
Youth Recommendations for Alcohol and Substance Use Education and Prevention

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Agenda

1. Introduction
2. Purpose of Project
3. Methodology
4. MYRBS 2017 - Overview and Summary
5. Focus Group Results
6. Alcohol Use Points of Discussion
7. Vaping Points of Discussion
8. Factors that Contribute to Substance Use
9. Student Opinions on Prevention
10. Student Opinions on Peer Pressure
11. Evidence Based Prevention Strategies
12. Suggestions Moving Forward



Purpose of Project

Funded by the Foundation for
Alcohol Education

- Learn from teens in the North Shore community about their opinions on issues of alcohol and substance use and effective prevention strategies
 - Engage youth and provide opportunity to express opinions and make positive contributions to research on substance use and prevention among youth
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Methodology

- 30 teens were identified from 5 North Shore communities
- Conducted in two waves over the course of 12 months
- A 60-minute focus group was conducted in each community with a trained group facilitator and observer/recorder(s) from Salem State
- Structure of focus groups
 - Analyze anonymous data from the 2017 MYRBS on substance use trends
 - Students share observations and opinions about data and prevention strategies based on open-ended and probing questions predetermined by facilitator

Methodology, Cont.

- Students/guardians signed consent forms prior to participating
- Confidentiality and anonymity stressed throughout focus group
- All of the students were volunteers
 - No monetary benefits
 - No penalties for choosing not to participate
- Limitations
 - Small sample size
 - Other common limiting factors using focus groups

MYRBS 2017 - Overview

- MYRBS - Massachusetts Youth Risk Behavior Survey
 - Conducted every 2 years
 - 59 randomly selected public high-schools
 - Anonymous survey on major risk behaviors including alcohol and substance use
- Topics chosen for review during focus group
 - Substance use perception and access
 - Alcohol, tobacco, and marijuana use among youth
 - Substance use on school property
 - Motor vehicle safety



MYRBS 2017 - Summary of Findings

Source: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/sfs/yrbs/>

- Substance use perception and access
 - Hearing/Seeing anti-drug ads, past 30 days: **75.2%**
 - Thinking most their age drink alcohol: **80.9%**
 - Thinking most their age smoke cigarettes: **31.6%**
 - Thinking most their age smoke marijuana: **82.4%**
 - Thinking the risk of harm from binge drinking is moderate or great: **79.9%**
 - Thinking the risk of harm from marijuana is moderate or great: **32%**
 - Thinking that is very or fairly easy to get alcohol: **75.9%**
 - Thinking that is very or fairly easy to get marijuana: **73.7%**



MYRBS 2017 - Summary of Findings, Cont.

Source: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/sfs/yrbs/>

- Alcohol use trends
 - Ever drank alcohol: **56.2%**
 - Drinking alcohol, past 30 days: **31.4%**
 - Binge drinking , past 30 days: **15.9%**
- Tobacco use trends
 - Ever smoke cigarettes: **19.6%**
 - Smoking cigarettes, past 30 days: **6.4%**
 - Ever use electronic vapor products: **41.1%**
 - Using electronic vapor products, past 30 days: **20.1%**
- Marijuana use trends
 - Ever use marijuana: **37.9%**
 - Using marijuana, past 30 days: **24.1%**



MYRBS 2017 - Summary of Findings, Cont.

Source: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/sfs/yrbs/>

- Substance use on school property
 - Using alcohol at school, past 30 days: **2.9%**
 - Using marijuana at school, past 30 days: **5%**
 - Being offered, sold, or given drugs at school, past year: **20.1%**



MYRBS 2017 - Summary of Findings, Cont.

Source: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/sfs/yrbs/>

- Motor vehicle safety
 - Riding with an intoxicated driver, past 30 days: **14.4%**
 - Driving after drinking, past 30 days: **5.7%**



Focus Group Results/Major Themes

- Theme 1: High school students believe most their age have tried alcohol
- Theme 2: Vaping is a prevalent issue in high school
- Theme 3: Social pressure seen as main factor that leads to substance use
- Theme 4: Current prevention education in schools is seen as ineffective

Alcohol Use Points of Discussion



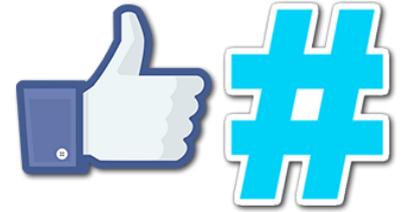
- Perception of usage versus actual usage
 - All students thought actual usage rates were low and should be higher
- Age of first drink
 - “First sips of alcohol occur at age 15 or 16”
- Drinking and Gender
 - Ever tried/consistent drinking is higher among females
 - “Females drink more because of low self-esteem”
 - “Pressure to meet roles and norms”
- Factors that lead to drinking
 - “If you want fit in with older students or popular student groups, so because they use, then you use too”
 - “Students see parents do it so they think it’s ok for them to do it too”
 - “Students may drink at house parties. Not so much in public because it smells”

Vaping Use Points of Discussion



- Perception on usage
 - “Everyone is vaping”
 - “Over the summer people got addicted to their flash drives”
- Why is vaping so popular?
 - Variety of flavors - appealing to youth
 - “It’s the flavors”
 - Accessible
 - “Everyone is vaping so it’s easy to do, hard not to do”
 - “You don’t have to be as old to vape as smoking [cigarettes], you can buy it online easily and lie about your age online”
 - “Stores don’t care how old you are to buy vape”
 - “Pods get sold to each other, use at each other’s house, think its not harmful, use pods in the bathrooms at school”

Factors that lead to substance use



- Social Capital
 - Social media - more 'likes'
 - "Kids post their weed, drinking, think they're so cool"
 - More independence = more likely to use
 - "Once students have their own income, drug and vaping increase"
 - Vaping appears to be the "cool" thing to do and it has become an addiction
 - "Students are slaves to the vape"
 - Drinking at parties - peer pressure to fit in with 'cool' crowd
 - "If you drink you are considered cool"
 - Using during school hours has "badass" appeal
 - "People are sharing their pods and pens in class they think they are so cool"
 - Rite of passage for upperclassmen
 - "You're old enough now, it's time you did this"

Factors that lead to substance use, cont.



- Boredom
 - Less extracurricular activities = more likely to use
 - “If students feel bored it gives them something to do”
- ‘Reward’ is greater than risk
 - Students continue using substances regardless of consequences
 - “School will suspend students who get caught, but even though there are negative consequences students don’t care”
- Family communication and Support
 - Students are influenced by their parents
 - “Parents are supposed to be a foundation. If parents discipline themselves not to use substances, you learn how to discipline yourself too”

Student Opinions on Prevention



- Current prevention education is not effective
 - Scare tactics do not work
 - “Scare tactic approach doesn’t work, not helpful at all, people don’t care until something happens to them”
 - Students only focus on immediate impact
 - “Kids think they can recover faster than adults they don’t think about long term effects”
- What works?
 - Prevention education should start sooner
 - “It should begin in 5th or 6th grade and continue into High-School”
 - Prevention education needs to be more relevant and more available
 - “Students don’t know where resources are”
 - “We know you are going to do it, but here are other resources to try instead”
 - More interactive discussions versus lectures
 - Credible speakers to speak on substance prevention
 - Educate teachers and administrators on substance use
 - “Teachers don’t know what vapes look like”

Student Opinions on Peer Pressure



- How are youth being pressure to use substances?
 - *Peer pressure is less of the 'c'mon let's try it' and more 'hand it off - expected to do it*
 - *Seeing posts on social media - fear of missing out*
- What kinds of strategies work well to avoid getting pressured?
 - *Avoid altogether, or say something like I can't drink for work or I can't drink on the medication I'm on or I get drug tested or I have medical conditions or I'm driving so I'm the DD*
- What are the hardest situations to avoid being pressured to use?
 - *Going away to college, grad parties, house parties, and if you can't drive, you're stuck*
- When asked about peer pressure in general, one participant stated...
 - *Reevaluate friends if you feel pressured and that you need to change the playgrounds and your play friends, and that you should surround yourself with positive people and people you can trust*

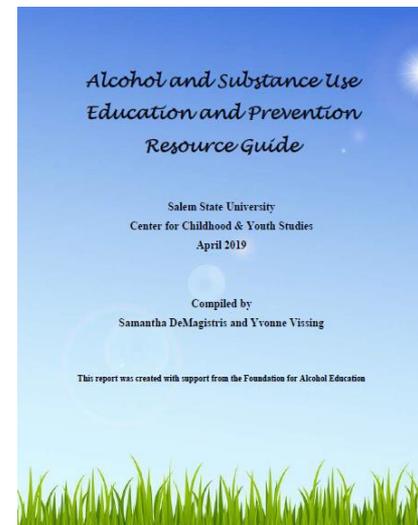
Evidence-Based Prevention Strategies



- CATCH my breath curriculum
 - Vaping prevention
 - Middle and high-school
 - DPH is supporting program for all MA districts
 - [Catch.org](https://www.catch.org) for more information
- Positive youth development = upstream prevention
- Best prevention is having conversations with kids
 - Scare tactics do not work
 - Parents and community leaders should rely on honest communication to help teens make healthy choices
 - Lead with facts, set good examples, reach out for help as early as possible

Suggestions Moving Forward / Further Research

- Expand research and include more communities
- Demographic correlations
 - Analyze differences among different demographics
- Educate Community on Resources
 - CCYS Alcohol and Substance Use Education and Prevention Resource Guide
 - Please reach out to Samantha DeMagistris or Yvonne Vissing for a copy of the guide!



Thank you!

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