

JANUARY 2020

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# #SuccessTogether

By Linda Francis, Director, Success of All Youth

I attended the StriveTogether Convening in September where David Brooks spoke about his journey out of a deep sadness and the realization that he had become very good at “striving” but not very good at the “together” part. In fact, it was a group of folks whom he believed embodies “together” that reached down and pulled him out and he has not been the same since. The plenary session was titled The Power of Networks; not the kind of networks we’ve grown to know – loose connections with folks who may help benefit us in some way.

Rather, the session was about the meaningful connections we need to make with other humans to further our work and, more importantly, to be whole human beings in a way that gives work and life true meaning. One of the reasons why Brooks’ story stuck with me is that it was a cautionary tale for what I’ve already been hearing from our young people.

Our community is struggling with a number of initiatives that challenge our perceptions of success. On the surface they may appear unconnected but they are deeply interconnected. Youth, women and people of color are demanding equity. Our schools are changing long held policies and practices. Our youth are experiencing high levels of mental and behavioral health challenges. Given what is happening locally and nationally, it’s difficult for many not to feel as if the world is shifting underneath them. Despite this, we do have choices. Those choices can lead us toward despair or toward hopefulness. I believe that the key lies in whether we choose to strive alone or to pursue success together. Brooks finally realized that long term success relies on the latter; and as the proverb says: “If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.”

Current times tell us that fast is better and that our kids must race through childhood cramming in as many activities,



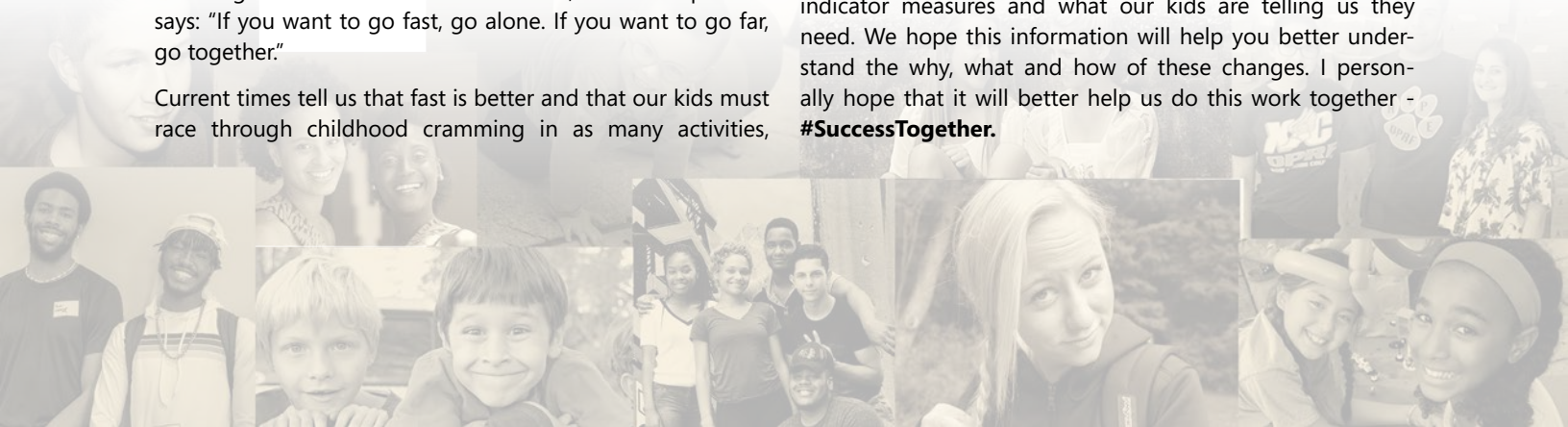
service hours, leadership positions, honors and AP classes as the day will hold. It is mostly a solitary endeavor. The team may help as part of our “strive network”, but the outcomes are ultimately singular, required to help boost college acceptance and future success. Resources are limited and can’t be shared. To be special one must stand out from the crowd. Average is unacceptable. But this approach is harming our kids. Even the goal of equity is no longer about making underserved kids more like those with advantages, for the advantaged situation is no longer the ideal. This is not simply my opinion. National research and local data is pointing us

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in this direction. [\[See what the data is telling us – page 4\].](#)

Our kids have been telling us as much: first quietly through data that reflects increased challenges in school, higher than state average use of alcohol and marijuana, high levels of depression, anxiety and suicide ideation. Now they are telling us in more direct ways: through focus groups, civic engagement, graduation speeches and videos. Our youth lament about the absence of time with which to develop relationships and flex their social and emotional muscles. They have asked us to consider their developmental needs in how we construct the structures and systems intended to serve them. They have been reaching out for increased support in navigating today’s challenges and asking us to please slow down this race. [\[See what the kids are telling us – page 2\].](#) What will it take for us to listen?

Our institutions and community organizations are making changes intended to have an impact. Every other month we will share some of these efforts and link them to our indicator measures and what our kids are telling us they need. We hope this information will help you better understand the why, what and how of these changes. I personally hope that it will better help us do this work together - **#SuccessTogether.**




# Voice of Youth

SAY Connects aims to include the voice of our young people on the very topics that we are learning about. Recently, we discussed the topic of success with four students who participate in the OPRFHS Spoken Word Club. Here are some of their thoughts:



## SEE & HEAR WHAT OUR YOUTH ARE SAYING:

-  [Civic Engagement](#)
-  ["Never Tell My Mother" \(OP girls\)](#)

"My parents didn't come from much money and they've always believed I'd be successful. To me, success means surpassing their expectations. My definition of success includes the ability to go home take a quick nap, eat a good meal and still get to do some good work. It would help if teachers got to know kids more than just academically. It would be so much better for kids' mental health and their achievement at the school."

– *Juliana, Junior*

"I have a lot of aspirations. My definition of success is when I can go after these aspirations while taking care of myself, which is the hardest part. I do have high standards and used to over-work myself and not take care of myself properly. One day I realized to be truly successful I had to take care of my mind and my body. It helps to have a strong support system of friends and to know where to get help when I need it."

– *Peera, Sophomore*

"Success is allowing yourself to do well, not because someone is pushing you; to have the time to process what you're learning, not just cramming to pass a test or finish a paper." It's okay to fail from time to time. That's part of learning.

– *Alissa, Sophomore*



"I'm my own worst critic. For me defining success is complicated. It is the feeling you get after you've completed a goal, the satisfaction pride in your abilities. When I was in 8th grade I was in a theater class and won for best film. I thought getting applause was success.

The transition from middle school to high school was a surprise – harder than my friends and I expected. I have friends who have tremendous anxiety because they believe they peaked in middle school!

Adults: make sure the student's ego doesn't get too big. Because once they hit their first failure it will hit them harder than Mike Tyson. Like success, failure is something that you learn from."

– *Allen, Junior*

# Youth Mental & Behavioral Health

## What the data says and what we're doing

We are sapping the life out of our kids. I know it sounds harsh and even accusatory. As parents we love our children deeply and seek to give them the best – all that we didn't have and more. But sometimes intent and impact are not the same. This [article in the Washington Post](#) explains what we see happening in our community and across the country and sources for the national data associated with it. The lack of equity also has a [negative effect](#) on the mental and behavioral health of our children, whether they are the recipients of inequitable treatment or bystanders to it. Below you will see data reflective of our community and what we are doing in response to it.

In May of 2019 the D200 Mental Wellness Collaborative issued a parent survey for D200 parents to determine how best to support parents in addressing student mental and behavioral health needs. We received an unprecedented 1,329 responses, a 39% response rate. Mental health responses were pretty much in line with what had been gathered from social workers, teachers and student survey data.

## This is a sample of what we're doing...

**PARENT UNIVERSITY** - You also let us know that you prefer online and parent university formats of information provided on weekday evenings; so we are hosting (2) OPRF Parent University series, the first of which was held November 13th, 7-9:30 at OPRFHS, with various topics and breakout sessions. The next event will be held in April.

**SUPPORT4U** – Is an anonymous text communication system for youth needing mental health assistance for themselves or a friend. OPRF students can text CARE to 844-670-5838 and be connected to a certified therapist 24 hours/7 days a week. (Text: HOPE – D97, SAFE – D90)

**SUPPORT GROUPS** – OPRFHS social workers offer the following support groups for students looking for safe supportive space.

**ONLINE EDUCATION** - coming

**PYD** – The Workgroup for Positive Youth Development is a cross sector team of institutions and individuals that has been successfully focused on reducing youth alcohol consumption across Oak Park and River Forest; and is now tackling the reduction of marijuana and vaping use.

**CULTURE & CLIMATE COACHES** – Staff charged with enhancing resources for student's social, emotional and mental health needs, increasing staff professional development opportunities, implementing common behavioral protocols across the district and monitoring of restorative justice practices in D97.

**MINDFUL MIDDLE-SCHOOLERS PROGRAM** – Partnership between DePaul Family Community Services, the Oak Park Community Mental Health Board and D97 to bring education to students, teachers and parents, as well as,

student group therapy and individual supports to address stress, anxiety and executive functioning needs of Oak Park middle schoolers.

**ADVISORY PERIODS** – Implemented by all three school districts to provide students with a consistent group and time to connect and be supported.

**STRIVE FOR SUCCESS CARE COORDINATION** – Provides care coordination and patient navigation for Oak Park minority youth and their families dealing with behavioral health needs.

**OTHER PARTNER EFFORTS** – NAMI, Thrive, Smart Love, YEMBA, Township Youth Services and other community partners regularly offer a range of services from workshops and mentoring to group therapy and one-on-one services.

## ... because this is what you told us

**How often in the past 6 months have you been concerned that your child is overwhelmed by stress?**

75.82% of respondents – sometimes, often or very often

**What are the most prevalent stressors for your child?**

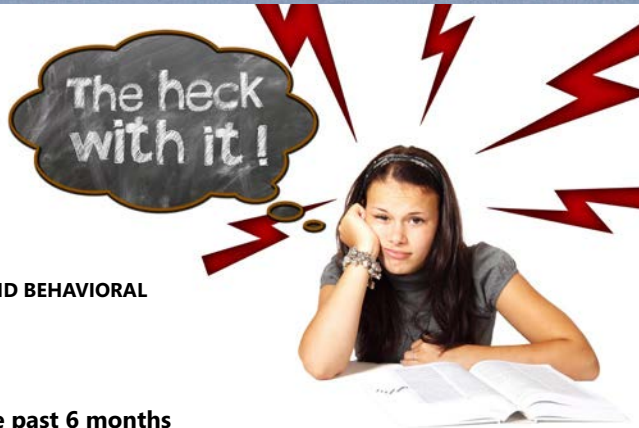
1. School work – 77.66%
2. Time management – 45.28%
3. Social conflict – 31.48%

**In the past 6 months which substance have you been concerned that your child is using?**

1. None – 74.75%
2. Marijuana – 16.5%
3. E-cigarettes/Vaping – 12.92%
4. Alcohol – 10.14%

*continued next page*





**YOUTH MENTAL AND BEHAVIORAL HEALTH – continued**

**How often in the past 6 months have you been concerned that your child is facing pressure from peers to engage in dangerous or unhealthy behaviors?**

74.55% of respondents – not at all or rarely

**What are some common behavior issues you see in your classroom? D200 social worker and teacher respondents (85)**

1. Incomplete work/Missing work – 82.4%
2. Lack of motivation – 77.6%
3. Anxiety – 75.3%

**... and this is what kids are telling us**

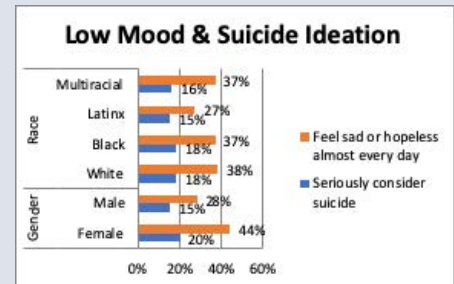
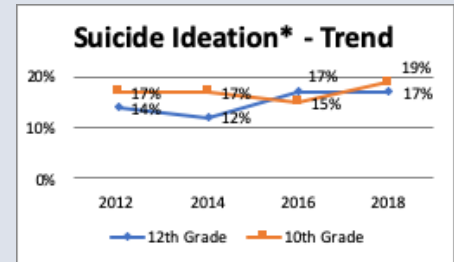
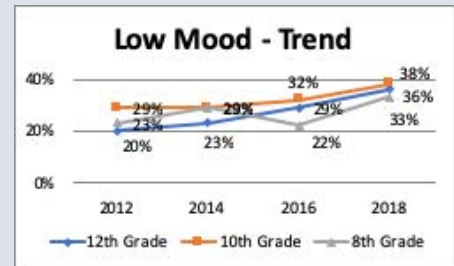
The IL Youth Survey (IYS) is a self-report statewide survey administered to OP and RF 8th, 10th and 12th graders (even years) and is designed to gather information about a variety of health and social indicators including substance use patterns and attitudes.

**During the past 12 months did you ever:**

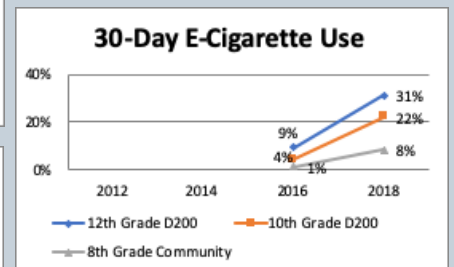
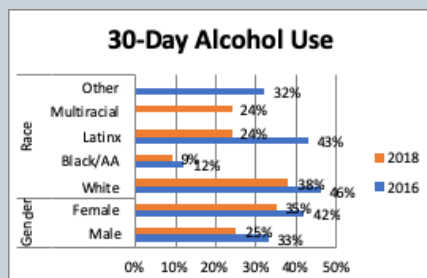
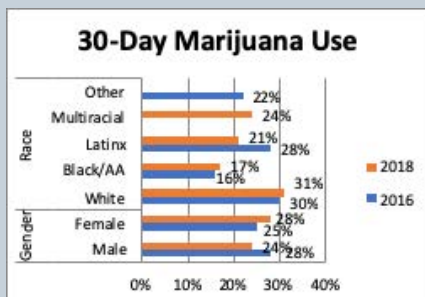
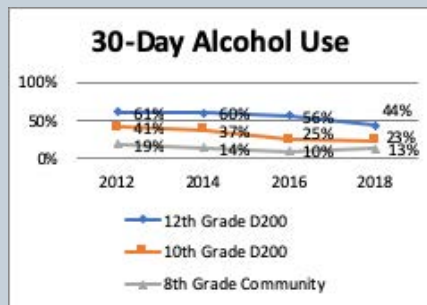
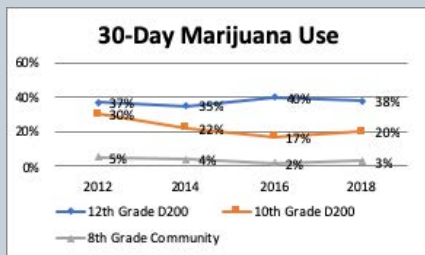
- Feel so sad or hopeless almost every day for two weeks or more in a row that you stopped doing some usual activities
- Seriously consider attempting suicide\*

\*NOTE: Not asked of 8th grade.

**MENTAL HEALTH**



**BEHAVIORAL HEALTH**



# Resources:

## OPRFHS Social Work Groups 2019-2020

### Beyond the Binary

This group is for students who are interested in exploring gender identity and gender expression, including transgender, non-binary, genderfluid, bigender, agender, and many other gender identities. This group is a forum for students to build connections with others who are also exploring gender.

### Calm & Cool

This group is for students who are interested in learning healthy ways to deal with anger and frustration. This group is a forum for students to explore the origins of anger and how to deal with emotions that are often masked by anger.

### Changing Families

This group is for students who have parents experiencing separation or divorce. This group is a forum for students to discuss family, relationships, and stressors.

### Connections

This group is for students who want to feel more connected to school and other students. This group will focus on learning conversation tips, healthy coping skills, and improving overall wellness.

### Girl Talk

This group is for female identified students who are interested in increasing their self-esteem and developing a positive self-image. This group focuses on empowerment.

### Guy Talk

This group is for male identified students who are interested in increasing their self-esteem and developing a positive self-image. This group focuses on empowerment.

### Mind Over Matter

This group is for students who are interested in learning strategies to manage feelings of sadness, anxiousness, and stress. This group focuses on healthy coping skills and overall wellness.

### Overcoming Obstacles

This group is designed to give students the opportunity to learn and to practice skills they need to succeed in school, at home, in their community, and on the job. It will cover three fundamental skills on which all other skills can be built: communication, decision making, and goal setting.

### Seasons

This group is for students who have lost a family member or close friend and need support. This group is a forum to learn about the stages and process of grief.

Please contact your counselor or social worker with any questions or referrals.

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Katie Madock	<a href="mailto:kmadock@oprfs.org">kmadock@oprfs.org</a>	ext. 3728
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