

# Summary Report: 2025 Pennsylvania Youth Survey

A snapshot of the 2025 PAYS data

## PAYS Overview

PAYS supports Pennsylvania’s data-driven prevention efforts by helping schools and communities identify youth risk behaviors and the factors that drive them. By focusing on underlying causes—not just outcomes—it helps guide effective strategies that promote healthy development and student well-being

The Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency, Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs, and Department of Education thank Bach Harrison, L.L.C. and Penn State’s Prevention Research Center for their support of the 2025 Pennsylvania Youth Survey.

## Participation

This report presents data from the 2025 Pennsylvania Youth Survey (PAYS), focusing on risk and protective factors linked to youth behaviors. The survey was administered to students in grades 6, 8, 10, and 12 across Pennsylvania. Conducted in Fall 2025, PAYS collected 267,379 valid responses from participating students.

- The data represents 1,064 schools
- Gender: 48% female, 50% male, 2% other
- Race/Ethnicity: White: 60%; Multiracial: 11%; Hispanic/Latino: 9%; Black/African American: 8%

	State 2021		State 2023		State 2025	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
<b>Survey respondents</b>						
All	246,312	100.0	262,535	100.0	267,379	100.0
<b>Survey respondents by grade</b>						
6	62,052	25.2	67,795	25.8	72,102	27.0
8	72,076	29.3	73,765	28.1	74,972	28.0
10	61,993	25.2	67,290	25.6	65,178	24.4
12	50,191	20.4	53,685	20.4	55,127	20.6
<b>Survey respondents by gender</b>						
Female	114,831	46.9	124,928	48.2	126,638	48.4
Male	121,909	49.8	129,070	49.8	130,997	50.1
Other	7,947	3.2	5,003	1.9	3,959	1.5
<b>Survey respondents by race*</b>						
Asian	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	11,432	4.3
Black, African American	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	21,745	8.1
Hispanic or Latino	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	24,545	9.2
White	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	159,135	59.5
Middle Eastern or North African	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	2,343	0.9
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	308	0.1
Alaska Native/American Indian/Native American	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	1,657	0.6
Multi-racial	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	28,336	10.6
I don't know what this question is asking	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	9,212	3.4
Race Unmarked	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	17,878	6.7

\*Question was revised in 2025 and the data is not comparable to prior years.

# Substance Use & Gambling

## Substance Use & Gambling

Early engagement in substance use or gambling can disrupt healthy development and raise the risk of substance use and gambling disorders. Prevention efforts like education and strong support systems help guide healthier choices.

Two important protective trends have emerged: students perceive less access to substances and greater risk in substance use.

- There was a 44% decrease in the percentage of students at risk due to perceived easy access to alcohol, marijuana, cigarettes and other drugs (31% in 2015 to 17% in 2025).
- There was a 21% increase in the percentage of students who perceive regular marijuana use as a moderate or great risk (72% in 2015 to 87% in 2025)

## Youth substance use and gambling continue to decline.



Since 2015, lifetime use of alcohol has decreased by 47% (from 44% in 2015 to 23% in 2025).



Since 2019, past 30 day use of vapes has dropped by 67% (from 19% in 2019 to 6% in 2025)—one of the sharpest declines in the dataset.



Since 2015, lifetime use of marijuana has decreased by 50% (from 17% in 2015 to 9% in 2025).



Since 2015, students reporting gambling in their lifetime has decreased 50% (from 37% in 2015 to 18% in 2025).



Since 2015, students reporting gambling in the past 30 days has decreased 24% (from 11% in 2015 to 8% in 2025).

# Student Health & Wellbeing

## Depression & Suicide

Mental health is essential to children's well-being, shaping development, learning, relationships, and coping skills. Challenges like stress, anxiety, loneliness, and depression can affect success at home, school, and in the community.



33% of students are at risk due to depressive symptoms, a decrease from a high of 42% in 2021.



14% of students seriously considered suicide-the lowest rate in 10 years.



By 2025, 6th graders showed rates of mental health concerns and suicide risk similar to or higher than older students.

## Screen Time

Social media and screen time can influence how young people feel, learn, and connect with others. Research suggests that 3+ hours of social media usage approximately doubles the risk of depression and anxiety symptoms among youth\*.

The 2025 PAYS Questionnaire included six new questions about access to devices, frequency of use, and parent/caregiver rules.



97% have a phone that can go on the internet.



81% have their own social media account.



28% say their parents or caregivers often/always make them follow screen time rules.



24% spend four or more hours on social media per school day.



12% of students spend four or more hours playing games on their electronic device.



36% spend four or more hours on an electronic device per day.

<https://www.hhs.gov/surgeongeneral/reports-and-publications/youth-mental-health/social-media/index.html>

## School Climate

Students who feel recognized and valued at school are less likely to engage in substance use and other problem behaviors. Opportunities to participate in meaningful school activities help build a sense of connection and investment, encouraging students to adopt positive behavior standards. In contrast, students who lack commitment to school are more likely to disengage from their role as students and face a higher risk of problem behaviors.



46% of students feel school is going to be important for their later life, representing an increase from 42% in 2021.



57% of students report their teachers praise them when they work hard, an increase from 52% in 2021.



While grades 8-12 showed some improvements from 2021 to 2025, improvements for 6th graders were more limited.

## Risk & Protective Factors

Risk and protective factor models help explain why some youth are more likely to engage in problem behaviors. Risk factors such as family conflict, academic failure, rebelliousness, or depression can increase the likelihood of problem behaviors, while protective factors like family attachment, school connectedness, and recognition for positive behavior help reduce risk and support healthy development.

In 2025, many youth risk factors declined while protective factors increased.



Total risk—the percentage of students with multiple risk factors—remained stable at 40–41% from 2015 to 2023, then declined to 35% in 2025.



Total protection—the percentage of students with 3 or more protective factors—declined from 2015 to 2021, then increased to 54% in 2023 and 59% in 2025.



## Want to Learn More?

Want to dig deeper into the PAYS data or put the data into action? Check out these additional resources or visit [pccd.pa.gov](http://pccd.pa.gov).

## PAYS Webtool

An online tool allowing you to analyze data at a county or state level for specific questions. Schools also receive access to their own private webtool to further analyze their school's data.

## PAYS Guide

Designed to help you and your team to get the most out of your PAYS data. In each module, you will find a library of worksheets, report examples/templates, and other resources to assist with successful PAYS analysis and planning.

## PAYS First Wednesdays at 1 Webinar Series

The PAYS webinar series offers short, expert-led sessions that cover key topics like survey administration, data interpretation, and using results for planning. These webinars are designed to help schools and communities better understand and apply PAYS data in practical ways.

## All Questions by Grade Report

Report provides the count and percent of students by grade selecting each answer choice for each question.

## PAYS Profile Report

The report summarizes statewide findings from the 2025 PAYS survey, highlighting key trends in youth behaviors and risk and protective factors.