



# *Broward Youth Report: Behavioral Health Needs During COVID-19*

In collaboration with: Memorial Healthcare System, Choose Peace Stop Violence Program, and Broward County Public Schools

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## Needs Assessment Overview

**Objective:** To inform prevention and promotion programs, campaigns, and messaging related to behavioral health and well-being for youth in Broward County during COVID-19.

**Method:** Mixed qualitative/quantitative (online anonymous survey & focus groups). The survey and focus group guide were developed in coordination with key partners. The survey was also validated for youth-friendliness. 359 youth responded to the survey, which was available May 14-26, 2020. 3 focus groups were hosted during May 7-14, 2020 with 8 youth per session (24 total participants).

**Sample:** Convenience sample. Broward youth aged 11-18+ years in middle or high school involved in the United Way of Broward County's Broward Youth Coalition (BYC) and Memorial Youth F.O.R.C.E. afterschool program. For the survey, participants also included youth from Broward County Public Schools' peer counseling program, Florida Initiative for Suicide Prevention's HOPE Sunshine Club, and related youth well-being providers and organizations.<sup>1</sup>

About 50% of survey participants were Black or African American, 36% were Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino, 20% were White or Caucasian, and 8% were Asian. 68% identified as female, 31% as male, and 1% as non-binary or gender-fluid. Participants variably represented all ages from 12 to 19 years and grades in school from 6<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup>.

**Key Findings:** The primary feeling youth reported was "**bored**;" they also reported feeling **many negative emotions, as well as some positive ones**. Insight from the focus groups suggested that youth are bored because of their inability to meet with friends or visit most places and have mixed feelings about limitations and opportunities presented by COVID-19 social distancing measures. Focus group findings suggest that many of these negative emotions might result from **distance-learning being stressful, overwhelming, and more difficult** (major themes), supported by the responses from 36% of survey participants that they are **learning worse** now.

57% of survey participants agreed or strongly agreed that they **found ways to cope** which have helped them. Many coping strategies were mentioned in the survey and focus groups. Also, 72% agreed or strongly agreed that they have a **good support system** to help them during this time.

95% reported no change in level of **substance use** (91% non- and never-users), while 4% reported an increase. A minority of survey participants agreed or strongly agreed that their **mental health** (25%) or **physical health** (17%) has been substantially reduced by COVID-19. A majority reported maintaining or increasing their **level of physical activity** (56%) and maintaining **quality of diet** (57%).

48% agreed or strongly agreed that they are **feeling lonelier** as a result of COVID-19. This could be explained by focus group findings that youth miss their friends and are interacting with them and with other youth less. The remaining 52% who did not agree might be explained by the focus group finding that **youth are spending more time with their parents and siblings**, which might offset feelings of loneliness, with almost 30% reporting improved **relationships with parents and siblings**.

68% agreed or strongly agreed that they are **hopeful about the future** after COVID-19.

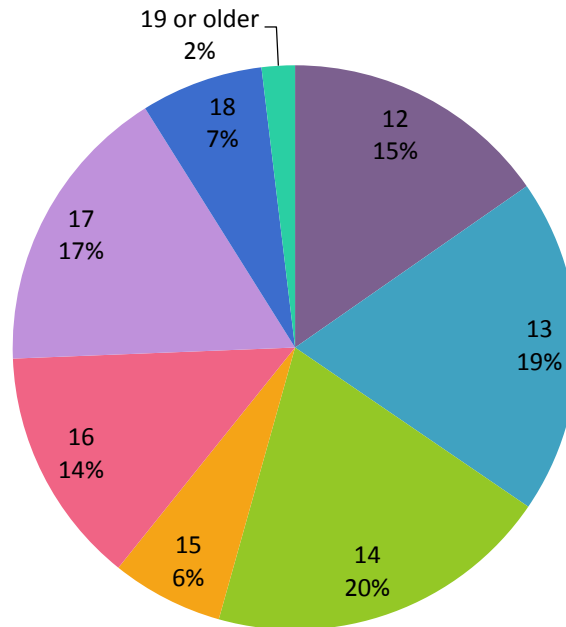
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<sup>1</sup> Due to the **convenience sampling** methodology used, results presented are not representative of the general Broward county youth population. Further research is needed to expand and explore a broader sample of this population and their behavioral health risk/protective factors as they relate to their perceptions and behavior.

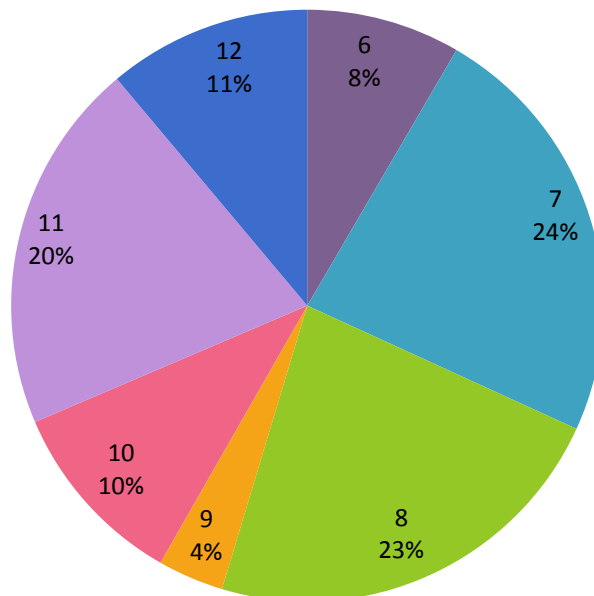
The remainder of this report contains detailed survey and focus group results.

## Survey Results

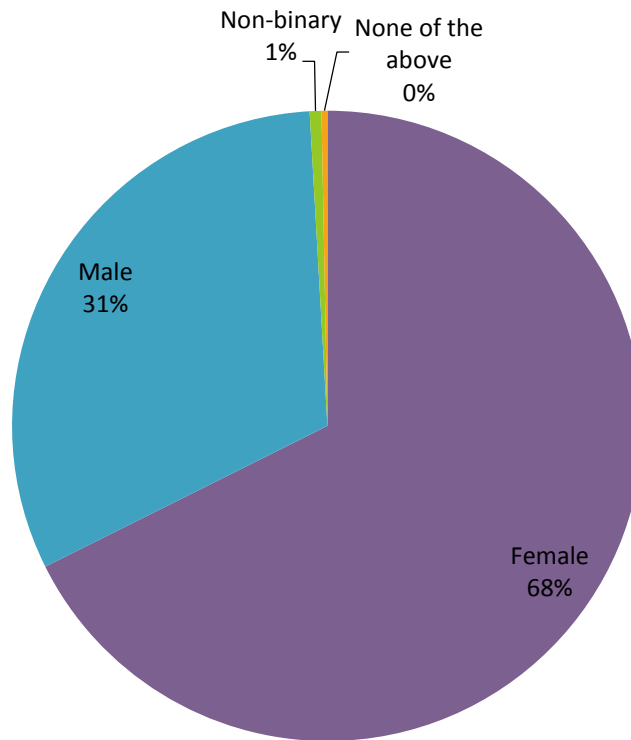
### 1. Age (in years):



### 2. Grade in school:

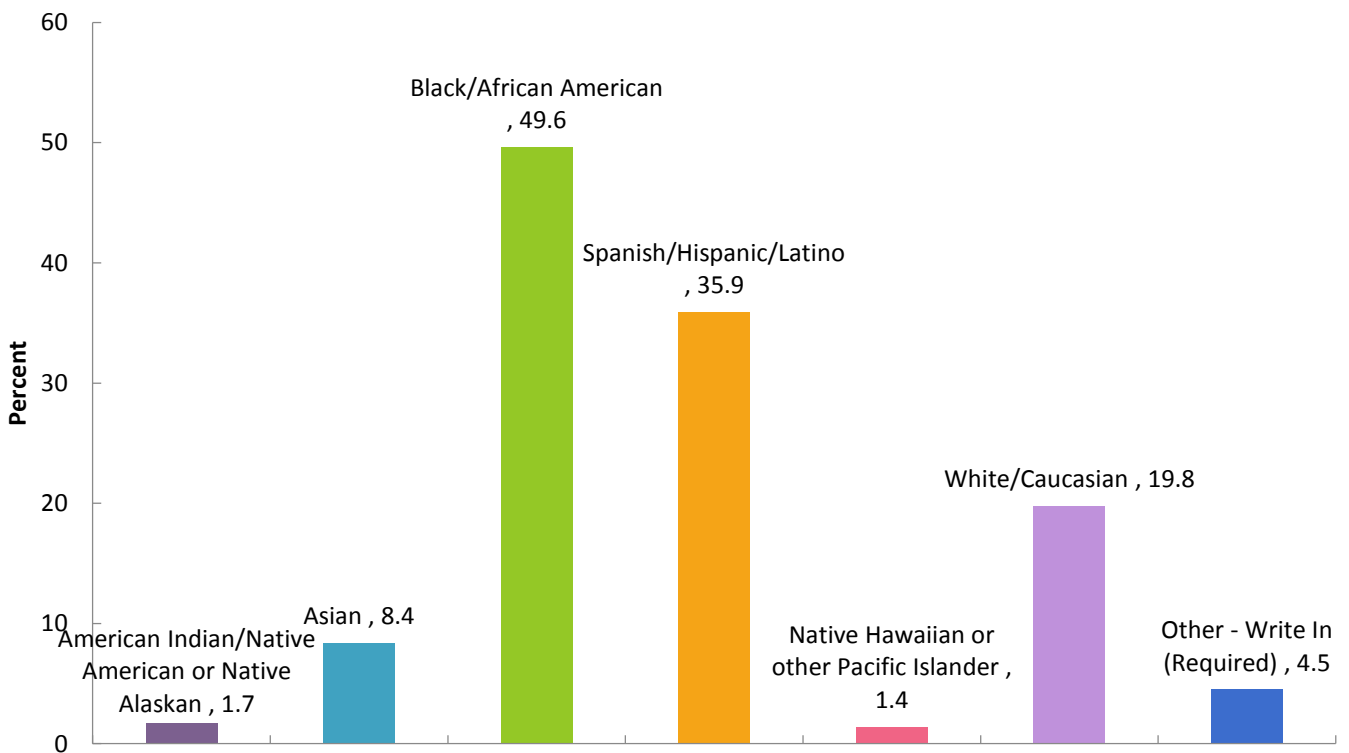


### 3. Gender (self-identified):



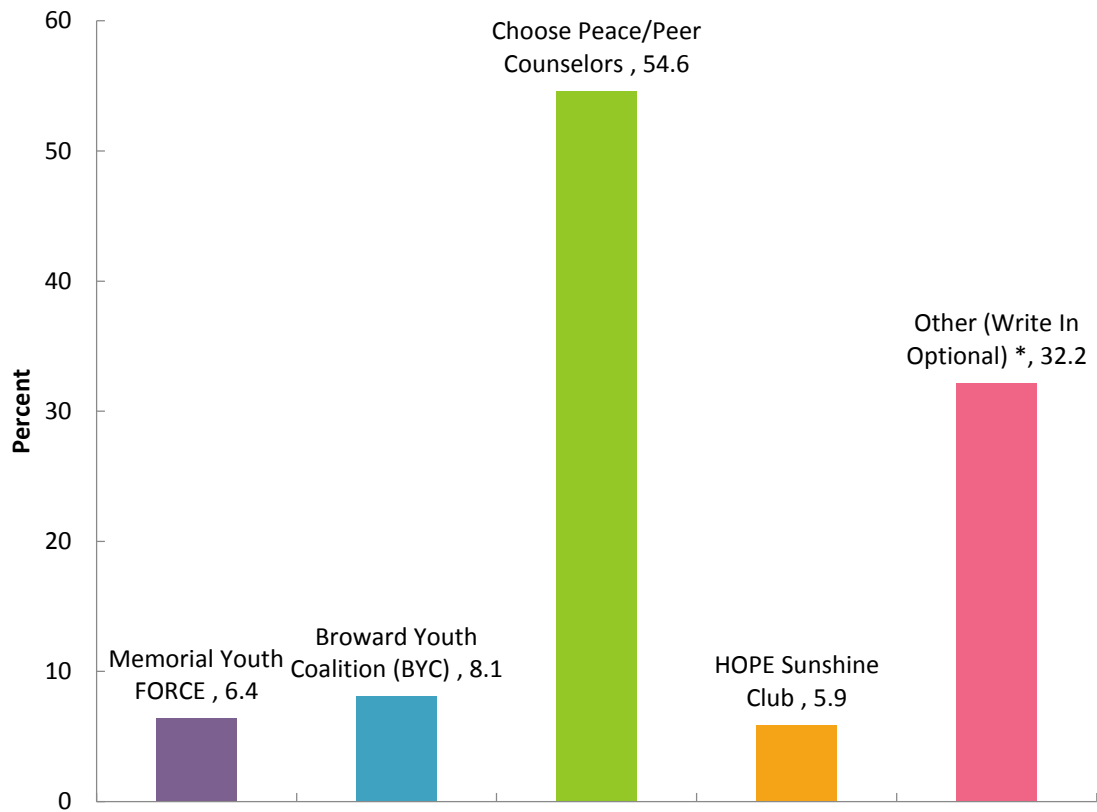
None of the above - Write In Response: Gender-fluid

### 4. Race/ethnicity (self-identified):



**Note:** Multiple answers per participant possible. Percentages added may exceed 100 since a participant may select more than one answer for this question.

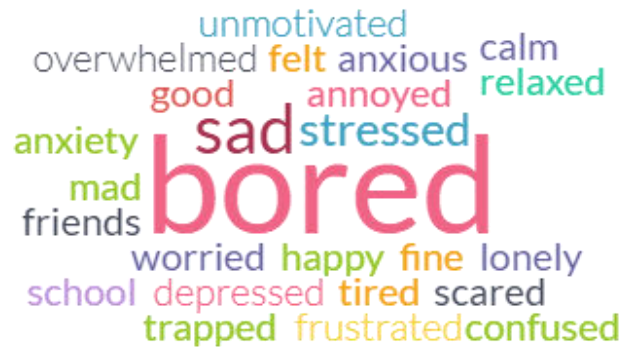
5. Member of which participating program(s) / organization(s):



\*Youth who marked “other” represented various youth-serving programs and organizations in Broward County.

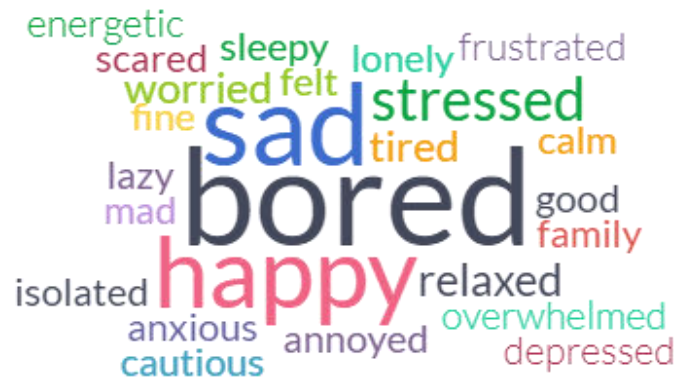
**Note:** Multiple answers per participant possible. Percentages added may exceed 100 since a participant may select more than one answer for this question.

6. During COVID-19, I have felt:



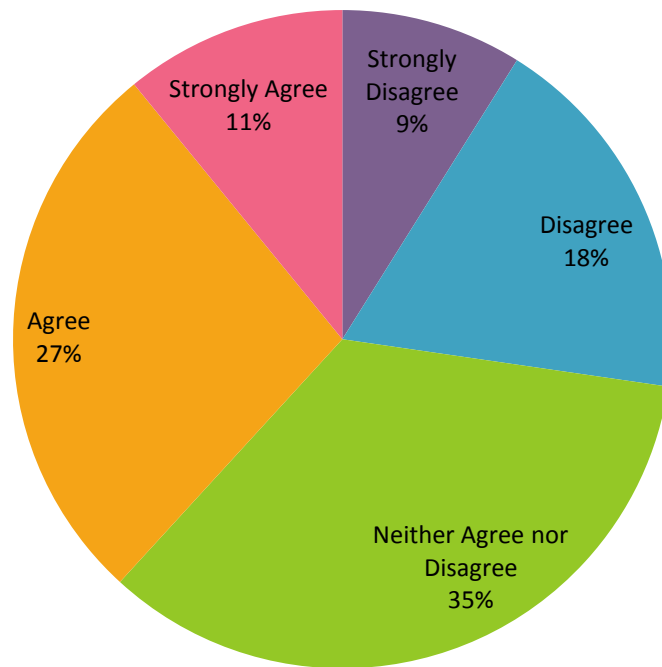
\*The larger the word, the more it was represented in participants' answers.

7. During COVID-19, I have also felt:

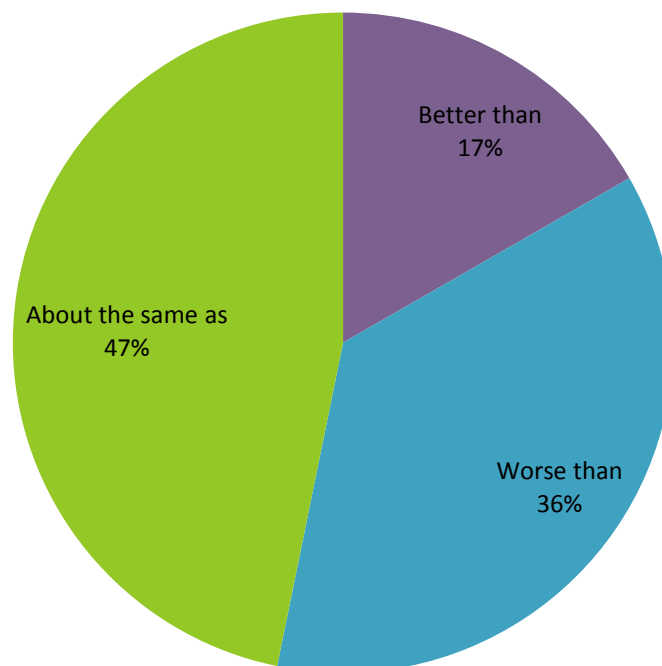


\*The larger the word, the more it was represented in participants' answers.

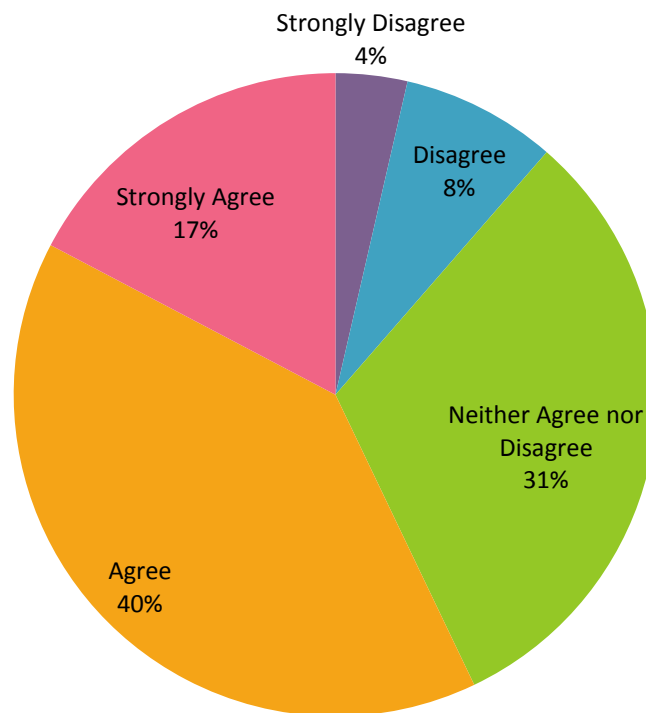
8. My experience during COVID-19 has been very challenging.



9. I am learning \_\_\_\_\_ I was before COVID-19.



10. I have found ways to cope (or deal with the situation) which have helped me during COVID-19.



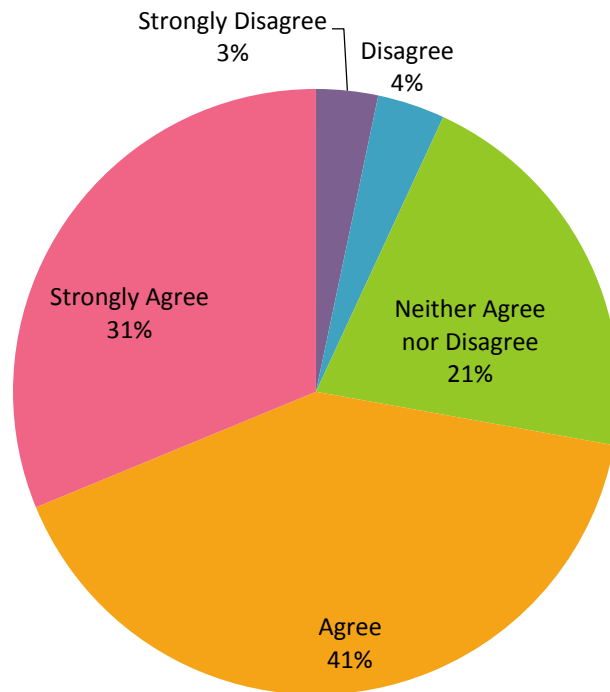
11. The main ways I have coped (or dealt with the situation) are (write “none” if none):



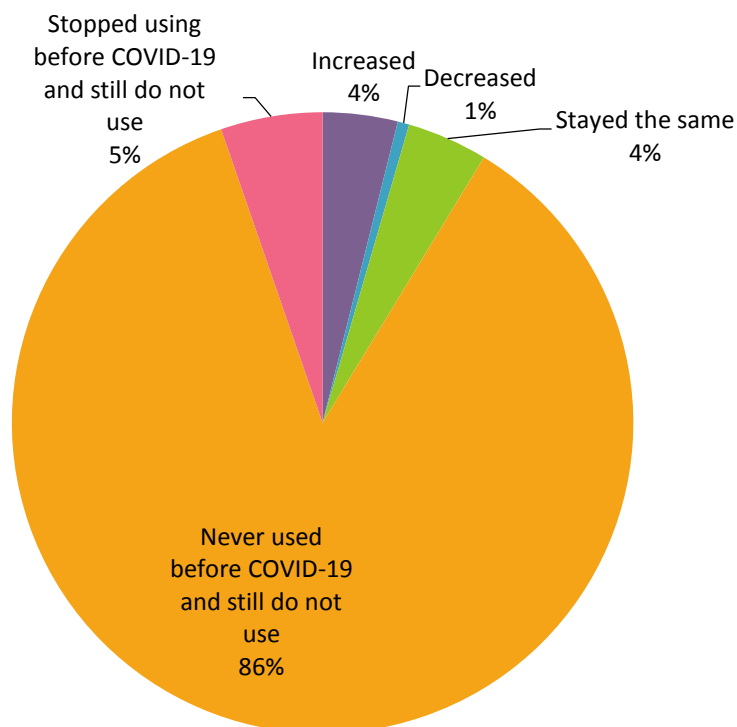
\*The larger the word, the more it was represented in participants' answers.



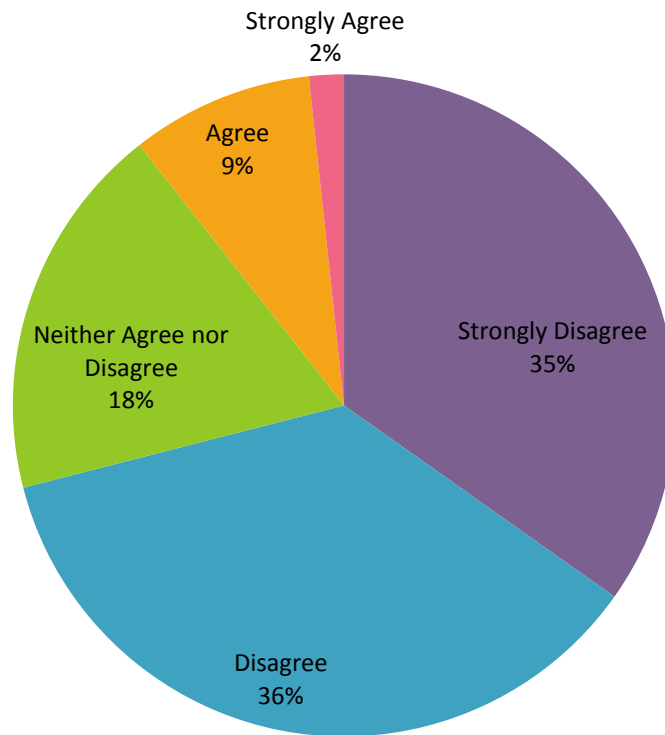
12. I have a good support system to help me during this time of COVID-19.



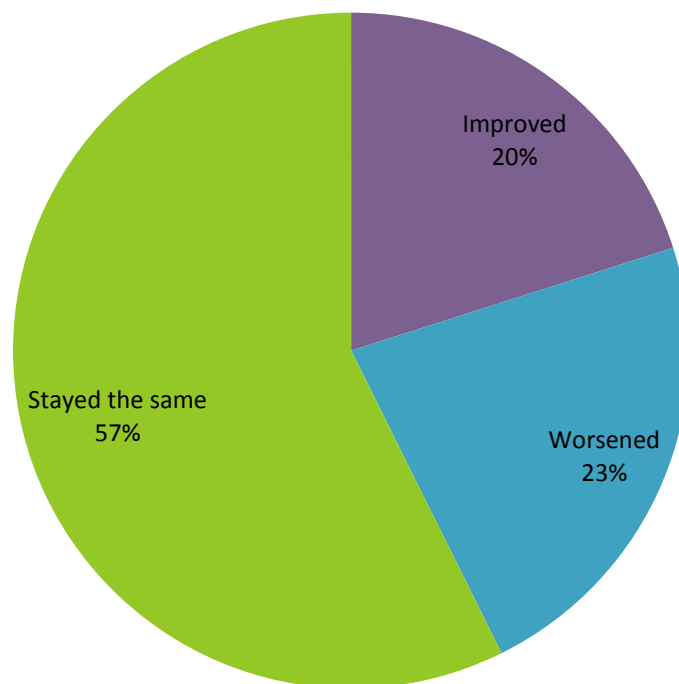
13. My use of vapes, tobacco, marijuana, alcohol, and/or other substances has \_\_\_\_\_ as a result of COVID-19.



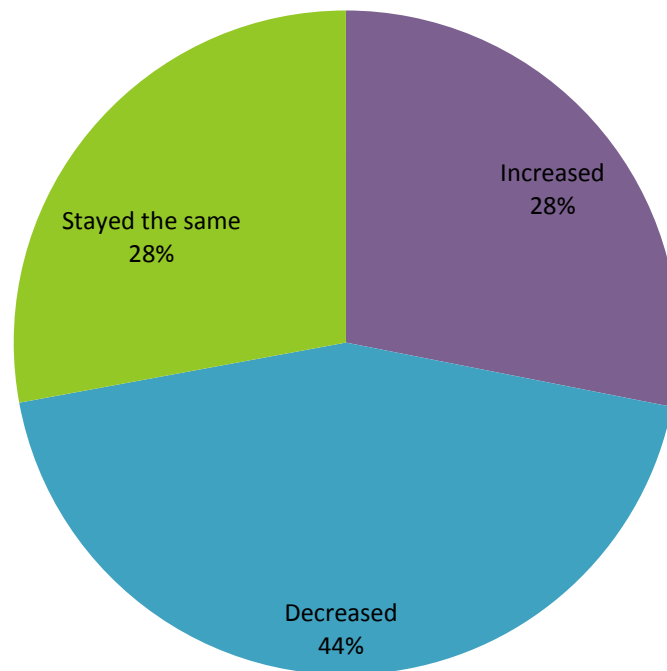
14. I am less able to access enough food as a result of COVID-19.



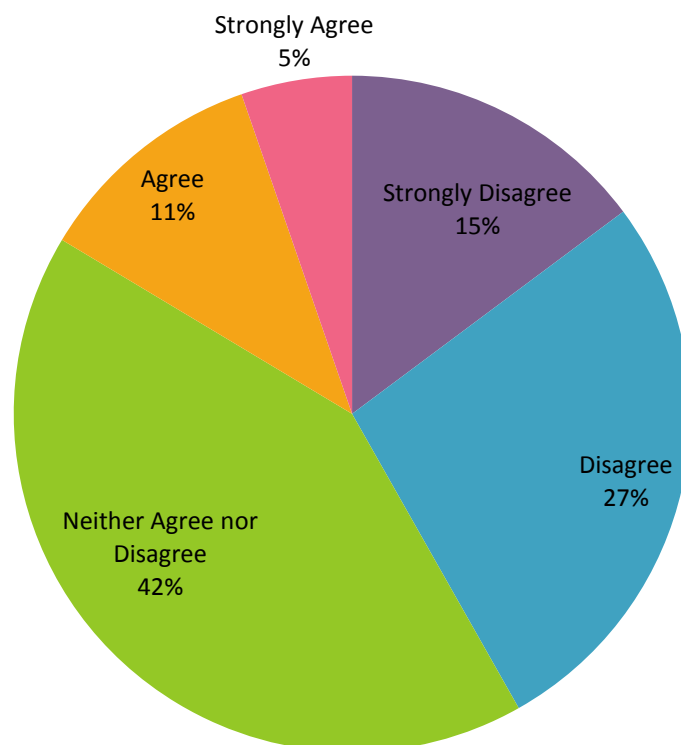
15. The quality of my diet has \_\_\_\_\_ as a result of COVID-19:



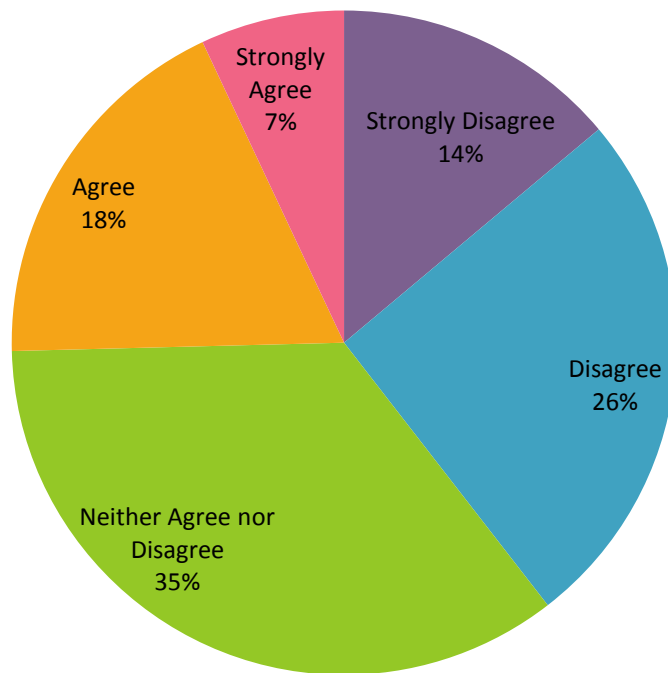
16. My level of physical activity has \_\_\_\_\_ as a result of COVID-19:



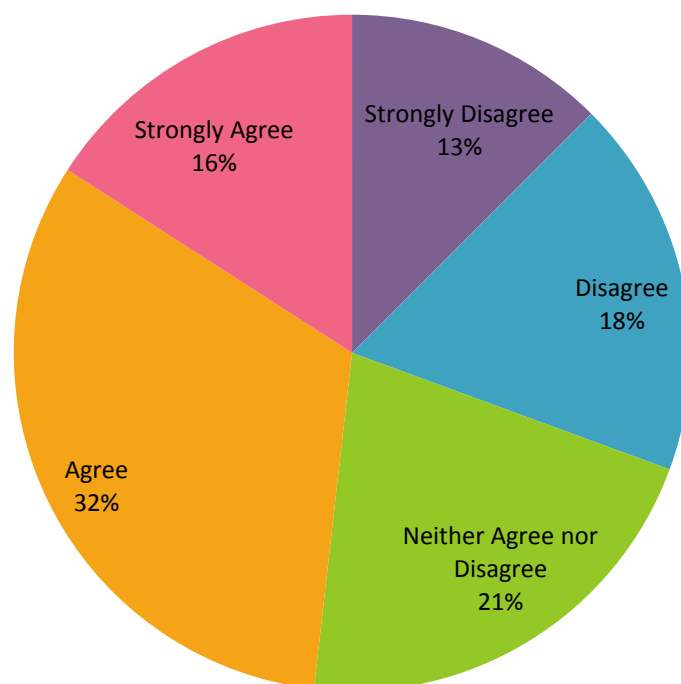
17. COVID-19 has substantially reduced my physical health.



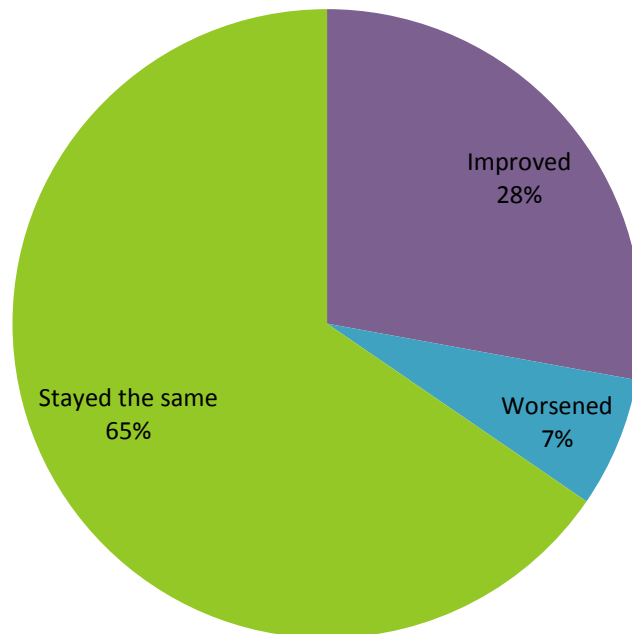
18. COVID-19 has substantially reduced my mental health.



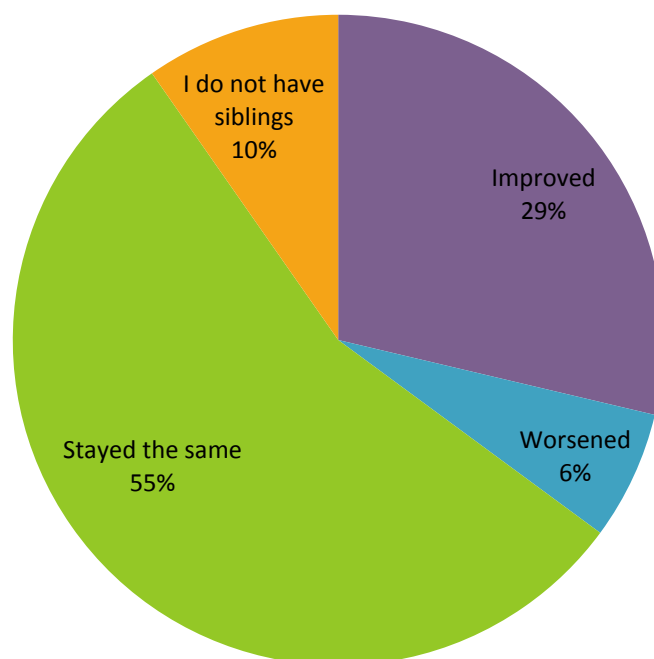
19. I am feeling lonelier as a result of COVID-19.



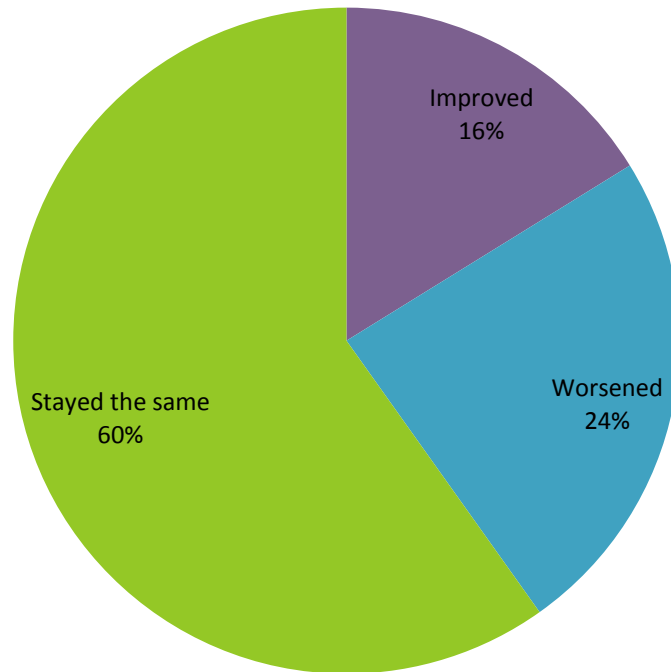
20. My relationship with my parents (or legal guardians, if different than your biological parents) has \_\_\_\_\_ as a result of COVID-19:



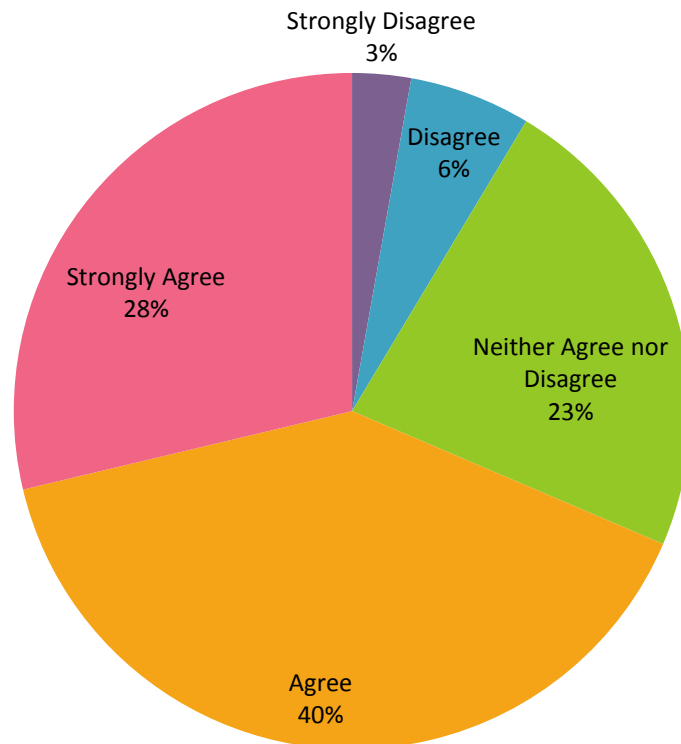
21. My relationship with my siblings has \_\_\_\_\_ as a result of COVID-19:



22. My relationship with friends has \_\_\_\_\_ as a result of COVID-19:



23. I am hopeful about the future after COVID-19.



24. What would help you most at this time?

Common Responses (Summarized)
Talk to/Spend time with friends
Emotional/Mental Support
Less assignments/Schoolwork
Face-to-face learning (physically being in school)
Ability to go outside/Fresh air
PPE/Hand sanitizer
High School Seniors: Senior activities (e.g. prom, graduation) and help with transition to college (e.g. scholarship assistance)
Life to be back to “normal”
Spend time with other family members (outside of household)
Motivation/Inspiration/Encouragement/Support
Food

25. Is there anything else that you want to share or suggest? (Optional)

Common Responses (Summarized)
Want to go back to school ( <i>most common</i> )
More time to complete assignments ( <i>most common</i> )
Keep in touch with your family ( <i>most common</i> )
Practice social distancing ( <i>most common</i> )
Resources to help students better understand their assignments
Difficult time but pulling through/adjusting
Virtual party to celebrate graduates (middle and high school)
A day of fun activities for teachers and students
Sad that Pride parades were cancelled
People to understand how you’re feeling
The government is taking away our freedom

\*There were fewer responses to this question than the previous and some topic overlap. Responses designated as most common appeared most often in responses to this question.

## Focus Group Results

Theme	Description	Example Quotes
<i>Youth are feeling bored</i>	Several youth expressed being bored, primarily because they cannot go places outside of their homes, meet with their friends, participate in extracurricular activities, or engage in the community. Loss of usual daily routine was also mentioned.	<p>I've been bored...You can't really hang out with your friends because you're supposed to stay at home.</p> <hr/> <p>It's like the same thing every day.</p>
<i>School is more stressful and overwhelming</i>	Youth are being assigned more projects and homework, from all their classes at once instead of only on previously designated days. For some, this results in working all day, spending less time with family/others and feelings of isolation. Navigating the several learning platforms utilized by teachers, conflicting class meetings, and learning primarily through YouTube videos and online resources is difficult.	<p>We would have less homework...Say for example, [one day] we would just have math, science, reading, or social studies. And then the other day, maybe I have P.E. and then other electives, and now it's...eight subjects at one time...it's just so stressful that you're telling yourself...get all of this done so that you don't...worry about doing it ever again...But it just keeps on continuing and continuing every single day of the week. Monday through Friday, Monday through Friday. I can't. Ugh.</p> <hr/> <p>Some teachers want things sent to their emails, others want stuff sent to the app that they choose to do their assignments on. You're not sure which one to send it to, and if you don't send it to the right one, that's a zero.</p>
<i>Not learning as well</i>	Some youth are searching answers to schoolwork online or referring to their notes during tests, stating this results in work/tests being easier than in school. Some have seen their grades drop substantially due to factors such as increased workload, difficulty level, and technology use and the lack of one on one interaction with teachers.	<p>Another good thing about it is you can take notes and when a test comes up, like for example, a Spanish test or something, then you could just go back to those notes in your notebook or whatever and use those notes as a reference to solve or find the answer to whatever the question is. So like every test that you have and that you have the notes for, it's kind of like an open book test.</p> <hr/> <p>I feel like we're not learning as much as we learned in school. I feel like kids are just searching up the answers and I have seen that people are posting [on social media] the grade before they were having A's and now everybody's having F's...</p>
<i>Experiencing positive growth</i>	Some youth have grown from the stay-at-home experience and are hesitant to return to previous schedules. For example, they improved time-management skills, became more responsible and independent, developed gratitude and self-awareness, focused more on themselves and activities they enjoy, and improved mental health.	<p>It's really helped me to get to know myself more, just because I've had so much time to be by myself. And it's also made me grateful. Like, I know that whenever we get out of quarantine, I'm going to have this new like, I guess you could call it fervor...I'll be more excited to do the things that I did before without thinking about them.</p> <hr/> <p>It's not the greatest time, but it's helping you for the future I think, right now. It's a good place to learn from being responsible and taking responsibility for your actions...</p>



<p><i>Using several strategies to cope</i></p>	<p>Youth expressed strategies such as spending time with and checking in on family, pets, being physically active (especially outdoors), calling friends, playing video games, watching Netflix and YouTube videos, social media (Instagram), sleeping, learning new things, focusing on oneself and self-reflection, and maintaining a positive mindset to adapt/cope.</p>	<p>What have been helpful is playing video games. That will get my mind off of the negativity and what's going on around the world. Just, I'll just be in my own world playing video games.</p> <p>I think coping comes down to the mindset that you have towards quarantine.</p> <p>I've been doing a lot of things that I like to do. So like, just to cope with everything. And just doing a bit of exercise at home and exercising with my sisters and playing around with my little brother and sister...and sometimes I'll even call friends first.</p>
<p><i>Feeling more lethargic and less cheerful</i></p>	<p>Youth expressed not being as energetic, cheerful, or excited as they used to be and getting tired and falling asleep more easily than before.</p>	<p>Before all of this, I used to be very, very energetic, but now that I'm not allowed to go out and be energetic, I guess my behavior changed 'cause I'm not that energetic anymore. I just want to stay in bed all day and watch TV and do homework.</p> <p>At school I'm like kind of goofy, always smiling and stuff like that. Or, sometimes I can get aggravated, but now I'm just not as peppy and stuff like that and I'm not as excited because it's not the same [being at home and not at school surrounded by friends].</p>
<p><i>Social interactions with friends negatively impacted</i></p>	<p>Youth are unable to see their friends. This is viewed negatively by most and contributes to boredom. Many miss their friends and are only maintaining contact with a select few of them, expressing it will be strange to see the others again. Some stopped speaking with school friends almost entirely and do not want or care to speak with others. A few youth increased socialization with schoolmates (e.g. to collaborate on schoolwork, promote an event) or remained as social as before.</p>	<p>Majority of my friends, the ones that...I haven't really been talking to them, so it's like if I were to go back...and talk to them, it would kind of be like, like weird because we haven't caught up in so long. But some of my friends, it's kind of the same 'cause I talk to them on a normal basis and stuff like that.</p> <p>For me it's the complete opposite [of being more social], like I cut off everybody I talk to in school. Like it literally showed me I really don't...Like no one means anything to me from school almost...</p>
<p><i>Spending more quality time with immediate family</i></p>	<p>Youth have been spending more time with siblings and parents, for reasons including greater proximity to each other, more free time, and to help cope. Though largely positive, some mentioned frustration from helping to take care of or tutoring younger siblings.</p>	<p>I take my laptop out on the dinner table or the couch. My mom's either in the kitchen or watching TV. A conversation kind of sparked that probably wouldn't have been there if you were on a schedule with school.</p> <p>My relationship got better because I watch my baby brother more.</p> <p>I learned how my parents got married.</p>
<p><i>Exercise is integral</i></p>	<p>Several youth are exercising more and engaging in more physical activities. They are using physical activities to cope, spend their time, as reasons to leave their houses, and to replace previous methods of physical activity such as sports.</p>	<p>Me and my siblings have been exercising a lot...We go in the backyard, we play sports and stuff like that and we go on runs and we do different exercise activities.</p> <p>Since we can't really go outside, me and my sisters have been exercising more...walking and I guess skateboarding a bit around the complex. So we've been exercising more.</p>

<p><b>Diet has worsened</b></p>	<p>Youth largely report eating more now and that the quality of their diets have worsened, with some reporting related health issues such as heartburn or weight gain. A couple of participants also mentioned skipping meals due to having a high volume of schoolwork or having limited variety in home-cooked meals. (For one participant, increased freedom of choice resulted in diet quality improvement.)</p>	<p>In school I would just eat lunch, and then before school I would eat breakfast and then dinner; but now I think I'm eating a lot more since there's not a lot to do. So I guess I get hungry a lot 'cause I'm...not thinking about anything 'cause I'm just home.</p> <p>My diet has gotten a lot worse. I feel like at school I eat healthier because...I eat fruits and stuff like that and then when I'm at home it's once in a while that I'll grab an apple. But mostly it's chips...I eat a lot more because...at school I'm kinda limited. So, I feel I've gotten a lot worse...I'll eat an obnoxious amount of food for no reason just because it's there to eat...</p>
<p><b>Substance use and risky behavior unchanged for participants, but increased for other youth</b></p>	<p>Participants said they did not use tobacco, alcohol, or other drugs before and are still not using. Some reported knowing of friends/other youth who have increased their smoking of marijuana and engagement in risky behaviors such as posting nude pictures of themselves for social media “challenges.” Participants presumed this was due to boredom and sadness.</p>	<p>I don't do any drugs. [others agreed]</p> <p>I don't smoke but...a lot of people I know they do smoke. They're stuck home high 'cause they have nothing to do...I'd say it's an attack on your mental health 'cause you're by yourself...you get sad and you smoke—I just I feel like that's terrible.</p> <p>You see these challenges that pop off online that would not have popped up during school time...It's like when people post their nudes online...people want shock value and they do it to a song. And they basically post child pornography on the internet, because they're bored.</p>

Feedback/Suggestions for Potential Campaigns and Messaging:

- Name for Campaign: “You’re not alone”
- Content ideas:
  - Quotes to uplift/inspire each other (*popular choice*)
  - Reminder to set a goal for yourself
  - Inspiring content (personal experiences being shared)
  - Differentiate physical distancing vs. social distancing
  - Remind people that your outlook determines how you’ll end up after the quarantine
  - Providing clarity on the situation (e.g. whether and when returning to school)
- Message frequency: daily, every other day, beginning of the week
- Mediums:
  - Instagram/Instagram Story and YouTube ad (*popular choices*)
  - Also: Twitter, Snapchat, TikTok, text message
  - Broward County Public Schools Canvas platform (display ad/message on home page)
  - Students mainly get news from Google, TV stations, parents
- Other ideas:
  - Utilize a catchy jingle
  - “Follow us, tag us, send us a picture” to promote the message
  - Provide incentive for people to promote message on social media to expand reach
    - For example: A sweepstakes – one main prize
    - People repost the message on IG (*popular choice*)