

>> Thank you for tuning in to the healthy minds.

Podcast when we host conversations with people who are really good listeners. And we asked them to share with us and Lucy Caldwell and I work for the Fairfax County public schools.

Joining me today, I'm very excited to welcome Jesse Alice Jesse Ellis is that prevention manager, the Fairfax County Department of neighborhood and community services in this capacity, he coordinates and guide strategic initiatives across systems and agencies related to children and youth.

He also co chairs the behavioral health issue team for the partnership of healthier Fairfax and as the staff or Nader for the Fairfax County successful children and youth policy team, there's the promoting mental health team, which played a role in the development of the northern Virginia suicide prevention plan and is responsible for overseeing its implementation all across Fairfax County. He served in multiple leadership roles with the county's opioid task force 2 great to see Jesse Jesse and I work together very closely when I was at the Police Department

as well as the community service support are you doing, I'm doing a lot of things with it's good to be here with you.

Yes and here we are

miss Fairfax County public schools and you covering from the county side anything having to do with children what sort of your main focus spin since the covid hit I must ask that before we move on.

>> Yeah, so

my team and I

do a lot of work supporting.

Providers across the county whether their commute County agencies were school system or community-based organizations

to make sure folks are able to

implement the best kinds of

programs and services and strategies to help our kids

be healthy and safe and successful.

And so as we leave

experience the pandemic yeah we're continuing to do a lot of the same or but the emphasis has shifted

to how to best respond to these times how to help connect kids and families to the types of emergency services and supports that they may need.

But also how do we just cope with all of this.

Both how do we help

kids and families cope, but how do we as providers cope ourselves and make sure that that

we're doing okay

a whole new world so a lot of that yeah, a lot of that kind of work is this where we're focused right now.

>> Seems like the county's stood up some pretty good programs at least from what I've seen I still try to keep my nose into what's happening with Fairfax County any that come to mind that you all have been a part of where you sit.

>> Yeah, I think that

what we've done a good job of is really trying to coordinate with the school system and with all of our partners and in the community to identify what needs are still out there workouts can be filled so great examples right now are SRS program the supporting return to school program which is an in person five-day a week

program for elementary school age kids where we're able to support them as they do their schoolwork and homework and also be able to identify and meet any other needs that they have. We also have parent support programs been going on in our community centers where parent needs help with figuring out the technology for their figuring out where they can go for different kinds of services or support were able to do that in person.

Parents find out about that that's OK.

Yes if you go to the Fairfax County dot gov website.

You can go to neighborhood and community services just go to Fairfax County dot gov slash ncs click on

families or children and youth and you'll find that information right away.

>> Yeah, I think that hands on help for parents, you know we at the school system of tried a lot of different ways to keep parents connected keep them engaged and keep them learning, but the more the better because we continue to hear from parents.

They need help and so we're doing everything we can to

keep that parents okay so they can support their kids and their neighbors, kids and any kids they know in their lives.

But one of the main reasons I wanted to talk to you today is because I noticed, and I hope everybody is listening out there also noticed that the Fairfax County youth survey

was the result of

the Fairfax County you survey wants your most recent results

and parents and listeners you might be curious about the survey if you haven't seen it,

it's important to know about it because it's really important and impacts the funding,

the strategic direction and all projects across Fairfax County

that address issues impacting youth children young people.

So Jesse first give us a bit of history on the youth survey, how did it start who takes it

and why it's important night touched on it, but you probably have a lot more detail, yeah.

>> So the youth survey, the Fairfax County survey has

been in place now for nearly 20 years in 2001 was last year that we did a youth survey.

Yeah, it's always been a joint project that is managed to cooperatively by the school system and Fairfax County government.

And we

at least now and have for probably the last more than a decade.

Do the survey every year.

It is taken by all 6 East 10th and 12th grade students enough CPS.

>> Has that been changed over the years has to be all kids are now it's always been something something 12.

>> And those are identified as groups you want to hear from yeah, reasons, yeah, and the

it's parents and kids can opt out of taking it, but we have very strong response rate around around 90%.

I believe kids.

Take the survey every year.

And so that's close to

a timber for well over 40,000 to 45,048 1000 kids a year that that take the survey, so it's a really rich.

Set of data on.

>> All kinds of things.

Yeah talk about that because I think parents

they don't take the survey

tell parents the kinds of questions

and the types of information may be how that's changed from 20 years ago to now.

Yeah, so.

>> There's a number of questions that are focused on behaviors so lots so a lot of questions around substance use for example, and

you have you smoked cigarettes in the last month have you ever smoked cigarettes if you smoke cigarettes when did you start smoking cigarettes.

We also asked questions around alcohol

around vaping and around other other drugs.

We ask questions about sexual behavior.

Those could some of these questions are not on the 6th great Sir, the 6th graders

take us us order survey than a 10th and 12th graders and so one example of the

difference is the 6th graders are not ask questions about sex made simple.

But we ask questions about

driving behaviors and you.

You

text while you're driving very simple and that's obviously also question that we don't 6th graders that is the only they're not driving wreck.

>> That's what I was thinking you know how it's changed in 20 years.

Some of the things that are happening now with vaping

probably even texting you know, yeah we definitely not have the texting and driving close you left off him 20 years ago to make room for all these new sorts of issues

together and things

a lot of things changed.

>> I'd have to go back and take a look and see what kind of questions we've we've dropped over the years a lot of times there's multiple questions around an issue

and over the years, we'll figure out which questions seem to provide the best data and the ones that we use most and so we may drop some questions that that we don't

then we haven't used in the past.

A good example,

is is the vaping questions because we didn't ask anything like that.

I certainly 20 years ago when I was about 3 years ago that we first started asking and we asked.

We asked students if they've used e-cigarettes okay and I think the first year we asked we had about 5% said they did in the second year we asked was up to 10%.

And then the 3rd year we added another question because kids are really saying e-cigarette right they don't know to use an e-cigarette I did the base, they say vaping or drooling and so we added another question that asked about vaping and all of a sudden the numbers went up even more. So we have 20% of kids saying that they they vape when still only 10 for we we had both questions on the survey and about 10% of kids said that they use e-cigarettes all right so it's really showing that e-cigarette was not even a term that doesn't connect hidden.

Yeah, exactly that they weren't connecting with so while e-cigarette question.

Both questions the e-cigarette and vaping questions were still on the survey for the 2019 version was just came out in the future we're going to drop the e-cigarette question.

Yeah, because it's no longer really a relevant question for us.

So those are the kinds of changes that we make over the years, I think it's really interesting to be able to look at that data and pull the trends.

>> And before I you know talk about the 5 take a ways from the survey this year because I think people might be interested in that.

I'm curious how do parents if they want to know what their children are being asking what's in the survey, what's the mechanism for parents to know about that.

>> Sure all of the information is on is on the Web site which is Fairfax County dot gov slash youth survey grief.

And on that site you can find the actual questionnaires to see exactly what they look like this can try and versions that that the kids fell out in school.

So you can see all of the questions.

There's also a frequently asked questions.

Page on the website, then that that details how the the surveys implemented.

How we protect anonymity how we use the results.

All of that kind of stuff.

>> So that's how parents are informed katic kids now have students know and how did their answers are not going to be shared and attached to them.

>> As it's being implemented the that that information is shared it is a completely anonymous survey we did not ask for we do not capture names at all.

The kids do it paper and pencil so they are filling ounce can French eating class and allows who knows that any my now.

Now,

and so

yes, so it is it is completely anonymous and then I think that really helps us get the best ad does it even accurate data.

>> That's the way to do it.

So we'll talk about the 5 takeaways because I think the listeners might want to know those and the first one of course is a little sad. Well white said it says that depressive symptoms are rising, what to ask to get to that in Howard those types of questions formulated to be able to devote inaccurate response about depression and feelings of sadness, yeah. >> Pretty much every question on the survey is taken from a another survey that has gone through rigorous process is to establish reliability and validity so that we know that they are they are good questions. The question that we asked that we use to show depressive symptoms. I actually asked kids in the last year have you ever felt so sad or hopeless. For a period of 2 weeks in a row or more that you stopped doing some of your normal activities right so it's it's really overwhelming sense of sadness or or hopelessness. And we know that that is first not a clinical definition of re depression nor is it the only way that depression. Manifest itself and some people may never have those feelings, but still be depressed but it is a good proxy for for depressive for depression. They certainly are depressive symptoms. Back to you real quick back to your original question on it the this wording this question comes from the youth risk behavior survey, which is a an annual survey done by the CDC not nationwide. So that's where this question and many of most of probably most of the questions on the new survey come from the youth risk behavior survey or the monitoring the future survey which is another survey that's done jointly by the federal government and the University of Michigan every year and has a national. A national reach what did the data show on this question. Yeah, so on this question we about 30% of kids responded that they have experienced a depressive symptoms in in the last year. That's a lot of kit is a lot of kids it is a lot of kids and when you break it down. It's there are there are some some populations that it's really high for right, so what for female females experience report depressive symptoms almost twice as often as as as moyes there or Hispanic students at the highest rates. And also kids who are lesbian gay or bisexual or questioning. Also report incredibly high up around 50%. And so any and then when you combine some of these rights, Hispanic girls right around 50% so think about that and he just one out of every too many girls and your sex accounting our reporting that they that they feel so sad or hopeless that for 2 weeks in a row, they're not able to do

their normal activities that perhaps only incredible the other the other thing that is worrying about this is that for a long time.

Early on.

Are the numbers is around 35% of all students in Fairfax that we're reporting putting this what actually put us higher than national averages.

And

between the county government and the school system and up.

So many partners.

We did a whole lot to try and address this and those numbers went down and they they got as low as about 25%.

But over the last 4 years or so they've been creeping back up so we're not at that 35

percent number that we were unlike 2013 or so yeah at 30%.

That's that's very worrying.

And frankly, I hate to see what it's going to be after the covid yes, there's so much stress.

>> Anecdotally we're hearing about from teachers and from students honor student, a schoolboy representative was very articulate in a letter that he sent in shared with the superintendent who shared it.

This week with the community and we're looking for small things that we can do and hoping that don't add up to bigger things and to try to address some of this depression and concerns and anxieties students are probably feeling new year.

>> And it's that's a that's of glad you brought that up because it is important to note that all of this data

was cab is from the 2019 they slash 20 school year and the survey was administered last November so November of 2009 3 because all of this is pre covid gains.

>> Well, that's with if I could ask what are some of the steps that you all are thinking about before we move on to number of to do you have some things that you've already talked about working on are implementing given the yeah, the time.

>> Numbers, yeah, there there are a lot of initiatives and services and programs that are in place right now and the major

point of emphasis is on how do we expand those and how do we how do we reach more so if CPS is doing an amazing job trying to build in social emotional learning into the curriculum and into into support services and it's these social emotional skills that we know can be really protective

against things like depression and and risky behaviors like like substance use for example, one kids know how to effectively cope with stressful situations when they know how to regulate their behaviors when they are able to

express empathy and and and and understand where others are coming from then they are

much better able to cope with these issues and

doesn't mean that nobody will would be depressed or or use these drugs but we do know that

building those skills within kids his is really effective.

So the more that we can continue doing that and scale up those kinds of interventions

also opportunities for kids to come together and talk about the issues.

Yes.

Our minds matter is.

Organization and a year from Miller with Yasser Arafat's County that was done and medium-range or here.

>> On this podcast awesome and we're trying to

expand our minds matter in 2 different schools and more schools apparently it is going really really well.

Yeah and we're with.

>> There may or in my agency neighborhood and community services or even working with them to try and expanded into our team and community centers so that the that's a just an amazing program that the really gets kids in a in a leadership kind of role to address these issues and help promote these kinds of skills and awareness and among among their peers and I think sometimes you know parents who were also busy in our lives.

>> Are we stopping and thinking in paying attention to what's really going on with our kids, you know sometimes all of us when our kids to do certain age we think other good now in their past the danger zone.

But I think as a parent you never really shift that judging from my experience.

>> Yeah, and there's so if I can just mention 1, 1, other.

Resource out there that really is great for parents is or are the online cut need.

Yeah, things so that you know is a company that has developed trainings primarily aimed at teachers for how do you recognize when a when a student may be struggling maybe an emotional crisis may be thinking about suicide.

And how do you effectively intervene.

The the trainings are surely interactive and immersive you're doing it online.

But you assume the role of the teacher and you're actually like interacting with these

you ever tell you that these yeah with the average cars and its it's really really effective a really amazing.

The point is that even though they were developed for teachers.

The skills that they teach or really universe absolutely and we're all teachers this year's act all parents great point

and so even even if also if your your kid isn't necessarily it's displaying

suicidal ideation or anything like that

the trainings are all about how do you

connect with kids how do you get them to open up to you how do you get them to talk to you and understand what they're saying in and those are skills that we on the anybody who's dealing with kids in any way whether you're a parent or a coach or a teacher

a pastor,

or a bus driver or a next door neighbor who doesn't mean the

it will come with a Handbook

exactly and so these trainings are free and available to anybody online anybody in Fairfax County and so if you go to Fairfax County dot gov slash csb for the community services board and click on training you'll you'll find it called Nieto yeah, the county to with okay.

>> That's right.

What is the second take a ways from the survey is about substances vaping and alcohol use.

One what does the data show and 2 how does this compare to other years.

Yeah, so.

>> Some of the best news that we have on these surveys really around substance use and alcohol is a great example, well there.

Every year the percentage of kids that report drinking

continues to go down

interest and what he wanted to I think the more surprising things to people is that only about 27% of high school seniors report, having used alcohol in the last month.

Yeah, that is a price, you know we have this mental image of high school kids

drinking already my life and that's not exactly and that's not the case

and and again the numbers have continued to go down and so really all of the questions that we ask about alcohol.

Whether you've ever used alcohol, whether you've used alcohol in the last month, look if you

engaged in binge drinking in the last couple of weeks that's drinking 5 or more having 5 or more drinks.

Consecutively.

When you started drinking, you know kids percentage of kids who began drinking before they were 13.

All of these are really at at their lowest levels that we've ever seen and Christian you to drop so we're really excited about that I think that's going out of favor.

It is

and we know that this is another

place where where parents really make a huge difference when when parents are clear express that they don't think drinking is OK.

Kids don't rank yeah in and we ask that question on the survey says a lot more power and influence in the realized is that exactly so

you know of of

kids who say that their parents don't think it's OK for them to drink.

Yeah, only about 10% of them during yeah

for kids whose parents say it is OK for them to drink, it's about half of the kids think it's it's it's very clear.

So.

>> Number 3 nutrition fruits and vegetables are on the decrease.

I found that to be interesting that that was one of the take aways and first of all why do you ask this question when was this question added and what does it mean what can we do about it.

>> So we know that

certainly eating well and being physically active are critical to overall health.

And so we've always asked questions about fruit and vegetable consumption and now how often are you eating fruits and vegetables in trending down it has been trending down so light.

We aggregate a lot of this state to the show.

Really

how many kids are are eating 5 servings of fruits and vegetables a day.

Right and we are down to.

It's low.

In the single digits yadier look that one up that so I just to about 30 35% maybe that are getting a full 5 servings of fruits and vegetables a day.

>> Well in just to be clear one Apple is 2 servings so everybody out there just keep giving your kids some fruits and vegetables make them available and find them and remember that

it is important to have that bounced I absolutely especially because we're all home a lot more right now.

So instead of you know, popping chocolates like I was in March, I started popping the baby carrots now.

And I honestly, I'll eat a whole bag of this baby carrots just crunching away.

But

number 4 is screen time and this is a tough one given

that so many are going to school virtually and so most likely next time we did a survey it's going to be pretty high.

So this is all connected to exercise which I see the downward trend.

People aren't getting enough exercise to talk about that a little bit.

>> What you're seeing and what that means and so those 2 things definitely go hand in hand and we are seeing right now that about 2 thirds of kids

or

have 3 or more hours of screen time a day on average school day that is not include school stuff.

I so if they're in class or doing homework on a computer that does not count so 3 hours a day of just being on your phone playing games chatting with friends doing now to stuff.

>> This was pre covid this is pretty 3 virtual school.

Yeah, although what did it

encompass March little bit after March.

Now so this is all all last November OK was was when we asked the questions.

>> And then similarly, only 38% of kids report, getting an hour a day.

Hour of physical activity on most days of the week.

And when again, we know those those things go hand in hand and

>> we really curious though, because we think about this year so far.

Students are home and that does bring opportunities to get out during lunch time.

Maybe you don't do that in school in maybe you will at home or act,

I'm not sure to be interesting to see what the data is yes, he certainly lose.

And we're losing that

that recess time for the younger kids.

>> Or a lot of organized sports.

Handing have been canceled.

And as we move into the winter right now you'll have even

if you are organized sports and does everything moves indoors.
And it's even harder to get outside.
So maybe in in not gathering even you know informal play.
Yeah, it's on
gathering just to play on the playground things like that use less and less of that
and so it's
it is definitely worrisome to maybe listeners can be thinking about that and just.
>> Trying to be intentional and think of ways that we can reverse this trend
despite the circumstances are going through right now
and then number 5 and before you go.
On a high note.
I thought it was interesting to
to see the data about students feeling safe and supported
what does that mean and also a lot of times I've heard in the past because I know
you
talk about 3 to succeed and how does that
help and contribute to that well being and feeling safe and supported yeah.
>> Thanks to bring it up because first, you know me well 3 to succeed is the most
important thing
we talk about with the survey.
On the survey we asked obviously about the behaviors we ask about things like mental
health.
We also asked about protective effect.
There's and these are the things that are
in kids lives that
help mitigate against the negative stresses.
And so
a lot of these have to do with
relationships, healthy, caring relationships with adults
and so do you field Al you by your teachers can you go to your parents if you need
help.
Do you have neighbors that they care about you and that you could go to a few that
help
are you involved in extracurricular activities and community service all these kinds
of things that help us connect with others.
The data says yes the data says yes and and we point out this year just how
could the data I think looks in schools in particular where kids spend so much time
but but
the overwhelming majority of kids report that
that they feel safe at school I believe is an 80's was it safe at school I think was
65% which is which is still good.
>> Yeah, we also got room for improvement there.
We also have majority's that
that say that they can have one on one time with their teachers if they need it and
that their teachers notice, and tell them if they're doing good work.
Those positive things are so important
Iceland so 3 to succeed is the idea that
if we can just make sure all kids have at least 3 of these
protective factors in their lives it dramatically cuts down the risks
and dramatically cuts down the

the negative outcomes that we often see right so if we look at the percentage of kids that are

using marijuana for example, right.

Kids that don't have any of these protective factors in their lives versus kids who have 3 of those protective factors in for analysis in the survey we've just identified 6 of those protective factors, Satan but that we use just for this analysis.

So of those 6 kids who are who have 0 versus kids who have 3

because we have 3 are about half as likely to engage in almost any risky behavior that you can think of whether it's substance use or bullying behaviors or harass other kind of harassing behaviors.

We see it even more strongly around the mental health and suicide so good to have more of those protective factors are less likely to have to present report depressive symptoms are less likely to report having thought of or even attempted suicide.

We also see the same patterns no matter how we break it down by population right so kids of all ages, we see the same patterns, boys and girls we see the same patterns kids that are from military connected families and not we see the same patterns lgbtq kids and

and straight kids we see the same patterns it doesn't really matter it's.

This is saying this is universal factors, right and so we often come at it from if we can make sure that there's a caring adult for each kid at home.

At school and in the community

whether it and it's a coach or or

clergy member or a next door neighbor or anybody else.

Somebody has 1003 right there right that's 3 right there.

>> Something you can count on somebody you can talk to exactly well exactly what jussie has been wonderful to have you here today and I think that all of us as parents as community members.

He really be thinking about as surveyed what it's telling that honest feedback in on a state.

And what we can do about it

as people as the public school system as Fairfax County government

as associations is the faith community,

civic organizations, no matter where you are no matter where you sit what can you do to help kids in our community succeed, and especially right now.

Given what's happened this year it's been extraordinarily difficult there have been shining moments

and as your survey shows I think there's some good news out there to share

but I really just want to say thank you for being here, thank you for all the work you're doing.

I know it's hard I you know word with you closely when I was with community services board as well as with the Police Department and I remember the work you did and you know just trying where huge community 1.2 million people.

How do you find ways to work not in isolation but together in partnerships.

>> Thank you you have right on and I think courage people again because go to the website Fairfax County dot gov slash youth survey.

We have a prevention tool kit we have an interactive data Explorer we have presentations and videos we have a whole lot of resources around 3 to succeed

that that have they can help folks get started on that on that journey and help connect them with with resources and ideas for how to take this data and do something with it.

>> Absolutely that's what it's all about thank you so much just CL us and for all you've done at the neighborhood

community services and we will see you again to help.

Thanks so much for having me was the show.

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