

Stress, Mental Health, Relationships & Substance Use in Norwalk Youth

Findings from the June 2021 Youth Survey



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About the 2021 Youth Survey

- Intended to identify current needs & behaviors, hear youth voice, inform community planning and awareness, support schools, meet grant requirements
- An initiative of **The Norwalk Partnership (TNP)**, the local substance use prevention coalition
- Coordinated & funded by Positive Directions-The Center for Prevention & Counseling, through the federal Drug-Free Communities (DFC) grant
- Used Developmental Relationships (™) Survey by the Search Institute
- Conducted June 2021

TNP Leadership Team organizations:



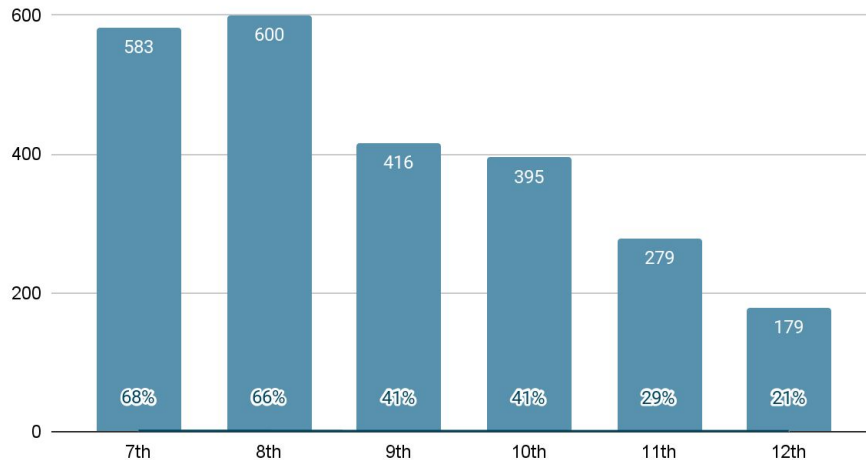
Demographics

Who Was Surveyed?

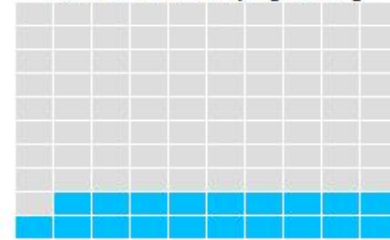
2542 Norwalk PS students took the survey in June 2021

- 67% of middle school students in 7th and 8th grades
- 33% of high school students
- 44% of all students in grades 7-12

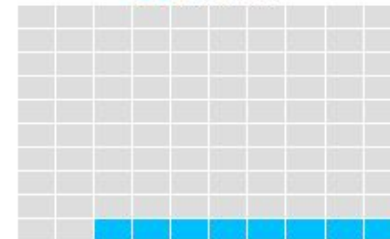
Students by Grade



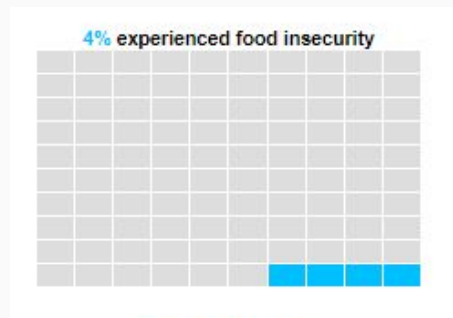
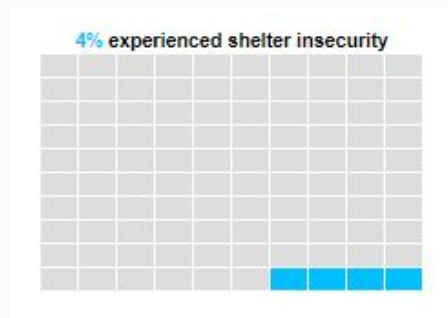
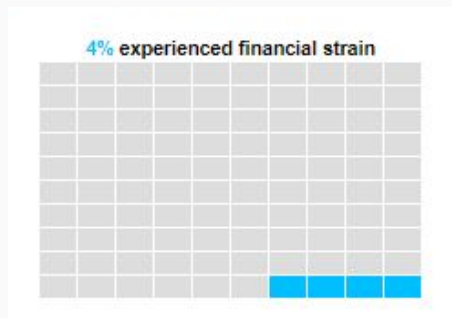
19% are in ESL/ELL programming



8% have an IEP

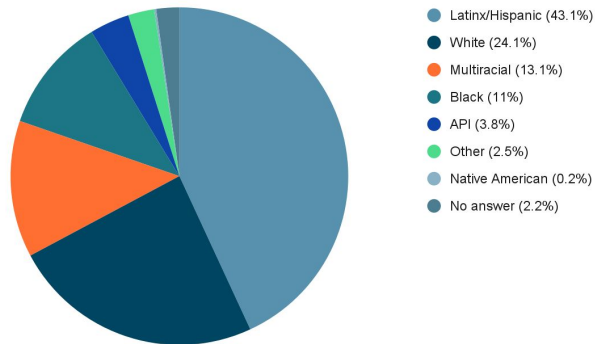


How Many Students Reported Basic Needs?

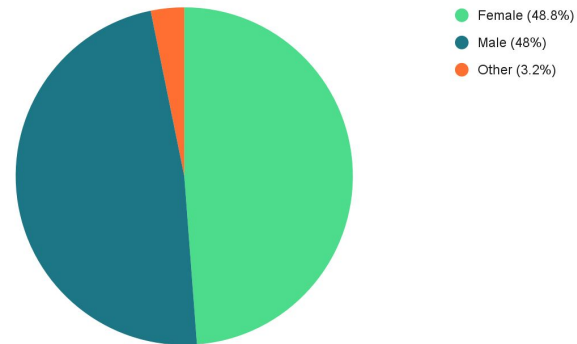


How Did Norwalk Students Identify?

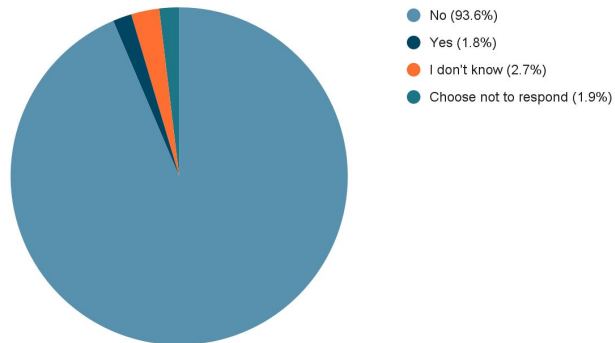
Racial Identity



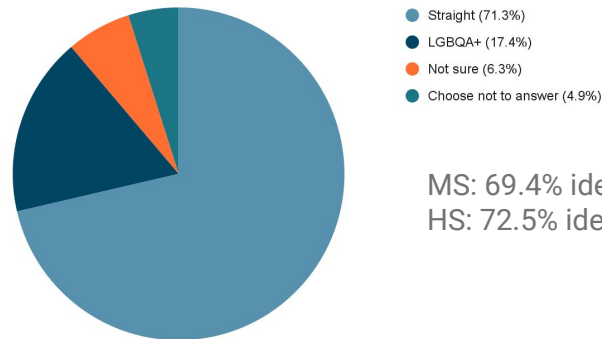
Gender Identity



Do you identify as Transgender?



Which of these best describes you? (Sexual identity)



MS: 69.4% identify as straight
HS: 72.5% identify as straight

Coping with COVID Stress

(grades 9-12 only)

How Stressful Has the Pandemic Been?

Overall, **73%** of students reported pandemic was Somewhat or Very Stressful for them:

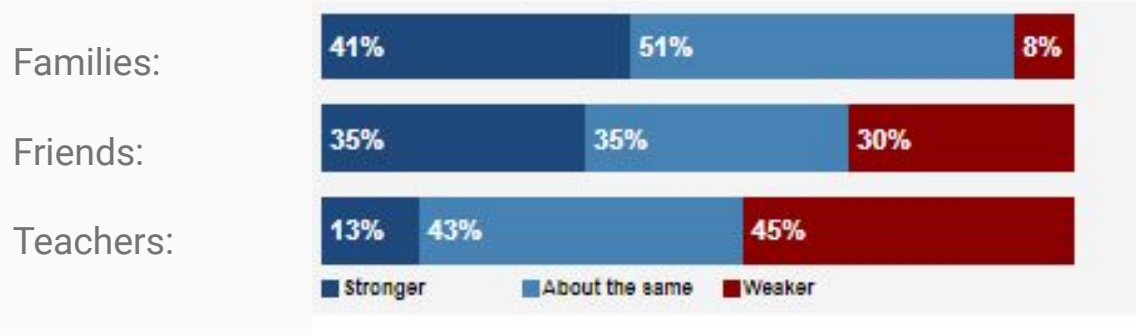


Only **30%** reached out to others about how they were feeling

Groups reporting higher rates of stress: LGBTQ+ (**84%**), families experiencing financial strain (**81%**), girls (**81%**), Black students (**77%**)

How Did COVID Affect Students' Relationships?

Quality of relationships since the pandemic:



Connections to people at school:

- **39%** feel connected to other students at school
- Majority (**83%**) feel connected to friends
- Just over half of students (56%) feel connected to staff in school

What Role did Teachers Play in Providing Support during COVID?

Emotional Support from Teachers during COVID (grades 9-12):

My relationship with my Teachers has helped make things feel more normal during the pandemic.



My Teachers have helped me understand, or make sense of, my feelings related to the pandemic.



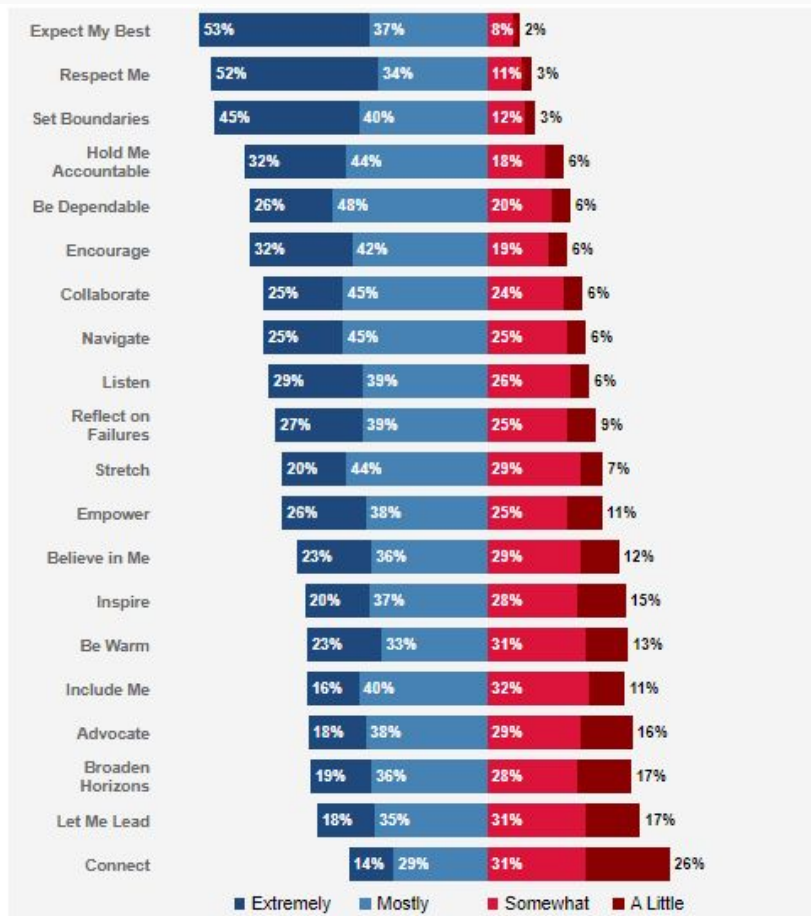
My Teachers provide a safe space where I can share my feelings and experiences related to the pandemic.



Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

Developmental Relationships With Teachers (grades 7-12)

To What Extent Do Students Feel Supported by Their Teachers' Actions?

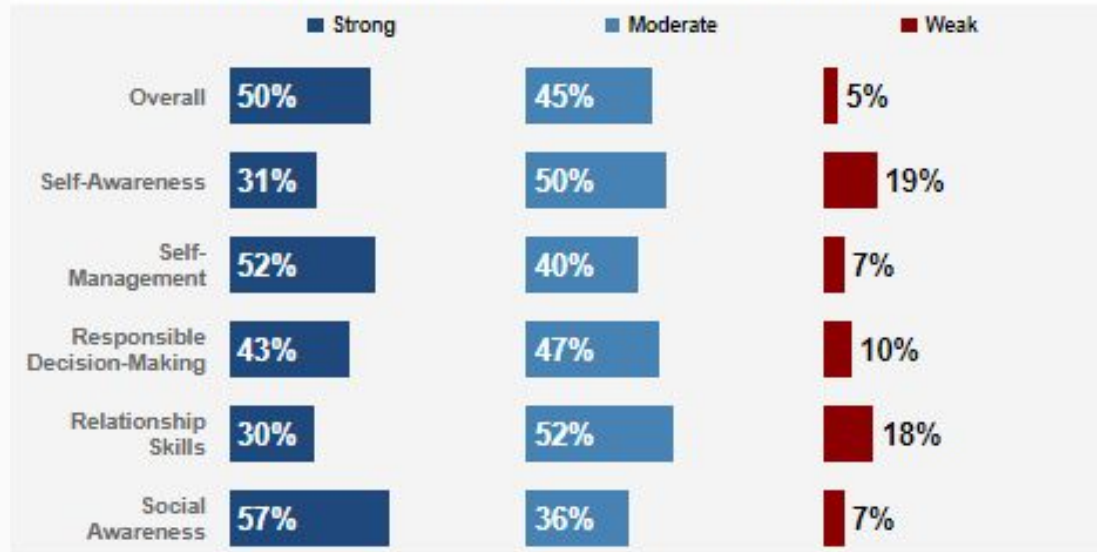


- For **19** of the 20 actions measured, **more than half of students feel “extremely” or “moderately” supported** by teachers.
- On **5** of the 20 actions, **15%-26% of students feel only “a little” supported.**

Groups reporting **lower** than average scores related to relationships with teachers: LGB+, Girls, Whites, Blacks.

How Do Students View their Own Social-Emotional Skills?

Overall, Norwalk teens report having **good social-emotional skills**:



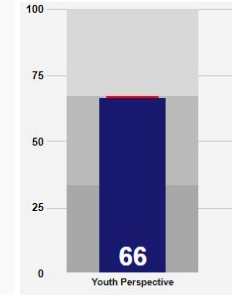
Groups reporting **lower** than average social-emotional skills: families experiencing financial strain, LGB+, Latino, students with IEPs, ELLs.

Youth who experienced stronger levels of Developmental Relationships had stronger Social Emotional Competence skills.

Do Students Find the NPS Environment to be Culturally Responsive?

Overall, youth scores indicate that the **NPS environment is moderately culturally responsive**:

“There are adults who have similar racial or ethnic backgrounds to mine and who I consider good role models”:

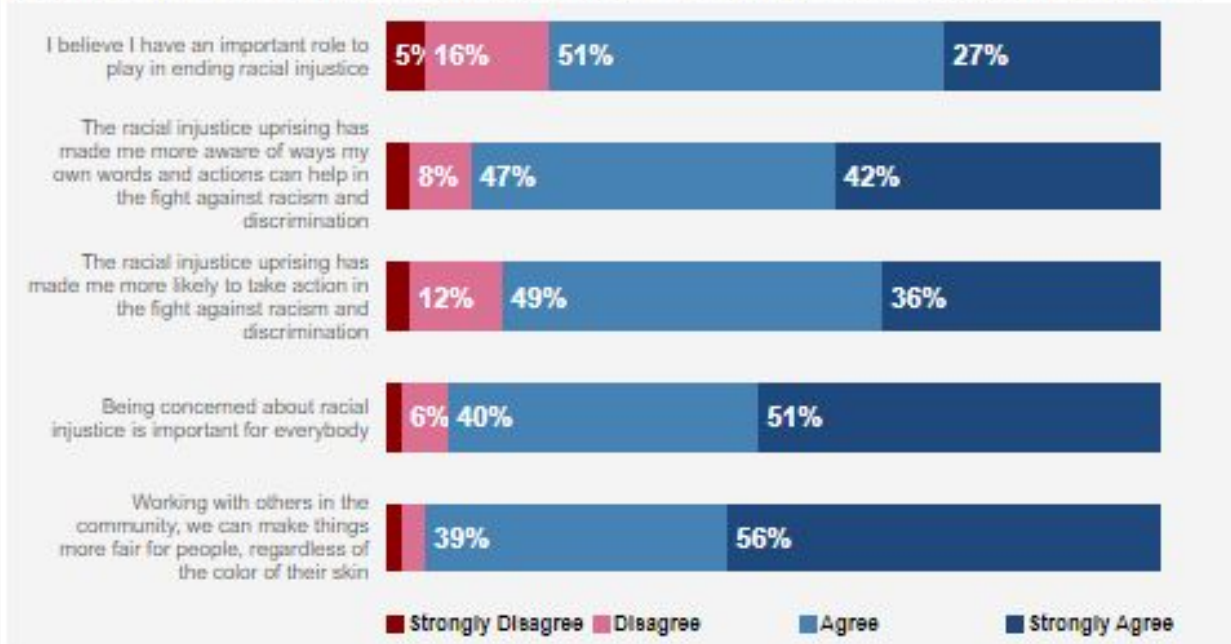


Groups reporting **lower** than average scores for cultural responsiveness: families experiencing financial strain, Black students, LGB+.

Youth who reported a more Culturally Responsive environment had stronger Social Emotional Competence skills.

Has the Racial Injustice Movement Empowered Our Teens? (9th-12th grades only)

Following the deaths of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor (and many other people of color), there has been increased attention and unrest around the issue of racial injustice. In the questions below, we refer to this as the “racial injustice uprising”.



“I have an important role to play”: 88% of girls agree vs 68% of boys

“We can make things more fair for people”: 95%-100% of most subgroups agree, vs 85% of those experiencing financial strain

What support do you wish you were getting from your school focused on building strong relationships during COVID-19 pandemic that you are not getting right now?



Key Points - Stress & Relationships

Need for:

- Community building embedded in all school activities
- Skills building: problem solving, self-awareness, relationship, self-esteem
- Opportunities and encouragement to reach out to others

Action steps:

- Maximize use of all class and extracurricular activities and advisories to build relationships, skills, support.
- Use community providers for skills workshops.
- Train teachers on Developmental Relationships model.
- Consider creating safe spaces, peer supports, and mentors that are culturally specific.

Mental Health

To What Extent are Norwalk Students Struggling with Depression?

During the past 12 months...	Grade	%
did you ever feel so sad or hopeless almost every day for two weeks or more in a row that you stopped doing some usual activities? YES	7-8	32
	9-12	46
	7-12	39
did you ever seriously consider attempting suicide? YES	7-8	12
	9-12	13
	7-12	13
7-8, n=1183; 9-12, n=1269; 7-12, n=2542		

Groups reporting rates of depression higher than the overall average of 39%:

- Gender: Prefer to self-describe (**76%**), Female (**49%**)
- Sexuality: LGB+ (**70%**), Not sure (**52%**), Prefer to self-describe (**51%**)
- Financial strain: Shelter insecurity (**48%**), Food insecurity (**44%**)
- Race: Multiracial (**46%**), Black (**43%**), Hispanic (**43%**)
- Students with IEPs (**45%**)
- English Language Learners (**43%**)

What about Suicide?

In the past 12 months, how many times did you actually attempt suicide?	7-8 %	9-12 %	7-12 %
0 times	93	94	94
1 time	4	3	4
2 or 3 times	2	2	2
4 or more times	1	1	1

7-8, n=1183; 9-12, n=1269; 7-12, n=2542

Groups reporting rates of suicide attempt higher than the overall average of 6%:

- Sexuality: LGB+ (**20%**), Prefer to self-describe (**13%**), Not sure (**12%**)
- Gender: Prefer to self-describe (**20%**), Female (**7%**)
- Financial strain: Food insecurity (**14%**), shelter insecurity (**13%**)
- Students with IEPs (**11%**)
- English Language Learners (**9%**)
- Race: Multiracial (**9%**), Asian (**8%**), Hispanic (**7%**)

Key Points - Mental Health

Need for:

- Social-emotional supports
- Coping skills
- Visible supports for different subgroups
- Suicide awareness & prevention training for youth, staff, parents
- LGBTQ training for staff, parents, coaches

Action steps:

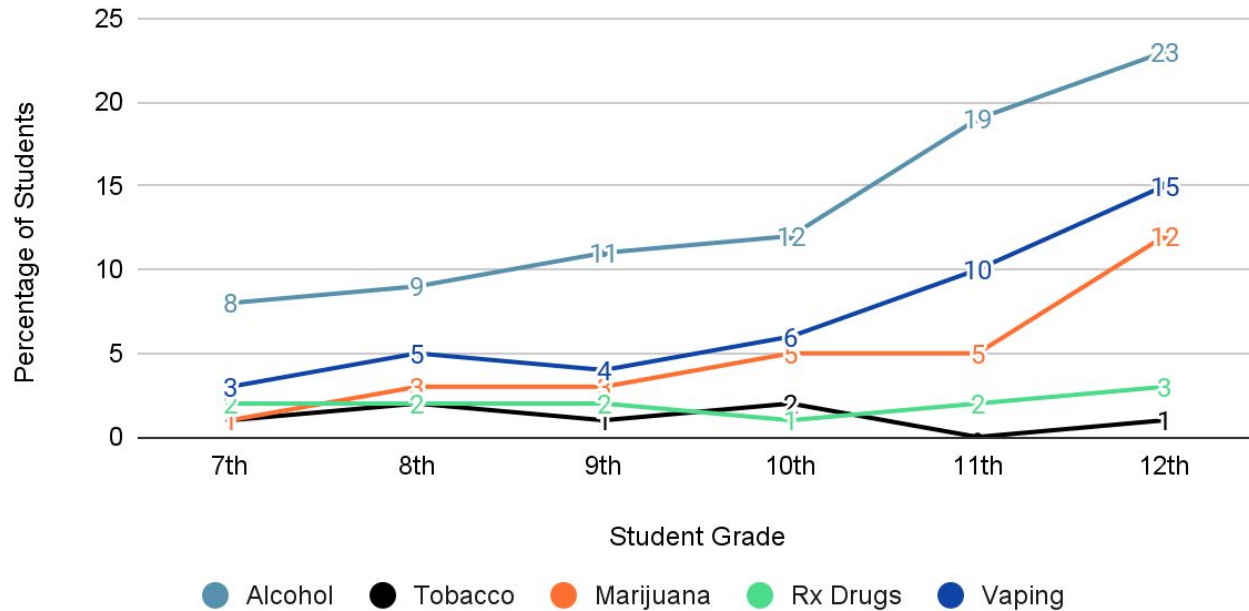
- Review K-12 health curriculum for coping skills, prevention and wellness content.
- Continue development of suicide postvention plans with community partners.
- Consider building wellness breaks into each class period.
- Use community resources for MH and suicide trainings for staff, students.
- Work with community groups to offer Fresh Check Day.
- Provide peer-led supports, drop-in spaces.
- Ensure classrooms and activities are culturally affirming and safe spaces.
- Provide LGBTQ awareness training.
- Disseminate community partner bulletin to parents to promote awareness, educational opportunities.

Substance Use

To What Extent are Norwalk Students Currently Using Substances?

Past 30 Day Use of Substances, NPS

June 2021



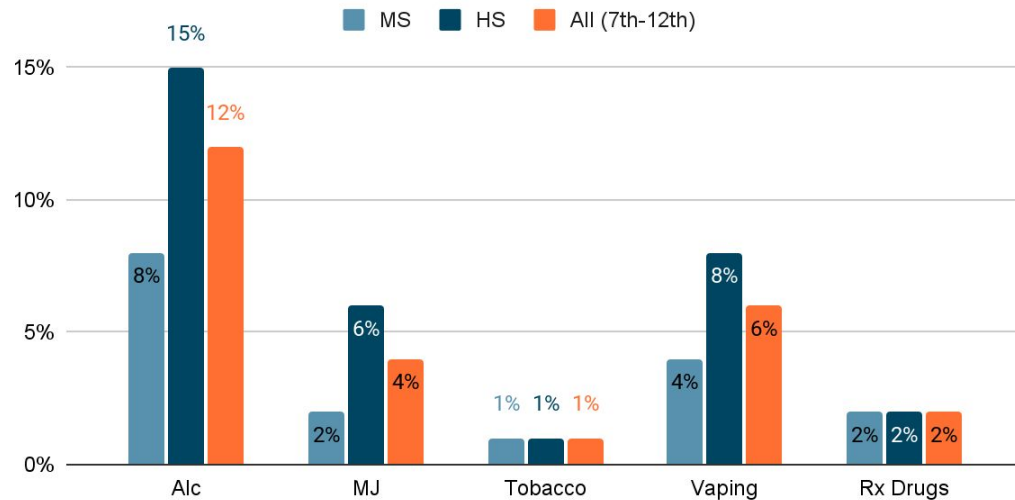
Among students who use alcohol:

- 32% vape
- 21% use marijuana
- 10% use Rx drugs
- 9% use cigarettes

What are the Substance Use Rates for Middle School, High School, and Overall?

Substance Use Rates by School Level & Overall

Norwalk, CT, June 2021



Disparities:

- **Girls** use vapes, alcohol & marijuana more than boys.
- Whites use alcohol more (17%); Blacks use marijuana more (7%); multiracial vape more (7%); Blacks use Rx drugs more (5%).

Groups using substances at **1.5+ times the average rate:**

- Depression (*3x higher for those with suicidal ideation*)
- LGBTQ+ (*4x higher for those who self-describe*)
- Students with IEP (*up to 2.5x higher*)
- Financial strain (*2x higher*)

Are Students Aware of the Health Risks from Substance Use?

- 86% think misusing prescription drugs is harmful
- 85% think smoking is harmful
- 78% think vaping is harmful
- 77% think drinking 5+ drinks at a time, 1-2 times per week, is harmful.
- 65% think using marijuana 1-2 times per week is harmful.
 - In 7th grade, only 77% students think marijuana is harmful, dropping to 52% of 12th graders.

Higher-risk groups where perception of harm is ~7-10 points lower than the average:

- Students experiencing financial strain (all drugs)
- Students with IEPs (all drugs)
- ELLs (all drugs except marijuana)

How Does Parent & Peer Disapproval of Substances Affect Student Use?

- Students who believe their **parents** do not disapprove have **higher rates** of substance use:
 - **40%** use alcohol (vs 12% overall)
 - **25%** use marijuana (vs 4% overall)
- Students who believe their **peers** do not disapprove have **higher rates** of substance use:
 - **27%** use alcohol (vs 12% overall)
 - **15%** use marijuana (vs 4% overall)
- Peer disapproval is highest for prescription drug use (**89%**) and lowest for marijuana (**77%**)
 - **More than half of seniors** do not perceive peer disapproval of marijuana.

Key Points - Substance Use

Need for:

- Prevention & health education
- Parental awareness
- Visibility of peers who are substance free

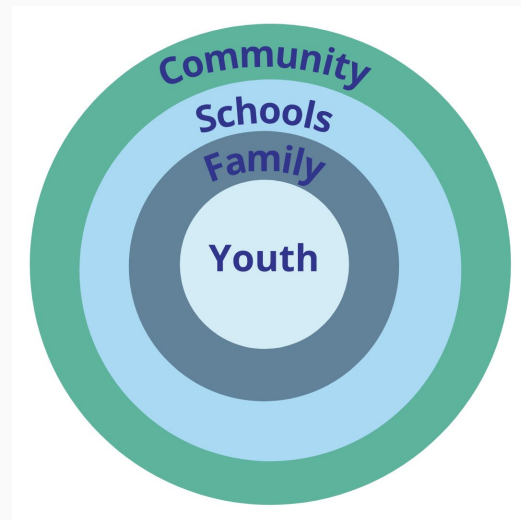
Action steps:

- Host Freshman Forum for teens & parents organized by TNP; require attendance for school activities or health class.
- Review K-12 health substance use curriculum.
- Provide training and resources to health educators, in collaboration with TNP.
- Promote sober pro-social activities in collaboration with community partners.
- Implement Preventure program.
- Environmental scan.
- Signage, lighting, bag checks, patrols.
- School policies / community ordinances.

Next Steps

NPS:

- Review data with school community (with TNP):
 - administrators & staff
 - health teachers & coaches
 - counseling staff
 - students
- Recommend / plan for possible curriculum & advisory changes, student programs, PD for health/PE & coaches
- Work with TNP and community partners to offer trainings and resources



Next Steps: Community Partners

TNP Coalition partners:

- Present data (BOE, Common Council, Norwalk ACTS SEH Committee, community stakeholder groups such as PTOs, YSB, parents, youth...)
- Finalize action plans with community partner input to address identified needs and align objectives and work
- Implement community-based mental health & prevention strategies through:
 - information & education (e.g., *Freshman Forum* for parents & teens, *infographics*, *postcards*, *newsletter*)
 - skills trainings (e.g., *Preventure*, *suicide prevention*)
 - youth supports (e.g., *peer supports*, *youth committee*, *internships*, *pathways*, *teen center*)
 - environmental (e.g., *environmental scans*, *access*, *physical design*, *policies*)



Questions?

Contact:

Margaret Watt, Prevention Director

Positive Directions-The Center for Prevention & Counseling

mwatt@positivedirections.org

Example of Coalition Education (parent postcard series - front, English)



Example of Coalition Education (parent postcard series - back, English)

Parenting is hard.....

You may not feel comfortable talking about drugs with your kids-- but you're the person they need to hear from, especially now that possession of marijuana is legal over age 21.

KNOW THE FACTS ABOUT THE **NEW** MARIJUANA:

•Today's marijuana comes in many different forms - and it's been **engineered to be many times stronger than nature.**

•Many young people are "dabbing" (vaping) marijuana in concentrated forms, like oil, wax, and shatter, that are almost pure THC--the addictive drug in the plant.

•Today's high-strength THC affects brain development during adolescence. Teen users can **lose up to 8 IQ points.**

•1 in 6 teens who use marijuana (and 1 in 10 adults) become addicted.

•The number of teens admitted to CT hospitals for marijuana intoxication increased **491%** between 2016 and 2019

•The younger a teen starts using marijuana, the more likely they are to develop psychosis or addiction.

**YOU WORK HARD TO GIVE YOUR KIDS THE BEST OF EVERYTHING.
DON'T LET THEM GET LOST IN THE WEEDS.**

talk early..... talk often

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PREVENTING SUBSTANCE MISUSE
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