

pccd researcher



Pennsylvania Youth Survey (PAYS)

Overview

Since 1989, the commonwealth has conducted a survey of students on their behavior, attitudes and knowledge concerning alcohol, tobacco, other drugs, violence, and other related problem behaviors. The Pennsylvania Youth Survey (PAYS) of public school students in grades 6, 8, 10, and 12 is conducted biennially.

The PAYS data are compared with previous survey administrations. Additionally, the PAYS survey is benchmarked against the Generation at Risk survey data, which is used to assess the drug use of Pennsylvania's students from 1989 through 1997.

PAYS is sponsored by the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD), in collaboration with the PA Department of Education, PA Department of Health, PA Liquor Control Board, and PA Department of Public Welfare. The report identifies the issues most in need of attention in the community. This information, in turn, can be used by school and health officials to guide prevention efforts, to address service gaps, and to promote healthy and positive youth development.

PAYS serves two primary needs. First, the survey results provide an important benchmark for community leaders to assess the prevalence of alcohol, tobacco, and other drug (ATOD) use and delinquency behavior among young Pennsylvanians and whether prevention programs are having any positive impact on youth behavior. Second, the survey assesses risk factors known to be related to youth alcohol, drug, tobacco, and risky behaviors as well as the prevalence of protective factors that guard against these risks. This information allows community leaders and school administrators to direct prevention resources to areas where they are likely to have the greatest impact.



The 2009 PAYS administered over 150,000 surveys in approximately 500 of Pennsylvania's schools. The full report is scheduled for release in the summer of 2010.

Background

The PAYS survey is based on the Communities That Care Youth Survey (CTCYS). Some key findings from the 2007 PAYS includes:

- 6.5 percent of Pennsylvania's 8th graders reported binge drinking compared to 10.3 percent of 8th graders nationally
- 10.5 percent of students reported attacking someone with intent to harm

Figures 1 and 2 provide examples of the type of data that are available from the survey.

Figure 1: Overall Lifetime & Past 30 Day Prevalence of Alcohol, Tobacco, & Other Drug Use (Sources: PAYS, 2007)

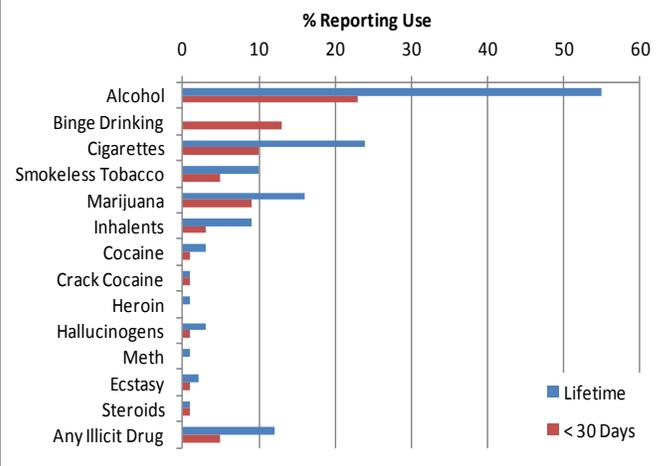
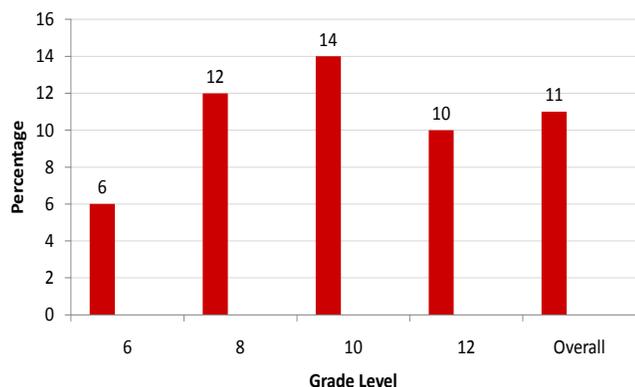


Figure 2: Attacking Someone with Intent to Harm
(Source: PAYS, 2007)



Benefits

PAYS offers a number of benefits to those responsible for or interested in preventing problem behaviors among youth.

First, PAYS consists of thirty-six questions which assess alcohol, tobacco and other drug (ATOD) use. The questions are closely aligned to those contained in the national Monitoring the Future youth study, including national data as well as data from other drug and risk assessments. Since PAYS aligns favorably with a number of these national surveys, schools find that they have greater comparability of the testing results.

Second, because PAYS has collected data biennially since 1989, the survey offers 10 years of data points for trend analysis.

Third, relative to content, PAYS provides officials with a broad picture of student behavior. PAYS provides insight on alcohol, tobacco, other drugs, and violence. And, it also provides data on risk and protective factors with peers, family, home, and school.

Fourth, PAYS enables community leaders to assess the utility of direct prevention programs and to determine where resources have the greatest impact on behavior.

Utilization

Officials use the PAYS data for planning, evaluation, and assessment. Several examples of this use by state and local agencies to make important programming and policy decisions follow:

- Local school districts, colleges and universities utilize PAYS data when developing their strategies to address problem behaviors. The PAYS can provide educators with a clear view of the risk and protective factors that need the most attention within the educational environment.
- Drug free coalitions and community partnerships funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMSHA) use PAYS for the risk and protective factors information to develop service delivery plans and prevention strategies.
- Local community planning collaborations, single county authorities (SCA), and other prevention planning organizations use PAYS data to develop their prevention strategies, guide their selection of evidence-based programs, demonstrate the impact of existing prevention programming and strategies, and to illustrate the needs of the community when requesting funding.
- The Pennsylvania Department of Health's Office of Epidemiology uses PAYS to develop its Epidemiology Profile based largely on its assessment of multiple-grade level changes in drug use and abuse across time.
- With the introduction of new questions in 2005, PAYS will assist the commonwealth in assessing the prevalence and risk of gambling behaviors among Pennsylvania's youth.
- The Pennsylvania Department of Health uses PAYS to provide benchmarks on substance abuse and tobacco for comparison with the Healthy People 2010 Statistics Report.

Conclusion

PAYS has proven to be a reliable instrument to measure the prevalence of substance use, risk behaviors, and protective factors among Pennsylvania's youth.

PAYS provides excellent benchmark data to facilitate effective justice, health care, and community planning initiatives across the commonwealth.