DRUG & ALCOHOL PREVENTION –

Awareness at the Elementary Level

11/11/25

Parent Education Series

PRESENTATORS: Megan McCullough, Director of Student Services - Behavioral Health
Leslie Shaud, Supervisor of Counseling & Wellness

Agenda

Why Now

Current research findings and recommendations supporting early, multi- component prevention

National and District Data

Key trends identified in National Survey on Drug Use and Health (2024) and Pennsylvania Youth Survey (2023)

WSSD Behavioral Health, PBIS

Review of supports delivered through PBIS framework and connect to drug and Alcohol Prevention

Botvin *LifeSkills* Program

Overview of Botvin *LifeSkills* curriculum and connection to social emotional learning. Focus on early prevention and future parent engagement opportunities.

Why Now?

Recent research shows that substance use and misuse are closely connected to:

- students' mental health
- stress levels
- New level of access to new high-potency or synthetic substances.

Summary of Cannabis Studies (Handout)

- Cannabis use during adolescence is consistently linked with increased risk of depression and suicidality
- Functional and structural brain changes are observed in heavy users
- Early and chronic use poses higher risk, especially for those with existing mental health conditions
- Importance of prevention efforts and informed behavioral health interventions
  - Improved outcomes when prevention efforts occur prior to initiation
  - Recommendations for multi-component prevention work

Brain Function Outcomes of Recent and Lifetime Cannabis Use - 2025

The study included 1,003 young adults (age 22-36)

Included MRI brain imaging, functional assessments and urine toxicology (for recent cannabis use)

Conducted over a three year period

Diverse demographics

Participants were grouped by lifetime cannabis-use:

- Nonusers: fewer than 10 lifetime uses
- Moderate users: 10-999 uses
- Heavy users: 1,000+ lifetime uses or a diagnosis of cannabis dependence

Brain Function Outcomes of Recent and Lifetime Cannabis Use - 2025 Cont.

Key Findings:

- Heavy lifetime cannabis use in young adults is associated with reduced brain activation in working-memory networks.
    - Working memory is critical for children in school: following instructions, solving problems, retaining new information.
    -
- The brain regions affected are those still developing in childhood/adolescence — so prevention and protective behaviors matter early

- Educating children about habits, substance use, choices, and helping them build strong cognitive supports (sleep, nutrition, attention games) are sensible strategies

- The study doesn't show that *every* cannabis use will cause major brain damage in kids, but it adds to the evidence that frequent/heavy use may carry cognitive/brain-activation costs that could map onto real-world skills

- Parents can use the findings as a basis for age-appropriate conversations

National Survey on Drug Use and Health - 2024

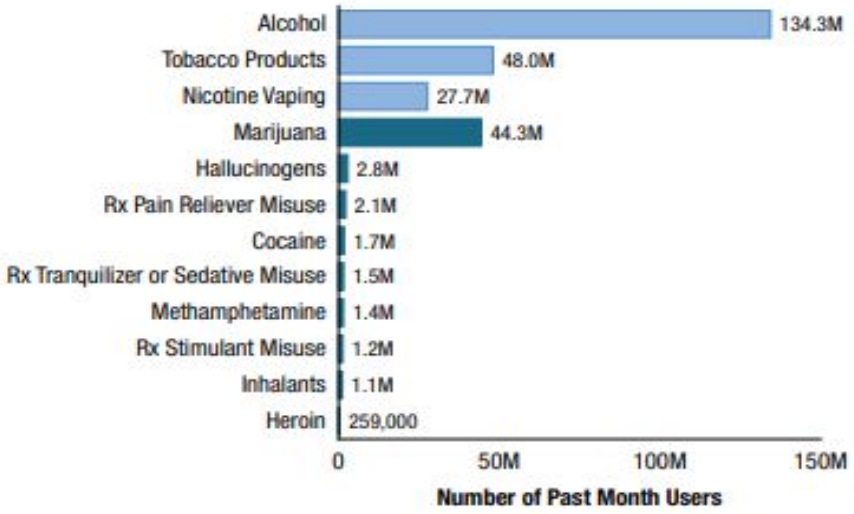
The survey included: 14,013 adolescents

56, 228 adults

National Survey on Drug Use and Health - 2024 Cont.

Key Substance Use and Mental Health Indicators in the United States:

Figure 1. Past Month Substance Use: Among People Aged 12 or Older; 2024



Rx = prescription.

Note: The estimated numbers of current users of different substances are not mutually exclusive because people could have used more than one type of substance in the past month.

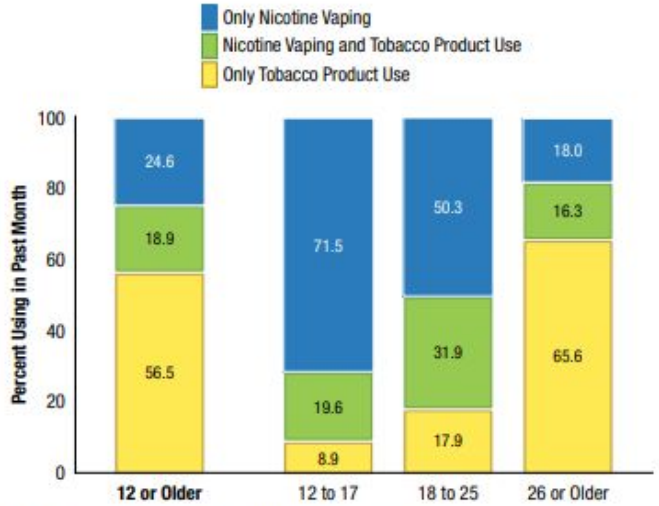
National Survey on Drug Use and Health - 2024 Cont.

Table A.4B Use of Selected Substances in the Past Month: Among Adolescents Aged 12 to 17; 2021-2024

Substance	2021		2022		2023		2024		Trend
TOBACCO PRODUCTS	2.9	(0.29)	2.0	(0.18)	1.9	(0.17)	1.9	(0.17)	Decreased
Cigarettes	1.7	(0.22)	1.2	(0.15)	1.3	(0.15)	1.2	(0.14)	No Change
Daily Cigarette Smoking[1]	*	(*)	3.1	(1.30)	*	(*)	3.8	(1.37)	Not Tested
Smoked 1+ Packs of Cigarettes per Day[2]	*	(*)	*	(*)	*	(*)	*	(*)	Not Tested
Smokeless Tobacco	0.6	(0.12)	0.2	(0.05)	0.3	(0.06)	0.5	(0.08)	No Change
Cigars	0.8	(0.16)	0.7	(0.10)	0.4	(0.07)	0.5	(0.09)	No Change
Pipe Tobacco	0.3	(0.08)	0.2	(0.07)	0.2	(0.05)	0.1	(0.03)	No Change
ALCOHOL	7.2	(0.44)	6.8	(0.32)	6.9	(0.37)	6.6	(0.36)	No Change
Binge Alcohol Use	4.0	(0.33)	3.2	(0.22)	3.9	(0.29)	3.5	(0.22)	No Change
Heavy Alcohol Use	0.4	(0.11)	0.2	(0.05)	0.5	(0.10)	0.4	(0.06)	No Change
MARIJUANA	6.1	(0.39)	6.4	(0.32)	6.0	(0.32)	6.0	(0.32)	No Change

* Low precision; no estimate reported.

Figure 3. Type of Past Month Tobacco Product Use or Nicotine Vaping: Among Past Month Nicotine Product Users Aged 12 or Older; 2024



Note: The percentages may not add to 100 percent due to rounding.

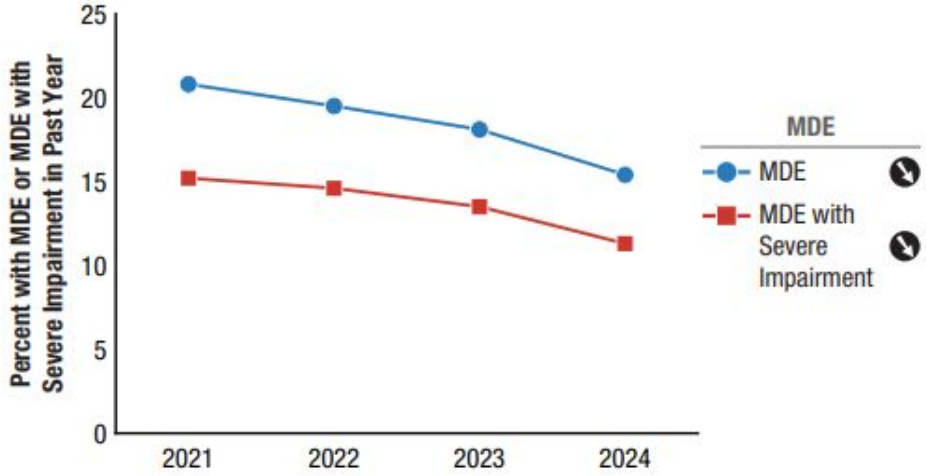
National Survey on Drug Use and Health - 2024 Cont.

Table A.8B Alcohol or Marijuana Use in the Past Month: Among People Aged 12 to 20; 2021-2024

Substance	2021		2022		2023		2024		Trend
ALCOHOL	15.6	(0.50)	15.1	(0.45)	14.6	(0.49)	13.3	(0.44)	Decreased
Binge Alcohol Use	8.6	(0.40)	8.2	(0.36)	8.6	(0.38)	7.6	(0.33)	No Change
Heavy Alcohol Use	1.6	(0.17)	1.7	(0.18)	1.7	(0.17)	1.5	(0.14)	No Change
MARIJUANA	10.8	(0.44)	11.8	(0.39)	11.3	(0.40)	10.5	(0.36)	No Change

National Survey on Drug Use and Health - 2024 Cont.

Figure 48. Major Depressive Episode (MDE) and MDE with Severe Impairment in the Past Year: Among Adolescents Aged 12 to 17; 2021-2024



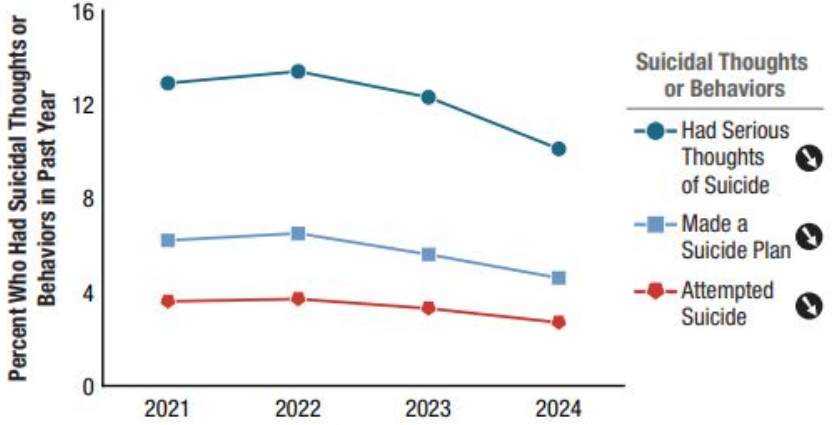
Note: Estimates for 2021 may differ from previously published estimates because the 2021 analysis weights were updated to facilitate between-year comparisons.

Figure 48 Table. Major Depressive Episode (MDE) or MDE with Severe Impairment in the Past Year: Among Adolescents Aged 12 to 17; Percentages, 2021-2024

MDE	2021	2022	2023	2024	Trend
MDE	20.8	19.5	18.1	15.4	Decreased
MDE with Severe Impairment	15.2	14.6	13.5	11.3	Decreased

National Survey on Drug Use and Health - 2024 Cont.

Figure 68. Had Serious Thoughts of Suicide, Made a Suicide Plan, or Attempted Suicide in the Past Year: Among Adolescents Aged 12 to 17; 2021-2024



Note: Estimates for 2021 may differ from previously published estimates because the 2021 analysis weights were updated to facilitate between-year comparisons.

Figure 68 Table. Had Serious Thoughts of Suicide, Made a Suicide Plan, or Attempted Suicide in the Past Year: Among Adolescents Aged 12 to 17; Percentages, 2021-2024

Suicidal Thoughts or Behaviors	2021	2022	2023	2024	Trend
Had Serious Thoughts of Suicide	12.9	13.4	12.3	10.1	Decreased
Made a Suicide Plan	6.2	6.5	5.6	4.6	Decreased
Attempted Suicide	3.6	3.7	3.3	2.7	Decreased

Note: Estimates for 2021 may differ from previously published estimates because the 2021 analysis weights were updated to facilitate between-year comparisons.

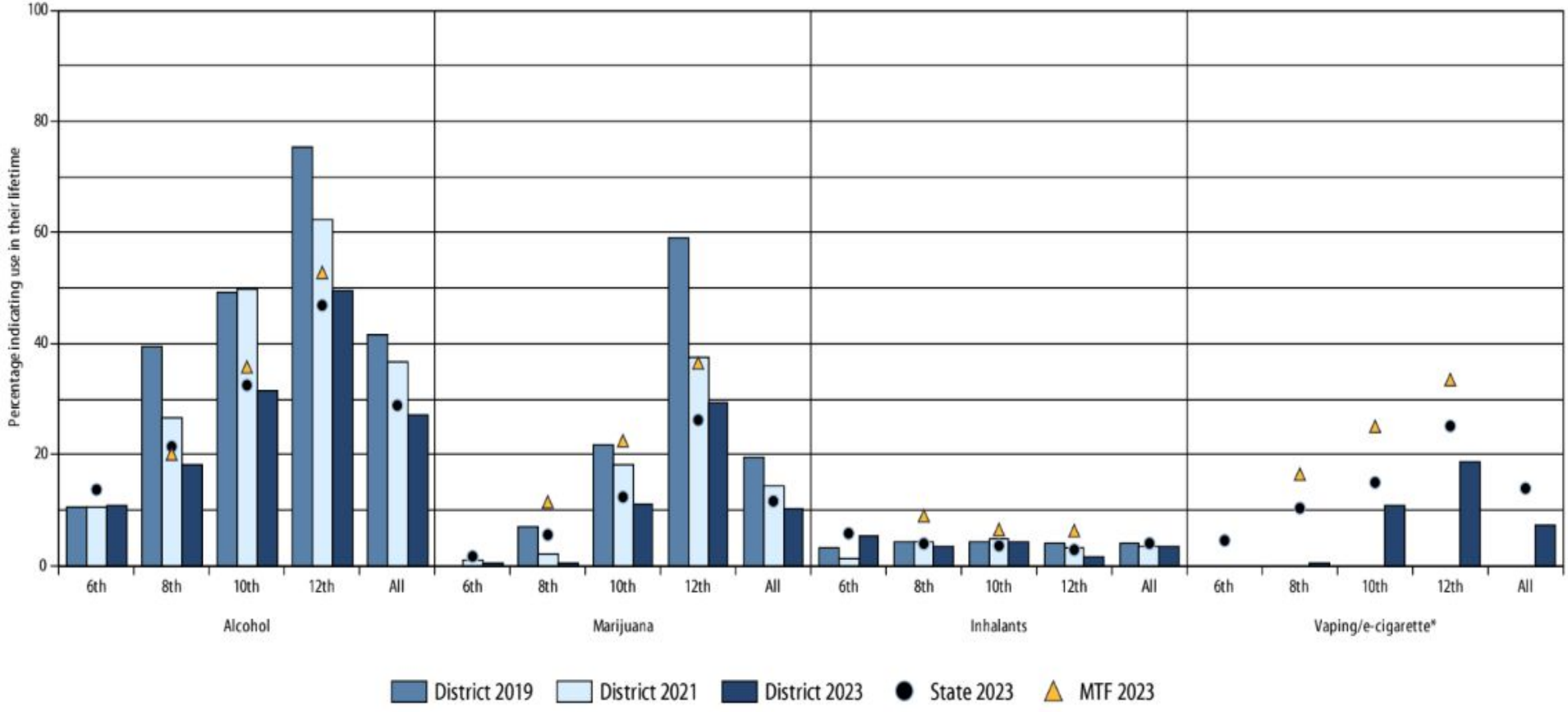
The Pennsylvania Youth Survey, or PAYS, is sponsored and conducted every two years by the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency. The data gathered in PAYS serve two primary needs.

- The results provide school administrators, state agency directors, legislators and others with critical information concerning the changes in patterns of the use and abuse of these harmful substances and behaviors.

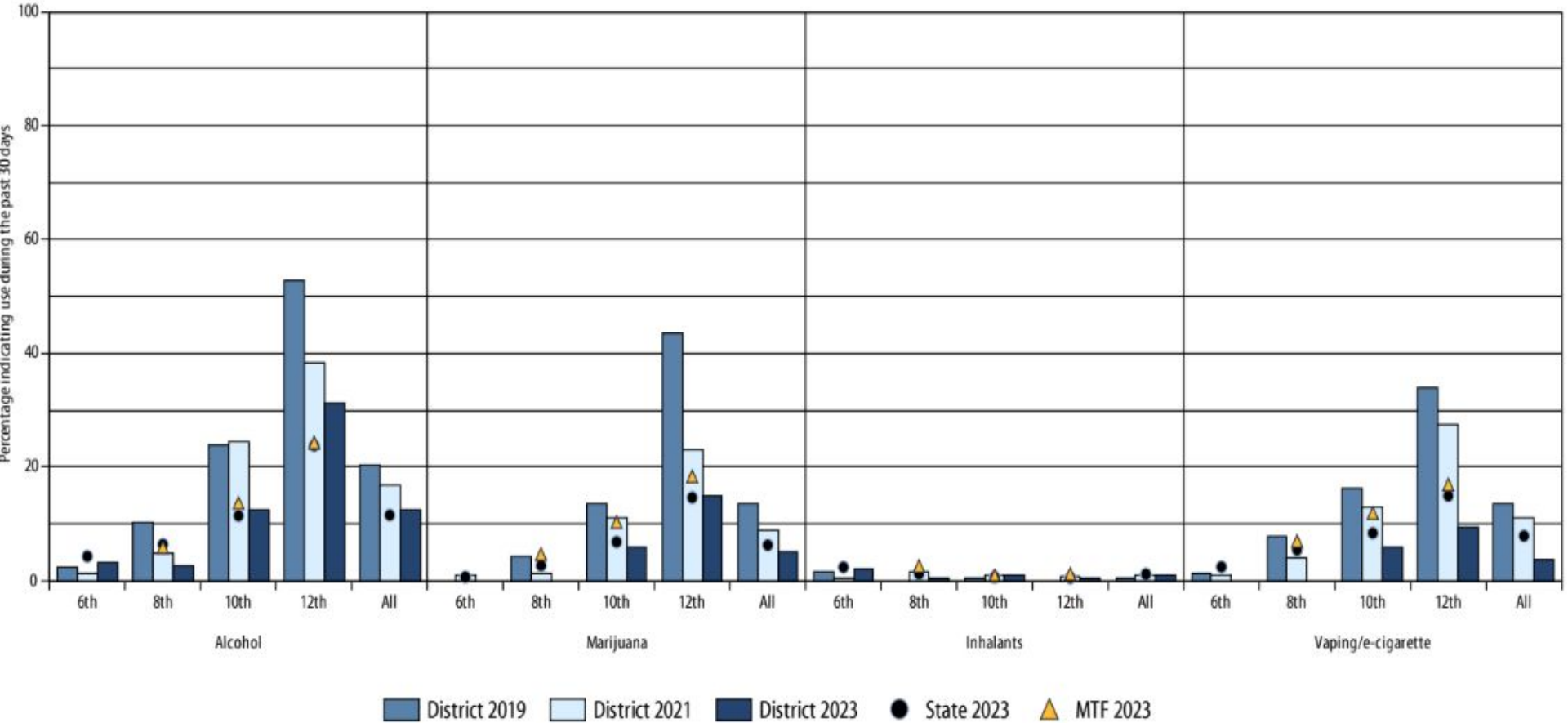
- The survey assesses risk factors that are related to these behaviors and the protective factors that help guard against them. This information allows community leaders to direct prevention resources to areas where they are likely to have the greatest impact.

PAYS
PENNSYLVANIA YOUTH SURVEY
IT PAYS TO ASK. IT PAYS TO KNOW.

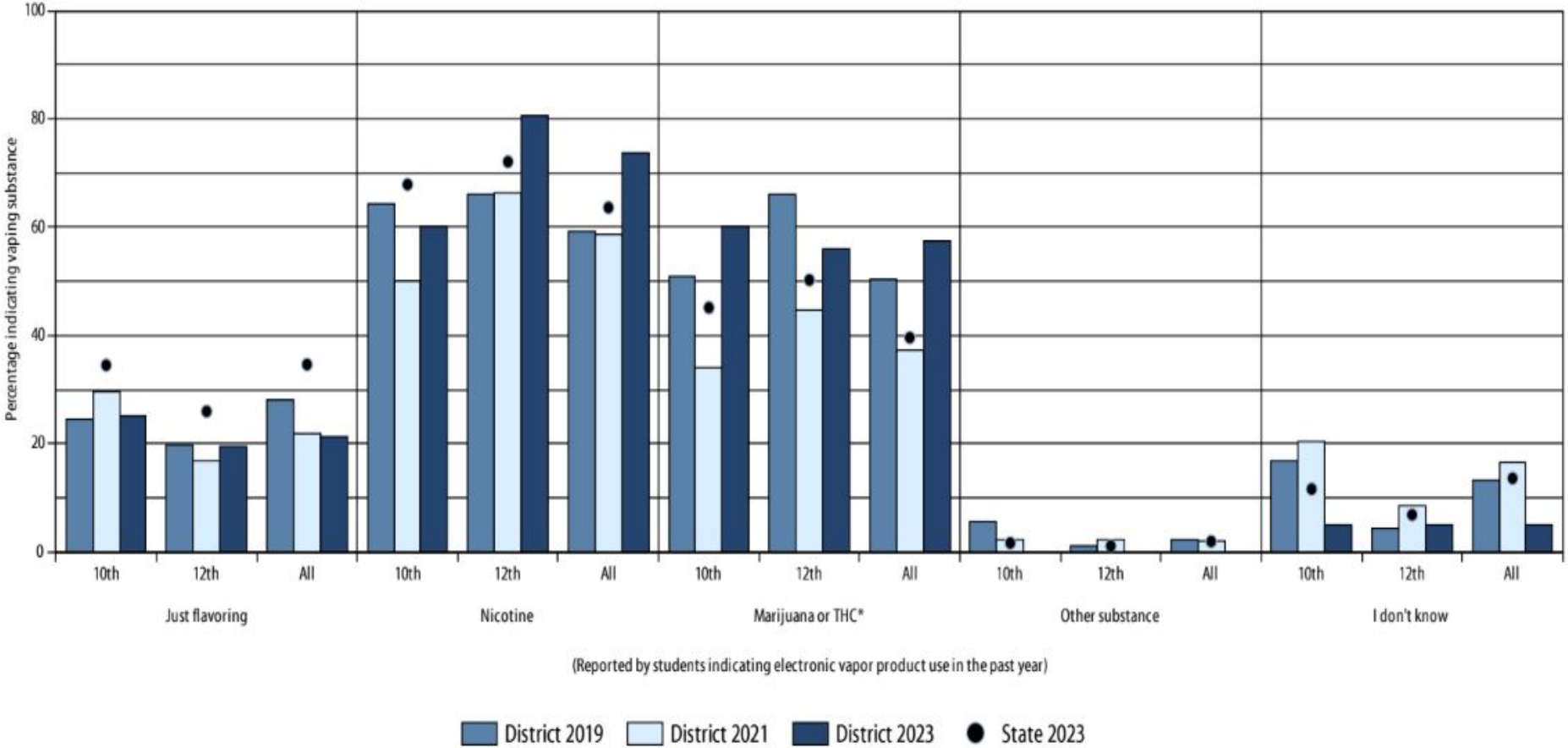
Early initiation and higher prevalence drugs - Lifetime use
Wallingford-Swarthmore School District 2023 Pennsylvania Youth Survey



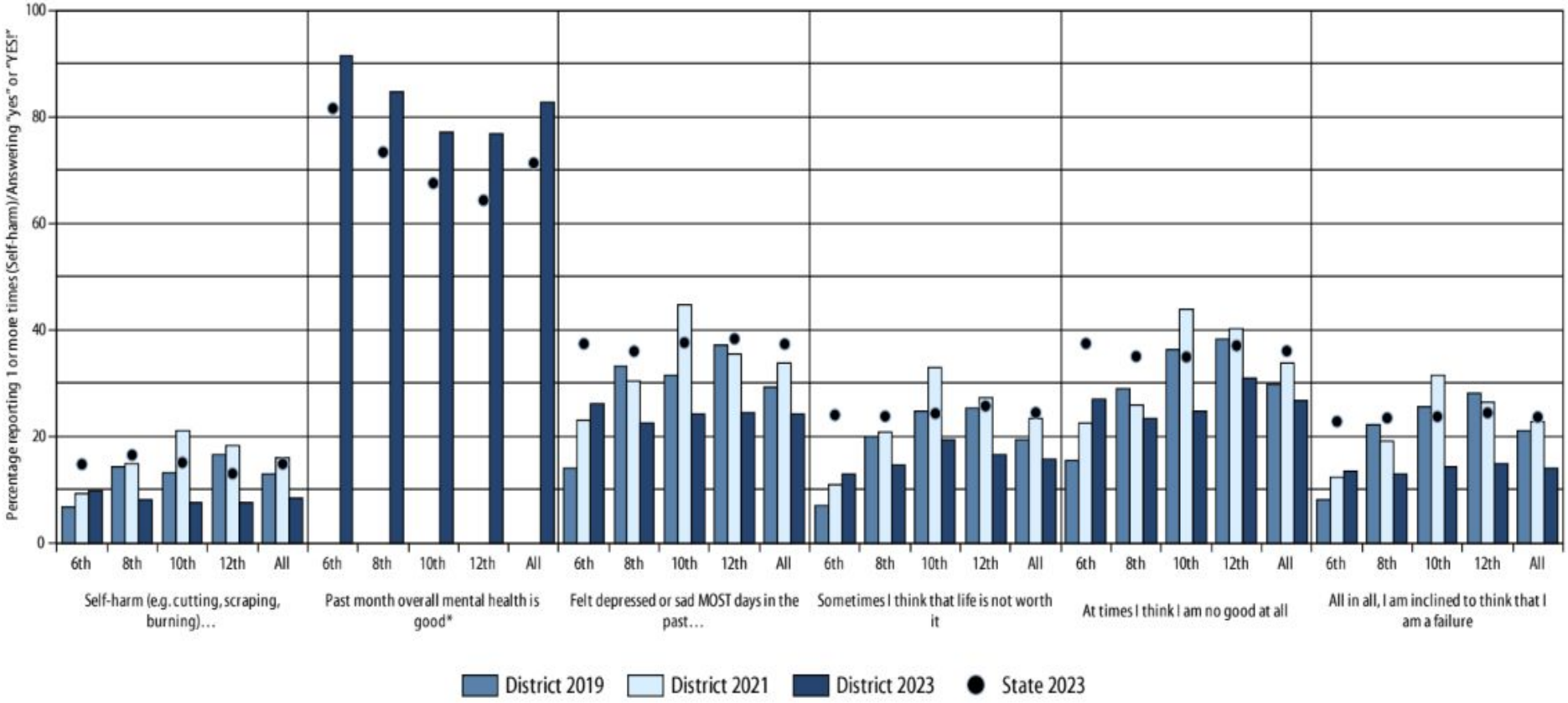
Early initiation and higher prevalence drugs - 30-day use
Wallingford-Swarthmore School District 2023 Pennsylvania Youth Survey



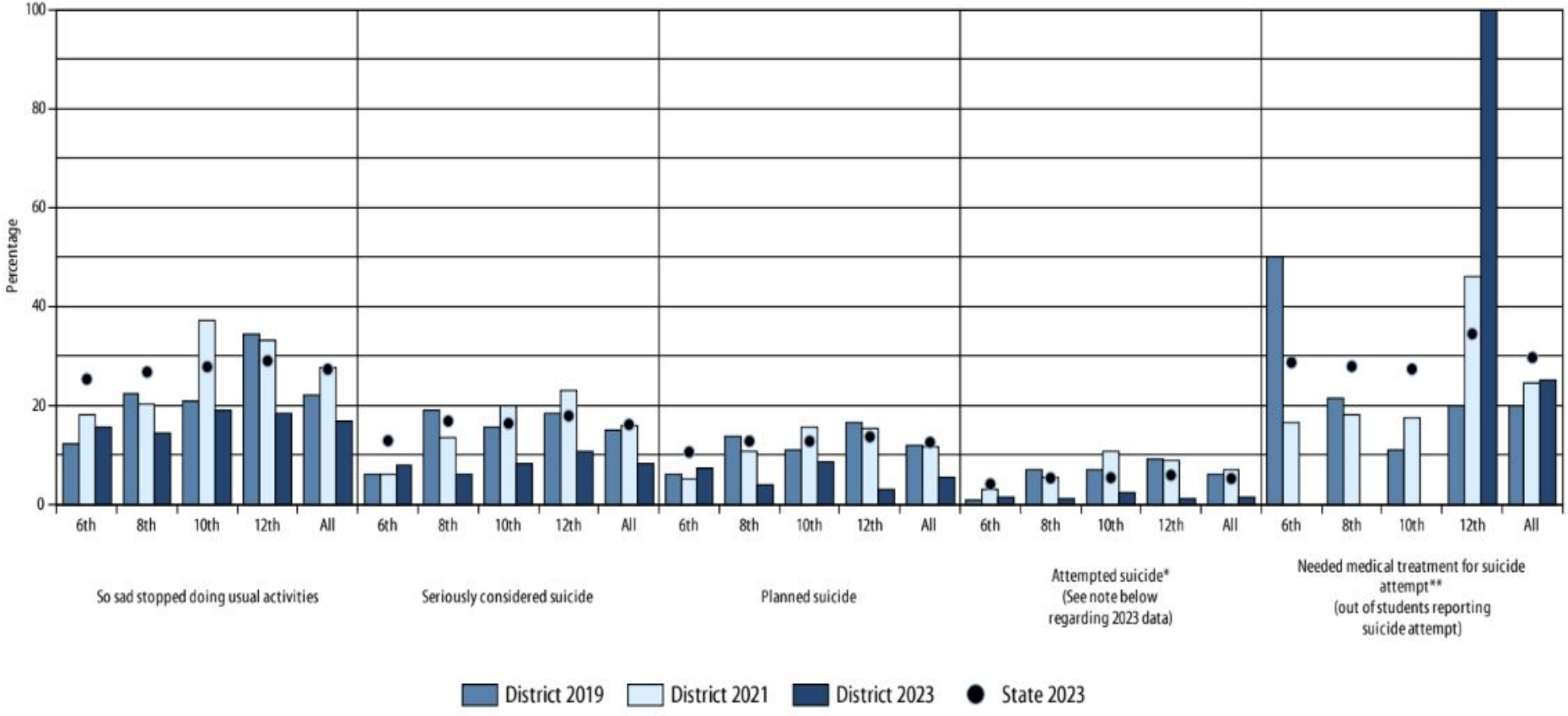
Vaping substances used by students indicating electronic vaping product use in the past year
Wallingford-Swarthmore School District 2023 Pennsylvania Youth Survey



Mental Health Concerns
Wallingford-Swarthmore School District 2023 Pennsylvania Youth Survey



Suicide risk
Wallingford-Swarthmore School District 2023 Pennsylvania Youth Survey



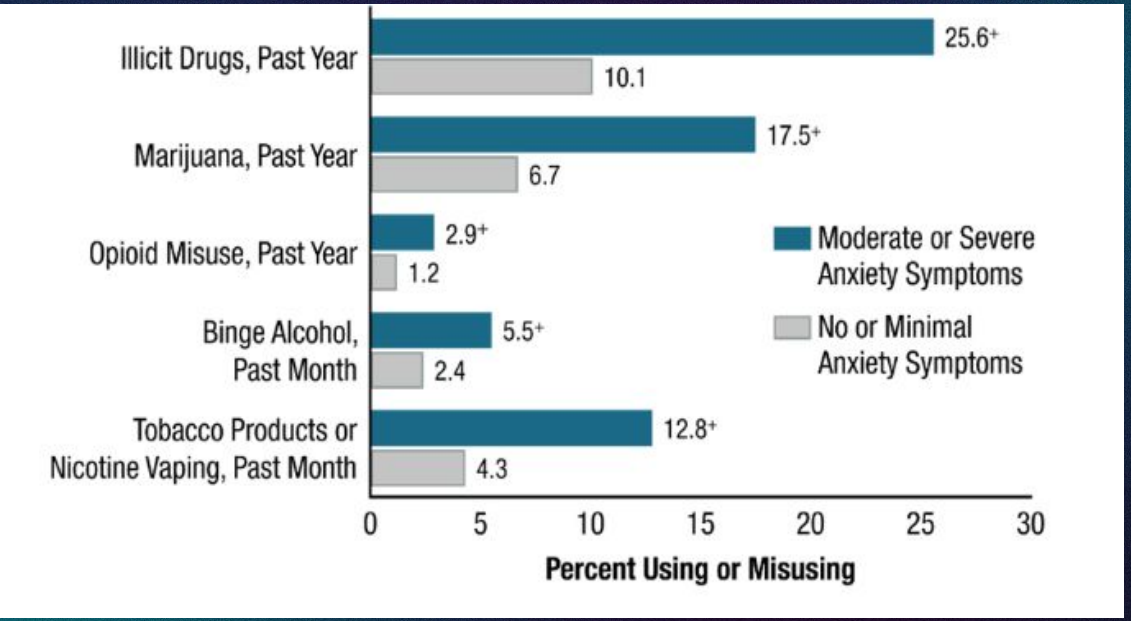
The Pennsylvania Youth Survey (PAYS) Jr. is an age-appropriate version of the PAYS designed for elementary students(grade 4)

- Implementation
  - Piloted in 2023
  - Implemented 2025

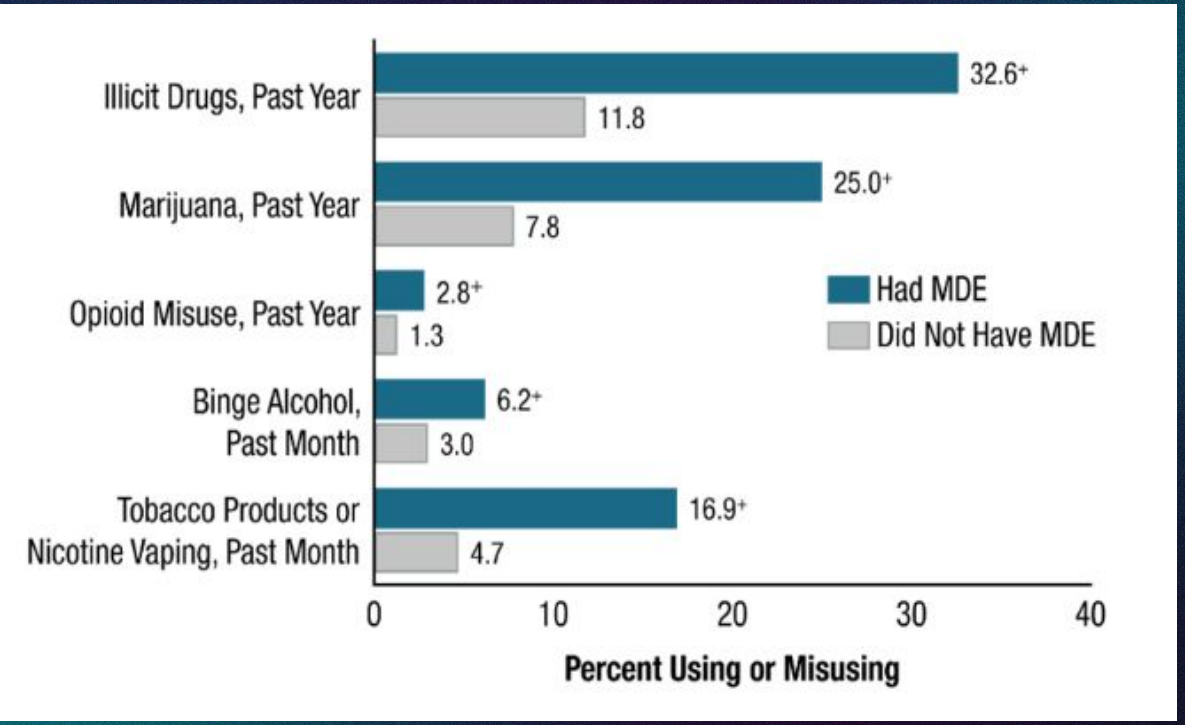
- Help schools and communities understand early attitudes/behaviors and risk/protective factors *before* students reach adolescence
  - substance use
  - bullying, mental health
  - school climate

Overview

National Survey on Drug Use and Health - 2024 Cont.



National Survey on Drug Use and Health - 2024 Cont.



Programs for Children and Youth - 2022

critical review of 22 empirical studies published 2017–2021 that evaluated alcohol-prevention programs for children and youth (up to age 19).

KEY FINDING: School programs produced reliable improvements in attitudes, intentions, perceived norms, and knowledge about alcohol, and several trials reported reductions in intoxication or the *amount* consumed even when frequency effects were small. These proximal changes (attitudes/skills) are important because they lower the chance that children will start or escalate use later.

Programs for Children and Youth - 2022 Cont.

- Most effective programs are **school-based** and are deliberately delivered *before* initiation of drinking (universal prevention), because intervening early targets risk and protective factors while kids are still forming attitudes and social norms
- Programs grounded in theory (e.g., Theory of Planned Behavior, Motivational Interviewing, social norms approaches, life-skills curricula) and those that teach refusal/ coping skills showed the clearest benefits, highlighting that *age-appropriate skills training* matters
- Family, community, and web-based interventions have potential but currently have **less consistent evidence** than school-based programs — so combining school efforts with family/community approaches is recommended but needs more research

Effective prevention efforts focus on:

- building coping skills
- Developing and maintaining strong relationships
- early support/education in schools
- consistent communication structures

National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) states that “evidence-based prevention strategies can have long-term, cost saving benefits … particularly when they are implemented during childhood and adolescence.

Meta -analyses Review

- Prior to 2019 found small but statistically significant positive effects for prevention interventions.

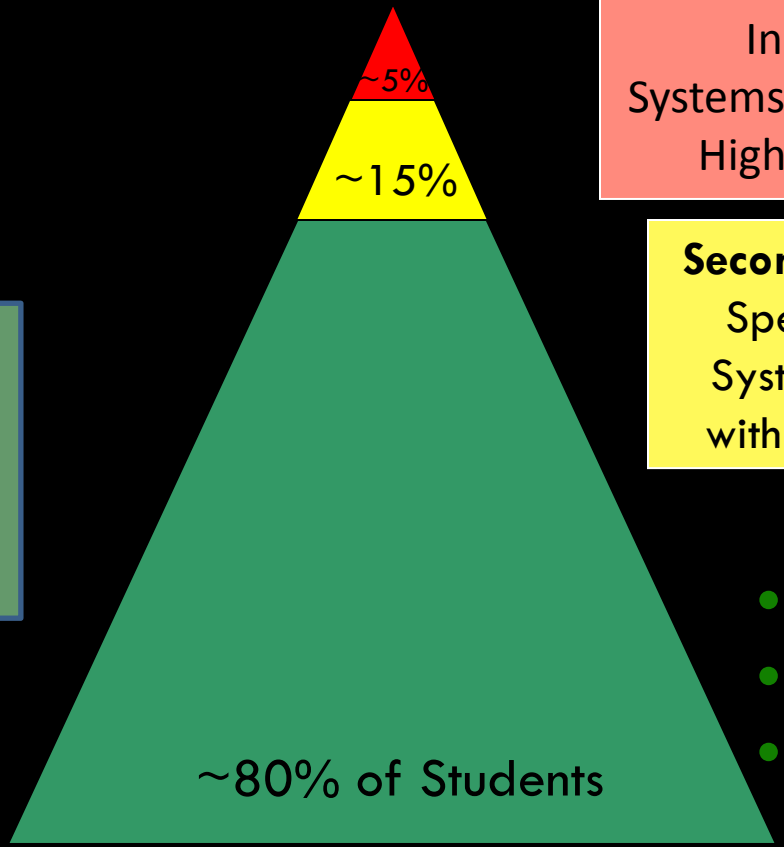
- After 2019 suggest that universal school-based programs alone may have small or minimal short-term effects on actual substance use outcomes

- elementary programs benefit from:
  - implementing multi-component programs (skills training, social/emotional learning, classroom curriculum, media literacy, parent/family engagement)
  - Ensuring long-term follow up

SCHOOL-WIDE POSITIVE BEHAVIOR SUPPORT

FRAMEWORK:

Primary Prevention:
School-/Classroom-Wide Systems for All Students, Staff, & Settings



Tertiary Prevention:
Specialized Individualized Systems for Students with High-Risk Behavior

Secondary Prevention:
Specialized Group Systems for Students with At-Risk Behavior

- **Students**
- **Staff**
- **Parents/Families**

PBIS Offerings- Secondary

Tier I

UNIVERSAL

- Evidence -Based Instruction
- Assemblies
- Incentives
- School Store
- Wellness Wednesday
- Character Recognition
- PBIS & SEL Lessons
- Clubs & Extra Curriculars
- Connection Building
- Student Leadership
- Building Themes
- Access to Counseling & Nursing Services

Tier II

SMALL GROUP, TARGETED

- SAP & Referrals
- Adult Mentoring
- Classroom Consult
- Peer Mentoring
- Emotional Regulation
- Targeted Re-Teach
- Social Skills Group
- Friendship Group
- Coping Skills Group
- Affinity Groups
- ExQ

Tier III

HIGHLY INDIVIDUALIZED

- Individual Counseling
- PTR
- BCBA Consult
- Grief Counseling
- IPT-AST
- Check & Check & Connect

PBIS Offerings - Elementary

Tier I

UNIVERSAL

- Evidence -Based Instruction
- Access to Counselor & Nursing Services
- Student Ambassadors
- Speedy Squad
- Newsletters Assemblies
- Safety Patrol
- Guidance Instruction as a special
- Collaboration with CPETL
- Building Incentives
- Universal Signs (ASL)
- Nurtured Heart
- SEL Lessons

Tier II

SMALL GROUP, TARGETED

- Referrals to Community-Based Services
- Breaks R Better
- Affinity Groups
- Mentoring
- Friendship Group
- CICO
- CICUCO
- Social Skill Groups
- Executive Functioning Group
- Behavior Contracting
- Emotional Regulation Group
- Coping Skills Group
- BCBA Classroom Consult
- Targeted Re-Teach
- Targeted meetings with

Tier III

HIGHLY INDIVIDUALIZED

- BCBA Consult
- Intensive CICO
- Individual Counseling
- Process Groups (grief)

Botvin *LifeSkills*

Botvin *LifeSkills:* Overview

- Evidence-based substance abuse program that is proven to reduced the risks of alcohol, tobacco, drug abuse, and violence by targeting the major social/psychological factors that promote the initiation of substance abuse and other risky behaviors
- Rather than teach information about dangers, Botivin promotes healthy alternatives to risky behavior:
  - Skills to resist peer pressures
  - Help students develop greater self-esteem and self-confidence
  - Enable students to effectively cope with anxiety
  - Increase their knowledge of consequences
  - Enhance cognitive and behavioral competency to reduce and prevent a variety of health risk behaviors

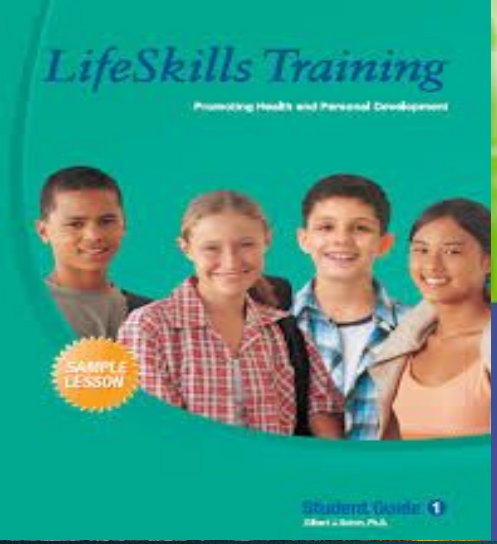
Botvin *LifeSkills:* Global Reach

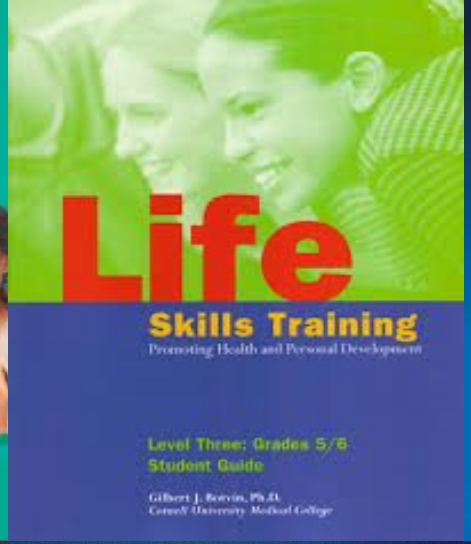
LST has been used with youth in all 50 states in the United States as well as in the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. Outside the United States, it has been used in 39 countries including:

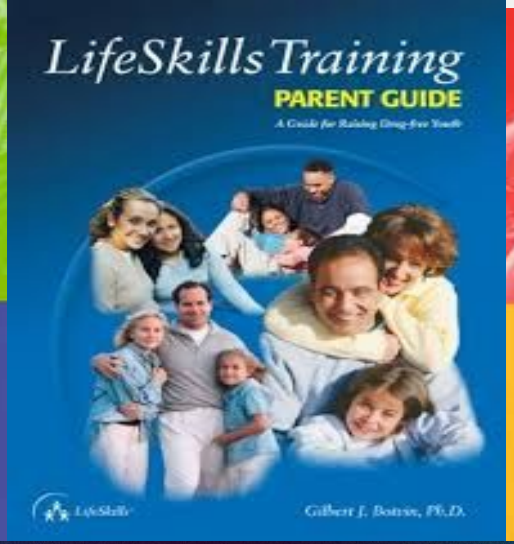
- Australia
- Barbados
- Bermuda
- Canada
- Colombia
- Croatia
- Costa Rica
- Denmark
- England
- France
- Germany
- Greece
- Honduras
- Hong Kong
- Ireland
- Italy
- Japan
- Kenya
- Malaysia
- Mexico
- Mexico
- New Zealand
- Nicaragua
- Norway
- Panama
- Peru
- Portugal
- Qatar
- Russia
- Saudi Arabia
- Scotland
- South Africa
- South Korea
- Spain
- Sweden
- Taiwan
- Thailand
- Turkey
- United Arab Emirates
- Venezuela

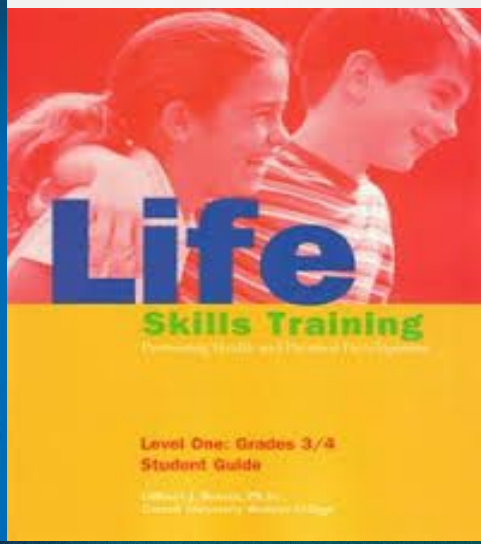
Botvin Recognition:

- Office of National Drug Control Policy
- U.S Department of Education
- American Medical Association
- American Psychological Association
- US. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention
- Early Intervention Foundation









- Comprehensive, dynamic, and developmentally appropriate substance abuse and violence prevention program designed for students in grades 3-5
- Highly effective curriculum has been proven to help increase self-esteem, develop healthy attitudes, and improve their knowledge of essential life skills–promoting healthy positive personal development and mental health

Botvin *LifeSkills* & CASEL

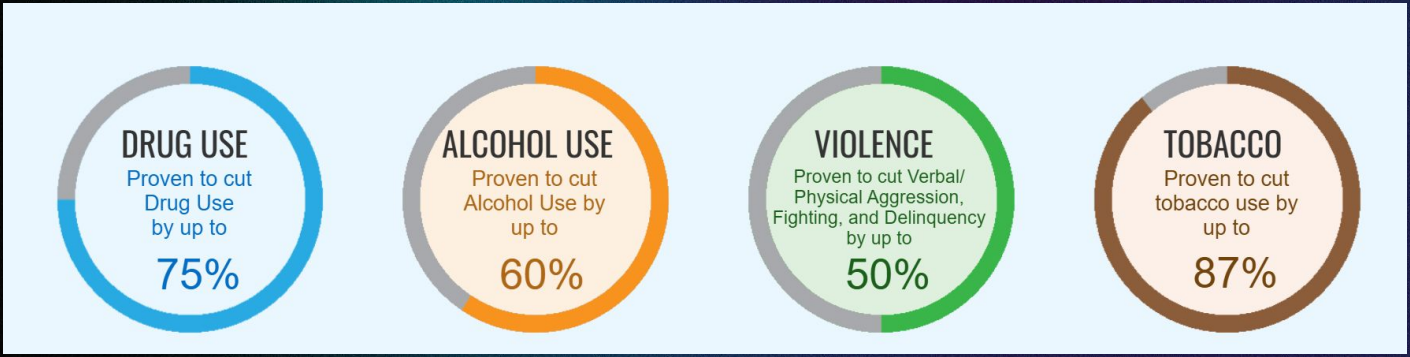
Self-Awareness & Self-Management Units:
Self-Esteem
Dealing with Stress

Social Awareness & Relationship Skills Units:
Advertising
Social Awareness
Communication Skills
Assertiveness

Decision Making Skills Units:
Decision Making
Smoking Information
Advertising

Botvin *LifeSkills:* Why Now?

- *Personal Self-Management Skills*
  - Students develop skills that enhance self-esteem, develop problem-solving skills, help them reduce stress and anxiety, and manage anger
- *General Social Skills*
  - Students gain skills to meet personal challenges such as overcoming shyness, communicating clearly, building relationships, and avoiding violence
- *Drug Resistance Skills*
  - Students build effective defenses against pressures to use tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs



Botvin: Communication and monitoring the connection to drug and alcohol prevention (K-5)

Date: 12/02/25 **Time:** 6:00 - 7:30 **Location:** NPE Library

Presenters: Rebecca Schwam, Guidance Instructor
Deborah Sweeney, School Nurse
Lauren DeSanctis, Counselor

Botvin: Modeling and Consistency and the connection to drug and alcohol prevention (K-5)

Date: 03/10/26 **Time:** 6:00 - 7:30 **Location:**WES Library

Presenter: Rebecca Schwam, Guidance Instructor
Erin Costa, School Nurse
Audrey Ennis, Behavioral Health Counselor

Botvin: Effects and Warning Signs of Drugs and Taking a Stand

Date: 04/22/26 **Time:** 6:00 - 7:30 **Location:** SRS

Presenter: Rebecca Schwam, Guidance Instructor
Linda Kealey, School Nurse
Ashley Yingst, Behavioral Health Counselor

THANK YOU

References:

Cho, M-K., & Cho, Y-H. (2021). Do alcohol prevention programs influence adolescents' drinking behaviors? A systematic review and meta-analysis. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 18*(16), 8524. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18168524

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Tinner, L., Palmer, J. C., Lloyd, E. C., et al. (2022). Individual-, family- and school-based interventions to prevent multiple risk behaviours relating to alcohol, tobacco and drug use in young people aged 8-25 years: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *BMC Public Health, 22*, 1111

References:

Sánchez-Puertas, L., Jiménez-Iglesias, A., & Moreno, C. (2022). *Prevention of alcohol consumption programs for children and youth: A narrative and critical review of recent research. Frontiers in Psychology, 13,* 838195. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.838195

Cannabis Studies (handout) https://docs.google.com/document/d/1HYI_CwFunl3yBWpjUP0NFj12C6ZdbaEl/edit