

# 2007 STUDENT LIFE AND CULTURE SURVEY

## SUMMARY OF HIGHLIGHTS

### Fall, 2007

#### Community Coalition for Healthy Youth

coordinated by the Tompkins County Youth Services Department  
supported by the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration  
Drug Free Communities Support Program # H79 SP11382

The Community Coalition for Healthy Youth and the Ithaca City School District (ICSD) collaborated to examine student activities, substance use, experiences with school climate and safety, and parental monitoring. The Student Life and Culture Survey was administered in March, 2003, April, 2005 and April, 2007 to students in grades 6-12.

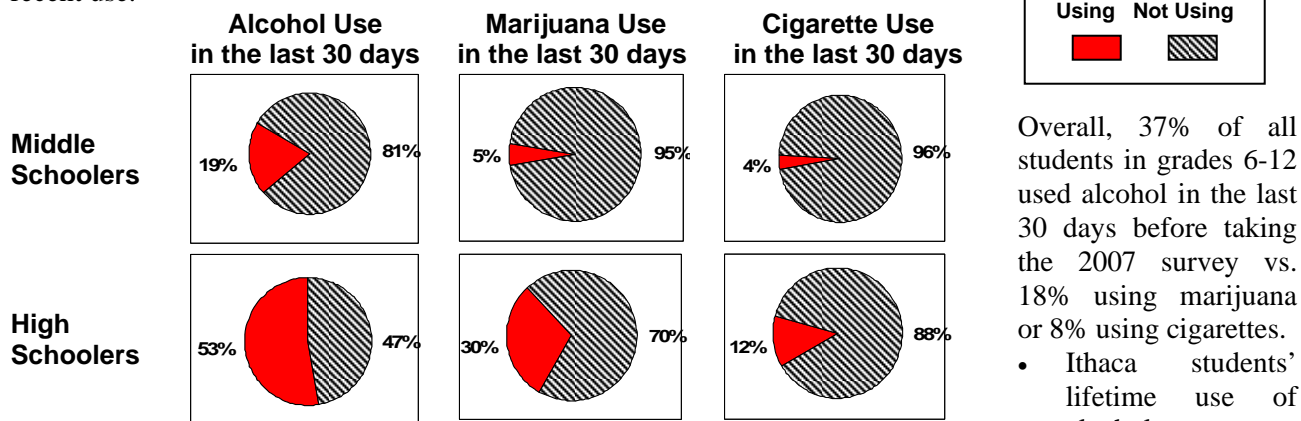
*Future* survey given nationally. The results will be used to guide school and community efforts to prevent and reduce the use and abuse of alcohol and other drugs and to improve school safety. The Community Coalition is coordinated by the Tompkins County Youth Services Department.

In 2007, 2,219 valid responses represent a 73% response rate of all enrolled students. Results were compared to the 2005 and 2003 surveys, to the *American Drug and Alcohol Survey*, given to ICSD students in grades 6, 8, 10, and 12 from 1999-2002 and to responses from the 2006 *Monitoring the*

The Final Public Report lists all questions and the combined responses of all students. The school superintendent, secondary principals, LACS and IHS libraries, and County Youth Services Dept. have copies of the Final Public Report. This summary is also available at [www.healthyyouth.org](http://www.healthyyouth.org) or [www.tompkins-co.org/youth](http://www.tompkins-co.org/youth) or upon request.

#### KEY FINDINGS RELATED to the USE of ALCOHOL, TOBACCO & OTHER DRUGS

Alcohol remains the most widely used drug among ICSD students as shown in the charts below indicating recent use.



Overall, 37% of all students in grades 6-12 used alcohol in the last 30 days before taking the 2007 survey vs. 18% using marijuana or 8% using cigarettes.

- Ithaca students' lifetime use of alcohol was somewhat greater than the national sample. 47% of 8<sup>th</sup> graders reported alcohol use at least once in their lifetime as compared with 41% of 8<sup>th</sup> graders in the 2006 national *Monitoring the Future* survey. Rates are also higher for local 10<sup>th</sup> graders (74% vs. 62%) and 12<sup>th</sup> graders (77% vs. 73%).
- A lower percentage of students of color (9%) than white students (19%) use alcohol regularly (at least monthly).
- More students of color than white students have never had an alcoholic drink (56 % vs. 45%) or tried marijuana (84% vs. 74%).
- In 2007, students viewed regular alcohol use as less harmful than regular marijuana or cigarette use.
- Cigarette use has decreased in all grades since 1999. By 2007, 12<sup>th</sup> grade use dropped to 17% from 32%.
- ICSD lifetime cigarette use by 12<sup>th</sup> graders was significantly less than their national peers (27% vs. 47%). The rates are also lower for 8<sup>th</sup> (9% vs. 25%) and 10<sup>th</sup> (19% vs. 36%) graders.
- ICSD 8<sup>th</sup> graders used marijuana less than their national peers (10% vs. 16%) but local 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>

graders' rates are higher than their national peers (10<sup>th</sup> – 44% vs.32%; 12<sup>th</sup> – 45% vs. 42%).

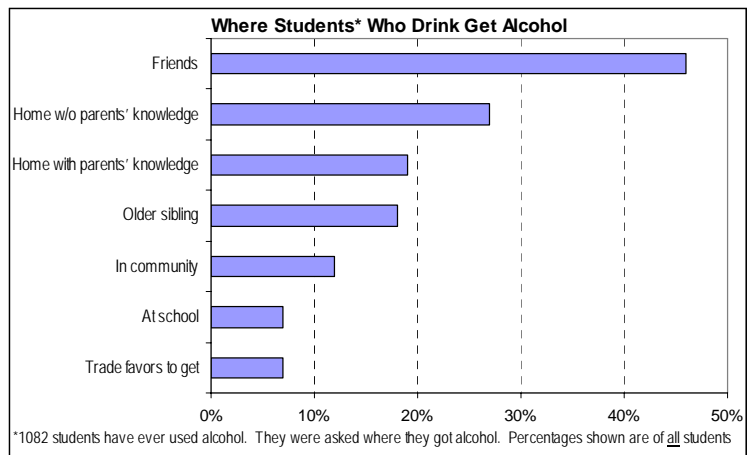
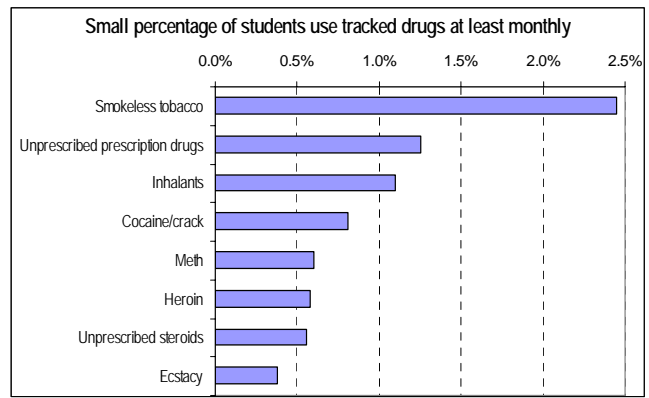
The Coalition is tracking the local use of selected substances whose use is increasing nationally. Fewer than 3% of all students surveyed used the drugs listed in the chart at right.

### WHERE ICSD STUDENTS GET & USE ALCOHOL, CIGARETTES, and MARIJUANA

To help reduce the harmful use of substances, the Coalition asked students who reported alcohol and drug use where they got and used alcohol, cigarettes, and marijuana. Over 77% of ICSD high schoolers said it would be easy to obtain alcohol. 2/3 said it would be easy to get cigarettes or marijuana. The rate is lower for middle schoolers with 46% saying it would be easy to get alcohol, 29% for cigarettes, and 29% for marijuana. While 46% thought it would be easy to get alcohol, only 34% did get it.

For those students who reported they have used alcohol, the most common setting for use in the past 30 days was “at night with friends” (79%), followed by “weekend parties” (64%). 13% said they had used alcohol during school hours at school.

When those who had ever used cigarettes, alcohol or marijuana were asked where they obtained it, the most common response for all substances was “from friends”.



### STUDENT CONSEQUENCES FROM ALCOHOL USE

Alcohol use can put students in difficult situations, whether it is the students' own use or the use of those around them.

- 33% of those who have used alcohol reported that alcohol use has led them to do something they later regretted.
- 26% of all students said they have intervened to keep a friend who had been drinking from injuring him/herself or another person.
- 25% of students said they have intervened to keep someone who was drunk from driving.
- 20% of those who have used alcohol reported that they have gotten in trouble at home because of their alcohol use.
- 15% reported that they have ridden with a friend who had been drinking.
- 9% of students who have used alcohol said their alcohol use has hurt their school work.

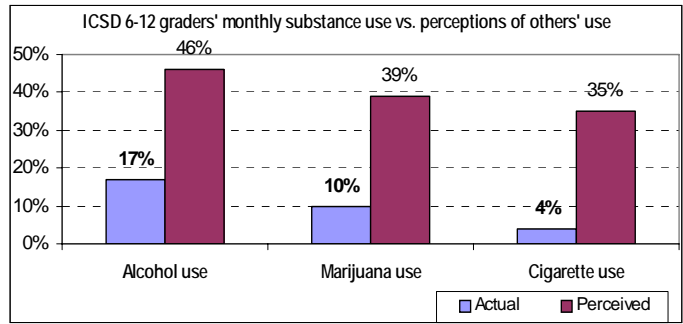
### STUDENT PERCEPTIONS and THEIR EFFECTS ON BEHAVIOR

Social Norms research has shown that we are influenced by what we *think* others are doing, rather than by what others are actually doing. Students who think that their peers are drinking alcohol feel pressure to drink in order to fit in with the perceived norm and are more likely to drink. The chart (next page) shows the percentage of students who reported using the listed substances monthly or more as compared with their perception of what other students in their school are doing.

By using the information from our survey, we can correct misperceptions and reduce risky behaviors, including alcohol and drug use. By documenting and advertising the “true” norm, healthy attitudes and

behaviors can be reinforced and pressure to conform to a "false" norm can be reduced.

Increasing students' belief that regular use of alcohol and drugs is harmful can also reduce use. ICSD students' perception of risk depends on the substance and their age. 75% of 6<sup>th</sup> graders perceive moderate or great risk of harm from regular marijuana use as compared with 68% of 8<sup>th</sup> graders and 50% of 12<sup>th</sup> graders. All grades perceive the greatest risk from regular use of cigarettes with between 77% and 94% reporting risk of harm from regular use. (See Appendix, Table 5, for perception of risk of harm by grade & substance use data.)



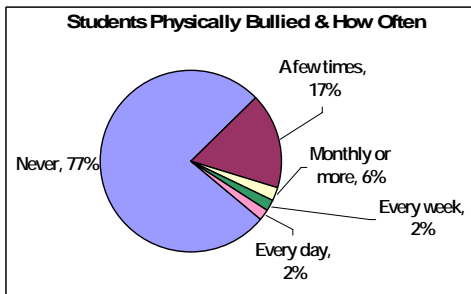
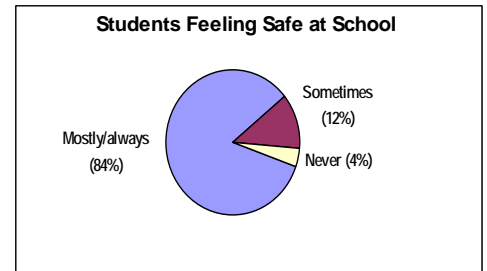
Only 17% of students in grades 6-12 drink alcohol monthly or more. 46% believe that most of their peers drink monthly or more.

### ICSD STUDENTS' SUBSTANCE USE TRENDS OVER TIME

- Since 1999, the percentage of students using cigarettes in the last 30 days has declined for all grades. 8<sup>th</sup> graders showed the greatest decrease (from 16% to 5%, a 67% decrease).
- From 2005 to 2007, overall 30 day use of marijuana dropped slightly from 20% to 18%. Use by 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> graders has increased; use rates by younger students have fluctuated with students in grades 7 – 9 showing reductions since 2005.
- 30 day alcohol use has increased overall. From 2005 to 2007, there was no change for grade 7 and decreases for grades 8 and 9; all other grades showed increases. 12<sup>th</sup> grade had a 9% increase (from 57% to 63%) and 6<sup>th</sup> grade had a 75% increase (from 8% to 14%).
- (Note: Percentage of change can be misleading for a small data set. In 2007, only six 6<sup>th</sup> graders reported use of marijuana in the last 30 days, 11 reported cigarette use and 48 reported alcohol use.)

### KEY FINDINGS RELATED to SCHOOL CLIMATE

- 84% of all students in grades 6-12 felt safe in school most of the time or always.
- 78% felt welcomed and appreciated at school most of the time or always.
- 16% of students in grades 6-12 reported they do not have a trusted adult in school; 27% were not sure.
- 3/4 of students of color and white students alike said that schoolwork is very important to them.
- On a monthly basis, 78% of students reported witnessing name calling and putdowns at school.

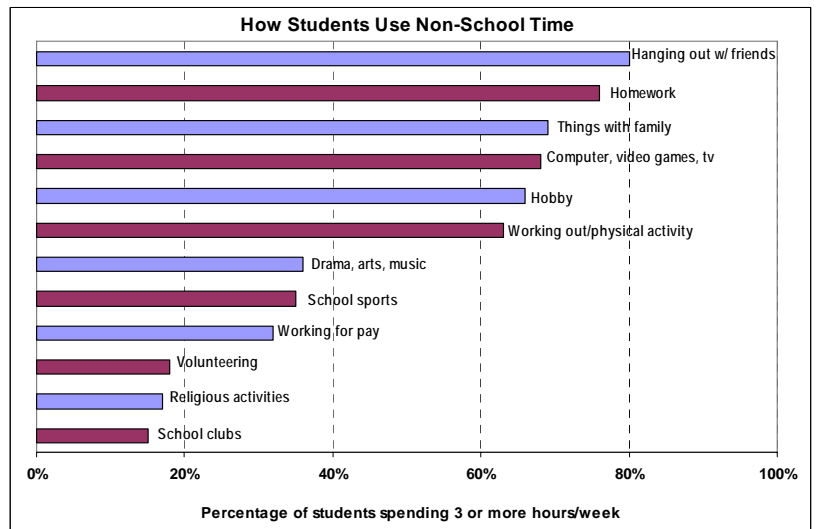


- 30% said they experienced these hurtful behaviors monthly or more. (Note: Many students can witness the same incident while fewer actually are the target of name calling or other hurtful behavior.)
- 63% of students witnessed exclusionary behavior monthly or more. 16% reported being excluded monthly or more.
- 6% reported experiencing physical bullying monthly or more. 2% (39 students in grades 6-12) reported being physically bullied every day.
- Students who witness hurtful behavior are most likely to ignore it (62%). Only 12% reported that they usually tell an adult.
- 42% of all students and 35% of students of color said school staff are usually or always available to deal with bullying.
- 53% of students reported that the teachers and adults in their school care about them and give them encouragement often or always. The rate is higher for middle (60%) than high (46%) schoolers and higher for students of color (58%) than white students (50%).

## KEY FINDINGS RELATED to STUDENT LIFE OUTSIDE OF SCHOOL

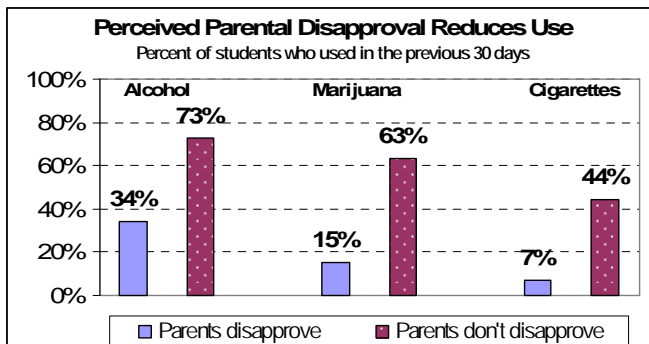
How do students spend their non-school hours? They spent 3 or more hours/week on the activities shown in the chart at right. Other items of interest:

- 85% of students have a trusted adult outside of school who could help them; 8% were not sure.
- 97% report having computer access at home; 91% have home internet access and 55% have a MySpace (or similar) account.
- 30% report at least one experience in the last year of being cyber bullied (someone using the internet or a text message to embarrass, insult, harass or threaten them).
- 17% have gambled for money and 6% have carried a weapon in the community three or more times in the last year.



## PARENTS' INFLUENCE on STUDENT BEHAVIOR

Though parents and caregivers may wonder whether their teens listen to and heed their advice, survey data show that parents do make a difference in the decisions their children make. Students who think their parents/caregivers disapprove of alcohol or other drug use are significantly less likely to use them. Overall, 83% of students reported that they get regular encouragement from their parents, 81% said their parents monitor their whereabouts often or always, and 73% said their parents often or always have clear rules about alcohol and drug use.



Only 34% of students whose parents disapprove of their alcohol use drank in the previous 30 days. In contrast, 73% of students whose parents don't disapprove used alcohol.

only 55% of students said they had learned some or a lot in the last year from their parents about the dangers of alcohol or drug use.

## HOW WILL SURVEY DATA BE USED?

The data informs the work and focus of the Community Coalition for Healthy youth:

- The Coalition is engaging schools, parents, police and others in countywide environmental strategies to reduce underage drinking and in efforts to reduce hurtful behaviors in Ithaca and other school districts.
- Schools will use the data to target and evaluate their efforts to reduce hurtful behaviors and bullying.
- DeWitt Middle School is using data on actual and perceived use in their ongoing Social Norms campaign to reduce alcohol use and bullying and improve school climate.
- Boynton Middle School is using the data to inform the launch of a school climate improvement project.

*The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of U.S. SAMHSA or the Drug Free Communities Support Program*

## APPENDIX – Ithaca City School District Student Survey Responses

*Note: The wording of some questions has changed over time to meet federal reporting requirements and to clarify misleading wording. This can make comparisons between years difficult. In the tables below showing our core data, the question that was used is included, along with variations used in previous years. Please note that different years are used for comparison in tables 2 – 5. All questions related to alcohol use specified “...more than a few sips or for religious purposes.” Data from 1999 and 2002 are from the American Alcohol and Drug Survey, given ICSD students in grades 6, 8, 10, and 12. Data from 2003, 2005, and 2007 are from the ICSD Student Life and Culture Survey, given to students in grades 6-12.*

**Table 1 Question: How often (if ever) have you used . . .**

Answer choices: Never, a few times but not in the last year, a few times in the last year, every month, every week, every day

Table 1 shows the sum of all students reporting use every month, every week or every day.

Table 1	ICSD Students Using Substances at Least Monthly in 2007 by Grade							
	6th	7th	8th	9th	10th	11th	12th	Avg. Use Gr. 6-12
Cigarettes	1%	1%	2%	4%	8%	9%	9%	4%
Alcohol	4%	3%	7%	20%	29%	32%	39%	17%
Marijuana	1%	3%	2%	12%	20%	21%	16%	10%
Smokeless tobacco	1%	<1%	2%	5%	5%	2%	2%	2%
Inhalants	1%	2%	1%	<1%	<1%	0%	1%	1%
Meth	<1%	<1%	<1%	1%	0%	<1%	<1%	<1%
Steroids w/o Rx	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	1%	<1%	0%	<1%
Prescription drugs	<1%	<1%	<1%	2%	2%	2%	2%	1%

**Table 2 Question: On how many occasions in the last 30 days have you . . . (2007, 2005)**

**How often in the last month have you . . . (1999, 2002)**

Answer choices: 0, 1 to 2, 3 to 5, 6 to 9, 10 to 19, 20 to 39, 40 or more (2007, 2005)

None, 1 – 2 times, 3 – 9 times, 10 – 19 times, 20 – 49 times, 50 or more times (1999, 2002)

Table 2 shows all students reporting any use.

Table 2	ICSD Students' Use of Substances in the Last 30 Days											
	Alcohol				Cigarettes				Marijuana			
	2007	2005	2002	1999	2007	2005	2002	1999	2007	2005	2002	1999
All students	37%	36%	n/a	n/a	8%	13%	n/a	n/a	18%	20%	n/a	n/a
Grade 6	14%	11%	9%	8%	3%	2%	3%	4%	2%	<1%	<1%	1%
Grade 7	18%	18%	n/a	n/a	3%	8%	n/a	n/a	6%	7%	n/a	n/a
Grade 8	26%	33%	22%	22%	5%	10%	11%	16%	8%	16%	9%	7%
Grade 9	42%	45%	n/a	n/a	7%	11%	n/a	n/a	19%	26%	n/a	n/a
Grade 10	58%	44%	40%	46%	12%	18%	10%	21%	34%	31%	22%	19%
Grade 11	55%	53%	n/a	n/a	18%	21%	n/a	n/a	37%	35%	n/a	n/a
Grade 12	63%	57%	53%	58%	17%	22%	24%	32%	32%	32%	31%	27%

**Table 3 Question: How wrong do you think it is for someone your age to . . . (2007, 2005)**

**How much would your friends try to stop you from . . . (2000, 2002)**

(See changes in definition of “regular” alcohol use on P. 6)

Answer choices: Very wrong, wrong, a little bit wrong, not wrong at all (2007, 2005)

A lot, some, not much, not at all (2000, 2002)

Table 3 shows all students who responded “wrong” or “very wrong” (2007, 2005); “a lot” or “some” (2000, 2002).

Table 3	ICSD Students' Perception of Peer Disapproval of Regular* Substance Use											
	Alcohol				Cigarettes				Marijuana			
	2007	2005	2002	2000	2007	2005	2002	2000	2007	2005	2002	2000
All students	76%	72%	n/a	n/a	82%	76%	not asked		69%	67%	n/a	n/a
Grade 6	94%	95%	67%	66%	94%	96%			96%	94%	84%	82%
Grade 8	80%	74%	45%	48%	89%	76%			79%	58%	59%	66%
Grade 10	67%	61%	21%	24%	75%	66%			52%	51%	29%	33%
Grade 12	59%	58%	10%	13%	64%	62%			48%	44%	17%	24%

**Table 4 Question: How old were you the first time you . . .**

Answer choices: Never, 10 or younger, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20 (2007)  
 Never, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, (2005)  
 Never, 7 or younger, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19 or older (2003)

Table 4 shows the average of the ages of all students who gave an answer other than “never.”

Table 4	Average Age (in years) of First Use of Substances								
	Alcohol			Cigarettes			Marijuana		
	2007	2005	2003	2007	2005	2003	2007	2005	2003
All students	12.59	11.75	12.08	12.80	11.77	11.93	13.76	13.23	13.22
Grade 6	10.47	7.73	9.87	10.68	7.53	9.41	10.60	none	10.21
Grade 8	11.77	10.95	10.83	11.77	10.85	10.59	12.95	11.69	11.68
Grade 10	12.98	12.88	12.77	12.87	12.06	12.13	13.79	13.54	13.41
Grade 12	14.35	13.67	13.40	14.10	13.29	13.18	14.78	14.47	14.40

**Table 5 Question: How much do you think people risk harming themselves (physically or in other ways) if they . . . (2007, 2005)**

**How much do you think people harm themselves (physically or otherwise) if they . . . (2003)**

(In 2003, “regular” use was not defined, each student made his/her own judgment about what “regular” meant.

Example: “How much do you think people harm themselves (physically or otherwise) if they use alcohol regularly?”)

Answer choices: No risk, slight risk, moderate risk, great risk (2007, 2005)

No harm, very little harm, some harm, a lot of harm (2003)

Table 5 shows the responses of students who replied “moderate risk” or “great risk” (2007, 2005); “some harm” or “a lot of harm” (2003).

Table 5	ICSD Students’ Perception of Moderate/Great Risk of Harm from Regular* Substance Use								
	Alcohol			Cigarettes			Marijuana		
	2007	2005	2003	2007	2005	2003	2007	2005	2003
All students	51%	71%	75%	86%	78%	91%	62%	58%	82%
Grade 6	52%	75%	76%	78%	78%	88%	75%	75%	88%
Grade 8	50%	67%	81%	82%	75%	91%	68%	57%	87%
Grade 10	52%	72%	79%	91%	81%	93%	55%	53%	80%
Grade 12	51%	78%	67%	94%	86%	90%	50%	50%	72%

**Definitions and abbreviations used in this report:**

\*“Regular” use of substances – “Regular” use of substances was defined within each question, using the appropriate definition for each substance as listed below. Example: “How much do you think people risk harming themselves (physically or in other ways) if they drink alcohol regularly (1 or 2 drinks nearly every day)?”

Cigarettes – ½ pack or more per day.

Marijuana – more than once/week.

Alcohol – 1 or 2 drinks nearly every day (2007); 4 or more drinks nearly every day or 5 or more drinks twice/week (2005)

“Lifetime” use of substances – Any reported use ever of the named substance

“Middle school” - All students at Boynton and DeWitt and students in grades 6-8 at LACS

“High school” - All students at IHS and students in grades 9-12 at LACS

“Students of Color” students – Of those students who identified their race, 36% identified themselves as either Black, American Indian/Alaska Native, Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, Bi-Racial, Multi-Racial or Other. 416 students did not identify their race.

“School climate” – The atmosphere (norms, values, relationships, and practices) of school life that affects the experiences of students, school staff and parents.

For more information, contact the Community Coalition for Healthy Youth  
 c/o Tompkins County Youth Services Department, (607) 274-5310 or at [www.healthyyouth.org](http://www.healthyyouth.org)

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