



BY ALEXANDRIA CITY HIGH SCHOOL

ISIS JONES



TOPIC

The struggle of the ACHS youth mental health directly impacts school safety.

RESULT

A positive, and safe school environment that fosters the students to feel better emotionally and well balanced.



TOPIC DESCRIPTION

The Youth of Alexandria should have access to schools where they can safely express themselves and rely on the support of the school if they need someone to talk to. Mental health is an important part of our youth health, influencing their feelings, behavior and thoughts.

Every year, **1 in 7** students in the USA aged 6-17 experience a mental health disorder each, with half of the mental conditions beginning by the age **14** (NAMI, 2025). Undiagnosed, and untreated mental health can interfere with students ability to learn, grow, and develop. Students mental health is significantly from bullying, cyber-bullying, social media, and high academic pressure. These factors can lead to anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and performance. Youth groups such as women, LGBTQ, and minority groups deal with mental health struggles, compared to men, and cisgender groups.

K-12 School plays a vital role in providing and supporting students within the school environment. By fostering a safe, inclusive, and positive environment it can create a sense of belonging, which is crucial for reducing stress, and improving academic performance. Offering mental service within schools can also help break down barriers such as cost or transportation, making it easier for students to receive treatment.

When students feel safe, they are more likely to build positive relationships with peers, and teachers, while fostering a community. A safe school environment, students can effectively engage with academic work, more likely to participate, and take on challenges, and risk without fear. We must take the steps to ensure that all students have access to either school-based mental health support or public support.



1 in 7 students USA youth aged 6-17 experience a mental health disorder each year.



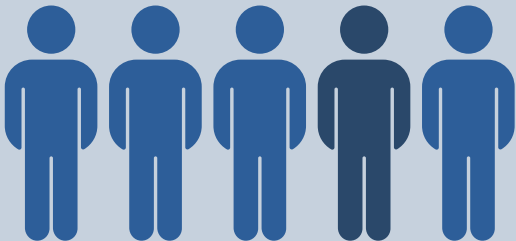
VOLUME 2, ISSUE 3

This issue reports the progress made to promoting youth mental health. -April 2025

SIGNIFICANCE

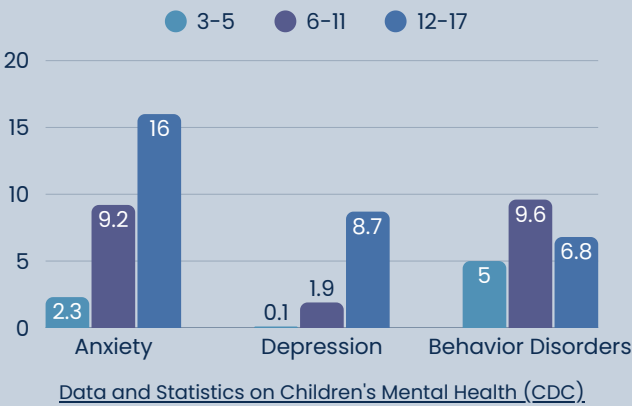
Mental health is an important essential for our everyday life from early childhood to adulthood. Mental health includes the student emotionally, socially, physically, and well-being. It influences how we act and feel. It also impacts how we handle stress, and our overall well being. Positive mental state promotes positive behaviors, builds resilience, and reduces cardiovascular disease risk.

When dealing with mental health issues it is more difficult to focus on current responsibilities. Untreated mental health issues can lead to higher risk of developing chronic physical conditions, hazardous behavior, and suicide. In fact, suicide is the second leading cause of death for youth ages **10-34**. (NAMI, 2025) According to a report from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention(CDC) released a graph on the rates of common mental health conditions in the US. This graph highlights the issue of these conditions starting in early childhood and has a prevalence to change with age. It also shows that very common mental conditions are anxiety problems, behavior disorders, depression are diagnosed the most in children. Based on the report, 11% of the children ages 3-17 had current, diagnosed anxiety which 9% of males, and 12% of being females. (CDC, 2025)



1 out of 5 students in Virginia experiences bullying (20%)

2022-2023 Mental and Behavioral Health Conditions by Age in the US



A crucial component to influencing mental health is both bullying and cyber-bullying, acting as a cause of trauma, depression, anxiety, and self-harm. Bullying is linked to many negative outcomes, including increased risk of substance abuse, suicide, and social withdraw. These actions impact both physical health, academic success, and creating long term challenges. Victims often feel and express persistence sadness, fear of going to school, and hopefulness. Based on the Virginia Department of Health, **1 in 5** students in Virginia have experienced bullying, both cyber and in-person. With raising rates over the recent years of school-based bullying, reaching **35.5%**.

SIGNIFICANCE

Figure 1. Percentage of Students who were victims of bullying on school property, electronically bullied and bullied someone by Race and Ethnicity, VYS, 2019

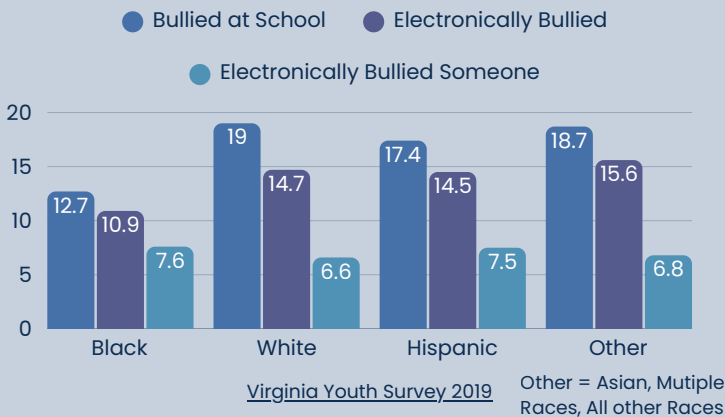
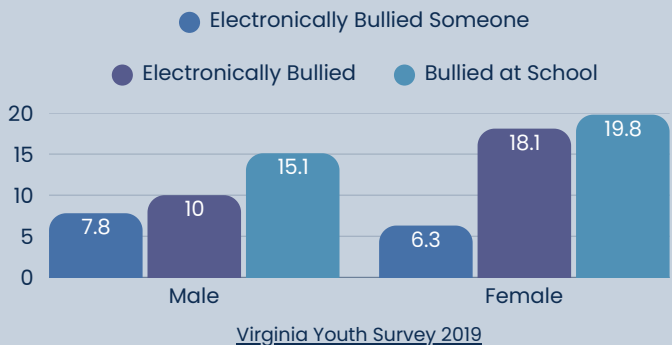
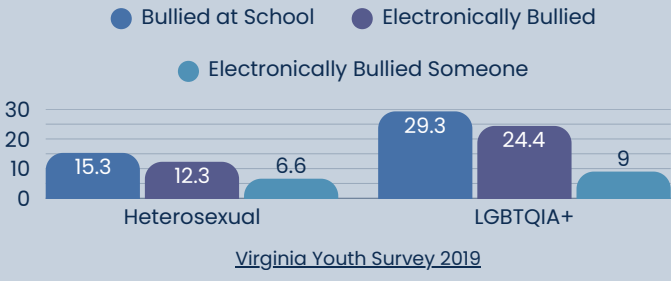
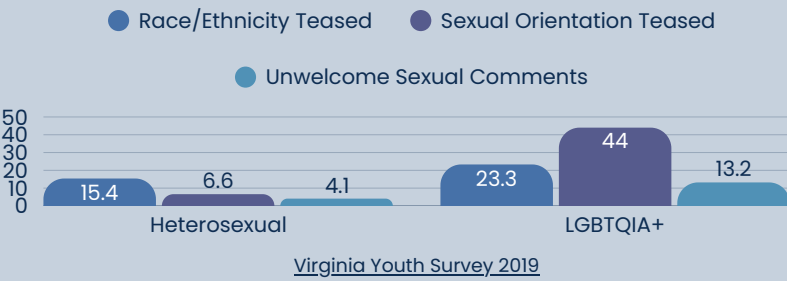


Figure 2. Percentage of Students who were victims of bullying on school property, electronically bullied and bullied someone by Gender, VYS, 2019



Physical, verbal, and digital harassment impacts a wide variety of people, affecting all ages, ethnicity, genders, and sexual orientations. According to a survey there has been a trend of white and other race students having higher rates of being bullied in school, and digitally with Hispanics closely behind. On the other chart, female students are **31.13%** bullied more in school compared to men, with them also being bullied more online.

Figure 3. Percentage of Students who were victims of bullying on school property, electronically bullied and bullied someone by Sexual Orientation/Gender Identity, VYS, 2019



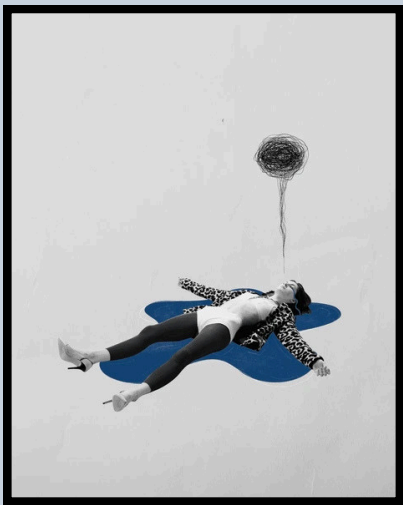
According to a Virginia 2019 Youth Survey, LGBTQIA+ shows a much higher rate of them being victims to bullying in school, and online. In school LGBTQIA students are **91.50%** bullied more compared to students that identify as heterosexual.

WHO IS EFFECTED THE MOST?



Women experience higher rates of mental health issues due to multiple stressful factors such as societal, emotional, biological pressures they navigate growing up. According to [new CDC data \[9.8 MB, 89 pages\]](#) released today, nearly 3 in 5 (**57%**) U.S. teen girls felt persistently sad or hopeless in 2021—double that of boys, representing a nearly **60%** increase and the highest level reported over the past decade. Women also have higher exposure chances to trauma (violent, sexual, abuse) while also combating hormonal changes.

Minority groups often deals with mental health issues due to the systemic racism, discrimination, and barriers to accessing care. “White adults (**50%**) are more likely to say they received mental health services in the past three years compared with Black (**39%**) and Hispanic adults (**36%**).” (kfflayotah, 2024) Many minorities may also face issues such as language barriers, and culture stigma around mental health.



People identifying as LGBTQIA+ are reported to have a higher suicide and depression rate compared to cisgender populations. Due to constant bullying, rejection, stigma, and discrimination it can create an occurring stress that leads to poor mental health. “**39%** of LGBTQ+ young people seriously considered attempting suicide in the past year – including **46%** of transgender and nonbinary young people. LGBTQ+ youth of color reported higher rates than White peers.” (The Trevor Project, 2024)

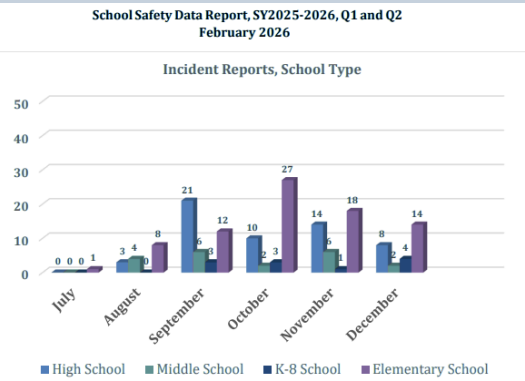
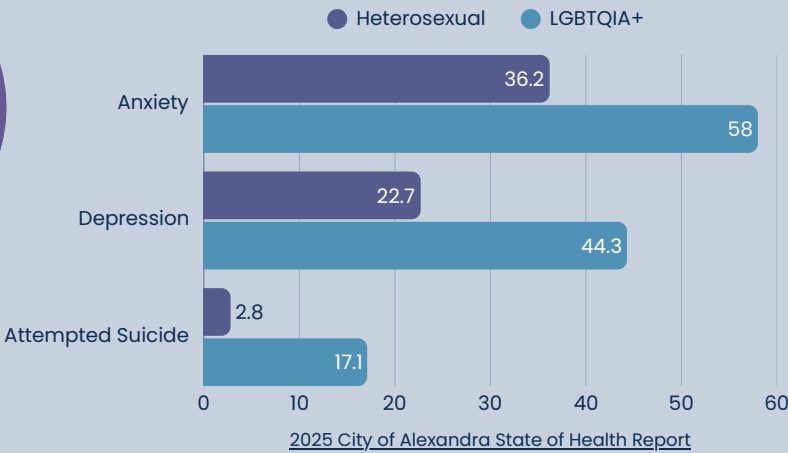
Older adolescents often experience poor mental health due to many factors such as bullying/cyber-bullying, internet, societal pressure, and brain development vulnerabilities. Other factors such as social media addictions and sleep deprivation can also mentally impact adolescents. **One in ten** high school students in Northern Virginia had seriously contemplated suicide in the past year. (Hughes, 2023)

HOW ARE WE DOING?

Of ACPS’ Youth Risk Behavior Survey respondents, nearly half (**47.6%**) of 10th and 12th graders reported problems with anxiety – slightly higher than in 2019 (**45.5%**).

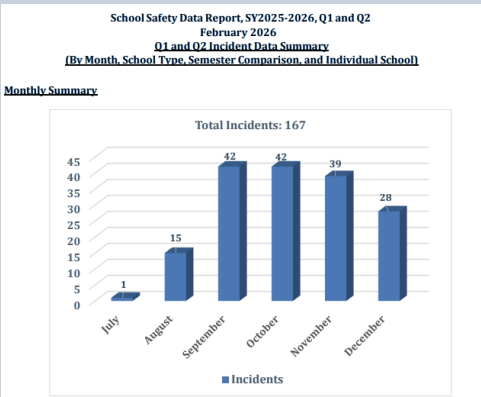
47.6%

Fig. 32 – Percent of ACPS 8th Graders Who Reported Anxiety, Depression, and Attempted Suicide, 2023*

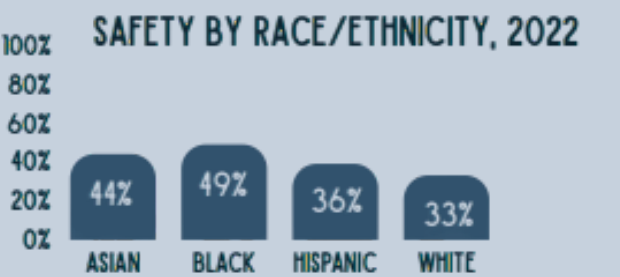


Trend: Compared to July, there is a rise of youth incident reporting from September to December.

Elementary schools are seen to have more incident reporting compare to any other level of education.



YOUNG PERSON FEELS SAFE AT HOME, SCHOOL, AND IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD



Safe Environments Report Card

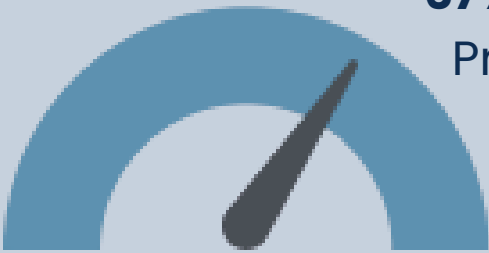
Trend: There is a 10% drop in safety reports from students in Alexandra. Black youth are more likely to feel safe in the community compared to white students.

IMPLEMENTATION STATUS

Progress with promoting mental health:

9 Action Steps
2 Strategies

67% are in Progress



Youth Mental Health CYCP Report Card

STRATEGIES

Strategy #8: Incorporate social, emotional, and academic learning into the school day

Strategy #9: Increase access to mental health and wellness services, supports, resources, and dialogues

Strategy #33: Expand access to and availability of physical spaces with trusted, caring adults, where youth can feel safe when not in school

Strategy #35: Prevent bullying by providing education, building Developmental Assets®, and growing awareness among community

IMPLEMENTATIONS

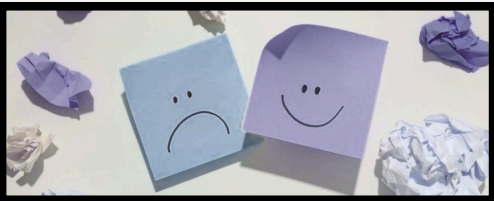
ACHS currently has many implementations to deal with student mental health. This framework includes, the universal RULER social-emotional learning, school-based support teams, and access to virtual resource Hazel Health.

Ruler aims to build emotional intelligence by recognizing, understanding, and recognizing to improve the school environments, enhance academic performance, and decrease anxiety in students. Ruler is designed for students, families, staff involvement , and creating an approach to emotional intelligence.

School-based teams such as counselors, social workers, nurses and psychologists provide mental support to students, and are tasked with removing learning barriers. They improve student outcomes by counseling, tutoring, and monitoring process.

Hazel Health is a resource that provides online support for students by scheduling appointments with licensed therapists. This resource is free with no cost to the family, make it accessible to families from all backgrounds.

PARTNERSHIPS



PERFORMANCE EFFORT

In a current ACPS safety report from 25-26 there has been an increase of incidents reported for the school safety check. According to the graphs, there has been a spike in both September and October for the rise of incidents. Most of the reported incidents as physical assault encounters, and injuries/medical assistance required. This highlights that there is a growth in violence within schools when it reaches the first, and second quarter.



PERFORMANCE EFFECT

Some barriers are searching for the right mental health resource that actually provides accessible resources for the youth. Many services may come at a price that limits many low-income families that can't afford to support there child. Many minority families may not have any services nearby due to geographic disparities, and financial limitations. Culture and Language barriers can overlap when accessing the right healthcare.

Positive:

- Mental health support such as counseling support, and school social workers to help manage student anxiety and stress.
- Creating a more inclusive environment by creating clubs, and events.
- Building a strong relationship between both the teacher and students.

Negative:

- Both bullying and cyber-bullying increase the stress levels in students leading to worsening mental health
- Physical violence can result in many injuries from other students, lower academic achievement and impact mental health crises.
- Urban living or dangerous environments these youth grow up
- Family structures and divorces also impact mental health

RECOMMENDATIONS

Improving the environment of the school by strengthening the relationship between students and staff while also making anti-bullying efforts. If a teacher notices bullying, they should pull the students aside and reinforce the punishments for bullying. Ways to combat bullying would be to take some time during class to teach the students empathy, fostering inclusiveness, and avoiding reprimands to prevent humiliation, and further negative behavior. When students are aware of the result of their action they will less likely do it again. Hiring more trained teachers, and social workers can help victims of bullying speak with someone and discuss a solution to the issue. Student typically don't go to teachers because of stigma of speaking with teachers about there thoughts, and not feeling heard.

Promoting current clubs more that focus on mental health to students in ACPS schools. A club called "The Mental Health Matter" in ACHS would better provide students access to speak with each other and create a community. Also the club creates a safe space after school for students dealing with mental health issues. School should also promote after activities that allows the students to foster a community and improve their mental health. Activities such as Field Day allow students a break from academic stress and physical development by working in groups.

Promote and make students more aware in the school of the city, and local programs that advocate student mental health, and safety. Programs such as Teen Wellness's Center, Peer Advocates, and Alexandria Youth Ambassadors work to better students in the community Alexandria by directly speaking with them and bringing it to the board. Every student should have a voice when it comes to mental health issues. With these collected surveys from these programs they can provide an understanding to school board on how to deal with issues.



This issue should be handled by the government because both school safety and student mental health involve the public good which unequally impacts that the schools and community rely on. Schools are an important benefit of the government which is in charge for making sure it is funded, and has a standard matter and rule to help their community. Mental health is not just an education issue but a public issue. Schools can't just handle the issue of mental health but require intervention for bettering certain programs from the government. To help the government can help low-funded programs that advocate for student health such as the AYA, and Peer advocates. This funding can bring more awareness to there cause and make more of a change to community.



ONLINE RESOURCES

Hazel Health

1-800-76-HAZEL (1-800-764-2935)

An online service that is partnered with Alexandria City Public Schools, students have access to set up appointments with online therapists. This service is available to use at home, school and carry no cost to families.

Services include:

- Scheduled therapy appointments: These free therapy services can help students cope with poor mental health struggles such as grief, withdrawal, grief of a peer, depression, stress, family relationships, and etc.
- Licensed therapist: Many types of licensed therapists are provided at Hazel including, bilingual, diverse, and expert in dealing with the needs of children, and teens.
- Care Coordination: if a student needs help seeking for sources outside of Hazel Health, Hazel can connect you to local services in the area.

Same Day Access

703-746-3535

A online or walk-in program that offers immediate service on youth behavioral health assessment (usually 5+) and families by providing quick connection for therapy or substance without an appointment.

- **Suicide and Crisis Hotline**

988

- **Crisis Text Line**

Text "HOME" to 741741 for 24/7 confidential support via text.



IN PERSON RESOURCES

Teen Wellness center

3330 King Street (Door 3), Alexandria, VA 22302

An in-person program that provides free service for students, which has both confidential and non-confidential options. Requiring a parent/guardian to consent to a student under 18 if the treatment falls under confidential services.

Non-confidential services provided are:

- Treatments for cold, acne, and other minor illnesses
- Tuberculosis Testing
- Physical examination for school, employment, and participation in sports

Confidential services provided are:(doesn't require parental consent)

- Pregnancy testing and prevention
- Health education on nutrients
- Diagnosis and treatments of sexually transmitted infections
- Mental health and substance using screening and referrals.



The Alexandria Youth Ambassadors

421 King Street, Alexandria Virginia 22314

A program that helps promote student engagement and focuses on anti-violence, trauma healing, and social-emotional learning. It is also a year-round employment option for high school students seeking a job in advocating for the community.

- On the team, they gather information from the students in Alexandria to help advocate and create more resilience for the students
- The youth leaders use experience from collected data of the students and use it to make a change in their community.

Peer Advocates

6295 Edsall Road, Suite 260, Alexandria, VA

A program that facilitates workshops for both high and middle school students involving sexual & reproductive health, substance use prevention, and mental health.

- Collaborating with city agencies, student organizations and local prevention programs
- Creating engagement and collaboration between students on an advocacy team.

LGBTQIA+ RESOURCES

Trans Lifeline

877-565-8860.

- The Trans Lifeline also maintains a directory of hotlines and warmlines that provide a range of specialized services including: BIPOC specific crisis lines, LGBTQ+ & religious crisis lines, substance abuse (crisis) support, mental health crisis support, and more. Additional information, gender affirming resources, and more can be found on their website.

LGBTQ National Hotline

888-843-4564

- This free and confidential resource is available by phone from 4 pm-12 am Eastern Monday-Friday and 12-5 pm Eastern on Saturdays. Trained volunteers are available to support members of the LGBTQ+ community and provide a safe and affirming space to talk during operational hours.

THRIVE Lifeline

+1-313-662-8209.

- This trans-led and operated text-based crisis support resource is available 24/7 to anyone 18+. This 501(c)(3) grassroots organization explicitly focuses on supporting individuals belonging to marginalized communities.



CITATIONS

- ACPS. "Virtual Mental Health Services with Hazel Health - Alexandria City Public Schools." K12.Va.us, 2025, www.acps.k12.va.us/families/hazel-health.
- "Back to School, back to Support: Alexandria Youth Mental Health in August." City of Alexandria, VA, 2 Oct. 2025, www.alexandriava.gov/dchs-connect/back-to-school-back-to-support-alexandria-youth-mental-health-in-august. Accessed 29 Apr. 2026.
- CHILDREN & YOUTH COMMUNITY PLAN (CYCP) REPORT CARD ALEXANDRIA'S PROGRESS towards ENSURING EVERY CHILD SUCCEEDS TODAY and TOMORROW.
- "Important Updates Regarding ACHS Safety & Security - Alexandria City High School." K12.Va.us, 2025, achs.acps.k12.va.us/important-updates.
- NAMI. "Mental Health in Schools." NAMI, 28 Oct. 2025, www.nami.org/advocacy-at-nami/policy-positions/improving-health/mental-health-in-schools/.
- Boarddocs.com, 2021, go.boarddocs.com/va/acps/Board.nsf/files/DEARRG6F3AC9/. Accessed 29 Apr. 2026.
- CDC. "U.S. Teen Girls Experiencing Increased Sadness and Violence." Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 13 Feb. 2023, www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2023/p0213-yrbs.html.
- Casey, Annie E. "Youth Mental Health Statistics in 2024." The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 25 July 2025, www.aecf.org/blog/youth-mental-health-statistics.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "Data and Statistics on Children's Mental Health." Children's Mental Health, CDC, 5 June 2025, www.cdc.gov/children-mental-health/data-research/index.html.
- DePaoli, Jennifer, and Jennifer McCombs. "Safe Schools, Thriving Students: What We Know about Creating Safe and Supportive Schools." Learning Policy Institute, 26 Jan. 2024, learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/safe-schools-thriving-students-report.

- Hughes, Elizabeth. Finding a Way Back from Sadness and Stress for Northern Virginia’s Teens. 2023.
- Miles, Vernon. “Report Shows Most Alexandria Middle and High School Students Feel Unsafe | ALXnow.” ALXnow | Alexandria, Va. Breaking News, Local Events and Community Happenings, 25 Aug. 2023, www.alxnow.com/2023/08/25/report-shows-most-alexandria-middle-and-high-school-students-feel-unsafe/.
- The Trevor Project. “2024 U.S. National Survey on the Mental Health of LGBTQ+ Young People.” The Trevor Project, The Trevor Project, 2024, www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-2024/.
- kfflayotah. “Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Mental Health Care: Findings from the KFF Survey of Racism, Discrimination and Health | KFF.” KFF, 23 May 2024, www.kff.org/racial-equity-and-health-policy/racial-and-ethnic-disparities-in-mental-health-care-findings-from-the-kff-survey-of-racism-discrimination-and-health/.