



Healthy Missoula Youth
Coalition

PURPOSE & NEED FOR PREVENTION EFFORTS

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PURPOSE & NEED FOR PREVENTION EFFORTS

Purpose of the Section

- Establish the rising public health concern related to substance use
- Introduce public health evaluation tools & strategies
- Present current trends in data regarding substance use and protective/risk factors

What Educators Can Do

- Understand the purpose of prevention needs assessments
- Utilize data to guide curriculum and/or policy development

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Understanding public health evaluation tools and strategies gives educators a valuable opportunity to learn more about the needs of their students. This data can be used when applying for grant funds, conducting evaluations on student health and well-being, and showcases factors that will help target behavior problems related to substance abuse, violence, delinquency, and truancy. Participation in prevention needs assessments allows schools to prepare improvement plans relative to school environment, external factors that present barriers to learning, community involvement, learning process, and school risk factors as well.

PURPOSE & NEED FOR PREVENTION EFFORTS

Rising Public Health Concern

Why youth substance use is concerning, and the results of the Healthy Missoula Youth School Survey.

Public Health Evaluation Tools & Strategies

An explanation of the Montana Prevention Needs Assessment, Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System, and Monitoring the Future.

Protective & Risk Factors

Protective & risk factor explanations, and how these factors influence risky health behaviors.

Current Trends in Data

A summary of the priority substances for Montana.

**90% OF PEOPLE WITH A SUBSTANCE USE
DISORDER INDICATED THAT THEY STARTED USING
BEFORE THE AGE OF 18.¹**

RISING PUBLIC HEALTH CONCERN

Excessive substance use is a public health concern in Montana and in Missoula County. An estimated 1 in 10 Montana adults (~100,000) currently have a substance use disorder (SUD), however, only 10% of those individuals receive treatment². In addition, more than 100 people die each year due to drug overdose, and 22,000 hospital or ER visits annually are attributable to alcohol and drug use². Rates of heavy drinking are particularly high in Missoula County, where 25% of adults report that they regularly drink heavily or binge drink (as compared to the U.S. report of 19%)³. This is the highest rate of excessive drinking in Montana and also one of the highest rates in the nation (top 13%)³.

This issue not only affects adults, but deeply affects our youth. Montana has the 2nd highest rate in the nation of youth being placed in foster care, with 65% being removed in 2019 due to parental drug use^{4,5}. Evidence suggests that the earlier a person starts using substances, the more likely they are to develop a substance use disorder and experience other consequences, such as academic difficulties, health related problems (including mental health), poor peer and family relationships, and involvement in the juvenile justice system. In fact, 90% of people with a substance use disorder indicated that they started using before the age of 18. In 2022, 53.2% of Missoula students in grades 8, 10 and 12 indicated drinking alcohol at some point, the majority starting between the ages of 12-15⁶.

2022 HEALTHY MISSOULA YOUTH SCHOOL SURVEY

With this rising public health concern in Missoula County, the Healthy Missoula Youth Coalition thought it prudent to assess what prevention measures are currently in place to best protect our youth. Teachers, counselors, and other school staff throughout the entirety of Missoula County were surveyed and asked questions about how they felt their school was doing with underage substance use prevention programming. This survey addressed questions such as which substances teachers were seeing their students use, which substances teachers heard their students talk about, what current prevention strategies are in place in their school, what the barriers to implementing underage substance use prevention programming are, and what additional strategies they would like to see implemented in their school. This survey also asked which policies and interventions are used to address underage substance use/substance use violations, if the teacher felt that Health Enhancement Learning Standards related to underage substance use were being met, the biggest issues related to underage substance use in the school, as well as asking for an assessment of parent involvement in this regard.

The results of this school survey indicated that the top two substances of concern for schools in Missoula County are electronic cigarettes/vaping and marijuana.



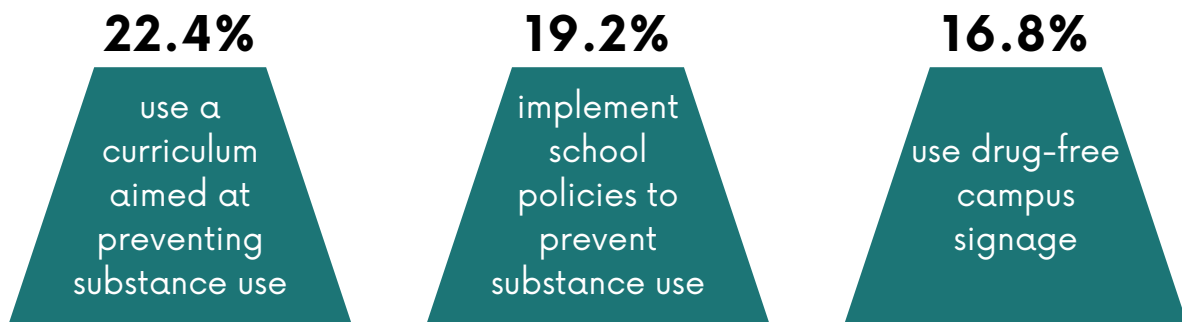
of teachers surveyed listed vaping as a substance they have seen students use on campus



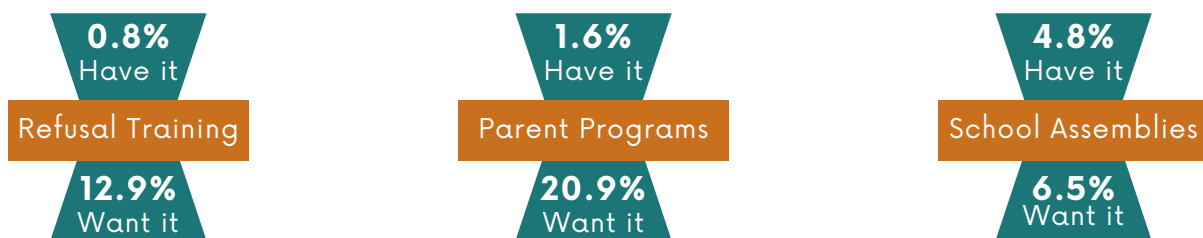
of teachers surveyed listed marijuana as a substance they have seen students using on campus, either as an edible, dab, concentrate, or THC vapes

2022 HEALTHY MISSOULA YOUTH SCHOOL SURVEY

The top three strategies teachers listed as being used to prevent this underage substance use were curriculum, school policies, and drug-free campus signage. However, despite these three strategies being listed as the most frequently used, nearly all survey respondents also listed these strategies as ones that need updating or additional support. In terms of whether this curriculum is meeting Health Enhancement Learning Standards, only 38.46% of survey respondents either “agree” or “strongly agree” that their school is meeting these guidelines as they are related to underage substance use.



The least frequently used strategies, and the ones most desired by survey respondents to be implemented in the future, are refusal training, programs for parents, and assemblies.



Other prevention interventions that survey respondents listed as desirable for the future include after-school programming, early intervention programs like Project Success, and substance use prevention campaigns.

PUBLIC HEALTH EVALUATION

TOOLS & STRATEGIES

In addition to the aforementioned School Survey conducted by the Healthy Missoula Youth Coalition, there are a variety of evaluation tools used to assess this rising public health concern. The Montana Prevention Needs Assessment Survey, the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System, and Monitoring the Future are some of the most commonly used tools when it comes to assessing youth behaviors on a county, state, and national level.

MONTANA PREVENTION NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Though the Prevention Needs Assessment is conducted nationally, each state has their own customized survey that features additional questions about problem behaviors based on areas of interest to state and local leaders. The Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services has conducted the Montana Prevention Needs Assessment (MPNA) since 1998, updating the question bank over the last several survey administrations to best reflect the current environment youth live in. This is a voluntary survey of youth in 8th, 10th, and 12th grades, with the option of inclusivity for 7th, 9th, and 11th grades, which gathers “information about their knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors towards alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use to help communities address root causes of antisocial behavior⁷.” This survey is conducted every even numbered year, and asks students questions across four main domains: community, family, school, and peer/individual. These answers help determine where additional support is needed outside of school that can have an impact on a student’s readiness to learn, as well as determining where the strengths of a community are that can assist those in need. Each school who completes the MPNA receives their results directly, with county and state-level data available for comparison.

PUBLIC HEALTH EVALUATION

TOOLS & STRATEGIES

YOUTH RISK BEHAVIOR SURVEILLANCE SYSTEM

Though it can still provide data on a state-level, unlike the Montana Prevention Needs Assessment, the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS) cannot be adapted on a state-by-state basis. This national survey was developed in 1990 “to monitor health behaviors that contribute markedly to the leading causes of death, disability, and social problems among youth and adults in the United States,” and the questions used in the survey remain consistent throughout the nation. The specific behaviors, often established during childhood and early adolescence, addressed in the YRBSS include:

- Behaviors that contribute to unintentional injuries and violence.
- Sexual behaviors related to unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV infection.
- Alcohol and other drug use.
- Tobacco use.
- Unhealthy dietary behaviors.
- Inadequate physical activity.
- The prevalence of obesity, asthma, and other health-related behaviors, plus sexual identity and sex of sexual contacts.

The CDC, through the Office of Public Instruction, conducts this YRBSS survey every odd numbered year, using a random sample of approximately 10% of all 7th-12th grade students in each state to provide data representative for each jurisdiction.

PUBLIC HEALTH EVALUATION TOOLS & STRATEGIES

MONITORING THE FUTURE

Perhaps the most widely known evaluation tool of these three is Monitoring the Future. Since 1975, Monitoring the Future (MTF), known by some as the National High School Senior Survey, measures drug and alcohol use and related attitudes among adolescent students nationwide. A nationally representative sample of survey participants report their drug use behaviors across three time periods: lifetime, past year, and past month. As a long-term epidemiological study, MTF looks not only at 8th, 10th, and 12th grade students, but also college students and young adults, to investigate substance use patterns, attitudes and beliefs about drugs, perceived availability of drugs, and norms among peer and role model groups. This survey is conducted annually by researchers at the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research, and is funded by research grants from the National Institute on Drug Abuse.

PROTECTIVE & RISK FACTORS

The Montana Prevention Needs Assessment Survey not only looks at trends and rates of substance use, it also looks at what are known as protective and risk factors. Protective and risk factors are elements that influence a person's life, and either increase or decrease the likelihood of that individual participating in high-risk behaviors like underage substance use, delinquency, school dropout, depression and anxiety, suicide, and/or violence.

The MPNA is a data source frequently referenced by prevention specialists because it looks specifically at questions that are focused across four domains of protective and risk factors (community, school, family, and peer/individual). These questions help assess where the strengths of a community lie, and how these strengths can be used as an additional support for students.

The four domains of these questions give a glimpse into the root causes of risky behaviors. For example, these questions look at:

- Family relationships
- Neighborhood connectedness and safety (attachment, availability of drugs, community norms)
- Participation in extracurricular activities
- School climate and safety (commitment to school, violence, bullying)
- Social Emotional Health (depression, suicide ideation)
- Drug and alcohol use (and risk for use – perception of harm, acceptance by parents, siblings, peers, etc.)

"The questions also help determine where potential problems may exist outside of school that can have an impact on a student's readiness to learn when they arrive at school each morning"⁷. These factors play a large role in influencing youth in their decision making, healthy choices, and overall well-being.

"By not just looking at rates of problem behaviors but also at the root causes of those behaviors, the MPNA allows schools and communities to address reasons (such as lack of commitment to school) rather than only looking at symptoms after the fact (like poor grades). This approach has been repeatedly shown in national research studies to be the most effective in helping youth develop into healthy, productive members of society."⁷

PROTECTIVE & RISK FACTORS

According to the 2022 Missoula County Prevention Needs Assessment, **Family Opportunity for Prosocial Involvement** and **School Opportunity for Prosocial Involvement** were the top two protective factors⁶. This means students felt there was an abundance of opportunities to become positively involved with their family or school. As a result, these students have an extra buffer of protection from risk because the impact of the risks influencing them are reduced, or students change the way they respond to risks as a result of their involvement.

Alternatively, the 2020 Montana Prevention Needs Assessment showed that **Perceived Risk of Drug Use** and **Low Commitment to School** were the two highest overall risk factors for students, both at a state level and for Missoula County specifically⁶. What this means is that the majority of youth in Missoula County (72.3%) do not believe that using substances will pose a risk of harming them (physically or in other ways), and that 63.1% of students in Missoula County do not feel connected to their schools, and thus are at a higher likelihood of involvement in drug use and problem behaviors⁶. This assessment is composed of two main sections: perceived importance of school, and whether school is seen as a positive, reinforcing environment.

Students were asked the following questions to assess their commitment to school:

- Now thinking back over the past year in school, how often did you:
 - Enjoy being in school?
 - Hate being in school?
 - Try to do your best work in school?
- How often do you feel that the school work you are assigned is meaningful and important?
- How important do you think the things you are learning in school are going to be for your later life?
- How interesting are most of your courses to you?
- During the LAST FOUR WEEKS how many whole days of school have you missed because you skipped or “cut”?

PROTECTIVE & RISK FACTORS

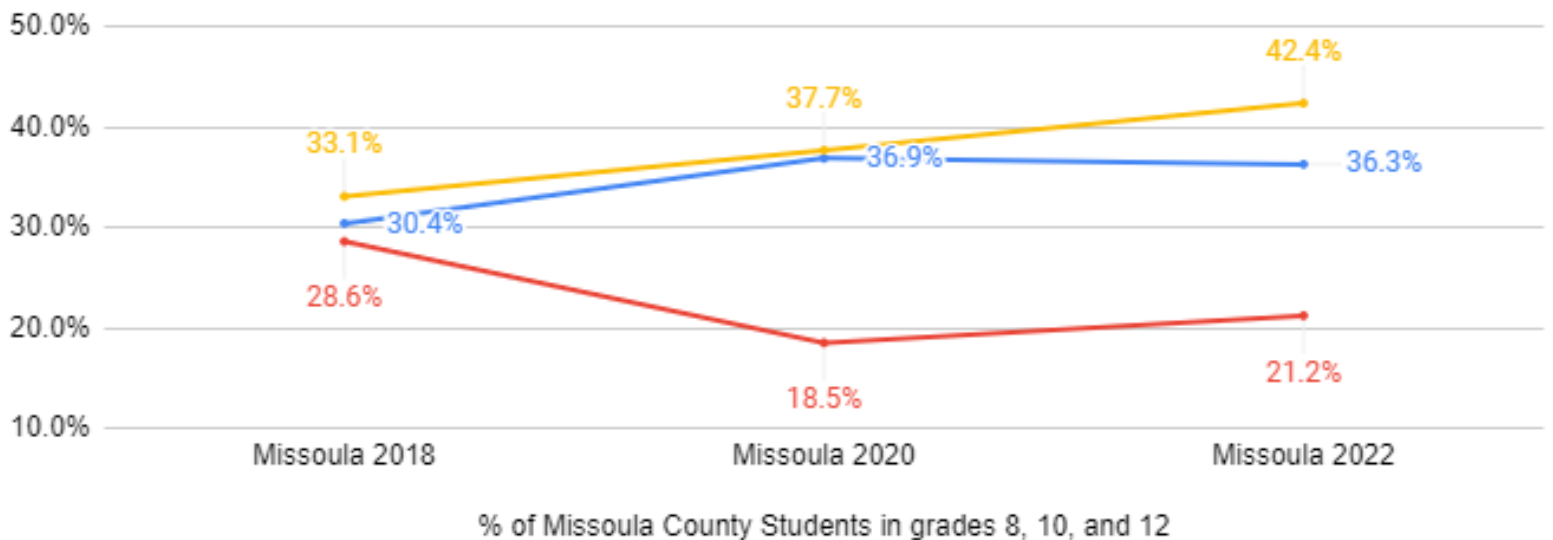
As depicted in the graph below, 2022 data trends show that within the domain of school commitment, the top three questions that were most concerning for Missoula County are the following:

- Thinking back over the past year, students "often" or "almost always" hated being in school.
- Students feel that the things they are learning in school are "quite important" or "very important."
- During the LAST FOUR WEEKS students have missed 1 or more whole days of school because they skipped or "cut."

Biggest Changes in Missoula County: Low School Commitment

2020/2022 Missoula Prevention Needs Assessment

- Students who "often" or "almost always" hated being in school when thinking back over the past year.
- Students who feel that the things they are learning in school they are "quite important" or "very important."
- During the LAST FOUR WEEKS students have missed 1 or more whole days of school because they skipped or "cut."



PROTECTIVE & RISK FACTORS

There are many factors to take into consideration when looking at this information. The 2020 Montana Prevention Needs Assessment was administered right around the time the COVID-19 virus was becoming a major issue in the United States. This had a large impact on the mental health of youth in Missoula, as they were no longer able to access the resources they were accustomed to. Many after-school sports and activities were no longer taking place, and some schools made the transition from teaching in the classroom, where students are surrounded by their peers and friends with many opportunities for engagement and activity, to a virtual platform in which students were learning from home.

As teachers work tirelessly to rectify this situation now that schools are open to in-person classes again, it is imperative to not only bring students back to this baseline, but to improve upon it. Enhancing commitment to school and providing students with the opportunity to once again be engaged with their learning and involved with their peers is an essential factor to growing their social and emotional wellbeing.

PROTECTIVE & RISK FACTORS

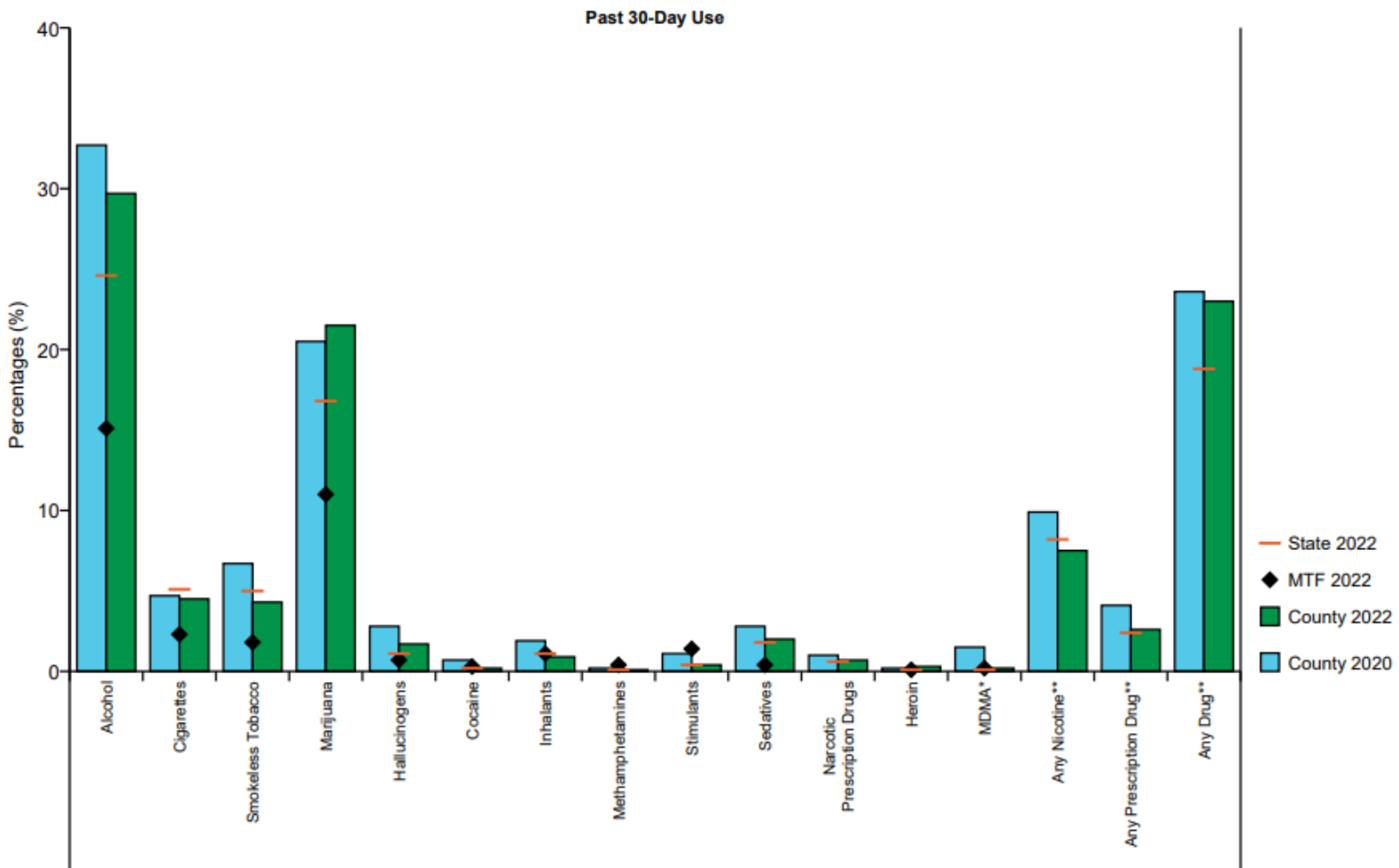
Implementing prevention practices based on these protective and risk factors is crucial, because they aim to preclude involvement in risky behaviors and underage substance use before it even has a chance to happen. Many of these protective and risk factors are related to multiple community outcomes. As such, it is important to use a holistic approach that acknowledges all aspects of social determinants of health.

By addressing factors like school commitment, neighborhood attachment, opportunities for prosocial involvement, perceived risk of drug use, and community laws and norms favorable towards drug use, firearms, and crime, there is a greater likelihood of preventing not only underage substance use, but also delinquency, teen pregnancy, school drop-out, violence, depression and anxiety, and suicide.

As a result, youth have more opportunity to form healthy bonds within the community, build life skills, form healthy beliefs and clear standards, as well as receive recognition for their efforts. Overall, this has a substantial impact on “children’s academic success, positive youth development, and the prevention of health and behavior problems”⁷.

CURRENT TRENDS IN DATA

The Montana Department of Health and Human Services Addiction and Mental Disorders Division recognizes 30-day rates of alcohol use, binge drinking (5 or more drinks of alcohol in a row within a couple of hours), marijuana use, and tobacco use as the top priority substances to address⁷. This is due to the fact that alcohol, marijuana, and tobacco are often the first and most commonly used substances abused by youth. Below is a chart from the 2022 Montana Prevention Needs Assessment Profile Report for Missoula County. It looks at the self-reported rates of 30-day substance use for youth grades 8, 10, and 12 within Missoula County. Students were asked to respond to the question “On how many occasions (if any) have you used (insert substance here) during the past 30 days?”



* New question for 2022. Data comparison is not available for 2020
 ** Any Nicotine, Any Prescription Drug, and Any Drug are calculated variables
 MTF = Monitoring the Future Survey

CURRENT TRENDS IN DATA

This chart reflects similar data to what participants of the 2022 Healthy Missoula Youth School Survey stated they were seeing within their own schools. Since the legalization of marijuana and the return to in-person school post-pandemic, many teachers and counselors responding to the survey have reported an increase in the number of interactions with students who are using illicit substances. Respondents of this survey list the underage substance use problem in schools of Missoula County as “pervasive” and note that “in our community, substance use feels widely accepted and the norm.”

Already, teachers are seeing this reflected in students’ academic performance, disclosing that behavior, attendance, and focus have seen a decline. When asked about the biggest issue related to underage substance use in their school, one survey participant explained:

“Students have a hard time learning and staying focused, substances are affecting their day to day lives and are increasing as years go by.”

Some schools are seeing students leave campus to access substances during the day, while others mentioned that substance use on campus, whether it be in bathrooms, classrooms, or hallways, due to the easy concealment of THC vape pens or nicotine vapes, has become an increasing issue. This is further confirmed by the 2022 Montana Prevention Needs Assessment Crosstab Report: 17.7% of Missoula County students in grades 8, 10, and 12 have been offered, given, or sold an illegal drug on school property within the past 12 months, and 14.5% of Missoula County students in grades 8, 10, and 12 have been drunk or high at school within the past 12 months.

This MPNA report can provide more information on the current conditions of underage substance use in Missoula County as well. If interested in learning more, contact the Healthy Missoula Youth Coalition at info@healthymissoulayouth.org, and they will help access and explain this data further.

PURPOSE & NEED FOR PREVENTION EFFORTS

Conclusion

The rising public health concern related to underage substance use confirms the need for prevention needs assessments. The data taken from these public health evaluation tools is crucial in guiding which risk or protective factors will be addressed in a specific school or community. This data can be used in grant applications, curriculum choices, or policy changes.

Action Items

- **ASK** your school for their most recent YRBS or MPNA data.
- **READ** the data and make decisions that are guided by student needs.
- **CONTACT** the Healthy Missoula Youth Coalition with questions or for support in interpreting data.
- **ASK** administration if they have registered for this year's needs assessment.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [Montana Prevention Needs Assessment](#)
- [Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System](#)
- [Monitoring the Future](#)

- 1: [Partnership to End Addiction, 2011](#)
- 2: [Silvers, 2021](#)
- 3: [BRFSS, 2020](#)
- 4: [Child Trends in Foster Care](#)
- 5: [Sepulveda & Williams, 2019](#)
- 6: [2022 Missoula County PNA Crosstab](#)
- 7: [2022 Missoula County PNA Profile](#)

