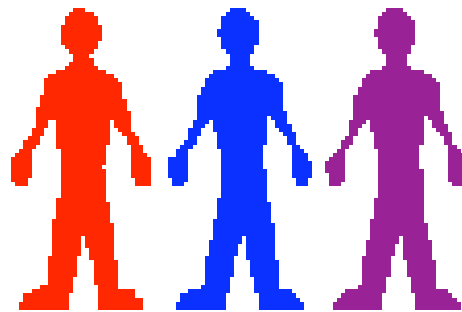


2006 PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION SURVEY

Summary of Findings



Presented to the DeKalb County Schools Prevention/Intervention Department

*Report Prepared by the
Georgia State University Prevention and Intervention Research Group and Center for Research
on School Safety*

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CONTENTS

Introduction and Executive Summary

Section 1: Demographics

Section 2: Academic Achievement and Future Expectations

Section 3: Risk Behaviors

Section 4: Gang Involvement

Section 5: Mental Health Problems

Section 6: Feelings About School

Section 7: Parental Protective Factors

Section 8: Ethnic Identity and Acculturation

Section 9: Links Between Protective Factors and Behavioral and Health Measures

INTRODUCTION AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2006 *Prevention and Intervention Survey* was administered in one ethnically and culturally diverse middle school in Georgia, grades 6-8.¹ The survey was undertaken by the DeKalb County Schools Prevention/Intervention Department with consultation from researchers in Georgia State University's Prevention and Intervention Research Group. Data from the 2006 *Prevention and Intervention Survey* offer some insights into behavioral and health risks that affect a substantial number of students, as well as school and family protective factors that might mitigate those risks. Given the rapid changes occurring in the demographic makeup of schools throughout Georgia, the survey was designed with careful attention given to capturing information about cultural diversity, especially as it might relate to students from immigrant or refugee families. By providing such a broad range of information, results from this survey can be useful for planning strategies to ensure that students have the best chance of developing positively and experiencing success in school.

This report summarizes findings from the 2006 survey. First, summary findings and overall observations about the data are presented, along with suggested action steps and future directions. Next, results are presented in greater detail with sections devoted to 1) sample demographics; 2) academic achievement and future expectations; 3) risk behaviors; 4) gang involvement; 5) mental health problems; 6) feelings about school; 7) family relationships; 8) ethnic identity and acculturation; and 9) links between protective factors and risk behaviors.

How was the survey administered?

The Prevention and Intervention survey contained 148 questions that measured the topics listed above. To ensure anonymity the survey was constructed using Psychdata.com. A Prevention and Intervention specialist at the middle school conducted the survey in the school's computer lab. The students were given a survey number and password to enter the survey and had to answer every question before moving on to the next question, with the option of "I prefer not to answer," if they felt uncomfortable.

Who participated in the survey?

Participants included 235 students in grades 6 through 8 (119 boys and 117 girls). Most students (87%) were eligible for a free or reduced price lunch. The majority of students were Hispanic/Latino (62%), with smaller representation of several other ethnic/cultural groups, including African American (6%), Asian (5%), White (4%), and other (20%). Approximately 2/3 of the students were immigrants, varying in the age at which they arrived to the US. It is notable that many students who were born in the U.S. were children of immigrants.

How are students doing in school and what is their outlook for the future?

Grades and attendance. Most students report that they are doing well in school, with grades above "C;" however substantial numbers report they are failing in Math (14%) and Reading (4%). Students reported being absent on average more than 3 days in the past month.

Future educational aspirations/expectations.

Most students aspire to higher education after high school graduation (more than 80%), and most of those students expect that they will achieve their aspirations. However, a substantial number (10%) report that they do not expect to graduate from high school.

¹ The name of the school is not included in this report to maintain confidentiality.

What behaviors are putting youth at risk for difficulties?

Health risk behaviors. Substantial numbers of students report that they have engaged in a range of behaviors that might compromise their health, including fighting or carrying a weapon to school, using cigarettes, alcohol, or marijuana, and having unprotected sex. The rates of engagement in these behaviors mirror current national statistics (e.g., data from the CDC’s Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance, Monitoring the Future).

Gang involvement. Most students reported no involvement with gangs; however between 16% and 33% of students reported some gang related activity. This finding does not mean that those students are members of gangs, but does indicate that gangs are a substantial presence.

Mental health. A high percentage (41%) of students reported experiencing significant levels of symptoms that place them at risk of mental health problems.

These domains of risk are interrelated. School grades and mental health are particularly strong markers of students’ overall adaptation. There is a strong link between school grades and mental health, such that students who reported more mental health problems had lower school grades. Also students with mental health problems were at heightened risk for difficulties in the domains of academics, violence, and risk behavior domains. Students with higher GPAs were at lower risk for most of those behaviors as well.

Who is at greatest risk?

Across many of the analyses of risk behaviors, three groups of students stood out as being at greatest risk:

1. *U.S. born students and US-reared immigrants (those who arrived in the US before their 5th birthday)* were more likely to report having been in a fight and having used alcohol than others. *US-reared immigrants* also reported more school absences than others and were more likely to report mental health problems at clinical levels.
2. *Seventh grade students* were more likely to report high levels of mental health difficulties (in the ‘borderline range’), reported higher levels of gang involvement and more marijuana use than others. Seventh graders also reported more school absences than others.
3. *Eighth grade students* reported feeling less safe at school than students in the lower grades.

What school and family factors can be helpful in reducing students’ exposure to risks?

Several potential protective factors in the family and school domain were examined:

1. In the family domain – connectedness to parents, parental monitoring, family responsibilities
2. In the school domain – perceived scholastic competence, school safety, school relationships, and school belonging.

Family factors were linked to nearly all of the behavioral and health measures examined, including academics, mental health, violence, and health risks. Factors in the school domain were linked to school grades, mental health, and violence, and somewhat linked to truancy, future expectations, substance use, and sexual activity.

Additionally, perceived discrimination was linked to higher rates of violent activity, gang involvement and substance use.

What action steps do these findings suggest?

The findings of this survey go beyond identifying risks and problem behaviors among students to also identifying protective factors that might be important in preventing or reducing those risks. The findings indicate that families play an important role in students’ overall adaptation. Thus, specific strategies aimed at supporting parents’ efforts to monitor their children’s activities, balance responsibilities, and

maintain positive relationships with their children may contribute to improvements in academic, behavioral, and health-related outcomes. Similarly, efforts to improve school climate (i.e., feelings of school safety, quality of relationships between teachers and students, and feelings of school belonging) and reduce real or perceived inequalities may also contribute to better psychological functioning and school performance.

An important first step would be to gain a greater understanding of why two groups – 7th graders and US reared immigrants – appear to be at heightened risk, and why a third group – 8th graders – perceive the school as more dangerous than do others. One possibility would be to engage students from these groups in discussions about possible reasons for their increased risk and to help develop and implement solutions. Such a strategy would serve to increase understanding of the survey findings while at the same time work to increase connections to school for groups identified as being at risk for difficulties. A parallel strategy would be to engage parents of students in these risk groups in similar discussion and planning.

Future assessment

The *Prevention and Intervention Survey* was administered in a single middle school in Spring 2006. The data provide a valuable snapshot of academic, behavioral, and health risks as well as protective factors – information that can be helpful in planning prevention activities in the school. Many school-based surveys emphasize the assessment of prevalence rates for a range of problem behaviors. When compared to data from multiple schools and across multiple years, data from such surveys can help identify problem areas of importance to a particular school. However, such data provide little guidance toward reaching solutions to those problems. The *Prevention and Intervention Survey* was designed to address some of those limitations by a) assessing protective factors in the school, family, and other domains; and b) including items that allow fine-grained examination of ethnic and cultural variations in risk behaviors and protective processes. As schools and communities become increasingly culturally diverse, it is important to recognize and be sensitive to such cultural variations; attention to these issues can help school administrators to understand changing academic and behavioral trends in their schools. The usefulness of this survey would be enhanced by administering it annually to a broader range of schools.

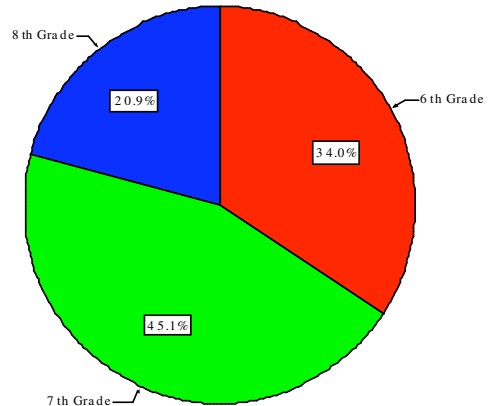
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DEMOGRAPHICS

The Sample (N = 235)

- Boys ($n = 119$, 48%) and Girls ($n = 117$, 52%)
- Grades 6 through 8.²
 - 6th grade ($n = 80$, 34%)
 - 7th grade ($n = 106$, 45%)
 - 8th grade ($n = 49$, 21%)
- Mean Age 13.17 years (St. Deviation = 1.19 years)
- Range from 10 to 16 years

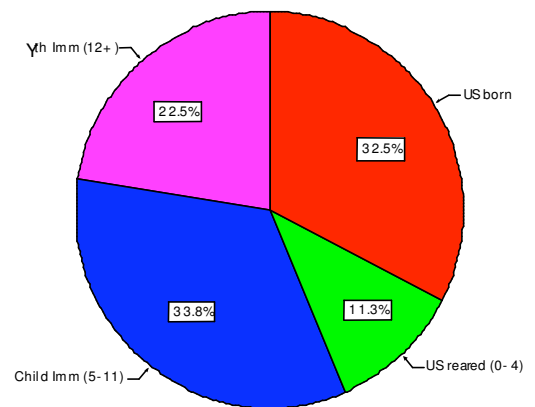


- Students eligible for free ($n = 201$; 87%) or reduced price ($n = 6$, 6%) lunch at school.
- Living in 2-parent household (73%)
- Living with both biological parents (63%)
 - Mother ($n = 46$, 20%)
 - Father ($n = 9$, 4%)
- Living with one biological parent and a step-parent (10%)
- Living with single parent (25%)
- Living in other household arrangement ($n = 6$, 3%) (e.g., with other relatives).

Ethnicity and Immigration Status

- Hispanic/Latino ($n = 139$, 62%)
- African American ($n = 14$, 6%)
- Asian ($n = 11$, 5%)
- White ($n = 8$, 4%)
- Other/2 or More ethnicities ($n = 45$)
- Other groups in the sample included Black Africans, Black Caribbean, and Native Americans

- Immigrants – “0” generation ($n = 160$, 70%)
- Immigrants – “1st” generation and at least 1 immigrant parent ($n = 48$, 21%)
- Born in US to parents who were born in US – “2nd” generation ($n = 22$, 10%)
- Age at Immigration
 - US reared immigrants (arrived before their 5th birthday) ($n = 26$, 11%)
 - Child Immigrants (arrived between the ages of 5 and 11) ($n = 78$, 34%)
 - Youth immigrants (arrived since their 12th birthday) ($n = 52$, 22%)



² Numbers may not add to 235 due to missing data; percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding error.

ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AND FUTURE EXPECTATIONS

Future Educational Aspirations and Expectations

Students were asked the following two questions:

1. If you could do exactly what you wanted, how far would you go in school? (Aspiration)
2. We can't always do what we most want to do. How far do you think you will actually go in school? (Expectation)

	Less Than High School Graduate	High School Graduate	Less than 4-year College	4-year College Graduate or Higher
Educational Aspirations	6.1%	12.2%	14.2%	67.3%
Educational Expectations	10.2%	14.8%	14.8%	60.2%

- 6 % reported that they did not aspire to graduate from high school
- 10% reported that they did not expect to graduate from high school.
- More than 2/3 reported that they aspired to a 4-year college degree or higher
- ~ 60% reported that they expected to attain that level of education.
- There were no differences by sex, grade level, or immigration status.

Current Grades

Students reported the grade on their last report card for Reading and Math. On average, students reported a B in Reading (Mean = 2.95), a C+ in Math (Mean = 2.40), and a B- averaging the two (Mean = 2.67). Sixth graders reported higher grades than 7th and 8th graders. Girls reported higher grades in Reading than boys, but did not differ from boys in Math. There were no differences by immigration status.

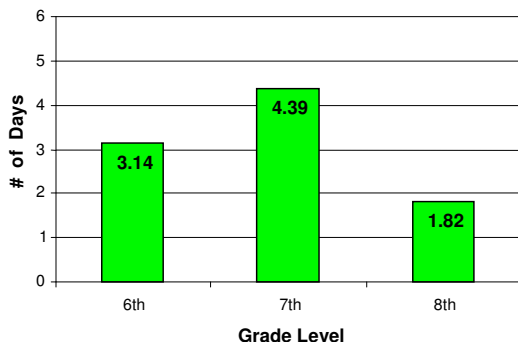
	A	B	C	D	F
Reading	34.2%	38.2%	20.4%	2.7%	4.4%
Math	22.3%	31.4%	24.5%	7.4%	14.4%

Attendance

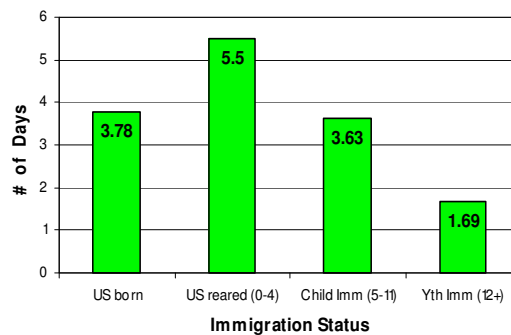
Students reported number of whole days of school missed in the past month because of 1) illness, 2) skipping school, 3) suspension, or 4) other reasons.

- On average, students reported missing 3.43 days of school in the past month for all reasons combined.
- 7th graders were absent more days than 8th graders.
- Recent immigrants missed fewer days than US Reared immigrants.
- There were no overall differences between girls and boys on overall attendance.
 - Boys were more likely than girls to miss school because of a suspension.

Days of School of School Missed by Grade



Days of School Missed by Immigration Status



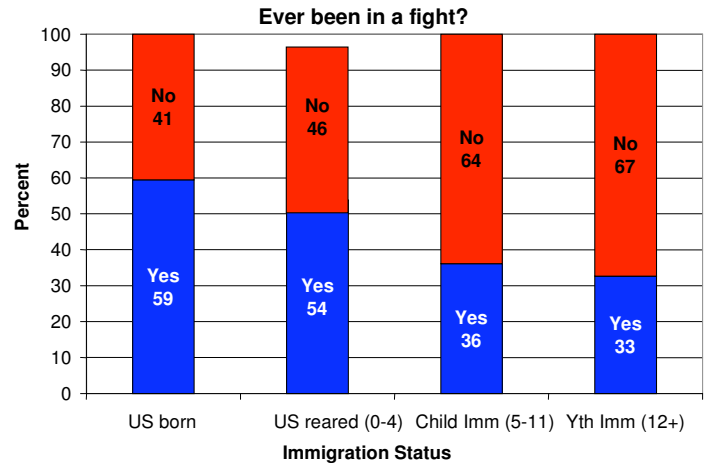
RISK BEHAVIOR

Items from the CDC’s Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) were used to assess students’ engagement in risky behaviors pertaining to violence, substance use, and sex. Results for each domain of risk and whether results varied by gender, grade, or age of immigration are summarized below.

Violence

Two YRBS items assessed whether students had ever (a) been in a fight and (b) carried a weapon to school.

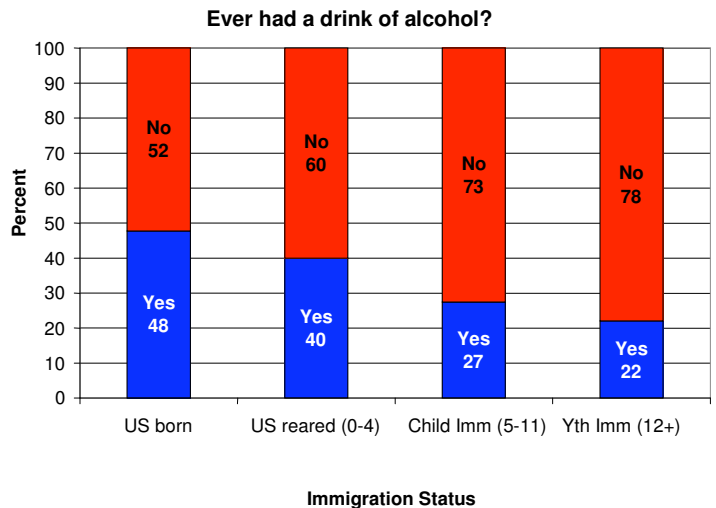
- Fighting
 - 44% reported having been in a fight.
 - The longer students had been in the U.S., the more likely they were to have been in a fight.
 - There were no significant differences by gender or grade.
- Weapon
 - 20% reported having carried a weapon in school.
 - This percentage did not vary significantly by gender, grade, or age of immigration.



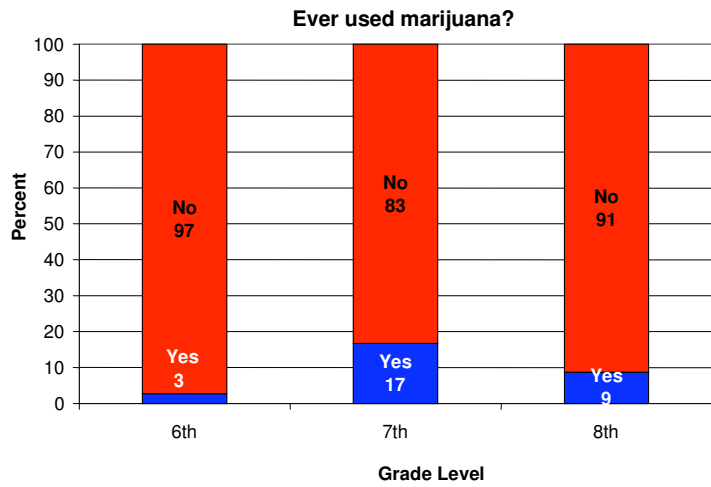
Substance Use

Three YRBS items assessed whether students had ever (a) tried a cigarette, (b) had an alcoholic drink, or (c) used marijuana.

- Cigarettes
 - 27% reported having tried a cigarette.
 - This percentage did not vary significantly by gender, grade, or age of immigration.
- Alcohol
 - 33.5% reported having an alcoholic drink.
 - The longer students had been in the U.S., the more likely they were to have drunk alcohol.
 - There were no significant differences by gender or grade.



- Marijuana
 - 10.5% reported having used marijuana.
 - 7th graders were more likely to have used marijuana than 6th or 8th graders.
 - There were no significant differences by gender or age of immigration.



Sex

Students were asked whether they had sex and whether they had used a condom the last time they had sex.

- 14% of the sample reported having had sex.
- This percentage did not vary significantly by gender, grade, or age of immigration.
- Of the students who reported having had sex, 52% reporting having used a condom the last time they had sex.

GANG INVOLVEMENT

Gang involvement was measured by a scale adapted from Walker-Barnes and Mason's (2001) measure of gang involvement and delinquency. Students were asked how often they (a) wore gang colors on purpose, (b) spray painted gang symbols, (c) showed gang hand signs, and (d) hung out with a gang. Frequency of responses is listed below:

	Never	1-4 times	5+ times
Wore gang colors	67%	23%	10%
Spray painted gang symbols	84%	13%	3%
Showed gang hand signs	70%	19%	11%
Hung out with a gang	72.5%	18.5%	9%

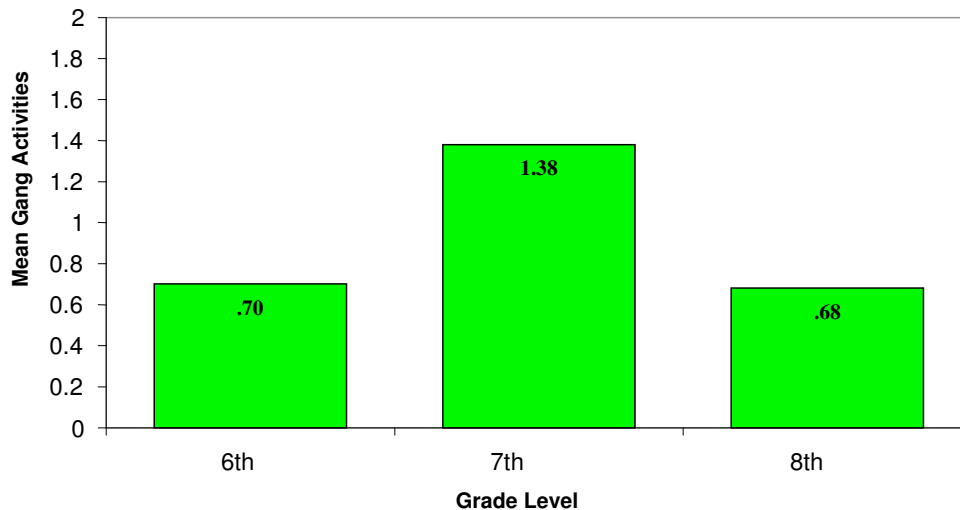
To compare gang involvement across gender, grade and age of immigration, an index score was computed in which whether students reported in engaging in each gang activity one or more times was summed across activities. The result was an index ranging from 0 (never engaged in any of the activities) to 4 (engaged in all of the activities at least once).

- On average, students reported involvement in 1.02 gang activities (SD = 1.37).
- A slim majority (54%) reported no gang involvement at all.
- 8% reported having engaged in all four of the types of gang activities at least once.
- Only 1% reported involvement in all four types five or more times each.

The mean levels of gang involvement were compared to see if they varied by gender, grade, or age of immigration. A significant grade difference was detected.

- 7th graders were significantly more involved in gang activities than 6th or 8th graders.
- There were no significant differences for gender or age of immigration.

Gang Involvement by Grade



MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS

The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire

The Strengths and Difficulty Questionnaire (SDQ) is a brief screening instrument for child and adolescent mental health problems. It consists of 20 self-rated items assessing emotional problems, conduct problems, hyperactivity and attentional problems, and peer problems. Below are sample responses to questions from each of the four problem domains.

	Not True	Somewhat True	Certainly True
I worry a lot.	33.0%	47.1%	19.9%
I fight a lot.	64.3%	23.7%	12.1%
I am easily distracted & find it hard to concentrate.	32.0%	45.5%	22.5%
Other children pick on me or bully me.	49.1%	43.2%	7.7%

The SDQ also has cutoff scores to screen for likely borderline and clinical levels of total mental health problems. According to these cutoff scores:

- 18% met the criteria for clinical levels of mental health problems.
- An additional 23% met the criteria for likely borderline mental health problems.
- A substantial minority of the sample (41%) is at risk for mental health problems.
- The numbers for this particular middle school are substantially higher than population norms for American early adolescents, as rated by their parents on the SDQ³.

Grade

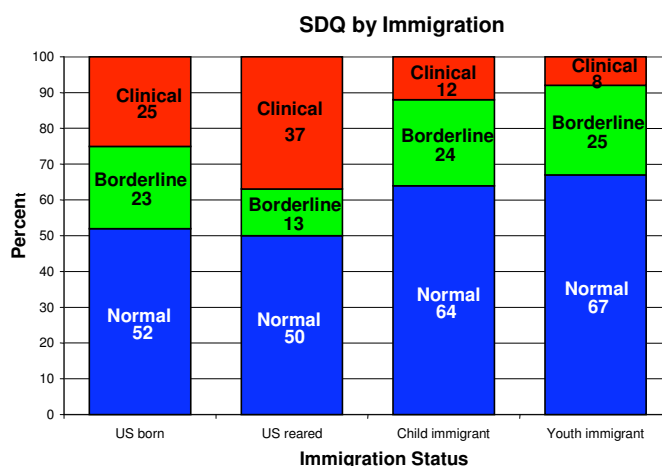
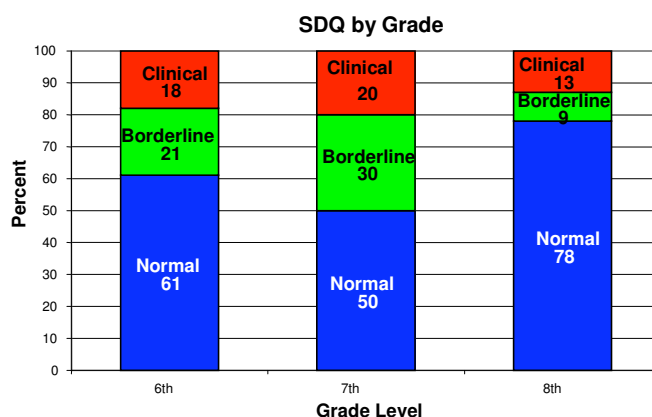
- There were no differences by grade in the proportion of students scoring at clinical levels.
- However, 7th graders were significantly more likely to score at borderline levels.

Gender

- There were no differences by gender in the proportion of students scoring at borderline or clinical levels.
- The only gender difference found was that girls were more likely to endorse, “I worry a lot.”

Immigration Age

- U.S. born and reared immigrants were at higher risk for mental health problems than were more recent immigrants.
- This finding was also reflected in frequency of response to all sample items above, except for, “I am easily distracted and find it hard to concentrate.”



³ In the population, only 9% met the clinical cutoff, with an additional 5% meeting the borderline criteria, as rated by parents.

FEELINGS ABOUT SCHOOL

Several survey questions asked about students' feelings about school. These questions were used to create scales assessing their perceptions of the following:

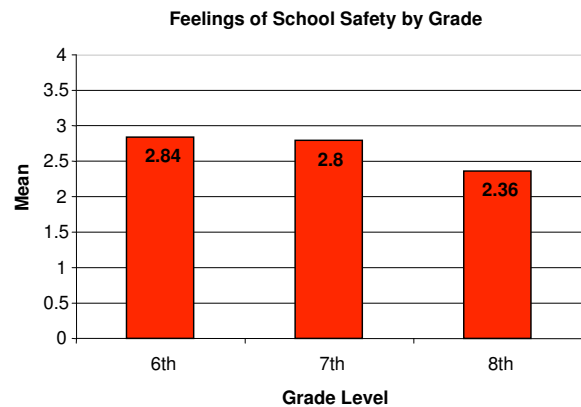
- School Climate
- Perceived Academic Competence
- Perceived Social Competence with Peers
- Extracurricular and Out of School Time Involvement
- Amount of Time Spent on Homework

Low scores on these variables can be considered risk factors for future academic or social difficulties.

School Climate

Students reported moderately high perceptions of school climate out of a possible score of 4.

- Feelings of being safe at school, mean of 2.72 (SD = .90)
- Feeling they share positive relationships with teachers and students for, mean of 3.00 (SD = .83)
- Feelings of belonging at school, mean of 2.71 (SD = .84)
- 8th graders perceived school as less safe than did 6th or 7th graders.
- There were no differences by gender or immigration status for any of these aspects of school climate.

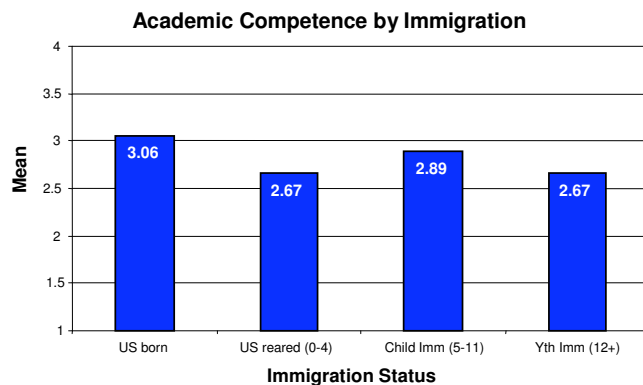


Perceived Academic and Social Competence

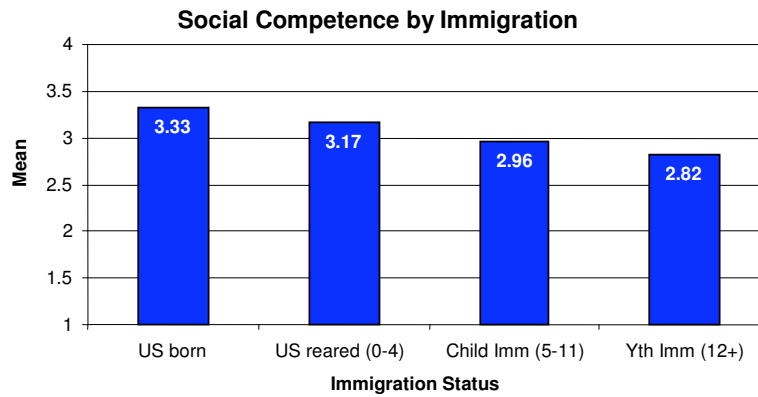
- Students reported moderately high levels of perceived academic competence (Mean = 2.87, SD = 0.63, on a 1-4 scale).
- High levels of perceived social competence (Mean = 3.07, SD = 0.72 on a 1-4 scale).

Students with high scores on academic competence were likely to agree with items such as, "I am a good student." Students with high scores on social competence were likely to agree with items such as, "I am popular with other kids my age."

- Students born in the US reported more positive perceptions of academic competence than recent immigrants and immigrants who arrived in the US early in their lives.



- Similarly, US born students reported the highest levels of social competence, whereas recent immigrants reported the lowest.
- There were no gender or grade level differences.

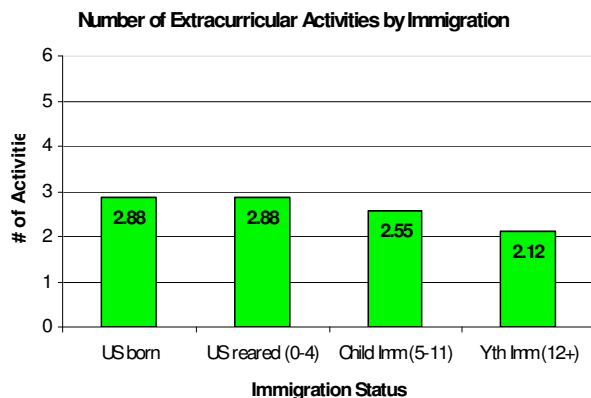


Extracurricular Activities and Out of School Time

Students were asked how many times in a regular week, they participate in the activities below.

	None	1 time	2 or more times	Total At least Once
Participate in organized sport activities	45.5%	19.0%	35.5%	54.5%
Play sports or exercise by yourself or with friends	13.9%	18.3%	67.9%	86.1%
Participate in music/art/dance activities	46.4%	20.6%	33.0%	53.6%
Get tutored outside of school time	86.3%	5.6%	8.2%	13.7%
Participate in after school programs	67.9%	14.5%	17.5%	32.1%
Participate in youth programs or clubs	73.7%	12.1%	14.2%	26.3%

- 94% reported that they participated in at least one of the activities listed.
- On average students were involved in 2.6 activities.
- The most commonly endorsed activity was playing sports or exercise alone or with friends.
 - 32% reported that they participate in after school programs
 - 26% reported participation in youth programs or clubs
 - 14% reported receiving tutoring outside of school time
- US born and reared students reported involvement in a greater number of extracurricular activities than immigrants arriving after age 12.
- There were no differences by grade level or gender in the number of activities.



Homework

Students were asked how many hours on a regular school day they spend doing homework.

- 8% reported that they do not do homework on a regular school day.
- 70% reported spending 1/2 hour to 1 hour on homework.
- ~ 23% reported spending 2 or more hours on homework.
- There were no differences for time spent on homework by gender, grade level, or immigrant status.

PARENTAL PROTECTIVE FACTORS

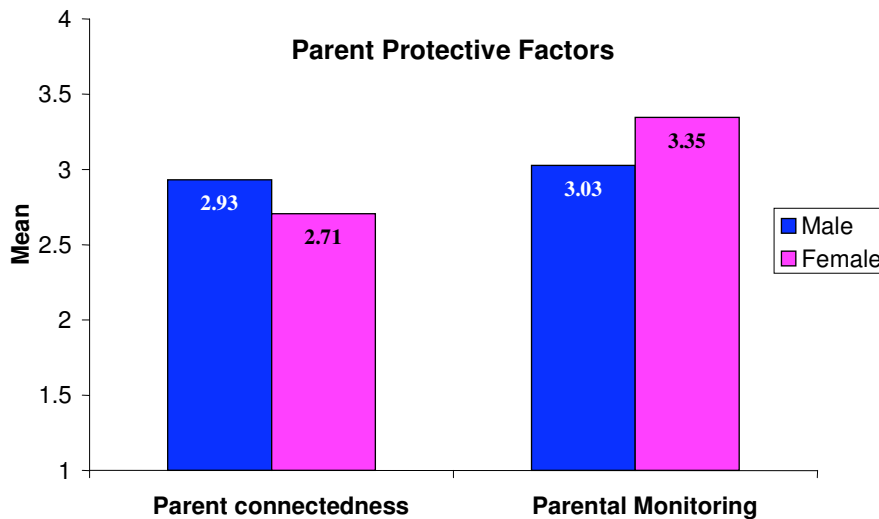
The survey assessed two types of parental protective factors:

- Student’s perceptions of parent connectedness
- Student’s perceptions of parental monitoring.

Parent connectedness was measured by a 6-item scale from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health. Parental monitoring was assessed by a 3-item scale from Social and Health Assessment (SAHA). Items measure how frequently students feel that their parents know and monitor where, and with whom, they go out. Sample items from the two scales are below:

- Overall, just under half of the sample reported feeling connected to their parents “often” or “always,” and just over half of the sample reported feeling monitored by their parents “often” or “always.”
- Boys on average felt closer to their parents than girls.
- Girls on average reported higher levels of parental monitoring.

Neither parent connectedness nor parental monitoring varied significantly by grade or age of immigration.



ETHNIC IDENTITY AND ACCULTURATION

Several survey questions centered on issues related to ethnic identity and acculturation. These questions were used to create scales assessing students' perceptions of:

- Ethnic Identity – the extent to which students feel connected to their ethnic group and have thought about what it means to them
- Perceived Discrimination – the extent to which students have had negative experiences related to their ethnic group membership
- English Proficiency – the level of skill with which students are able to speak, understand, read, and write in English
- Speaking another Language
- Other Language Proficiency - the level of skill with which students are able to speak, understand, read, and write in a language other than English

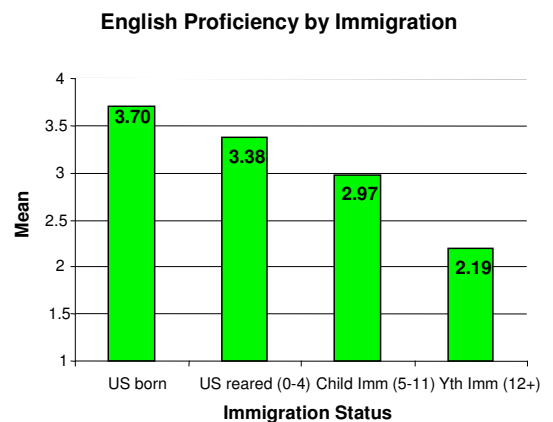
Ethnic Identity and Perceived Discrimination

- Students reported moderately high perceptions of ethnic identity, mean = 2.73 (SD = .76) on a 1-4 scale.
- Students reported low to moderate perceptions of discrimination, mean = 1.92 (SD = .78) on a 1-4 scale.
- There were no differences by gender, grade level, or age at immigration.

Language Proficiency

English

- English proficiency was relatively high, mean = 3.08 (SD = .81) on a 1-4 scale.
- Levels of English proficiency varied by age at immigration,
 - U.S. born youth reported the highest levels.
 - Recent immigrants reported the lowest levels.
- There were no differences in English proficiency by gender or grade level.



Other Language

- 74% of students also reported that they speak another language in addition to English.
- Spanish was the most common spoken language ($n=144$).
- Other languages included Amharic, Cambodian, Cantonese, Chinese, French, Fulani, Mandingo, Portuguese, Urdu, and Vietnamese.
- Levels of Other Language proficiency were high, mean = 3.17 (SD = .79).
- There were no differences in Other Language proficiency by gender, grade level or age at immigration.

LINKS BETWEEN PROTECTIVE FACTORS AND BEHAVIORAL AND HEALTH MEASURES

Analyses were conducted to investigate the extent to which two domains of protective factors – school and family – were related to four domains of behavioral & health variables – academic, mental health, violence, and risk taking. The measures included in the school and family protective factors are listed below:

School Domain	Family Domain
Perceived scholastic competence	Parent connectedness
School safety	Parental monitoring
School relationships	Family responsibility
School belonging	

The patterns of relationships between the protective factors and the behavioral & health measures are illustrated in the table below. Strength of relationship is represented by darkness of shading.

- Black - at least half of the variables in the protective factors domain are correlated significantly with the behavioral or health measure.
- Grey - a minority of the variables in the protective factor are correlated significantly with the behavioral/health measure.
- White - there are no significant correlations present.

		Protective Factors	
		School Domain	Family Domain
<i>Behavioral & Health Measures</i>	Academic	GPA	
		Truancy	
		Future expectations	
	Mental Health	SDQ	
	Violence	Fighting	
		Gang involvement	
	Health Risks	Cigarette use	
		Alcohol use	
		Marijuana use	
		Sexual activity	

Specifically, in the school domain:

- Students who felt more scholastically competent had higher GPAs, greater future expectations, fewer mental health symptoms and were less likely to engage in gang activities or to smoke.
- Students who felt safer at school had higher GPAs, fewer mental health symptoms, and engaged in less violence.
- Students who had better relationships at school or who felt like they belonged more at school had higher GPAs, fewer mental health symptoms, and engaged in less violence.
- Students who had better relationships at school had higher GPAs, fewer mental health symptoms, and engaged in less violence.

Specifically in the family domain:

- Students who felt more connected to their parents had higher GPAs, skipped school less, had fewer mental health symptoms, engaged in less violence and fewer gang activities, and were less likely to have smoked a cigarette, drunk alcohol, done marijuana, or had sex.
- Students who reported higher parental monitoring had higher GPAs, skipped school less, had fewer mental health symptoms, engaged in less violence and fewer gang activities, and were less likely to have smoked a cigarette, drunk alcohol, done marijuana, or had sex.
- Students who reported greater filial responsibilities were less likely to have had sex.

Additional analyses were also conducted to investigate the extent to which students' ethnic identity and perceived discrimination were related to the four domains of behavioral variables. No significant relationships between ethnic identity and behavioral outcomes were found, but several interesting relationships were found between perceived discrimination and each of the behavioral domains. Specifically, students with higher ratings on the perceived discrimination scale engaged in more violent activities and gang activities, and were more likely to have smoked a cigarette and drunken alcohol. Moreover, students with higher rating on the perceived discrimination scale had more mental health symptoms and lower GPAs.

We also examined the inter-relationships among the various outcome variables. All domains were inter-related. Two variables that emerged as particularly strong markers of students' levels of risk were GPA and mental health symptoms. The two were strongly negatively related such that students with more mental health symptoms had lower GPAs. Further, students with more mental health symptoms were at heightened risk across the board on *all* other variables from the academic, violence, and risk behavior domains. Conversely, students with higher GPAs were at decreased risk on all other variables across the various domains, with the one exception that they were not less likely to have had sex.