

Strategies for Success
Youth Survey Results for 2023
Carlsbad Municipal Schools

The Strategies for Success (SFS) survey was collected online from middle and high school students across the Carlsbad Municipal Schools in March of 2023. **A total of 1,120 middle school students completed the SFS survey and 1,119 high school students completed the survey, for a total of 2,239 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, and perceptions of risk for using substances in the community and school. In addition to monitoring outcomes, the data help the community plan the most effective and needed prevention services.

Positive Findings

- + Middle school substance use decreased for alcohol, e-cigarettes, and marijuana. High school substance use stayed similar to last year for most substances.
- + Students offered resiliency factors such as wanting to take care of their health, to avoid negative consequences or get in trouble, and to protect their future plans as reasons for not drinking or using other using substances.
- + More than 80% of students have an adult who believes they will be a success, and at least one friend their own age who cares about them.
- + More than 90% of students say their parent/guardian knows who they are with and what they are doing when not at home.
- + High school perception of the risk of using marijuana weekly increased from 45% to 49.3%.
- + Middle school and high school students report decreases in getting alcohol from parents and parties since last year.

Troubling Findings

- Students over-estimate peer substance use, rather than realizing the majority of students are not using substances.
- High school substance use increased very slightly for most substances but increased significantly for cigarettes 3.2% in 2022 compared to 6.1% in 2023).
- High school students report increases in prescription painkillers (for any reason) and unprescribed stimulant use.
- Perception of harm decreased (undesired) for cigarette use, misuse of prescription painkillers, e-cigs, and alcohol use.
- Perception of peer disapproval of substance use is lowest (compared to parents and self).
- Nearly 17% 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.
- Students are most likely to access alcohol at parties and un-related adults.
- Youth access marijuana by purchasing or receiving it from others, at parties, and adult family members.

- Youth report using marijuana to cope with stress or anxiety, to help them sleep, and to have fun with friends. Little understanding exists regarding the impacts of marijuana use on the adolescent brain.
- Students are reporting concerning levels of mental distress and suicide ideation. These mental health risks compound or increase substance use.

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.
- Encourage students to think about going to college or technical school after they graduate high school.
- Tell students you believe in them.
- Show interest in students' 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://youth.gov/youth-topics/substance-abuse/risk-and-protective-factors-substance-use-abuse-and-dependence) <https://youth.gov/youth-topics/substance-abuse/risk-and-protective-factors-substance-use-abuse-and-dependence>

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

Thank You!

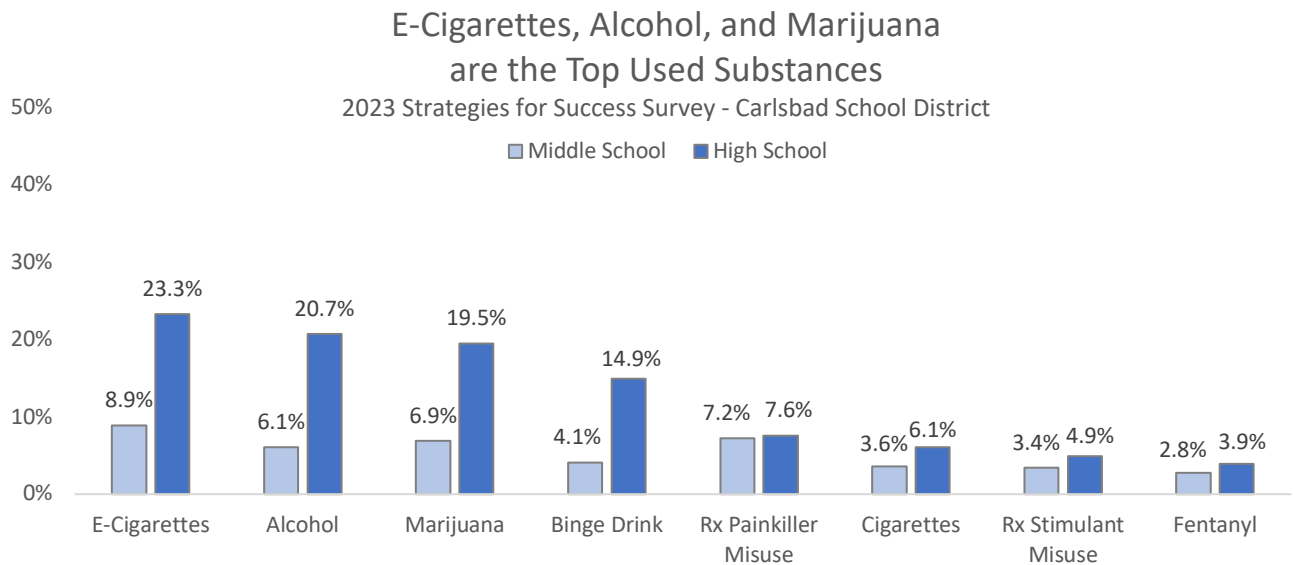
We would like to THANK everyone who played a role in helping us collect these data.

- 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 day, 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.

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
Positive changes since 2022	E-Cig use decreased from 11.6% Alcohol use decreased from 8.5% Marijuana use decreased from 8.1%	Alcohol use decreased slightly from 21.1%



Boys

High school boys are more likely to use every substance than high school girls.



Girls

Middle school girls are more likely to use e-cigs, alcohol, marijuana, Rx, and cigarettes than middle school boys.

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

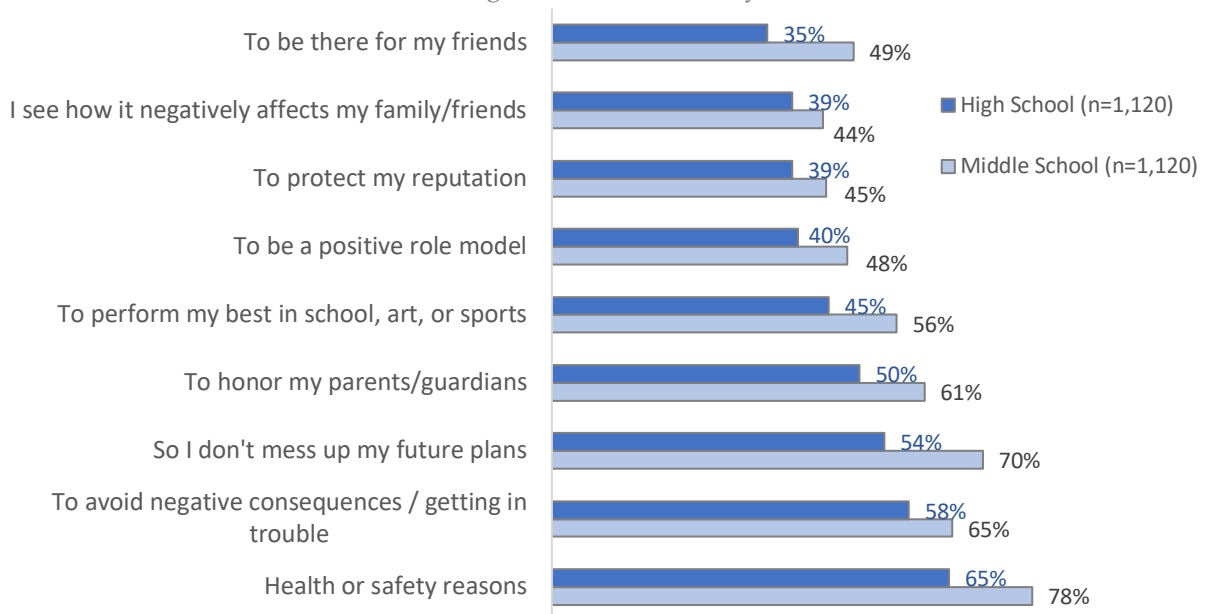
Prevention Focuses on the Positive

Most students are not using alcohol or other substances. 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 choose not to drink or use other substances.

If you choose not to drink alcohol or use other substances, what would be your main reasons?

Students say health reasons, their future plans, and other negative consequences keep them from using substances

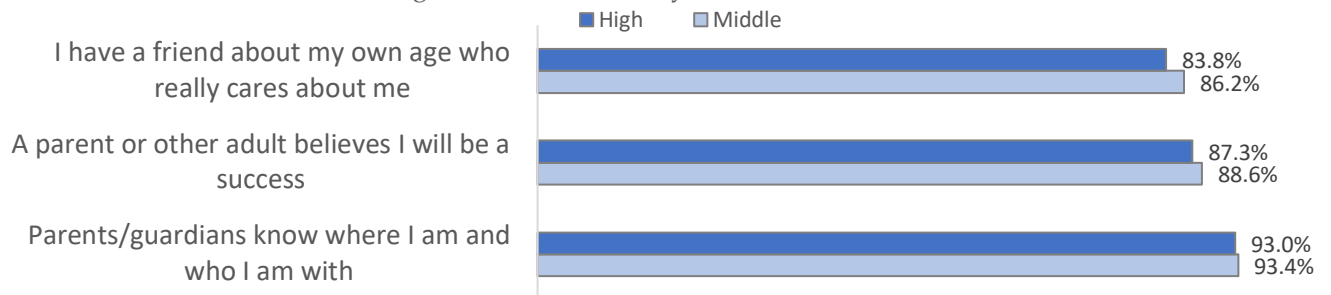
2023 Strategies for Success Survey - Carlsbad



Most Students have Supportive Friends and Adults in their Life

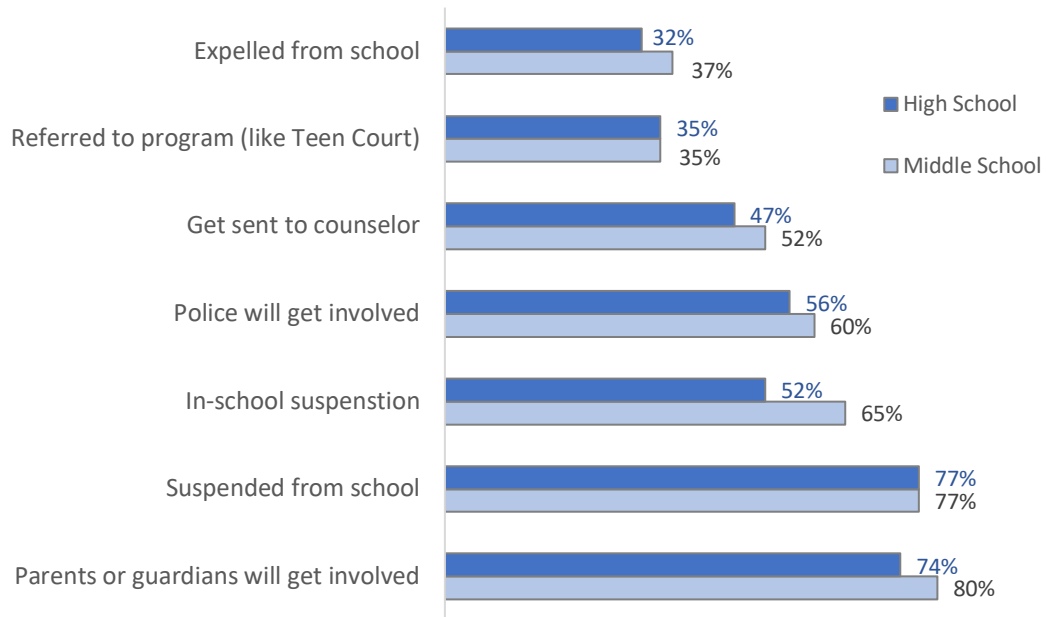
% who said "mostly true" or "very true"

2023 Strategies for Success Survey - Carlsbad School District



What are the consequences if you get caught using substances on school campus?
Most students think their parents will be involved and/or they will be suspended if they get caught using substances

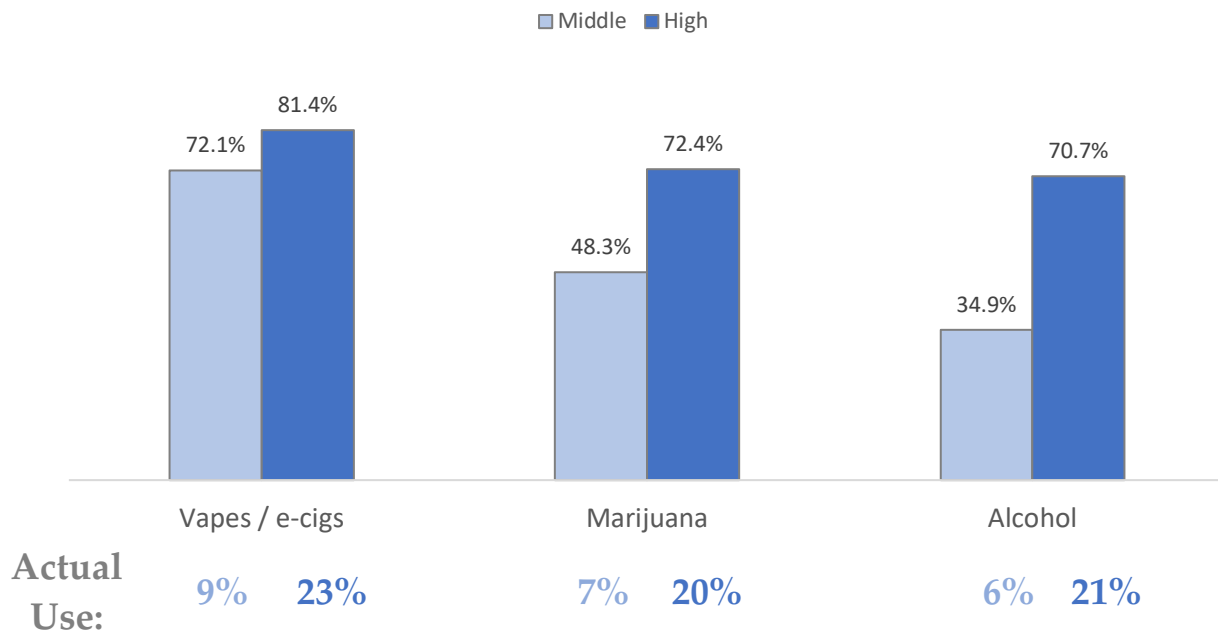
2023 Strategies for Success Survey - Carlsbad



Most Students (especially high schoolers) have Inflated Perceptions of Substance Use Among their Peers

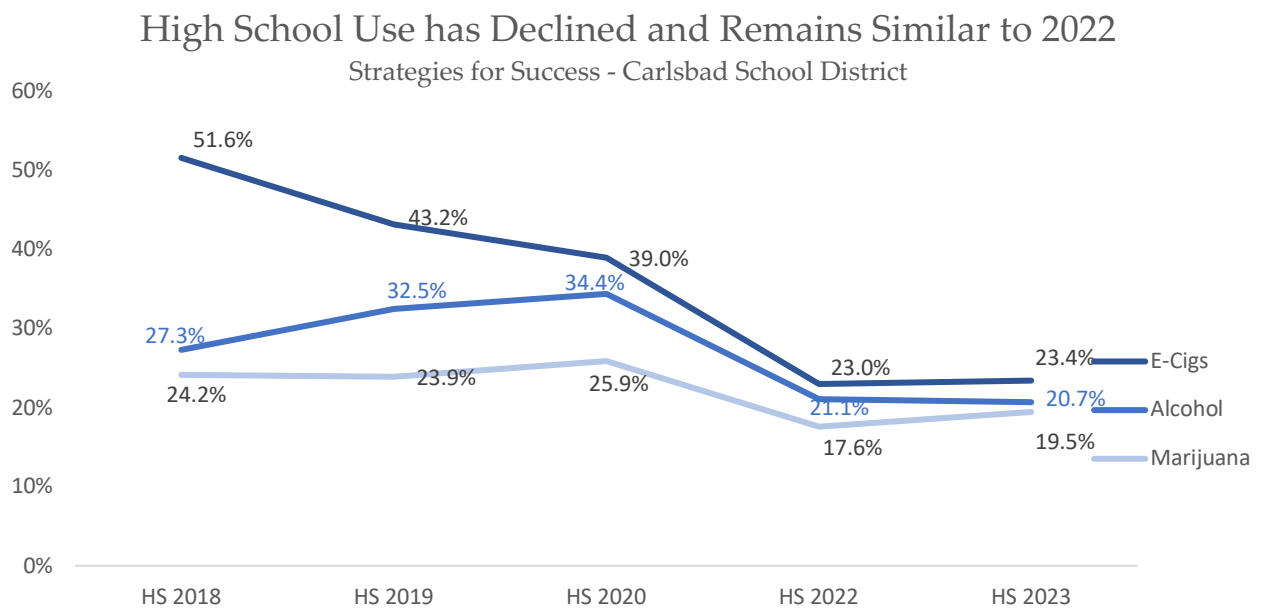
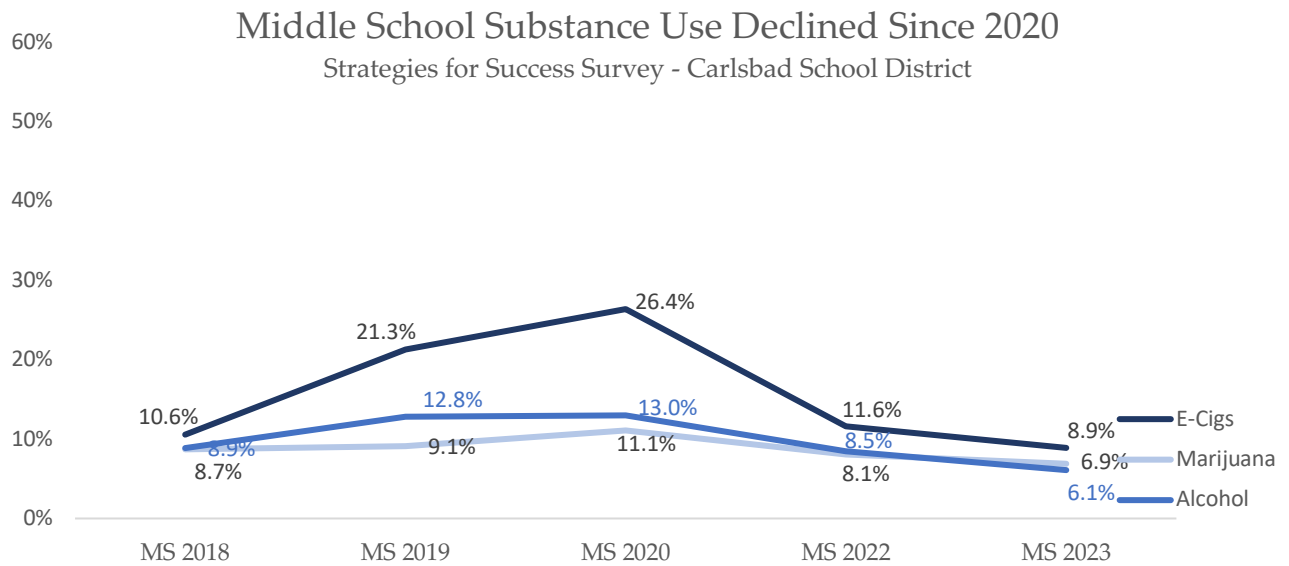
% who said more than 40% of their peers used each substance

2023 Strategies for Success Survey - Carlsbad School District



Trends Among the Top Three Substances Show Reductions

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

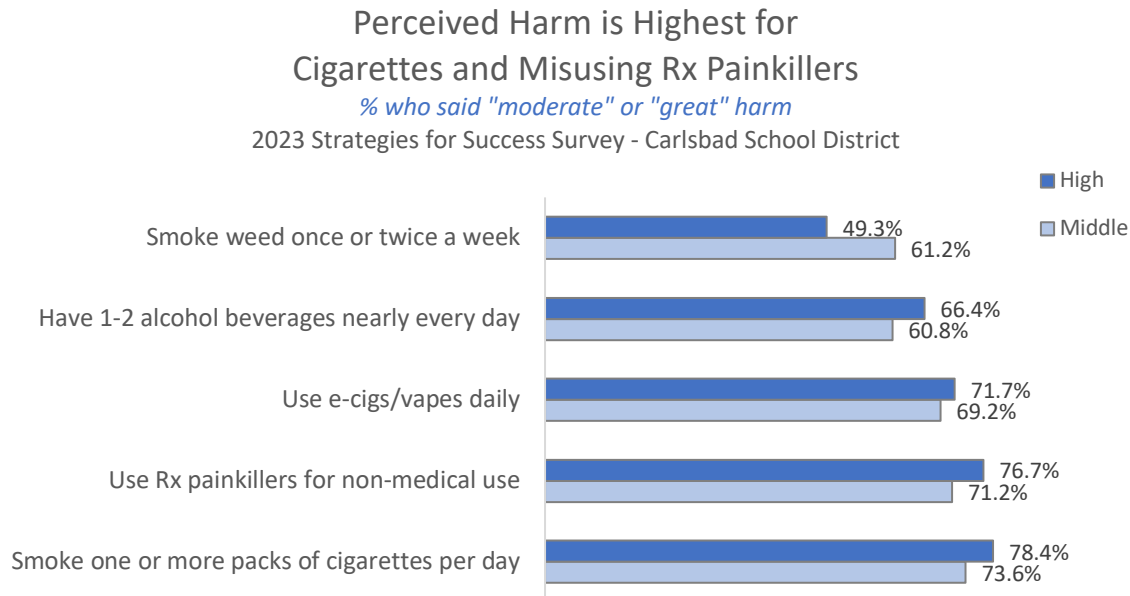


High School Substance Use (past 30-days)	U.S. YRBS 2021	New Mexico YRRS 2021	Carlsbad SFS 2023
E-Cigarettes	18.0%	25.3%	23.4%
Alcohol	15.8%	19.5%	20.7%
Marijuana	22.7%	20.3%	19.5%

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

Perception of Harm from Using Substances

A set of questions on the SFS 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.



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

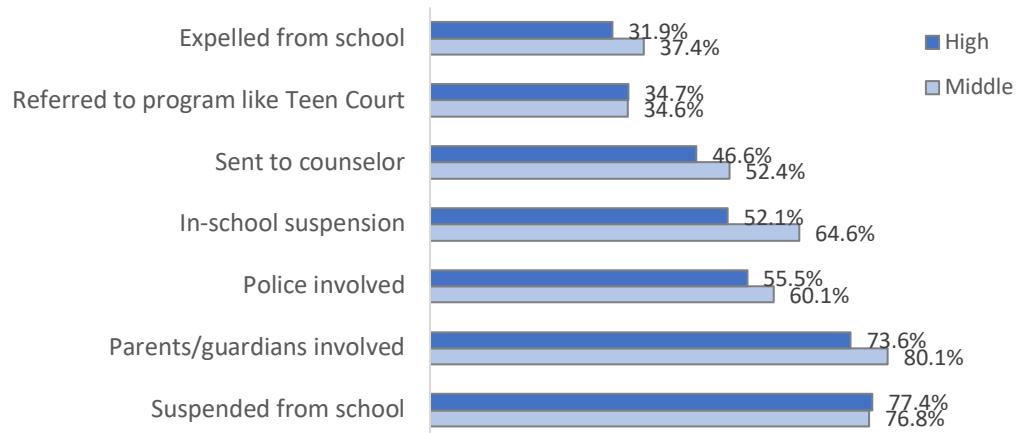
Perceived Risk of Harm <i>% who said moderate or great risk</i>	Middle			High		
	2020	2022	2023	2020	2022	2023
Smoking marijuana once or twice a week	69.9%	62.6%	61.2%	46.4%	45.0%	49.3%
Having 1-2 alcoholic beverages nearly every day	79.4%	66.0%	60.8%	73.1%	67.6%	66.4%
Using e-cigarettes daily	79.0%	72.4%	69.2%	71.7%	73.1%	71.7%

Perception of harm decreased for all items (undesired) except high school perception of the risk of using marijuana weekly increased from 45% to 49.3%.

Perceived Consequences of Use on Campus

Students think they will be suspended and their parents will be called if they are caught using substances on campus

2023 Strategies for Success Survey - Carlsbad School District



Perception of Disapproval of Substance Use

Youth were asked “how wrong” they think parents and peers would think it is for someone their age to drink alcohol or use weed 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 is lower than personal and parental disapproval.

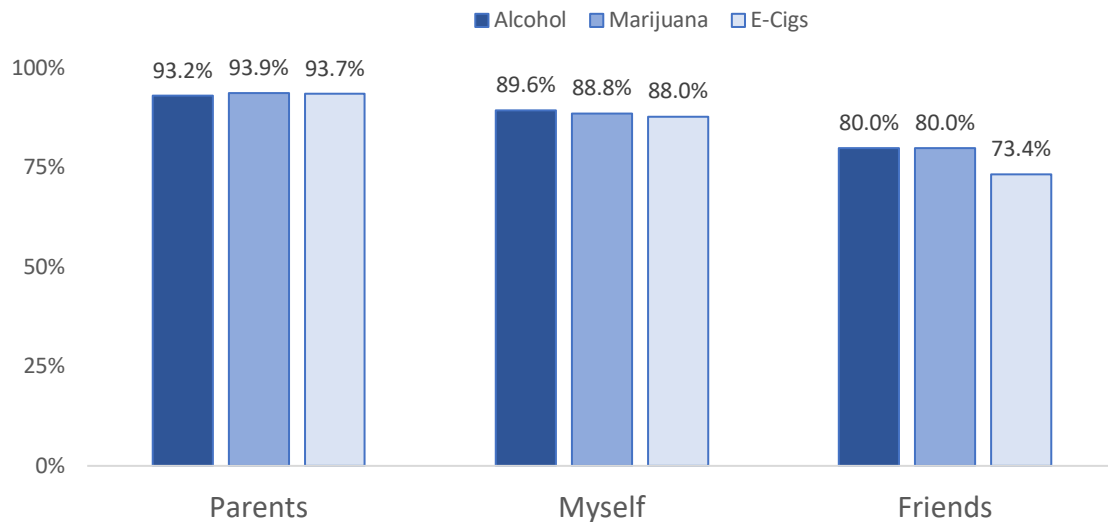
Alcohol	Middle			High		
	2020	2022	2023	2020	2022	2023
My <u>parents</u> feel it is wrong for me to drink regularly	90.6%	92.1%	93.2%	82.8%	86.4%	85.0%
<u>I think</u> it is wrong for someone my age to drink regularly	85.4%	88.1%	89.6%	66.4%	68.8%	77.8%
My <u>peers</u> think it is wrong for someone my age to drink alcohol	--	80.4%	80.0%	--	47.0%	61.7%

Marijuana *new in 2022*	Middle		High	
	2022	2023	2022	2023
My <u>parents</u> feel it is wrong for me to use weed/marijuana regularly	93.0%	93.9%	86.4%	84.7%
<u>I think</u> it is wrong for someone my age to use weed/marijuana regularly	85.5%	88.8%	63.5%	72.6%
<u>My peers</u> think it is wrong for someone my age use weed/marijuana regularly	78.8%	80.0%	42.3%	55.9%

Middle School Students' Perceived Parental Disapproval of Substance use is Highest

2023 Carlsbad Strategies for Success Survey

% who said it is "wrong" or "very wrong" for them to use each substance

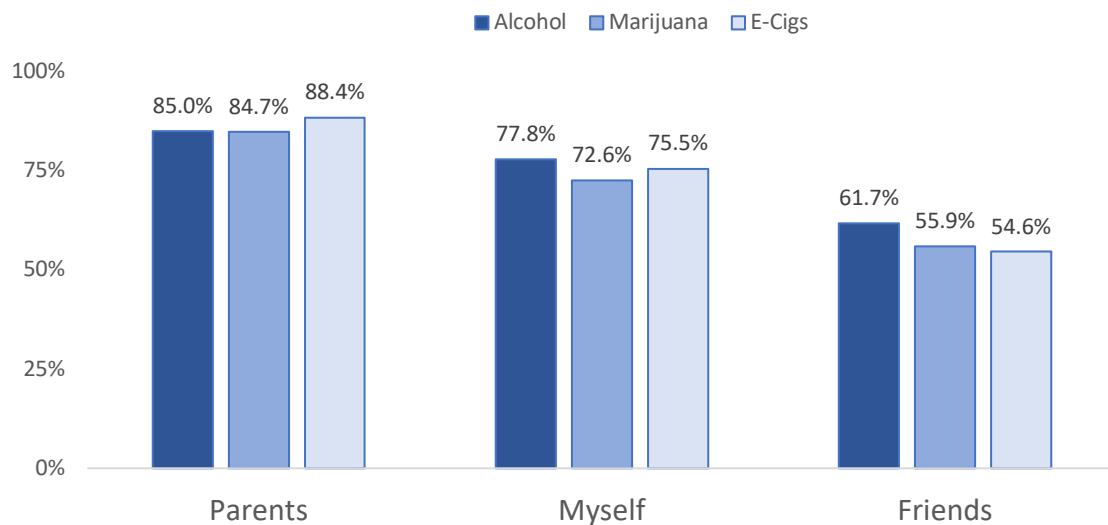


How wrong would each person/group think it is for you to use each substance?

High School Students' Perceived Parental Disapproval of Substance use is Highest, Peers is Lowest

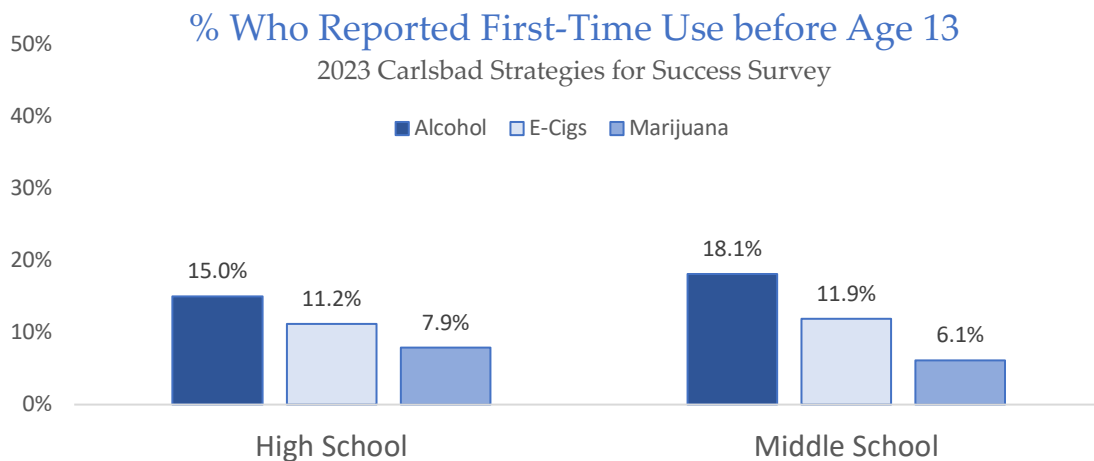
2023 Carlsbad Strategies for Success Survey

% who said it is "wrong" or "very wrong" for them to use each substance



Early Initiation & Access

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* 2021 YRRS/YRBS	New Mexico		U.S.	
	Alcohol	Marijuana	Alcohol	Marijuana
Middle School	10.6%	2.9%	--	--
High School	17.8%	11.1%	15.0%	4.9%

*Use before age 11 (Middle school) and before age 13 (high school)

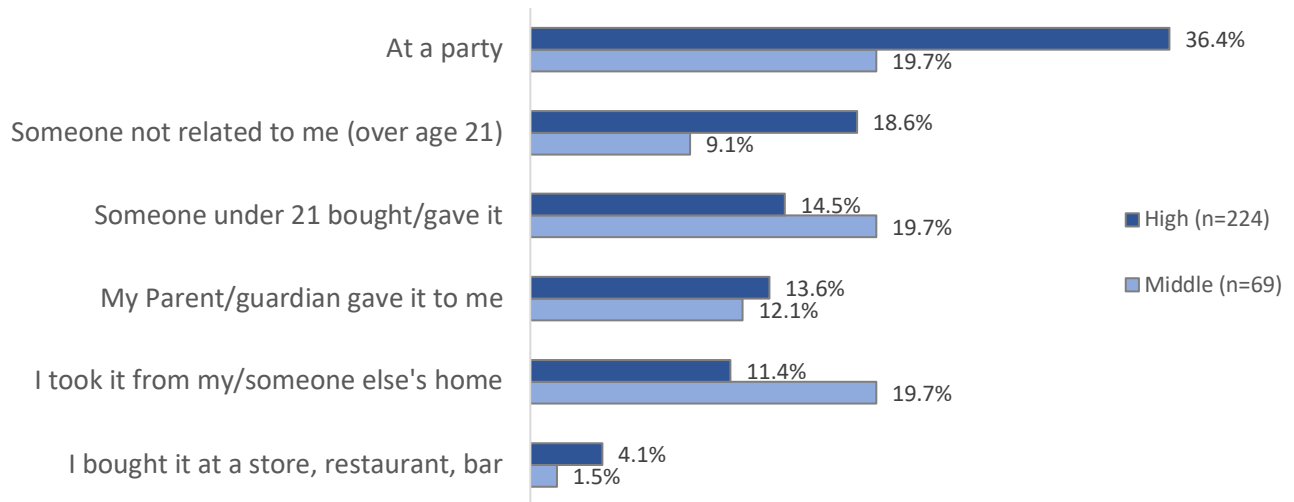
³ Squeglia, L.M.; Tapert, S.F.; Sullivan, E.V.; Jacobus, J.; Meloy, M.J.; Rohlfing, T.; and Pfefferbaum, A. Brain development in heavy-drinking adolescents. *American Journal of Psychiatry* 172(6):531–542, 2015. [PMID: 25982660](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/25982660/)

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>

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.

Youth are Most Likely to Get Alcohol through Social Sources: Parties and Someone Not Related (both under and over 21)

2023 Strategies for Access Survey - Carlsbad School District
% among current users



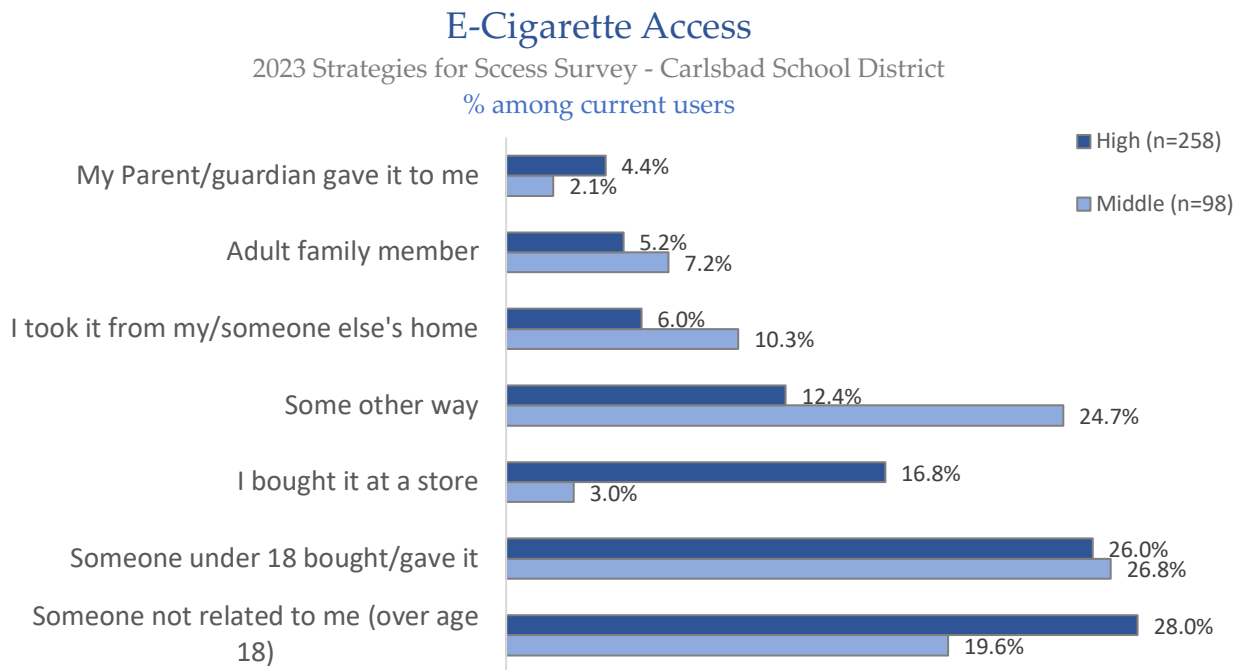
The most common sources of alcohol among high school students includes parties and unrelated adults. Middle school youth are more likely to report taking it from home or from someone under 21 than high school youth.

Alcohol Access	Parent Guardian			At a Party		
	2020	2022	2023	2020	2022	2023
Middle School	15%	21%	12%	36%	38%	20%
High School	13%	16%	14%	45%	48%	36%

Middle school and high school students report decreases in getting alcohol from both parents and parties since last year.

Youth E-Cigarette Access

It is illegal for anyone under age 21 to possess or use tobacco products, including e-cigarettes or vapes. The Strategies for Success survey asked about access to vapes for the first time in 2023. Most youth get vapes from someone under 18, or someone not related who is over 18. Twenty percent (20%) of high school vape users report buying it themselves in a store.

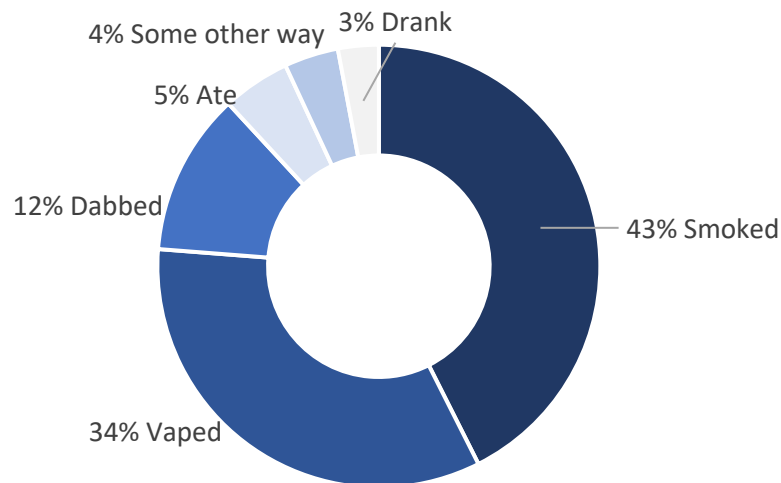


Marijuana Use and Access

Marijuana use 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.

Smoking Marijuana is Most Common Consumption Method

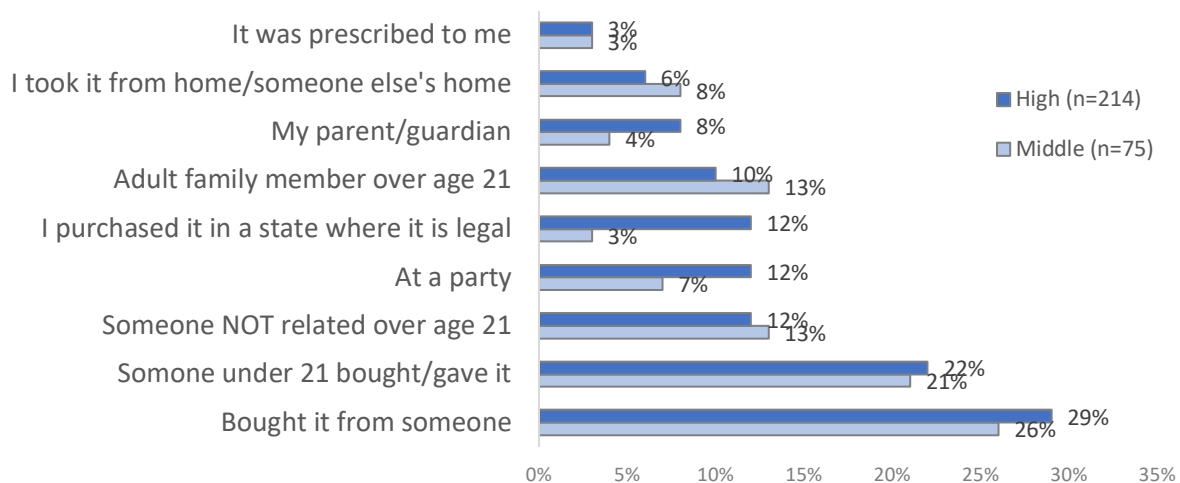
2023 Strategies for Success Survey - High School - Carlsbad School District
Current Users n=214



Middle school youth who used marijuana (n=98) were most likely to smoke it (45%), or vape it (38%), followed by dab (9%), some other way (7%), then ate it (2%).

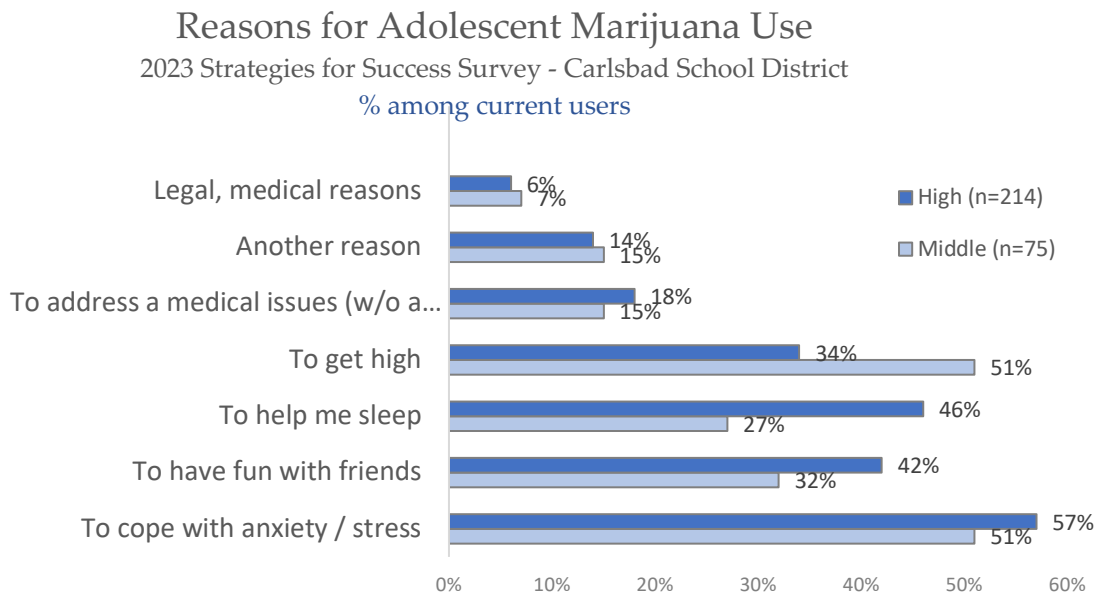
Youth Usually Access Marijuana from Social Sources

2023 Strategies for Success Survey - Carlsbad School District



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.

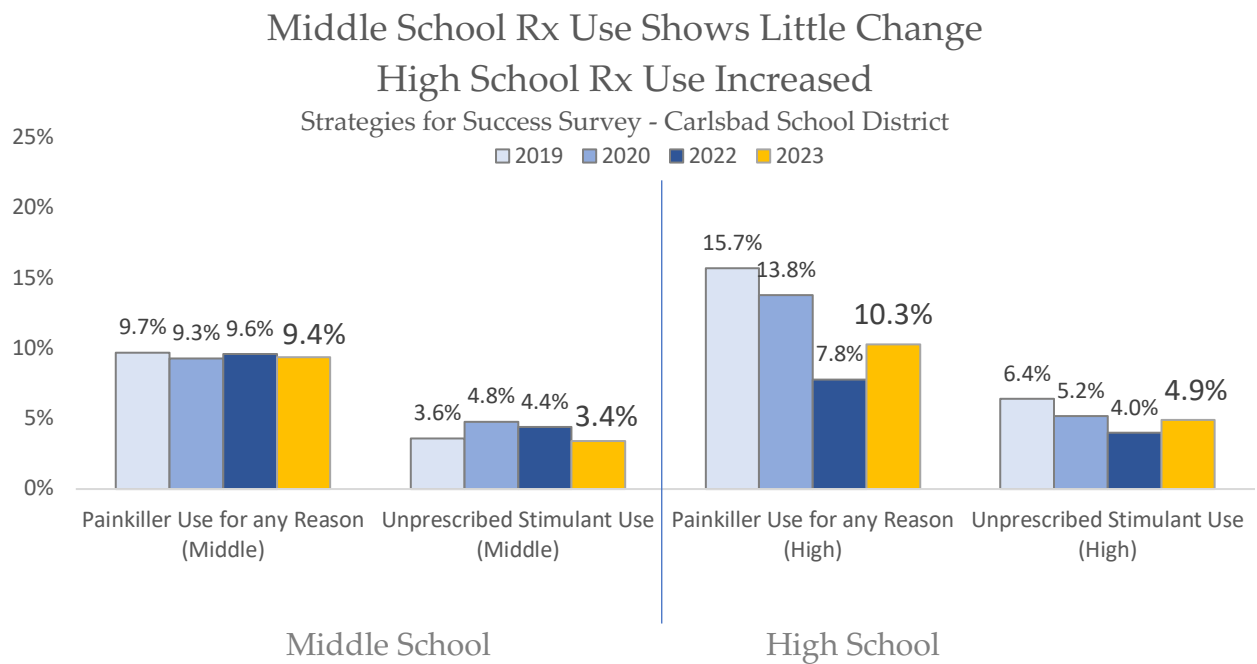
⁶ Grubner SA, Sagar KA, Dahlgren MK, Racine M, Lukas SE. (2012). Age of Onset of Marijuana Use and Executive Functioning. Psychology of Addictive Behaviors, 2012 Sep;26(3):496-506.

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.

7.6% of High Schoolers reported misusing a prescription painkiller in 2023.

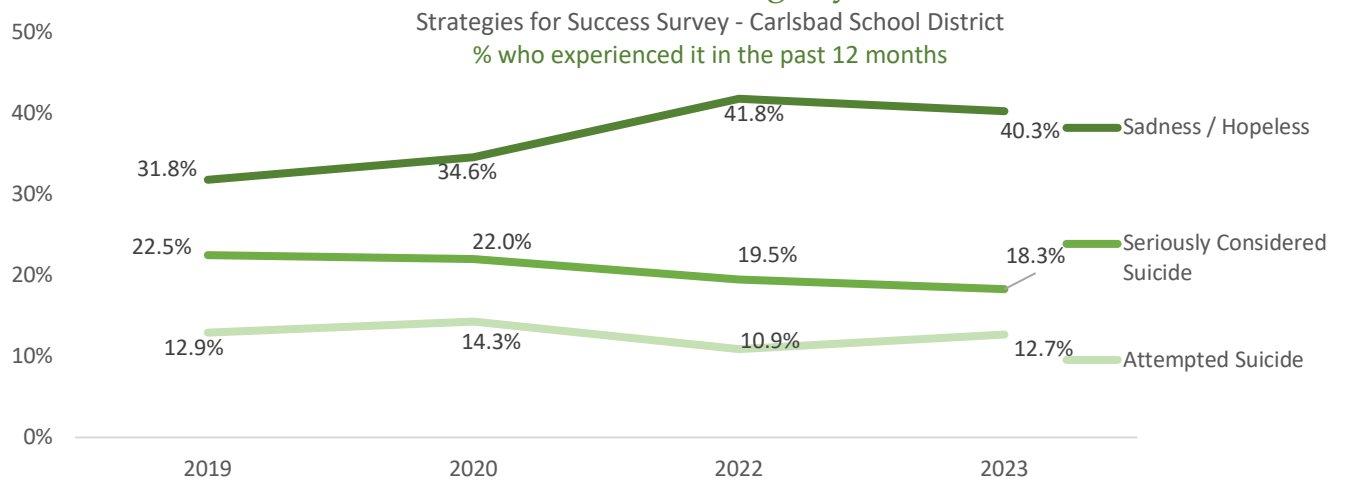
7.2% of Middle Schoolers reported misusing a prescription painkiller in 2023.



Mental Health Concerns

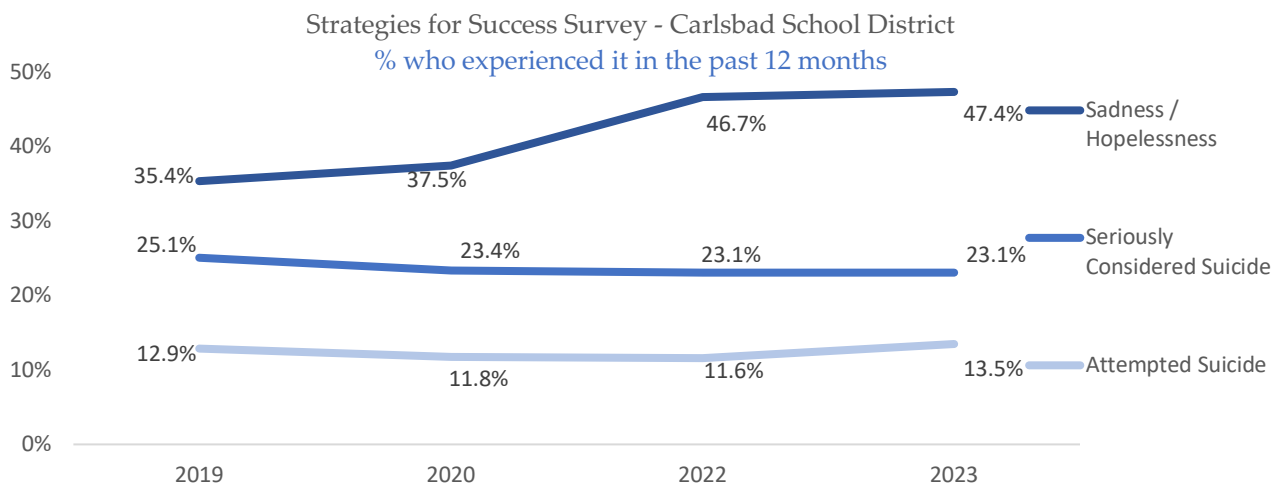
Mental health is closely linked with physical health, success in school, and other important youth outcomes. The graphs show the percentage of students who report **feeling sad or hopeless almost every day for two weeks or more that it kept them from doing regular activities**, and those who seriously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

Middle School Sadness/Hopelessness and Considering Suicide Decrease Slightly



Mental Health Risks Carlsbad SFS 2023	Seriously Considered Suicide		Attempted Suicide	
	#	%	#	%
Middle School	205	18.3%	143	12.7%
High School	254	23.1%	149	13.5%

High School Youth Report Slight Increases in Mental Health Risk Factors

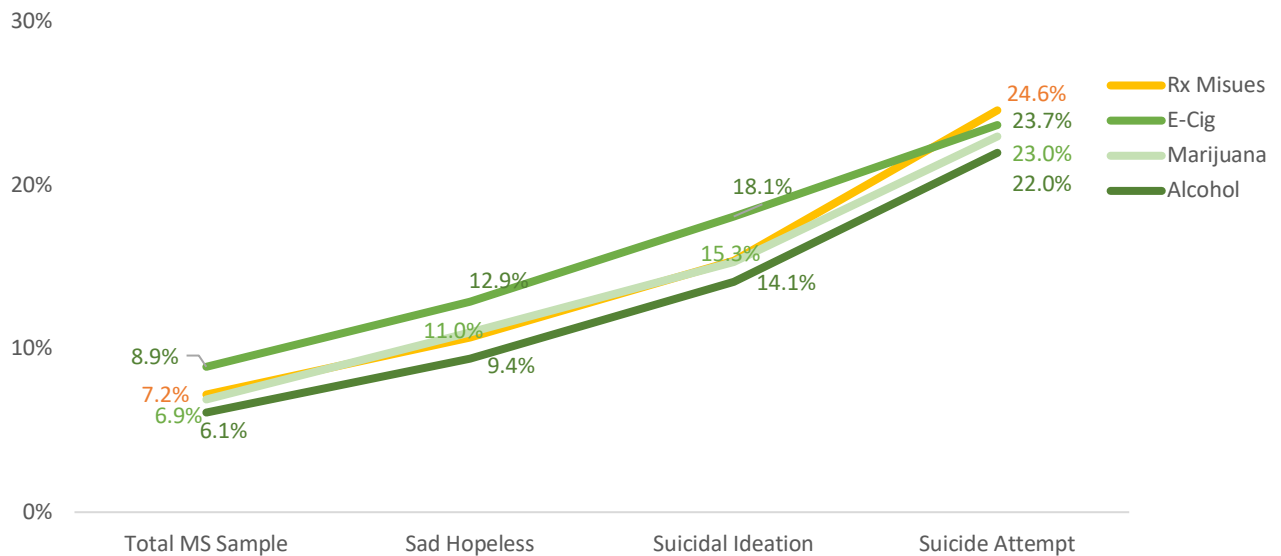


Mental Health and Substance Use Overlap

The survey asks students if they experienced these mental health concerns in the past 12 months. The graphs below only include the students who report having the mental health issue, not the entire survey sample. They demonstrate how substance use and mental health issues co-exist, and students who use substances are more likely to report mental health issues.

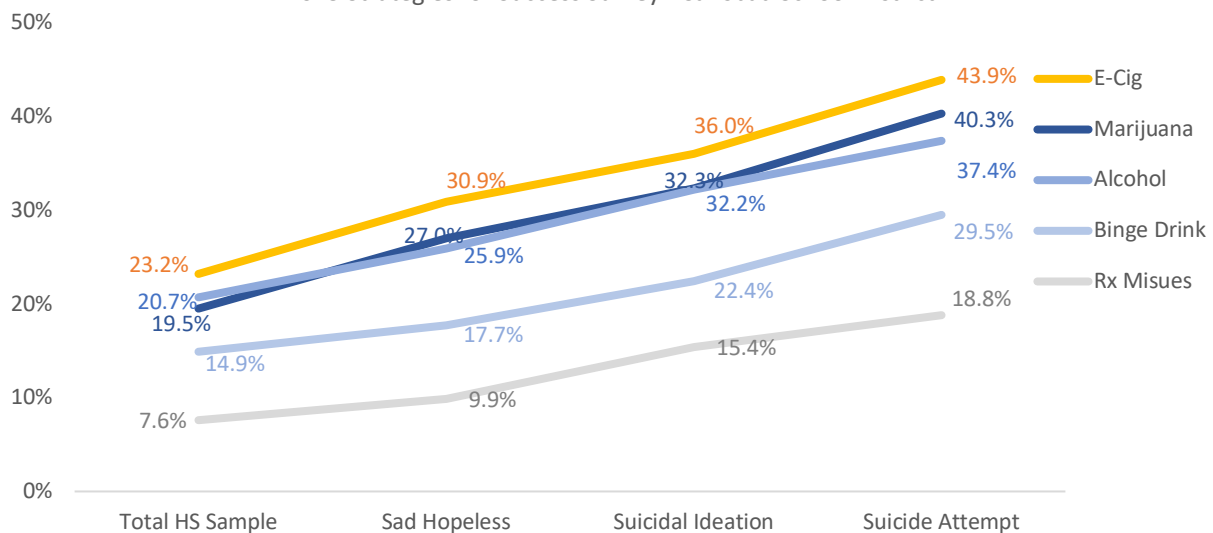
Middle School Substance Use Correlates with Severity of Mental Health Risks

2023 Strategies for Success Survey - Carlsbad School District



High School Substance Use Correlates with Severity of Mental Health Risks

2023 Strategies for Success Survey - Carlsbad School District



2023 Strategies for Success – Respondent Demographics Carlsbad Independent School District

School	Number of Surveys
Carlsbad High School	926
Carlsbad Early College High School	126
Carlsbad Enrichment Center	53
Eddy Alternative	4
Alta Vista	483
P. R. Leyva	581
	2,239

Surveys by Grade	6 th	7 th	8 th	9 th	10 th	11 th	12 th	Total
Middle School	381	321	420					1,120
High School				375	292	199	253	1,119

Not all students selected a grade

Carlsbad SFS 2023	Middle School		High School	
	#	Mean Age	#	Mean Age
N	1,120	12.9	1,119	15.9
Gender	#	%	#	%
Male	525	46.8%	516	46.3%
Female	517	46.1%	541	48.5%
Non-Binary or Genderfluid, other	75	6.7%	58	5.2%
Race/Ethnicity*				
Asian	34	3.0%	43	3.8%
Black	79	7.1%	75	6.7%
Hispanic	716	63.9%	699	62.5%
Native American	83	7.4%	63	5.6%
White	392	35.0%	431	38.5%
Other	69	6.2%	47	4.2%
Identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, or Questioning	194	17.3%	222	19.8%

*Students could check all that apply

Data Limitations and Considerations

Due to the COVID pandemic, the Strategies for Success Survey was collected in the fall of 2019, then not again until the spring of 2022. Substantial disruptions to daily life and learning during the COVID pandemic, and stay-at-home orders may have influenced youth well-being in unknown ways and may still be impacting youth mental health and substance use. Data from these times may be skewed in unknown ways, therefore changes reflected in the data (positive or negative) must be interpreted with caution.