The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children

Parent, peer and school connections may help reduce suicide risk for young Australians

Supplementary materials

April 2026

Study measures

In this study, LSAC data from Waves 6 (*N* = 3,321), 7 (*N* = 2,916) and 8 (*N* = 2,649) were used. Data for Wave 6 were collected in 2014, Wave 7 in 2016 and Wave 8 in 2018.

The following section includes details of all measures used in the analysis, except for suicidal thoughts and behaviour (ideation, planning or attempt) that is reported in the main report. Further information on the study design, questionnaires, statistical considerations, data files and other data resources is available via the LSAC website (growingupinaustralia.gov.au). Additionally, the rationale for including the all validated scales in LSAC can be found in the LSAC rationale report aifs.gov.au/growing-australia/data-use-documentation/rationale-report.

All the modifiable factors examined in this study were collected via computer-assisted self-interviewing (CASI). It's a survey mode where respondents read and answer questions directly on a computer or tablet, rather than speaking to an interviewer (who is present to only to assist, clarify or answer respondent queries if needed) or filling out a paper form. While CASI reduces social desirability bias, it may still lead to overreporting of socially acceptable behaviours or underreporting of undesirable ones.

When asking sensitive questions, we provided information about useful support services and the opportunity to opt out of any topics participants did not wish to answer. We also ensured that interviewers were informed and prepared to respond to any signs of distress during the interview.

Modifiable factors: Family, peers and school

Modifiable factors refer to characteristics or behaviours that can be changed to modify their risk on an outcome. At age 16–17 years, young people were asked about their trust and communication with parents, parental involvement in their/adolescent's life, adolescent–peer relationships using Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA), school participation and school belonging using the Psychological Sense of School Membership Scale (PSSM). Detailed descriptions of all the modifiable factors (family, peers and school) are provided below.

Trust and communication with parents

At age 16–17 (in 2016) the LSAC K cohort respondents were provided with the following 8 statements about their relationship with their parents as part of CASI.

1. My parents accept me as I am.
2. My parents understand me.
3. I trust my parents.

4. I can count on my parents to help me when I have a problem.
5. My parents pay attention to me.
6. I talk with my parents when I have a problem.
7. If my parents know that something is bothering me, they ask me about it.
8. I share my thoughts and feelings with my parents.

These statements were drawn from the People in My Life measure (Ridenour, Greenberg, & Cook, 2006). For each statement the respondents were asked to choose the best answer from 1 = Almost never or never true; 2 = Sometimes true; 3 = Often true; 4 = Almost always or always true. The responses to the 8 items were summed to create a total score that ranged from 8 to 32, with higher scores indicating increased frequency of the application of each statement to the study child.

Total scores were divided as a binary measure where '0%–75%' scores were considered as having 'low to moderate' and '>75%–100%' scores were considered as having 'high' trust and communication with parents.

Parental involvement in adolescent's life

At age 16–17 years (Wave 7, 2016), the LSAC K cohort respondents were asked a series of questions about parents' knowledge of child activities, reflecting parental involvement in their life, as part of CASI. These included:

'How much do your parents know about:

a. who your friends are?
b. how you spend your money?
c. what you do with your free time?
d. where you are when you are not at home?'

Response options included: 1 = Parents don't know; 2 = Parents know a little; 3 = Parents know a lot; 4 = I'm not sure. Responses to items a and d were combined and were recorded as 0 = 'Parents don't know/'m not sure', 1 = 'Parents know a little' and 2 = 'Parents know a lot'. The mean was calculated from the recoded responses to the 4 items and responses were categorised as follows: min/0.99 = 0 as 'Low parental involvement'; 1/1.99 = 1 as 'Middle parental involvement'; 2 = 2 as 'High parental involvement'.

Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA)

At age 16–17 years (Wave 7; 2016) LSAC K cohort respondents' support from friends was examined using an adapted version of the Peer Attachment Communication and Trust Sub-Scales from the Inventory of Peer and Parental Attachment (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987; Gullone & Robinson, 2005) as part of CASI. Using the response scale, 1 = Almost always true; 2 = Often true; 3 = Sometimes true; 4 = Seldom true and 5 = Almost never true, respondents were instructed that 'The next questions are about how you get on with friends. For each statement, choose the number that best describes you and your friends.' Items included:

1. My friends sense when I'm upset about something.
2. My friends encourage me to talk about my difficulties.
3. I tell my friends about my problems and troubles.
4. If my friends know something is bothering me, they ask me about it.

5. My friends listen to what I say.
6. I feel my friends are good friends.
7. I trust my friends.
8. My friends respect my feelings.

The responses to the 8 items were summed to create a 2 subscale, IPPA Trust Scale and IPPA Communication Scale where higher scores indicated that the respondent considers the statement to be less true of his/her peers. Two subscale scores were standardised and categorised as follows: (min/0.999 = 1 as 'High') (1.0/max = 0 as 'Low/moderate')

School participation

At age 16–17 years (Wave 7, 2016), the LSAC K cohort respondents were asked a series of questions about school absenteeism in the past 6 months as part of CASI. Using the response options 1 = Never; 2 = 1–2 times; 3 = 3–6 times; 4 = 7–9 times; 5 = 10 or more times, respondents were asked 'How many times did the following things happen to you in the last 6 months?

1. I was late for school.
2. I cut or skipped classes.
3. I was absent from school without parental permission.
4. I was absent from school with parental permission.
5. I got into trouble for not following school rules.'

The responses to these 5 items were summed to create a mean score, which were then standardised and the responses categorised as follows: (min/0.999 = 1 as 'High') (1.0/max = 0 as 'Low/moderate').

Psychological Sense of School Membership Scale (PSSM)

At age 16–17 years (Wave 7, 2016), the respondents' perceptions of sense of school belonging were measured using the Psychological Sense of School Membership Scale (PSSM) (Goodenow, 1993) as part of CASI. The 12 items were:

1. People here notice when I'm good at something.
2. It is hard for people like me to be accepted here.
3. Other students in this school take my opinions seriously.
4. Most teachers at this school are interested in me.
5. Sometimes I don't feel as if I belong here.
6. There's at least one teacher or other adult in this school I can talk to if I have a problem.
7. Teachers here are not interested in people like me.
8. I am included in lots of activities at this school.

9. I can really be myself at this school.
10. The teachers here respect me.
11. I wish I were in a different school.
12. Other students here like me the way I am.

The response options include 1 = Not at all true; 2 = Not very true; 3 = Neither not at all true nor completely true; 4 = Somewhat true; 5 = Completely true. The scores are summed to attain a total score where negatively worded items were reverse-coded (i.e. items 2, 5, 7 and 11). The total scores were divided by the number of items in the scale. The average scores were rounded to the nearest whole number. Finally, the average scores were categorised as 1/3 = 0 as 'Low to Moderate') and (4/5 = 1 as 'High')

Moderating factor: Past experience of suicidal thoughts and behaviours

Moderating factors are variables added to the model that can change the strength, direction or existence of the relationship between the modifiable factors and the outcome. Prior suicidal thoughts and behaviours are well-established predictors of future suicidal behaviours, albeit with mixed evidence on their strength (Ribeiro et al., 2016). While the available evidence indicates the stronger relationship is with attempts specifically, the relatively small numbers in our sample required us to include the full set of thoughts, plans and attempts as the moderating factor.

If an LSAC participant reported having experienced suicide ideation, planning or an attempt at age 14–15 and/or 16–17 years, they were classified as having a prior history of suicidal thoughts and behaviours at 14–17 years. All the analyses were conducted separately for those with and without prior suicidal history.

Confounding factors

Confounding factors are included where the available evidence indicates they may distort the findings. Based on previous studies (Daraganova, 2016; Swami et al., 2025), gender, household composition, language background, SEIFA and area remoteness were considered as confounding factors related to both the outcome and modifiable factors (see Figure S1).

Gender

Participants' gender was reported by parents or caregivers at age 4–5 years either as 'female' or 'male'.

Single-parent household

The number and type of parents in the study child's household at the time of interview indicates family composition. For this study, household composition was coded as 'Not a lone-parent household' or 'lone-parent household'.

Language other than English at home

At ages 14–15, 16–17 and 18–19 years, a parent or guardian indicated whether or not the study child spoke a language other than English at home.

Socio-Economic Index for Areas (SEIFA)

The SEIFA indicator used was the Index of Relative Socio-Economic Advantage and Disadvantage (IRSAD). This indicator is created by the Australian Bureau of Statistics from social and economic information in the Census of Population and Housing. It ranks geographic areas across Australia in terms of their relative socio-economic advantage and disadvantage. We used IRSAD and area-based deciles (SA2) to identify which areas fall into higher or lower deciles. The measure was categorised as follows:

- Q1 (Decile 1 or 2) = most disadvantaged area
- Q2 (Decile 3 or 4)
- Q3 (Decile 5 or 6)
- Q4 (Decile 7 or 8)
- Q5 (Decile 9 or 10) = most advantaged area.

Remoteness area of residence

The remoteness area indicator used was the Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) remoteness structure that divides Australia into 5 classes of remoteness on the basis of a measure of relative access to services. Categories for outer regional, remote and very remote were combined in a single category 'Outer regional/remote'.

Design limitations of the study

The LSAC data used in this study covers the period 2014 (Wave 6), 2016 (Wave 7) and 2018 (Wave 8). It's important to acknowledge that, since 2018, the impact of digital technologies on young people's social lives and connections may have changed.

The study child's suicidal thoughts and behaviours before the age of 14–15 years were not collected. Hence, we do not have suicidal history prior to 14 years.

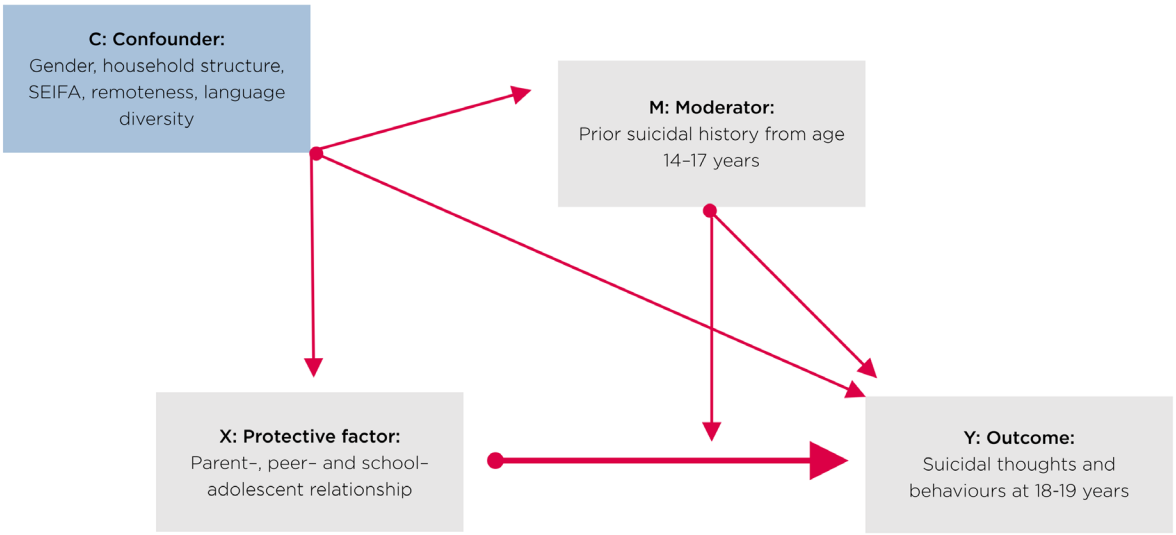
The time interval between the longitudinal data collections was 2 years. A shorter follow-up period may provide more clinically useful data, as an individual's suicidal thoughts and behaviours could vary greatly within a short time period.

When LSAC participants were aged 14–15 and 16–17 years, their primary parent's consent was required for their child to report on suicidal thoughts and behaviours. No parental consent was required at 18–19 years. Comparing prevalence between Waves 6, 7 and 8 could be challenging if bias was introduced by parental consent. However, there were <5 parents who did not provide consent for their child (all aged 14–15 years).

Regression analysis

Based on the existing literature we developed a Directed Acyclic Graph (DAG, Figure S1), which explains the relationship between family–, peer– and school–adolescent relationship, suicidal thoughts and behaviours, and the influence of moderating and confounding factors on the relationship.

Figure S1: Relationship between family–, peer– and school–adolescent relationships, suicidal thoughts and behaviours and demographic characteristics



Key relationships:

X ⟶ Y: Primary causal path

C → X, C → M, and C → Y: C is a confounder

M → X → Y: Early suicidal thoughts and behaviours influence how family, peer and school factors affect later outcomes.

Based on the DAG, we investigated how family, peer and school factors in the previous wave, at age 16–17 years, were associated with later experience of suicidal thoughts and behaviours at age 18–19 years, adjusting for their prior suicidal history, using multivariate binary logistic regression with robust error variances. Specifically, we fitted 3 models:

- estimating the overall effect of parent, peer and school level factors at age 16–17 (each separately) on suicidal thoughts and behaviours reported at age 18–19, adjusting for prior suicidal history (measured at 14–17 years).
- splitting the data into 2 groups based on their prior suicidal history and then estimating the effect of parent, peer and school level factors at age 16–17 (each separately) on the probability of having suicidal thoughts and behaviours at age 18–19, separately for each group.

Tables S3 shows the odds ratios for models 1, 2 and 3 and Table S4 shows the marginal probabilities using the fitted models.

Statistical significance

In statistical analysis of survey data, results are considered statistically significant when we can reject the null hypothesis that there is no true difference or association. A *p* value indicates how likely it is to observe results as extreme as those found in the study if there were truly no effect; smaller *p* values suggest that such results would be unlikely to occur by chance alone. Historically, a threshold of $p < 0.05$ has commonly been used to indicate statistical significance.

Recent discussion highlighted that using a strict cutoff such as $p < 0.05$ to decide whether a finding 'matters' can be misleading. This approach turns results into a simple yes/no decision and ignores how large or meaningful an effect is and how uncertain the estimate might be. Instead, the focus should be

on looking at the size and direction of the effect, with confidence intervals, and whether the finding is important or useful in practice or for policy, rather than relying only on whether a result crosses an arbitrary threshold.

Taking the modern best practice in statistics into consideration, in this report we have used a more nuanced approach such as effect size, direction and width of a 95% confidence interval, or practical significance, in interpreting the results.

Characteristics of young people by experienced suicidal thoughts and behaviours at age 18–19 years

Table S1 shows the key socio-demographic characteristics of young people conditional on their experience of any form of suicidal thoughts and behaviours in the past 12 months at 18–19 years.

Table S1: Demographic characteristics of young people who reported suicidal thoughts and behaviours in past 12 months at age 18–19

Young person's characteristics	No suicidal thoughts and behaviours at age 18–19 years *N* (%)	Suicidal thoughts and behaviours at age 18–19 years *N* (%)
At age 16–17 years		
Sex at birth		
Female	1,106 (84.1)	209 (15.9)
Male	1,161 (87.0)	173 (13.0)
Single-parent household		
No	1,702 (86.6)	264 (13.4)
Yes	357 (83.4)	71 (16.6)
Main language other than English spoken at home		
No	2,032 (85.6)	342 (14.4)
Yes	227 (86.0)	37 (14.0)
Relative Socio-Economic Advantage and Disadvantage (SEIFA)		
Quintile 1 (Lowest 20%)	285 (85.1)	50 (14.9)
Quintile 2	382 (85.3)	66 (14.7)
Quintile3	406 (83.4)	81 (16.6)
Quintile 4	456 (85.4)	78 (14.6)
Quintile 5 (Highest 20%)	557 (89.1)	68 (10.9)
Remoteness area (ABS)		
Major city	1,337 (85.3)	231 (14.7)
Inner regional	466 (86.5)	73 (13.5)
Outer regional or remote	284 (87.9)	39 (12.1)

Source: LSAC K cohort, Waves 6, 7 and 8. Unweighted proportions

Table S2: Experience any form suicidal thoughts and behaviours in past 12 months at age 18–19 years by parent, peer and school level factors

Young person's characteristics and behaviours	No suicidal thoughts and behaviours at ages 14–17 years *N* (%)	Suicidal thoughts and behaviours at ages 14–17 years *N* (%)
Suicidal thoughts and behaviours at age 14–15 and/or 16–17 years		
No	1,642 (92.4)	136 (7.6)
Yes	304 (62.4)	191 (38.6)
Exposures at 16–17 years		
Parent Adolescent Communication Scale (PACS) trust/communication		
Low to medium	1,344 (83.3)	269 (16.7)
High	680 (91.9)	60 (8.1)
Parental involvement in child's life		
Low	113 (72.4)	43 (27.6)
Middle	967 (84.5)	177 (15.5)
High	944 (89.7)	109 (10.4)
Peer trust (based on IPPA)		
Low to medium	302 (82.1)	66 (17.9)
High	1,719 (86.6)	265 (13.4)
Peer communication (based on IPPA)		
Low to medium	258 (79.9)	65 (20.1)
High	1,764 (86.9)	266 (13.1)
Study child's school participation		
Low to medium	243 (77.6)	70 (22.4)
High	1,772 (87.3)	259 (12.8)
Psychological Sense of School Membership Scale (PSSM)		
Low to medium	248 (70.9)	102 (29.1)
High	1,540 (89.7)	176 (10.3)

Source: LSAC K cohort, Waves 6, 7 and 8. Unweighted proportions

Table S3: Parent, peer and school level factors by suicidal thoughts and behaviours at ages 14–17 years

Young person's characteristics and behaviours	No suicidal thoughts and behaviours at ages 14–17 years	Suicidal thoughts and behaviours at ages 14–17 years
Suicidal thoughts and behaviours at age 18–19 years		
No	1,642 (92.4)	304 (61.4)
Yes	136 (7.6)	191 (38.6)
Exposures at 16–17 years		
Parent Adolescent Communication Scale (PACS) trust/communication		
Low to moderate	1,347 (62.3)	505 (84.6)
High	815 (37.7)	92 (15.4)
Parental involvement in child's life		
Low	110 (5.1)	78 (13.1)
Middle	1,000 (46.3)	346 (58.0)
High	1,052 (48.7)	173 (29.0)

Young person's characteristics and behaviours	No suicidal thoughts and behaviours at ages 14–17 years	Suicidal thoughts and behaviours at ages 14–17 years
Peer trust (based on IPPA)		
Low to moderate	298 (13.8)	131 (21.9)
High	1,859 (86.2)	468 (78.1)
Peer communication (based on IPPA)		
Low to moderate	274 (12.7)	122 (20.4)
High	1,885 (87.3)	477 (79.6)
Study child's school participation		
Low to moderate	255 (11.8)	134 (22.5)
High	1,896 (88.2)	462 (77.5)
Psychological Sense of School Membership Scale (PSSM)		
Low to moderate	259 (13.5)	171 (35.4)
High	1,654 (86.5)	312 (64.60
Confounders at age 16–17 years		
Sex at birth		
Female	1,018 (47.0)	392 (58.3)
Male	1,147 (53.0)	280 (41.7)
Single-parent household		
No	1,793 (83.6)	459 (76.3)
Yes	353 (16.4)	143 (23.7)
Main language other than English spoken at home		
No	1,947 (90.2)	612 (91.9)
Yes	211 (9.8)	54 (8.1)
Relative Socio-economic Advantage and Disadvantage (SEIFA)		
Quintile 1 (Lowest 20%)	291 (13.5)	99 (16.1)
Quintile 2	403 (18.6)	128 (20.8)
Quintile3	436 (20.2)	137 (22.2)
Quintile 4	474 (21.9)	122 (19.8)
Quintile 5 (Highest 20%)	560 (25.9)	130 (21.1)
Remoteness Area (ABS)		
Major city	1,385 (64.0)	408 (66.2)
Inner regional	480 (22.2)	145 (23.5)
Outer regional or remote	300 (13.9)	63 (10.2)

Source: LSAC K cohort, Waves 6, 7 and 8. Unweighted proportions

Table S4: Association between parent, peer and school level factors and suicidal thoughts and behaviours at age 18–19 years

	Suicidal thoughts and behaviour at age 18–19 years		
Modifiable factors at age 16–17 years	**Model 1 (All participants) Odds ratio [95% CI]**	**Model 2 (Young people without prior suicidal history at ages 14-17) Odds ratio [95% CI]**	**Model 3 (Young people with prior suicidal history at ages 14-17) Odds ratio [95% CI]**
High trust and communication with parents (ref. = Low-medium)	0.686	0.620	0.846
	[0.480, 0.980)	[0.402, 0.956]	[0.457, 1.565]
Total, *N*	2,219	1,760	459
Parental involvement in adolescent's life (ref. = Low)			
Middle parental involvement	0.523	0.490	0.543
	[0.310, 0.882)	[0.227, 1.058]	[0.275, 1.071]
High parental involvement	0.526	0.429	0.664
	[0.305, 0.910)	[0.197, 0.934]	[0.319, 1.382]
Total, *N*	2,219	1,760	459
High peer trust (ref. = Low-medium)	0.811	1,120	0.629
	[0.564, 1.167)	[0.610, 2.058]	[0.378, 1.047]
Total, *N*	2,217	1,757	460
High peer communication (ref. = low-medium)	0.632	0.740	0.543
	[0.435, 0.918)	[0.416, 1.317]	[0.319, 0.924]
Total, *N*	2,218	1,758	460
High school participation (ref. = low-medium)	0.648	1.011	0.459
	[0.455, 0.924)	[0.555, 1.842]	[0.277, 0.762]
Total, *N*	2,211	1,752	459
High sense of school belonging (ref. = Low-medium)	0.461	0.384	0.526
	[0.323, 0.660)	[0.232, 0.637]	[0.320, 0.862]
Total, *N*	1,964	1,578	386

Notes:

Model 1: Association between modifiable factors and outcome adjusted for prior experience of suicidal thoughts and behaviours at ages 14–17 and confounding factors.

Model 2: Association between modifiable factors and outcome adjusted for confounding factors among those with no prior experience of suicidal thoughts and behaviours at ages 14–17.

Model 3: Association between modifiable factors and outcome adjusted for confounding factors among those with prior experience of suicidal thoughts and behaviours at ages 14–17.

All estimates are weighted.

Table S5: Marginal probabilities from the regression models on association between parent, peer and school level factors and suicidal thoughts and behaviours at age 18–19 years

Modifiable factors at age 16–17 years	Suicidal thoughts and behaviour at age 18–19 years		
	Model 1 (All participants)	Model 2 (Young people without prior suicidal history at ages 14–17)	Model 3 (Young people with prior suicidal history at ages 14–17)
	Margins [95% CI]	Margins [95% CI]	Margins [95% CI]
Trust and communication with parents			
Low/medium	16.0 [14.0, 18.0]	9.5 [7.4, 11.5]	38.7 [33.4, 44.0]
High	12.0 [9.0, 15.0]	6.1 [4.0, 8.2]	35.0 [22.4, 47.5]
Difference in margins (dy/dx): Low/medium vs High	4.0 [0.4, 7.6]	3.4 [0.5, 6.3]	3.7 [-9.9, 17.4]
Total, *N*	2,219	1,760	459
Parental involvement in adolescent's life			
Low	22.5 [15.3, 29.7]	15.5 [6.3, 24.7]	49.4 [34.7, 64.2]
Middle	14.3 [12.0, 16.4]	8.3 [6.1, 10.5]	35.2 [28.9, 41.4]
High	14.3 [11.7,16.9]	7.3 [5.2, 9.5]	39.7 [30.6, 48.8]
Difference in margins (dy/dx): Low vs Middle	8.2 [0.8, 15.8]	7.2 [-2.3, 16.7]	14.3 [-1.8, 30.4]
Difference in margins (dy/dx): Low vs High	8.2 [0.4, 16.0]	8.2 [-1.3, 17.7]	9.7 [-7.7, 27.2]
Total, *N*	2,219	1,760	459
Trust with peers			
Low/medium	17.0 [13.1, 20.9]	7.6 [3.6, 11.5]	46.6 [36.0, 57.2]
High	14.6 12.8, 16.4]	8.4 [6.7, 10.1]	35.9 [30.4, 41.3]
Difference in margins (dy/dx): Low/medium vs High	2.4 [-1.9, 6.7]	0.8 [-5.1, 3.5]	10.7 [-1.2, 22.7]
Total, *N*	2,217	1,757	460
Communication with peers			
Low/medium	19.7 [15.1, 24.2]	10.4 [5.5, 15.3]	49.7 [38.4, 61.0]
High	14.1 [12.4, 15.9]	7.9 [6.3, 9.5]	35.4 [30.1, 40.8]
Difference in margins (dy/dx): Low/medium vs High	5.5 [0.6, 10.4]	2.5 [-2.7, 7.7]	14.3 [1.7, 26.9]
Total, *N*	2,218	1,758	460
School participation			
Low/medium	19.4 [15.2, 23.6]	8.2 [4.1, 12.3]	52.7 [42.1, 63.3]
High	14.2 [12.4, 16.0]	8.3 [6.6, 9.9]	34.5 [29.1, 39.8]
Difference in margins (dy/dx): Low/medium vs High	5.2 [0.6, 9.8]	0.08 [-4.6, 4.4]	18.2 [6.3, 30.2]
Total, *N*	2,211	1,752	459
Sense of school belonging			
Low/medium	22.1 [17.5, 26.6]	16.4 [10.6, 22.2]	47.6 [38.4, 56.8]
High	12.5 [10.5, 14.4]	7.0 [5.3, 8.7]	32.8 [26.3, 39.2]
Difference in margins (dy/dx): Low/medium vs High	9.6 [4.6, 14.6]	9.3 [3.2, 15.4]	14.8 [3.4, 26.2]
Total, *N*	1,964	1,578	386

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