



pennsylvania

COMMISSION ON CRIME AND DELINQUENCY

The Pennsylvania Youth Survey (PAYS)

SINCE 1989, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania has conducted a survey of school students in the 6th, 8th, 10th and 12th grades to learn about their behavior, attitudes and knowledge concerning alcohol, tobacco, other drugs and violence. Additional information was added to the PAYS in 2015 about school climate and safety (especially around bullying), and where available, this information can be matched against the PDE School Climate Survey. The PAYS also includes data about sources of alcohol and prescription drugs in the instances when youth report having obtained those substances. Additionally, more specific detail about the types of pro-social activities in which youth engage is also reported. The report provides information about risk factors (conditions that can lead youth to engage in problem behavior) and protective factors (people or conditions in the lives of youth that can buffer a youth from the negative effects of risk factors). The 'Pennsylvania Youth Survey,' or PAYS, is voluntary for school districts and is sponsored and conducted every two years by the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency.

The data gathered through the PAYS serve two primary needs. First, the results provide school administrators, state agency directors, legislators and others with critical information concerning the changes in patterns of the use and abuse of these harmful substances and behaviors. Second, the survey assesses risk factors that are related to these behaviors and the protective factors that help guard

against them. This information allows community leaders to direct prevention resources to areas where they are likely to have the greatest impact.

Increasingly, schools across the Commonwealth are utilizing the PAYS to help inform their local decision-making. To this end, the McDowell Institute, in collaboration with state and local partners, has been providing support to schools to interpret their PAYS data in a manner that leads to action plans. In turn, guidance is provided to these schools to build their capacity to further build resiliency in their students through implementation of their action plans.

One of the great values of the PAYS is that it provides access to valid and reliable data that is community specific to inform decision-making at the local level. In particular, questions posed on the PAYS help educators to quantify and understand non-academic barriers to learning. Non-academic barriers to learning create particularly unique challenges for educators as they are often resistant to traditional pedagogy (such as well-designed and delivered lesson plans reflective of the curriculum). Of course, well-designed and delivered instruction is still important. It is simply that in isolation it is often insufficient by itself to overcome non-academic barriers to learning for large portions of a given school system's student population. Both in-service and aspiring educators are highly encouraged to become familiar with the PAYS. To learn more about the PAYS contact Tim Knoster (tknoster@bloomu.edu) or Danielle Empson at (dempson@bloomu.edu) at the McDowell Institute.



