

Strategies for Success
Youth Survey Results for 2025
Carlsbad Municipal Schools

The Strategies for Success (SFS) survey was collected online from middle and high school students across the Carlsbad Municipal Schools in October of 2025. **A total of 1,385 middle school students and 1,319 high school students completed the SFS survey, for a total of 2,704 surveys.** Questions on the SFS are used to monitor and measure the Carlsbad Community Anti-Drug and Gang Coalition's outcomes related to youth substance use, access to alcohol and other drugs, perceptions of risk for using substances in the community and school, and mental health. In addition to monitoring outcomes, the data help the community plan the most effective and needed prevention services.

Positive Findings

- + High school substance use decreased in 2025 for all substances (alcohol, e-cigarettes, marijuana, binge drinking, prescription pain medication misuse, stimulants, and fentanyl). Middle school e-cigarette and marijuana use decreased.
- + Students offered reasons for avoiding using substances such as to protect their health and safety, to protect their future plans, and to avoid negative consequences.
- + Almost 90% of students had at least one friend their own age who cares about them.
- + More than 90% of students reported their parent/guardian knew who they were with and what they were doing when not at home, and that they had an adult who believed they would be a success, both are strong protective factors (these stayed about the same since 2024).
- + High school students' perception of harm increased (desired) for marijuana in 2025 (from 56.1% to 63.1% reporting they believed smoking or using marijuana once or twice a week posed a moderate or great risk of harm).
- + Students' perceived disapproval of using alcohol and marijuana by parents, friends, and themselves increased for both middle and high school students.
- + Early initiation (first tried before age 11) of alcohol and marijuana decreased for middle school students since 2024.
- + The majority of students reported never experiencing intimidation or harassment at school, never hearing about a student bringing a weapon to school, and never being threatened with a weapon on school property.

Troubling Findings

- Middle school substance use increased for alcohol, binge drinking, prescription pain medication misuse, stimulants, and fentanyl since 2024.
- Over 20% of high school students who reported past 30-day e-cigarette use reported buying it in a store, despite it being illegal for anyone under age 21.
- One of the top three ways both middle and high school students accessed alcohol was through their parents or guardians buying it for or giving it to them.
- Youth accessed marijuana by purchasing or receiving it from others under age 21, taking it from their or someone else's home, purchasing it where it is legally sold, and getting it

from their parents or guardians. They reported using marijuana to cope with stress or anxiety, to help them sleep, to get high, and to have fun with friends.

- Students reported concerning levels of mental distress, suicidal ideation, and attempted suicide. Suicidal ideation and attempted suicide increased since 2024.
- Though slightly down from 2024, middle school students reported using alcohol, marijuana, and e-cigarettes before age 13 at very high levels (higher than high schoolers).
- Though down from 2024, the percentage of students that reported driving after alcohol or marijuana use or riding with a driver who had been drinking remained high.
- Only 20.3% of middle school students and 13.1% of high school students knew about an anonymous way to report unsafe behavior at school.
- When middle school students were asked which substances were in their e-cigarettes, most reported they did not know.

Recommendations

- Support mental health services and help equip teachers to better identify and refer students who are struggling to those services.
- Have clear rules about what youth can and cannot do at school and at home.
- Support programs, teachers, students, and staff who strive to make school the safest and best part of each students' day. Ensure there is an anonymous way for students to report unsafe behavior at school, and that they know about.
- Encourage students to think about going to college or technical school after they graduate high school.
- Tell students you believe in them and show interest in their schoolwork.
- Encourage students to pursue their interests and get involved in drama, debate, art, music, math league, sports, or other hobbies and areas of interest.
- Give students opportunities to use their skills and recognize them for trying.

These are all protective factors that help buffer youth from risks and help them succeed. [Read more here: https://www.cdc.gov/aces/risk-factors/index.html](https://www.cdc.gov/aces/risk-factors/index.html)

Creating a safe school climate can prevent bullying, substance use, and truancy.¹

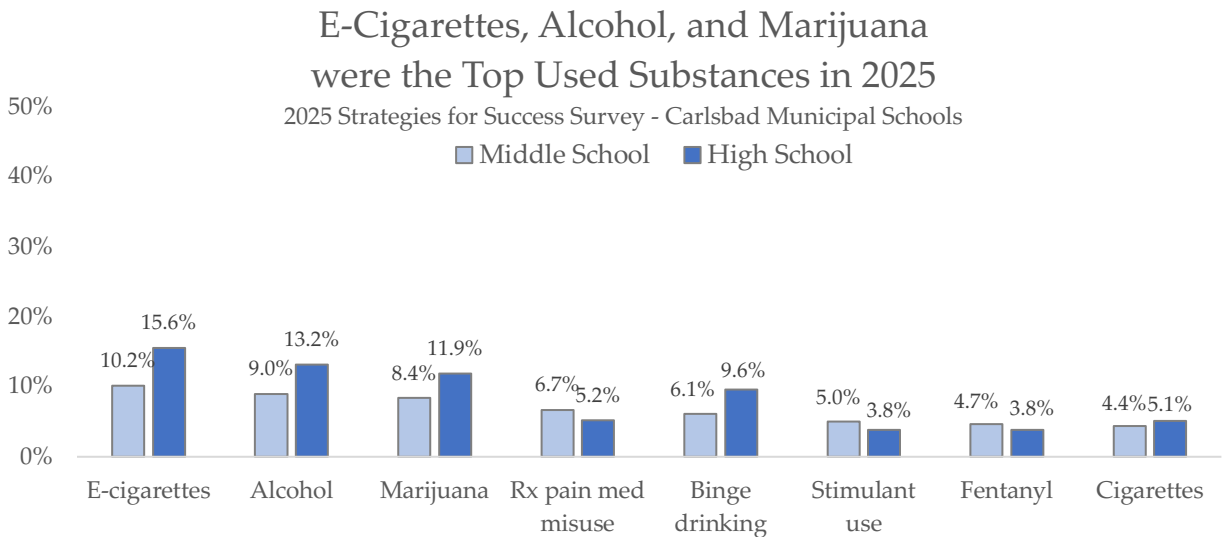
School climate is all of our responsibility. Students have the most influence on school climate but can also be influenced by volunteers, families, school staff, and community members.

- Be personable.
- Encourage peer support.
- Have an open door for students.
- Make an effort to include students who are left out.

¹ Sulkowski, M. and Lazarus, P., *Creating Safe and Supportive Schools and Fostering Students' Mental Health*, (Routledge, 2016), 227-246.

Current Substance Use

Current substance use is measured by the percentage of people who report using the specific substance in the past 30 days. Adolescent substance use is risky because research literature confirms that the brain does not stop developing until the early twenties and substance use during development can have lasting effects.² The graph below shows the current substance use among middle and high school students.



	Middle School	High School
Changes since 2024	+ E-cigarette use decreased from 11.4%. + Marijuana use decreased from 9.7% - Alcohol use increased from 7.4% - Binge drinking increased from 4.7%. - Rx pain med misuse increased from 6.2%. - Stimulant use increased from 3.9%. - Fentanyl use increased from 2.5%.	+ E-cigarette use decreased from 18.4%. + Alcohol use decreased from 14.9%. + Marijuana use decreased from 14.3%. + Binge drinking decreased from 10.3% + Rx pain med misuse decreased from 7.5%. + Stimulant use decreased from 5.4%. + Fentanyl use decreased from 5.0%.

+ indicates positive change, - indicates negative change



Boys

High school boys were more likely to use alcohol, binge drink, use marijuana, misuse Rx pain medicine, use cigarettes, use stimulants, and use fentanyl than high school girls.



Girls

Middle school girls were more likely to use alcohol, binge drink, use e-cigs, use marijuana, and use stimulants than middle school boys.

² Volkow, ND. (2017). Developmental Cognitive Neuroscience. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dcn.2017.10.002>

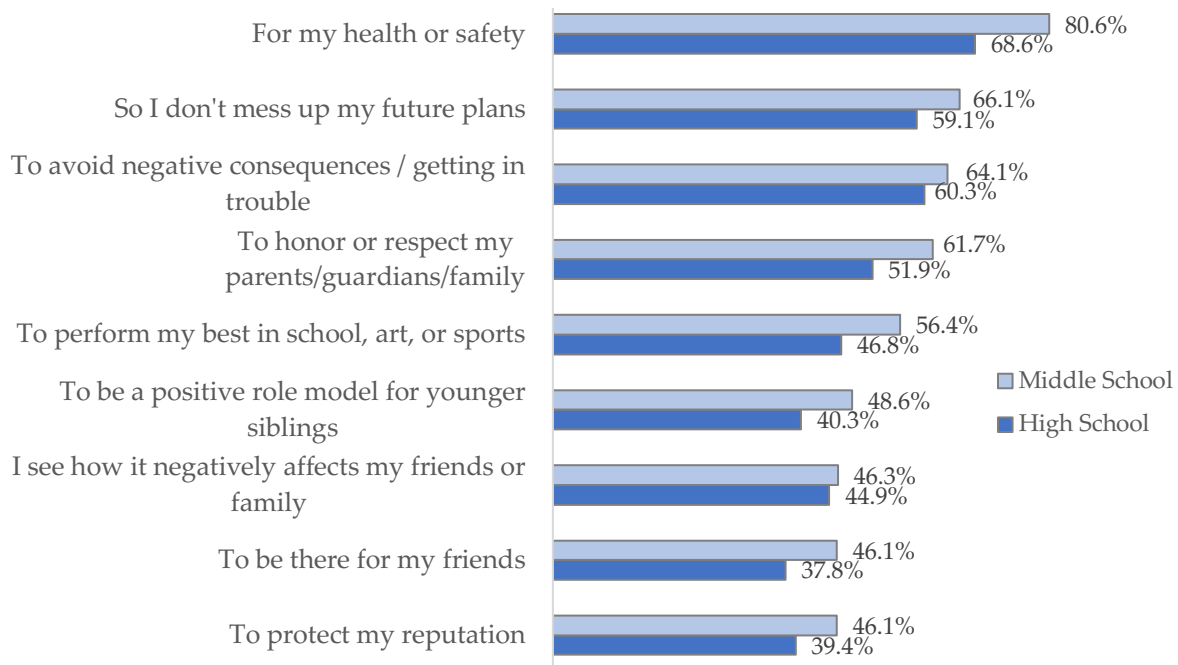
Prevention Focuses on the Positive

Most students did not use alcohol or other substances in 2025. Prevention research shows that students with goals, supportive adults and peers, and connection to school and community are less likely to engage in risky behavior. The graph below displays the top reasons why students chose not to drink or use other substances.

Students' Top Reasons for Avoiding Substance Use were Their Health or Safety, Their Future Plans, and Avoiding Negative Consequences

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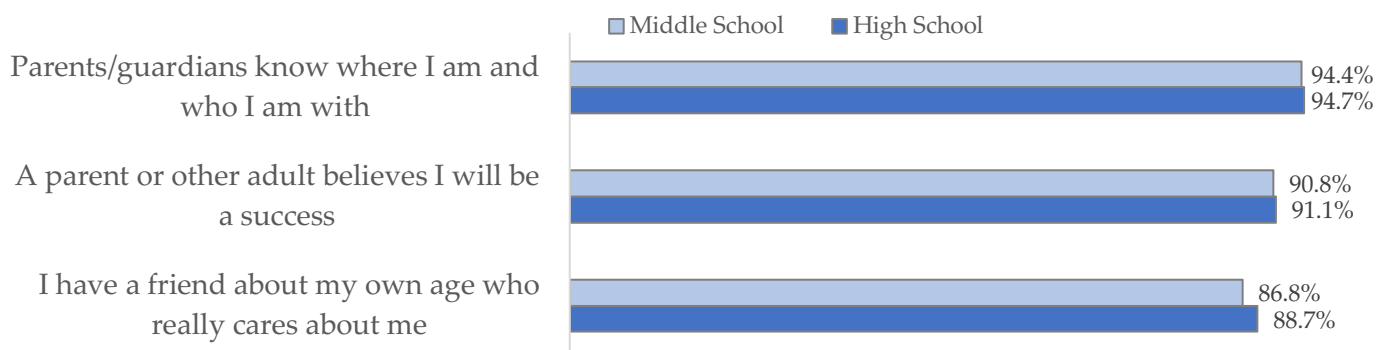
*If you choose not to drink alcohol or use other substances, what were your main reasons?
Students could select more than one.*



Most Students Had Supportive Friends and Adults in Their Lives

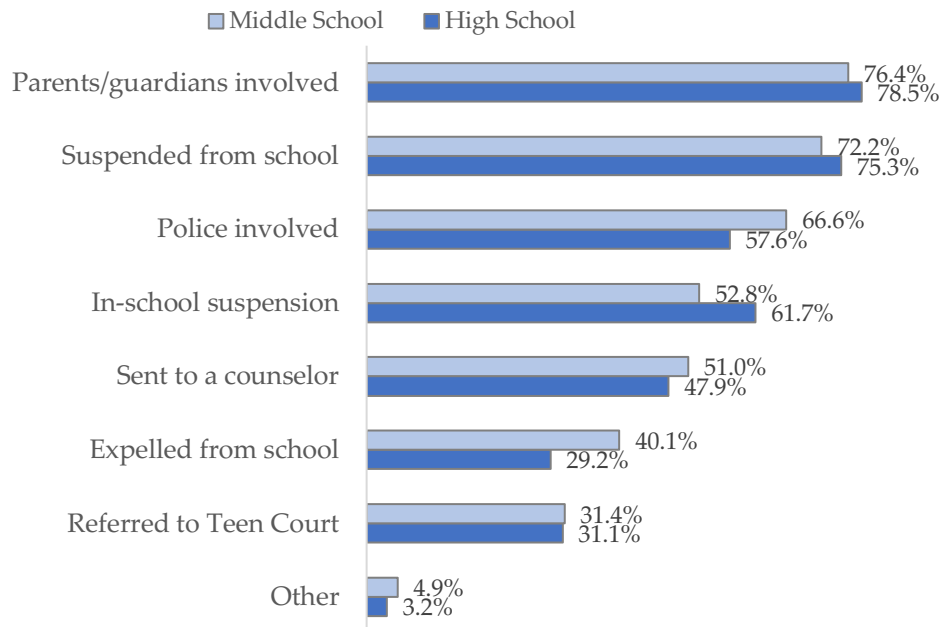
% who said "mostly true" or "very true"

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Perceived Consequences of Use on School Grounds

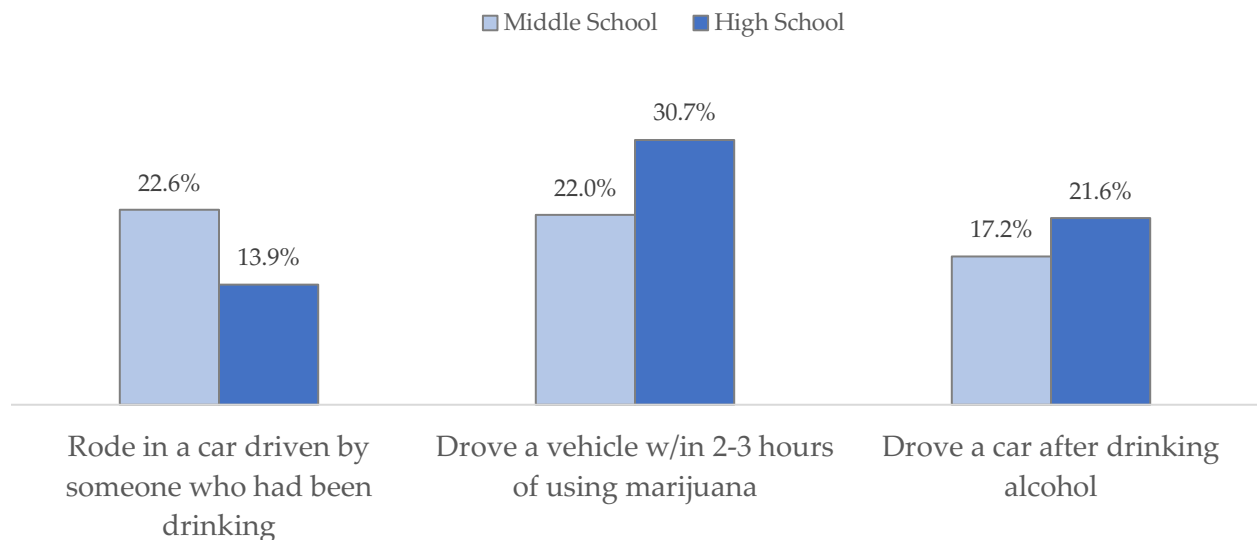
Most Students Thought a Student Caught Using Substances on School Grounds Would Face Their Parents Being Called, Suspension, and/or the Police Getting Involved
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Substance Use and Vehicles

Past 30-day behaviors (driving is among students who reported current substance use; riding in vehicles is among all respondents).

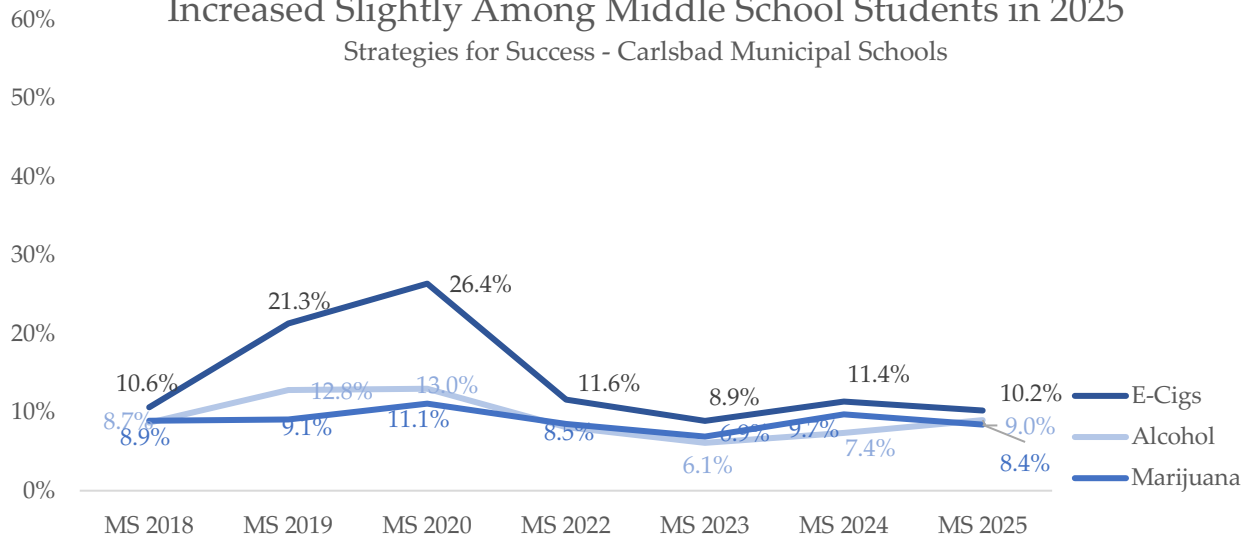
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No surveys were collected in 2021 due to COVID/school closures

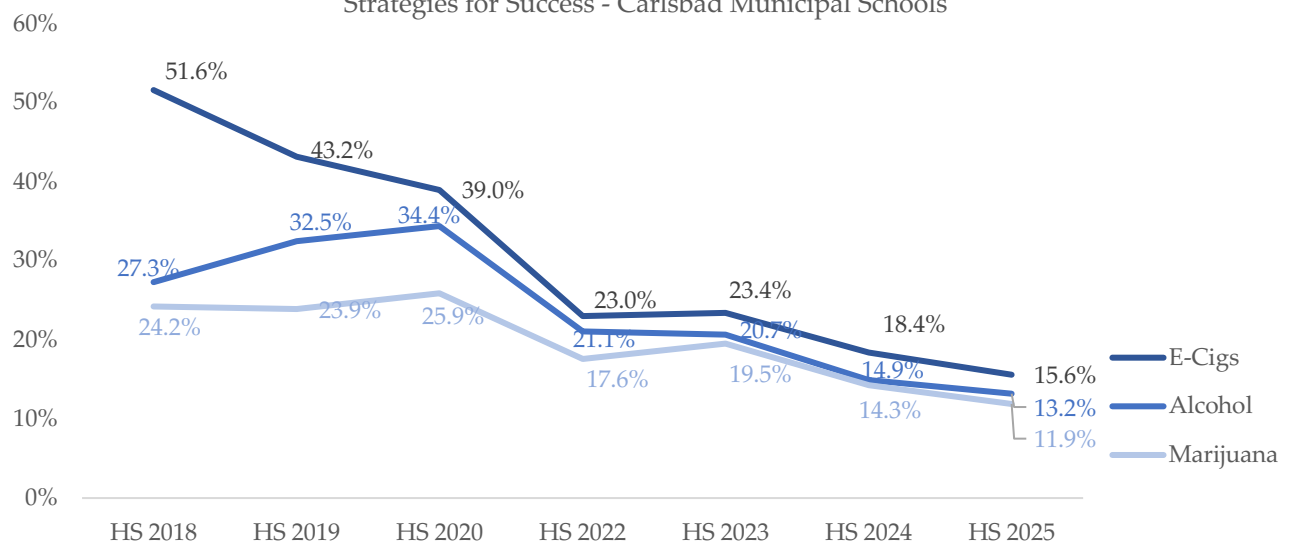
E-Cig and Marijuana Use Decreased While Alcohol Use Increased Slightly Among Middle School Students in 2025

Strategies for Success - Carlsbad Municipal Schools



High School Substance Use Continued to Decline in 2025

Strategies for Success - Carlsbad Municipal Schools



High School Substance Use (past 30 days)	U.S. YRBS 2023	New Mexico YRRS 2023	Carlsbad SFS 2025
E-Cigarettes	16.8%	18.8%	15.6%
Alcohol	22.1%	16.4%	13.2%
Marijuana	17.0%	17.9%	11.9%

SOURCES: NM <https://youthrisk.org> and U.S. <https://yrbs-explorer.services.cdc.gov/#/>

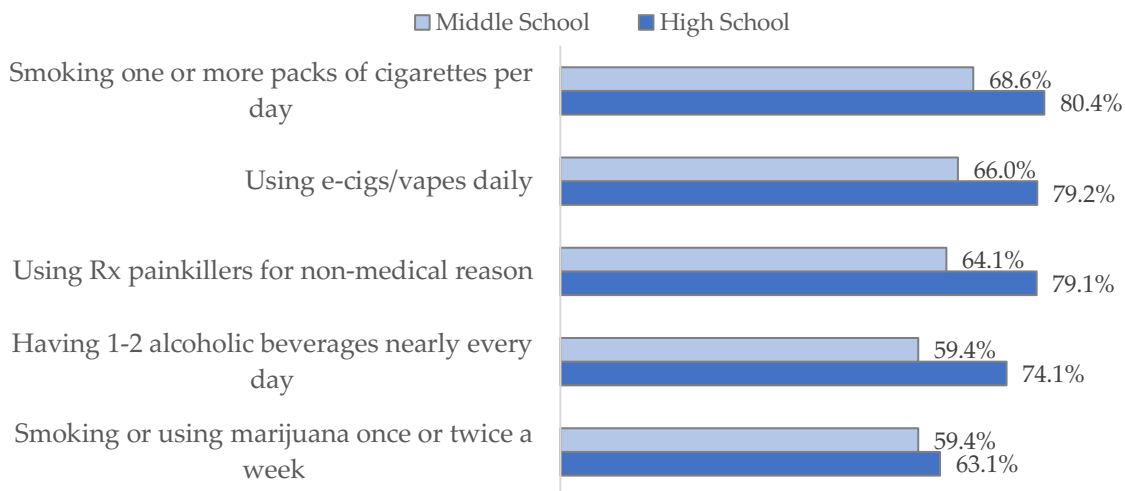
Perceived Risk of Harm from Using Substances

A set of questions on the SFS survey asks about the perceived risk of harm associated with substance use. Higher perceived risk is associated with lower use. The graph below shows the percentage of students who said they risk “great” or “moderate” harm from using the substance as described.

Perceived Risk of Harm was Lowest for Marijuana and Alcohol Use

% who said "moderate" or "great" risk

2025 Strategies for Success Survey - Carlsbad Municipal Schools



A higher perceived risk of harm is associated with a decreased tendency to engage in that behavior.

Perceived Risk of Harm <i>% who said moderate or great risk</i>	Middle			High		
	2023	2024	2025	2023	2024	2025
Smoking or using marijuana once or twice a week	61.2%	64.0%	59.4%	49.3%	56.1%	63.1%
Having 1-2 alcoholic beverages nearly every day	60.8%	65.3%	59.4%	66.4%	74.5%	74.1%
Using e-cigs/vapes daily	69.2%	74.3%	66.0%	71.7%	80.6%	79.2%

Perception of harm decreased in 2025 for all but one (smoking or using marijuana for high school students). These decreases are undesired changes.

Perception of Disapproval of Substance Use

Youth were asked “how wrong” they think parents and friends would think it is for someone their age to drink alcohol or use marijuana regularly. The tables show the percentage of students who answered “wrong” or “very wrong” to the question. Normative beliefs of substance use influence youth decisions to try substances.

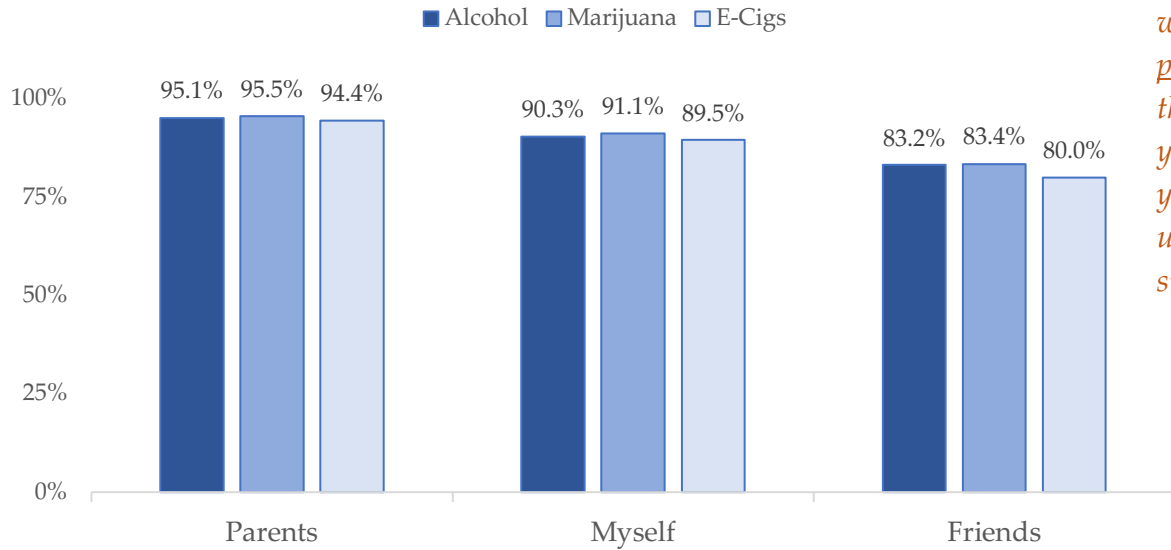
Perceived peer disapproval was lower than personal and parental disapproval.

Alcohol <i>% who said wrong or very wrong</i>	Middle			High		
	2023	2024	2025	2023	2024	2025
My <u>parents</u> feel it is wrong for me to drink alcohol regularly	93.2%	93.1%	95.1%	85.0%	89.4%	90.9%
I <u>think</u> it is wrong for someone my age to drink alcohol regularly	89.6%	89.2%	90.3%	77.8%	83.6%	84.9%
My <u>friends</u> think it is wrong for someone my age to drink alcohol regularly	80.0%	79.2%	83.2%	61.7%	70.6%	72.0%

Marijuana <i>% who said wrong or very wrong</i>	Middle			High		
	2023	2024	2025	2023	2024	2025
My <u>parents</u> feel it is wrong for me to use marijuana	93.9%	92.7%	95.5%	84.7%	87.2%	90.5%
I <u>think</u> it is wrong for someone my age to use marijuana	88.8%	88.9%	91.1%	72.6%	78.6%	82.2%
My <u>friends</u> think it is wrong for someone my age to use marijuana	80.0%	79.3%	83.4%	55.9%	66.2%	70.1%

Middle School Students' Perceived Parental Disapproval of Substance Use was Highest, Friends was Lowest

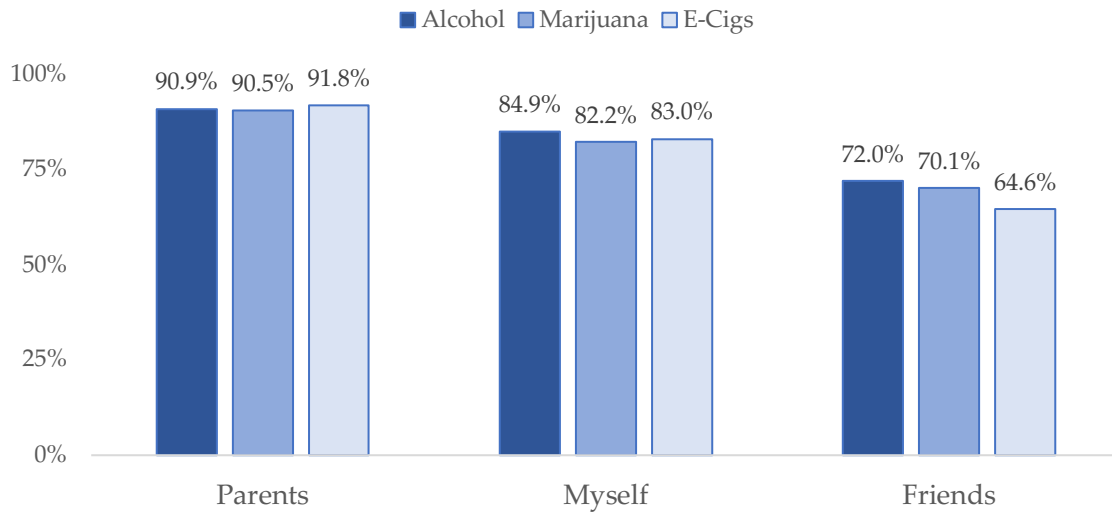
2025 Strategies for Success Survey - Carlsbad Municipal Schools
% who said it is "wrong" or "very wrong" for them to use each substance



How wrong would [each person/group] think it is for you / someone your age to use each substance?

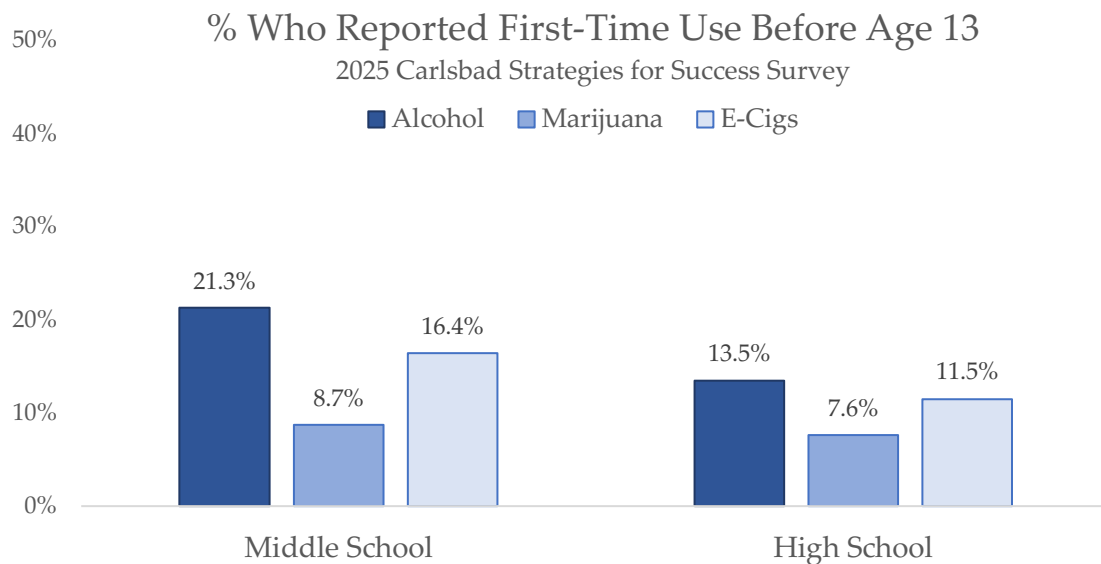
High School Students' Perceived Parental Disapproval of Substance Use was Highest, Friends was Lowest

2025 Strategies for Success Survey - Carlsbad Municipal Schools
% who said it is "wrong" or "very wrong" for them to use each substance



Early Initiation

Research shows that young people who start drinking before the age of 15 are at a higher risk for developing alcohol use disorder later in life. Early initiation of alcohol use can interfere with healthy brain development causing learning disabilities as well as increased risk of physical and/or sexual assault.³ Additionally, many young people have easy access to alcohol in the community. In a 2019 national SAMHSA survey, 96.5% of 12–14-year old’s who reported past-30-day alcohol use said that they got the alcohol “for free” or from relatives or friends.⁴



Early Initiation* 2023 YRRS/YRBS	New Mexico		U.S.	
	Alcohol	Marijuana	Alcohol	Marijuana
Middle School	12.8%	3.5%	--	--
High School	16.2%	10.5%	13.3%	4.8%

*Use before age 11 (middle school) and before age 13 (high school).

³ Squeglia, L.M.; Tapert, S.F.; Sullivan, E.V.; Jacobus, J.; Meloy, M.J.; Rohlfing, T.; and Pfefferbaum, A. Brain development in heavy-drinking adolescents. *American Journal of Psychiatry* 172(6):531–542, 2015. [PMID: 25982660](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/25982660/)

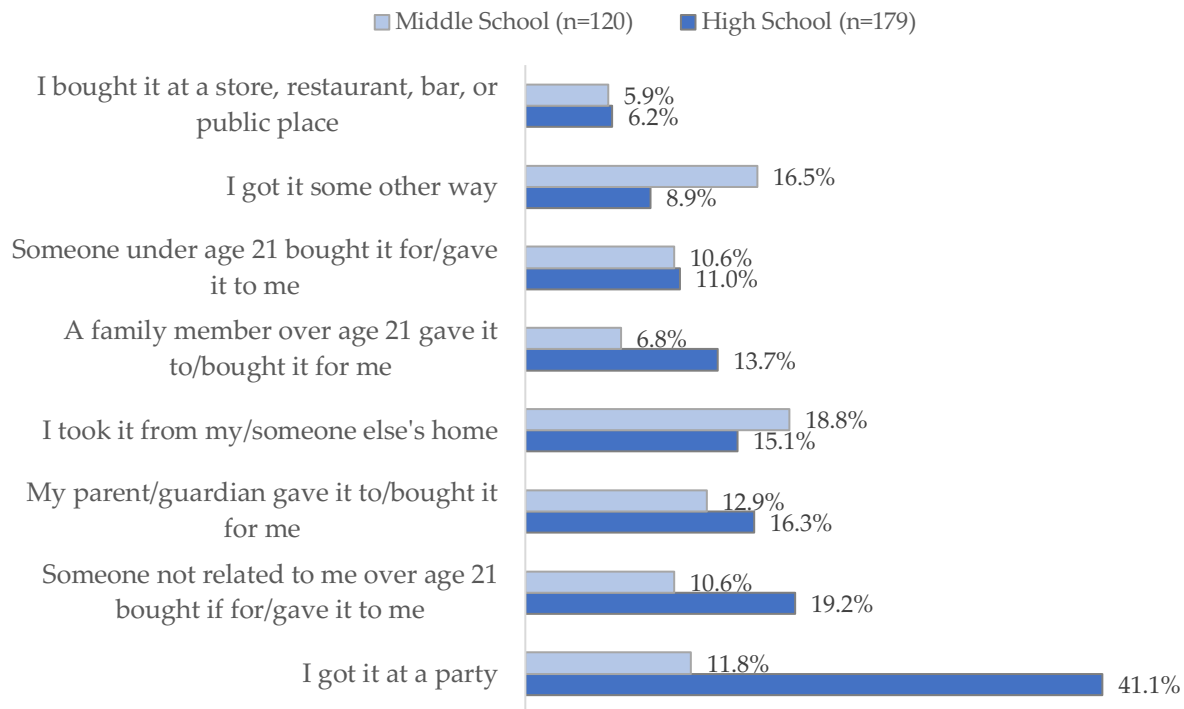
⁴ SAMHSA, CBHSQ. 2019 National Survey on Drug Use and Health. Table 6.16B—Source Where Alcohol Was Obtained for Most Recent Use in Past Month among Past Month Alcohol Users Aged 12 to 20, by Age Group and Gender: Percentages, 2018 and 2019. <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/reports/rpt29394/NSDUHDetailedTabs2019/NSDUHDetTabsSect6pe2019.htm#tab6-16b>

Alcohol Access

The Coalition works to reduce social access of alcohol to minors through coordination with law enforcement to hold adults accountable and educating parents and the community that it is a 4th degree felony to provide alcohol to minors.

Middle and High School Students Accessed Alcohol from a Variety of Sources

2025 Strategies for Sccess Survey - Carlsbad Munucipal Schools
% among current users

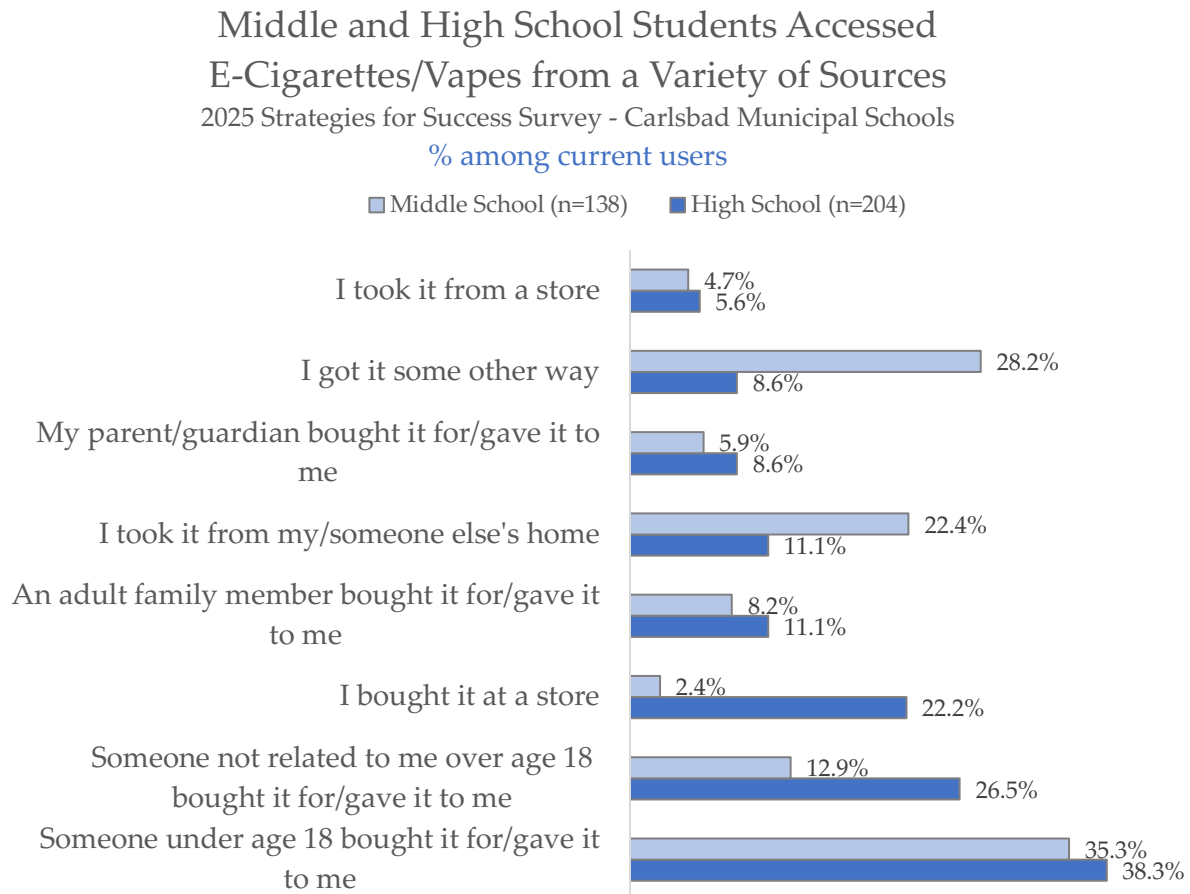


The most common sources of alcohol for middle school students included their own home or someone else’s home, another source (not included in the survey options), or their parents/guardians. The most common sources for high school students were parties, people not related to them over age 21, and their parents/guardians.

Alcohol Access	Parent/Guardian			At a Party		
	2023	2024	2025	2023	2024	2025
Middle School	12%	14%	13%	20%	24%	12%
High School	14%	13%	16%	36%	21%	41%

E-Cigarette Access

It is illegal for anyone under age 21 to possess or use tobacco products, including e-cigarettes or vapes. The SFS survey asked about access to e-cigarettes for the first time in 2023.



The most common way both middle and high school students accessed e-cigarettes or vapes was by getting them from someone under age 18, the two other most common ways middle school students accessed e-cigarettes were some other way (not included in the survey options), and from their own or someone else’s home. The two other most common ways high school students accessed e-cigarettes were from someone not related to them over age 18, and from a store where they purchased it.

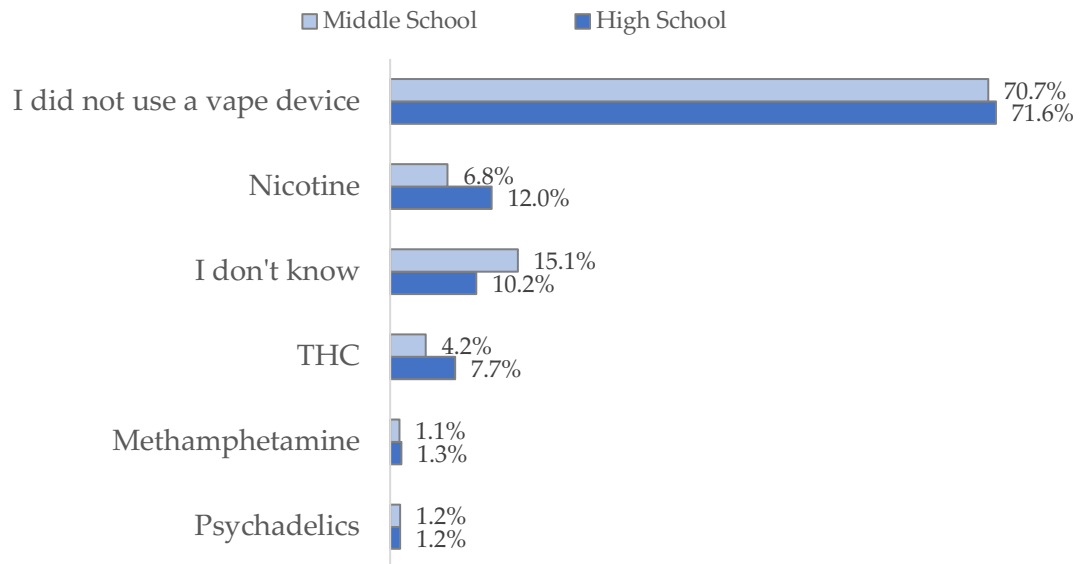
Substances in E-Cigarette Devices

To better understand the types of substances used in vapes, a question was added in 2025 asking current vape users what they consumed.

Nicotine-infused Liquids were Most Used in Vape Devices

2025 Strategies for Success Survey - Carlsbad Municipal Schools

% among current users

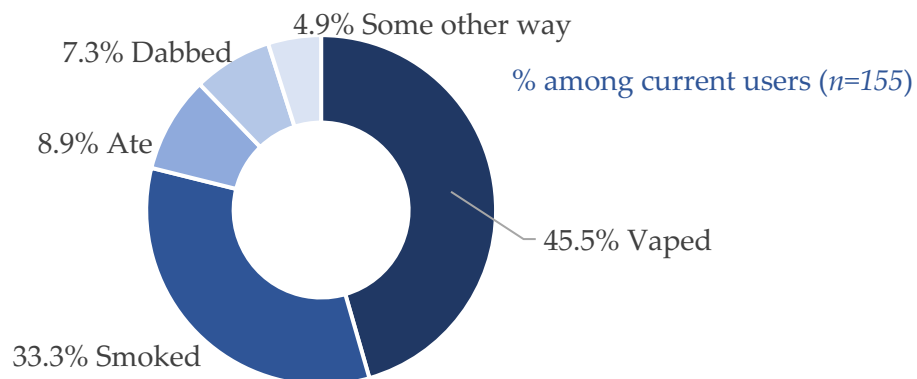


Marijuana Consumption Methods and Access

Marijuana has become one of the most commonly used substances among youth in Carlsbad. Youth often perceive that marijuana is *safe* and even *healthy*, especially since medical and recreational marijuana have been legalized in New Mexico. There is a general lack of awareness of the damage marijuana causes to the developing brain.

Vaping was the Most Common Marijuana Consumption Method for High School Students, Followed by Smoking

2025 Strategies for Success Survey - High School - Carlsbad Municipal Schools

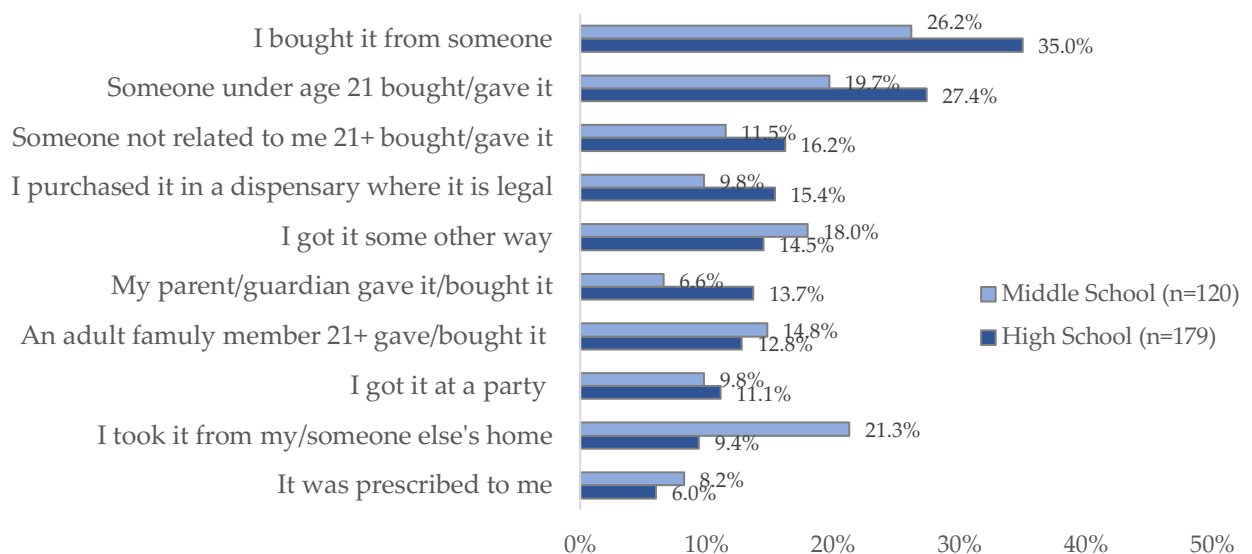


Middle school youth who used marijuana (n=113) were also most likely to vape it (44.4%) or smoke it (34.9%), followed by dab it (11.1%), consume it some other way (4.8%), eat it (3.2%), or drink it (1.6%).

Middle and High School Students Accessed Marijuana from a Variety of Sources

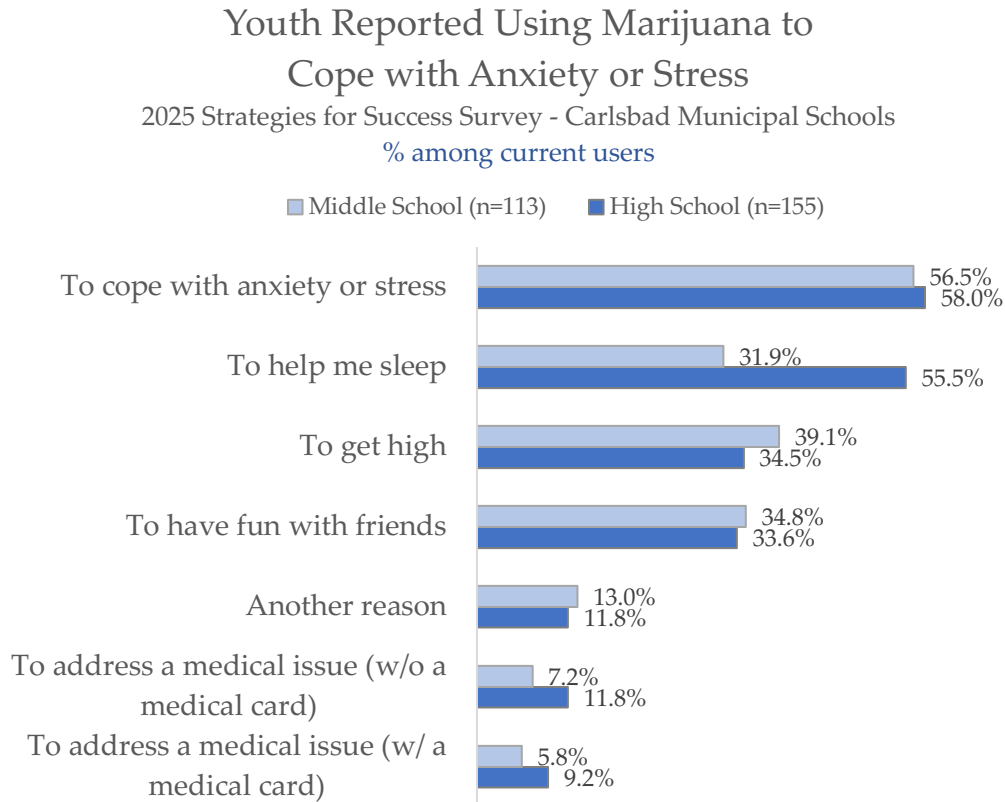
2025 Strategies for Success Survey - Carlsbad Municipal Schools

% among current users



Reasons for Using Marijuana

Numerous studies link marijuana use to impaired development of the adolescent brain. Particularly, differences are found among adolescent marijuana smokers in the frontal cortex which is critical to judgement, planning, decision-making, personality, and the amygdala, which directs memory, decision-making, and emotion.^{5 6}



⁵ Weir, K. (2015). Marijuana and the Developing Brain. American Psychological Association, Vol 46, No. 10.

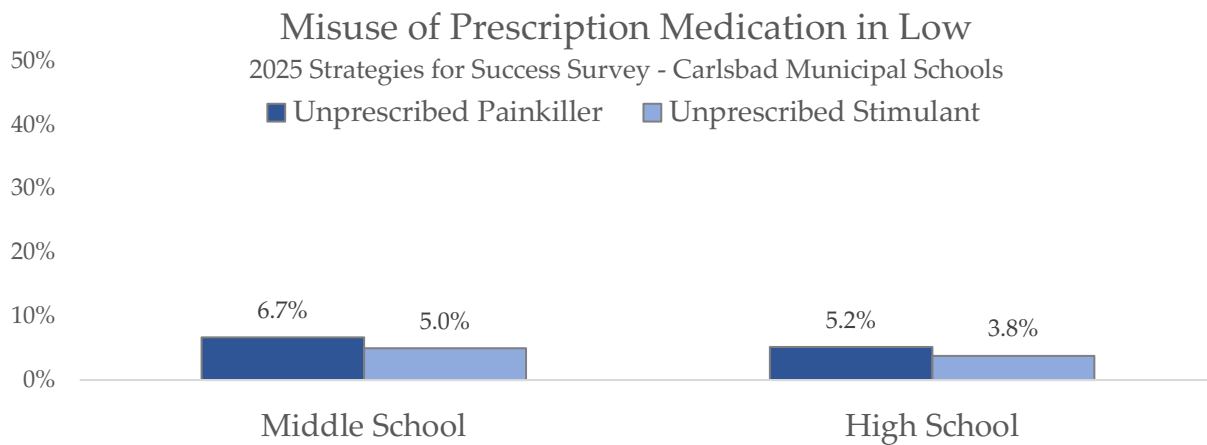
⁶ Grubner SA, Sagar KA, Dahlgren MK, Racine M, Lukas SE. (2012). Age of Onset of Marijuana Use and Executive Functioning. Psychology of Addictive Behaviors, 2012 Sep;26(3):496-506.

Prescription Painkiller Use and Access

The Coalition aims to reduce prescription painkiller misuse by educating adults on the dangers of sharing them with anyone to whom they were not prescribed, educating on safe storage and disposal, and promoting Drug Take Back Days. The graph below shows the percentage of students who took a prescription painkiller in the past 30 days for any reason and who used stimulants in a manner not prescribed by their doctor.

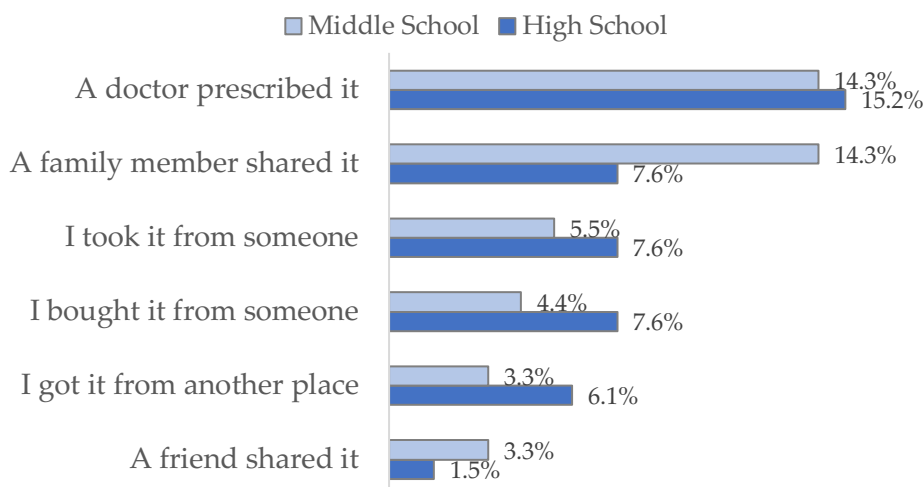
5.2% of high schoolers reported misusing a prescription painkiller in 2025.

6.7% of middle schoolers reported misusing a prescription painkiller in 2025.



Youth Mostly Accessed Prescription Pain Medication from Doctors but Also from Social Sources

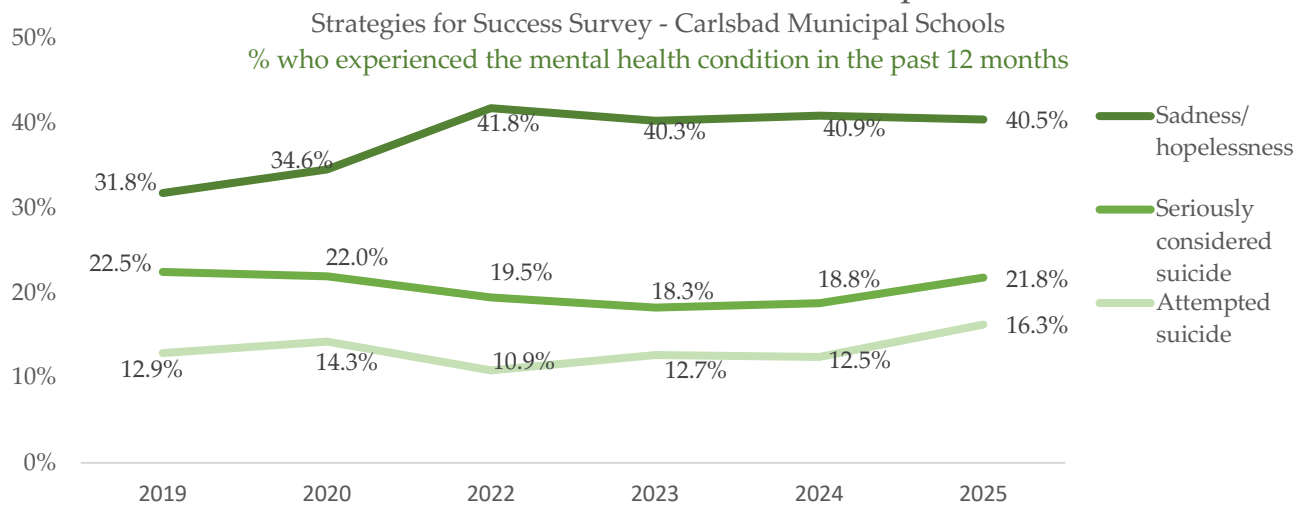
2025 Strategies for Success Survey - Carlsbad Municipal Schools
% among current users



Mental Health Concerns

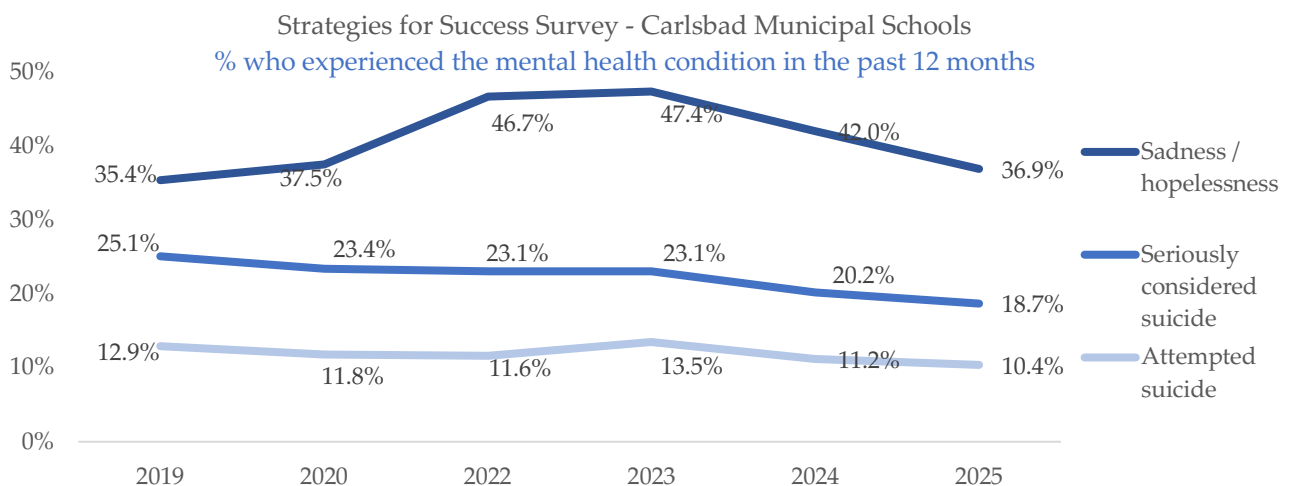
Mental health is closely linked with physical health, success in school, and other important youth outcomes. The graphs show the percentage of students who reported feeling so sad or hopeless almost every day for two weeks or more that it kept them from doing regular activities, those who seriously considered suicide, and those who attempted suicide in the past year.

Middle School Sadness/Hopelessness Stayed About the Same While Suicidal Ideation and Suicide Attempts Increased



Mental Health Risks Carlsbad SFS 2025	Seriously considered suicide		Attempted suicide	
	#	%	#	%
Middle School	292	21.8%	219	16.3%
High School	240	18.7%	134	10.4%

High School Youth Reported Decreases in Mental Health Risk Factors

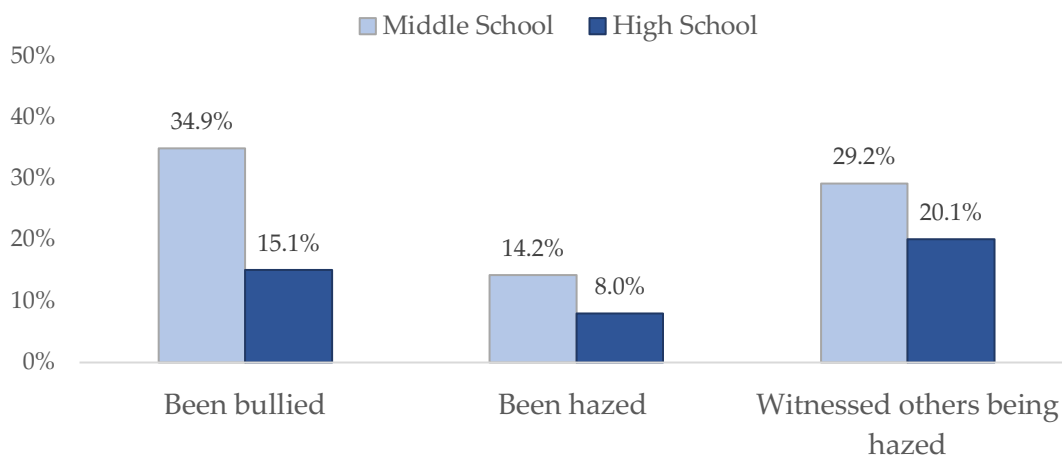


Bullying, Harassment, and Feeling Safe at School

Bullying and harassment can affect mental health as well as impact success in school and other youth outcomes. Feeling safe at school, having ways to anonymously report unsafe behavior, and having access to mental health supports are linked with positive outcomes. Questions about bullying, harassment, and perception of safety at school were added to the SFS survey in 2025.

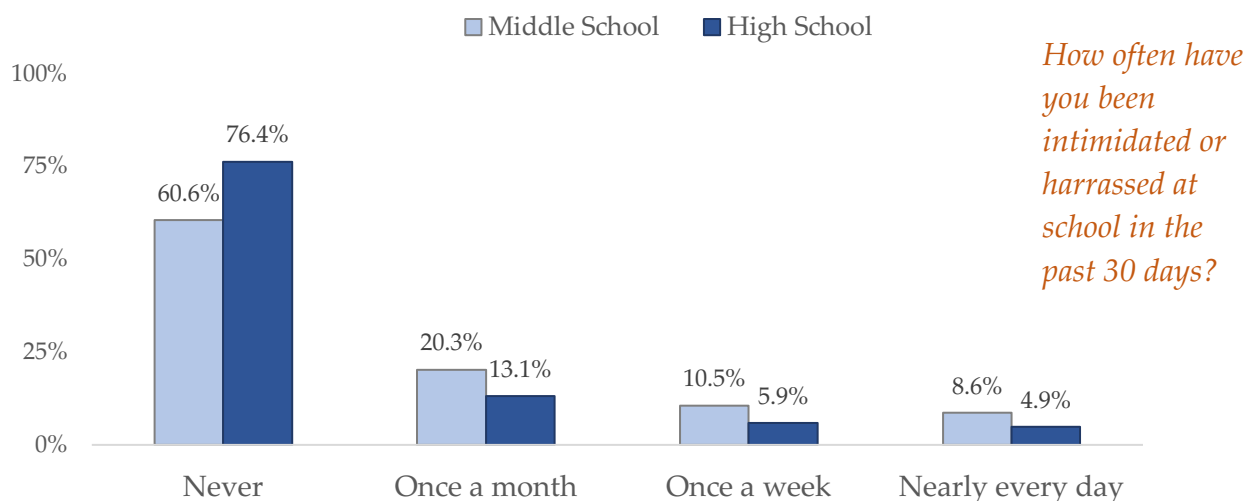
Both Middle and High School Students Reported Being Bullied or Hazed, and/or Witnessing Others Being Hazed

2025 Strategies for Success Survey - Carlsbad Municipal Schools



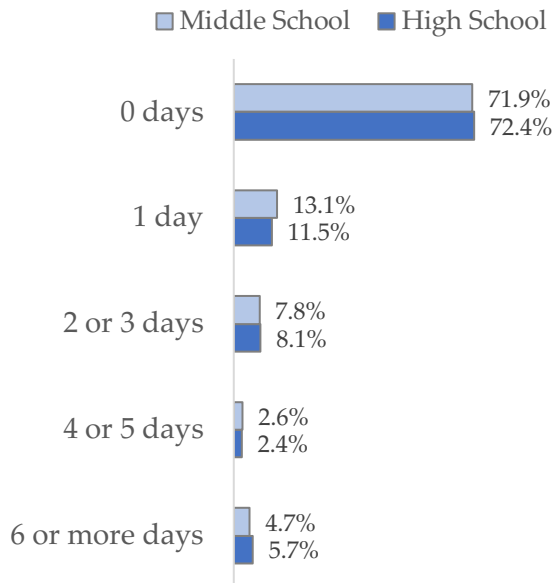
Most Middle and High School Students Reported Never Experiencing Intimidation or Harrasment at School

2025 Strategies for Success Survey - Carlsbad Municipal Schools



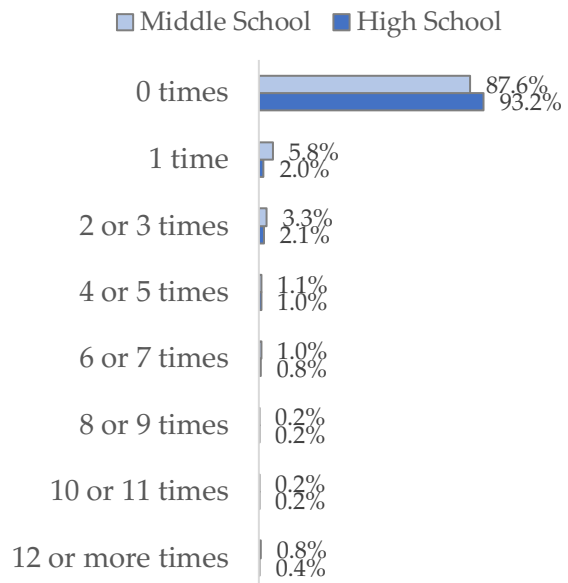
Most Students Reported Never Hearing About a Student Bringing a Weapon to School

2025 Strategies for Success Survey - Carlsbad Municipal Schools



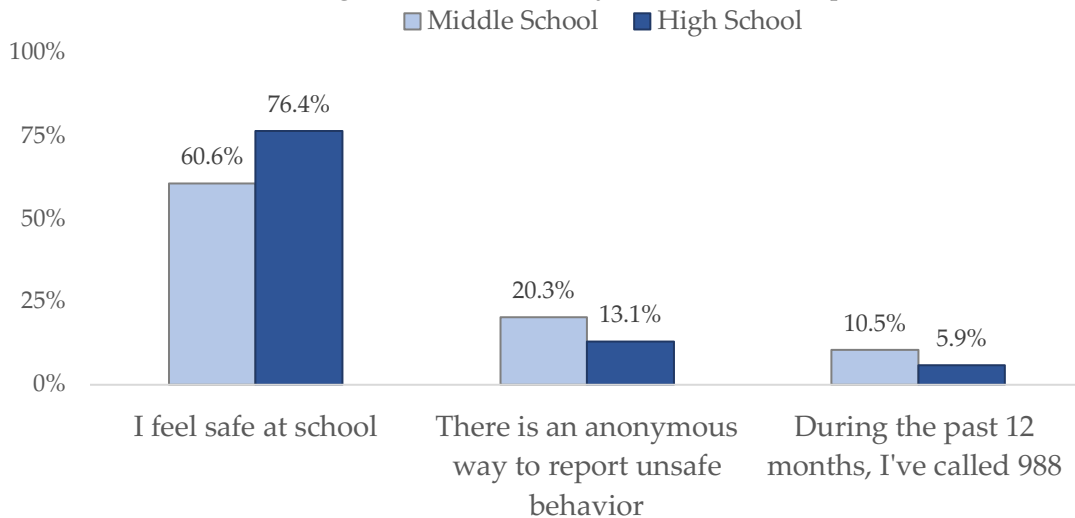
Most Students Reported Never Being Threatened with a Weapon on School Property

2025 Strategies for Success Survey - Carlsbad Municipal Schools



Most Middle and High School Students Reported Feeling Safe at School but Fewer Reported Knowing About an Anonymous Way to Report Unsafe Behavior or Calling 988

2025 Strategies for Success Survey - Carlsbad Municipal Schools



2025 Strategies for Success – Respondent Demographics Carlsbad Municipal Schools

School	Number of Surveys
Carlsbad High School	1105
Carlsbad Early College High School	193
Eddy Alternative High School	14
Alta Vista	622
P. R. Leyva	752
*Unanswered	18

Surveys by Grade	6 th	7 th	8 th	9 th	10 th	11 th	12 th	Total
Middle School	479	483	423					1,385
High School				396	328	272	323	1,319

Carlsbad SFS 2025	Middle School		High School	
	#	Mean Age	#	Mean Age
N	1,376	12.5	1,315	15.7
Gender	#	%	#	%
Male	656	47.7%	671	51.0%
Female	685	49.8%	597	45.4%
Non-binary, genderfluid, other	35	2.5%	47	3.6%
Race/Ethnicity*				
Asian	29	2.1%	46	3.5%
Black	81	5.9%	76	5.8%
Hispanic	890	64.7%	900	68.4%
Native American	151	11.0%	93	7.1%
Pacific Islander	13	0.9%	14	1.1%
White	431	31.3%	468	35.6%
Other	129	9.4%	19	1.4%
Identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or questioning	203	14.8%	171	13.0%

*Students could check all that apply. Not all participants selected their age, gender, race/ethnicity, and sexual orientation.

Thank You!

We would like to THANK everyone who played a role in helping us collect these data.

- All the **students** who took the time to answer the questions honestly;
- All the **teachers** who helped give instructions to students on completing the survey, took time out of their busy days, and gave up precious instruction time; and
- The **school administration and staff** who supported the data collection and want to use the findings to plan, implement, and evaluate programming.