Unpacking Youth Substance Use in Connecticut:

Using Focus Group Data to Unpack the Results of the 2023 Connecticut School Health Survey

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Building Healthier Communities Together: Centering on Community for Changemaking
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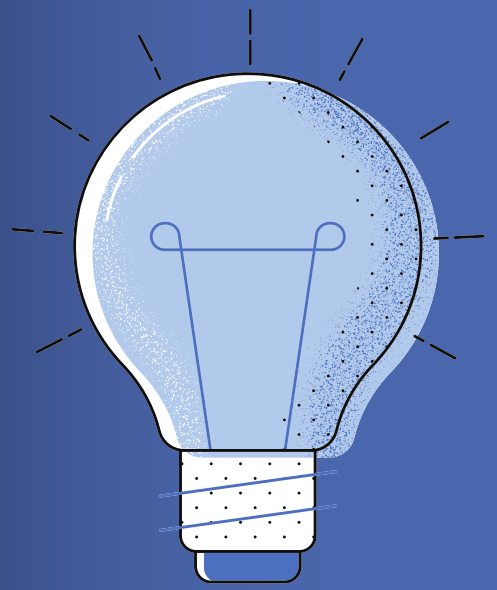
CONNECTICUT Mental Health & Addiction Services

CPES Center for Prevention Evaluation and Statistics

UCONN HEALTH

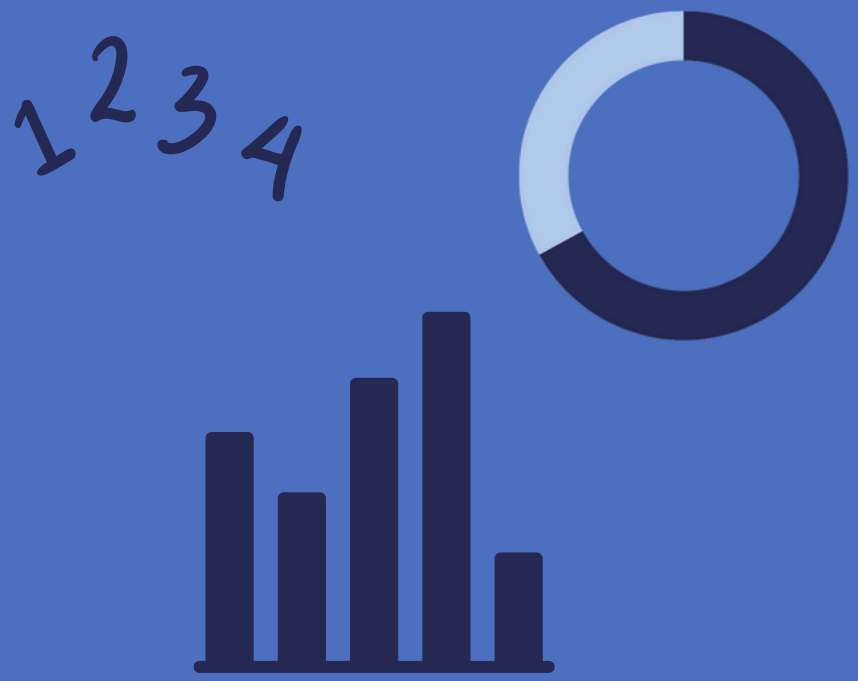
Learning Objectives



1	Demonstrate the importance of using multiple data sources to explain substance use patterns among youth in Connecticut.
2	Discuss results of the Connecticut School Health Survey in the context of the focus group results of the DMHAS Youth and Parent Focus Group Initiative.

Methodology: Mixed-method Approach

Quantitative Data



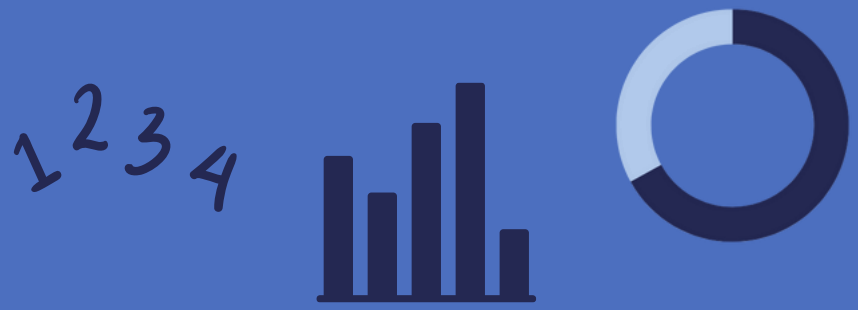
Qualitative Data



Methodology: Mixed-method Approach

Quantitative Data

- 2023 Connecticut School Health Survey
- Monitor trends in health behaviors
- 3,182 high school students (grades 9-12)
- 50 public, charter, & vocational high schools
- February to June 2023

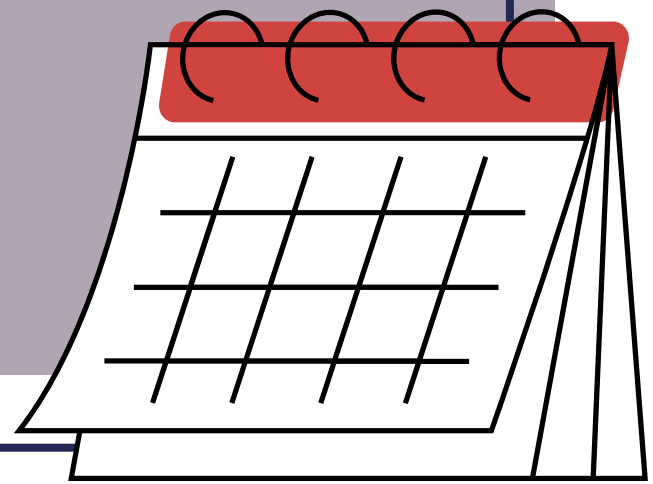


Qualitative Data

- 2022-2023 DMHAS Youth and Parent Focus Group Initiative
- Youth perspectives on substance use
- 12 high-risk communities in Connecticut
- 14 youth focus groups
- March to June 2023

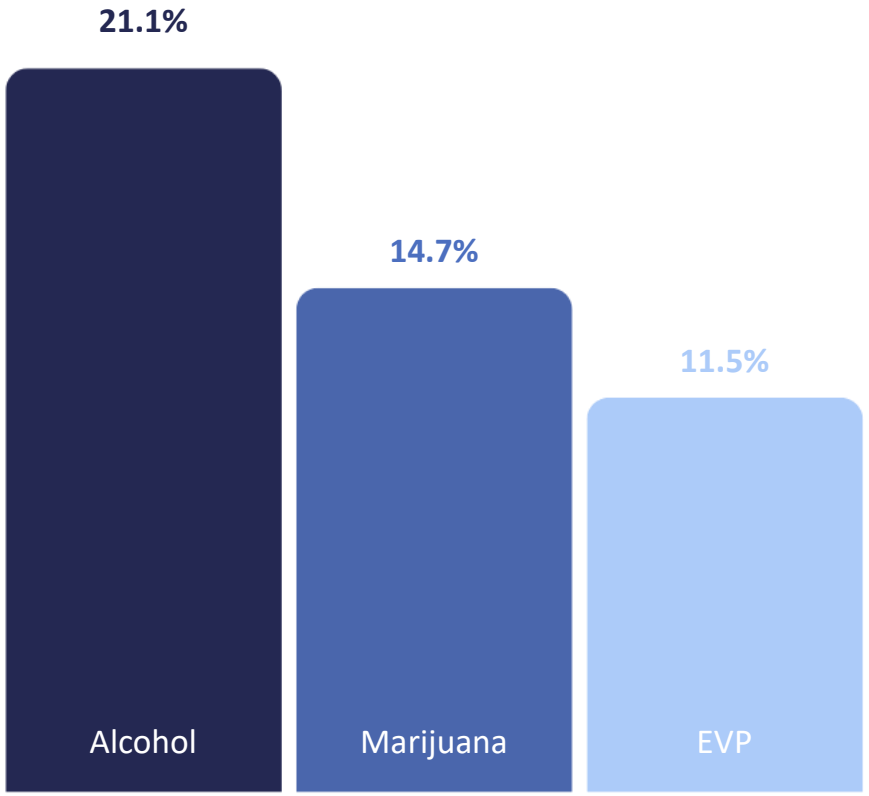


CURRENT SUBSTANCE USE



Current Substance Use

Past 30-day Substance Use



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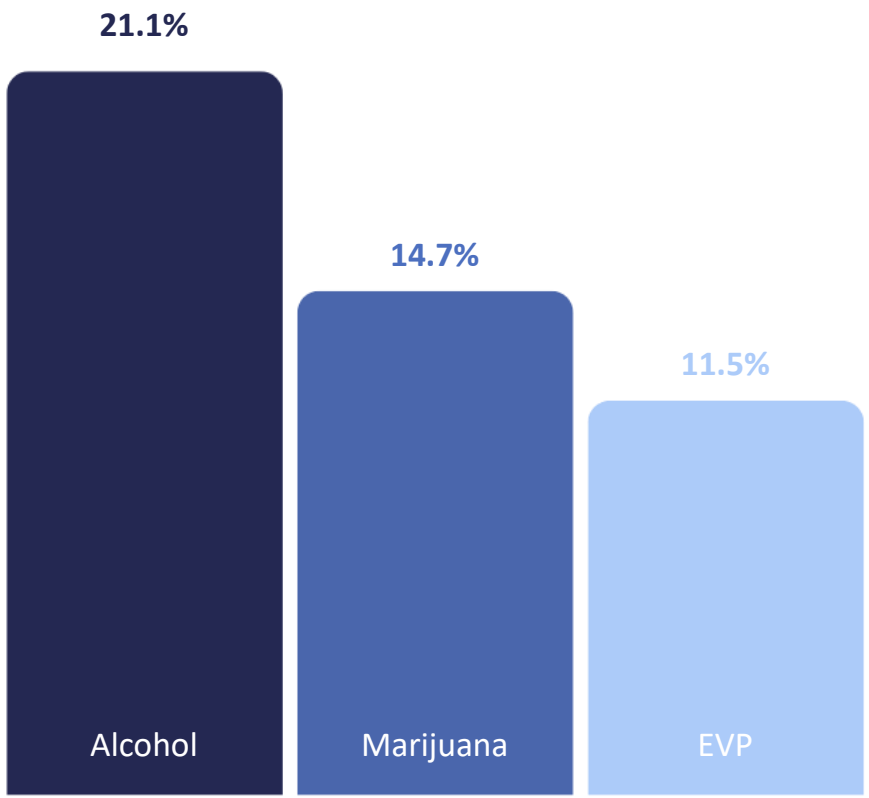


How common is...

1 Vaping

*". . . whenever you walk in **bathroom**, you'll probably find people in there vaping. . . . And I know at parties, **people always have vapes on them**. Not everyone but a lotta people do."*

2 Cannabis Use

*"...I always smelt it near the **bathrooms in my school** or just simply would see... **carts and stuff like that on the floor** outside whenever I'm skateboarding. I see it everywhere wherever I go"*

3 Alcohol use

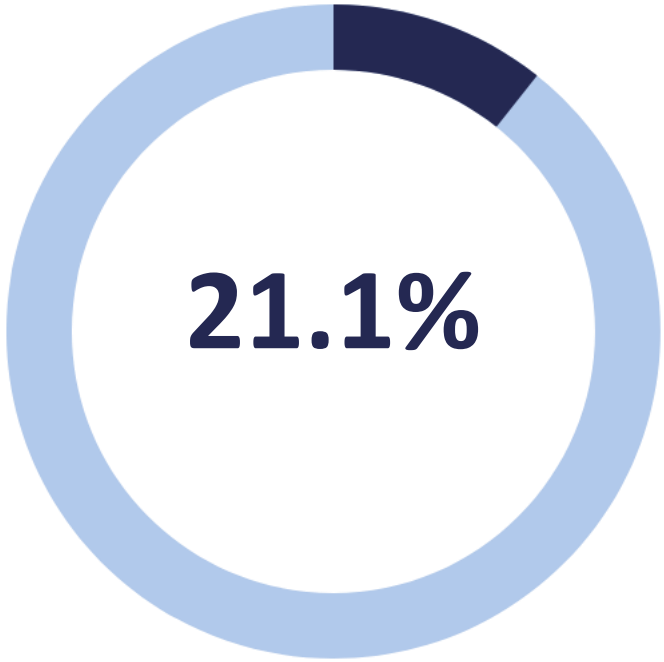
*"I don't really know a lot of people that like drink daily, because it can be **expensive** . . . you can very easily **tell if someone's been drinking** . . . I think a lot of, **other substances,** for example, are used daily because **they're easy to hide**."*

ALCOHOL USE



Alcohol Use

Past 30-day Alcohol Use



Accessibility of Alcohol

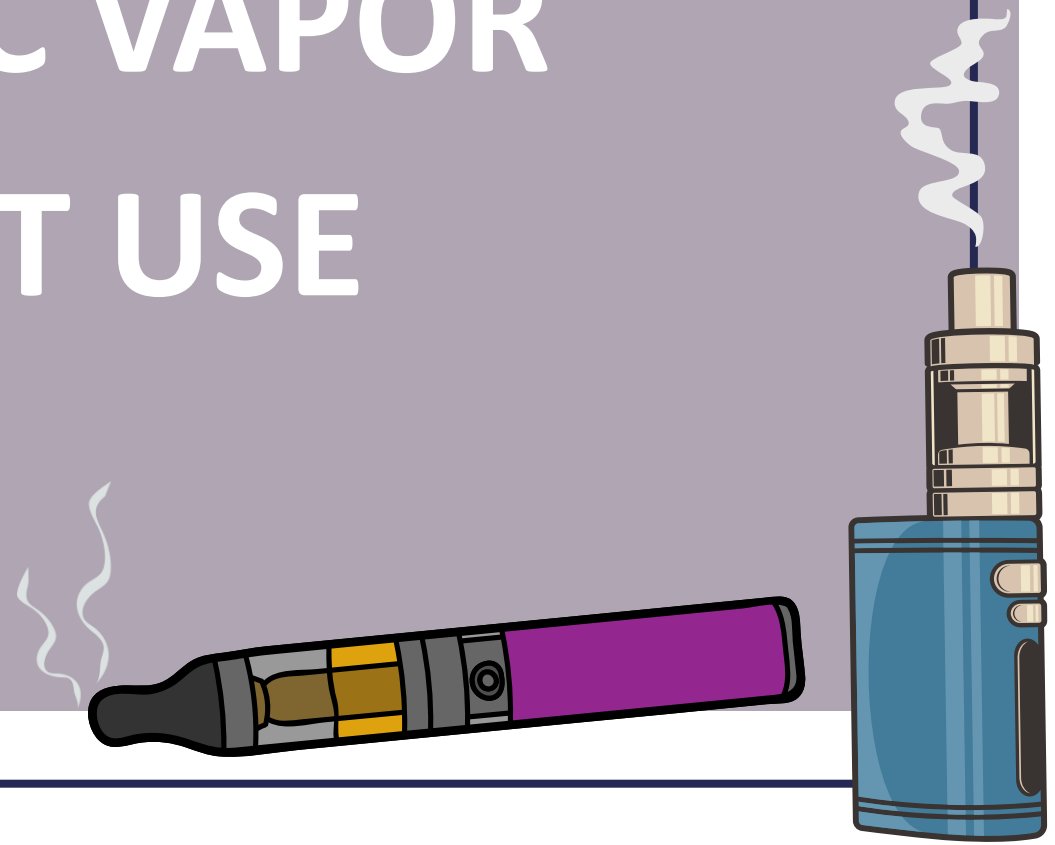
*"In my personal experience, it's always been...from **parents, places in the house**, and **without permission**..."*

*"A lotta people have **fake IDs**... and that's kind of how most people get it. It's like there's either **one person everyone knows** . . . . They're like hey, you wanna give us alcohol for this?"*

Locations of Alcohol Use

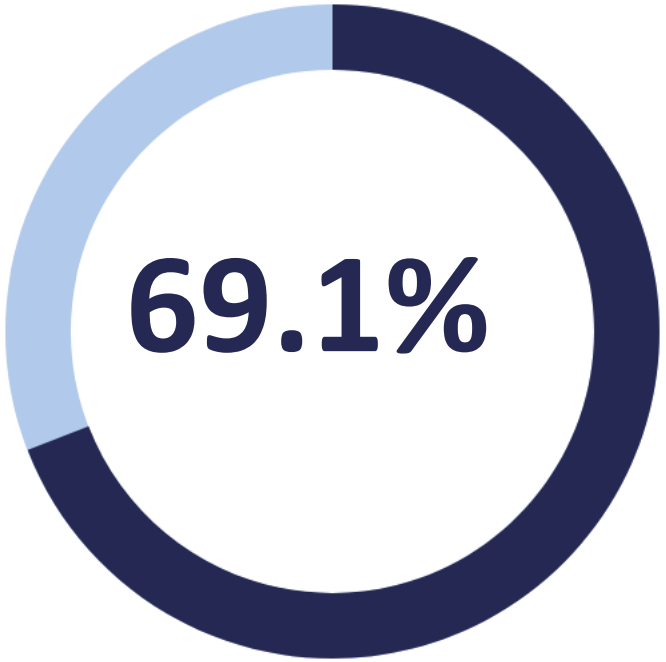
*"...it's more of something that people do at **social gatherings** . . . it's **less talked about** than other things like when people get high or stuff like that."*

ELECTRONIC VAPOR PRODUCT USE

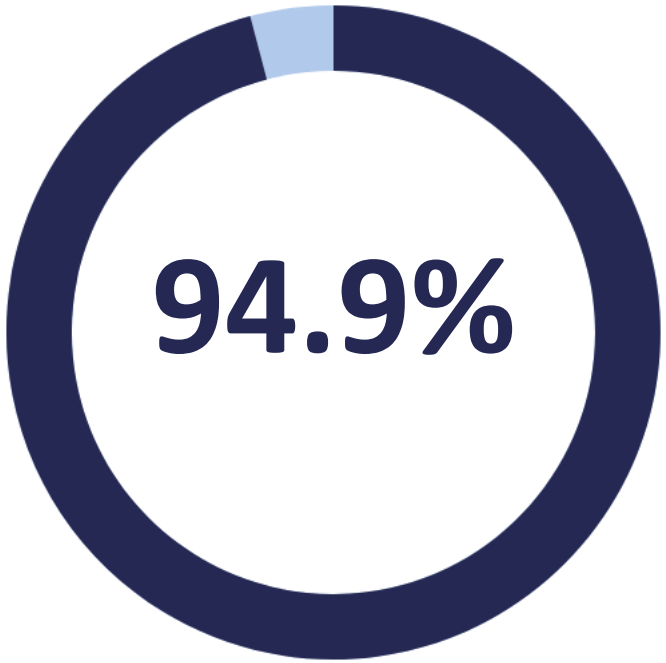


Electronic Vapor Product - Forms

Vaped marijuana *



Vaped flavored product *



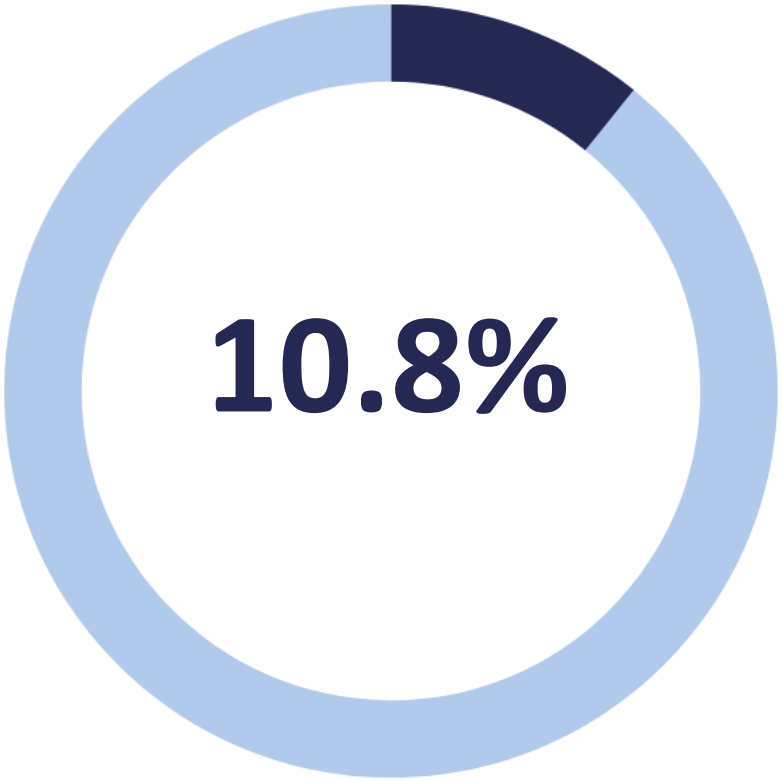
*"There's a lotta **carts** but there's also a lotta just **flavored vapes**. . ."*

*". . . vapes are, like they're **marketed towards young people** . . . . The flavors themselves are cotton candy, unicorn, blue raspberry, it's **all appealing**. . ."*

*Of high school students who reported current EVP use

Electronic Vapor Product - Accessibility

Purchased EVP from convenience store, supermarket, discount store, or gas station

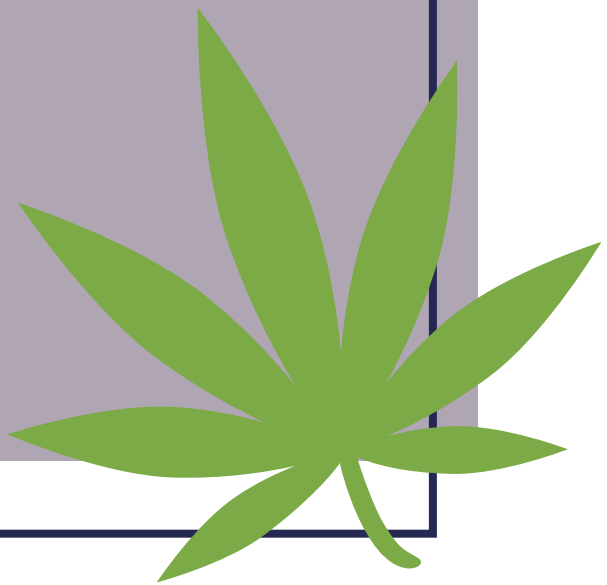


*"They get it from other kids at school or they'll go to a **store that doesn't card**."*

*". . . if there's like one person in a friend group who vapes, then that person might **share with the others**."*

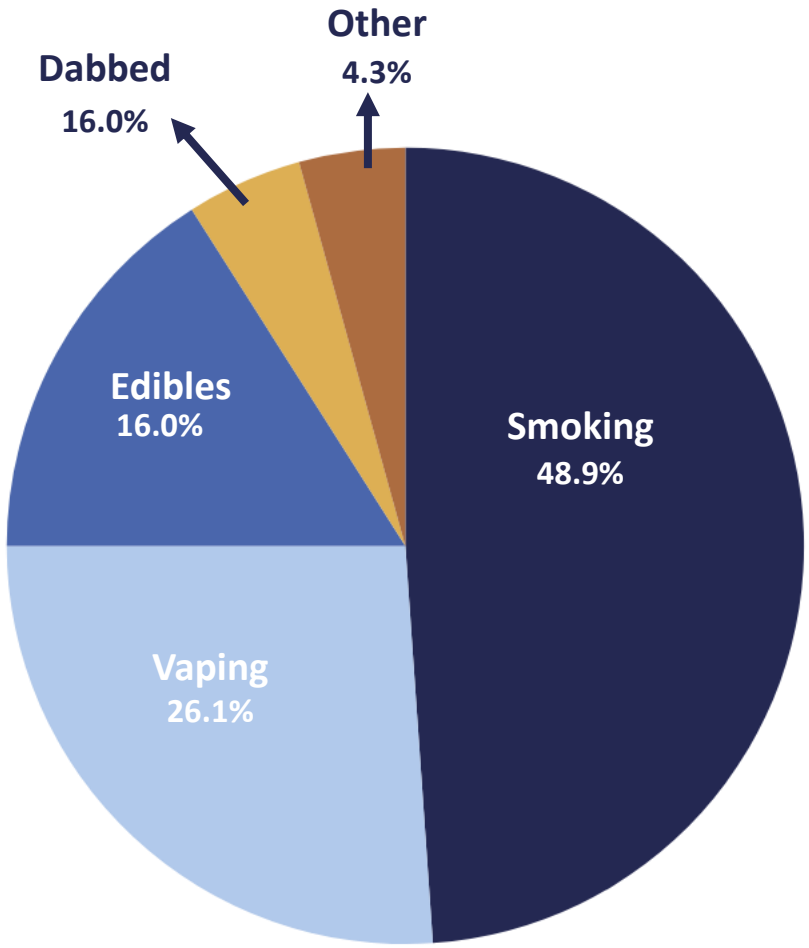
*". . . vapes are also very often like you can **pass them around as friends**. . . . Think they're very often **distributed between friends**."*

CANNABIS USE



Cannabis Use - Forms

How did you usually use marijuana?*



*Of high school students who reported current marijuana use

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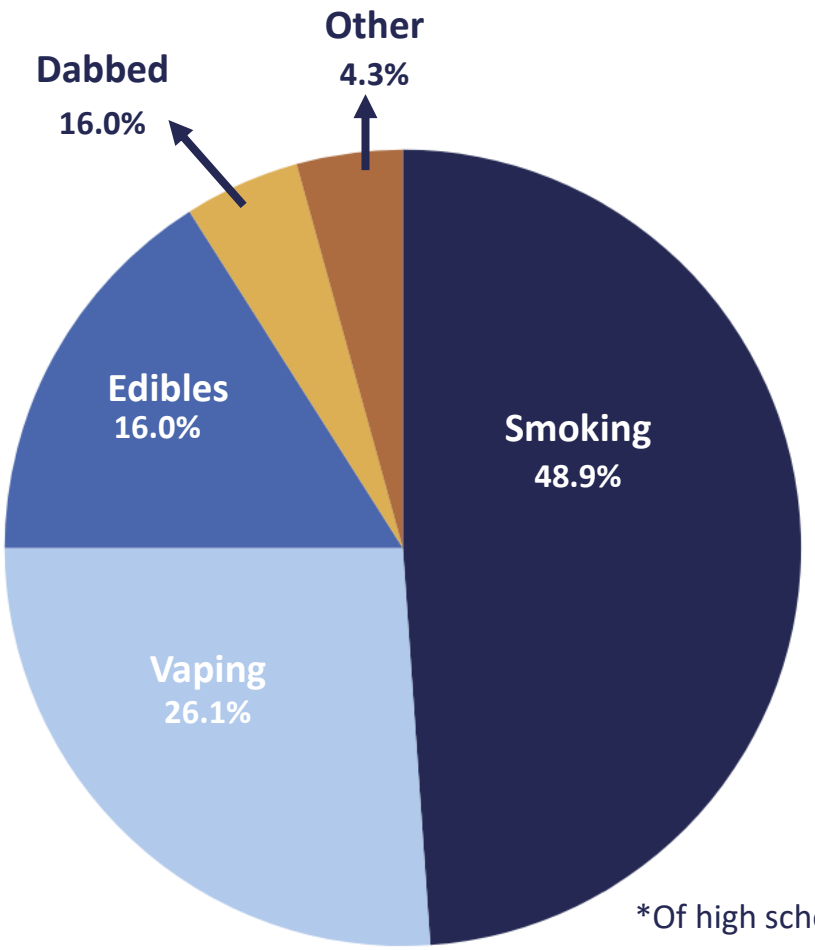
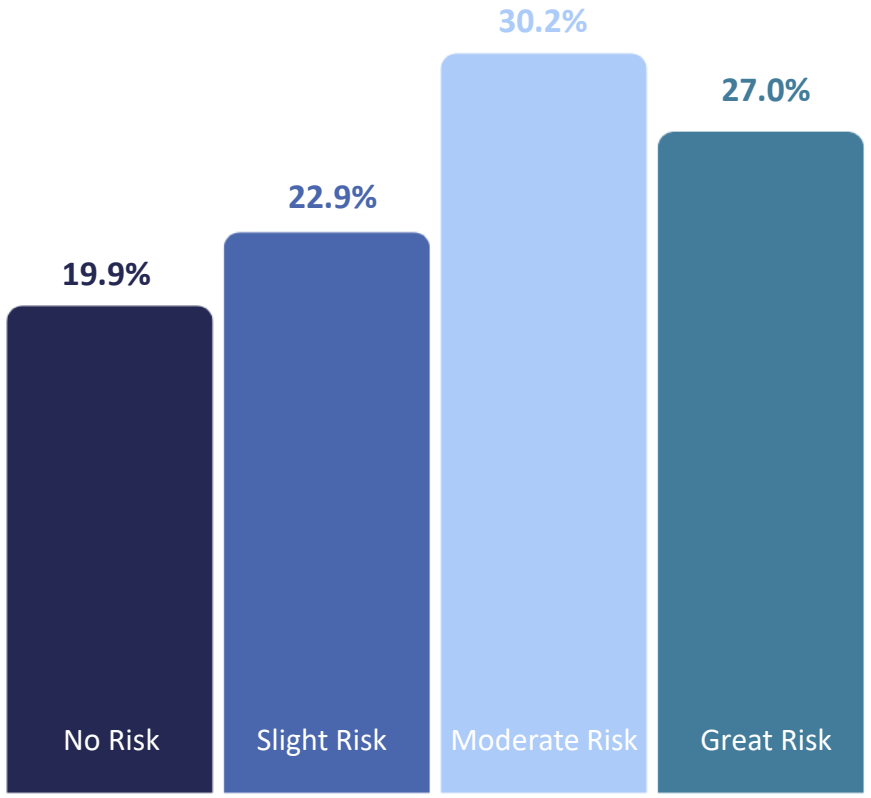


*"I feel like **smoking** is a trend also. Not only just like weed and stuff but, you know, the **vape pens** and all of that. And the **weed gummies**. Like now people, they sell . . . **cupcakes**, **brownies**, **cookies**."*

*Of high school students who reported current marijuana use

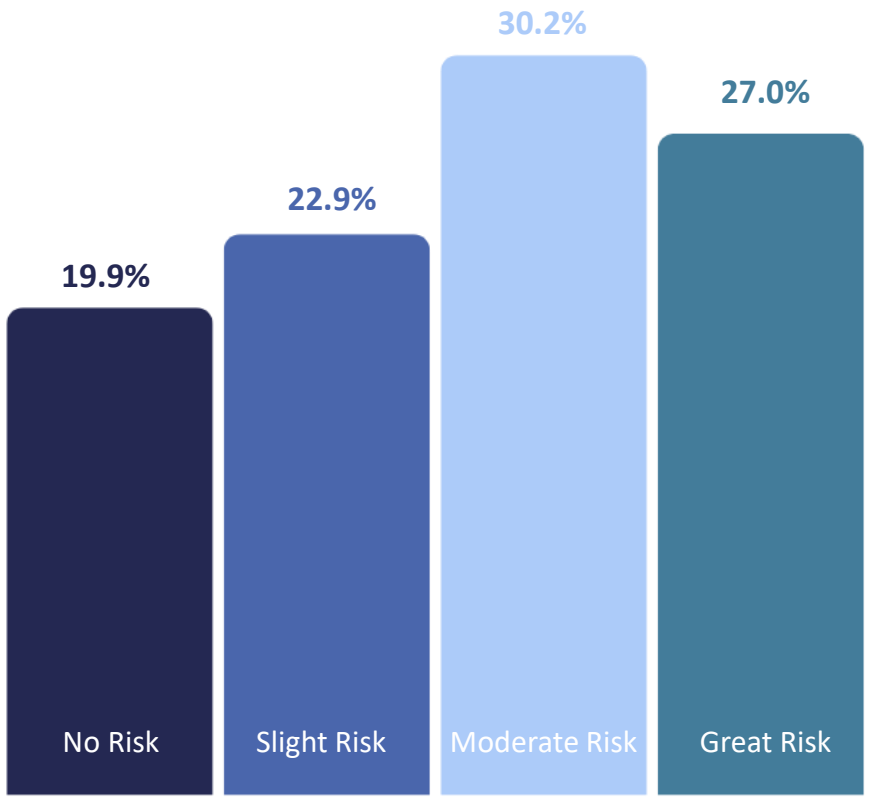
Cannabis Use - Perception of Risk

Perception of Risk from Regular Marijuana Use



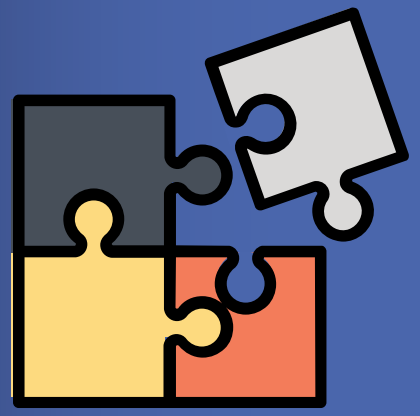
Cannabis Use - Perception of Risk

Perception of Risk from Regular Marijuana Use



"I think I've seen maybe a little bit of just people thinking there's ***less repercussions*** *because of it, like it's* ***less dangerous*** *since it's legal for like older age. . . . Because if it's legal in a few years, then* ***what's different about how it would affect me now?***"

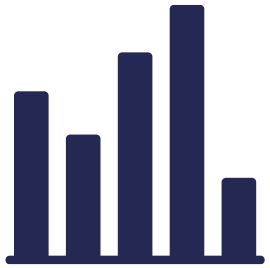
Conclusion



Qualitative data and quantitative data similar

- corroborate findings
- understand full picture
  - add depth to findings









Qualitative data and quantitative differ

- indicate weaknesses of data source
  - bias
  - under reporting
- areas for further exploration



Final Thoughts

One form of data is not superior to another



Look for opportunities to explore data together





Use focus group to unpack quantitative results



Useful for strategic planning

Acknowledgements



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