

## Tri-Town Youth Substance Abuse Prevention Coalition

### 2013 Adult Perception Survey Report

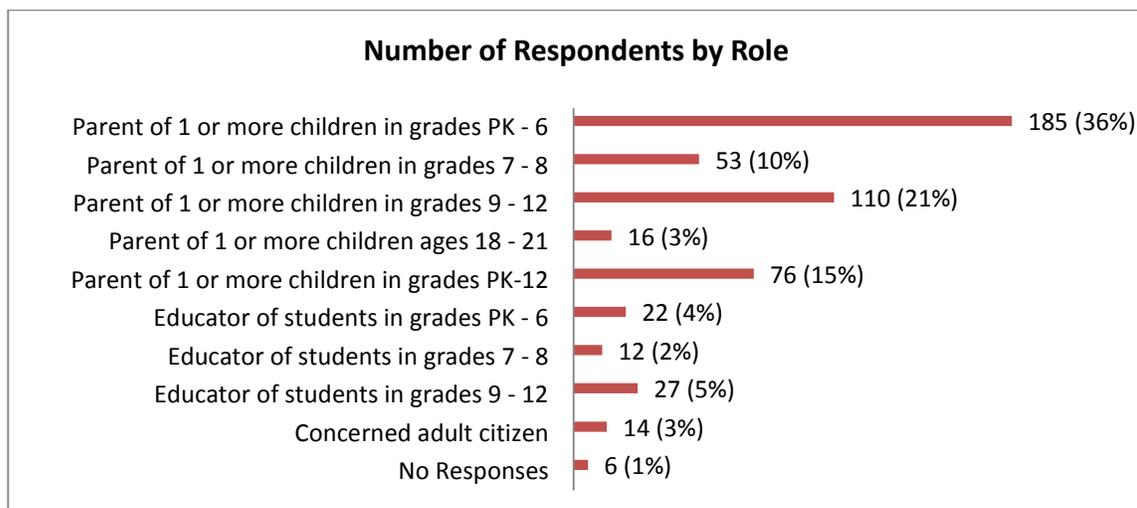
#### *Executive Summary*

#### INTRODUCTION

The Tri-Town Youth Substance Abuse Prevention Coalition conducted its second Adult Perception Survey in May 2013 on-line in Boxford, Middleton and Topsfield. The purpose of the survey was to provide an opportunity for Tri-Town parents, educators and concerned adults to share their attitudes, perceptions and concerns regarding middle and high school youth regarding alcohol substance abuse and other health issues. The results of this survey provide information to expand understanding of parent concerns and beliefs, and will support continued discussions to strengthen the well-being of youth in the Tri-Town region.

#### PARTICIPATION

The Coalition received 521 responses to the 2013 Adult Perception Survey. Of the total respondents, 36% were from Boxford, 29% from Topsfield and 24% from Middleton. The majority of respondents (84%) were parents with one or more children in grades pre-K through age 21, while 12% were educators of youth in grades pre-K through 12, and 3% identified as concerned adult citizens. Seventy-five percent (75%) of respondents were female, compared to 83% in 2011, and 83% were between the ages of 35-54, the same as in 2011. More parents (27) participated in this survey than in 2011, including a larger percentage of parents with children in grades PreK-6, 36% of total respondents in 2013 compared to 14% 2011. The number and percent of respondents by role is shown in the table below.



## KEY FINDINGS

### Common Concerns

The adults who participated in the survey identified similar concerns for Tri-Town youth. The top concerns were: **social issues**<sup>1</sup>, **substance abuse**<sup>2</sup>, **mental health issues**<sup>3</sup>, **academic pressure**, **bullying**<sup>4</sup>, and **sexual issues**.

Respondent Role by Grade of Child	#1 Concern	#2 Concern		#3 Concern
Parents PreK-6	Social issues (64%) <sup>5</sup>	Bullying (49%)		Substance abuse (41%)
Parents 7-8	Social issues (71%)	Substance abuse (67%)		Mental health (38%)
Parents 9-12	Substance abuse (76%)	Social issues (57%)		Mental health (55%)
Educators PreK-6	Academic pressure (63%)	Social issues (53%)	Bullying (53%)	Mental health (42%)
Educators 7-8	Social issues (75%)	Mental health (58%)		Academic pressure (42%)
Educators 9-12	Mental health (85%)	Substance abuse (61%)		Social issues (46%)
Concerned Adults	Substance abuse (75%)	Mental health (51%)		Academic pressure (41%)

The issues of greatest concern differed by respondent group. **Social issues** and **substance abuse** were among the top concern for parents of elementary, middle and high school youth. **Mental health issues** was one of the top three concerns for parents, educators and concerned adults, with the exception of parents of PreK-6 graders and concerned adults. Many respondents commented that selecting their top three concerns was difficult as many of the issues seem to be related to one another.

Closer analysis shows that parents reported substance abuse was a more predominant concern as youth age increased; with Substance Abuse moving from the third area of concern for parents of elementary level youth, to the second area of concern for parents of middle school youth, and to the top concern for parents of high school youth. Similarly, mental health became a greater concern for educators as youth age increased. Mental Health was educators' third area of concern at the elementary level, the second area at the middle school level, and the top concern at the high school level. Substance Abuse was not one of the top three areas of concerns for educators, PK-8.

<sup>1</sup> Social issues were defined as "friendships, social media, etc."

<sup>2</sup> Substance abuse was defined as "alcohol, marijuana, prescription drugs, other"

<sup>3</sup> Mental health was defined as "youth depression, anxiety and other mental health concerns"

<sup>4</sup> Bullying included occurrences in and out of school and on-line

<sup>5</sup> Results were calculated by combining the percent of participants who selected an issue as one of the top three concerns.

## Risk of Harm

The majority of respondents reported they believe that use of the following substances poses a moderate or great risk of harm for youth in grades 6-12, as they did in 2011. Respondents perceived that youth in grades 9-12 were at greater risk of harm from use than those in grades 7-8.

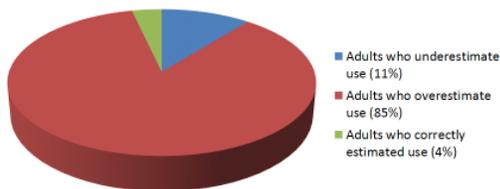
- Smoking cigarettes daily
- Sniffing glue and use of other inhalants
- Having one or two drinks of alcohol nearly every week
- Having one or two drinks of alcohol nearly every day
- Smoking marijuana once or twice nearly every week
- Smoking marijuana nearly every day
- Taking over the counter medicines (such as cough or cold medicines) in order to get high
- Taking prescription drugs (without a doctor's orders) to get high nearly every week

## Perceptions of Youth Substance Use

Adults perceived that more middle and high school youth smoked tobacco, drank alcohol and used marijuana at higher rates than youth actually reported in the 2012 Youth Risk Behavior Survey conducted at the Masconomet Middle and High Schools. Adult perception and youth reported usage rates are shown in the pie charts below.

### Adult Perceptions of Past 30 Day Middle School Youth Use Rates - Alcohol

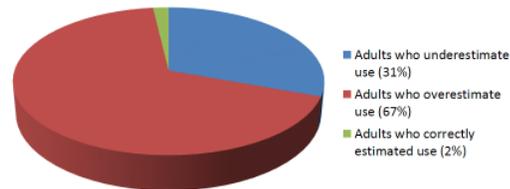
Youth who have had at least one drink of alcohol



Less than 5% of MS Youth reported having had at least one drink of alcohol in the past 30 days

### Adult Perceptions of Past 30 Day High School Youth Use Rates - Alcohol

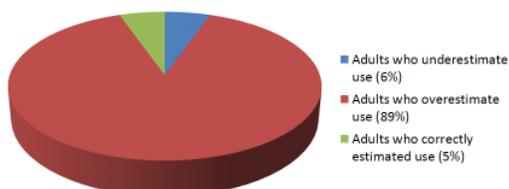
Youth who have had at least one drink of alcohol



34% of HS youth reported having had at least one drink of alcohol in the past 30 days

### Adult Perceptions of Past 30 Day Middle School Youth Use Rates - Tobacco

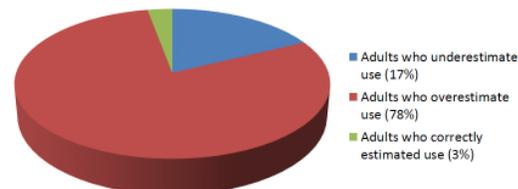
Youth who have smoked cigarettes



2% of MS Youth reported smoking cigarettes in the past 30 days

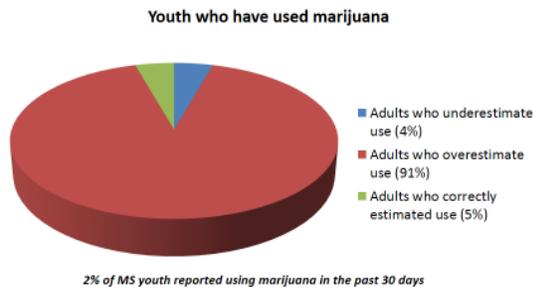
### Adult Perceptions of Past 30 Day High School Youth Use Rates - Tobacco

Youth who have smoked cigarettes

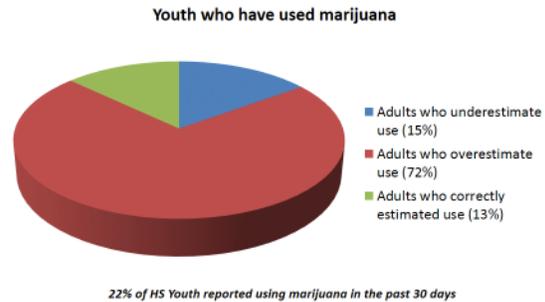


9% of HS youth reported smoking cigarettes in the past 30 days

### Adult Perceptions of Past 30 Day Middle School Youth Use Rates - Marijuana



### Adult Perceptions of Past 30 Day High School Youth Use Rates - Marijuana



Youth in grades 7-8 use alcohol, cigarettes and marijuana **at much lower rates** than is perceived by adult respondents. Adults accurately reported that youth use of substances increases from middle to high school, as validated by the usage rates student reported in the 2012 youth survey. And, according to the YRBS reports, youth use of substances increases as they progress through the high school grades. It is important to note that, according to the results of the youth survey, middle and high school youth **use of alcohol, cigarettes and marijuana is not the norm**. . Overestimating actual use rates among youth can be a risk factor and unintentionally promote risky behaviors due to the belief that “everyone else is doing it”.<sup>6</sup>

Grade	Substance	Adult Perception of Youth Use in Past 30 Days	Youth Report of Use in Past 30 Days
7-8	Alcohol	37% of adults thought 15-44% of youth used alcohol	4% of middle school youth self-reported alcohol use
	Cigarettes	29% of adults thought 15-44% of youth used cigarettes	2% of middle school youth self-reported cigarette use
	Marijuana	31% of adults thought 15-44% of youth used marijuana	2% of middle school youth self-reported marijuana use
9-12	Alcohol	44% of adults thought 15-44% of youth used alcohol 49% of adults thought 45-75+% of youth used alcohol	34% of high school youth self-reported alcohol use
	Cigarettes	56% of adults thought 15-44% of youth used cigarettes	9% of high school youth self-reported cigarette use
	Marijuana	55% of adults thought 15-44% of youth used marijuana 32% of adults thought 45-75+% of youth used marijuana	22% of high school youth self-reported marijuana use

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.mostofus.org/about-us/what-is-social-norms-marketing/>

## **Adult Attitudes towards Substance Use**

### Parental Attitudes about Youth Substance Use

Parents of middle and high school youth shared similar attitudes of disapproval of 7-12 graders use of substances.

- 99% or more parents of children in grades 7-8 reported that it would be ‘very wrong’ or ‘wrong’ for their child to use cigarettes, alcohol, marijuana or other substances to get high, which is the same percentage as in 2011 .
- 95% or more parents of children in grades 9-12 reported it was ‘very wrong’ or ‘wrong’ for their child to use cigarettes, alcohol, marijuana or other substances to get high, compared 98% or more in 2011.

### Alcohol Access and Use

Adults identified the primary source of alcohol for middle and high school youth was from their own home, the same as in 2011. Middle school youth also reported home as the primary source of alcohol, with parties and friends as the next most common sources of alcohol. High school youth, however, reported friends as their primary source of alcohol, and parties and home as their second and third sources of alcohol. Sixty-five percent (65%) of high school youth reported it is ‘very easy’ or ‘fairly easy’ to obtain alcohol, compared to 41% of middle school youth.

Adults varied in their opinion about permitting youth under age 21 to drink at home.

- 63% of all survey participants in 2013 felt it was never OK to allow youth under 21 to drink at home, a slight increase from 61% in 2011.
- 29% felt it was permissible to allow their own children under 21 to drink at home, up from 23% in 2011.
- Very few participants believed it was OK to have youth drink in their home if an adult took their car keys (3%) or if an adult were supervising (2%), a slight increase from 1% for each in 2011.

## **Parent Conversations with Middle and High School Youth**

The large majority of parents of youth in grades 7-12 have talked with their child(ren) about substance use and other health and safety issues. However, the vast majority of parents had not had a conversation with their child(ren) about any of these topics in the past 30 days. Fifty percent (51%) of high school youth reported having talked with a parent or other adult about sexuality issues in the past 12 months (YRBS, 2012).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> The 2012 High School YRBS did not include questions about parent-child conversations on other topics.

The majority of middle and high school youth report they have a parent or family member and teacher or other adult at school to whom they can talk (YRBS, 2012). Parent-child and educator-child conversations show interest in a child and are an important protective factor against risk-taking behavior<sup>8</sup>. Middle and high school youth also reported feeling valued within the Tri-Town community.

Nearly 100% of parents have ever talked with their children about:	More than 75% of parents have talked with their children about:	More than 40% of parents have talked with their children about:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alcohol use</li> <li>• Tobacco use</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Marijuana use</li> <li>• Sexual health and safety</li> <li>• Driving with a person who is intoxicated</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of prescription drug use without a prescription</li> <li>• Sniffing/inhaling chemical to get high</li> <li>• Use of over-the-counter drugs to get high</li> <li>• Other drugs including Ecstasy, cocaine, heroin, methamphetamine (crystal meth), LSD or other psychedelics</li> </ul>

**CONCLUSIONS & INITIAL RECOMMENDATIONS:**

Results of the 2013 Adult Perception Survey demonstrate that parents, educators and concerned adults in Boxford, Middleton and Topsfield are very aware of the issues and pressures that Tri-Town youth face. Review and comparison of the results for the adult and youth surveys suggest the need to:

1. Share the survey results with parents, school leaders and educators, community leaders and other concerned adults through the most appropriate methods for the Tri-Town region.
2. Continue to promote and celebrate that most Tri-Town youth in grades 7-12<sup>th</sup> are making healthy choices and choose not to use alcohol, tobacco, marijuana and other substances.
3. Continue to advance consistent, healthy messages, attitudes and behaviors to promote health of all youth in grades PreK-12 and young adults at home, in school and in the community.
4. Continue to actively engage parents, educators, businesses, community organizations and concerned adults throughout the three communities to support youth in making healthy choices.
5. Continue to assess and monitor youth health concerns and behaviors, as well as adult perceptions and attitudes towards these issues.

<sup>8</sup> Resnick MD, Harris LJ, Blum RW. The impact of caring and connectedness on adolescent health and well-being. *Journal of Pediatrics & Child Health* 1993;29(Suppl 1):S3-9.