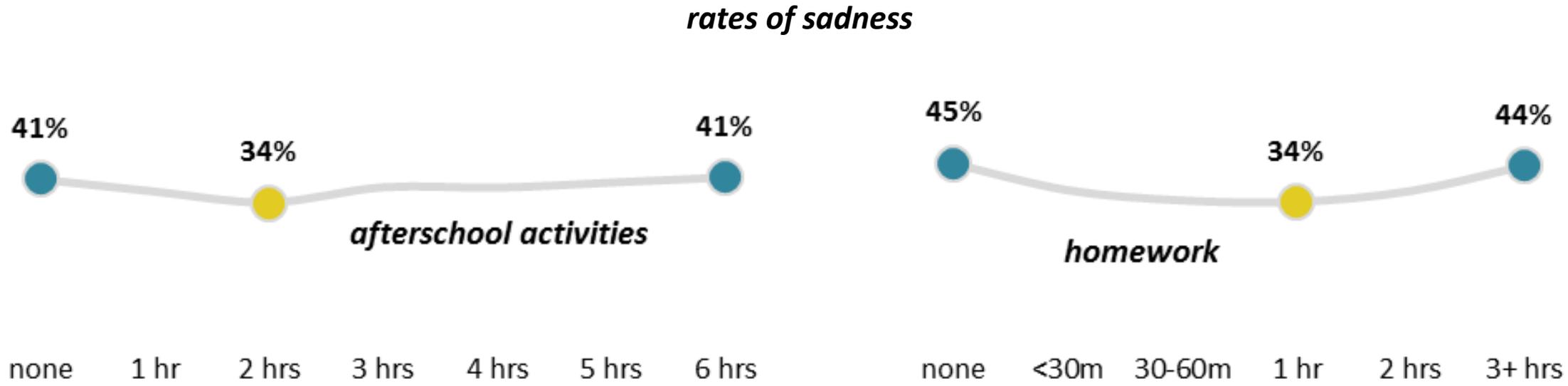


Source: Insight Region analysis of data from Fairfax County Youth Survey, 2021



by time use

**Productive Time.** Students with a moderate amount of afterschool activities and homework have the lowest rates of sadness, while those who spend a lot of time OR no time on these activities have higher rates.



Source: Insight Region analysis of data from Fairfax County Youth Survey, 2021



by time use

**Downtime.** Here, moderation is not key. Sleep had a strong, positive association with mental health (students who get more sleep tend to be less sad), while teenagers who spent a lot of time using a screen reported increased sadness.

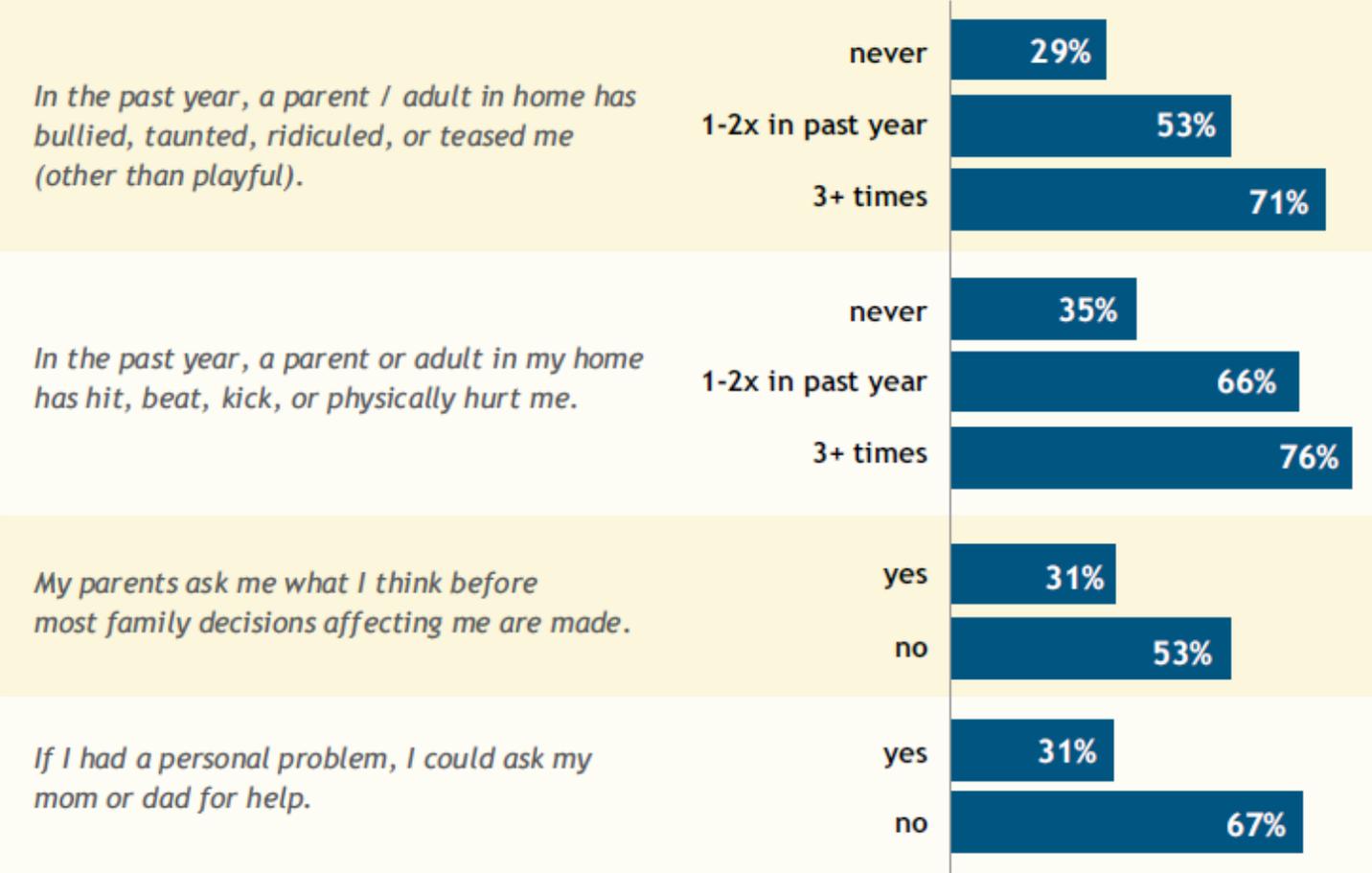


Source: Insight Region analysis of data from Fairfax County Youth Survey, 2021



## by relationship with adults

- Parents matter a lot.**  
 Youth who reported positive relationships with their parents (e.g., who included them in family decisions, were available to talk about personal issues, did not verbally or physically abuse the teen) had substantially lower rates of both persistent sadness than their peers.

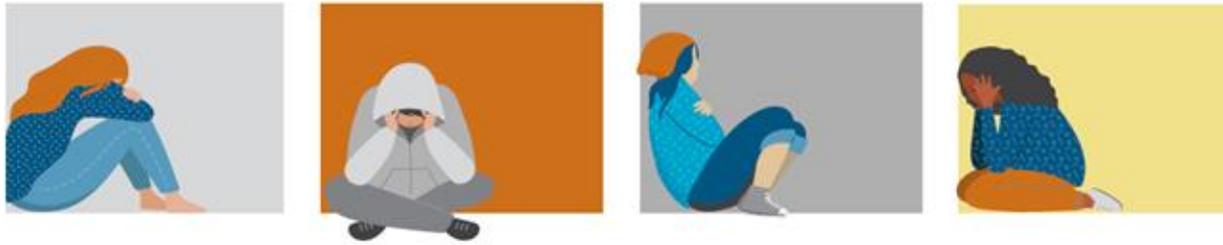




## by relationship with adults

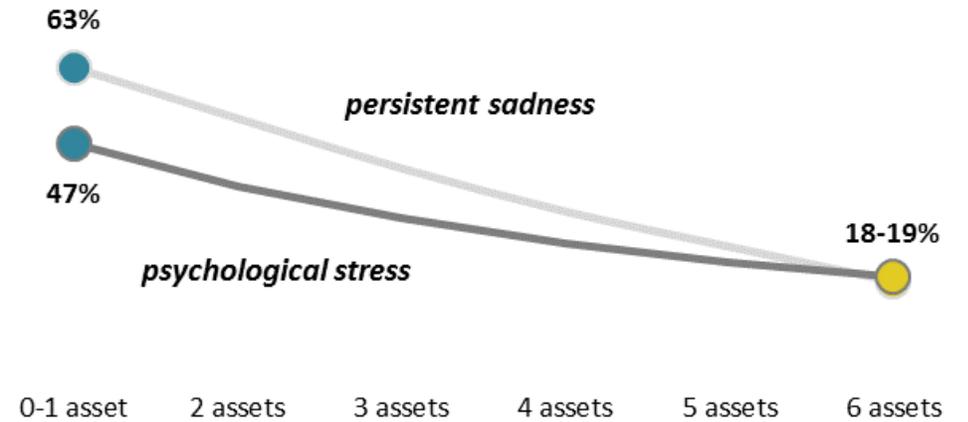
- Other adults provide an important buffer, too.**  
 Youth who perceived availability of teachers and other adults in the community tended to have lower rates of persistent sadness, too.





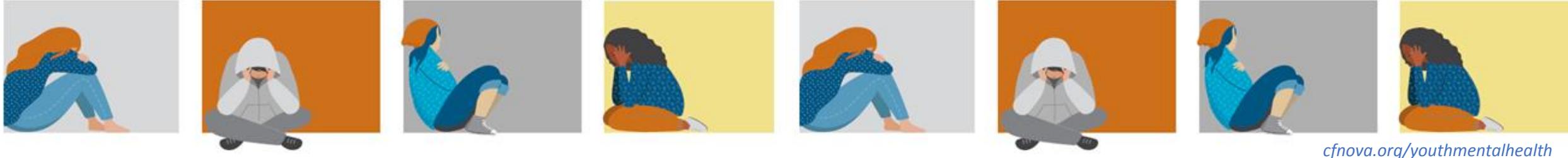
## by relationship with adults

These factors—relationships with parents, teachers, and other adults—are three of six assets monitored by Fairfax County through its Three to Succeed campaign. The more assets a teen has, the less likely they were to report persistent sadness and stress.



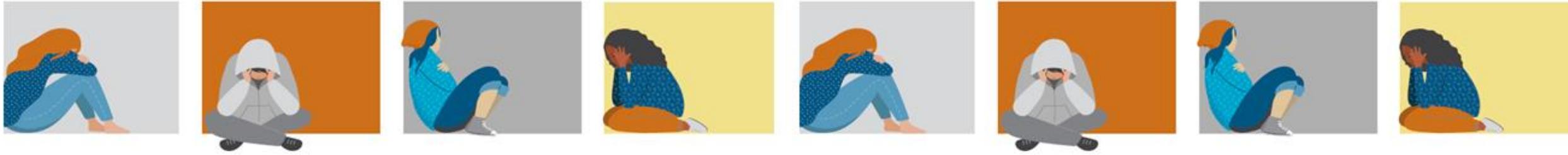
During the pandemic, there was a noticeable downward shift in the total number of protective factors teenagers possess. In 2019, 21% of FCPS students were at-risk (fewer than 3 protective factors), compared to 28% by 2021.

Source: Insight Region analysis of data from Fairfax County Youth Survey, 2021



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### III. COMING TOGETHER AROUND SOLUTIONS



**A community response to these three areas of concern might include:**

1. focusing mental health outreach to youth at heightened risk of persistent sadness and stress
2. acknowledging that adequate sleep is not just a “nice to have”—it is a key ingredient in youth wellbeing, stress management, and happiness
3. expanding the number of trusting, supportive adults in a teenager’s life by focusing on mentoring skills, parenting skills, and adult mental health services