



# Middle Years Development Instrument

The Middle Years Development Instrument (MDI) is a questionnaire completed by Northwest Territories (NWT) students in grades 4 and 7 that provides information about the health and well-being of students in those grades. This fact sheet offers a glimpse of these results for the 2023-24 school year and a comparison to previous years of MDI results.

The Middle Years Development Instrument includes five areas of development:

- Physical health and well-being
- Connectedness
- Social-emotional development
- School experiences
- Use of after-school time

These five areas of development are strongly connected to well-being, health and academic achievement. As part of the Middle Years Development Instrument, the 'Well-Being Index' provides a summary of children's social, emotional and physical health. It combines five measures from the Instrument:

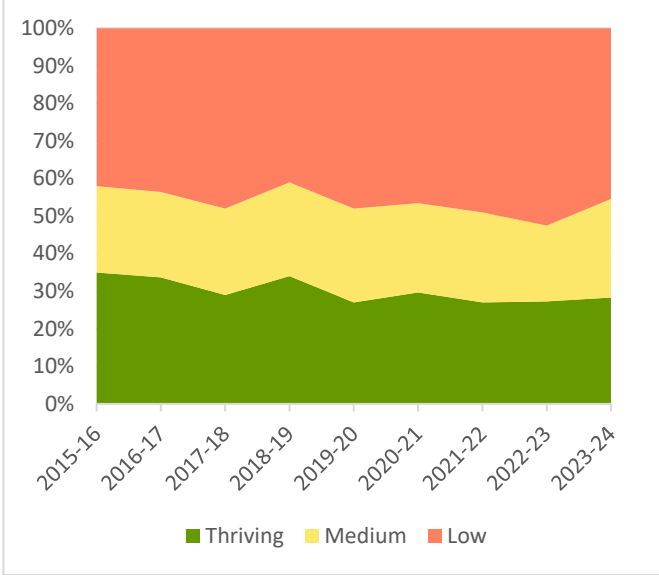
- Optimism
- Self-esteem
- Happiness
- Absence of sadness
- General health

Depending on how children respond in these five areas of well-being, they are assigned an overall result that is either *THRIVING*, *MEDIUM TO HIGH WELL-BEING*, or *LOW WELL-BEING*.

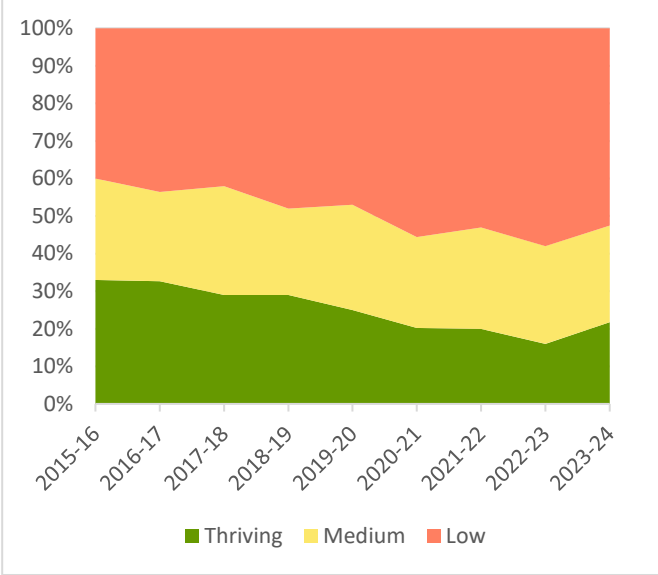
The Department of Education, Culture and Employment (ECE) and schools use Middle Years Development Instruments results annually to assess the health and well-being trends of students in grades 4 and 7. The expectation is that, as the NWT Junior Kindergarten to Grade 12 school system becomes better able to reflect the cultures of the NWT and support students to flourish as capable and healthy persons, *THRIVING* scores should increase.

There has been lower Middle Years Development Instrument participation in the NWT since 2019-20, which aligns with the COVID-19 pandemic. Other jurisdictions have also seen lower participation. Given the lower participation rate, results are not necessarily representative of the student population. Therefore, results in recent years should be interpreted with caution.

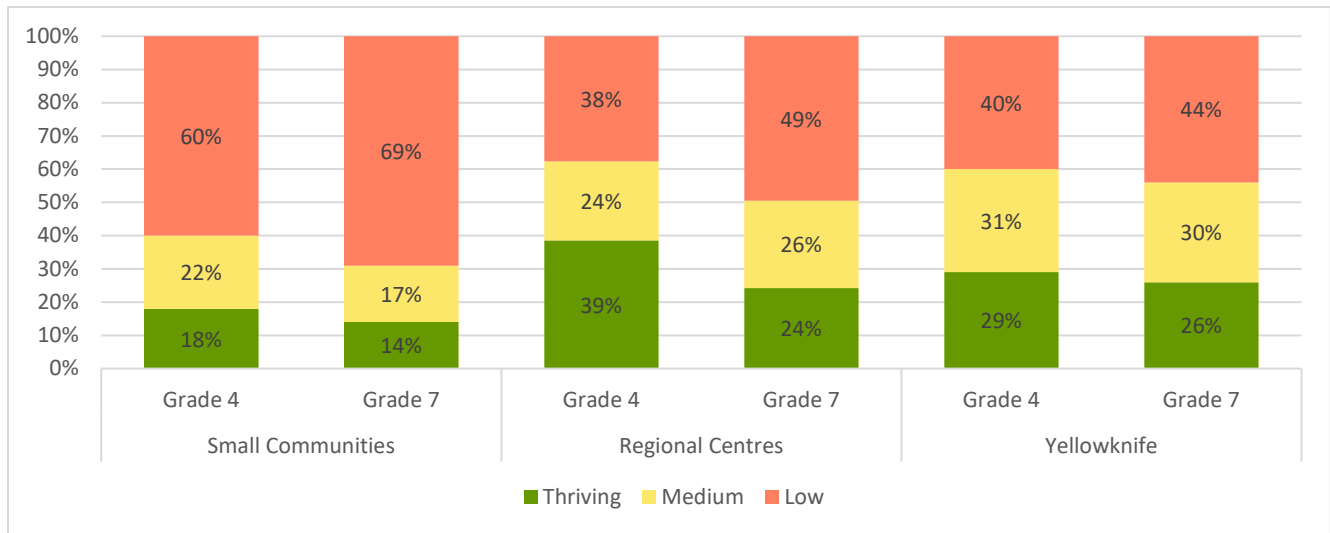
**Figure 1: Well-Being Index for NWT Grade 4 students, over time.**



**Figure 2: Well-Being Index for NWT Grade 7 students, over time.**



**Figure 3: Well-Being Index by grade and community type, 2023-24.**



- The Well-Being Index shows no obvious trends over time for Grade 4 students in the NWT. Results show sharp changes year to year (Figure 1).
- The percentage of Grade 7 students who participated in the MDI who are **THRIVING** in the NWT overall trended upwards in 2023-24 (Figure 2). This indicator has been trending downwards over time. ECE will continue to monitor these results to see if the positive trend continues.
- Grade 7 students in small communities had the highest proportion of students with **LOW WELL-BEING** (Figure 3).
- Regional centres showed the biggest difference in well-being between Grade 4 and Grade 7 students (Figure 3).

It is important to note that **THRIVING** scores are affected by more than just students' experiences in school. Students' lives and experiences outside of school also affect their sense of well-being and influence how students feel when they arrive at school. These results may also reflect the continued impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and other events such as wildfire evacuations.

Decreases in **THRIVING** scores suggest the NWT education system needs to continue to provide school-based mental health and wellness supports, as well as collaborate with the health system to support well-being in students throughout the middle grades.

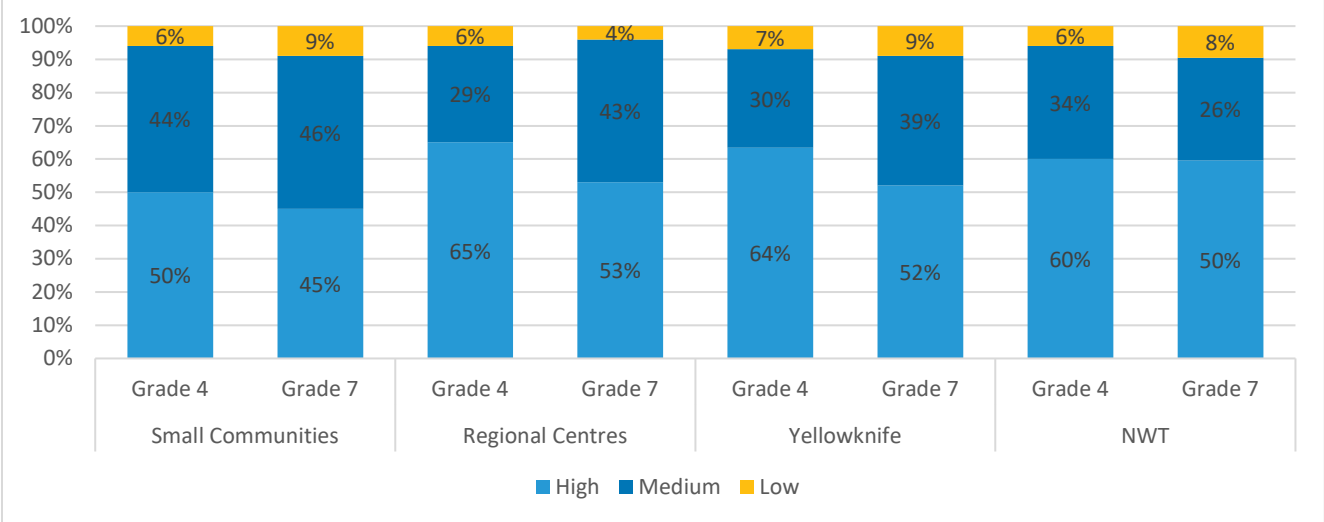
## Meaningful relationships at school

Data from students' Middle Years Development Instrument questionnaires has shown that their well-being is significantly and positively related to the number of "assets" in their lives. Assets include their relationships with adults and peers, after-school activities, nutrition, sleep, and school experiences.

Adults at school, such as teachers, principals, and school staff, are in a unique position to form meaningful bonds with students. Research shows that good relationships with adults at school promote

mental health and overall well-being. A sense of connectedness in a student-adults relationship means there are one or more adults at school who the student feels listen, believes and cares about them.

**Figure 4: Students reported quality of relationships with adults at school by grade and community type, 2023-24.**



**Figure 5: Number of important adults at school reported by NWT Grade 4 students, 2023-24.**



**Figure 6: Number of important adults at school reported by NWT Grade 7 students, 2023-24.**



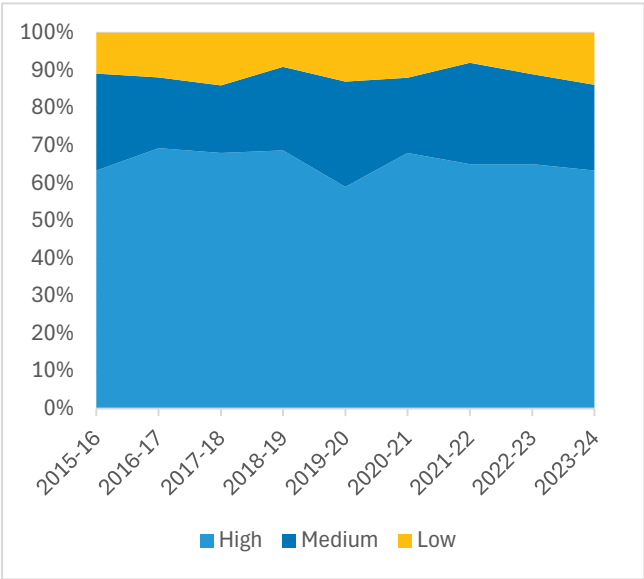
- In the NWT overall, 60 percent of Grade 4 students and 50 percent of Grade 7 students who participated in the MDI reported the quality of their relationships with adults at school as **HIGH** in the 2023-24 school year.
- Grade 7 students in small communities and Grade 7 students in Yellowknife had the highest proportion of students who reported the quality of their relationships with adults at school as **LOW** (Figure 4).
- In the NWT overall, 68 percent of Grade 4 students and 48 percent of Grade 7 students who participated in the Middle Years Development Instrument in 2023-24 reported the number of important adults at school as 2 or more (Figure 5 and Figure 6).

Disruptions to the NWT education system such as online learning and school closures related to the COVID-19 pandemic, flooding and wildfires have impacted this indicator in recent years. Schools continue to adapt to learning disruptions and connect with students to build meaningful relationships.

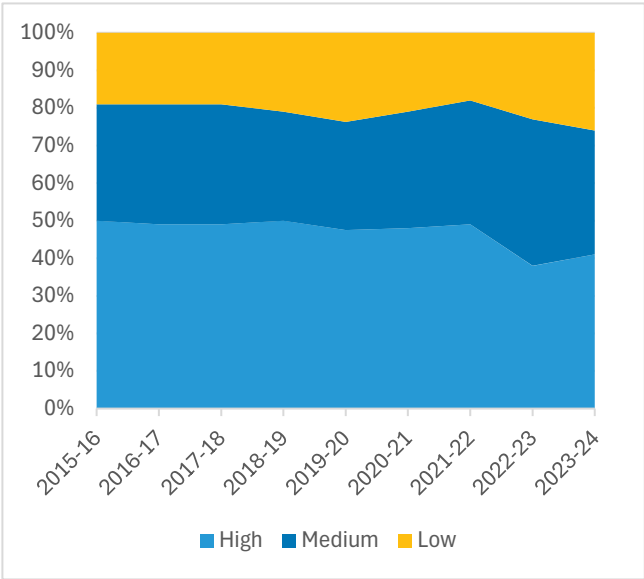
# School climate

Research shows that when children have positive experiences at school, they are more likely to feel they belong within their school, feel more motivated and engaged, and have higher academic achievement. School climate refers to the overall tone of the school environment, including the way teachers and students interact and how students treat each other.<sup>1</sup>

**Figure 7: School Climate reported by NWT Grade 4 students, over time.**



**Figure 8: School Climate reported by NWT Grade 7 students, over time.**



- Consistently over time, a higher proportion of Grade 4 students in the NWT have reported the quality of their school climate as **HIGH** when compared to Grade 7 students (Figure 7 and Figure 8).
- The proportion of Grade 7 students in the NWT who reported the quality of their school climate as **HIGH** increased in the 2023-24 school year (Figure 8).

Understanding children’s school experiences improves the ability to both create and cultivate school environments that are safe, caring, and supportive.

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<sup>1</sup> Results are based on responses on an agreement scale to three statements about school climate. More information can be found [here](#).

# In Summary

The developmental health of children is a shared responsibility.

The Middle Years Development Instrument results reflect the experiences of children in grades 4 and 7 in the NWT. Information about health and wellness is connected to several areas of development, including well-being, health, academic achievement, and overall success throughout the school years and later in life. The Instrument illustrates the importance of multiple settings in students' lives, including home, school, and community. Together, everyone contributes to nurturing positive experiences and supporting children's well-being as they grow.

Middle Years Development Instrument reports will continue to be shared with education partners, Indigenous governments, and the public to reinforce the shared responsibility of supporting the well-being of children in schools and in communities.

For more information on the MDI overall, [visit the University of British Columbia website](#).