

NASHVILLE LONGITUDINAL STUDY OF Youth Safety and Well-being

Results from 2019 Year-One Survey



Nashville is experiencing the biggest economic boom in its history. Yet a large population of its school-age children still face significant challenges to their safety and well-being in their very own neighborhoods.

The Nashville Longitudinal Study of Youth Safety and Well-being is a collaboration of Vanderbilt University, Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools, Oasis Center and the Mayor's Office that is taking an in-depth look at MNPS students' experiences in their neighborhoods. The study is supported by the National Institute of Justice and led by Maury Nation, professor at Vanderbilt Peabody College of education and human development and a national expert on violence and bullying prevention among school-age children.

The goal of the study is to create a multi-year data set that allows teachers, professionals who work with youth, researchers and policymakers to promote safety and well-being by gaining a greater understanding of how young people's experiences are shaped by factors ranging from trust to transportation, and how these factors affect students in the classroom and beyond.

This initial report offers a first glance at several key findings from the study's first year.

HOW THE SURVEY WORKS

The first of three annual Neighborhood and Wellbeing Surveys took place in January 2019, focusing on students in grades 3–12.

The students were asked about what they experience in their neighborhoods, including:

- levels of mutual **trust** and **support**
- sense of **safety**
- sense of **connectedness** and **belonging**
- how they **get around** Nashville
- relationships with **adults** and **peers**
- access to **afterschool** opportunities

The research partners will utilize the data to supplement existing information from sources such as the Metropolitan Planning Organization, the Metropolitan Nashville Police Department, the U.S. Census, Metro Nashville Public Schools and more.

Oasis Center, a national leader in incorporating youth voice in programming and youth development service, will support the study by gathering youth perspectives through focus groups and other means.

Combined, these data will help provide insight into such critical issues as stable housing, proximity to public transportation and nearby land use, including access to safe recreation, healthy food and other important resources.

FINDINGS

FOUR BIG IDEAS

Four “big ideas” emerged from the first round of data, which provide a high-level look at MNPS students as a whole. Future reports will break down the results geographically, providing a detailed view of the similarities and differences in MNPS students’ experiences, depending on where they live.



BIG IDEA #1:

Neighborhood Support and Trust

Despite Nashville’s economic boom, many students don’t feel that people in their neighborhoods support and trust one another.

BIG IDEA #2:

Transportation and Access to Resources

Youth who are faced with the most neighborhood challenges have the least access to transportation that would connect them to Nashville’s rich resources and supports.



BIG IDEA #3:

Sense of Connection to an Adult

Starting in fifth grade and continuing through high school, students become less and less likely to have a positive relationship with an adult outside their home or school.

BIG IDEA #4:

After-school Activities and Supervision

Large numbers of Nashville youth have limited access to activities, supervision and support during the crucial after-school time period.



BIG IDEA #1:

NEIGHBORHOOD SAFETY AND SUPPORT



To measure students' perceptions of the levels of mutual support and trust among people in their neighborhoods, they were asked to respond to each of the following five statements about where they live. Here are the percentages of students who **“agreed”** or **“strongly agreed”** with each statement.

“If you live in a bad community, there may not be safety nets—people are not there to look out for you.”

—MNPS Student

1. People are willing to help their neighbors.

43%

2. People can be trusted.

33%

3. People get along with each other.

45%

4. People share the same values.

28%

5. It is a close-knit neighborhood.

29%

Overall, more than half of students did not agree with these statements, indicating that students perceive low levels of mutual support and trust among their neighbors. Students' responses to these statements suggest that Nashville's residential neighborhoods deserve more of our city's attention.

DISAGREE

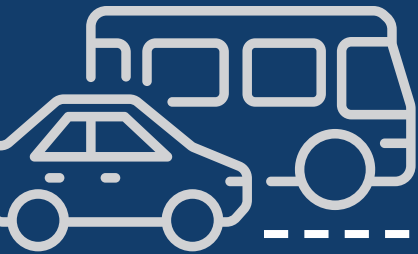
AGREE

BIG IDEA #2:

TRANSPORTATION AND ACCESS TO RESOURCES



With Davidson County encompassing more than 500 square miles, transportation challenges loom large in the experiences of all its residents, including children. To get around Nashville, the vast majority of MNPS students (93 percent) report that they usually travel by car, either driving themselves or riding with friends or family.



However, only half of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement:

“It is easy for me to get where I would like to go around the city.”

Also significant is that young people living in **neighborhoods** that they view as **safe and supportive** also reported **greater mobility** around the city.

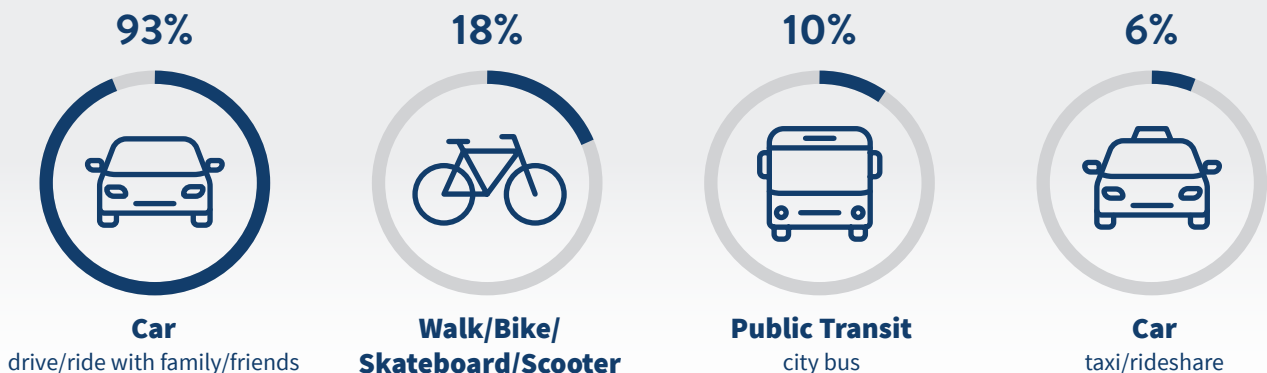


Of those who agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “My neighborhood is a safe place to be,” **60 percent** agreed or strongly agreed that it’s easy for them to get where they would like to go around Nashville.



In comparison, among those who disagreed or strongly disagreed that their neighborhood is safe, **only 35 percent** agreed or strongly agreed that “It is easy for me to get where I would like to go around the city.”

HOW DO YOUNG PEOPLE GET AROUND NASHVILLE?



BIG IDEA #3:

SENSE OF CONNECTION TO AN ADULT



Starting in fifth grade and continuing through high school, the data show that students become less and less likely to say they have a positive relationship with an adult outside their home or school.

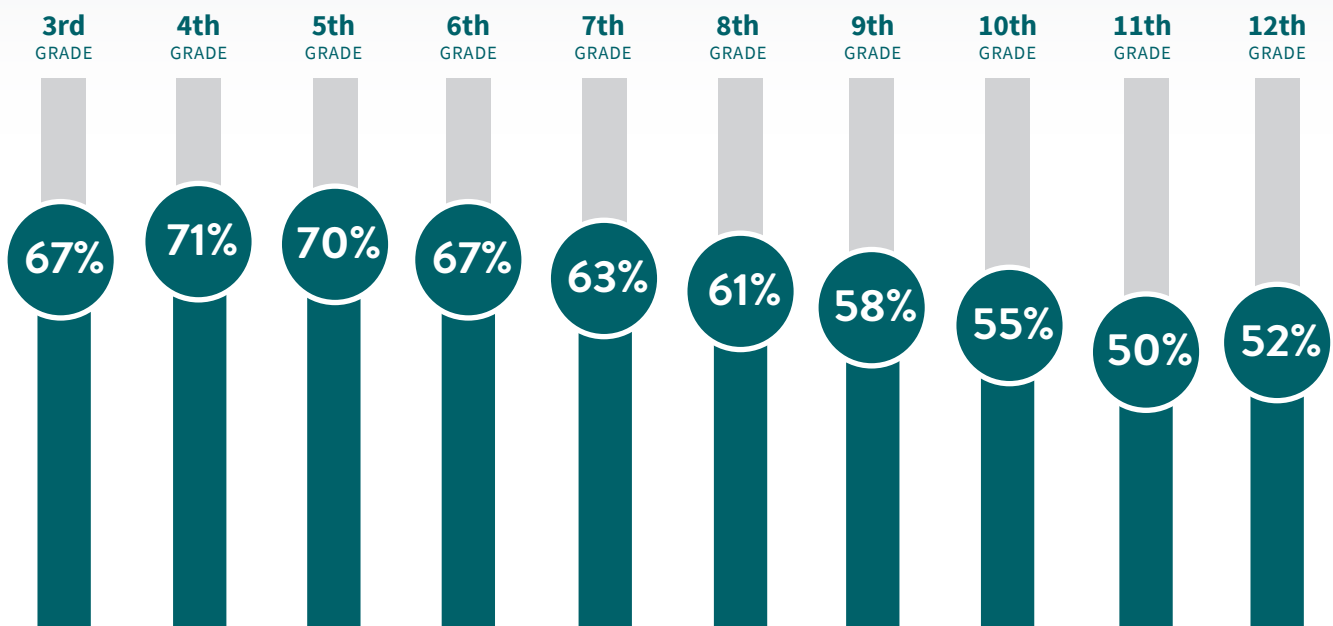


This is particularly significant because research indicates that adolescents face greater risks and challenges as they get older, and having supportive relationships with caring adults are associated with social/emotional competencies, positive mental health and better academic performance.

A key question is whether older students form such relationships in school, e.g., with teachers or other school staff.

HOW MANY STUDENTS REPORT HAVING A POSITIVE RELATIONSHIP WITH AN ADULT OUTSIDE HOME OR SCHOOL?

**These percentages are based on four questions about students' connection to adults in their neighborhoods.*



BIG IDEA #4:

AFTER-SCHOOL SUPPORT



For school-age youth, the time between the end of school to early evening (8 p.m.) is the period for exposure to the greatest risks to healthy development, such as a pregnancy, contracting sexually transmitted infections and exposure to violence. Nashville middle school students have access to structured programs and supports, but these decrease with age. Despite efforts to improve after-school options, large numbers of Nashville youth have limited supervision and support during the after-school period.

After school, **38% of students** stay at school (i.e. for afterschool activities) and/or go to aftercare, a neighborhood organization, or work.



In fact, only **24% of students** reported a frequent connection to resources, programs, or opportunities in their neighborhood.

13% of students share that they are by themselves after they leave school.



SUMMARY AND NEXT STEPS

These data offer a starting point for conversation on how Nashville can improve the lives of its public school children by addressing the challenges in the ever-changing landscape of its neighborhoods.

Project partners will work with the Nashville community to create opportunities to dive more deeply into the knowledge gleaned, to hear directly from youth about their experiences through focus groups, and to consider implications for the city's efforts to promote the safety and well-being of all young people.

The researchers will continue to examine how home and neighborhood environments impact learning and behavior to better understand how to help children succeed and how policymakers and other partners can support Nashville's most vulnerable citizens.

When complete, the dataset will provide a longitudinal database that will shed light on improvements the city can make to support its youngest citizens and their families.

These findings will be archived in two forms: a publicly available open access dataset with a limited number of variables; and a more extensive dataset with access restricted to researchers approved by the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research.

COLLABORATORS

Maury Nation, professor of human and organizational development (HOD) at Vanderbilt's Peabody College of human and organizational development, is principal investigator for the project.

Vanderbilt co-investigators:

Caroline Christopher
research assistant professor of teaching and learning and HOD

David Diehl
assistant professor of HOD

Marcy Singer-Gabella
professor of the practice of education

Paul W. Speer
professor and chair, HOD

Co-investigators at other institutions:

Allison Caruthers
senior research associate at the University of Oregon

Benjamin Fisher
assistant professor of criminal justice at the University of Louisville

David Padgett
associate professor of geography and director of the Geographic Information Sciences (GISc) Laboratory at Tennessee State University

Emily Tanner-Smith
associate professor and associate dean for research in the college of education at the University of Oregon

Adam Voight
director of the Center for Urban Education at Cleveland State University

“If you could build relationships in the community, the community would be better.”

—MNPS Student

FUNDING

*National Institute of Justice Award
#2016-CK-BX-K002*