



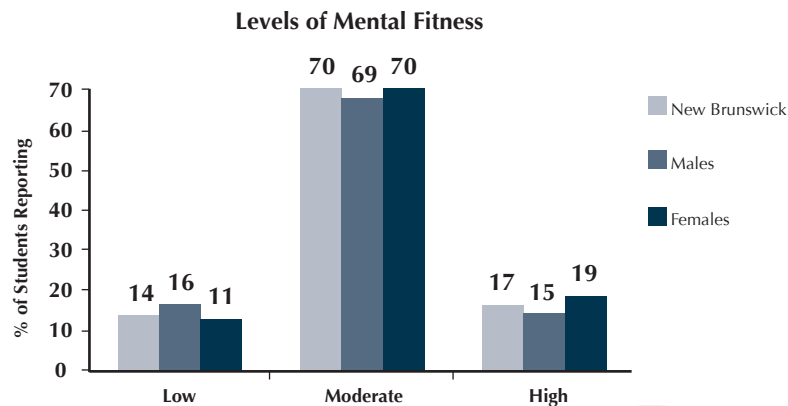
## MENTAL FITNESS

The New Brunswick Student Wellness Survey (NBSWS) is a provincial initiative of the Department of Wellness, Culture and Sport (WCS). Data collection and analysis is conducted by the Health and Education Research Group (University of New Brunswick and Université de Moncton) in collaboration with WCS, and in cooperation with the Department of Education. The purpose of the survey is to examine the health and wellness attitudes and behaviours of students in grades 6-12.

Mental fitness refers to our personal sense of psychological wellness (thoughts and feelings). We are more likely to be mentally fit when our needs for recognition (competency), 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.

### Levels of Mental Fitness

The following graph represents a combined measure of mental fitness among New Brunswick students, and provides the percentage of male and female students who reported respectively high, moderate and low levels of mental fitness.



When mental fitness needs are sufficiently met, people become more self-determined in adopting attitudes and behaviours that contribute to their own personal wellness and that of others. Evidence arising from the NBSWS 2006-2007 data (Province of New Brunswick, 2009) indicated that higher levels of mental fitness are associated with:

- Increases in reported pro-social attitudes and behaviours
- Decreases in reported oppositional attitudes and behaviours
- Lower probability of smoking
- Lower levels of susceptibility to smoking
- Increased probability of engaging in competitive physical activity
- Increases in students' sense of school connectedness

## Mental Fitness Needs

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

**Competency:** *"I have strengths and gifts that are recognized by myself and others."*

We need 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.

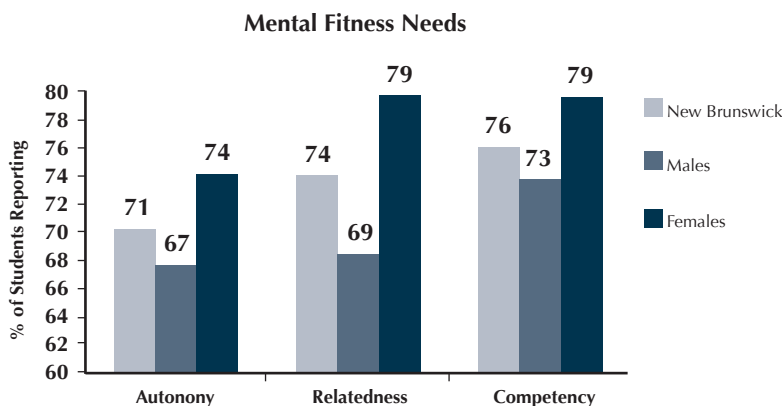
**Autonomy:** *"I am able to make choices about things that are important to me."*

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

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

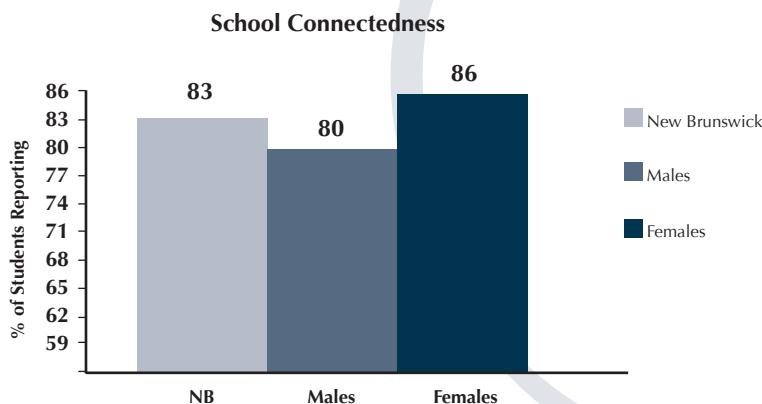
We need connection to and closeness with family, peers and other significant individuals. This need is met through interaction with others, our membership in groups, and the support and encouragement we receive from others.

Students were asked a series of questions related to each of the three mental fitness needs. The graph below shows the provincial results, including the differences seen in male and female students.



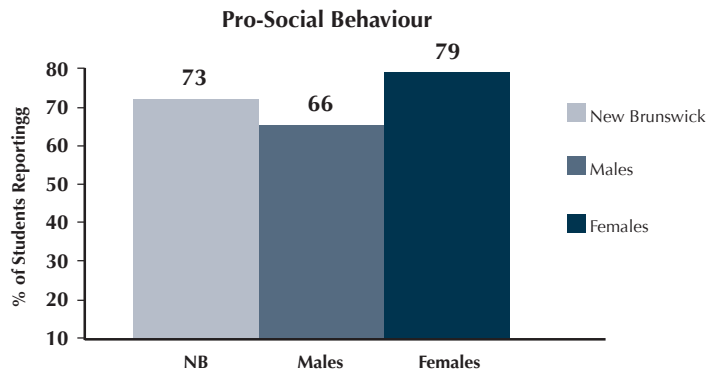
## School Connectedness

A sense of school connectedness can support students in making healthy choices. Students who feel an attachment to their school, and who consider their teachers to be supportive, are less likely to engage in unhealthy or high-risk behaviours.

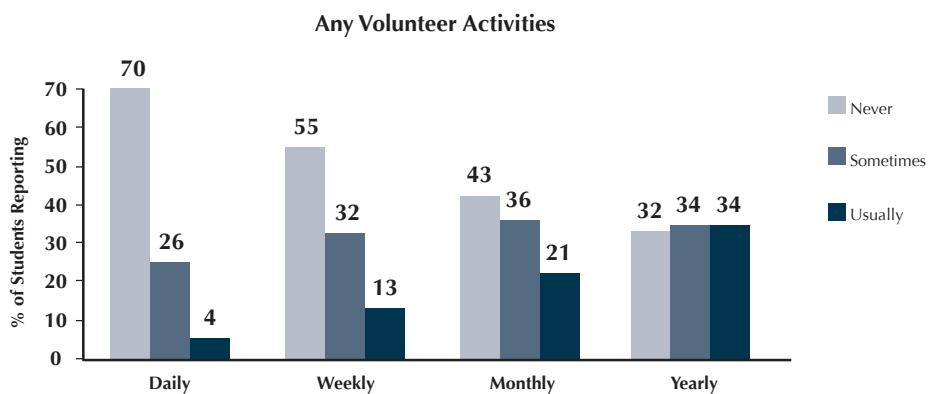


## Pro-Social Behaviours

Students with higher levels of mental fitness tend to report more pro-social behaviours such as helping people and sharing things without being asked. The graph below shows the outcomes reported by students.

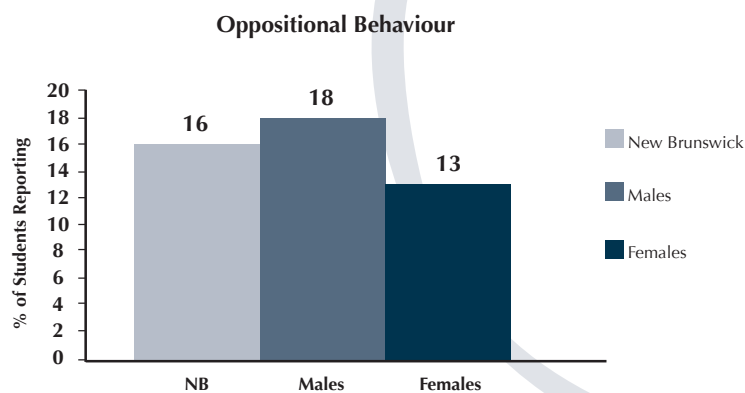


Students reported the frequency of their engagement in pro-social volunteering activities such as supporting a cause and fundraising, in both school and community contexts.

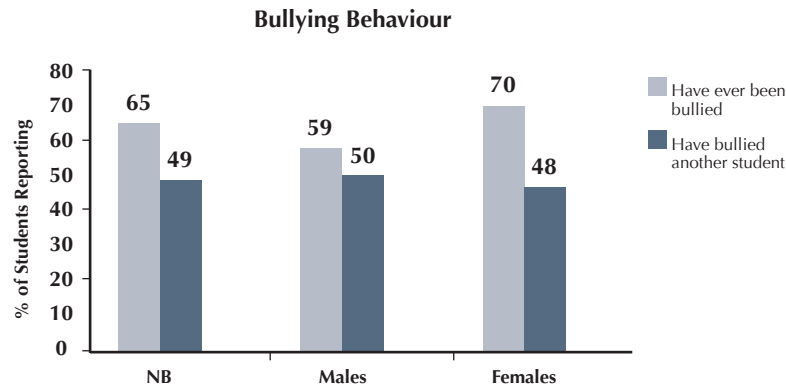


## Oppositional Behaviours

Oppositional behaviours in childhood have been linked to a variety of negative outcomes later in life, including risk of academic challenges and school drop-out; unhealthy social relationships; problem substance use; conflict with the law; and increased risk of mental health issues (van Lier, Muthén, van der Sar & Crijnen, 2004). Positive mental health approaches and practices have been correlated with healthy and enhanced physical and emotional developmental outcomes, and have been associated with decreases in oppositional behaviours (Juvonen, 2007). Students reported their oppositional behaviours, such as disobedience, defiance and fighting. The graph below shows the outcomes for these behaviours.



In Canada, 36% of young people have been a victim of bullying 1-2 times within a 2 month period and 20% of students report being both bullies and victims (World Health Organization, 2008). Children who are bullied may experience emotional and behavioural problems, including feeling hurt, embarrassed, lonely and depressed (Hawker & Boulton 2000; Sharp, Thompson, & Arora 2000). Among children who engage in bullying, studies show evidence of poorer academic skills and grades than the majority of their classmates, low empathy, distorted perceptions of the impact of aggression and its' role in social problem-solving, and increased risks for substance use and conflict with the law (Beran, Hughes & Lupart, 2008). The following graph reports the percentage of New Brunswick students who have ever been bullied, as well as those who have bullied another student.



### Comparison of NB Student Wellness Survey Results

The following provides a comparison of 2006-2007 and 2009-2010 outcomes of selected New Brunswick Wellness Strategy Indicators and Targets related to mental fitness.

Target	Wellness Indicator	2006-2007 Baseline	2009-2010 Results	Progress
↑	Youth who identify their own behaviour as pro-social	60%	73%	👍
↓	Youth who identify their own behaviour as oppositional	20%	16%	👍
↑	Youth who feel connected to their school	80%	83%	👍

### References

- Beran, T. N., Hughes, G. & Lupart, J. (2008). Attachment Quality and Bullying Behavior in School-Aged Youth. *Canadian Journal of School Psychology*, March 2010, 25: 5-18.
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The New Brunswick Student Wellness Survey Provincial Fact Sheets are available at [www.unbf.ca/education/herg](http://www.unbf.ca/education/herg) and [www.gnb.ca/wellness](http://www.gnb.ca/wellness)

- 127 schools participated in the 2009-2010 New Brunswick Student Wellness Survey.
- The survey data was collected from 21,078 students across New Brunswick.
- The students surveyed were in grades 6 to 12.