

Early Childhood Substance Use Prevention

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Background

- City of Gloucester received State Opioid Response- Prevention in Early Childhood (SOR PEC) grant
- Aimed to create substance use programming for 9-11 year olds in Gloucester
- MAPC conducted an assessment of risk & protective factors to answer:
 - **What are the risk and protective factors for substance use prevention among 9-11 year olds in Gloucester, MA?**
 - **What are possible interventions to enhance protective factors and minimize risk factors?**

Risk and Protective Factors



Risk factors are characteristics at the biological, psychological, family, community, or cultural level that precede and are associated with a higher likelihood of negative outcomes.



Protective factors are characteristics associated with a lower likelihood of negative outcomes or that reduce a risk factor's impact. Protective factors may be seen as positive countering events.

Methods

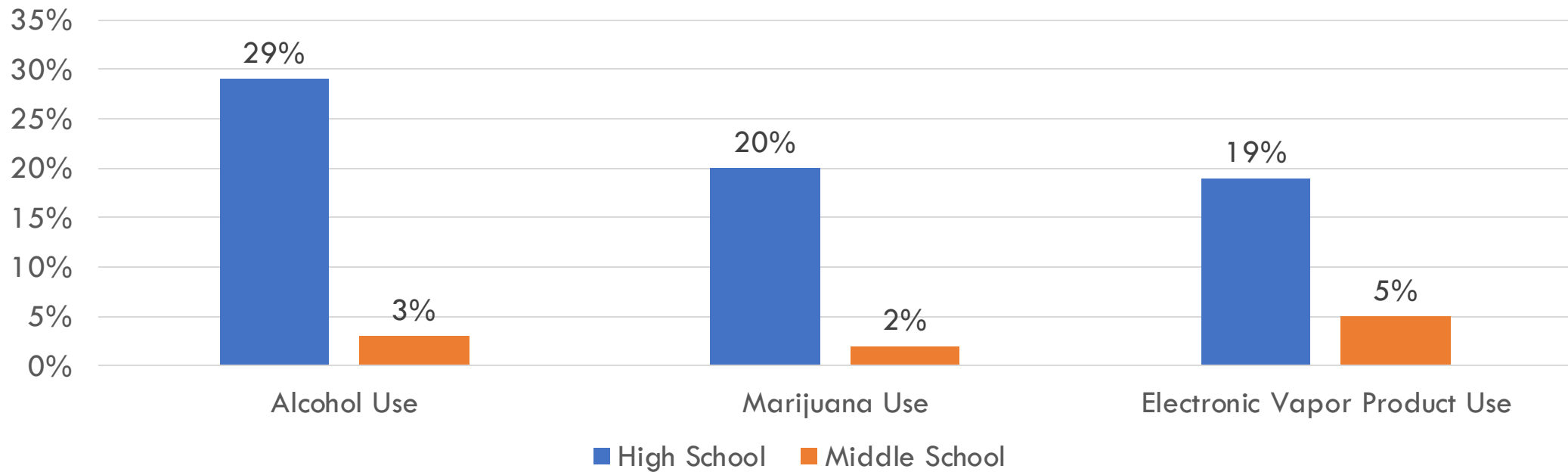
- Focus groups with youth (n=11), caregivers (n=4) and social workers (n=3)
- Qualitative analysis conducted with the focus group transcripts
- Analysis of Gloucester Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS)

	Youth (n=11)	Caregiver (n=4)	Social Worker (n=3)	Total (n=18)
Gender				
Male (#, %)	2 (18%)	0	0	2 (11%)
Female (#, %)	9 (82%)	4 (100%)	3 (100%)	16 (89%)
Race/Ethnicity				
Non- Hispanic White (#, %)	11 (100%)	3 (75%)	3 (100%)	17 (94%)
Prefer not to say (#, %)	-	1 (25%)	-	1 (6%)

Youth Substance Use Landscape

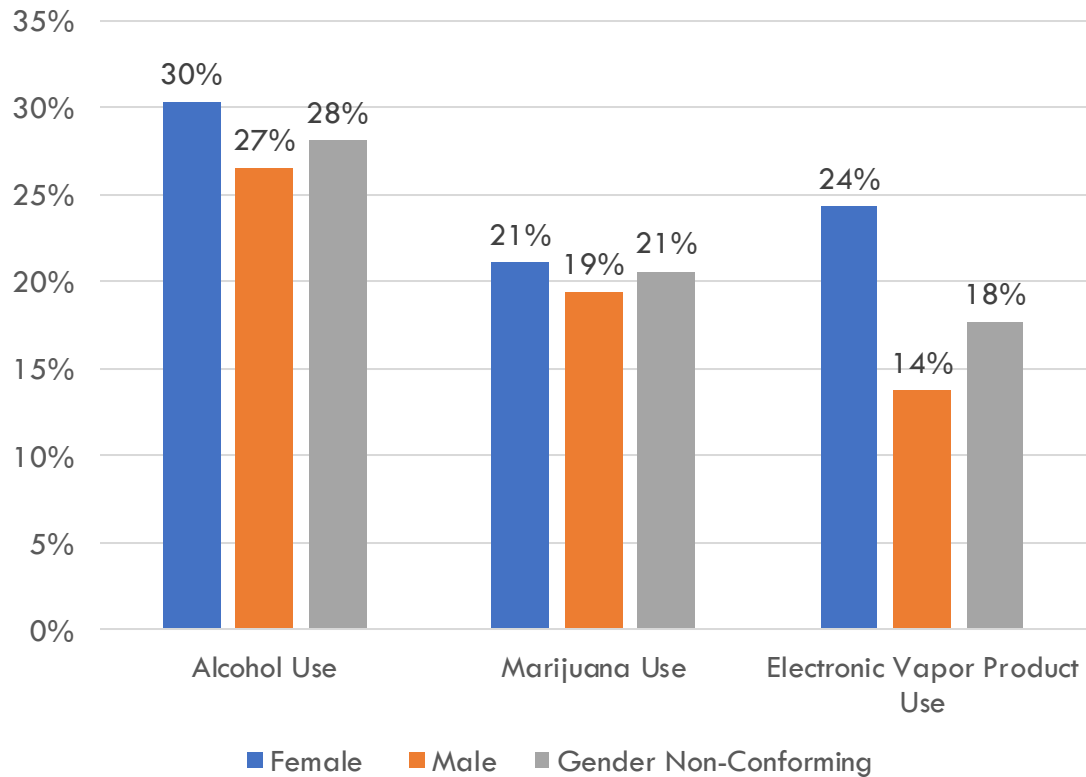
The most commonly used substances among Gloucester youth are alcohol, marijuana, and electronic vapor products.

Percent of High School and Middle School Students Reporting Current Use of Substances

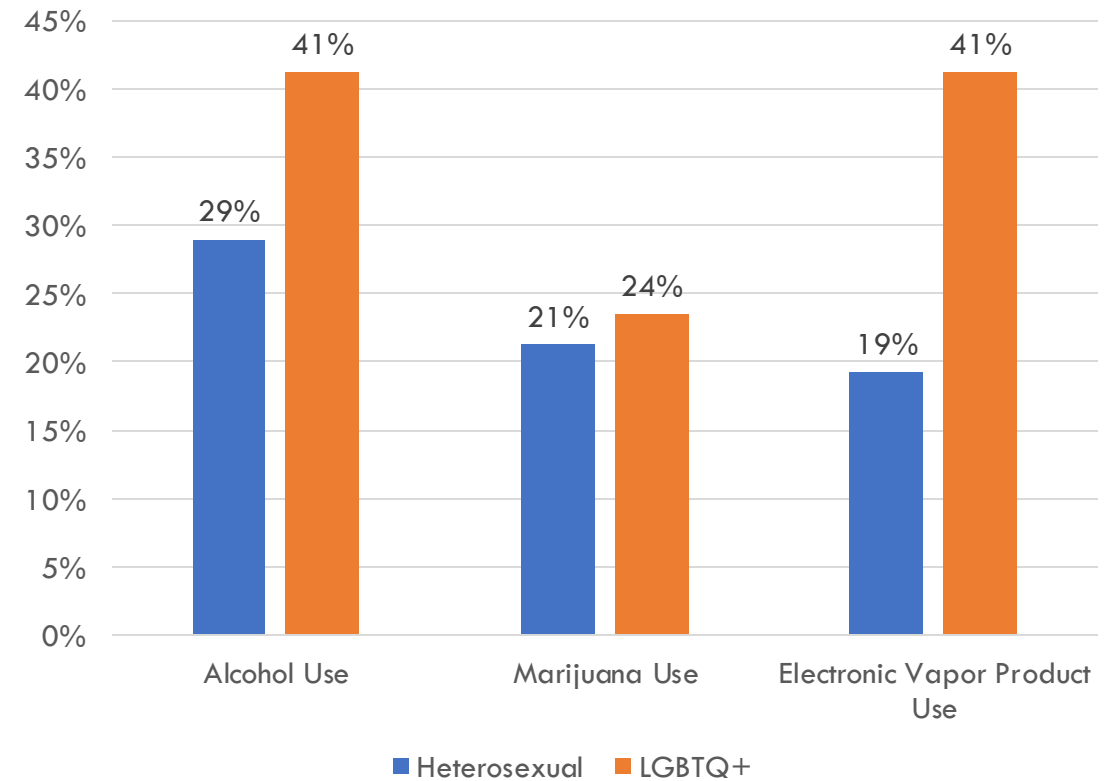


High schoolers who identify as **female** or **LGBTQ+** report higher alcohol, marijuana, and electronic vapor product use compared to other gender identities or sexual orientations.

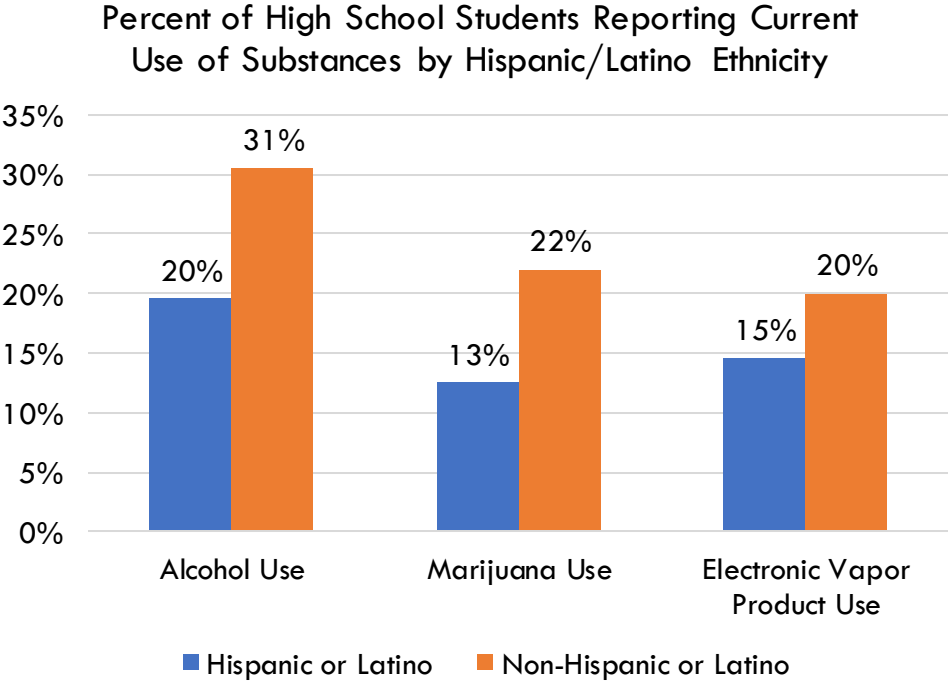
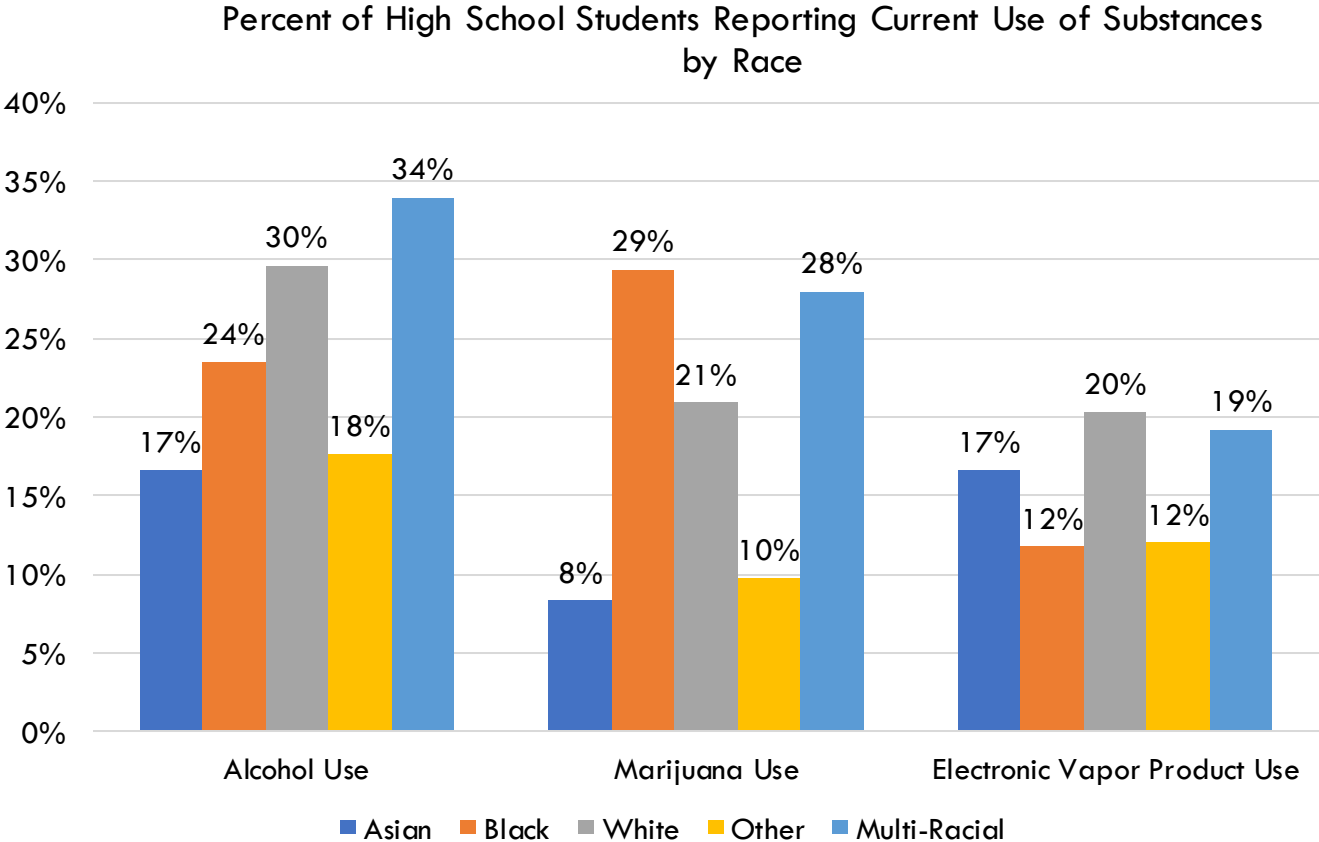
Percent of High School Students Reporting Current Use of Substances by Gender Identity



Percent of High School Students Reporting Current Use of Substances by Sexual Orientation



Use of certain substances varies among high-schoolers of different racial identities. Hispanic or Latino students reported using substances less frequently than non-Hispanic or Latino students.



Students reported accessing substances in the following way:

Caregivers

Older peers or siblings

Online

Risk Factors for Youth Substance Use

Risk Factors: Overview

Mental
Health

Pressure to
Succeed

Peer Group

Instability at
Home

Culture
around use in
Gloucester

Mental health challenges emerged as a top contributing factor to youth substance use

- Youth suffering from anxiety, depression, stress, past traumas, among others; these struggles impact their daily lives yet there was a cited lack of support for mental health issues
- Significance of mental health education, including learning coping skills, understanding warning signs, etc.

“Kids do have mental health problems and I feel like a lot of the time it's glossed over because people don't like the reality that kids in elementary school have the same issues that maybe a kid in high school has, they just don't know what it is. When you're in high school, it's easier to realize, ‘Oh, I'm really anxious, maybe I have anxiety. Oh, I'm really depressed all the time, maybe I'm depressed’, whereas when you're in middle school and elementary school you don't really understand any of that.”

-High school student

Students experience pressure to succeed in their various activities, as well as the weight of future decisions.

- Stress in balancing school, jobs, social life, financial responsibilities
- Weight of future decisions

"You can change everything and you can switch your major or switch your school, but it is difficult and even having people tell me that, still the thought of you're still probably gonna end up doing this and you have to study what you like and that's gonna be your job for the rest of your life, **it's really stressful and trying to balance everyday life on top of that**, I feel like some people don't understand. It's a very stressful time."

-High school student

Friend groups generally influence the activities and behaviors of youth, whether that results in healthy or unhealthy decisions

- Impact of older peers or "fear of missing out"
- Peer groups as an indicator of future behaviors and decisions

"It's a domino effect sometimes. **One person says, 'Hey look I'm drinking.' That triggers a bunch of other kids because they want to do it too.** They want to be cool people that are doing it. Kids start talking about it. All these other kids get curious about it. It's a long chain."

-High school student

Students raised many stressors arising from their home life, some of which are considered *Adverse Childhood Events (ACEs)*.

- Acute events (parents' divorce, death of a family member)
- Strife among family members
- Parental substance use

“My sister was in maybe freshman year, yeah, and when I was in fifth grade, and she had a lot of **struggles with mental health**, and would get in a lot of arguments with my parents too. So it was kind of like sometimes I was the only one she would talk to, so I **had to take care of her, but I was the younger one. And then it kind of just made me feel like I had to be perfect** so that my parents won't have to deal with me too.”

-High school student

Students and caregivers perceived Gloucester was a place that accepted and promoted drinking.

- Gloucester is perceived as a “alcohol-saturated” community
- Lack of recreational activities for adults, teens, and children

“I think my humble opinion about the attitude of alcohol in the community of Gloucester is I feel like **we as a community really condone alcohol, it's a part of everything we do** it's even probably the focal point of our biggest celebration of the year.”

-Caregiver

Noteworthy
Risk Factors

Social media and
smartphones

COVID-19

Grades

Protective Factors for Youth Substance Use

Protective Factors: Overview

Recreational
Activities

Sense of
Community

Parenting
Style

Recreational activities provide a time for youth to socialize and gain a sense of purpose.

- Activities mentioned include sports teams, school run club, bowling league, D&D club, dance classes, theater, and fine arts programs

“Volleyball just helps me get out more 'cause I've isolated myself so much these past couple of years. **I've gotten out more** because of it.”

-High school student

“I feel like it's both **being in a group of other people and having like a social aspect**, but also it's **rewarding when you make own personal goals** and just feel productive.

-High school student

Having a community brought students joy and gave them a support system.

- Recreational activities provide a sense of community
- Caregivers described YOUnity and the former YMCA Teen Center as places that foster community

My daughter **just likes the social aspect of bowling. It's a team. It's just the encouragement.** It's something she wanted to learn so she's with her peers, and they **encourage each other.** She gets a piece of pizza, and they chat, and they talk about Pokemon and stuff. It's a big social thing for her, which is really fun.

-Caregiver

Parenting style as a protective factor in modeling healthy behaviors and teaching youth about substance use

- Serves to model healthy behaviors around substance use
- Trusting and communicative relationships seem to foster healthier approaches to substances

“When I was a freshman last year, my mom sat me down and had a talk with me, and she obviously did that type of stuff, but **she just told me the cons about it and how people around me are probably gonna do it**, and not to really feel forced to do anything and to do what you want, and obviously know what's good and bad, and I just took her advice and listened to it.”

-High school student

Noteworthy Protective Factors

Creative outlets

Shift in disciplinary
approaches

Therapy

Safe neighborhood

Youth Substance Use Intervention Ideas

Intervention 1:

Welcoming and Accessible Community Center for Youth

Foster a sense of belonging and community

- This helps youth to find a way to occupy their time
- Develops friendships

Skill development

- Structured time for activities, workshops, etc.
- Unstructured time

Financially accessible

- Often suggested that this be held at a community center like the YMCA

Intervention 2: Educational programming for caregivers

Educate caregivers about how to communicate with youth about substance use to encourage open communication

- Use facts instead of scare tactics when talking to youth
- Identify warning signs for youth substance use
- Respond if their child is using
- Learn what resources are available for students at-risk of or who are using
- Monitor child's social media use

Educate caregivers about how to model healthy behavior at home

- Use substances healthily at home
- Create opportunities for family to bond

Intervention 3:

Behavioral Health Education for Youth

Educate youth about substance use and mental health from an early age

- Share factually accurate information that do not rely on scare tactics
- Discuss how to develop healthy coping mechanisms for when they experience stressors

Students would like to be taught by other peers

Key Takeaways

- Gloucester youth experience risk & protective factors across individual, family, peer, and community levels
- Important to connect with more diverse populations about their experiences!
- Prioritize which risk and protective factors to focus interventions on
- Incorporate ideas of the community into any potential programming

Additional resources of evidence-based interventions for youth substance use prevention:

- [BluePrints](#)
- [NIDA](#)
- [Brandeis Opioid Resource Connector](#)
- [SAMHSA](#)



Thank you!

QUESTIONS?

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