

**Middlesex County Substance Abuse Action Council**  
**2017 Epidemiological Update**  
*(Mini-Epi Report)*

**SOURCE MATERIAL**

The source material for this report came from Search Institute student survey data supplied by Local Prevention Councils in Middlesex County. Eight high schools are represented, surveying their students over a time span of four years. The eight include regional high schools that serve multiple towns.

For the purpose of comparison we pooled data from 2014 and 2015 (“past”) and compared it to data from surveys done in 2016 and 2017 (“present”). The aggregate number of students responding to survey questions within each time frame differs from question to question for two reasons: (1) some school systems used an abbreviated version of the survey that gives only “four core measures,” and (2) some schools surveyed their students in one time frame but not another. Thus, data was drawn from a high of 3,911 students for some questions (e.g., past-30-day drinking), and a low of 2,057 students for others (e.g., recent gambling). Still, a sample of even 2,000 students is very reliable considering the population of Middlesex County.

The one exception to the 2014-2015 and 2016-2017 rule was Middletown. Because of its large student body it was important that we include their 2016 survey in our “present” data. To provide similar data for “past,” however, we used their 2012 survey, as there were none in the 2014-2015 time frame.

Included in this report is data on alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, cocaine, and heroin use. Other high risk behaviors included are gambling and suicide attempts. We added the questions about sex, technology use, and school/community climate at the request of coalition members.

**METHOD**

The answers were weighted by sample size. The largest school, yielding about 2,000 high school surveys, carried more than three times the weight of a school of 600; this gave us a more reliable reading for “students throughout Middlesex County.”

Within each school we averaged affirmative answers from 9<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade students. Looking at affirmative answers made it easier to compare various high-risk behaviors. The chart below defines data considered “affirmative.”

Question	Affirmative Answer
(84) Past 30 day drinking	Any answer except 0
(86) Past 30 day smoking	Any answer except Never or Not at all
(87) Past 30 day marijuana use	Yes
(88) Past 30 day Rx abuse	Yes
(85) Binge drinking - past 2 weeks	Any answer except None
(101) Cocaine, ever	Any answer except 0
(112) Heroin - past 12 months	Any answer except 0
(144) Gambled - past 12 months	Any answer except 0
(108) Suicide attempt, ever	Any answer except No
(109) Sexual intercourse, ever	Any answer except No
(151) Use Technology	3 - 4 or more hours per day
(115) Adults listen to me	Strongly Agree + Agree
(52) Students care about me	Strongly Agree + Agree
(27) Teachers care about me	Strongly Agree + Agree

## RESULTS

**The work of Middlesex County coalitions is working!** Favorable movement below is shaded in pink (a decrease in risky behavior and increase in assets). Unfavorable movement is yellow. Only heroin and suicide attempts fell into the latter category, and in each case, an incremental rise of less than 1% made them statistically insignificant.

Behavior	Number of students surveyed 2014-2015*/ 2016-2017	Percent Using or Answering Affirmatively 2014-2015*	Percent Using or Answering Affirmatively 2016-2017	Low to High Percentages
(84) Past 30 day drinking	3,911 / 3,389	32.78	31.32	20.8 - 45.7

(86) Past 30 day smoking	3,911 / 3,389	8.97	5.93	1.9 - 10.4
(87) Past 30 day marijuana use	3,911 / 3,389	22.49	20.66	9.9 - 30.9
(88) Past 30 day Rx abuse	2,846 / 3,389	6.73	5.76	3.0 - 8.5
(85) Binge drinking - past 2 wks	3,911 / 2,957	20.64	18.81	11.3 - 31.5
(101) Cocaine, ever	3,911 / 2,957	6.19	6.17	2.8 - 9.5
(112) Heroin - past 12 months	3,911 / 2,957	3.82	3.94	0.8 - 6.8
(144) Gambled - past 12 mo.	3,911 / 2,957	16.3	15.8	12.0 - 19.7
(108) Suicide attempt, ever	3,911 / 2,957	12.45	13	9.3 - 18.25
(109) Sexual intercourse, ever	3,911 / 2,957	33.24	30.8	22.8 - 40.5
(151) Use Technology	3,911 / 2,957	61.8	59.33	53.5 - 73.7
(115) Adults listen to me	3,911 / 2,957	36.18	39.45	29.5 - 47.5
(52) Students care about me	3,911 / 2,957	54.78	56.94	44.8 - 71.5
(27) Teachers care about me	3,911 / 2,957	49.77	56.73	40.8 - 69.3
* Excepting Middletown High School, which was 2012				
<i>Numbering of questions is from the 2017 survey; older surveys may have slightly different numbering.</i>				

In certain drug categories there is a notably wide range in student behavior from school to school. Tobacco and cocaine show five-fold differences from the school with the least use, to the one with the highest. Heroin is nearly seven-fold greater in the highest-using school compared to the lowest. The most ubiquitous drug, alcohol, is used by 20.8% of high school youth at one school and by 45.7% at another.

**To make best use of this data table please reference your own survey results.** For example, if 30% of your high school teens reported past-30-day drinking in a 2016 survey, you are close to the Middlesex County average of 31.32%. You can also see that your community is close to the median (about half-way between 20.8% and 45.7%).

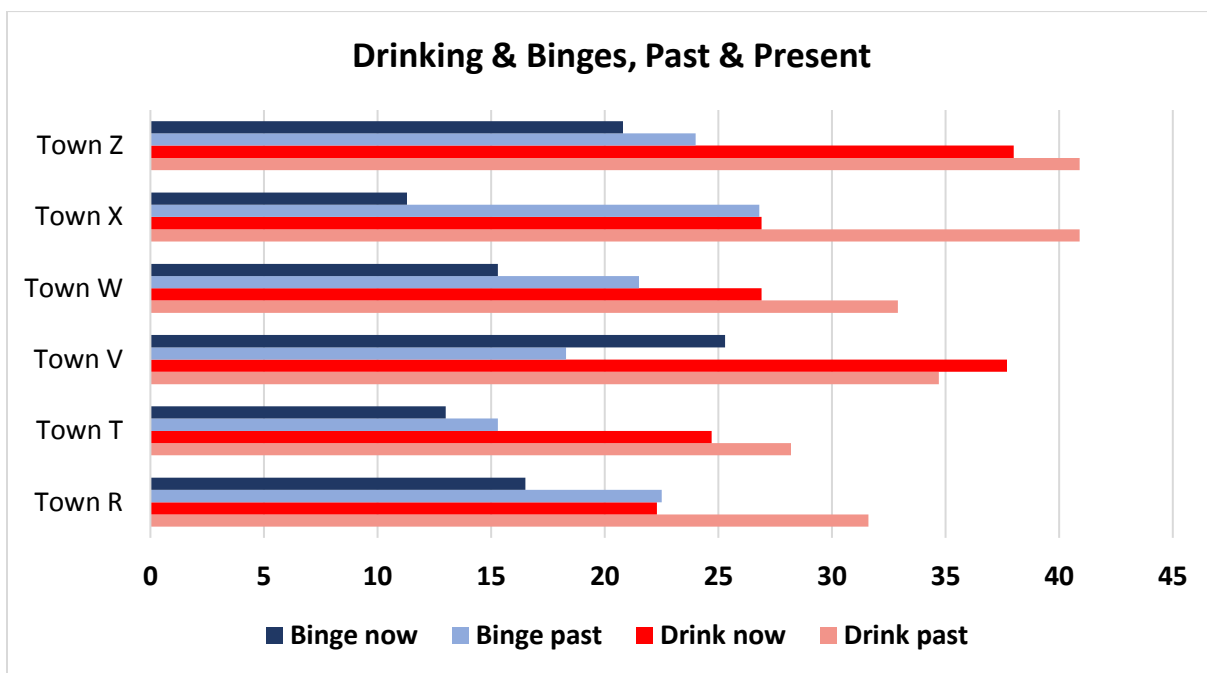
## ANALYSIS

Over the past eight years we've seen a gradual downward trend in "past-30-day drinking" data. This was mostly driven by teens who reported using alcohol once or twice monthly; behavior probably linked to partying and other social events. The binge drinking rates, however, remained stable. Problem drinkers were becoming statistically more numerous among all teen drinkers. MCSAAC interpreted that to mean that coalitions' prevention work was reaching the majority of teens – the average kids who

only occasionally drank – but having little effect on those at highest risk for a lifetime of alcohol abuse.

Fortunately, this is changing! The current data tells us that overall drinking rates continue to decline AND that binge drinking has dropped as well. Six school districts provided data for this analysis; six schools measured past-30-day and binge drinking in *both* time frames (14/15 and 16/17). This provided an ample number of students to compare and contrast. The chart below shows 14/15 in pale shades (“past”) and 16/17 in dark colors (“present”).

In five communities, the dark blue and red lines are shorter than the pale ones, indicating a drop in both past-30-day and binge drinking. Only in Town V do we find the reverse. Prevention messages are reaching the more problematic drinkers as well as the average teens. We hope to see this trend continue.



MCSAAC staff was asked to tabulate a few asset questions from the survey. For example, how much do teachers and students care about the student answering the survey? Do adults in the student’s community listen to their concerns? A few interesting correlations between high risk behaviors and assets appeared. They are presented in the tables below.

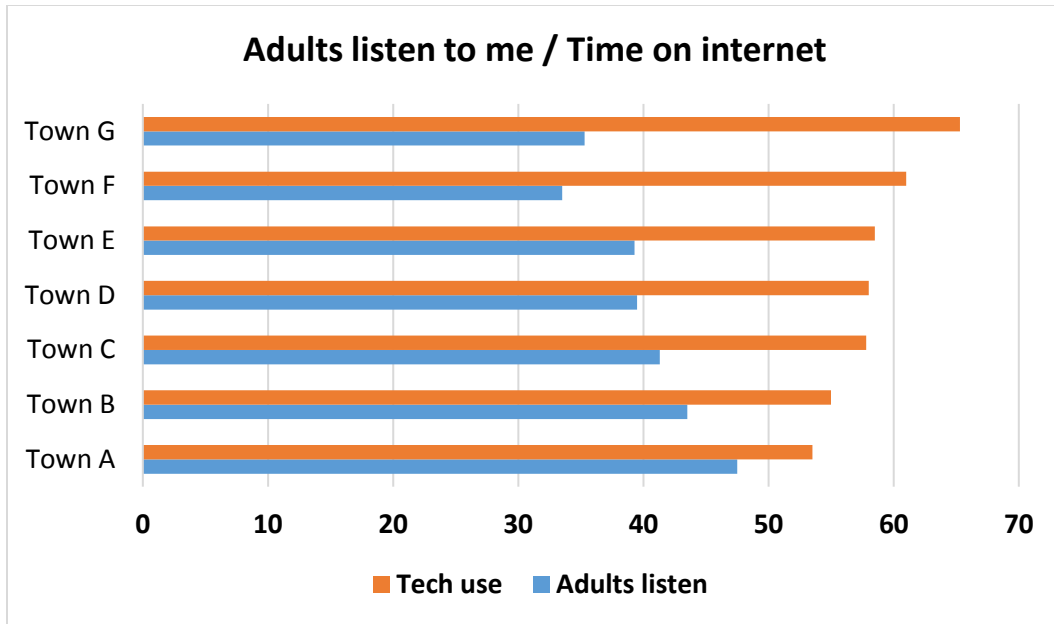
The town with the greatest number of teens who felt that other students cared about them also experienced the lowest rate of suicide attempts (Town L). The town with the lowest number of students feeling cared for experienced the highest suicide attempt rate (Town R). Within those extremes there was some variation, but these two indicators of student well-being did tend to correlate.

**PERCEPTION OF STUDENT CARE FOR ME, AND SUICIDE ATTEMPTS**

<b>Community</b>	<b>Students Care</b>	<b>Suicide Attempt</b>
Town L	71.5	9.3
Town M	57.5	12.8
Town N	59.3	14
Town O	60.3	14.3
Town P	59	16.8
Town Q	58.3	17
Town R	44.8	18.25

In our society internet use seems to be going nowhere but up, but that’s not actually true of our teenagers. Middlesex County high school students indicated a somewhat lower “heavy use” of technology (defined as 3+ hours per day) in 2016-17 than they did in 2014-15. Heavy use dropped from 61.8 to 59.33 percent of high school students. This was encouraging.

There was a visible correlation between hours spent on the internet and the perception that adults in their community listen to students. The exception to the rule was Town F. The longer the blue line in the chart below (adults listen), the shorter the orange line (heavy use of technology). What we don’t know is: what is driving what? Does a lot of time spent online mean less time for real-life interaction with people in the community, or does the lack of meaningful interactions with adults drive teens to spend more time on the internet?



Over the years, MCSAAC has produced regional reports for Middlesex County based on survey results generously shared by local coalitions. This function is unfortunately coming to an end. We're sure that the strong ties between coalitions in our region, however, will keep information flowing!

In the meantime, you can find regional, state, and national youth data at these websites:

1. Monitoring the Future 2017 Survey Results

<https://www.drugabuse.gov/related-topics/trends-statistics/infographics/monitoring-future-2017-survey-results>

2. Reports and Tables from the 2016 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH)

<https://www.samhsa.gov/samhsa-data-outcomes-quality/major-data-collections/reports-detailed-tables-2016-NSDUH>

3. Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS)

<https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/data/yrbs/index.htm>

4. Connecticut State Department of Public Health

<http://www.portal.ct.gov/DPH/Press-Room/Press-Releases---2014/June-2014/State-Releases-Latest-School-Health-Survey-Results>