



The Coalition

2015 Adult Perception Survey Report

Executive Summary

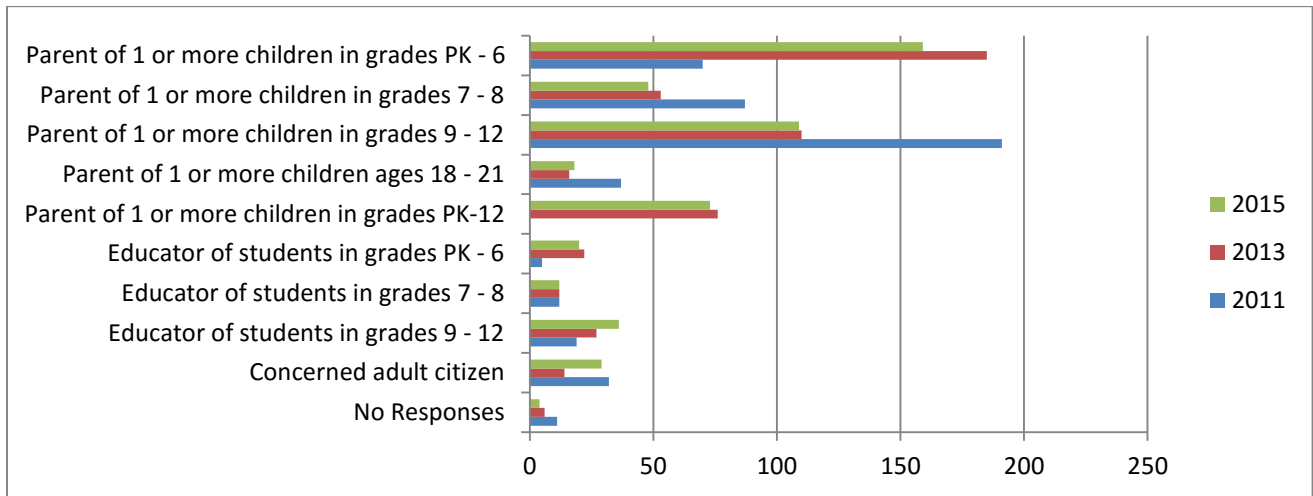
INTRODUCTION

The Coalition, a program of the Tri-Town Council, conducted its third bi-annual online Adult Perception Survey in June 2015. The purpose of the survey was to provide an opportunity for Tri-Town parents/primary caregivers, educators and concerned adults to share their attitudes, perceptions and concerns of middle and high school youth regarding substance use and abuse and other health issues. The results of this survey provide information to expand understanding of parent and community concerns and beliefs, to assess parent, educator and community perceptions of normative behaviors of tri-town youth, and to support and inform continued discussions to strengthen the well-being of youth in the Tri-Town region.

PARTICIPATION

The Coalition received 508 responses to the 2015 Adult Perception Survey. Of the total respondents, 31% were from Boxford, 30% from Topsfield and 26% from Middleton which closely mirrors 2013 results. The majority of respondents (80%) were parents with one or more children in grades pre-K through age 21 compared with 84% of respondents in 2013. 13% of respondents identified as educators of youth in grades pre-K through 12. Participants identifying as concerned adult citizens more than doubled over 2013, representing 6% of responses. Seventy-six percent (76%) of respondents were female, compared to 75% in 2013 and 83% in 2011, and 80% were between the ages of 35-54, compared with 83% in 2013. The table below identifies and compares the number of respondents according to the role identified for 2015, 2013, and 2011.

Number of Respondents by Role:



KEY FINDINGS

Common Concerns

The adults who participated in the survey identified similar concerns for Tri-Town youth. The top concerns were: **social issues**¹, **substance abuse**², **mental health issues**³, **academic pressure**⁴, and **bullying**⁵. The top concerns identified were similar to 2013 survey results.

Respondent Role	#1 Concern	#2 Concern	#3 Concern
Parents grades PreK-6	Social issues	Academic pressure	Substance abuse
Parents grades 7-8	Academic pressure	Social issues	Mental health
Parents grades 9-12	Social issues	Substance abuse	Academic pressure
Parents of youth aged 18 - 21	Substance abuse	Mental health	Social issues
Parents grades PreK-12	Social issues	Substance abuse	Mental health Academic pressure
Educators PreK-6	Mental health	Social issues	Academic pressure
Educators 7-8	Social issues Academic pressure	Mental health	Bullying
Educators 9-12	Mental health	Social issues	Academic pressure
Concerned Adults	Mental health	Substance abuse	Social issues

¹ Social issues were defined as “friendships, social media, etc.”

² Substance abuse was defined as “alcohol, marijuana, prescription drugs, other”

³ Mental health was defined as “youth depression, anxiety and other mental health concerns”

⁴ Academic pressure was defined as curricular demands/homework

⁵ Bullying included occurrences in/out of school and on-line

The issues of greatest concern differed by respondent group. **Social issues** and **academic pressure** were among the top concerns for parents of elementary, middle and high school youth. **Substance abuse** was a top concern for all parents (with the exception of parents of grades 7-8) and concerned adults. Note that **substance abuse** moves from the 3rd area of concern of PK-6 parents to the first area of concern for parents of college-aged children. As the 2014 YRBS data and national trends show, youth participation rates in substance use increases as age increases. Due to the likely increase in participation, parents of older children are more likely to identify **substance abuse** as a top concern. **Mental health** continues to be a top concern for parents of youth in grades 7 – 8 as in 2013, but is no longer identified as a concern for parents of high school aged youth. New in 2015, **academic pressure** is identified as a top concern for all parents of PK- 12 youth; however, it was not identified as a concern in 2013 survey data.

With the exception of **bullying** for teachers of grades 7 - 8, educators across all grade levels identified the same top concerns: **social issues, mental health issues** and **academic pressure**. As in 2013, **substance abuse** is not a top concern for educators. For youth who engage in substance abuse, it can often be a way of relieving social and mental health issues and academic pressure. Reviewing 2013 survey results, PreK-6 teachers' top concerns remained the same, however different in order. While PreK-6 teachers identified **bullying** as a top concern in 2013, it was not identified as a concern in 2015. Unlike in 2013, educators in grades 7- 8 identified bullying as a top concern. Of the 9 concern selections in 2013 survey, bullying was 5th for participating middle school teachers. All other concerns remained the same as 2013, yet differed in order. In comparing 2013 data for educators in grades 9- 12, **substance abuse** was replaced with **academic pressure** as a top concern in 2015.

Concerned citizens continued to identify substance abuse and mental health as top concerns as in 2013; however, **social issues** replaced **academic pressure** as a third area of concern in 2013.

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 9 -12, as they did in 2013 and 2011. As in 2013, 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
- Using electronic smoking devices⁶
- 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

⁶ NOTE: Comparative data for risk of harm of e-cigarette use is not available given the question was added in 2015 survey

Perceptions of Youth Substance Use

As was shown in the 2013 survey, adults continued to perceive that more middle and high school youth smoked tobacco, drank alcohol and used marijuana at higher rates in the past 30 days than youth actually reported in the 2014 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) conducted at the Masconomet Middle and High Schools.⁷ Adult perception and youth reported usage rates are shown in the table below.⁸

NOTE: Highlighted text represents the percent of adult perceptions that aligned with actual reported youth use.

Grade	Substance	Adult Perception of Youth Use in Past 30 Days	Youth Report of Use in Past 30 Days
7-8	Alcohol: <i>How many MS youth had at least one drink of alcohol in the past 30 days?</i>	39% of adults thought between 0 – 10% of youth 38% of adults thought between 20 – 30% of youth 13% of adults thought between 40 – 50% of youth 9% thought between 60 – 90% of youth	1.1% of middle school youth self-reported alcohol use
	Cigarettes: <i>How many MS youth have smoked cigarettes in the past 30 days?</i>	57% of adults thought between 0%-10% of youth 33% of adults thought between 20 – 30% of youth 8% of adults thought between 40 – 60% of youth	.5% of middle school youth self-reported cigarette use
	Marijuana: <i>How many MS youth have used marijuana in the past 30 days?</i>	45% of adults thought between 0 - 10% of youth 39% of adults thought between 20 – 30% of youth 10% of adults thought between 40 – 50% of youth	.7% of middle school youth self-reported marijuana use
9-12	Alcohol: <i>How many HS youth had at least one drink of alcohol in the past 30</i>	38% of adults thought 30% or fewer of youth 22% of adults thought between 40 – 50% of youth 24% of adults thought between 50 – 60% of youth	30% of high school youth self-reported alcohol use

⁷ Adult perception questions of youth substance use were revised for 2015; a direct comparison is not possible

⁸ Because the adult perceptions of youth substance use questions were revised for 2015, 2013 comparison is not available

Grade	Substance	Adult Perception of Youth Use in Past 30 Days	Youth Report of Use in Past 30 Days
	<i>days?</i>		
	Cigarettes: <i>How many HS youth have smoked cigarettes in the past 30 days?</i>	23% of adults thought 10% or fewer of youth 52% of adults thought between 20 – 30% of youth 16% of adults thought between 40 – 50%	6% of high school youth self-reported cigarette use
	Marijuana: <i>How many HS youth have used marijuana in the past 30 days?</i>	10% of adults thought between 0 – 10% 40% of adults thought between 20 – 30% of youth used marijuana 24% of adults thought between 40 – 50% of youth 24% thought 60% or more of youth	22% of high school youth self-reported marijuana use

Youth in grades 7-12 use alcohol, cigarettes and marijuana **at much lower rates** than is perceived by adult respondents. While the table shows that a number of adult respondents perceive middle and high school youth use rates of alcohol, cigarettes and marijuana in the range of use based on the 2014 YRBS (highlighted in the table), the majority of adults perceive that middle school youth are using at much higher rates than the data show. Adults accurately reported that youth substance use increases from middle to high school, as validated by the usage rates students reported in the 2014 YRBS. 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 YRBS, the average Masconomet middle and high school youth is **not using substances**. Alcohol, cigarette and marijuana use among tri-town youth is **not the normative behavior** based on the survey results. Overestimating actual use rates among youth can be a risk factor and can unintentionally promote risky behaviors by perpetuating the inaccurate perception that “everyone else is doing it”.

Additionally, respondents who identified as Masconomet educators were asked to gauge Masconomet middle and high school youth past 30 day use of alcohol, marijuana, and prescription drugs without a prescription. Respondents represent 14% of middle school and 26% of high school educators. The small sample size should be taken into consideration when looking at the following results. Because the data does not reflect a representative sample of Masconomet educators, caution should be exercised when interpreting the information. *NOTE: Highlighted text represents the percent of educator perceptions that aligned with actual reported youth use.*

Educator Perceptions of Past 30 Day MS and HS Youth Use					
Respondents	Substance	Perception of MS use	Actual 2014 MS use	Perception of HS use	Actual 2014 HS use
MS educators Grades 7 & 8	Alcohol: <i>What percentage of MS/HS youth have had at least 1 drink of alcohol in past 30 days?</i>	78% thought between 0 - 10% 22% thought between 30 - 40%	1.1%	11% thought 10% 44% thought 20% 22% thought between 30 - 40% 22% thought between 50 - 60%	30%
	Marijuana: <i>What percentage of MS/HS youth have used marijuana in past 30 days?</i>	78% thought between 0 - 10% 22% thought 20%	.7%	22% thought 10% 44% thought 20% 22% thought 40% 11% thought 50%	22%
	Rx Drugs w/o Rx: <i>What percentage of MS/HS youth have used Rx drugs not prescribed to them in past 30 days?</i>	77% thought between 0 - 10% 22% thought 20%	.4%	56% thought 10% 22% thought 20% 11% thought 30% 11% thought 40%	5%
HS educators Grades 9 – 12	Alcohol: <i>What percentage of MS/HS youth have had at least 1 drink of alcohol in past 30 days?</i>	61% thought between 0 - 10% 13% thought 20% 20% thought between 30 - 40% 6% thought between 50 - 60%	1.1%	6% thought between 0 – 10% 37% thought between 20 – 30% 36% thought between 50 – 60% 19% thought between 70 – 90%	30%

	Substance	Perception of MS use	Actual 2014 MS use	Perception of HS use	Actual 2014 HS use
	Marijuana: <i>What percentage of MS/HS youth have used marijuana in past 30 days?</i>	60% thought between 0 – 10% 30% thought between 20 – 30% 9% thought between 40 – 50%	.7%	13% thought between 0 – 10% 47% thought between 20 – 30% 20% thought between 40 – 50% 19% thought between 60 – 70%	22%
	Rx Drugs w/o Rx: <i>What percentage of MS/HS youth have used Rx drugs not prescribed to them in past 30 days?</i>	80% thought between 0 – 10% 13% thought 20% 3% thought 50% 3% thought 70%	.4%	46% thought between 0 – 10% 43% thought between 20 – 30% 3% thought 40% 6% thought between 60 – 70%	5%

Middle school teachers' perceptions of 30 day middle school youth use of alcohol, marijuana and Rx drugs without a prescription fall within the range of actual use as reported in the 2014 YRBS.⁹ 55% of middle school teachers' perceive high school youth are using alcohol at lower rates than reported on the 2014 YRBS. Close to half of middle school teachers accurately estimate (within the range) actual use of marijuana and Rx drugs without a prescription for high school youth.

A majority of high school teachers (60 – 80%) identified middle school youth use rates within the range of actual use reported on the 2014 YRBS. Conversely, 55% of high school educators overestimated high school youth alcohol use rates by 20% or more. Almost half identified high school youth use rates of marijuana and Rx drugs without a prescription in the range of actual use reported on the 2014 YRBS; however it should be noted that 52% of high school teacher respondents perceived use of Rx drugs without a prescription at much higher rates than reported on the 2014 YRBS. The survey question did not ask teachers to think of youth in a specific grade; however a factor that may impact high school teachers' responses on the survey is that they are thinking about the youth they specifically work with. For example, a teacher who works primarily with youth in 12th grade may estimate high school youth substance use at a higher rate than a teacher who works primarily with 9th grade youth. As noted

⁹ Note: Question asked teachers to estimate youth use rates in 10% increments.

previously and in the 2014 YRBS, high school youth substance use increases as they age. This factor should be considered when interpreting perception information in the tables above.

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.

- 98% 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 similar to 2013 survey results.
- 93% 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 95% or more in 2013.
- NOTE: Aggregating the “very wrong” and “wrong” categories leads to similar results for MS and HS parents, however; when looking at the response rate differences between the “wrong” and “very wrong” selections, it was noted there was a greater difference between the 2 categories for HS parents. For example: 78% of HS parents feel smoking cigarettes is ‘very wrong’ compared with 92% of MS parents; 82% of HS parents feel drinking alcohol is ‘very wrong’ compared with 95% of MS parents; 77% of HS parents feel smoking marijuana is ‘very wrong’ compared with 94% of MS parents.

Alcohol Access and Use

Adults identified the primary source of alcohol for middle school youth was from their own home, the same as in 2013 and 2011. From friends and at parties were the second and third sources identified by survey participants. Note: 30% of respondents selected “I think most youth in grades 7 – 8 do not use alcohol.” Per the 2014 YRBS, middle school youth who reported obtaining alcohol in the past 12 months primarily took it from home.¹⁰

For high school youth, adults identified the top four most likely sources of obtaining alcohol as: home, parties, friends, and older siblings. Per the 2014 YRBS, of high school youth who obtained alcohol in the past 12 months¹¹ obtained it through friends (24%), parties (21%), and home (15%) which was consistent with 2012 YRBS results.

Additionally, 61% of high school youth and 25% of middle school youth reported it is ‘very easy’ or ‘fairly easy’ to obtain alcohol. The high school youth response was similar to 2012; however the middle school youth response dropped from 41% in 2012.

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

¹⁰ The 2014 YRBS question asks: “How did you get beer, wine coolers, wine or liquor in the past 12 months?”

¹¹ See above.

- 63% of all survey participants felt it was never OK to allow youth under 21 to drink at home, mirroring 2013 results.
- 26% felt it was permissible to allow their own children under 21 to drink at home, down from 29% in 2013.
- Very few participants believed it was OK to have youth drink in their home if an adult took their car keys (<1%), a decrease over 2013; or if an adult were supervising (3%), a slight increase of 1% over 2013 survey results.
- When breaking out results by age of children (i.e. grades PK – 6; 7 – 8 etc.) most survey participants responses to “it is never OK to all youth under 21 to drink at home” were within +/- 3% of the aggregate 63%. Similarly, breakout of most responses to “it is ok to allow youth under 21 to drink at home only if it’s your own child” were within +/- 2%. The only exception was respondents with children aged 18 – 21. Response rates were 55% and 39% respectively. 89% of middle school parent respondents would not allow their child to drink at home as a way to prevent dangerous behavior. 96% of high school parent respondents would not allow their child’s friends to drink in their home as a way to prevent dangerous behavior.

Parents of youth in grades 7 – 8 and parents of youth in grade 9 – 12 were also asked about their own attitudes toward underage drinking, the attitude of their child, the attitude of their child’s peers, and the attitude of child’s peers’ parents. Results shown in the tables below:

Middle School Parent Responses				
<i>Which statement best represents the attitude(s) of...</i>	<i>You</i>	<i>Your child</i>	<i>Your child’s peers</i>	<i>Your child’s peers’ parents/guardians</i>
Drinking is never a good thing for youth under 21	81%	81%	37%	58%
Drinking is alright for youth under age 21, but they should not get drunk	8%	5%	28%	13%
Drinking is alright for older teenagers as long as it is in a private home with a parent present, and no one drives	10%	11%	23%	29%
Getting drunk occasionally is okay for youth under 21 as long as it does not interfere with daily activities	1%	3%	12%	0%
Getting drunk regularly is okay if that is what the youth under 21 chooses to do	0%	0%	0%	0%

2014 YRBS results show that 93% of middle school youth believe their parents would view them consuming alcohol as “very wrong/wrong”. When asked how their peers would feel about them drinking alcohol, 93% of youth selected “very wrong/wrong”. 84% of middle school youth reported that drinking one or more alcoholic drinks a day puts people at “great risk/moderate risk” of harming themselves.

Despite that the questions on the YRBS and Adult Perception Survey are slightly different and measure opinions, attitudes, and perception of risk of underage drinking, some comparisons may be gleaned. Analysis of the data table above and the YRBS results show that most middle school youth report knowing their parents disapprove of underage drinking, at higher rates than middle school parent respondents. Additionally, most middle school youth understand that underage drinking is a risky behavior. 84% identified risk of harm as “great risk/moderate risk”.

The survey data shows most middle school parent survey respondents disapprove of underage drinking (and would not allow their child to drink at home as a way to prevent dangerous behavior), perceive their child shares a similar attitude, yet perceive child’s peers and other parents disapprove at much lower rates than they themselves.

High School Parent Responses				
<i>Which statement best represents the attitude(s) of...</i>	<i>You</i>	<i>Your child</i>	<i>Your child’s peers</i>	<i>Your child’s peers’ parents/guardians</i>
Drinking is never a good thing for youth under 21	80%	51%	22%	39%
Drinking is alright for youth under age 21, but they should not get drunk	<2%	22%	20%	17%
Drinking is alright for older teenagers as long as it is in a private home with a parent present, and no one drives	17%	21%	25%	37%
Getting drunk occasionally is okay for youth under 21 as long as it does not interfere with daily activities	<2%	4%	26%	6%
Getting drunk regularly is okay if that is what the youth under 21 chooses to do	0%	2%	7%	1%

2014 YRBS results show that 81% of high school youth believe their parents would view them consuming alcohol as “very wrong/wrong”. When asked how their peers would feel about them drinking alcohol, 47% of youth selected “very wrong/wrong”. When asked about the risk of harm from consuming 5+ alcoholic beverages once or twice a week, 85% of high school youth selected “great risk/moderate risk”.

As with the middle school parent respondent data, high school parents perceive child's peers and other parents disapprove of underage drinking at much lower rates than they themselves. Additionally almost all (96%) of high school parents surveyed would NOT allow their child and their child's friends to drink in their home as a way to prevent dangerous behavior.

Parent Conversations with Middle and High School Youth

The large majority of parents of youth in grades 7-12 report having talked with their child(ren) about substance use and other health and safety issues.

Parents of high school aged youth report having ever talked with their child about alcohol, tobacco, marijuana and driving with persons under the influence at the highest rates (92% or greater). 86% of high school parents report having ever talked with their child about sexual health and safety. **However, the vast majority of parents had not had a conversation with their child(ren) about most of these topics in the past 30 days with the exception of alcohol use (72%) and driving with persons under the influence (55%).** Per the 2014 YRBS, 2/3 of high school youth reported talking with their parents about various topics¹² in the past 12 months. More than half reported talking to their parents about alcohol, 38% about marijuana, and 33% about sexual activity.

Parents of middle school aged youth report having talked about alcohol, tobacco, marijuana and driving with persons under the influence at the highest rates (78% or greater). Between 48 – 56% of middle school parents report having talked with their child about alcohol, tobacco and marijuana use in the past 30 days. Fewer than 28% of middle school parents have talked with their child about prescription drug use without a prescription, use of other substances (heroin, inhalants, etc.) and sexual health and safety in the past 30 days. **According to the 2014 YRBS, fewer than half of middle school youth reported having talked with their parents about health and safety related topics in the past 12 months.** 34% had discussed alcohol use, 30% tobacco use, 27% marijuana use and 26% about sexual activity.

Protective Factors

Most (90%+) parents of middle and high school aged youth report having an family or non-family member adult (outside of school) their child(ren) can talk with about important things. 2014 YRBS data shows that 96% of middle school youth and 92% of high school youth report having adults outside of school they can talk with about things that are important to them.

When asked whether middle school youth feel valued and cared about by adults in the tri-town community, 83% of parent respondents of middle school youth strongly agreed/agreed, while 14% chose "neutral". 2014 YRBS data shows that 66% of middle school youth strongly agreed/agreed that the tri-town community cares about them as young people, while 24% selected "neutral". 70% of high

¹² Various topics include: alcohol use, binge drinking, tobacco and marijuana use, Rx drugs w/o a Rx, driving with persons under the influence, and sexual health and safety

school parent respondents strongly agreed/agreed that youth in grades 9 – 12 feel valued and cared about by the adults in the tri-town community. 24% selected “neutral”. 2014 YRBS data shows that 54% of high school youth strongly agreed/agreed with the statement “I feel valued and cared about by the adults in the tri-town community.” while 30% selected “neutral”.

CONCLUSIONS, QUESTIONS & INITIAL RECOMMENDATIONS:

Common Concerns:

- *Bullying appears to be less of a concern to PK-6 parents and educators – might that be attributed to the implementation of the Olweus Program in the elementary schools?*
- *Middle school educators surveyed rated bullying as more of a concern in 2015. What might teachers be seeing or sensing with middle school youth?*
- *Many of the top concerns identified across respondent groups are “root causes” that may lead to substance abuse.*
- *What resources do parents/primary caregivers, teachers and citizens have to address their top concerns for youth and how are they communicated and accessed? In what ways are these concerns addressed in schools and in the community?*

Perceptions of Youth Substance Abuse:

- *Adults misperceive middle school and high school youth use of alcohol, tobacco and marijuana at rates of 50% or higher. (Misperception is defined as a difference of 50%+ in perception vs. actual use rates.)*
- *The Positive Community Norms campaign - where tri-town youth’s positive normative behaviors are promoted school and community wide - will address these misperceptions.*

Adult Attitudes towards Substance Use:

- *While parent respondents strongly disapprove of substance use, it was noted that parents’ disapproval of substances from “very wrong to wrong” decrease (13% - 17%) as child moves from middle school to high school. What impact might this shift have on young people’s perceptions and actions?*
- *Primary source of alcohol is perceived to be the home among adults and is consistent w/ middle school YRBS data. Continue to educate parents/primary caregivers of the importance of securing alcohol kept in the home.*
- *While the majority of parent respondents disapprove of underage drinking, survey shows they misperceive the attitudes of their child’s peers and other parents/guardians. What impact might those misperceptions have on themselves, their children, and the community? As part of the Positive Community Norms campaign, develop messaging for parents/primary caregivers that communicates parental disapproval of underage drinking is a **normative belief** among parents of middle and high school aged youth.*
 - *It’s possible as youth enter middle/high school and become part of broader social circles, parents may not know their child’s friends/families well and may be hesitant to talk to*

other parents due to the risk of isolating their child from his/her peer group. To address this concern:

- *Encourage parents/primary caregivers to talk with each other about substance use*
- *Provide parents/primary caregivers resources for how to have these difficult or sensitive conversations with each other.*

Parent Conversations with Middle and High School Youth:

- *Middle school parents report talking with their children about substance use more frequently than high school parents (with the exception of alcohol use and driving with persons under the influence). Frequent conversations about substance use are necessary – especially due to the fact that use rates increase with age.*
 - *Remind parents/primary caregivers of the importance of frequent conversations.*
 - *Provide “ages and stages” resources for talking with children about substance use as they grow*

Protective Factors:

- *Most parents perceive their children have people outside of school they can talk to and it is supported by the 2014 YRBS data.*
- *Most parents perceive that youth are valued and cared about by the adults in the tri-town; however, a significant percentage are “neutral”, which was also reflected in the 2014 YRBS. The 40 Developmental Assets Framework can provide the information, support, and tools adults may need to communicate how they value and care about young people. This work may impact those who feel neutral.*
- *Continue to look for opportunities in the community to communicate Asset information.*
- *Continue to provide opportunities for youth to contribute in a meaningful and authentic way to the community.*