

Provincial Fact Sheets: 2013 – 2014

*New Brunswick Student Wellness Survey
Kindergarten to Grade 5*

Mental Fitness



Introduction

Mental fitness refers to our personal sense of psychological wellness (positive thoughts and feelings). We are more likely to improve our mental fitness when our needs for recognition (competence), choices (autonomy), and belonging (relatedness) are met. It means having a positive sense of how we feel, think and act which improves our ability to enjoy life. It also implies the ability to efficiently respond to life’s challenges, and to effectively restore and sustain a state of balance.¹

Individuals with greater capacity to support healthy development and wellness are more likely to engage in healthy decision making, and are more socially oriented. They are less susceptible to marketing and influences that can lead them towards making unhealthy choices, and have a greater sense of responsibility for their own health and that of others around them. These people have assets within themselves and in their immediate relationships that help them be resilient, motivated and engaged.² A cultural shift towards wellness will occur when the large majority of people and settings have adopted positive changes.

Mental Fitness Needs

Mental fitness is fostered in environments and relationships that address three interrelated needs: *competence, autonomy and relatedness*.

Competence: *“I have strengths and gifts that are recognized by myself and others.”*

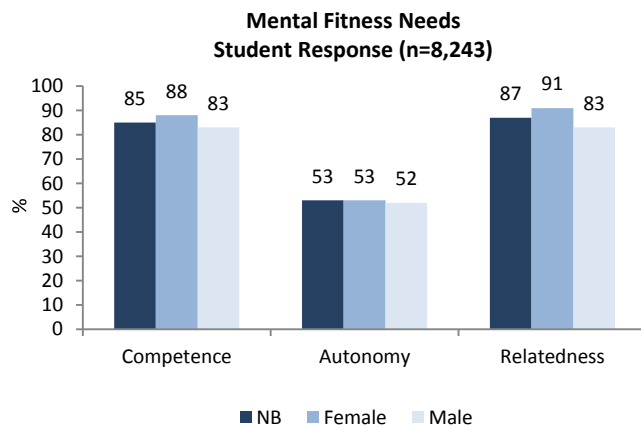
We need to be able to recognize and use our personal gifts and strengths in achieving personal goals. Fulfillment of this need provides us with a sense of personal achievement and accomplishment.

Autonomy: *“I am able to make choices about things that are important to me.”*

We need personal freedom to make choices or decisions that affect our lives. When this need is satisfied in conjunction with other psychological needs, freedom and choice are expressed in ways in which respect is demonstrated for one’s self and others.

Relatedness: *“I feel included, supported and encouraged by others.”*

We need connection to and closeness with family, peers and other significant individuals. This need is met through interaction with others, our membership in groups, and the support and encouragement we receive from others.

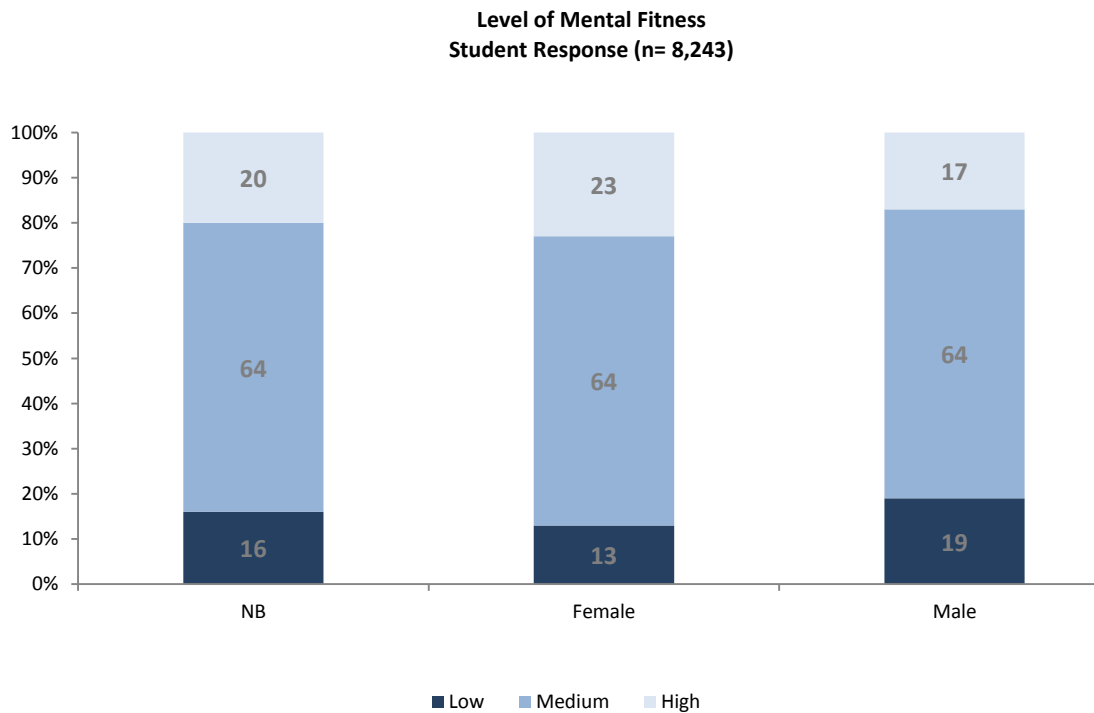


- Competence needs have been shown to protect against depressive symptoms in children, whereas, autonomy and relatedness needs have been shown to protect against depressive symptoms in adolescents.⁴

Level of Mental Fitness

Level of Mental Fitness can reflect well-being and can change the perspective of an individual. Positive mental health is shown to be linked with lowering blood pressure, stress, reducing mortality, increasing life satisfaction and boosting cognitive functions over the years.⁵ It is based on the ability of an individual to enjoy life, cope with life's difficulties to be well, to have spiritual values, and to be connected socially.⁵

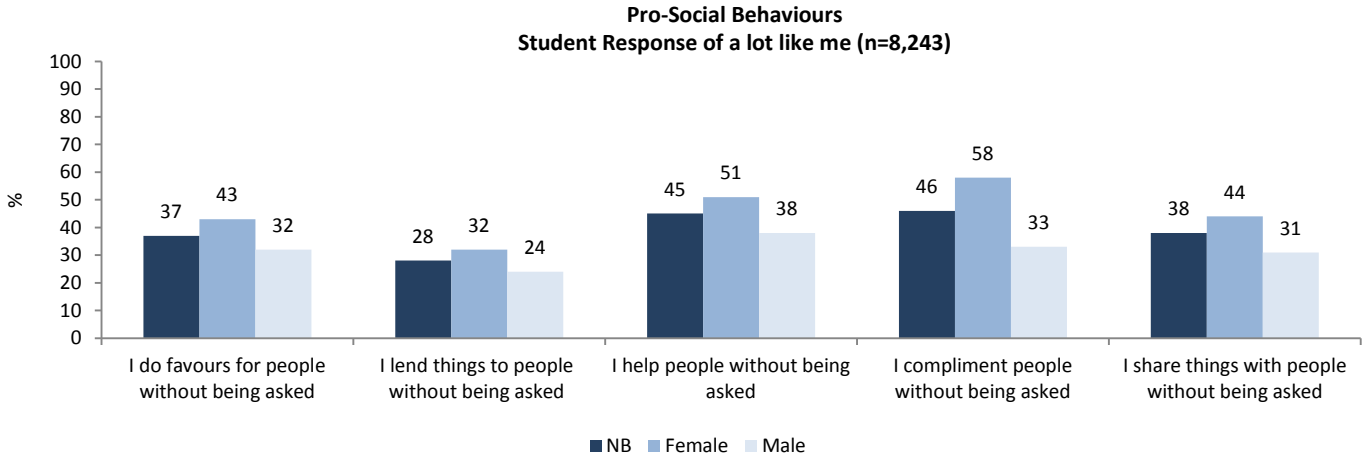
- Children that scored lowest in level of mental fitness are at increased risk for future mental health issues.⁶ One in six students or 16% of students in Grade 4-5 are at risk in New Brunswick. In addition, more boys have a low level of mental fitness than girls.



Pro-Social Behaviours

Pro-social behaviours are defined as the ability to express a social interest in others such as willingness to help or being generous. Empathic and resilient individuals have been shown to develop better pro-social behaviours as they grow up.⁷ Pro-social behaviours have also been shown to strengthen academic achievement over the years.^{8,9}

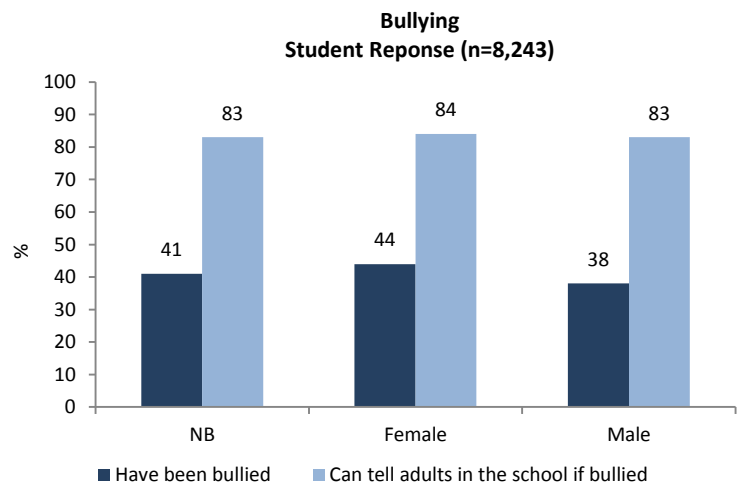
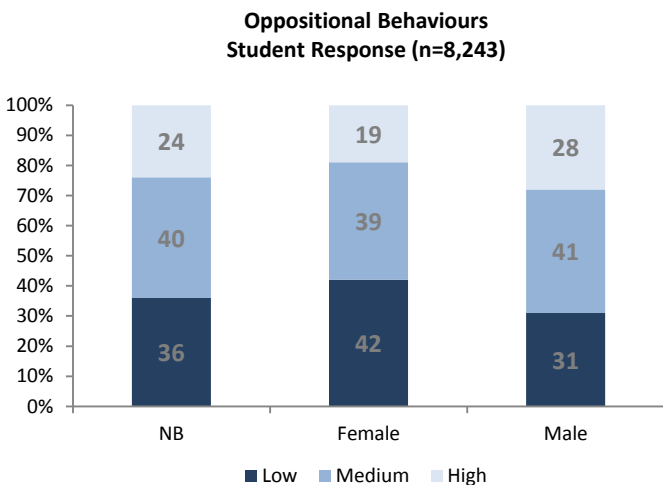
- Based on an array of social behaviour questions, a higher proportion of girls from Grade 4-5 reported having positive pro-social behaviours compared to boys.



Oppositional Behaviours

Oppositional behaviours are defined as being defiant, disrespectful or rude to other. Oppositional behaviours in childhood have been linked to negative factors later in life, such as risk of academic challenges, school drop-out, unhealthy social relationships, substance abuse, conflict with the law, and increased risk of mental health issues.¹⁰ It has also been associated with higher rates of bullying in and out of school.

- High levels of oppositional behaviours are shown to be present in 28% of boys and 19% of girls in Grade 4-5, and
- Higher rates of girls have reported being bullied (44%) than boys (38%) in New Brunswick. Both girls and boys report equal ability to tell an adult in the school if they are being bullied.



Key or selected wellness indicator results and progress from the New Brunswick Elementary Student Wellness Survey

| Wellness Indicator | 2010-2011 Results | 2013-2014 Results | Progress |
|---|-------------------|-------------------|----------|
| Mental Fitness Level | | | |
| - Low | 21% | 16% | 👍 |
| - Moderate | 61% | 64% | 👍 |
| - High | 19% | 20% | 👍 |
| Children who identify their own behaviour as pro-social | 70% | 79% | 👍 |
| Children who identify their own behaviour as oppositional | 22% | 24% | 👎 |

* In the 2013-2014 academic year, a provincial sample of 136 (62%) elementary schools completed the student wellness surveys. In total, 8,243 students Grade 4 & 5 and 14,367 parents participated in the survey.

The *New Brunswick Student Wellness Survey (NBSWS)* is a provincial initiative of the New Brunswick Department of Social Development (SD) in cooperation with the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. Data collection and analysis is carried out by the New Brunswick Health Council (NBHC) according to their requirements. The purpose of this survey is to examine the health and wellness attitudes and behaviours of students in Grade 4 and Grade 5 and of parents of students in kindergarten to Grade 5.

References:

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