



### ***What our kids are saying about....***

## **HOW MANY OF THEIR PEERS DRINK AND SMOKE**

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For risky behaviors like alcohol, tobacco and other drug use, what a teenager *thinks* his/her peers are doing may actually be more important than what they actually are doing. Unfortunately, many young people over-estimate how many of their peers drink and smoke. An adolescent who thinks "everyone's doing it" may be more likely to engage in risky behaviors.

What about in Franklin County? What do you our kids think about how many of their peers use drugs? How accurate are their estimates? Are these perceptions associated with actual use? What should we do? Using data from the 2006 PPAAUS survey (see description below), this research brief answers such questions.

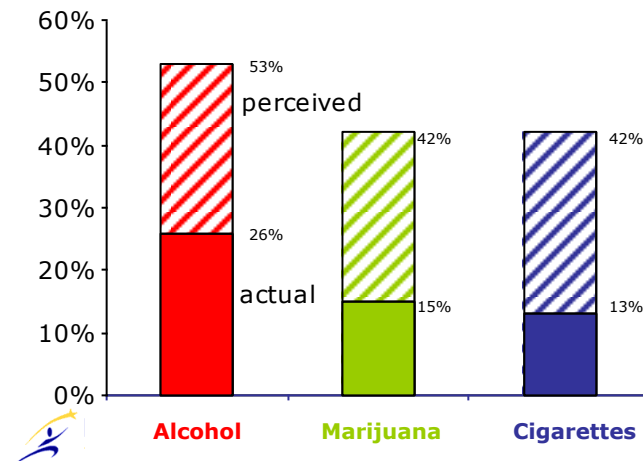
### **What do our kids think about how many of their peers use drugs?**

- On average, high school students think that 53% of the kids in their school drink alcohol each month. Estimates are somewhat lower for cigarette and marijuana use. Estimates among middle school students are much lower.
- These beliefs vary by school. In some high schools, students believe that more than half of their classmates use marijuana regularly. In other high schools, students think that only 25% do so.

### **Are their estimates accurate?**

- **No!** At all ages and in all schools, kids over-estimate how much their peers use drugs.
- On average, high school students think that 42% of the kids in their schools smoke cigarettes.
- The actual rate is only 13%.

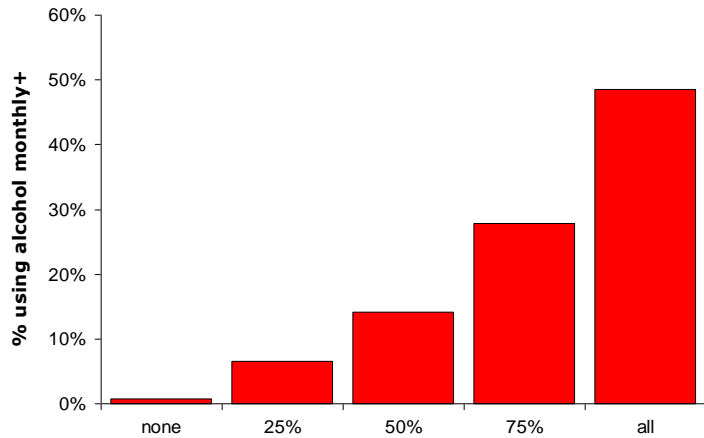
*Perceived versus actual monthly+ substance use among high school students*



**Are these beliefs related to use?**

- **Yes!** Youth who think that most of their classmates use drugs are much more likely to use drugs themselves.
- Regular alcohol use occurred among only 1% of ninth graders who thought "none" of the kids in their school used alcohol each month. In contrast, it occurred among 49% of those who thought "all" of the kids in their school used alcohol each month.
- This same pattern appeared at all grades and for all substances.

*Monthly+ alcohol use by perceptions of peer alcohol use: 9<sup>th</sup> grade only*



"I think this % of students at my school use [alcohol] once or twice a month or more often."

- Among youth who do not drink alcohol or smoke marijuana, those who think most of their peers use drugs are more likely to be willing to do so.

**What should parents do?**

- Know the facts! The vast majority of youth in Franklin County do not regularly drink and smoke.

*Percentage of students who regularly use drugs, Franklin County (OH), 2006*

	<u>6<sup>th</sup> grade</u>	<u>9<sup>th</sup> grade</u>	<u>12<sup>th</sup> grade</u>
Alcohol	1%	16%	38%
Cigarettes	1	7	13
Marijuana	1	10	19

- Know the truth! Most kids over-estimate how much their peers use drugs. Ask your children what they think. Tell them what you know.
- Support school and county efforts to correct teenagers' misperceptions of drug use. For more information, contact the Safe and Drug Free Schools Consortium.

**About PPAAUS**

The Safe and Drug-Free Schools Consortium has administered the Primary Prevention, Awareness, Attitude and Use Survey (PPAAUS) seven times since 1988. PPAAUS is designed to measure student attitudes and reported use of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs and provide information on violence and safety issues. Results from the latest survey (2006) are based on responses from 78,333 sixth through twelfth graders in 16 public school districts and 36 non-public schools in Franklin County. For more information, visit the PPAAUS website ([http://www.edcouncil.org/programs/drugfree/ppaaus\\_2007/index.htm](http://www.edcouncil.org/programs/drugfree/ppaaus_2007/index.htm)). Thank you to funders who have made this series of research briefs possible: ADAMH Board, Columbus Medical Association Foundation, United Way of Central Ohio and the US Dept of Health & Human Services/SAMHSA.