



2022-2023 CONVERSATION CAFE RESULTS

**COMMUNITIES THAT
CARE OF GREATER
DOWNINGTOWN**

WHO IS CTC?

CTC of Greater Downingtown is a collective of organizations, schools, hospitals, faith community, law enforcement, health care providers, human services, and local government using evidence-based prevention programs, policies, and resources to foster positive youth development, mental health, and prevent substance use.

OUR MISSION

Collectively, with families, schools and community, CTC empowers youth by promoting mental health and preventing substance use.

OUR VISION

We are creating a healthy, supportive, and engaged Downingtown community where all youth are empowered to achieve their full potential.



WHAT IS A CONVERSATION CAFE?

A conversation cafe is a one-time meeting of 40 to 50 students where PAYS data was shared. After which, facilitators asked the students three questions to get their feedback.

It gives students an in-person chance to share their thoughts on mental health and drug & alcohol prevention.



WHO PARTICIPATED?

Students from:

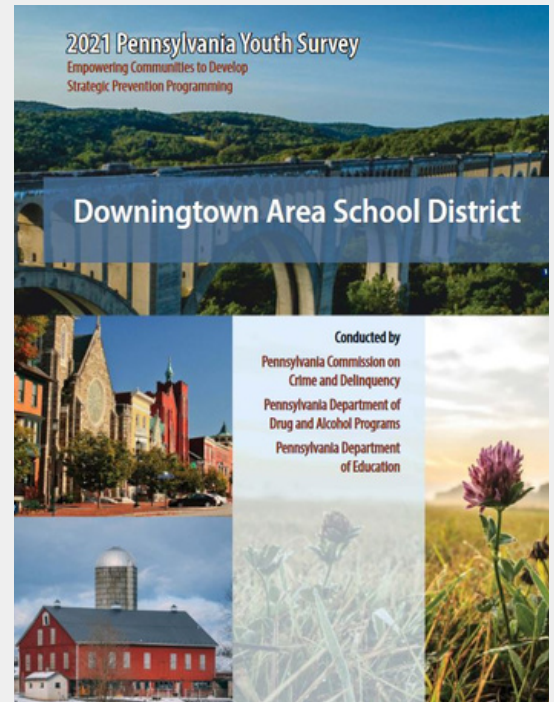
- Downingtown East High School
- Downingtown West High School
- Downingtown STEM Academy
- Marsh Creek 6th Grade Center (Feedback will be shared at completion of Conversation Cafes)

Total: 140 students participated

WHAT IS PAYS?

The Pennsylvania Youth Survey (PAYS) is a student survey administered in odd-numbered years (e.g. 2017, 2019, 2021) to youth in 6th, 8th, 10th, and 12th grades in participating schools throughout the state.

The questions asked in the survey cover many types of attitudes, knowledge, behaviors, and experiences.



WHAT QUESTIONS WERE ASKED?

The same three questions were asked to each group of students:


1. What do you think your school/the district is doing well in regard to mental health and substance use?
2. What could your school/the district do to enhance the supports available for mental health and substance use?
3. What would you like teachers and parents to know about your reaction to this data and how they could help with mental health and substance use issues?



IN THEIR OWN VOICES

Comments – Question 1

1. What do you think your school/the district is doing well in regard to mental health and substance use?


- Variety of mental health related clubs – HYPE, Aavidum, Morgan’s Message and Best Buddies
 - Supportive teachers who are willing to help and care enough to be supportive.
 - Approachable and supportive counselors and prevention specialists. Their doors are always open.
 - Many resources available when needing to talk – so many options for people you can talk to and connect with.
 - Provide a comfortable environment for students
 - Music played in the schools makes me happy and excited for the day
 - Daily mental health checks – speakers and assemblies around mental health
 - Constant encouragement for kids to take part in school activities
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IN THEIR OWN VOICES

Comments - Question 2

2. What could your school/the district do to enhance the supports available for mental health and substance use?


- Ask students more how to help them because everyone works differently
 - Limit unnecessary school work
 - Understand kids have activities outside of school
 - Spread more awareness about resources offered – prevention specialists and SAS
 - Provide more space for students to relax and talk in – such as the Zen Den at East
 - Talk more about mental health
 - Have more counselor check ins – students visiting counselors and counselors scheduling frequent meetings to talk
 - Stress how important speaking out is to get rid of the stigma that people will be looked down on if they do.
 - Make it easier/more confidential for students to open up about substance use/make it easier to come forward/make it easier to get help.
 - Don't just suspend students caught with drugs/alcohol
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IN THEIR OWN VOICES

Comments – Question 2 (Continued)

2. What could your school/the district do to enhance the supports available for mental health and substance use?


- Let students have breaks during classes like walks and brain breaks to relax and reset.
 - Punish bullying more harshly. So many kids say awful stuff and no one seems to care or do anything.
 - More options during study hall – not always digital because not everyone has a phone – ability to go outside or play sports to relieve stress
 - Make mental health/drug conversations not the same every time
 - Having less expectations for teens and allowing them to come as they are
 - Mindfulness with course loads
 - More team building activities for the whole grade
 - Start the conversation about mental health in elementary school and have active, open and regular dialogue around mental health.
 - Celebrate everything the students have to offer, not just athletics and high grades
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IN THEIR OWN VOICES

Comments – Question 2 (Continued)

2. What could your school/the district do to enhance the supports available for mental health and substance use?


- Talk about the “ugly” mental health stuff, lack of hygiene, isolation, etc. and speak honestly without judgment.
 - Preventative education about drugs and mental health, not fearmongering
 - Validate emotions, we’re not just young and overreacting.
 - Separate academic and emotional counselors
 - Have counselors available for drop ins all the time
 - Actually teach healthy coping skills – more than just telling kids to “ask for help”
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IN THEIR OWN VOICES

Comments – Question 3

3. What would you like teachers and parents to know about your reaction to this data and how they could help with mental health and substance use issues?


- The PAYS data is sad and it angers me. There's so much we can do to prevent sadness.
 - Saddest part about PAYS is that it didn't surprise me at all.
 - They (parents, teachers, admin) need to be more understanding
 - Create a more positive environment in the classroom so students are more open.
 - Internet culture really impacts kids mental health. On social media depression is seen as cool and desirable along with other mental illnesses, which really harms mental health.
 - That people assume only the kids who speak out are struggling.
 - I didn't expect it to actually happen, but kids actually try to peer pressure us into doing drugs and alcohol. It's so weird and uncomfy.
 - Bring awareness to bullying, not just to the school, to the kids parents
 - Bad grades don't equal not caring.
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IN THEIR OWN VOICES

Comments – Question 3 (Continued)

3. What would you like teachers and parents to know about your reaction to this data and how they could help with mental health and substance use issues?


- Peer pressure is high, overwhelming expectations from teachers, some people use substances not just to deal with school but home also, teachers should reach out to students first.
 - Take the data seriously (parents sometimes believe that these issues don't affect them, but in reality they occur frequently). I feel like parents have a tendency to be apathetic, or they deny it. Have open conversations so that kids feel safe.
 - We're still teens and we make mistakes and we learn from them. Huge expectations can feel like pressure and we can't always meet them.
 - Make it easier to get help, because asking for help is so hard but necessary.
 - We want our parents to know that we don't try to make them mad
 - We want our teachers to know that we have bad days
 - Start these conversation young
 - Listen to us talk/rant instead of only trying to fix or respond – sometimes we just need to talk or get it out.
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IN THEIR OWN VOICES

Comments – Question 3 (Continued)

3. What would you like teachers and parents to know about your reaction to this data and how they could help with mental health and substance use issues?

- Be more supportive if a student comes out with substance abuse problems instead of reprimanding – most substance abusers have things lying under the surface.
 - More uncomfortable conversations
 - Our input has been ignored in the past – feels repetitive
 - More class bonding activities starting from 9th grade
 - Teachers and parents could be more understanding as students have more than school on their plate.
 - To clearly show they are always here to talk and that they care about us
 - Have fun challenges that involve the whole school.
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THANK YOU

Thank you for supporting our prevention work in the DOWNTOWN community for youth & families!

LEARN MORE...

To learn more about all that CTC offers, visit our website at:
www.dtownctc.org

