

# CHILD WELLNESS



Children are considered sacred gifts from the Creator, and their health and happiness reflect the well-being of the community.<sup>1,2</sup> Childhood is an important time in life when First Nations girls establish social and familial connections, are shaped by their environments, and nourish their bodies in a way that impacts their future health outcomes.<sup>3</sup> BC First Nations believe there is a collective responsibility to care for, educate, and mentor their children.<sup>4</sup> However, the racist systems, institutions, and policies of settler colonialism have attempted to break the vital networks of support around First Nations girls, and disrupted the rituals, cultural practices, and passage of teachings.<sup>4,5</sup> Racist, sexist, and misogynist policies and practices across the health, education, and child welfare systems create barriers for First Nations girls, but they have learned from their matriarchs, mothers, aunts, and grandmothers to be resilient and to assert their rights to health and wellness.

This chapter provides detailed charts for findings presented in the Child Wellness chapter of the report *Sacred and Strong: Upholding our Matriarchal Roles*. The chapter focuses on the health and wellness of First Nations girls. It demonstrates how young First Nations children flourish when connected to culture and community, and it speaks to the various support systems needed to ensure healthy development throughout their childhood years. Please refer to the main report—[\*Sacred and Strong: Upholding our Matriarchal Roles\*](#)—for further interpretation of the data presented here.

# HEALTHY, SELF-DETERMINING CHILDREN & COMMUNITIES – ROOTS OF WELLNESS

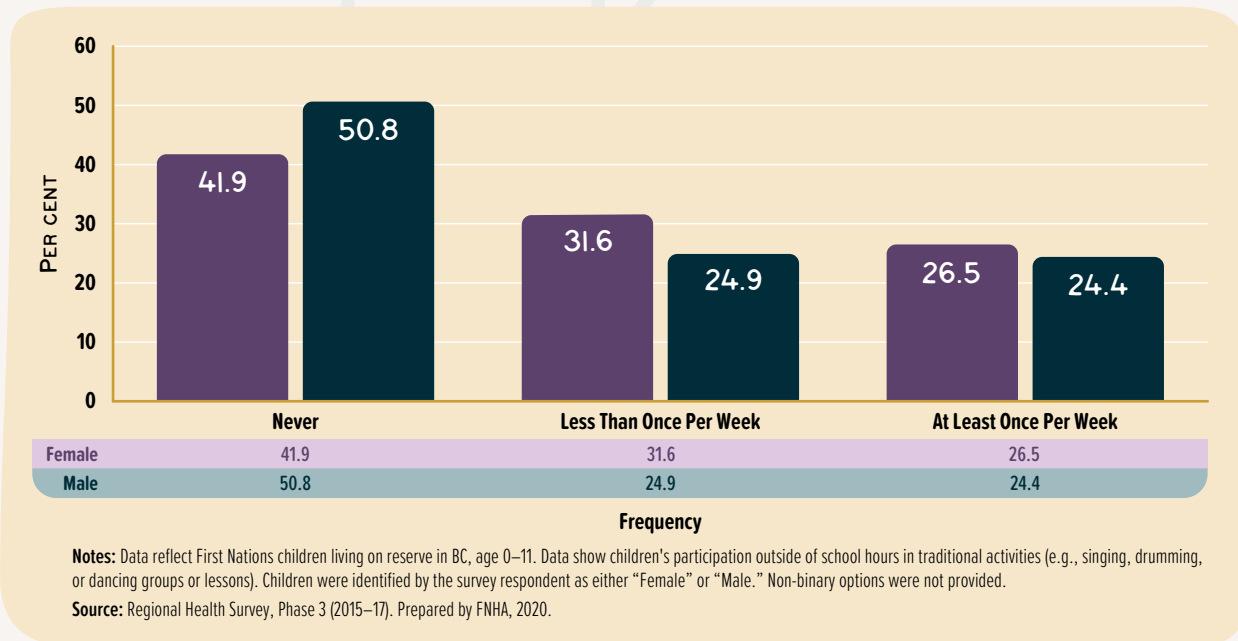


Childhood is a pivotal time when the roots of wellness are established. Developing strong connections to the land, community, and culture during the early years forms a foundation for health and well-being throughout life. Families and communities play a vital role in providing First Nations girls with unique teachings and ceremonies to empower them with knowledge about ways of being in the world, how to respect and care for themselves, as well as their roles and responsibilities in the community.<sup>6</sup>

## PARTICIPATION IN CULTURAL EVENTS

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FIG 2.1 PERCENTAGE WHO REPORTED PARTICIPATION IN CULTURAL EVENTS IN THEIR LOCAL COMMUNITY, FIRST NATIONS CHILDREN, AGE 0–11, BY SEX, BC, 2015–17

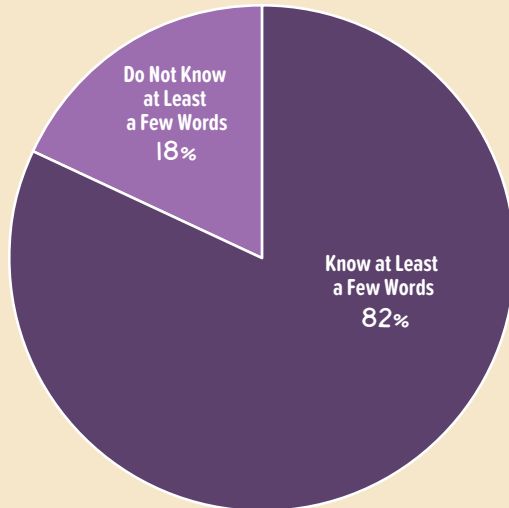


From Regional Health Survey, Phase 3 (RHS3; 2015–17), more than half (58.1%) of First Nations girls age 0–11 participated in cultural activities including singing, drumming, or dancing: 26.5% participated at least once per week, and 31.6% participated less than once per week. First Nations girls were more likely than First Nations boys in the same age group to participate in cultural activities less than once per week (31.6% vs. 24.9%) and at least once per week (26.5% vs. 24.4%). Participation in cultural activities, rituals, and ceremonies grounds First Nations girls in their culture at a young age.<sup>7</sup> Cultural activities range from beading, drumming, dancing, and the potlatch, to being out on the land gathering and preparing food, to learning their language from their Elders.<sup>7</sup>

## FIRST NATIONS LANGUAGE

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FIG 2.2 FIRST NATIONS GIRLS WHO REPORTED KNOWING AT LEAST A FEW WORDS OF THEIR NATION'S LANGUAGE, AGE 0–11, BC, 2015–17



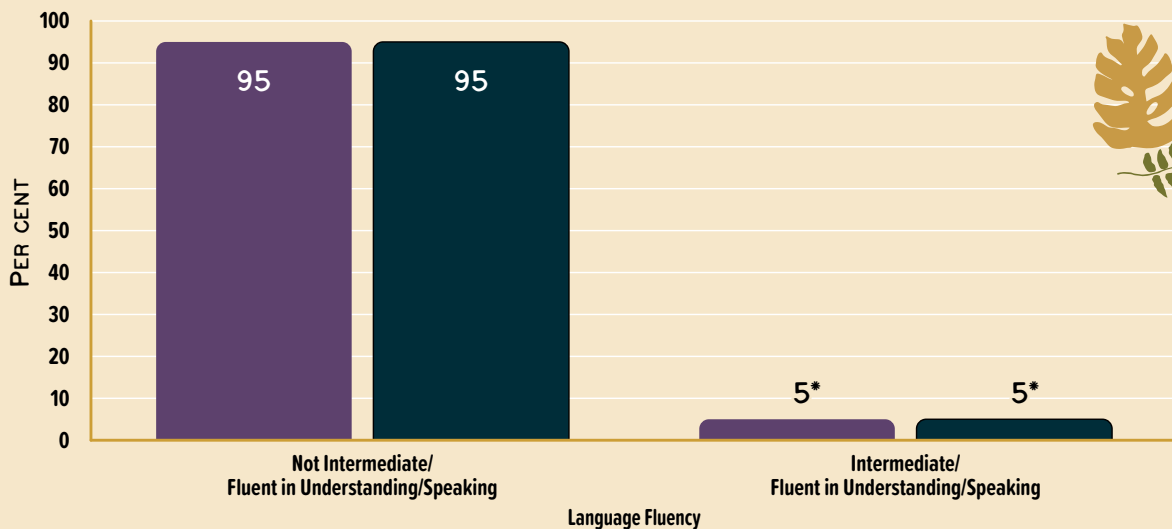
**Notes:** Data reflect First Nations girls living on reserve in BC, age 0–11, who reported being able to speak at least a few words of their Nation's language. Children were identified by the survey respondent as "Female." Non-binary options were not provided.

**Source:** Regional Health Survey, Phase 3 (2015–17). Prepared by FNHA, 2020.

An increasing number of First Nations people in BC are learning their traditional language, the majority being children and youth under the age of 25.<sup>8</sup> From RHS3 (2015–17), 82% of First Nations girls age 0–11 knew at least a few words of their Nation's language. Some First Nations individuals take part in language nests and immersion programs provided by communities and spend about three hours a day immersed in their traditional language.<sup>8</sup>

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FIG 2.3 LANGUAGE FLUENCY AMONG FIRST NATIONS CHILDREN WHO REPORTED KNOWING AT LEAST A FEW WORDS OF THEIR NATION'S LANGUAGE, AGE 0–11, BY SEX, BC, 2015–17



**Notes:** "\*" means the percentage should be interpreted with caution due to a high coefficient of variation ( $0.333 \geq CV \geq 0.166$ ). Data reflect First Nations children living on reserve in BC, age 0–11, who reported being able to speak at least a few words of their Nation's language. Children were identified by the survey respondent as "Female" or "Male." Non-binary options were not provided.

**Source:** Regional Health Survey, Phase 3 (2015–17). Prepared by FNHA, 2020.

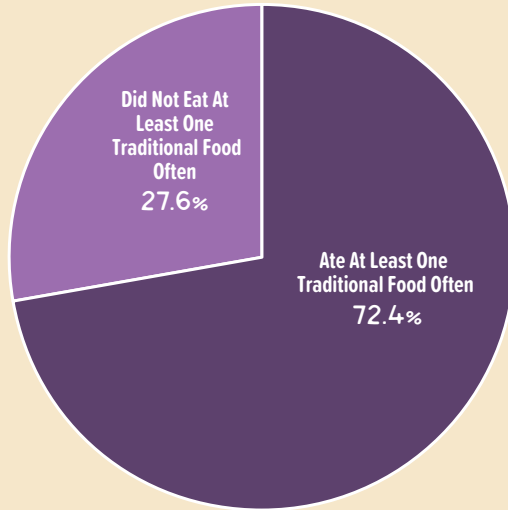
From RHS3 (2015–17), of the First Nations girls age 0–11 who knew at least a few words of their Nation's language, 5% were intermediate or fluent in speaking *and* understanding the language.



## FIRST NATIONS FOODS

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FIG 2.4 FIRST NATIONS GIRLS WHO REPORTED EATING TRADITIONAL FOODS (NOT INCLUDING BANNOCK) "OFTEN" IN THE PAST YEAR, AGE 0–11, BC, 2015–17



**Notes:** Data reflect First Nations girls living on reserve in BC, age 0–11, who reported eating at least one type of traditional food (not including bannock) “often” in the past 12 months. Children were identified by the survey respondent as “Female.” Non-binary options were not provided.

**Source:** Regional Health Survey, Phase 3 (2015–17). Prepared by FNHA, 2020.

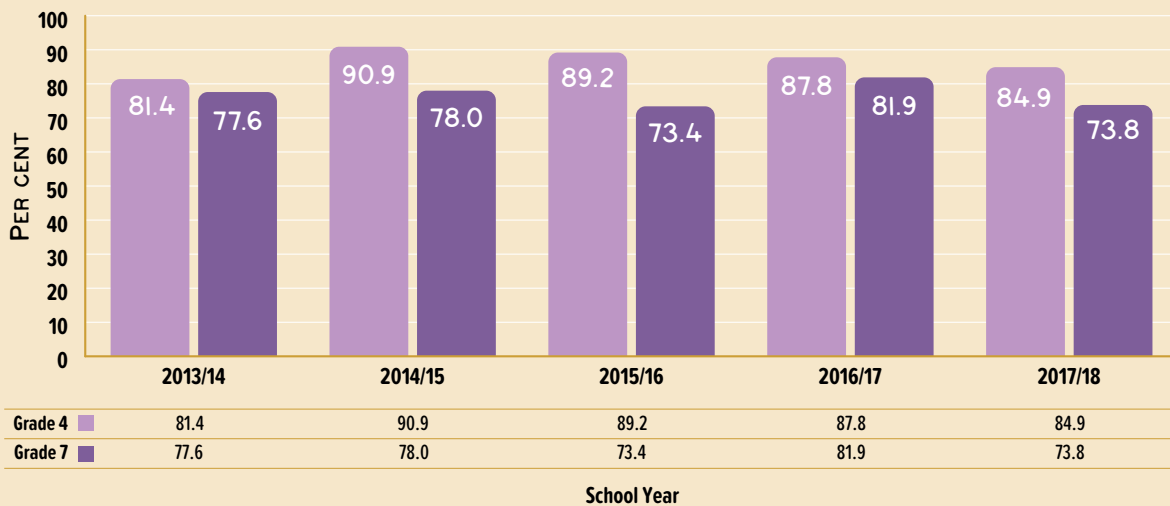
From RHS3 (2015–17), 72.4% of First Nations girls age 0–11 ate at least one traditional food (other than bannock) “often” in the past year. Land-based education initiatives, such as the Aboriginal Head Start On Reserve program,<sup>9</sup> promote access to traditional foods by allowing First Nations children to take part in hunting, gathering, and food preparation activities.



## CARING ADULTS

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FIG 2.5 PERCENTAGE OF INDIGENOUS GIRLS WHO REPORTED “MEDIUM” OR “HIGH” SCORES ON THE ADULT RELATIONSHIPS ASSET, BY GRADE, BC, 2013/14 TO 2017/18



**Notes:** Data reflect responses from students in grades 4 and 7, attending school in BC, who self-identified as Indigenous and “Female.” Non-binary options were not provided. “High” scores reflect that on average, responses were “Pretty Much True” or “Very Much True,” and “Medium” scores reflect that on average, responses were “A Little True” or a mix of positive and negative responses.

**Source:** Human Early Learning Partnership, Middle Years Development Instrument, 2013/14 to 2017/18. Prepared by FNHA.

Many of the charts in this chapter use data from the [Early Years Development Instrument \(EDI\)](#) or the [Middle Years Development Instrument \(MDI\)](#). These are surveys conducted by the [Human Early Learning Partnership](#) research network at the University of British Columbia.

To see how EDI and MDI data in this report compare with trends in the general population, please refer to the [EDI BC 2019 Provincial Report](#) and [MDI Data Highlights and Trends 2019–20](#).

For more information on these surveys, please refer to the “Data Sources and Methodology” chapter of this technical supplement. Interpretation guides are also available:

[EDI Interpretation Toolkit](#)

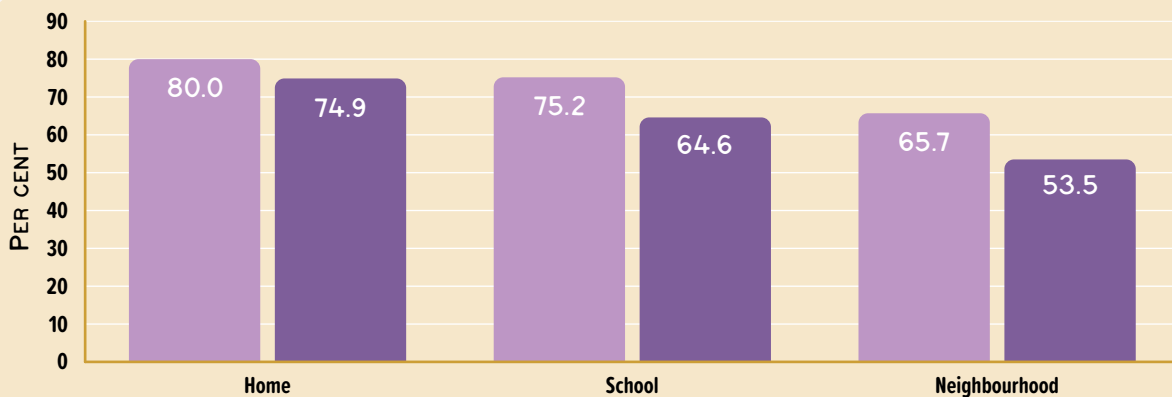
[MDI Companion Guide](#)

Having strong connections to adults in the community allows First Nations girls to feel a sense of belonging. These attachments are critical to the growth and development of First Nations girls and can have significant positive impacts on their lives.<sup>5</sup> For each school year from 2013/14 through 2017/18, data from the Middle Years Development Instrument (MDI) showed that Indigenous girls in grade 4 were more likely to report average responses of “a little true” or higher on the Adult Relationships asset than Indigenous girls in grade 7. The Adult Relationships asset includes three measures of adult relationships—in the school, home, and community—and includes statements such as “At my school there is an adult who really cares about me,” and “In my home there is a parent or another adult who believes I will be a success.”



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FIG 2.6 PERCENTAGE OF INDIGENOUS GIRLS WHO REPORTED THAT THEY HAD SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH CARING ADULTS, BY GRADE AND LOCATION, BC, 2017/18



Grade	Home	School	Neighbourhood
Grade 4	80.0	75.2	65.7
Grade 7	74.9	64.6	53.5

Location

**Notes:** Data reflect responses from students in grades 4 and 7, attending school in BC, who self-identified as Indigenous and “Female.” Non-binary options were not provided. “High” scores reflect that on average, responses were “Agree a Little” or “Agree a Lot” on a five-point scale.

**Source:** Human Early Learning Partnership, Middle Years Development Instrument, 2017/18. Prepared by FNHA.



Data from the 2017/18 MDI showed that a greater proportion of Indigenous girls in grade 4 than grade 7 had “high” scores in the Connectedness dimension, on statements like “At my school there is an adult who really cares about me,” and “In my neighbourhood/community (not from your school or family), there is an adult who believes that I will be a success.”

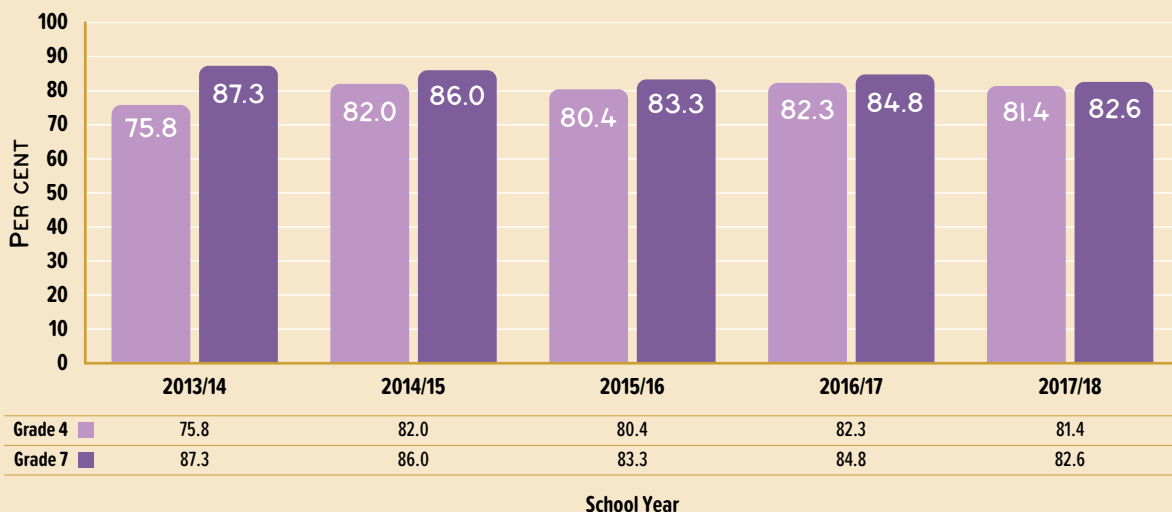




## MEALS AT HOME WITH ADULTS

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FIG 2.7 PERCENTAGE OF INDIGENOUS GIRLS WHO REPORTED HAVING MEALS AT HOME WITH ADULTS AT LEAST THREE TIMES PER WEEK, BY GRADE, BC, 2013/14 TO 2017/18



**Notes:** Data reflect responses from students in grades 4 and 7, attending school in BC, who self-identified as Indigenous and “Female.” Non-binary options were not provided. Data reflect the proportion of respondents who reported eating meals at home either “3–4 Times a Week” or “5 or More Times a Week.”

**Source:** Human Early Learning Partnership, Middle Years Development Instrument, 2013/14 to 2017/18. Prepared by FNHA, 2020.



For each school year from 2013/14 through 2017/18, MDI data showed that a higher proportion of Indigenous girls in grade 7 than grade 4 reported having had meals with adults at home at least three times per week. Having meals at home can strengthen family bonds, as it provides time for parents and caregivers to connect and provide support to the children. Children who regularly eat meals with their family have higher self-esteem, hold a more positive view of the future, and are more likely to possess social resistance skills used to combat peer pressure.<sup>10</sup>



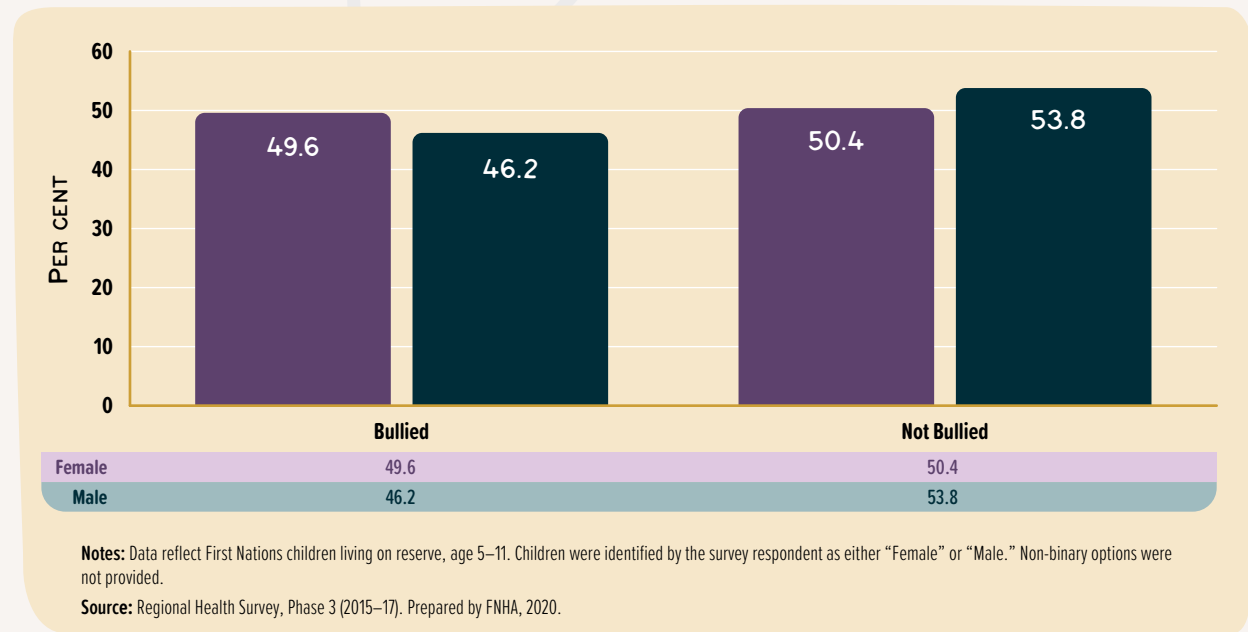
# SUPPORTIVE SYSTEMS

Children are the heart of First Nations families, communities, and Nations. Childhood is a formative time for First Nations girls, and it is the community’s responsibility to provide them with guidance, support, and cultural practices that enable them to flourish. However, many of the anti-Indigenous, racist policies and practices that First Nations girls interact with in the education, health care, and housing systems remain deeply rooted in settler colonialism.<sup>11,12</sup> Elders and matriarchs lead the way forward, continue to assert their inherent rights, and advocate for the dismantling of systems that undermine the health and wellness of their children, promoting supportive systems that enable First Nations girls to thrive and live up to their potential.

## BULLYING

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**FIG 2.8 PERCENTAGE OF FIRST NATIONS CHILDREN WHO REPORTED BEING BULLIED OR NOT BULLIED IN THE PAST YEAR, AGE 5–11, BY SEX, BC, 2015–17**



From RHS3 (2015–17), a higher percentage of First Nations girls age 5–11 were bullied in the past year compared to First Nations boys (49.6% vs. 46.2%). First Nations girls have incredible strength that has been learned and inherited from previous generations of matriarchs. Unfortunately, many continue to be subjected to emotional, physical, spiritual, and psychological traumas due to persistent settler colonial oppression and targeted anti-Indigenous racism, which is often compounded by sexism and misogyny.<sup>13</sup>



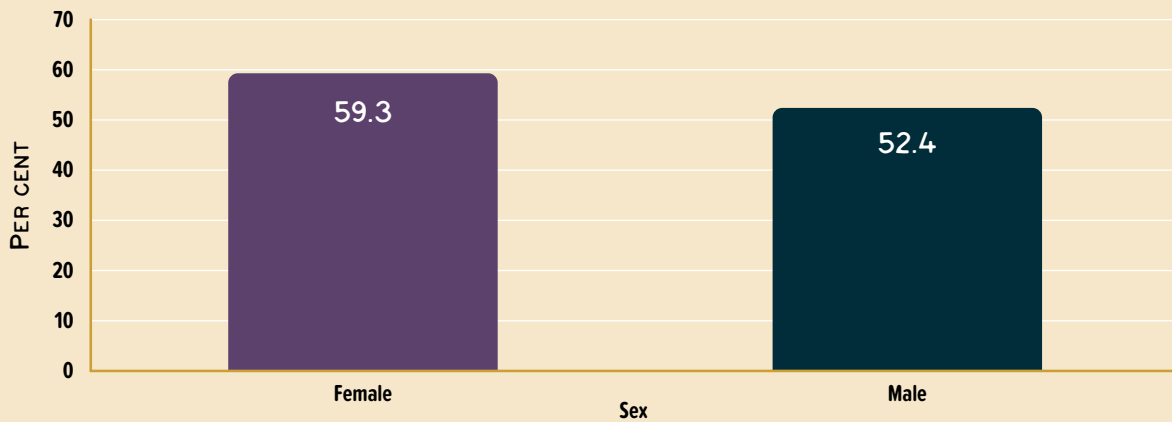




## ABORIGINAL HEAD START ON RESERVE

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FIG 2.9 PERCENTAGE OF FIRST NATIONS CHILDREN WHO HAD EVER ATTENDED AN ABORIGINAL HEAD START ON RESERVE PROGRAM, AGE 0–11, BY SEX, BC, 2015–17



**Notes:** Data reflect First Nations children living on reserve, age 0–11. Children were identified by the survey respondent as either “Female” or “Male.” Non-binary options were not provided.

**Source:** Regional Health Survey, Phase 3 (2015–17). Prepared by FNHA, 2020.

From RHS3 (2015–17), a higher percentage of First Nations girls age 0–11 had attended—at some point—an Aboriginal Head Start On Reserve program, compared to First Nations boys (59.3% vs. 52.4%). First Nations cultures view learning as a wholistic, experiential process embedded not only in the mainstream classroom setting, but in all aspects of life. First Nations children are exposed to teachings grounded in land, culture, and language.<sup>14</sup>

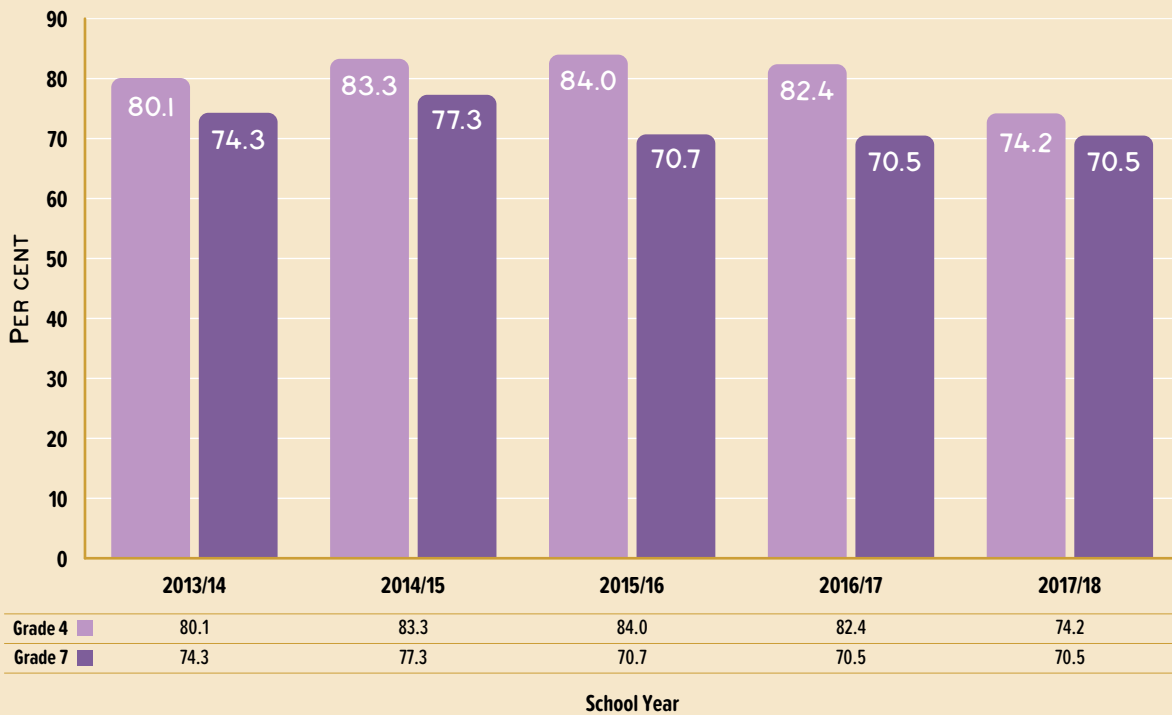




## ACADEMIC SELF-CONCEPT

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FIG 2.10 PERCENTAGE OF INDIGENOUS GIRLS WHO HAD “HIGH” SCORES ON THE ACADEMIC SELF-CONCEPT MEASURE, BY GRADE, BC, 2013/14 TO 2017/18



**Notes:** Data reflect responses from students in grades 4 and 7, attending school in BC, who self-identified as Indigenous and “Female.” Non-binary options were not provided. “High” level of confidence reflects children whose average responses were “Agree a Little” or “Agree a Lot” on a five-point scale, across three elements.

**Source:** Human Early Learning Partnership, Middle Years Development Instrument, 2013/14 to 2017/18. Prepared by FNHA, 2020.



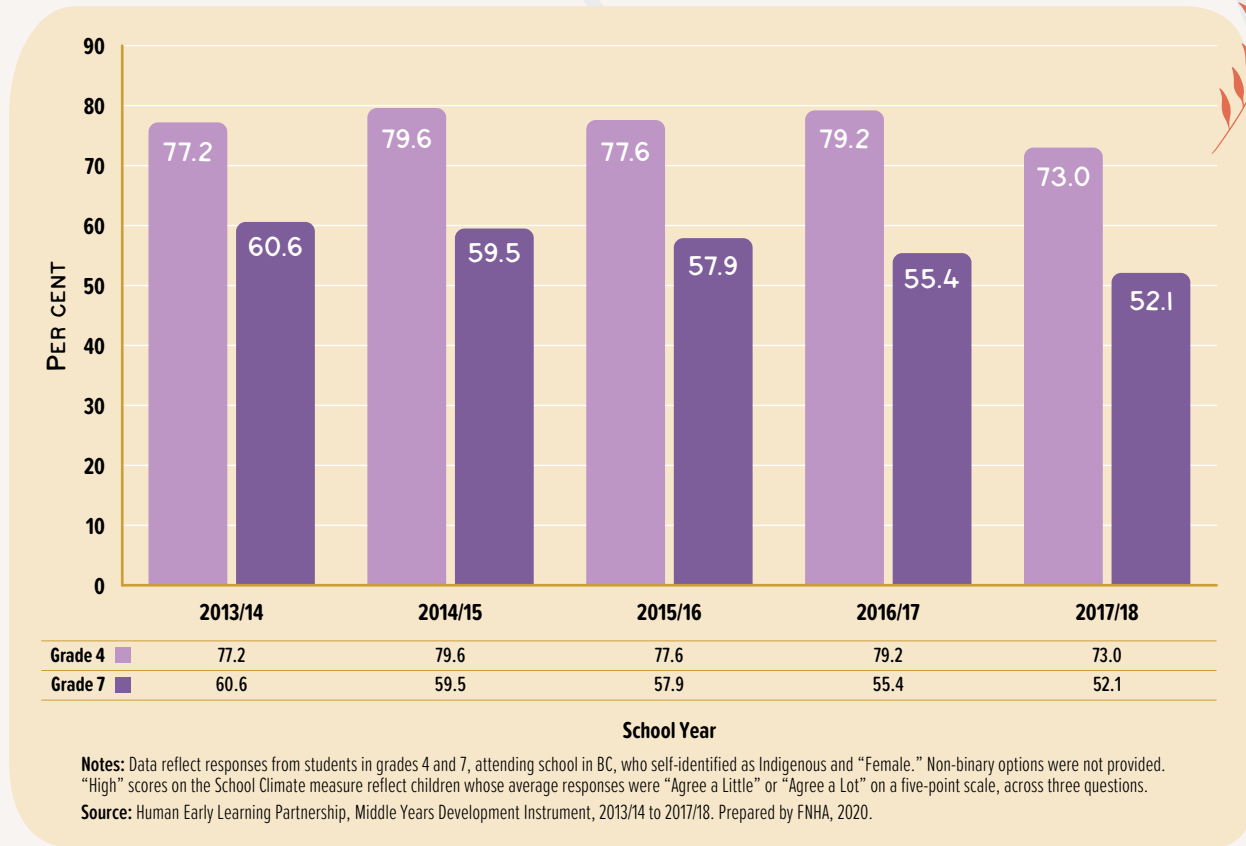
In each school year from 2013/14 through 2017/18, MDI data showed that a greater proportion of Indigenous girls in grade 4 than grade 7 had “high” scores on the Academic Self-concept measure, on statements like “I am certain I can learn the skills taught in school this year,” and “If I have enough time, I can do a good job on all my school work.” The development of emotional, physical, intellectual, and spiritual capacities in the first six years of life is crucial to the development of a child’s identity and sense of self, as this is when the foundation for self-esteem and pride in community and culture is established.<sup>15</sup> It is important to ensure that First Nations children have opportunities in the mainstream settler colonial education system to learn about their cultures and history prior to contact, as well as to restore First Nations self-determination in education.<sup>16</sup>



## SCHOOL SUPPORT AND BELONGING

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FIG 2.II PERCENTAGE OF INDIGENOUS GIRLS WHO HAD “HIGH” SCORES ON THE SCHOOL CLIMATE MEASURE, BY GRADE, BC, 2013/14 TO 2017/18



Children are best able to learn in environments where they feel safe, cared for, and supported.<sup>17</sup> For each school year from 2013/14 through 2017/18, MDI data showed that a greater proportion of Indigenous girls in grade 4 than grade 7 had “high” scores on the School Climate measure of the School Experiences dimension, on statements like “Teachers and students treat each other with respect in this school,” and “People care about each other in this school.” This difference in reported “high” scores between Indigenous girls in grade 4 and grade 7 is concerning, and further information is needed to understand the root causes. The necessary work ahead to ensure that Indigenous girls continue to feel safe, accepted, and cared for throughout their school years will require committed partners working with intention and accountability.

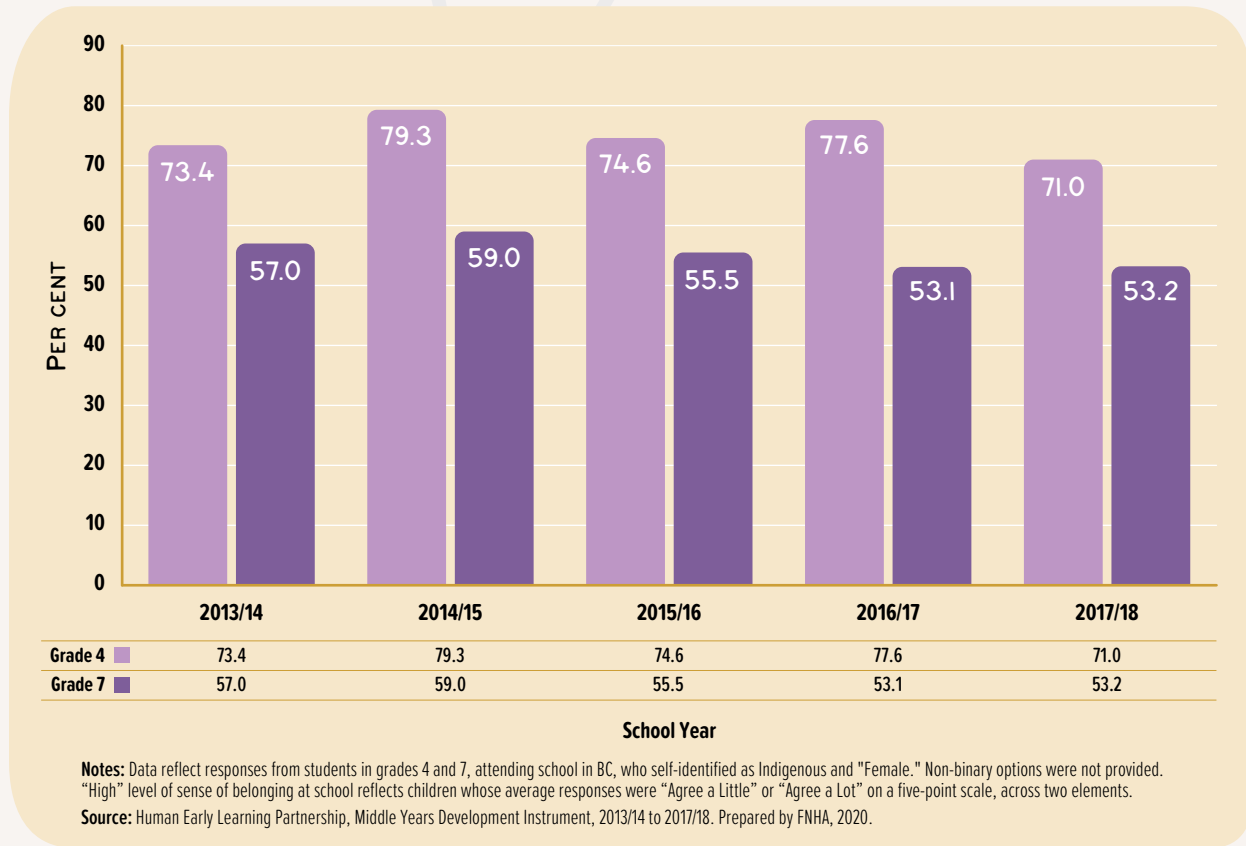




## STRONG SENSE OF BELONGING AT SCHOOL

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FIG 2.12 PERCENTAGE OF INDIGENOUS GIRLS WHO REPORTED FEELING A STRONG SENSE OF BELONGING AT SCHOOL, BY GRADE, BC, 2013/14 TO 2017/18



For each school year from 2013/14 through 2017/18, MDI data showed that a greater proportion of Indigenous girls in grade 4 than grade 7 had “high” scores on the School Belonging measure of the School Experiences dimension, on statements like “I feel like I belong in this school,” and “I feel like I am important to this school.” This trend is consistent across school years and is of significant concern. More work is needed to understand why results for school belonging are consistently lower for Indigenous girls in grade 7 than in grade 4. It is especially important to address this trend early on, as school belonging is associated with better academic motivation and competence, higher self-esteem, lower emotional distress, and the likelihood of completing high school.<sup>18</sup>

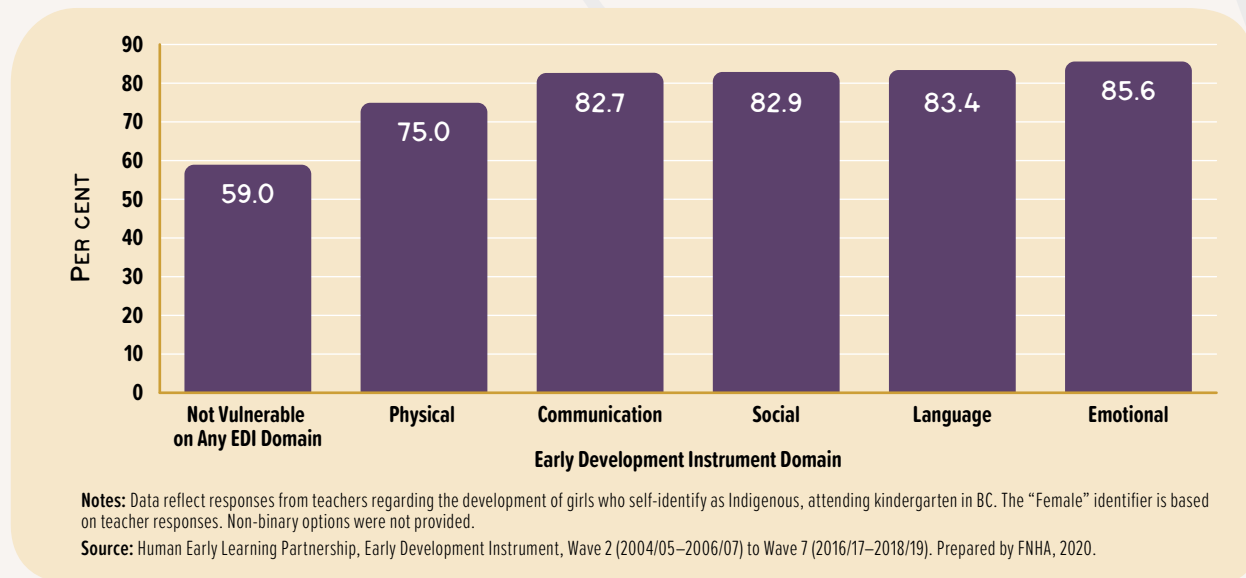




## STARTING SCHOOL

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FIG 2.13 PERCENTAGE OF INDIGENOUS GIRLS WITH NO VULNERABILITIES ACROSS THE EARLY DEVELOPMENT INSTRUMENT, AGE 5–6, BY DOMAIN, BC, WAVE 2 (2004/05–2006/07) TO WAVE 7 (2016/17–2018/19)



For each of the Early Development Instrument (EDI) domains—Physical, Communication, Social, Language, and Emotional—across Wave 2 (2004/05–2006/07) through Wave 7 (2016/17–2018/19), the majority of Indigenous girls age 5–6 were reported to have no vulnerabilities. In addition, 59.0% were reported to have no vulnerabilities across any of the EDI domains.

## AFFORDING BALANCED MEALS

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FIG 2.14 PERCENTAGE OF FIRST NATIONS HOUSEHOLDS THAT COULD NOT AFFORD TO EAT A BALANCED MEAL IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS, BC, 2008–10 AND 2015–17



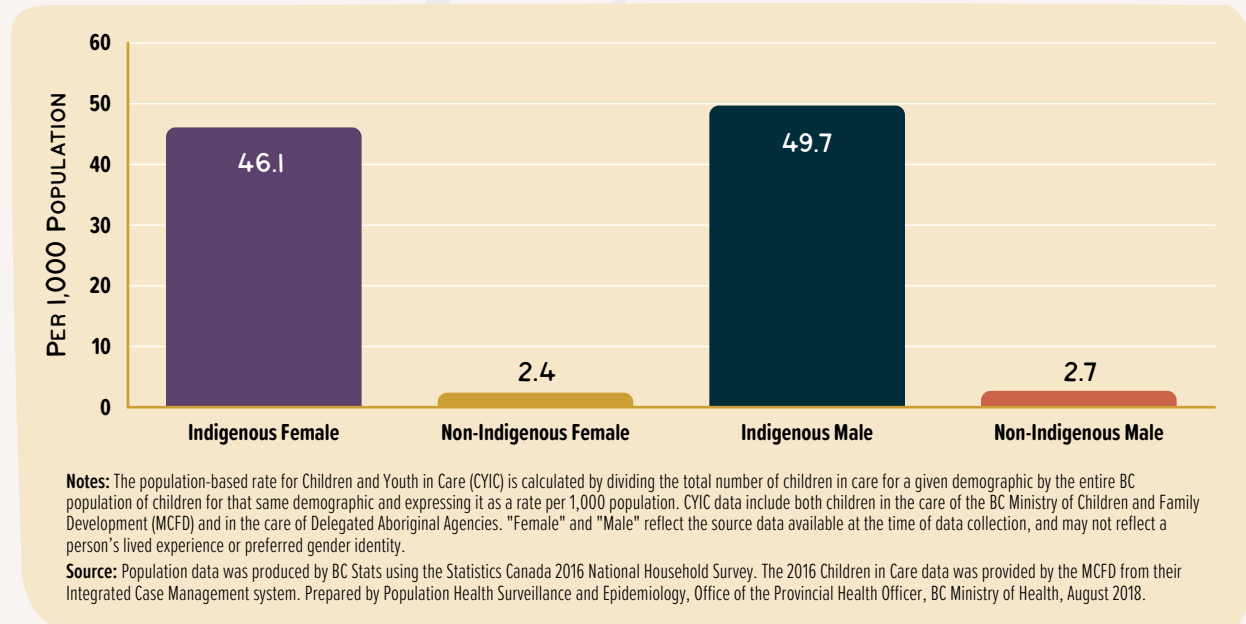
From RHS2 (2008–10) to RHS3 (2015–17), the proportion of First Nations households reporting they could not afford to eat a balanced meal in the past 12 months decreased 3.2 percentage points, from 46.7% to 43.5%. The historical and ongoing impacts of settler colonialism, as well as racist policies and systems that result in manufactured poverty and inequitable service provision, have economically disadvantaged First Nations people.<sup>19</sup> These inequities particularly impact First Nations children, who experience higher rates of poverty than any other population in Canada.<sup>20</sup>



## GOVERNMENT CARE

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FIG 2.15 RATE OF INDIGENOUS AND NON-INDIGENOUS CHILDREN IN CARE, AGE 0–9, BY SEX, BC, 2016



Data from the BC Ministry of Children and Family Development showed that Indigenous girls age 0–9 (46.1 per 1,000) were over 19 times more likely to be in government care than non-Indigenous girls (2.4 per 1,000).

“There is a tendency to codify poverty as neglect, which is why so many Indigenous children end up in care ... it’s not that their families don’t care about them – it’s because they didn’t have and couldn’t access the resources needed to care for them. Therefore, child welfare codifies discrimination and colonization as personal or family deficits instead of tackling the underlying problems.”

- Dr. Cindy Blackstock, Gitksan First Nation  
- *Sacred and Strong: Upholding our Matriarchal Roles* (p.37)

The *Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families* (also called *Bill C-92*) came into force on January 1, 2020 and recognizes Indigenous peoples’ jurisdiction over child and family services as part of their right to self-governance. The Act also establishes principles for governing child welfare to ensure that when determining the best interests of an Indigenous child, primary consideration is given to the child’s physical, emotional and psychological safety, security and well-being. The Act emphasizes the need for the system to shift from apprehension to prevention, with priority given to services that promote preventative care to support families. It also establishes protocols to preserve a child’s connection to their family, community, and culture.<sup>21</sup>

- *Sacred and Strong: Upholding our Matriarchal Roles* (p.37)

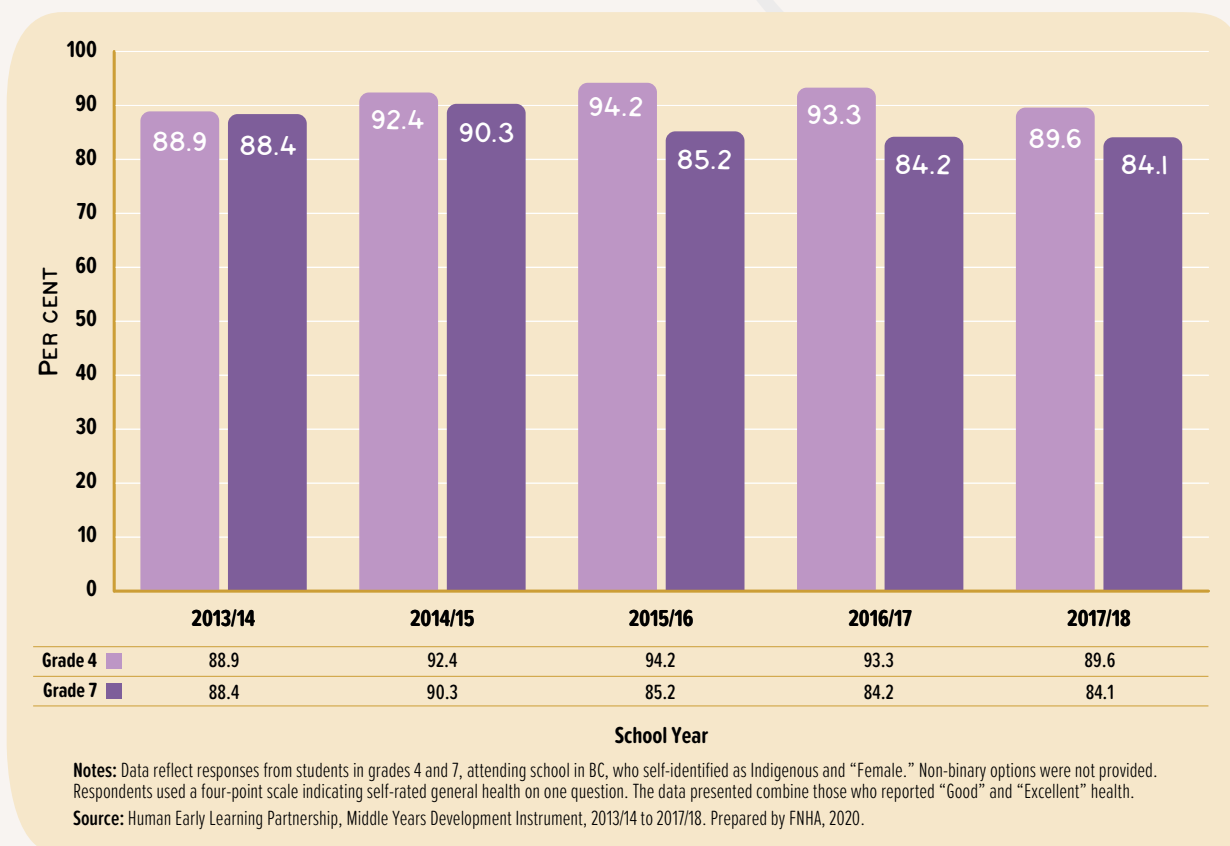
# HEALTHY BODIES, MINDS AND SPIRITS

The health and wellness of First Nations children are shaped by their physical and social environments, and strengthened by identity, culture, and kinship ties that form their cultural values.<sup>22</sup> BC First Nations have specific laws, customs, and teachings that create nurturing environments for First Nations girls to thrive and flourish.

## GENERAL HEALTH

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**FIG 2.16 PERCENTAGE OF INDIGENOUS GIRLS WHO RATED THEMSELVES IN “GOOD” OR “EXCELLENT” HEALTH, BY GRADE, BC, 2013/14 TO 2017/18**

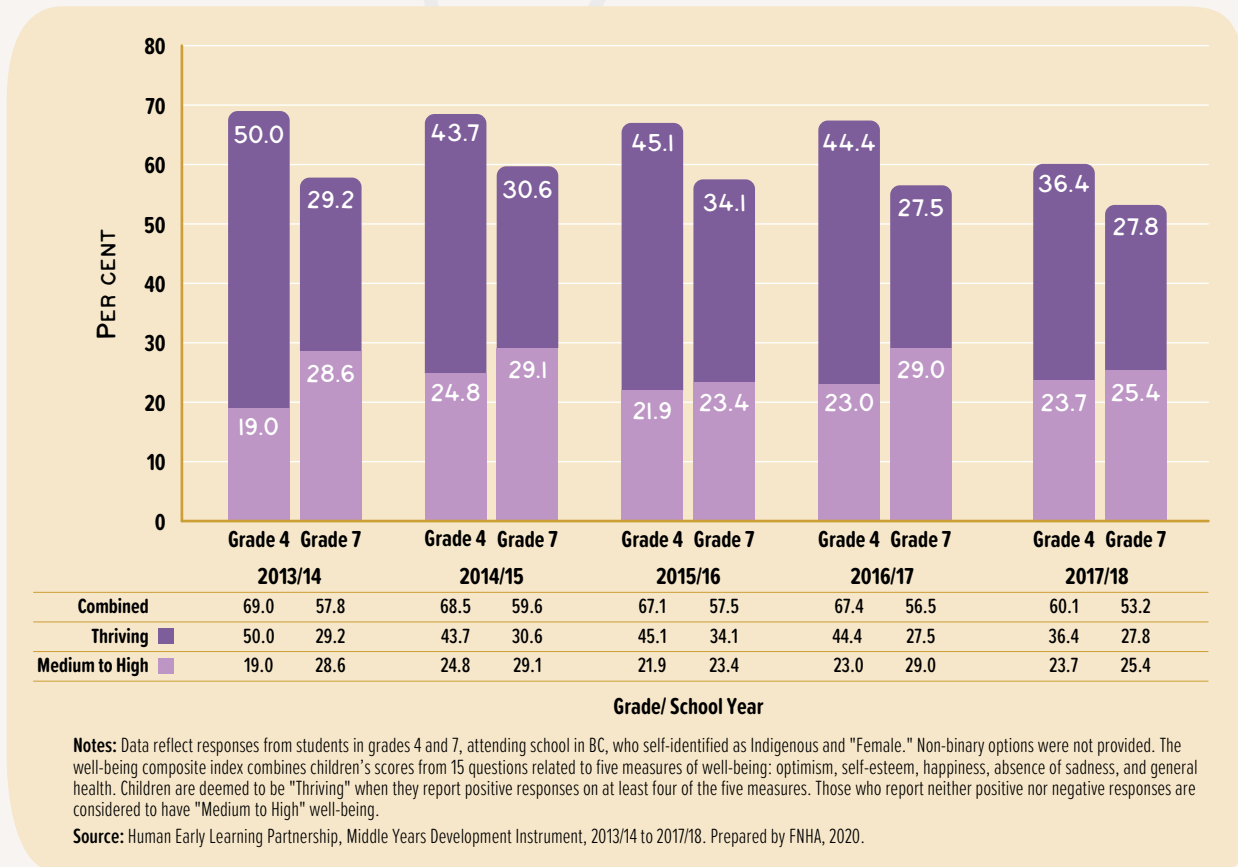


For each school year from 2013/14 through 2017/18, MDI data showed that a greater proportion of Indigenous girls in grade 4 than grade 7 reported being in “good” or “excellent” health.

## WELL-BEING COMPOSITE INDEX

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FIG 2.17 PERCENTAGE OF INDIGENOUS GIRLS WHO HAD “THRIVING” OR “MEDIUM TO HIGH” SCORES ON THE MDI WELL-BEING INDEX, BY GRADE, BC, 2013/14 TO 2017/18



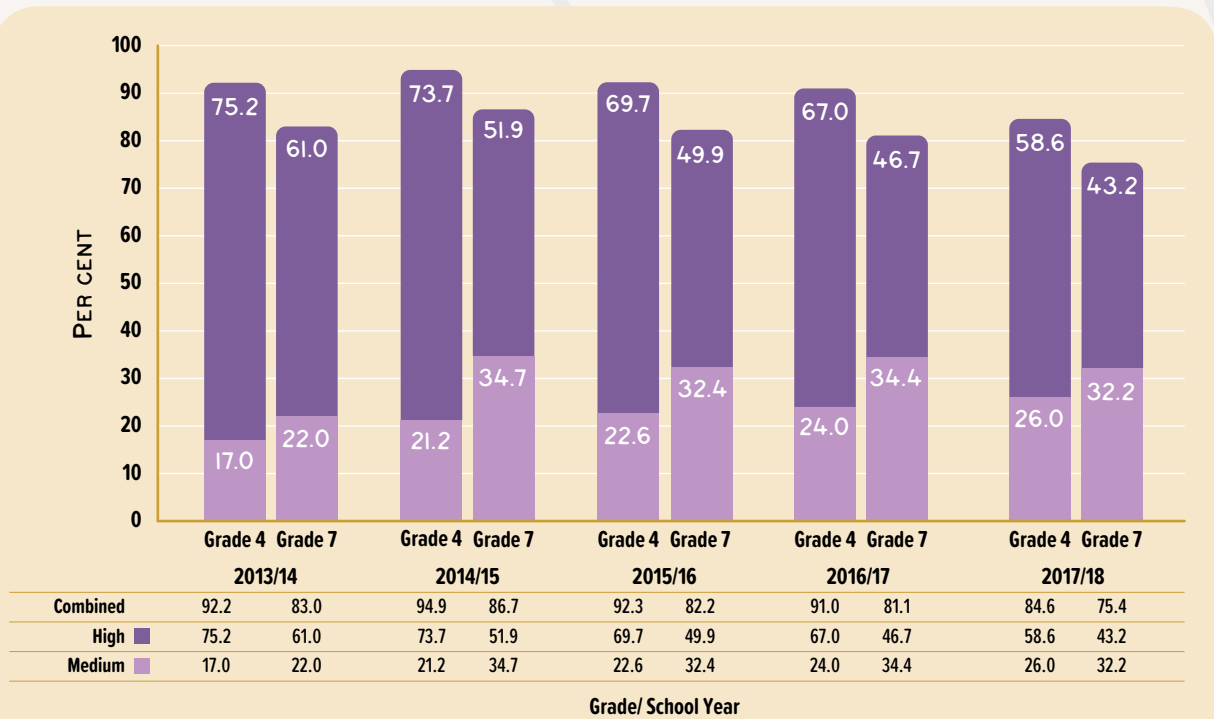
For each school year from 2013/14 through 2017/18, MDI data showed that Indigenous girls in grade 4 had a higher overall score on the Well-being Index across the “thriving” and “medium to high” categories, compared to Indigenous grade 7 girls. Wellness is achieved when there is a balance of mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical health. First Nations girls experience this balance when they feel a sense of purpose, have hope for the future, and a sense of belonging and connectedness with their family, community, and culture.<sup>23</sup>



## OPTIMISM AND FUTURE GOALS

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FIG 2.18 PERCENTAGE OF INDIGENOUS GIRLS WHO HAD “HIGH” OR “MEDIUM” SCORES ON THE OPTIMISM MEASURE, BY GRADE, BC, 2013/14 TO 2017/18



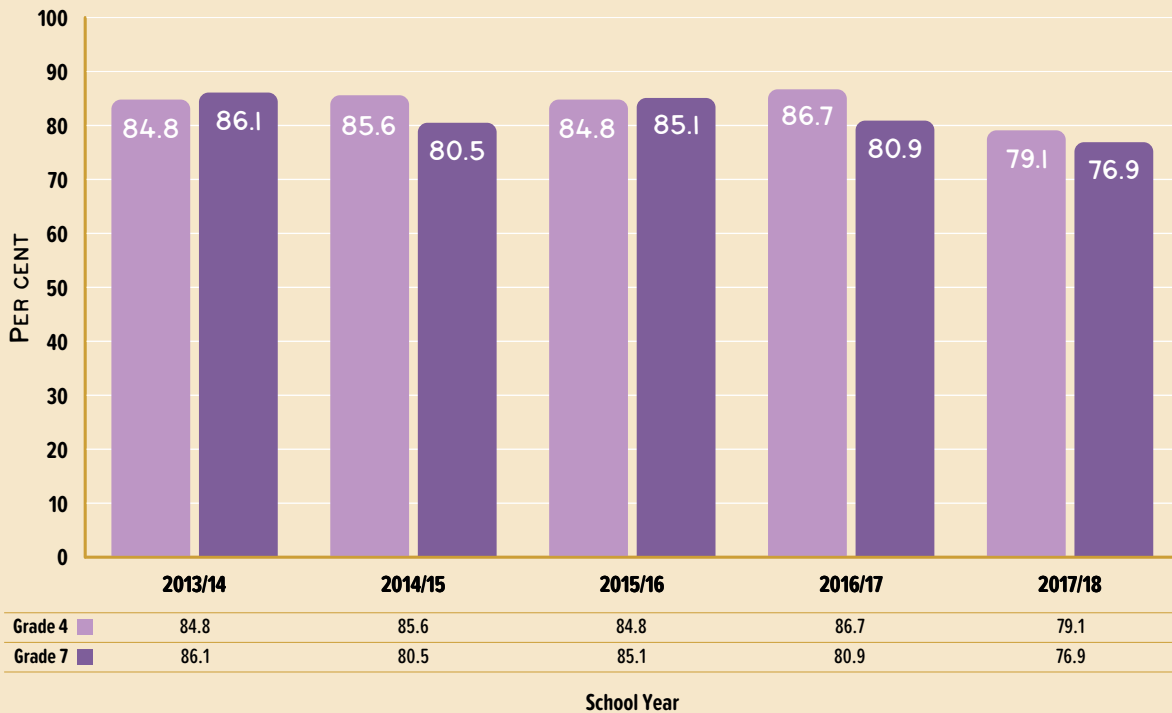
**Notes:** Data reflect responses from students in grades 4 and 7, attending school in BC, who self-identified as Indigenous and “Female.” Non-binary options were not provided. “High” level of optimism reflects children whose average responses were “Agree a Little” or “Agree a Lot” on a five-point scale, across three elements. “Medium” level of optimism reflects children whose average responses were “Don’t Agree or Disagree” and those who reported a mix of positive and negative responses.

**Source:** Human Early Learning Partnership, Middle Years Development Instrument, 2013/14 to 2017/18. Prepared by FNHA, 2020.



Supporting First Nations girls to achieve and maintain mental wellness helps them realize their own potential and more easily cope with the stresses of life.<sup>24</sup> For each school year from 2013/14 through 2017/18, MDI data showed that a higher proportion of Indigenous girls in grade 4 than grade 7 reported “high” scores for the Optimism measure on the Social and Emotional Development dimension. A higher proportion of Indigenous grade 7 girls had “medium” scores on the same measure for each school year. Across the survey years, there appears to be a downward trend of Indigenous girls in both grades 4 and 7 reporting “high” levels of optimism and, in turn, an increase in the proportion of girls reporting “medium” levels of optimism. Further analysis is needed to confirm the statistical significance of this finding.

FIG 2.19 PERCENTAGE OF INDIGENOUS GIRLS WHO REPORTED HAVING PLANS FOR THE FUTURE, BY GRADE, BC, 2013/14 TO 2017/18



**Notes:** Data reflect responses from students in grades 4 and 7, attending school in BC, who self-identified as Indigenous and “Female.” Non-binary options were not provided.  
**Source:** Human Early Learning Partnership, Middle Years Development Instrument, 2013/14 to 2017/18. Prepared by FNHA, 2020.



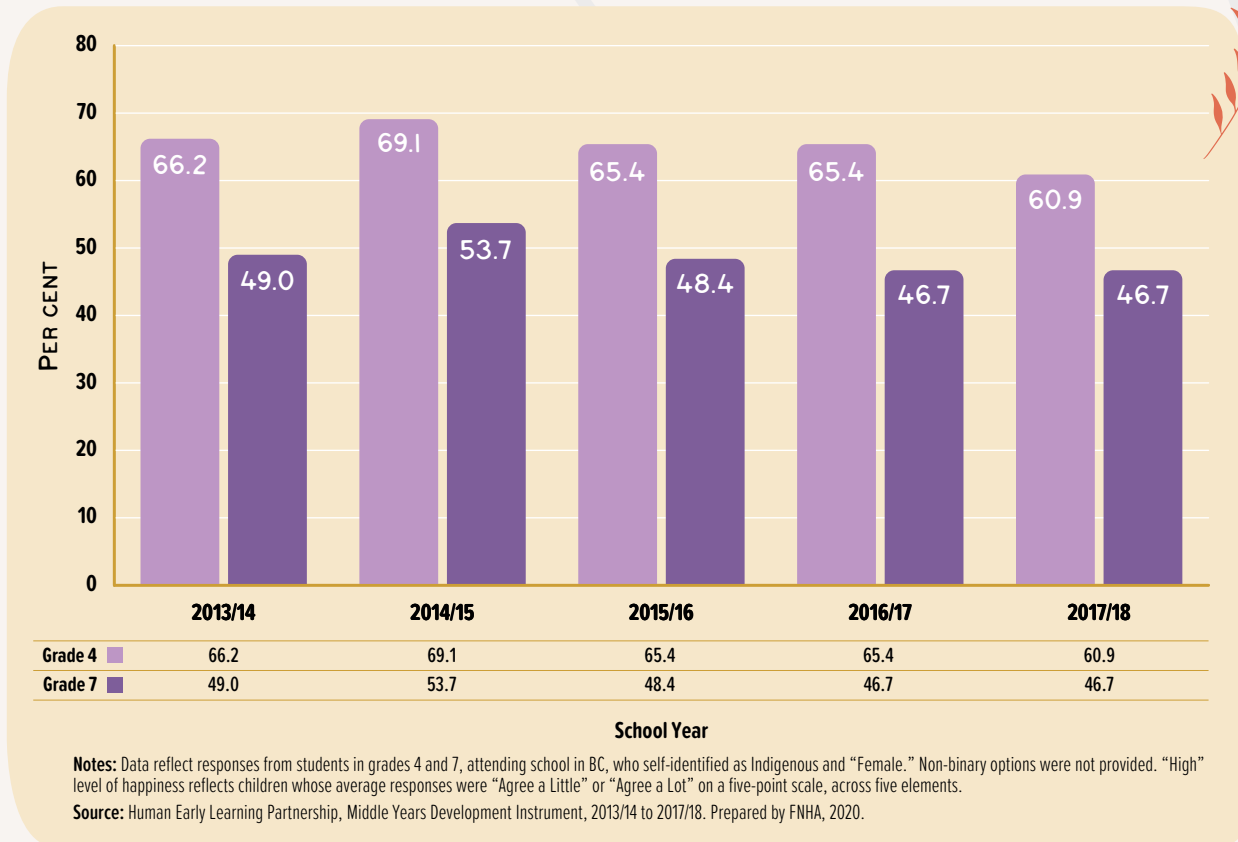
For each school year from 2013/14 through 2017/18, MDI data showed that the proportions of Indigenous girls in grades 4 and 7 were comparable when measuring agreement on the statement “When I grow up, I have goals and plans for the future,” within the Future Goals measure.



## HAPPINESS

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FIG 2.20 PERCENTAGE OF INDIGENOUS GIRLS WHO HAD “HIGH” SCORES ON THE HAPPINESS MEASURE, BY GRADE, BC, 2013/14 TO 2017/18

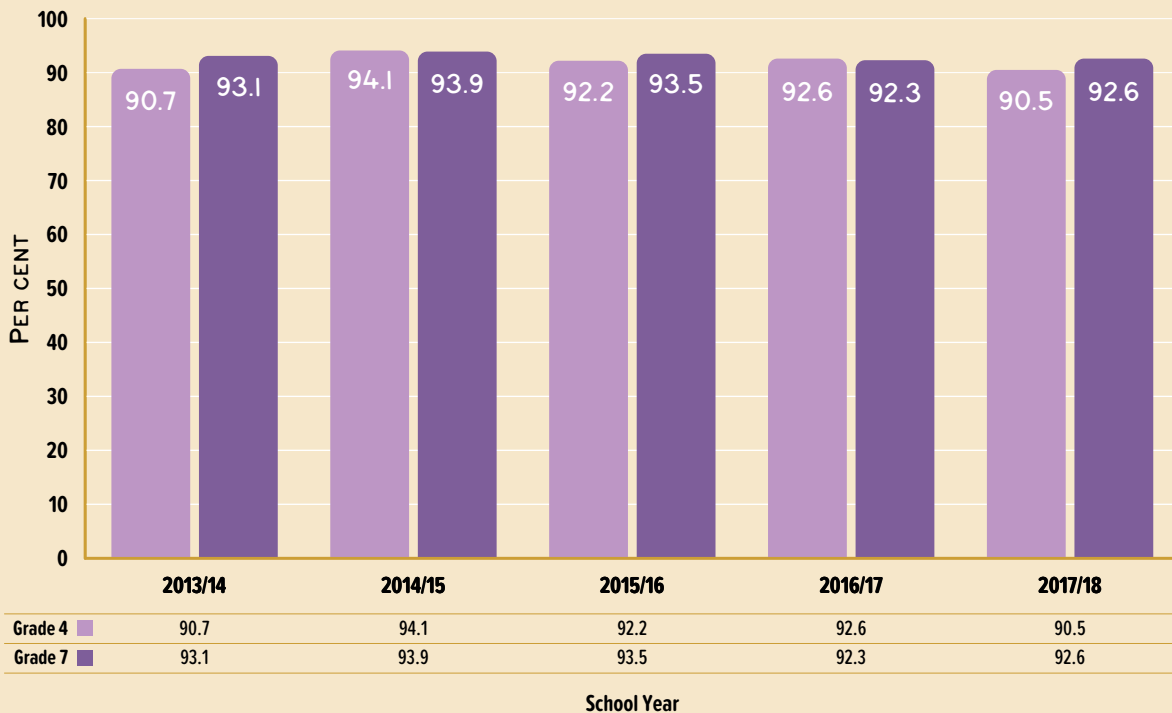


First Nations have always valued emotional and social development during childhood, as it sets a path for mental wellness later in life.<sup>25</sup> Each child enters the world with special gifts to share with their family and community.<sup>26</sup> For each school year from 2013/14 through 2017/18, MDI data showed that a greater proportion of Indigenous girls in grade 4 than grade 7 reported “high” scores on the Happiness measure of the Social and Emotional Development dimension. An example of a statement assessed in the Happiness measure is “The things in my life are excellent.”

## PEER RELATIONSHIPS – CLOSE FRIENDSHIPS

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FIG 2.21 PERCENTAGE OF INDIGENOUS GIRLS WHO HAD “HIGH” OR “MEDIUM” SCORES ON THE FRIENDSHIP INTIMACY MEASURE, BY GRADE, BC, 2013/14 TO 2017/18



**Notes:** Data reflect responses from students in grades 4 and 7, attending school in BC, who self-identified as Indigenous and “Female.” Non-binary options were not provided.  
**Source:** Human Early Learning Partnership, Middle Years Development Instrument, 2013/14 to 2017/18. Prepared by FNHA, 2020.

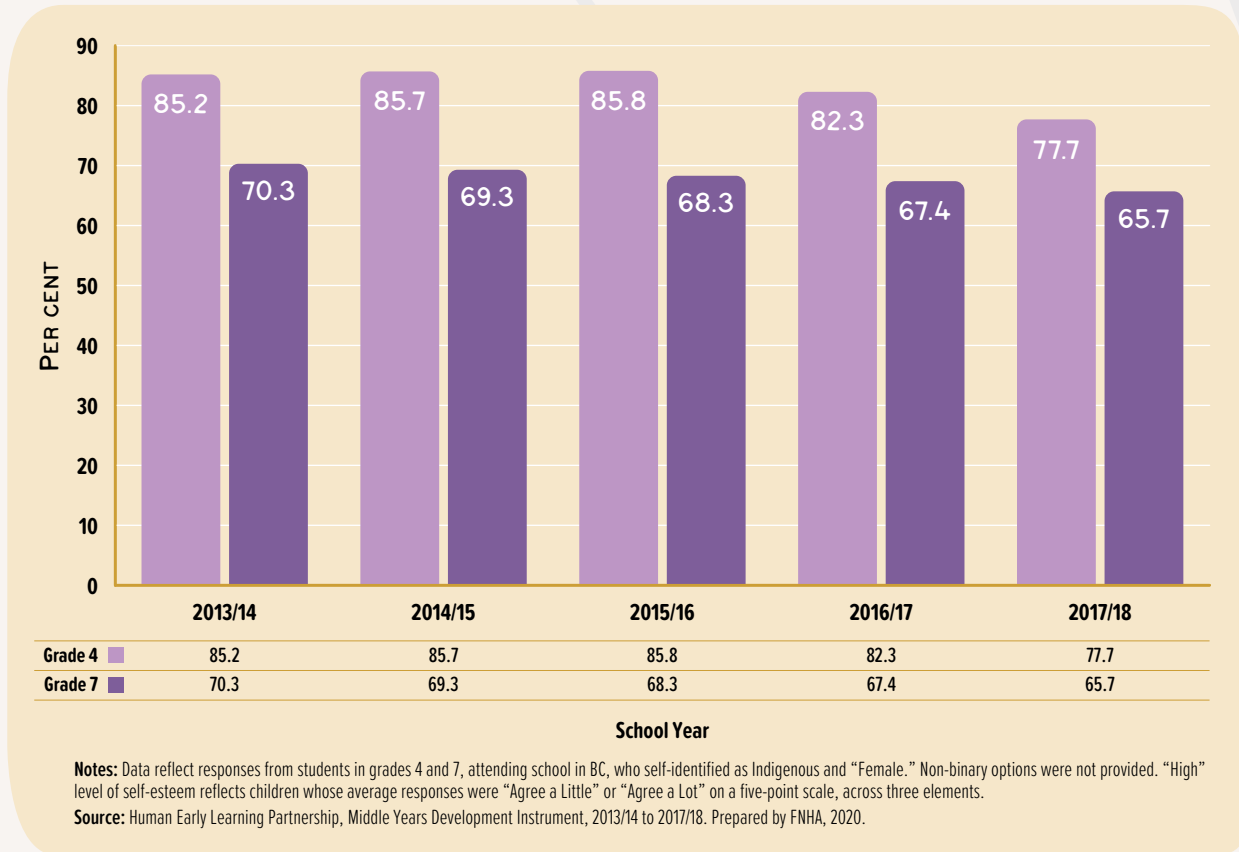
For each school year from 2013/14 through 2017/18, MDI data showed that more than 90% of Indigenous girls in grades 4 and 7 reported having “medium” to “high” scores on the Friendship Intimacy measure of the Connectedness dimension. This means that over 90% of Indigenous girls across grades 4 and 7 agreed with statements such as “I have a friend I can tell everything to,” and “I have at least one really good friend I can talk to when something is bothering me.”



## SELF-ESTEEM

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FIG 2.22 PERCENTAGE OF INDIGENOUS GIRLS WHO HAD “HIGH” SCORES ON THE SELF-ESTEEM MEASURE, BY GRADE, BC, 2013/14 TO 2017/18



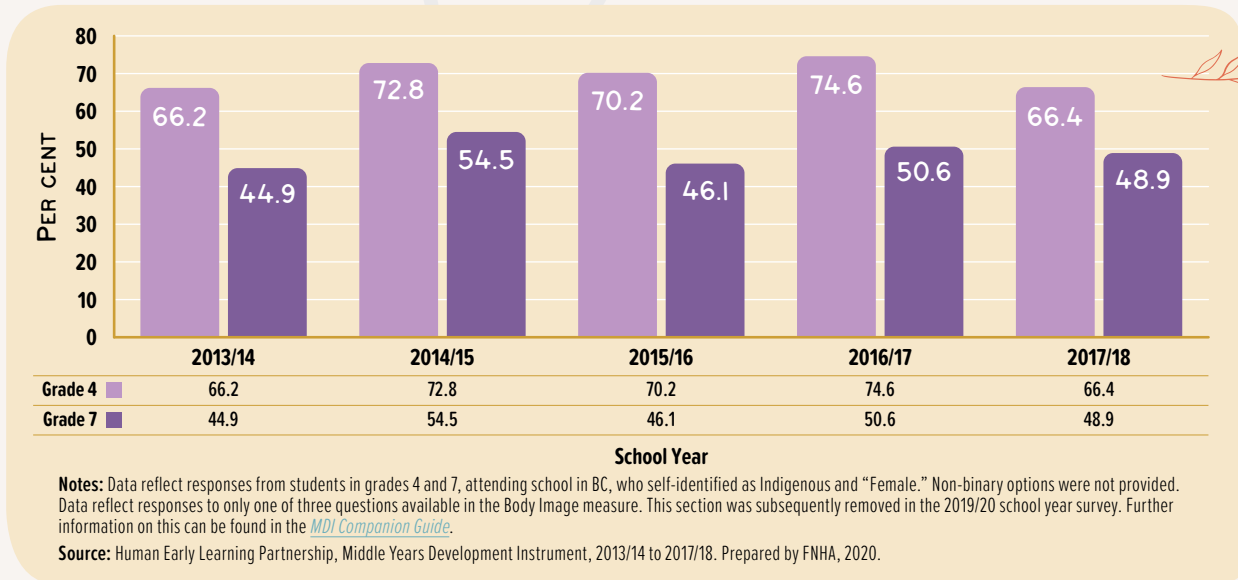
For each school year from 2013/14 through 2017/18, MDI data showed that a greater proportion of Indigenous girls in grade 4 than grade 7 scored “high” on the Self-esteem measure within the Social and Emotional Development dimension. This means that most Indigenous girls in grade 4 agreed with statements like “A lot of things about me are good,” and “Overall, I have a lot to be proud of.” The differences seen between grade 4 and 7 Indigenous girls are important to understand, especially in the context of what we can do to better support Indigenous girls through their adolescent years; this is a call to action for us and all our partners. It is imperative to enhance our understanding of these findings and assess whether this trend is also seen among non-Indigenous girls. Racist anti-Indigenous policies have deliberately disrupted First Nations knowledge and practices that nurture and promote mental wellness, and have created inequalities in the social determinants of health for many First Nations families.<sup>27,28,29</sup> These inequities and disruptions of culture can negatively impact First Nations girls’ sense of belonging and mental wellness.<sup>30</sup> BC First Nations continue to assert their inherent rights, and communities are advocating and working to re-establish the circles of connectedness around their children.<sup>7</sup>



## POSITIVE BODY IMAGE

p-42

FIG 2.23 PERCENTAGE OF INDIGENOUS GIRLS WHO REPORTED THEY “OFTEN” OR “ALWAYS” LIKED THE WAY THEY LOOKED ON THE BODY IMAGE MEASURE, BY GRADE, BC, 2013/14 TO 2017/18

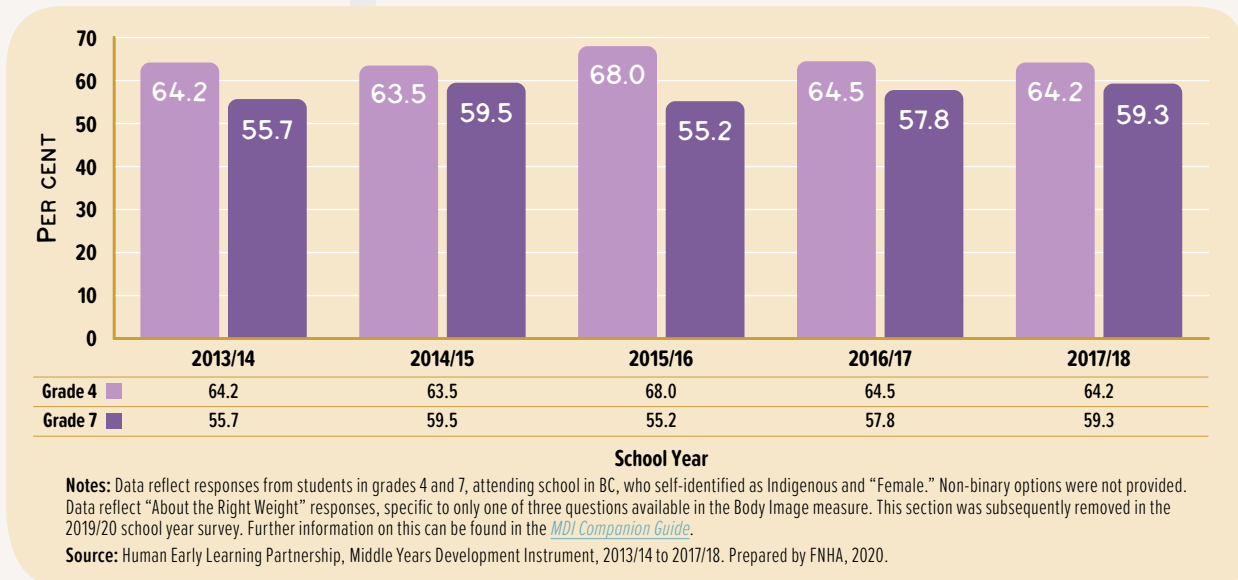


For each school year from 2013/14 through 2017/18, MDI data showed that a greater proportion of Indigenous girls in grade 4 than grade 7 reported “often” or “always” liking the way they looked. This is a single indicator within the broader Body Image measure of the Physical Health and Well-being dimension.

## SELF-RATED BODY WEIGHT

p-44

FIG 2.24 PERCENTAGE OF INDIGENOUS GIRLS WHO REPORTED HAVING A BODY WEIGHT THAT WAS “ABOUT RIGHT,” BY GRADE, BC, 2013/14 TO 2017/18

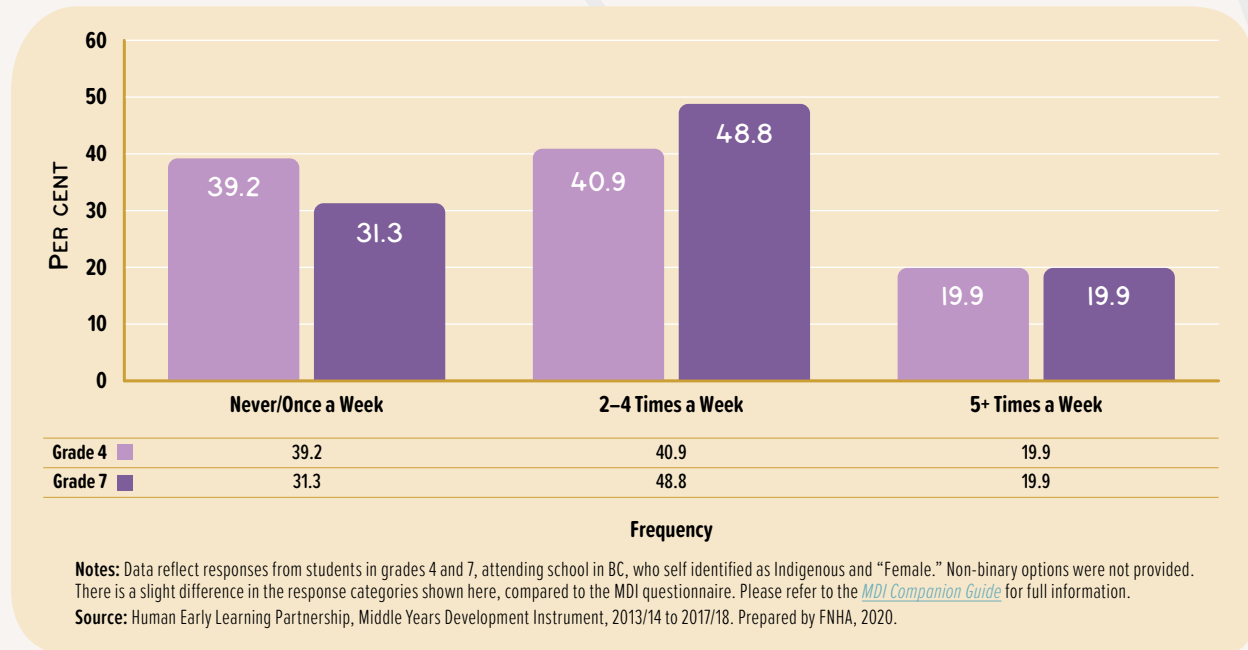


For each school year from 2013/14 through 2017/18, MDI data showed that a greater proportion of Indigenous girls in grade 4 than grade 7 rated their body weight “about right.” This is a single indicator within the broader Body Image measure of the Physical Health and Well-being dimension. Feeling dissatisfied with one’s body image during childhood can have a negative impact on self-esteem and increase self-consciousness.<sup>10,31</sup> Unfortunately, many First Nations girls are exposed to, and socialized by, distorted and unhealthy Western values and norms about women’s bodies.<sup>32,33</sup>

## HEALTHY EATING

p.43

FIG 2.25 PERCENTAGE OF INDIGENOUS GIRLS WHO REPORTED EATING JUNK FOOD (E.G., CHIPS, CANDY, POP), BY GRADE AND FREQUENCY, BC, 2017/18



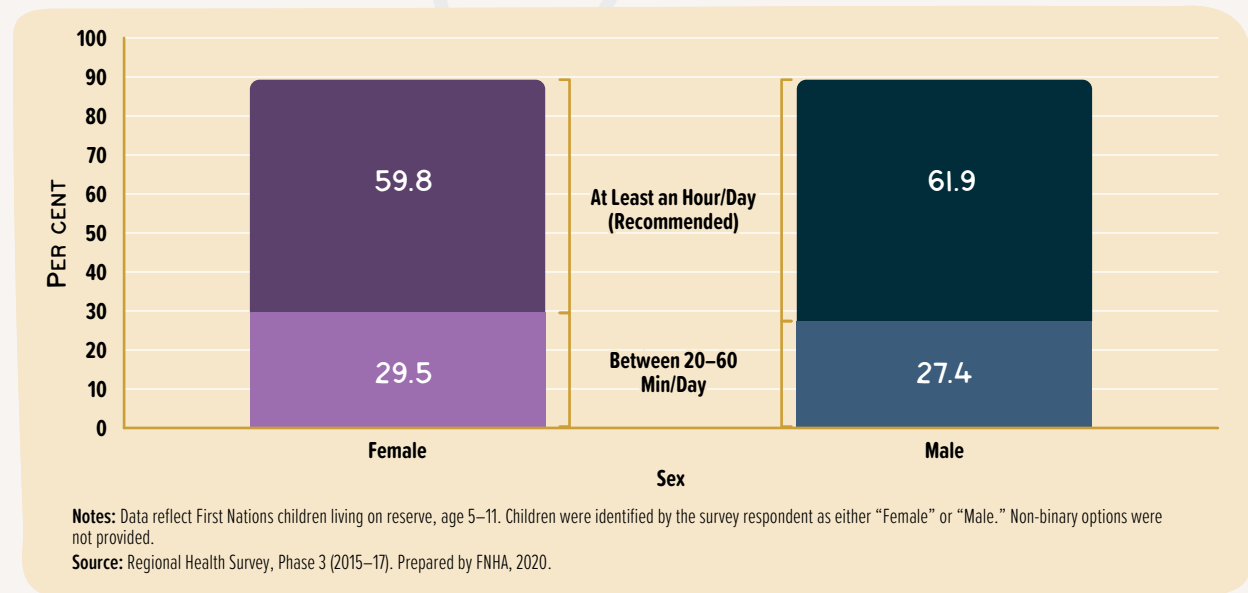
MDI data from 2017/18 showed that a greater proportion of Indigenous girls in grade 4 (39.2%) than grade 7 (31.3%) reported eating junk food “never” or “once a week.” Almost half (48.8%) of Indigenous girls in grade 7 reported eating junk food “2–4 times a week,” compared to 40.9% of Indigenous girls in grade 4. One in five (19.9%) Indigenous girls in both grades 4 and 7 ate junk food “5 times or more a week.” The MDI questionnaire did not include questions on the reason for eating junk food. Traditional food gathering and preparation activities such as berry picking, fishing, and canning provide First Nations girls with opportunities to connect with their families and communities; these activities can also help to build a sense of purpose and belonging.<sup>34</sup>



## PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

p.44

FIG 2.26 PERCENTAGE OF FIRST NATIONS CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION IN PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IN A TYPICAL WEEK, AGE 5–11, BY SEX AND AMOUNT OF TIME, BC, 2015–17

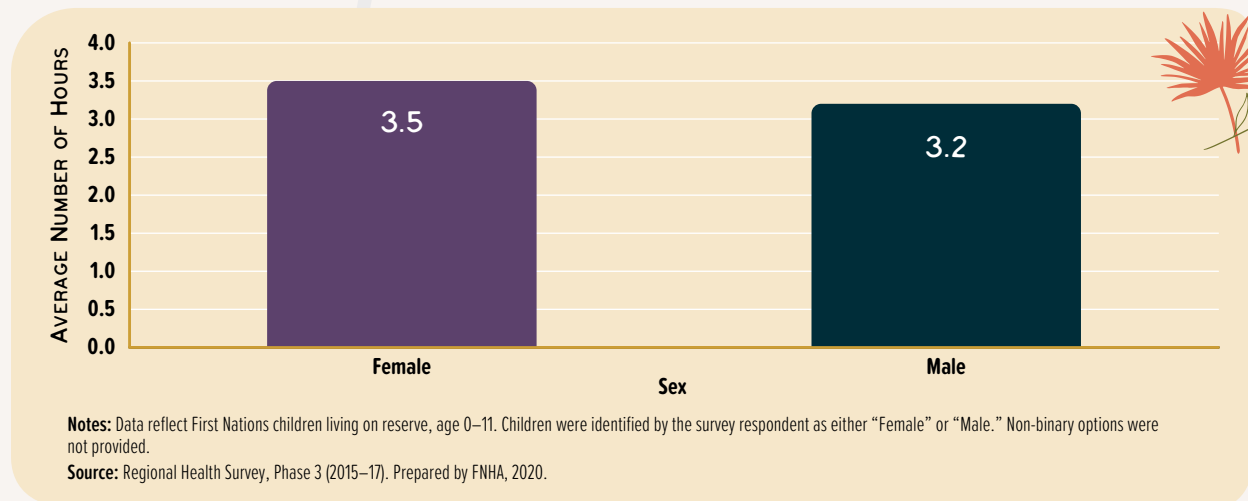


From RHS3 (2015–17), a slightly lower percentage of First Nations girls age 5–11 (59.8%) participated in physical activity for the recommended amount of “at least an hour/day,” compared to First Nations boys in the same age group (61.9%). Being active during childhood is vital to First Nations girls’ development; it can have a positive impact on their confidence, self-esteem, strength, and coordination.<sup>35</sup> Activities that take place outdoors also allow children to be on, and connect with, the land.

## SCREEN TIME

p.44

FIG 2.27 FIRST NATIONS CHILDREN'S REPORTED AVERAGE HOURS OF SCREEN TIME PER DAY, AGE 0–11, BY SEX, BC, 2015–17



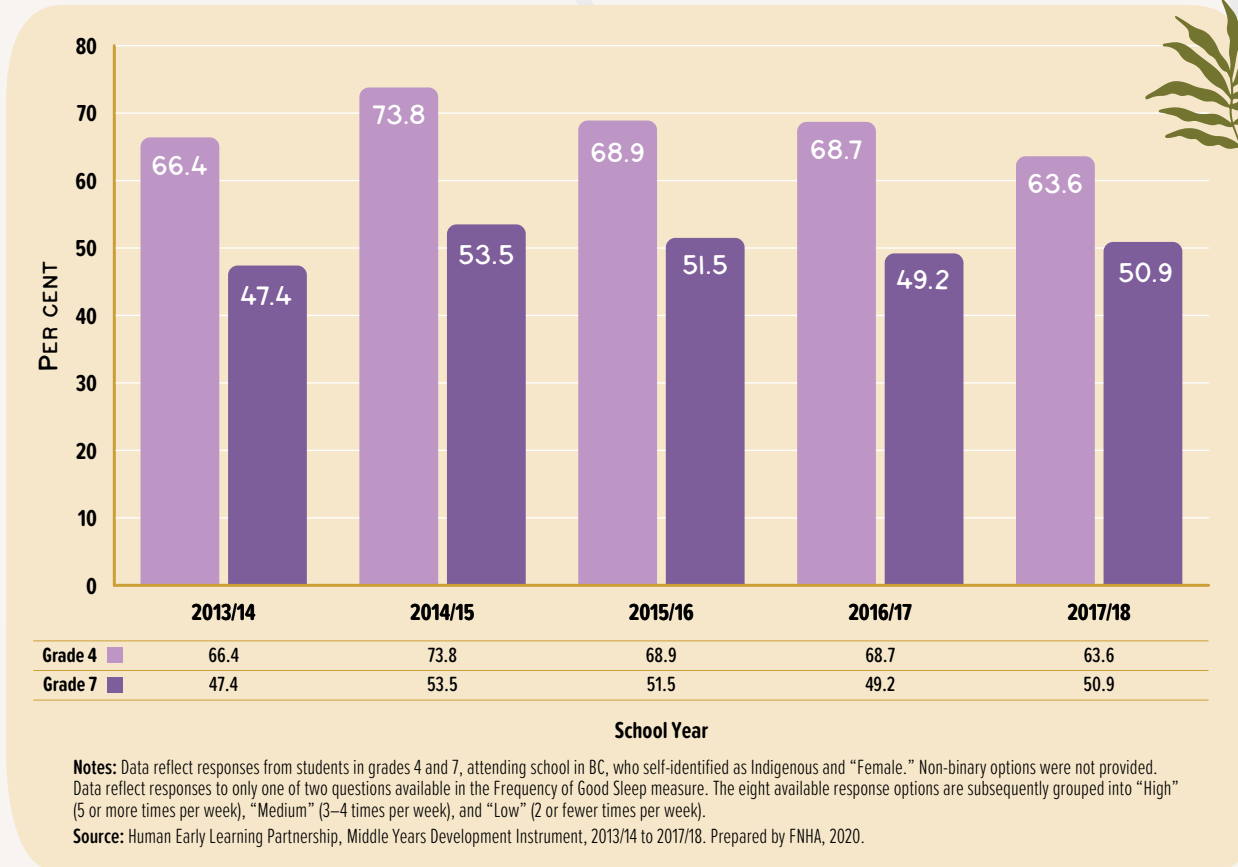
Establishing an active and healthy lifestyle in childhood that finds a balance between physical activity, more sedentary activities, as well as rest, is important for developing lifelong behaviours that contribute to health and wellness.<sup>36</sup> From RHS3 (2015–17), First Nations girls age 0–11 spent an average of 3.5 hours on daily screen time, whereas First Nations boys in the same age group spent an average of 3.2 hours.



## SLEEP

p.44

FIG 2.28 PERCENTAGE OF INDIGENOUS GIRLS WHO HAD "HIGH" SCORES ON THE FREQUENCY OF SLEEP MEASURE, BY GRADE, BC, 2013/14 TO 2017/18



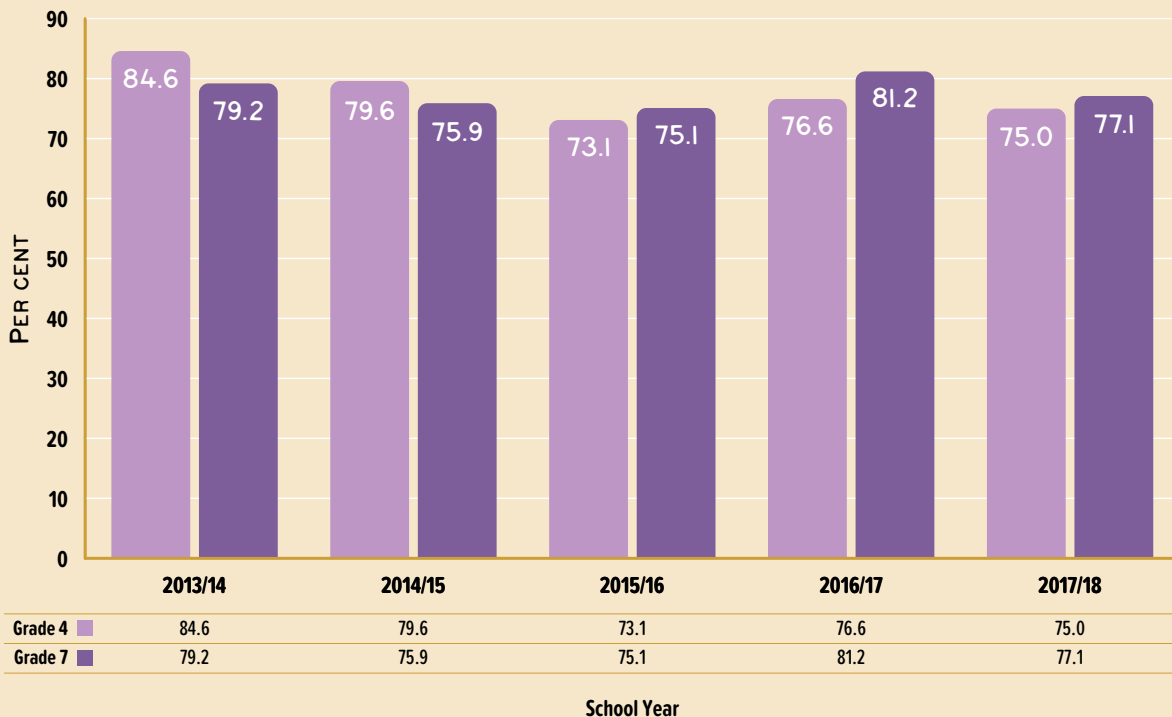
For each school year from 2013/14 through 2017/18, MDI data showed that a greater proportion of Indigenous girls in grade 4 than grade 7 had "high" scores for the "Frequency of Good Sleep" measure within the Physical Health and Well-being dimension. For each school year, more than 60% of Indigenous girls in grade 4 had five or more nights of good sleep per week.



## PHYSICAL CONDITION / ILLNESS

p.45

FIG 2.29 PERCENTAGE OF INDIGENOUS GIRLS WHO REPORTED HAVING NO PHYSICAL OR HEALTH CONDITIONS ON THE BODY IMAGE MEASURE, BY GRADE, BC, 2013/14 TO 2017/18



**Notes:** Data reflect responses from students in grades 4 and 7, attending school in BC, who self-identified as Indigenous and “Female.” Non-binary options were not provided. Data reflect the proportion of respondents who indicated “No Health Condition” where the health conditions assessed included a physical disability, a long-term illness, being overweight, or another respondent-specified condition. The Body Image measure was subsequently removed in the 2019/20 school year survey. Further information on this can be found in the [MDI Companion Guide](#).

**Source:** Human Early Learning Partnership, Middle Years Development Instrument, 2013/14 to 2017/18. Prepared by FNHA, 2020.

For school years 2013/14 through 2014/15, MDI data showed that a greater proportion of Indigenous girls in grade 4 than grade 7 reported having no physical or health condition that kept them from doing things that other kids their age do. Indigenous girls in grade 7 had a greater proportion on the same indicator from 2015/16 though 2017/18.



“Some of my earliest memories as a youth are from the summer and fall, when everyone in my community would be smoking salmon and jarring it – and being put on fish-gutting duty. At the time, I didn’t think it was so awesome, but now I know how valuable it is and it was teaching me respect. It’s just like when I went to Wet’suwet’en culture camps, and we butchered moose meat. I remember all those teachings we learned there. The culture in my community is strong and it’s definitely helped me a lot in growing up and being proud of being Wet’suwet’en. I remember there was a time when I wasn’t proud and that was really hard for me to get through. I think it can be difficult for the youth still – being proud of who you are when we’ve received so much discrimination and racism as Indigenous people. It’s a big part of your wellness, your mental wellness, to be proud of your culture and your identity.”

- Michelle Buchholz, Wet’suwet’en Nation

- *Sacred and Strong: Upholding our Matriarchal Roles* (p.44)



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