

2025



Core Measures Student Survey

Introduction

The Drug-Free Communities Core Measures Student Survey is an annual survey organized by ACT Bennington that gathers information from students in grades 6–12 about health behaviors. Questions are asked about student use of substances as well as their perceptions of risk associated with those substances. Additionally, questions are asked about mental health, sexual health, resiliency and assets, and support systems. Schools, communities, and state agencies use the results of the survey to evaluate and improve programs, plan new initiatives, and secure funding. The survey is a supplement to the Vermont Youth Risk Behavior Survey, administered every two years. This report serves as a summary of the 2025 results and highlights areas of concern as well as protective factors in students' responses. To view the full results from the 2025 survey, [click here](#). To view past survey results, [click here](#).

Method

The survey was taken by Mt. Anthony Union Middle School (MAUMS) students in November 2024. The survey was voluntary and anonymous; students' responses were not linked to their individual identity. 261 students responded to the survey. 3 responses were removed.

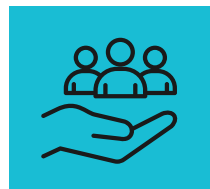
What's Inside



Substance Use



Mental Health



Resiliency & Assets



Life at Home



School & Community Safety

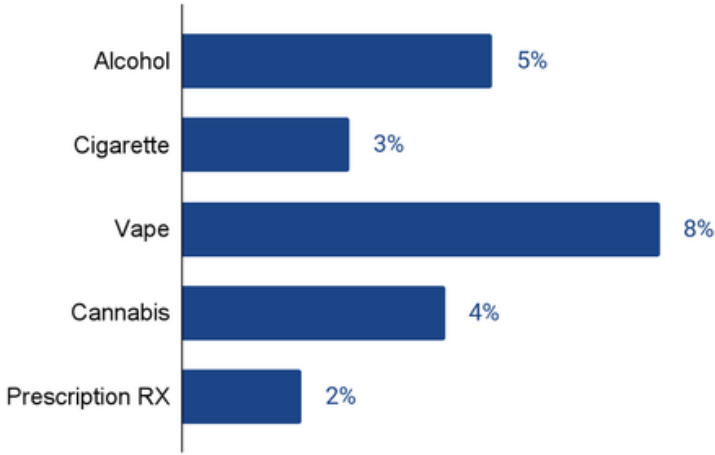


Note: When this icon appears, the data are broken out by demographic groups to highlight differences and disparities.

Substance Use

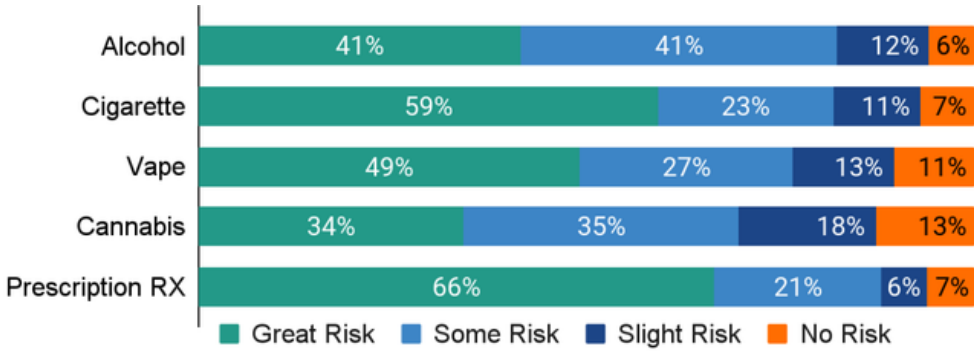
This section asked students about their past 30-day use of substances including: alcohol, cigarettes, nicotine vape products, cannabis, and prescription drugs *not* prescribed to the student (for example: Vicodin, Adderall).

PAST 30-DAY USE OF SUBSTANCES



According to the 2023 Vermont Youth Risk Behavior Survey, MAUMS students report higher use of substances than middle school students statewide, including nicotine vapes (13% vs. 6%), alcohol (7% vs. 5%), and cannabis (8% vs. 4%). Significantly more female students and LGBTQ students use these substances, compared to male, heterosexual, and cisgender peers.

PERCEPTION OF RISK OF PHYSICAL OR OTHER HARM

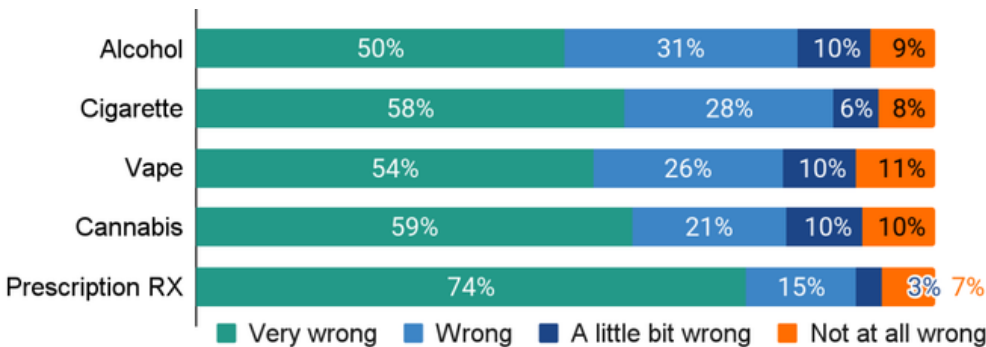


Perception of risk of harm and disapproval significantly influences students' decisions about substance use.

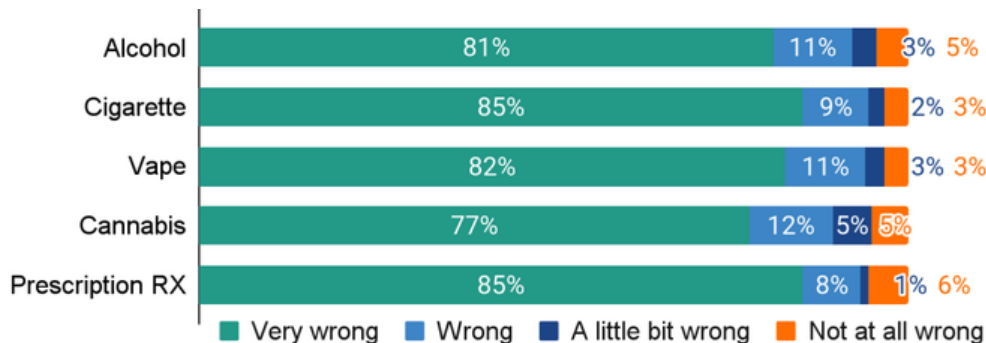
When young people know and understand potential risks of youth substance use and view alcohol, nicotine, or cannabis as dangerous, they are less likely to experiment or engage in use.

Similarly, when young people believe that their friends and family strongly disapprove of using substances, they are less likely to engage in these behaviors. Research shows that when caregivers talk openly about the risks of youth substance use, their messages make a real impact.

PERCEPTION OF PEER DISAPPROVAL



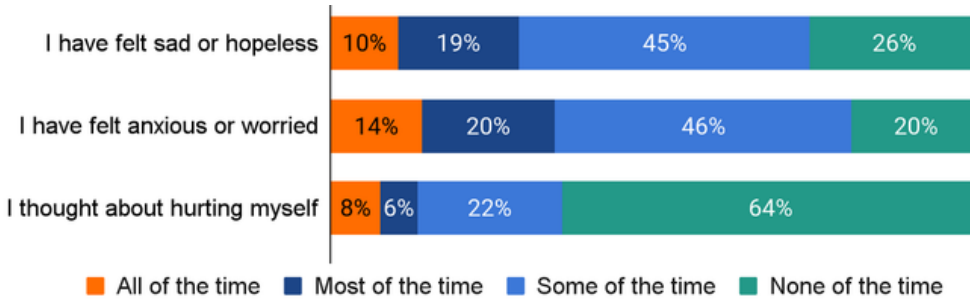
PERCEPTION OF CAREGIVER DISAPPROVAL



Mental Health

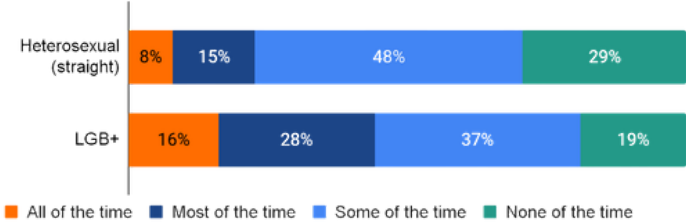
Here, students were asked about their mental health in the past year, including self-harm and suicidal ideation.

MENTAL HEALTH IN THE PAST YEAR

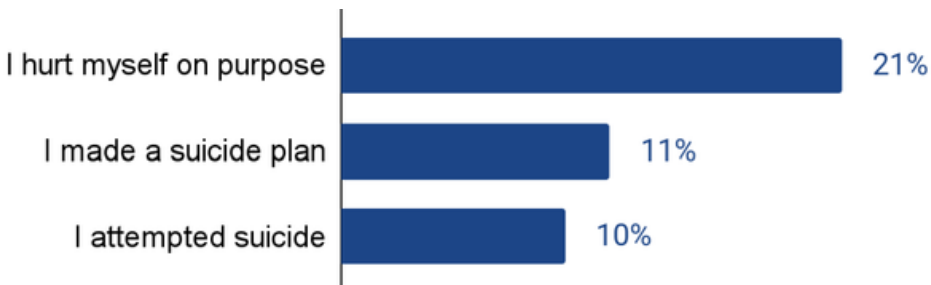
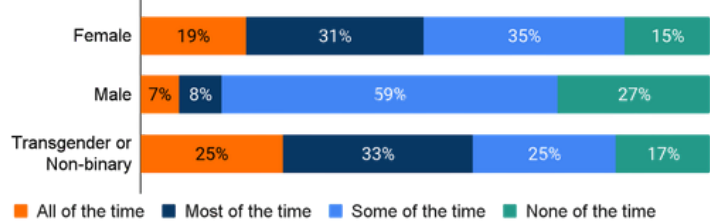


Reflecting national trends, female and LGBTQ+ students continue to report higher rates of experiencing feelings of sadness or hopelessness, poor mental health, and suicidal thoughts and behaviors.

I have felt sad or hopeless

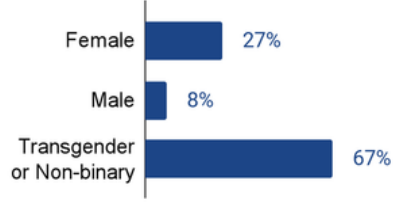


I have felt anxious or worried

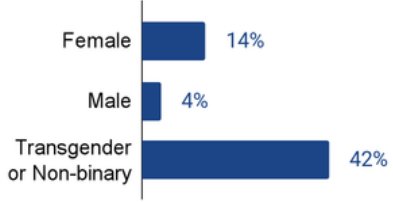


Gender differences in internalizing behaviors (such as anxiety and depression) during adolescence arise from a combination of biological, social, and structural factors.

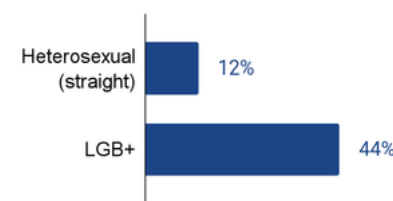
I hurt myself on purpose



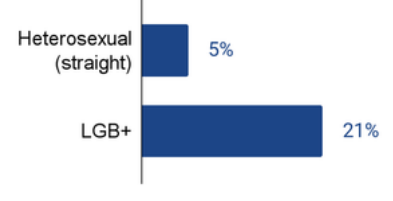
I made a suicide plan



I hurt myself on purpose



I made a suicide plan

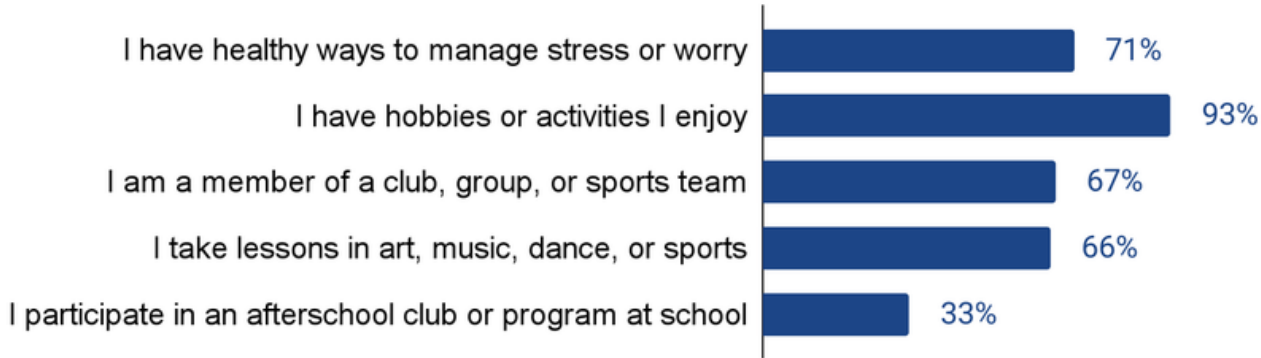


Social norms and expectations often encourage girls to internalize stress, while girls may also experience higher levels of relational conflict and pressures related to body image and academic performance, further increasing their vulnerability to depression and anxiety. For LGBTQ+ and gender-diverse youth, internalizing distress is amplified by minority stress, including discrimination, stigma, and lack of social support, contributing to a significantly higher risk of suicidal thoughts and behaviors.

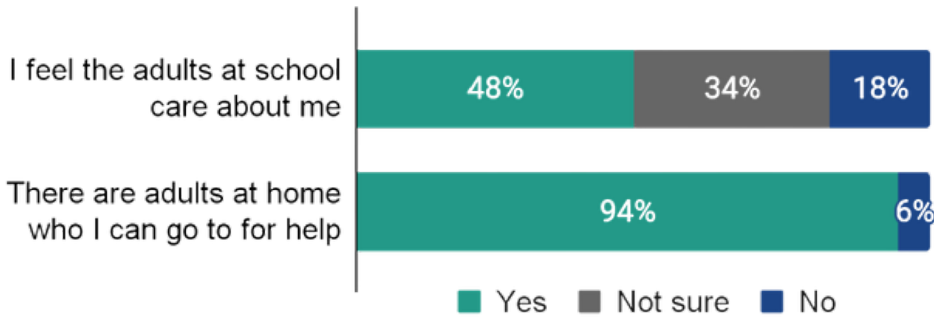
Resiliency & Assets

This section explores students' involvement in hobbies, clubs, teams, and support systems that contribute to their overall well-being and ability to cope with challenges.

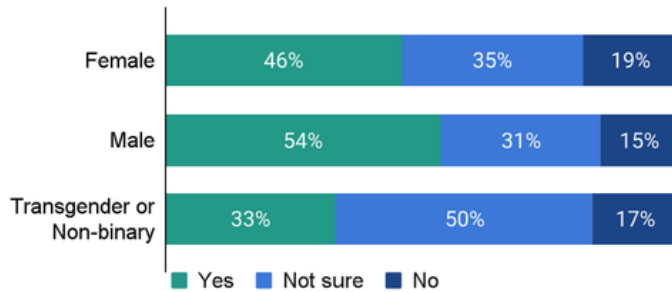
ENGAGEMENT IN HEALTHY ACTIVITIES



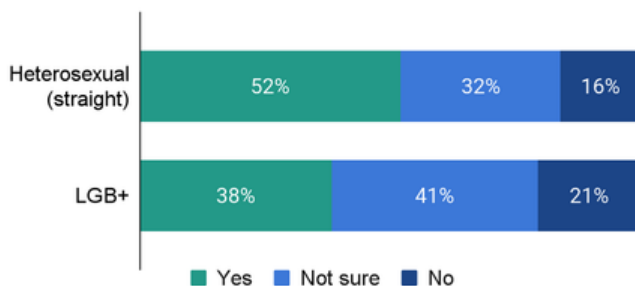
SUPPORT SYSTEMS



I feel the adults at school care about me



I feel the adults at school care about me

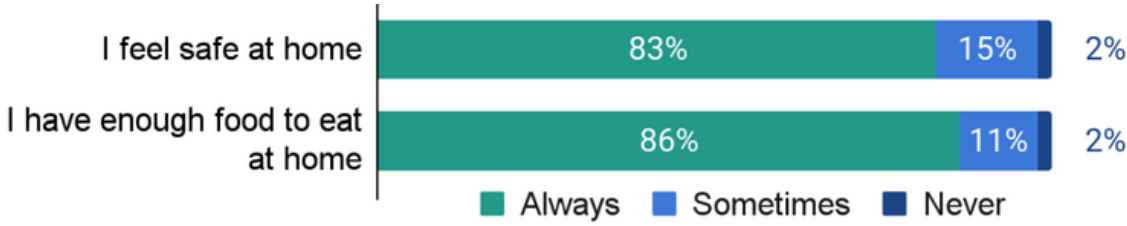


Non-parental adults, such as mentors, coaches, teachers, and community members, play a vital role in positive youth development. Research indicates that having at least one consistent, caring adult outside of the family improves outcomes for young people, including enhanced social skills, stronger community connections, academic achievement, and more positive health behaviors.

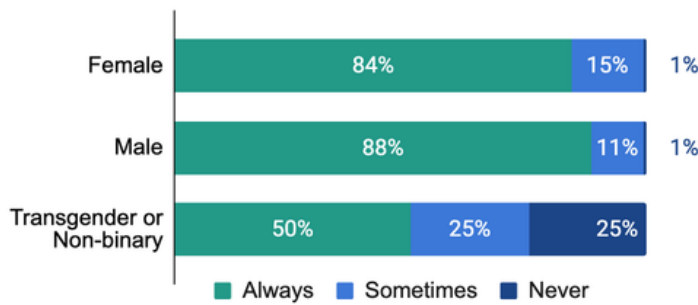
Life at Home

This section examines students' sense of safety, food security, and access to basic necessities at home.

SAFETY AT HOME

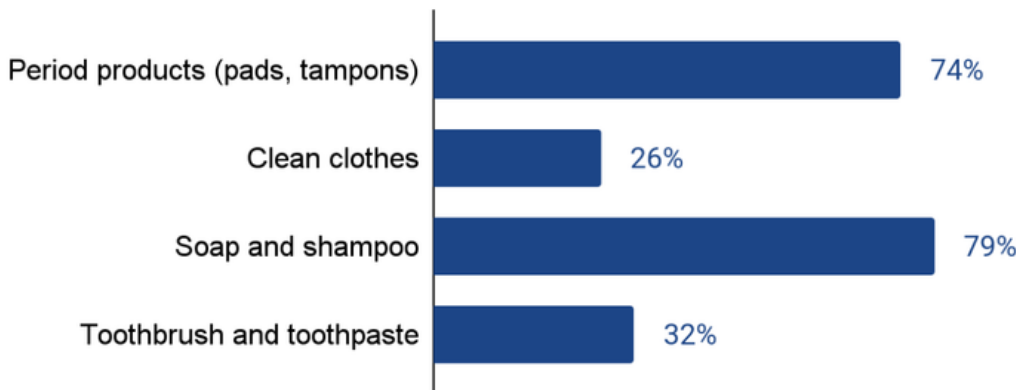


I feel safe at home



BASIC NEEDS

10% of students reported* *not* always having access to basic necessities including menstrual products, clean clothes, soap and shampoo, or oral care. These students reported needing the following essentials:



**Note: Responses about access to basic needs may be subject to under-reporting due to social stigma and embarrassment, which can prevent students from fully disclosing needs related to personal hygiene and essential items.*

When young people have their basic needs met, it communicates to them that they are worthy of care and that the community is invested in their success. **Bennington has many resources to support youth and their families:**



Food Resource Calendar:
Free prepared foods, food pantries, and produce distribution



SVSU Family Engagement Specialists connect students to resources including food, clothing, and community services

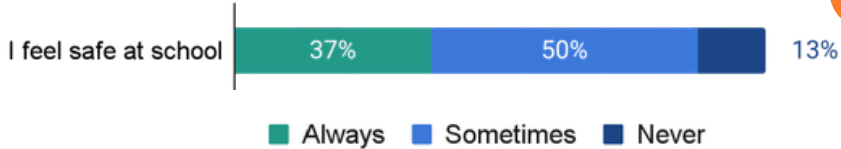


Take Care Project:
Community partners providing free period and hygiene products

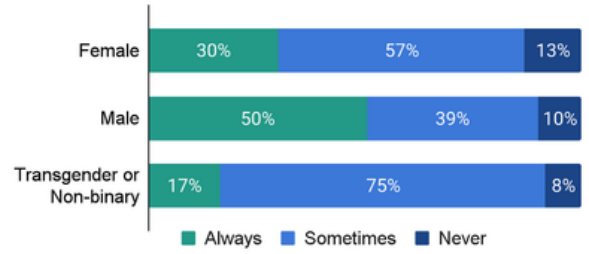
School & Community Safety

This section explores students' sense of safety at school, feelings of mattering in the community, and suggestions for making Bennington more youth-friendly.

SCHOOL SAFETY



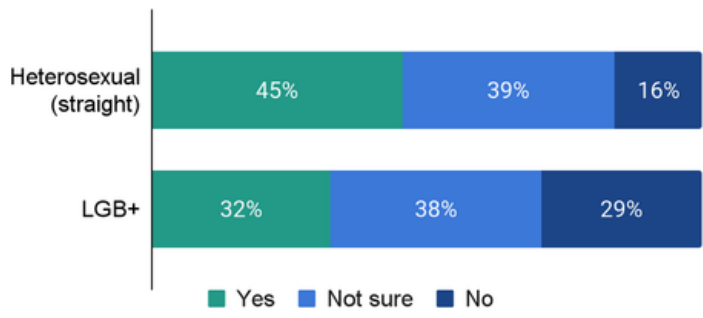
I feel safe at school



"I FEEL I MATTER IN THE COMMUNITY"

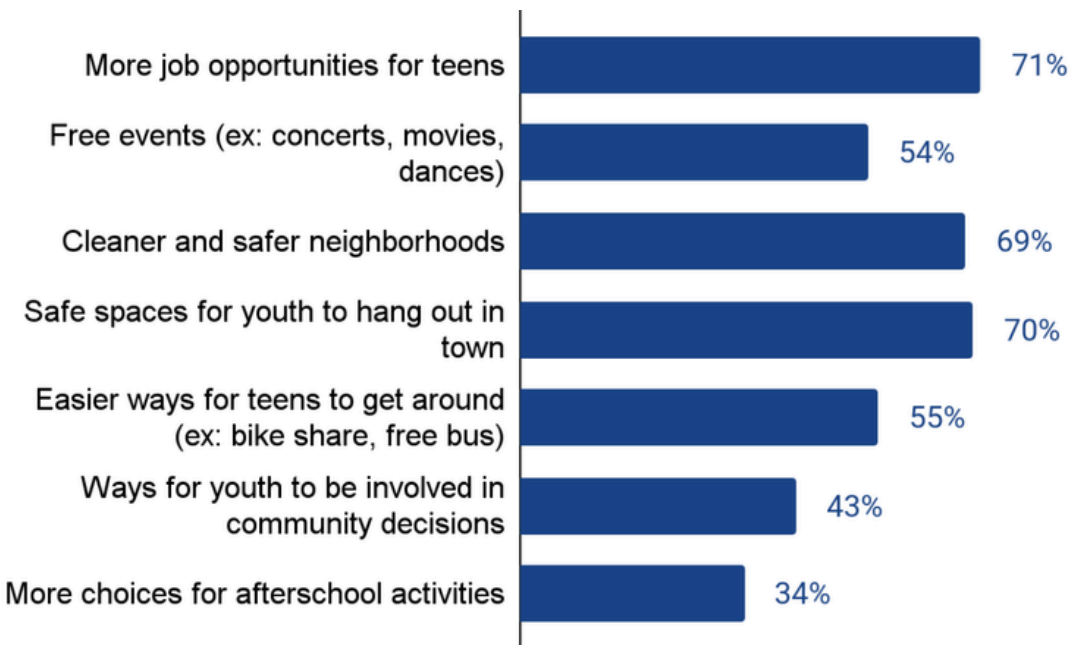


I feel I matter in the community



Youth mattering — the sense that young people are seen, valued, and can make a difference — is a key factor in healthy development. Research shows that when youth feel they matter to family, peers, and their community, they experience better mental health, higher self-esteem, and stronger overall well-being, while low mattering is linked to increased risk of depression, loneliness, and violence.

WHAT WOULD MAKE BENNINGTON MORE YOUTH-FRIENDLY?



Conclusion

The results of the 2025 Core Measures Student Survey at MAUMS highlight ongoing challenges and meaningful opportunities for growth. As in previous years, and in line with national trends, disparities persist among students with marginalized identities, including higher rates of substance use and poorer mental health outcomes, particularly among female and gender-diverse youth.

Most middle school students are not using substances and are making healthy choices. The continued normalization and accessibility of substances such as cannabis and nicotine, however, can complicate the environment in which adolescents are making decisions. Adolescent brains are still developing through the age of 25, making them especially vulnerable to the risks of early substance use. Nicotine, cannabis, and other drugs can disrupt normal brain growth, affecting memory, decision-making, and mental health well into adulthood. Early use of substances also increases the likelihood of dependence and addiction. These realities highlight the importance of prevention efforts that begin early and are reinforced consistently across school, family, and community settings.

The survey also reflects the strength of the MAUMS community. A majority of students report being connected through positive activities, including participation in sports teams, creative and artistic opportunities, and afterschool programming. With the ongoing efforts of educators, support staff, and community partners, these connections help foster environments where students feel safe, valued, and supported. This engagement plays a necessary role in building resilience and positive relationships, and supporting healthy, informed decision-making.

To build on these strengths, we encourage continued collaboration with community prevention partners and professional development focused on:

- Health impacts of youth substance use
- Gender identity and inclusivity
- Consent and healthy relationships
- Health disparities impacting the lives of MAUMS students

About ACT Bennington

ACT is a prevention coalition supporting Bennington-area youth in making healthy choices.

ACT provides prevention education, empowers youth through leadership and afterschool programming, and collaborates with the community to promote youth wellness and healthy youth development. We encourage changes to the physical environment that reduce risk factors for youth substance use and that increase safety, as well as provide basic needs to address health inequities amongst priority populations. Learn more at actbennington.org.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to the SVSU and MAUMS for continued support and partnership with ACT, and to participating teachers and staff members. We are especially grateful to Prevention Coordinator Glauke Cooijmans for her efforts organizing survey administration. Many thanks to Samantha Pearce, Community Epidemiologist at The Collaborative, for compiling the data and producing the accompanying graphs.