

Communities that Care coalitions reduce problem behaviors among youth

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Students in Pennsylvania school districts that participated in Communities that Care (CTC) coalitions were significantly less likely to use alcohol or marijuana, or to engage in delinquent behavior than those in non-CTC districts, according to a recent study published in *Prevention Science*.

Penn State researchers analyzed data from 388 Pennsylvania school districts collected during at least one year from 2001-11, from the Pennsylvania Youth Survey (PAYS), a bi-annual survey of youth in sixth, eighth, 10th and 12th grades.

Based upon self-reports, students in the CTC school districts that used at least one evidence-based program were less likely to engage in marijuana use by 22%, cigarette use by 17%, alcohol consumption by 15%, were 18% less likely to be high or drunk in school, and 12% less likely to be arrested.

More than 500 communities throughout the U.S. use the CTC model, which involves a five-phase change process with the goal of promoting healthy youth development and reducing problem behaviors. Coalitions comprised of community stakeholders receive training in prevention science methods and data-based decision making, and then select and implement programs that have been shown in prior research to significantly improve the lives of children and families involved.

The study, funded by the National Institute on Drug Abuse, is the largest to-date to examine the effectiveness of Pennsylvania CTC coalitions.

"There is a real need for thoughtful, developmentally-sensitive, and coordinated prevention programming across K-12 schools in Pennsylvania, with a focus on the development of early social-emotional competencies and protective developmental assets that all children need to succeed," said Jennifer Frank, Penn State assistant professor of education and principal investigator on the study.



“ It's really about the power of taking a systematic and collaborative approach to prevention and a sustained commitment. I'd like to see community monitoring systems like the PAYS integrated in public and private schools in every state and district, coupled with consistent funding for programs that have been proven effective.”

Sarah Chilenski, senior research associate, Edna Bennett Pierce Prevention Research Center and study's lead author

Geoff Kolchin, PAYS project leader for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, noted that PAYS data can be instrumental in helping schools select appropriate evidence-based programming to address the risks faced by their youth based on responses from those youth themselves. PAYS is offered to all schools and school districts in Pennsylvania at no cost through a partnership between the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency, the Pennsylvania Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs, and the Pennsylvania Department of Education.

Source:

Penn State

Journal reference:

Chilenski, S.M. *et al.* (2019) Public Health Benefits 16 Years After a Statewide Policy Change: Communities That Care in Pennsylvania. *Prevention Science*. doi.org/10.1007/s11121-019-01028-y.
