

# Substance Abuse Prevention

Snapshots from  
the Safe Schools/  
Healthy Students  
Initiative



## **Substance Abuse Prevention: Snapshots from the Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative**

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## Introduction

Preventing alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use among youth requires a comprehensive approach that addresses a range of risk and protective factors. The responsibility for preventing youth substance abuse does not lie with one discipline or group. Consistent prevention messages must be present from early childhood through young adulthood and be reinforced by multiple messengers at home, at school, and in the community.<sup>1</sup>

Schools have a significant role to play in addressing student substance abuse. Research shows that youth who receive universal, school-based substance abuse prevention programming are less likely to drink, smoke, and use other drugs.<sup>2</sup> Schools—from kindergarten through high school—are an ideal venue to deliver age-specific, developmentally appropriate, and culturally responsive prevention programming. Teachers and administrators can foster positive school climates, create and enforce substance abuse prevention policies, and communicate consistent norms that youth substance abuse is unacceptable.<sup>3</sup>

The benefits are many: students who do not regularly use alcohol and other drugs are more likely to have higher grades, better attendance, and superior overall academic achievement than those who do use substances.<sup>4,5</sup> Substance abuse can contribute to bullying and other violent behaviors in schools;<sup>6</sup> thus, decreasing substance use contributes to safer schools. In addition, reducing substance abuse and related disciplinary and intervention responses can free up teacher, administrator, and staff time to focus on students' academic success.

*It's important to include substance abuse as part of a comprehensive approach to prevent risky behaviors in youth. We have a menu of services to offer our students and their families, and when appropriate, we have them available in the schools.*

—Kevin Rhodes, SS/HS project director,  
Kershaw County School District

## Characteristics and Consequences of Substance Abuse

Substance use impacts all school communities in the United States. Three out of four (75.6 percent) high school students have used alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, or cocaine in their lifetime and 33.3 percent of current substance users in high school have a clinical substance use disorder.<sup>7</sup>

While youth *alcohol use* has decreased overall since the 1990s, it remains the most common substance used by youth. In 2011, 70.8 percent of 9th–12th graders had at least one drink in their lifetime, and 38.7 percent had at least one drink in the previous month. When teens drink, 55.9 percent report that they do so at someone else's home, and 20.6 percent report that they received alcohol from their parents, guardians, or an adult family member.<sup>8,9</sup>

*Youth cigarette use* has also decreased since the 1990s. In 2011, 44.7 percent of 9th–12th graders had tried a cigarette in their lifetime, and 18.1 percent had smoked in the past 30 days. On the other hand, *marijuana use* has increased over the same time period. Today, more youth smoke marijuana than cigarettes on a regular basis;

39.9 percent of 9th–12th graders have used marijuana in their lifetime, with 23.1 percent having used it at least one time in the previous month.<sup>10</sup> In 2009, 4.4 percent of 12 to 17 year olds used *other illicit drugs*, including prescription medications (3.1 percent), inhalants (1.0 percent), hallucinogens (0.9 percent) and cocaine (0.3 percent).<sup>11</sup>

Students of all ethnic backgrounds and socioeconomic statuses (SES) are at risk for substance use. According to the 2011 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, in 2011, among persons ages 12 or older, the rate of current illicit drug use was 3.8 percent among Asians, 8.4 percent among Hispanics, 8.7 percent among whites, 10.0 percent among blacks, 11.0 percent among Native Hawaiians or Other Pacific Islanders, 13.4 percent among American Indians or Alaska Natives, and 13.5 percent among persons of two or more races.<sup>12</sup> Data indicate that adolescents with low SES are more likely to engage in substance use, but there is also increasing evidence that students whose parents have high SES are at increased risk of early substance use.<sup>13</sup>

Teen substance use increases steadily with age, with most youth beginning to use substances in mid-to-late adolescence.<sup>14</sup> Youth who initiate substance use at an early age are at greater risk of becoming dependent or addicted and of experiencing early the negative consequences associated with substance use.<sup>15</sup>

Additionally, young people who use substances are at increased risk for a myriad of academic, health, social, and emotional problems:

- *Academic*: lower grades, absenteeism, and school dropout
- *Physical health*: injuries, physical disabilities, and death through suicide, homicide, illness, and unintentional injuries
- *Mental health*: memory problems, depression, developmental delays, personality disorders, and suicidal ideation
- *Social*: isolation from and stigmatization by peers; disengagement from school, family, and community activities; and family dysfunction<sup>16</sup>

There is also a strong link between youth substance abuse and delinquency. Arrest, adjudication, and further involvement in the juvenile justice systems are the all-too-frequent result of youth substance use.<sup>17</sup> While it is not known if substance abuse leads to delinquency or vice versa, it is clear that juvenile justice system involvement causes a host of school and family problems.<sup>18</sup>

Many individual, family, social, and community factors influence students' decisions to use alcohol and other drugs. *Risk factors* for youth substance use include: peer substance use, perceptions of high levels of use among peers, perceived parental approval and low parental monitoring, familial drug use, poor school achievement or bonding, and the ease of accessing substances.<sup>19,20</sup>

At the same time, several factors can decrease the likelihood that youth will use or abuse alcohol and other drugs. *Protective factors* include: perceived risks associated with substance use, having received prevention messages, having parents who monitor their activities, and having a strong sense of family and school connectedness and engagement.<sup>21</sup>

Effective substance abuse prevention seeks to reduce risk factors while increasing protective factors.





## Safe Schools/Healthy Students and Substance Abuse

The federal Safe Schools/Healthy Students (SS/HS) Initiative addresses underlying factors that contribute to school violence, student substance abuse and mental health problems, school failure, school dropout, truancy, and suspension and expulsion. The National Center for Mental Health Promotion and Youth Violence Prevention (National Center) provides training and technical assistance to SS/HS communities as they form partnerships to assess school and community needs and resources, implement and adapt evidence-based interventions, evaluate their efforts, and ensure sustainability.

To ensure a comprehensive approach that builds on the strengths of community partners, SS/HS grantees integrate five core elements\* into their initiatives, of which the second is alcohol, tobacco, and other drug prevention activities, with a specific focus on decreasing the percentage of students who use substances. The SS/HS approach relies heavily on collaborative, districtwide partnerships that work together to build community commitment to addressing substance use. It also focuses on integrating services and programs that reduce other related risk factors (e.g., mental health disorders, violent behaviors) and increase protective factors (e.g., positive school climate, social-emotional development).

Data show that SS/HS sites' work in substance use prevention has had a positive impact. As an example, since implementing their SS/HS initiatives, grantees from fiscal years (FY) 2005–2007 report a 12 percent decrease in students' reported 30-day alcohol use (25.4 percent to 22.4 percent). In addition, 80 percent of school staff reported that the SS/HS grant helped reduce substance use among students.<sup>22</sup>

To better understand the factors that contributed to these positive outcomes, the National Center conducted interviews with 10 SS/HS grantees from FY 2005–2009 who implemented effective and innovative substance use prevention work to learn more about their experiences. This Snapshot discusses best practices for school substance abuse prevention efforts and explores the experiences of these grantees.

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\* The five SS/HS elements are (1) creating a safe school environment and violence prevention activities; (2) enhancing alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use prevention activities; (3) enhancing early childhood social and emotional learning and development; (4) enhancing mental, emotional, and behavioral health; and (5) connecting families, schools, and communities.



## Key Strategies in Preventing Youth Substance Abuse

Schools and communities must create environments in which student substance use is strongly discouraged. **A multifaceted approach that incorporates substance abuse policy, the involvement of community stakeholders, implementation of evidence-based interventions (EBIs), the engagement of and support for students, and use of communication strategies to educate students can address the many factors that contribute to youth substance use.** Implemented in isolation, substance abuse prevention programs that focus only on education are not as effective as comprehensive programs that include raising awareness, peer mentorship, building skills, and creating a more positive school climate.<sup>23, 24</sup> Many prevention efforts now adopt an environmental management approach, which encourages communities to focus on school- and community-wide prevention strategies, such as social marketing campaigns, training for those who serve alcoholic beverages, and implementing and enforcing local alcohol policy.<sup>25</sup>

Schools have reduced substance abuse and created effective health promotion approaches by integrating several key strategies into their substance abuse prevention initiatives.

**Strategy 1: Create School Substance Abuse Prevention Policies.** School policies about substance use serve to help create a climate that is unsupportive of drinking, smoking, or illicit drug use. These should be formal policies and may include alcohol-, tobacco-, and drug-free campuses, random locker inspections, increased supervision around the campus, and clear consequences for students who violate substance abuse policies.<sup>30</sup> Policies should also address how the school will select and implement substance abuse prevention, intervention, and rehabilitation or treatment programs.

Broader school climate improvement programs that support healthy behaviors, respectful relationships, stress management, emotional and social skills development, and consistent discipline enhance substance use policies by creating overall health-promoting school environments.

Schools should involve everyone who will be affected by the policies—students, teachers, and parents—to participate in policy development to both garner their support and ensure the policies accurately represent

### *Ineffective Tactics for Youth Substance Abuse Prevention*

Research shows that activities and tactics meant to “scare students straight”—placing crashed cars on campus around prom season, showing lungs damaged by smoking during health class, and hosting guest speakers who provide personal testimonials about the negative consequences of their illicit drug use—are an ineffective long-term youth substance abuse prevention strategy.<sup>26, 27</sup> Scare tactics can undermine the trust youth have in adults and can sometimes even encourage risky behavior.<sup>28</sup>

According to the National Institutes of Health, scare tactics can actually harm students due to the “opportunity cost” of schools using valuable resources on ineffective programs instead of effective, evidence-based interventions.<sup>29</sup>

the community's values.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, policies are effective when they are regularly communicated to students, parents, and staff and are consistently enforced. Giving certain students, such as athletes, second chances or leeway in complying with substance abuse policies undermines the healthy social norms these policies are designed to create, and may cause resentment among students and staff.

Schools can also work with city and state government on policy changes to support youth substance abuse prevention initiatives. Reducing alcohol outlet density near schools, increasing enforcement of ordinances prohibiting youth access to tobacco, and instituting youth drug courts can reduce youth substance abuse and reinforce school prevention policies.

**Strategy 2: Partner with Community Stakeholders.** Because substance abuse prevention is most effective when delivered by multiple messengers in schools, at home, and in the community, **it makes good sense for schools to work closely with parents and community constituencies on youth substance abuse prevention initiatives.** Together, they can develop shared ownership for youth substance use prevention programs, delivering consistent substance abuse prevention messaging and raising community awareness about the issue.

SS/HS grantees partner with law enforcement, juvenile justice, and mental health providers, all of whom are natural allies for substance abuse prevention. Law enforcement personnel can help schools create and implement school substance abuse policies, and juvenile justice representatives can work with schools on drug courts and diversion programs for youth who violate policies. Community mental health professionals can provide counseling for students with dual substance use-mental health issues, join with school-based counselors to provide wraparound care for students in need, and coordinate their services with community-based substance abuse intervention and treatment programs.

Other community agencies and organizations can play central roles in school substance abuse prevention. Local youth-serving organizations such as YMCAs, camps, and art centers can offer out-of-school programming, providing structured activities during the critical afterschool period when unsupervised youth are at increased likelihood of experimenting with substances.<sup>32, 33, 34</sup> Out-of-school programs may include academic support, mentoring, youth development, arts, sports, and recreation.<sup>35</sup>

Schools can work in close partnership with parents on youth substance abuse prevention. Educating parents about the risks of substance abuse can help change their beliefs, influence community norms about substance use, and encourage them to model healthy attitudes and behaviors for their children. Parents who work in partnership with schools and communities may feel empowered knowing that preventing their children from using substances is not solely their responsibility, and they have many supports. Further, schools can teach parents how to discuss substance abuse with their children and how to recognize the warning signs of substance experimentation. Finally, parents can advocate for local and state substance use policy change and help raise community awareness about the issue.<sup>36</sup>

**Strategy 3: Implement Evidence-Based Interventions.** Another key strategy is implementing prevention programs that are proven to be effective, and adapting them for the unique characteristics of the school (e.g., demographics, size of student body, age of students).

**The first step in choosing evidence-based interventions (EBIs) is collecting and analyzing data to identify (1) the school's particular substance abuse issues, (2) the school and community assets that can be leveraged for prevention, and (3) the shortcomings that must be addressed.** Based on these data, schools can choose appropriate EBIs that address identified needs, customizing them so they are age, culturally, and linguistically appropriate. Schools should continue to collect data during EBI implementation to determine if the program is working as anticipated and to evaluate emerging issues. The resulting data will help schools adapt

current programming or adopt new EBIs. The Glossary describes the substance abuse EBIs and promising programs used by the sites featured in this Snapshot.

**Strategy 4: Engage Students in Substance Abuse Prevention Initiatives. Schools provide an ideal setting for peer mentoring and leadership programs that engage youth as prevention partners.**<sup>37</sup>

Many schools have encountered success involving students with substance abuse prevention design and implementation. Students can assist with data collection and analysis, design prevention campaigns that resonate with peers, and participate in focus groups to test program messages and delivery. Involving students helps them to become leaders in prevention, gain a sense of ownership over programming, and buy in to prevention messages.

Youth can also provide peer-to-peer support to students who are at risk for or are experimenting with substances. Their voices resonate more than adult voices, and struggling youth may be more likely to open up to someone their own age.

**Strategy 5: Use Communications Strategies to Educate Students about Substance Abuse.**

Substance abuse education, when used alone, is not effective for preventing and reducing youth substance abuse. However, communications campaigns that educate students can support comprehensive substance abuse prevention programming. Campaigns that include normative information, such as **social norms marketing**\*\* (see box), can correct misperceptions about peer substance use and support a substance-free school climate. Such campaigns have been successful in reducing high school alcohol and tobacco use.<sup>38</sup>

Media campaigns can be used to build student, parent, and community awareness about youth substance abuse. Consistent messaging at home, in schools, and in the community can help shift cultural norms about substances and prevent youth substance abuse.<sup>40</sup>

**Social Norms and Social Norms Marketing**

Social norms are the perceived standards of acceptable attitudes and behavior prevalent within a community. Social norms marketing uses commercial marketing techniques in an effort to modify or correct normative beliefs about a certain behavior and ultimately change behavior in a positive way. There is evidence that social norms marketing is a promising approach to alcohol education.<sup>39</sup>

**Strategy 6: Incorporate Early Intervention and Treatment into Prevention Work. School substance abuse prevention programming must include early intervention for students who are experimenting with substances, and also a protocol for referring students with substance abuse issues to effective treatment programs.**

School staff who suspect a student is struggling with substance use, and students who are caught violating school substance abuse policies, can be referred to school-based substance abuse counselors for evaluation and counseling. When further intervention is warranted, or the school does not have the staff to provide intervention, staff can refer students to community substance abuse intervention and treatment partners, following protocols outlined in the school's substance abuse policies.

Administrators can support these procedures by training staff to recognize, evaluate, and refer students suspected of using substances. Elementary, middle, and high school staff can also conduct brief interviews to identify students at risk for or abusing substances, and connect students with programs that prevent and mitigate substance abuse. Many of these programs include family education and supports.

\*\* Evidence-based intervention and promising programs marked with blue-bold are described in the Glossary.



## Albemarle County Public Schools—Charlottesville, Virginia (FY 2009)

The Albemarle County Public Schools SS/HS Initiative, also known as the Albemarle/Charlottesville Project (ACP), serves both an urban and a rural school district located near the University of Virginia (UVA). ACP targeted high rates of underage drinking by collaborating with UVA to create a **social norms marketing** campaign, involving students and parents, and partnering with law enforcement.

**Listening to Student Voices to Prevent Underage Drinking.** ACP found that students grossly overestimated what percentage of their peers drink. Students perceived that “everyone” was using alcohol; however, districtwide survey data indicated that over 80 percent of students were not using any alcohol. The National Social Norms Institute at UVA trained ACP students to use social norms marketing to correct this perception. Each school created its own social norms marketing campaign, and ultimately all the high schools adopted a campaign called “You Choose,” which promoted the message that staying safe is the best choice for students and encourages students to choose not to drink, or to get a safe ride home. Campaign posters covered the school campuses and school announcements conveyed “You Choose” messages.

**ACP also used results from student surveys to identify and develop alcohol abuse prevention messages that would have the greatest impact.** For example, surveys revealed that students’ choices were influenced by knowing that younger students looked up to them and cared about them. As part of increased efforts during prom season, a time when underage drinking peaks, elementary school students wrote letters to high school students that simply read “Stay safe at prom.”

**Partnering with Law Enforcement to Reinforce Prevention.** Law enforcement was an important partner for alcohol abuse prevention programs. **Police sponsored awareness events to educate students about substance abuse and attended ACP’s events to educate youth about the legal consequences of underage drinking and drunk driving.** In addition to raising awareness, these events helped foster positive relationships between students and police officers.

**Bringing the Message Home: Parent Involvement.** ACP actively encouraged parents to speak to their children about underage alcohol use. ACP invited parents to all alcohol abuse awareness events and provided information about the “You Choose” campaign. Parents also learned about the dangers and legal consequences of serving alcohol in their homes to minors. According to SS/HS Project Director June Jenkins, “Parents need to understand the amount of influence that they have. They think that their children don’t listen to them about alcohol, but they do. **A conversation between parents and their child about alcohol could prevent a death from alcohol poisoning or drunk driving.**”

*It's important to have a consistent message that empowers students. We've never strayed from our message that it's up to students to make healthy choices. Having students share this message with others further contributes to their sense of empowerment.*

—June Jenkins, SS/HS project director

ACP’s approach to substance abuse prevention appears to be having an impact. Between the fall of 2009 and the spring of 2012, the percentage of students in grades 6–11 who reported using alcohol in the past 30 days decreased from 19.4 percent to 15.6 percent.

## Amarillo Independent School District—Amarillo, Texas (FY 2008)

The Amarillo Independent School District (AISD), addressed youth substance abuse prevention through a multi-pronged approach, involving parents, students, and the community. AISD's approach included innovative programs, such as a youth film festival, and partnerships with law enforcement.

**Providing Parents with Substance Abuse Information.** Based on research suggesting that parents have a substantial influence on their children's decisions related to substance use, AISD prioritized providing parents with accurate information regarding youth substance abuse. AISD used a number of strategies to reach as many parents as possible with accurate and trustworthy information, including newsletters to parents, media announcements in mega-churches, and advertisements in a local magazine.

**AISD also engaged parents as partners in efforts to decrease underage drinking at parties in students' homes.** Through a partnership with law enforcement, parents were able to anonymously notify the police of parties where it was likely that alcohol would be provided to minors. The police would stop by the home just before the party began to warn parents of the legal repercussions of serving alcohol to minors. Using this strategy, law enforcement reduced substance abuse by putting a stop to underage drinking before parties even started. In addition, staff reached out to parents before proms and graduations to inform them of the dangers of providing alcohol to minors. According to SS/HS Project Director Melynn Huntley, the outreach to parents has paid off. Following these efforts, police noticed a decrease in the number of big parties involving underage drinking in the district.

**Engaging the Community.** AISD involved community partners in youth substance abuse prevention by convening a Safe Schools Resource Team, comprised of school counselors, community drug prevention groups, mental health agencies, law enforcement, government officials, churches, parents, and students. During these meetings, SS/HS staff spent a few minutes outlining a particular problem and providing background information about substance abuse. **The community representatives would then break into small groups to discuss what they could do together to prevent substance abuse.**

*It's not the schools' responsibility to be the only drug prevention resource in the community. Drug prevention begins in the home. If you can involve everyone in the community in addressing the same issue together, then you will make progress.*

—Melynn Huntley, SS/HS project director

**Involving Youth in Prevention Efforts.** AISD actively engaged students in the development and implementation of substance abuse prevention strategies. For example, **when developing substance abuse Public Service Announcements (PSAs), SS/HS staff shared initial script drafts with students.** Students often rejected scripts and created new ones that better communicated the message to their peers. In addition to PSAs, AISD ran a positive social norming campaign based on marijuana use data gathered from students in the district. As part of the campaign, AISD created T-shirts for students that read "87 percent don't smoke it," and filmed students engaged in healthy positive activities, such as playing sports and spending time with friends.

In a particularly innovative approach to substance abuse prevention, AISD created a student film festival. The STOP (Students Taking on Prevention) film festival encouraged students to create 30–60 second films with a focus on tobacco use, risk behaviors, and substance abuse. Students won prizes of up to \$1,000 for their entries and AISD played the winning films during school announcements.

From 2012 to 2013, AISD documented a decrease in the percentage of students using all substances, including alcohol, marijuana, and prescription drugs. Students reporting the use of drugs in the previous 30 days decreased from 10.5 percent to 6.2 percent for synthetic drugs, and from 30.5 percent to 26.6 percent for alcohol.

## Campbell County School District—Gillette, Wyoming (FY 2008)

Campbell County School District (CCSD) has a significant transient population, and about half of the adults in the county work in mining or oil industries. A social norms campaign and substance abuse referral system, coupled with strong community partnerships, make up the core of CCSD's approach to preventing youth substance abuse.

**Social Norming Campaign.** As part of CCSD's social norms campaign, customized posters in each secondary school highlighted 30-day usage rates for each school. CCSD engaged students in a social norms text message program by raffling off prizes to students who signed up to receive texts. Some students who enrolled in the text messaging program shared texts with their peers, allowing the campaign to reach an even broader audience.

**CCSD also held a program to teach parents about social norms theory and to highlight the difference between social norming and commonly used scare tactics.** While the use of scare tactics for substance use prevention is very popular in Wyoming, research shows such approaches are not successful at combatting substance abuse. CCSD attempted to change the way people thought about substance abuse prevention by explaining the philosophy behind social norming and positive community norms.

**Implementing a Comprehensive Referral System. CCSD's substance abuse intervention and treatment referral system connected students struggling with alcohol and other drugs to a range of services,** including educational classes, individual counseling, and outpatient treatment. Since 2008, approximately 350 students have been referred for substance abuse issues through the SS/HS program. Referrals generally occurred when a student committed violation at school; however, parents could also refer their children proactively if they suspected an alcohol- or drug-related problem.

*We're referring close to 8 percent of our students for mental health and substance abuse services. We're seeing a real impact in the school climate and in how kids treat each other. Kids are making better choices.*

—Kip Farnum, SS/HS project director

Prior to SS/HS, a student caught with illegal substances on campus would have been expelled, diminishing his or her chances of completing high school. Through SS/HS, CCSD offered the Specialized Treatment and Rehabilitation Project (STAR) program, which provides students at risk of expulsion with wraparound services, including substance abuse services, helping youth to be successful rather than punishing them through expulsion.

SS/HS Project Director Kip Farnum noted that there is often a link between youth substance abuse and mental health problems. CCSD's comprehensive approach to substance abuse prevention worked to improve the school environment and support students with a range of issues.

**Leveraging Community Partnerships. CCSD's SS/HS Core Management Team (CMT) set the stage for strong partnerships and collaboration to support substance abuse prevention.** The Substance Abuse Advisory Council, the Juvenile Services Partnership, and the Behavioral Health Services Advisory Boards all worked to address underage drinking and substance abuse, using close coordination to avoid duplication of efforts.

The "Life RU Ready?" project is an example of a community partnership to prevent youth substance abuse, incorporating key community agencies such as the Gillette Police Department, Campbell County Public Health Nursing, and Campbell County Health Communities. During the one-day kick-off event, students participated in educational activities, such as scenarios involving substance abuse and possible consequences. CCSD then integrated key messages and information from the event into the secondary schools' health and wellness curriculum.

CCSD's approach to substance abuse appears to be working. Among 12th grade students, 30-day drinking rates decreased from 55 percent in 2008 to 47 percent in 2012. Similarly, "binge" drinking rates decreased from 41 percent in 2008 to 30 percent in 2012.

## Delta-Schoolcraft Intermediate School District—Escanaba, Michigan (FY 2006)

Located in rural Michigan, the Delta-Schoolcraft Intermediate School District (DSISD) noted a disturbing increase in youth substance abuse rates. DSISD focused on implementing evidence-based interventions (EBIs) and involving students in creative substance abuse prevention messaging to raise community awareness.

**Integrating EBIs into School Curricula.** Under the SS/HS grant, DSISD expanded the **All Stars** program, an alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use prevention program for middle school students. In addition to prevention programming in schools, the All Stars program required students to talk with their parents about various topics, including substance use, and their goals for the future. DSISD also offers **Second Step**, a social-emotional learning program for students in kindergarten through eighth grade. Second Step indirectly deals with substance abuse by helping students develop skills that will allow them to avoid harmful behaviors. **DSISD found that connecting substance abuse programming lessons to students' academic goals was key to integrating EBIs into the schools and successfully reaching youth.**

**Facilitating Student Messaging.** Following a significant rise in prescription drug abuse-related deaths in the community, **DSISD and several community organizations started a video and art poster contest on drug abuse prevention, encouraging youth to create their own prescription drug abuse prevention messages.** The contest was later expanded to include other types of substance abuse. Student videos communicated substance abuse prevention messages in culturally salient ways. In particular, Native American/American Indian students created videos to demonstrate how substance abuse conflicts with their values and traditions.

*We had teachers develop wonderful lessons and writing assignments that linked to the All Stars and Second Step lessons. Teachers are really busy, so integrating substance abuse prevention into the curricula helped them feel like they didn't have to take time away from lessons.*

—Kristine Paulsen, SS/HS project director

**Engaging Parents through Students Activities.** Prior to SS/HS, town hall meetings were held to educate parents about youth substance abuse, but these events drew only small crowds of 20–30 people. DSISD discovered that events involving youth, such as the video and poster contest, attracted much larger crowds of 500–600 family members interested in seeing the students' work. **By encouraging youth to develop creative substance abuse prevention messages, DSISD created opportunities for parents and the community to learn about substance abuse from students.**

The reach of the substance abuse prevention video contest extended beyond the school district. Individuals across the United States searched for substance abuse prevention information and found out about the video contest. A mother from Philadelphia whose son died from an accidental prescription drug overdose wrote in the local newspaper: "The poster and video contest is amazing. Delta County has given other communities across the nation a model to begin fighting this epidemic."

DSISD has seen reductions in youth substance abuse. From 2003 to 2010, the percentage of seventh grade students who consumed at least one alcoholic drink in the previous 30 days decreased from 17 percent to 7 percent. Similarly, the percentage of seventh grade students who consumed at least five drinks within a couple of hours in the previous 30 days decreased from 13 percent to 3 percent.



## Hampden-Wilbraham Regional School District—Wilbraham, Massachusetts (FY 2009)

Hampden-Wilbraham Regional School District (HWRSD) involved the entire community in a multi-tiered approach to substance abuse prevention, focusing its efforts on data-driven decisions and alternative activities.

**Leveraging Partnerships for Improved Program Delivery.** HWRSD's work with community partners informed its overall approach to substance abuse prevention and improved services for youth. For example, a partnership with a local mental health agency focused HWRSD's efforts on the close connection between substance abuse and mental health. This partnership enhanced HWRSD's capacity to refer students and families struggling with substance abuse to appropriate community-based intervention programs.

Partnering with law enforcement also proved vital to the school district. In addition to serving on the SS/HS core management team, local law enforcement assisted with analyzing community level substance abuse data. **Communication among police, the school district, and community members bolstered HWRSD's prevention efforts.** Parents and police raised concerns about the dearth of activities to occupy middle school students after school. The school district responded by instituting an afterschool program for middle school students. For older students, parents hosted an alternative event after high school graduation known as The Ultimate Party, which provided safe, fun activities for graduating seniors. The Ultimate Party has become extremely popular, with more than 90 percent of graduating students attending the event each year.

*A successful approach to substance abuse requires a broad-based community commitment. Schools alone cannot be the only representations of expectations for students. The community as a whole has to be able to share that responsibility and be a part of the conversation.*

—Gina Kahn, SS/HS project director

**Implementing a Multilevel Approach to Prevention.** HWRSD delivered substance abuse prevention at multiple levels of intervention. School resource officers (law enforcement officers specially trained to work in schools), assisted with implementing **Botvin LifeSkills**, a curriculum that begins in third grade to teach personal and social skills that build resilience among youth. HWRSD also incorporated substance abuse prevention awareness into its Student Teacher Assistance Teams (STAT), multidisciplinary groups that support students who are struggling in school. STAT team members are trained to look for substance abuse risk factors and refer students to substance abuse services and intervention. In addition, teachers receive training to recognize the signs and symptoms of substance abuse, and two counselors, one each at the middle and high school levels, provide support for students with substance abuse problems.

**Using Data to Ensure Success.** HWRSD conducted annual student surveys to obtain a clear picture of student substance use and students' perceptions of their peers' substance abuse. After analyzing the data, HWRSD adjusted its programming to provide the most appropriate supports for students. HWRSD has also conducted a survey on parents' beliefs and attitudes about substance abuse and invited parents to participate in follow-up focus groups to discuss limiting students' access to alcohol and effective strategies for communicating with youth about substance abuse prevention.

HWRSD's approach is having an effect. Thirty-day drinking rates decreased from 39.6 percent in 2010 to 36.4 percent in 2013. Thirty-day use of marijuana also decreased during this time period, from 28.7 percent to 20.8 percent.

## Kershaw County School District—Camden, South Carolina (FY 2009)

Kershaw County School District (KCSO) serves a relatively small population that is geographically dispersed over an area the size of Rhode Island. Facing reports of high alcohol and tobacco use by youth, KCSO provided customized interventions and wraparound services to help youth with a range of issues, such as substance abuse, mental health, and employment.

**Partnering for Increased Service Provision.** KCSO took a very open approach to community involvement in providing services for youth in schools. KCSO encouraged community agencies, such as the Department of Mental Health and law enforcement, to work with students at school in an appropriate and measured way. **The district's collaboration with community agencies allowed students access to a wide array of services.** SS/HS staff partner closely with the ALPHA Center, a community behavioral health center that provides substance abuse prevention, testing, and treatment services to individuals and families.

The SS/HS grant played a pivotal role in organizing community efforts and establishing processes to meet students' needs. Representatives from the agencies who work with school-age youth met once a month to identify students who might benefit from additional services. The school district hired a full-time referral coordinator, which improved the efficiency of case management and allowed staff to better serve students.

**Engaging Parents in Substance Abuse Education. In addition to working directly with students, KCSO educated parents and families about substance abuse prevention.** KCSO held Parent University events on school campuses to educate the community about topics such as new high-risk drugs, how youth are obtaining alcohol, the risks associated with youth substance abuse, and warning signs that a student may be abusing—or at risk of abusing—substances. Most parents were alarmed to learn about the rates of youth substance use in the community.

**Providing Wraparound Services for Youth. KCSO used a comprehensive approach to substance abuse prevention, providing students with a range of services that addressed their individual needs.** To prevent teenagers from experimenting with drug use out of boredom or a lack of constructive activities, KCSO provided multiple services for youth and their families, including referrals to an employment program to teach youth how to find and keep a job. Students with substance abuse issues could be referred to a range of additional services, such as anger management and mental health counseling.

*We have the opportunity to help people to change their own lives and that is what we do. We empower them to change themselves, and we have the resources to help them do that.*

—Kevin Rhodes SS/HS project director

The value of wraparound services is best illustrated in a story about a student with numerous unexcused absences from school. The district's truancy team investigated and learned that the boy was in foster care and had been arrested. The state failed to follow up on his case, leaving the boy in jail for longer than necessary. The student was prepared to admit guilt to a crime he did not commit in the hopes of getting out of jail when KCSO's substance abuse and youth transition service teams intervened and helped get him out of jail. After the student was connected with appropriate services, he received counseling, quit using marijuana, graduated high school, left foster care, and went on to attend college.

## Putnam County Educational Service Center—Ottawa, Ohio (FY 2008)

Putnam County Educational Service Center (PCESC) engaged the school district and the community to deliver consistent messages about underage alcohol use. Using data on the county's youth substance abuse problem, PCESC carefully selected evidence-based interventions (EBIs) to reach goals specific to the community. The initiative created widespread support for alcohol prevention programming and ultimately reduced youth alcohol use.

**Data-Driven and Participatory Selection of Evidence-Based Interventions.** PCESC's student alcohol consumption rates have typically been above the national average. Given cultural norms that support alcohol use, PCESC established goals to increase the age of drinking inception and decrease the amount of drinking, rather than focus on abstinence-based programming.

Staff reviewed a variety of EBIs and presented school staff with the programs that best met the SS/HS goals for substance use. The schools voted to implement **Project Northland**, an EBI that aims to delay the age at which youth begin drinking and limit alcohol-related problems among those who already drink. The program promotes student leadership, engages parents, and addresses community issues that support alcohol use. According to SS/HS Project Director Pat Smith, **by including schools in the decision-making process and allowing them to select the staff members to implement the program, PCESC significantly increased the schools' sense of engagement in the program.**

**Community Engagement for Unified Message Delivery.** PCESC's broad-based coalition engaged schools and community partners, including law enforcement, juvenile justice, community substance abuse and mental health agencies, hospitals, the local health department, the Family and Children First Council, and faith-based organizations. **The coalition strategically identified areas of need by considering data and input from community members and youth, and then developed programs and strategies to address those issues.**

The coalition's work included public awareness campaigns. For example, billboards, radio and newspaper advertisements, and signs promoted the "Parents Who Host Lose the Most" campaign to raise public awareness about the risks of parents serving alcohol at teen parties. PCESC also expanded Red Ribbon Week (a national weeklong substance abuse awareness campaign) into a monthly campaign, where schools developed activities and media materials to raise awareness about substance abuse prevention and other health topics.

### **Building Support for Substance Abuse Prevention.**

PCESC built substantial community support for its substance abuse prevention work. Prior to SS/HS funding, many community norms reinforced youth alcohol use. Putnam County's messaging to students, parents, and the community changed these perceptions. **Now the community—including parents, law enforcement, and school personnel—speaks out against substance abuse and presents a united front that youth alcohol use is a problem.** Superintendent Dr. Jan Osborn explains, "We're not working in silos anymore. It's the community supporting kids."

*We now have a unified county delivering a unified message. There's not one person or one organization doing it all. It's the combination of programs, it's a variety of people ... it's a county effort. And I think that accounts for our success and the positive data that we're getting back."*

—Pat Smith, SS/HS project director

Data suggest that this approach to substance abuse prevention is working. By almost all measures, PCESC's youth alcohol use rates are now *below* the national average. In grades 4–12, 30-day drinking rates decreased from 21 percent in 2008 to 14 percent in 2012. For students in every grade, the onset of alcohol use has been delayed. And, fewer parents agree that it is okay for students to drink (20 percent in 2012, compared to 26 percent in 2008).

## Rockdale County Public Schools—Conyers, Georgia (FY 2009)

Situated in a large, racially diverse county close to Atlanta, Rockdale County Public Schools (RCPS) collected data that indicated a rise in youth substance use. In response, RCPS implemented a school-based curriculum and student-driven substance abuse prevention activities.

**Building on Existing Structures.** RCPS built upon existing school initiatives to implement substance abuse prevention programming. They incorporated evidence-based interventions (EBIs), such as **Too Good for Drugs**, in health classes for fifth- to ninth-grade students, which were delivered by law enforcement officers in partnership with school health teachers.

Using Students Against Destructive Decisions (SADD) as a model, **RCPS identified existing student groups to take on the work of promoting appropriate decision making related to alcohol and other drugs.** SADD's basic philosophy is that empowering young people to help each other is the most effective way to approach substance abuse prevention. RCPS encouraged all of the county's middle and high schools toward the same substance abuse prevention goals and objectives. The design and implementation of each school's program varied, as students and staff tailored the SADD mission to best meet the needs of the students.

**Establishing Ownership of Prevention Efforts.** RCPS encouraged staff and students to take ownership and tailor their school's substance abuse prevention approach to meet the school's needs. **Rather than dictating how schools should implement substance abuse prevention activities, RCPS set the parameters and allowed students to make programming their own.** In one instance, students at a middle school decided that they did not like the name SADD, so they renamed their group SWAG, or Students with a Goal.

**Involving Students and Parents in Substance Abuse Education.** RCPS worked with students to conduct an environmental scan of community resources and learn about substance abuse issues within the county. Project Director Susan Paul Smith advises, "Before coming up with a substance abuse program, go to the schools and ask the staff to describe the situation. Ask students what they can do and what will influence their peers."

**RCPS encouraged students to participate in creating substance abuse prevention messaging for their peers.** In one instance, high school students developed and performed a play about drinking and driving for middle school students. Members of Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) were so impressed by the performance that they invited the students to perform at their annual kick-off assembly.

RCPS also offered a Parent Academy twice a year to educate parents about a range of issues, including youth substance abuse. Several courses are conducted in Spanish to engage Hispanic families. RCPS worked very closely with the liaison for Hispanic parents to make sure that resources were culturally competent and accessible to both English- and Spanish-speaking parents.

*If you want this substance abuse work to be sustained, you have to find "the hook." If schools are invested and take ownership of substance abuse prevention, it is more likely to continue past the end of grant funding.*

—Susan Paul Smith, SS/HS project director



## Santa Fe Public Schools—Santa Fe, New Mexico (FY 2008)

Santa Fe Public School (SFPS) targeted high rates of underage drinking by collaborating with city and state governments to change policy, select appropriate evidence-based interventions (EBIs), and involve community organizations in substance abuse prevention.

**Collaborating with City and State Governments to Create Change.** New Mexico state law allows parents to bring their children into bars and purchase alcohol for minors. SFPS staff believed this contributed to a widely held attitude that underage drinking was not a problem. Indeed, local data indicated high rates of underage drinking: 28.7 percent of Santa Fe County high school students reported using alcohol before age 13 compared to the national average of 20.5 percent. Santa Fe conducted student focus groups and discovered that adults provided much of the alcohol to youth.

**SFPS collaborated with city and state governments to both limit minors' access to alcohol and send a message that underage drinking was not acceptable.** This collaboration with the city of Santa Fe resulted in several new policies and laws, such as a policy that city-owned properties could no longer serve or permit the use of alcohol. A new city ordinance allowed police to enter homes where they suspected underage drinking and arrest any adults who were supervising the youth. SFPS and the city of Santa Fe also collaborated to reduce and prevent tobacco use by creating smoke-free spaces within the city, and real estate agents and management companies agreed to make more of their properties smoke-free.

Because Santa Fe is the state capital, the school district's students had a unique opportunity to attend state legislature meetings and advocate for their substance abuse prevention needs. SFPS successfully advocated for increasing the state tobacco excise tax to provide funding for prevention programs. Students have continued to visit the legislature to advocate for increasing the alcohol excise tax.

**Involving Community Partners.** SFPS partnered with a number of local organizations to strengthen its substance abuse prevention efforts, especially underage drinking. **The Santa Fe Underage Prevention Drinking Alliance, Santa Fe Juvenile Board, and law enforcement worked together to prevent underage drinking,** especially in very young students. These organizations already interacted with at-risk students, so they supported SFPS's program by conveying a consistent substance abuse prevention message and connecting students to substance abuse counseling.

*It is vital to have frequent communication between the collaborating partners so that you can be reactive to trends. A local agency alerted us to the fact that students were experimenting with a chemical form of marijuana. We were able to address it in our schools, and our police department was able to crack down on it. After three months, we no longer had reports of students using it.*

—Tita Gervers, SS/HS project director

**Implementing Effective Evidence-Based Interventions.** SFPS selected and implemented age-appropriate EBIs for all students with the assistance of a certified prevention specialist. For students in Pre-K through Grade 3, the classroom-based social skills program **Second Step** was used to teach social-emotional skills and reduce impulsive and aggressive behavior. Students in grades 4 through grade 6 participated in **Botvin LifeSkills Training**, a program that targets the major social and psychological factors that support the initiation of substance use and other risky behaviors. The district also implemented **Project SUCCESS**, which offers middle school students assistance with substance abuse issues by helping them focus on their futures and take steps to reach their goals. According to SFPS Drug Prevention Coordinator Shelley Mann-Lev, these interventions increased the number of students receiving intensive services, reduced alcohol and tobacco use, and increased the number of students who reported feeling that school district staff care about them.

## Willits Unified School District—Willits, California (FY 2009)

Willits Unified School District (WUSD) tailored its substance abuse prevention approach to fit the needs of every school in its district. A combination of social norms campaigns, culturally relevant evidence-based interventions (EBIs), and school-based substance abuse counseling resulted in an overall decrease in student substance use.

**Using a Social Norms Campaign to Correct Student Perceptions.** Because growing marijuana for medicinal use is legal in California, the region faced an increase in permissive attitudes towards marijuana use. Despite this, neither marijuana use nor underage drinking was as widespread as students believed. A 2010 student survey from the Laytonville Unified School District, one of the districts WUSD serves, indicated that 11 percent of middle school students drank alcohol; however, 85 percent of students thought that the percentage was higher. Similarly, more than two thirds of middle school students had never tried marijuana, but students believed marijuana use was far more prevalent.

**To correct students' false perceptions about substance abuse, the school district implemented a social norms campaign and trained students to deliver campaign messages.** The students used local data to create posters that conveyed accurate information about the percentage of students who use marijuana and alcohol. According to SS/HS Project Director Pat Sanborn, students were surprised to learn that most of their peers did not use illegal substances.

**Selecting Culturally Appropriate EBIs.** In the district's tribal high school, WUSD implemented **White Bison's Sons and Daughters of Tradition**, a substance abuse prevention program centered on Native American/American Indian culture. Sons and Daughters of Tradition applies traditional teachings about health, emotions, and the transition from youth to adulthood to substance abuse prevention, making it a culturally appropriate fit for Native American students. School staff and counselors received training in the program, and the school offered it as a full-semester class. Sons and Daughters of Tradition was well-received by students.

*Every school has its own personality, students, and issues, so it's important to tailor substance abuse prevention programs to the unique needs of each school. Having a "cookie cutter" approach will not work. You need to work with each school and find out what their strengths are and what resources they have available.*

—Pat Sanborn, SS/HS project director

### **Offering School-Based Substance Abuse Counseling.**

As part of the SS/HS Initiative, WUSD hired a school-based substance abuse counselor who **successfully integrated mental health and substance abuse services and developed a strong relationship with WUSD's tribal community.** The counselor involved parents and families in the initial stages of students' substance abuse treatment, helping students receive support at home and repairing relationships with their families. In addition to meeting with students regularly, the counselor met with parents on an as-needed basis throughout each student's treatment.

WUSD's approach to substance use is having an impact. From 2010 to 2012, rates of binge drinking in the past 30 days decreased among middle school students from 18 percent to 6 percent. During the same time period, reported use of marijuana in the past month decreased from 20 percent to 8 percent.



The 10 SS/HS sites profiled in this Snapshot have made a positive impact on substance abuse prevention by employing multifaceted, comprehensive approaches that address the individual, social, policy, and community factors that contribute to youth substance use. These communities' stories illustrate how districtwide partnerships can bring substance abuse prevention into focus, broaden the reach of media campaigns, lead to school and local policy changes, and result in the effective implementation of proven strategies to shift cultural norms and decrease substance initiation and use.

The successes of these SS/HS grantees can serve as a model for communities nationwide. Working collaboratively with partners, these sites delivered data-driven, age-appropriate, and culturally responsive substance abuse programming that fostered positive school climates; strengthened and enforced school policies; and addressed the social, emotional, and psychological needs of students. They demonstrate how effective substance abuse prevention can contribute to safer, healthier schools where students can learn and succeed.



## Glossary of Substance Abuse-Related Evidence-Based Interventions and Promising Practices Used by SS/HS Sites

### All Stars

All Stars, a school-based program for youth ages 11–14, works to prevent high-risk behaviors such as drug use, violence, and premature sexual activity. The All Stars' curriculum uses interactive group activities, small-group discussions, one-on-one sessions, and parent engagement to promote developing positive ideals, bonding with school and family, and building strong personal commitments to avoid high-risk behaviors. The basic All Stars curriculum consists of 13 weekly sessions led by a teacher, prevention specialist, or social worker. Additional lessons can be added to the core curriculum to reinforce lessons.<sup>41</sup>

### Botvin LifeSkills Training

Botvin LifeSkills Training (LST), a school-based program to prevent alcohol, tobacco, and marijuana use, works to address the major social and psychological factors that lead to substance use and other high-risk behaviors. Age-appropriate LST programs for elementary, middle, and high school students teach personal and social skills to help youth build resilience and develop the skills necessary to resist pro-drug influences. LST uses facilitated discussion, small-group activities, and role-playing to engage students and enhance learning.<sup>42</sup>

### Project Northland

Involving students, peers, parents, and communities, Project Northland aims to delay the onset of drinking among adolescents and to reduce alcohol consumption among youth who already drink. Geared toward middle school students, the program engages with youth on a weekly basis to talk with their parents about alcohol use and to help youth develop skills to resist pressures to drink. Key components of the program include student-parent homework assignments, peer- and teacher-led curricula, discussions, and games.<sup>43</sup>

### Project Success

Project SUCCESS (Schools Using Coordinated Community Efforts to Strengthen Students) aims to prevent and reduce substance use among students ages 12–18. The program consists of the Prevention Education Series, which teaches students how to resist pressures to use substances and to correct misconceptions about the prevalence of youth substance use. Project Success also includes a program to educate parents about youth substance use as well as schoolwide activities to change social norms about youth substance use. For students requiring additional support, Project SUCCESS counselors offer short-term individual and group counseling, as well as referrals to community resources.<sup>44</sup>



## Second Step

Second Step is a classroom-based, social-skills program designed to aid teachers in reducing aggressive behavior and increasing social skills. For children ages 4–14, the program includes school-based curricula, parent training, and skills development to help children understand emotions, set goals, and engage in healthy decision making. The program contains age-appropriate curricula, using interpersonal situations as teaching tools to guide students in developing empathy and managing anger.<sup>45</sup>

## Social Norms Marketing

Social norms marketing is an approach to substance abuse prevention that attempts to correct misperceptions of normative behavior within a population. Within a school, it provides accurate information about substance use among students and corrects the misperception that substance abuse is widely prevalent. Methods used to disseminate accurate information include posters, public service announcements, and social media campaigns.<sup>46</sup>

## Too Good for Drugs

Too Good for Drugs (TGFD), a school-based prevention program for kindergarten through 12th grade students, aims to help youth develop personal and interpersonal skills to resist peer pressure, set goals, manage emotions, and communicate with others. The program promotes a nonviolent, drug-free lifestyle and provides students with age-appropriate information about the negative consequences of drug use.<sup>47</sup>

## White Bison's Sons and Daughters of Tradition

Designed using traditional Native American teachings, these character-building curricula (one each for male and female students) assist Native American youth ages 8–17 to create healthy identities for themselves. The culturally relevant and age-appropriate programs teach Native American youth how their cultural traditions can guide them to live healthy lives, leaving youth with tools to succeed in adolescence and adulthood. The goals of the programs include teaching youth to identify and discuss feelings, to recognize healthy behaviors, and to set appropriate goals and boundaries.<sup>48, 49, 50</sup>



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