

Research has found that students who are overage for their grade level or who have been retained at least one time have lower self-esteem, poorer social and emotional skills, and more negative attitudes about school.<sup>1-4</sup> Compared to their peers, students who have been retained are significantly less likely to pursue postsecondary plans and are 2 to 11 times more likely to dropout of school.<sup>4</sup>

This brief examines the impact being overage has on substance use, bullying, and mental health, and as well as protective factors that can help reduce negative outcomes associated with being overage for grade.

## Overage for Grade Level

Traditionally, middle school students turn 11, 12, and 13 during their sixth, seventh, and eighth grade year.<sup>1</sup>

In this report, overage for grade is defined as students at least two years over the traditional age for their grade level.

## Demographics of Overage Middle School Students

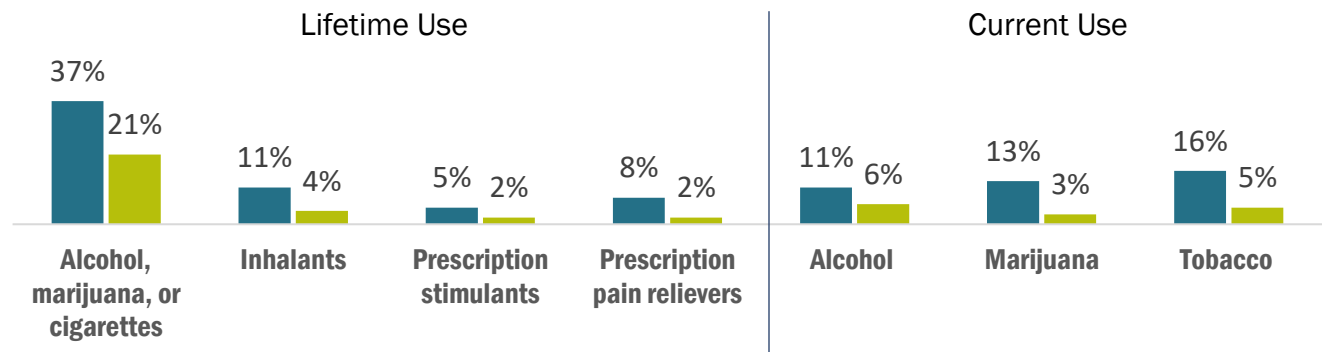
In 2017, 1.7% of middle school students were overage for their grade level.

Among middle school students, male students are twice as likely as female students to be overage. Students of color and students not born in the US are three times as likely as their white, non-Hispanic and US born peers to be overage. Schools with higher rates of Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL >75%) are two times as likely as schools with low rates of FRL (<25%) to have overage students.

## Substance Use and Overage Students

Overage middle school students are significantly more likely to have ever used an illicit substance or misused prescription drugs and are more likely to have used alcohol, marijuana, or tobacco products during the past 30 days.

**Overage students are more likely than their peers to use illicit substances.**



<sup>1</sup> Advocates for Children (2014). [Sixteen going on seventh grade. Overage students in NYC middle schools.](#)

<sup>2</sup> Henry, P., (2013) [Overage students in the classroom: teachers lived experiences.](#) Journal of Elementary and Secondary Education.

<sup>3</sup> RAND Education. (2009) [Retaining Students in Grade](#) A literature review of the effects of retention on students' academic and nonacademic outcomes.

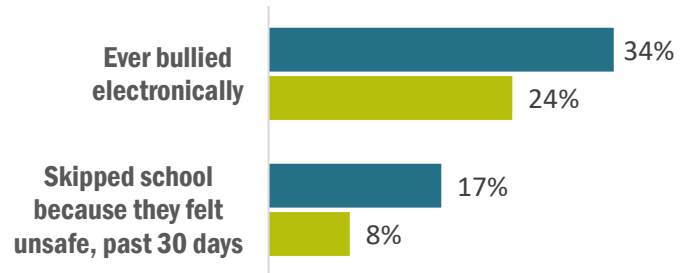
<sup>4</sup> National Education Association. [Preventing future dropouts.](#) An Advocacy and Action Guide for NEA State and Local Affiliates

# Overage Middle School Students

## Bullying and Overage Students

Overage students are as likely as their peers to have ever been bullied on school property, experienced bullying or bullied someone else during the previous 30 days, However, overage students are significantly more likely to have experienced electronic bullying in their lifetime (34% vs 24%). In addition, they are twice as likely to skip school because they feel unsafe at or on their way to or from school (17% vs 8%).

**Overage students are significantly more likely to experience electronic bullying and to skip school because they feel unsafe compared to their peers.**



## Mental Health and Overage Students

**1 in 4 students who are overage for grade have seriously thought about killing themselves.**

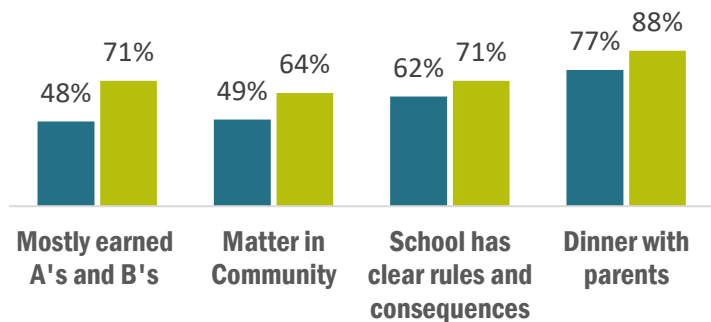
Nearly one in three overage students (28%) felt so sad or hopeless for a least two weeks during the past year that they stopped doing some usual activities, significantly more than their peers (19%). Overage students are also more likely to report having serious thoughts about (24% vs 18%) or attempting to kill themselves (11% vs 6%).

## Protective Factors and Overage Students

Students who are overage are significantly less likely to report receiving mostly A's and B's in school during the previous year. Overage students are significantly less likely than their peers to feel like they matter to people in their community, eat dinner with at least one parent on four or more nights during the previous week and believe their school has clear rules and consequences.

Overage students are as likely as on-track students to report having at least one teacher or other adult in their school that they could talk to if they had a problem (73% vs 76%).

**Overage students experience fewer protective factors compared to their peers.**



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