



## Why are Student Assistance Programs Needed?



The use of alcohol and other drugs, particularly marijuana, is widespread among high school students. In New Jersey, by the 11th grade 51% of students will have used alcohol or used marijuana at least once. The percentage of New Jersey high school students who reported both lifetime and recent marijuana use was almost identical in 2009 and 2005. In 2009, 35% of students reported lifetime use of marijuana, which was slightly less than the 2005 results (36%) and lower than the high of 41% reached in 2001. One in five students (20%) in 2009 used marijuana in the prior month (recent marijuana use), which was the same as 2005, and less than the one quarter of students who reported using it in 2001 (25%) and 1995 (24%). The percentage of students reporting lifetime cocaine use was fairly consistent across survey years, with 6% of students in 2009 and 2005 having used cocaine at least once in their lifetime compared with 9% in 2001 and 7% in 1995. Recent cocaine use was not measured in 2009, but had dropped to 2% of students in 2005 from 4% in 2001 and 1995.

Reporting of lifetime alcohol consumption declined in 2009 from levels in past surveys. This proportion was the lowest of all four years at 75%, compared to a high of 83% in 2001. Similarly, recent alcohol use (past 30 day use) also declined. Less than half of students in 2009 (45%) reported having one or more drinks of alcohol within the prior 30 days (recent alcohol use), as compared to 47% in 2005, 56% in 2001, and 51% in 1995. While lifetime rates and recent alcohol consumption rates decreased, recent binge drinking rates remained consistent with the 2005 rates. A little more than a quarter of students in 2009 (27%) had engaged in recent binge drinking – having five or more drinks on the same occasion. This rate is similar to 2005 (27%) but lower than the previous years (33-31%). Although the 2009 survey did not ask about alcohol use on school property, the use of alcohol on school property has remained relatively consistent across survey years (4%-6%).

Overall, reports of lifetime and recent cigarette use among New Jersey high school students have steadily declined over the years and reached a new low in 2009. In the current year, 43% of students had tried cigarette smoking, even one or two puffs, as compared to 49% in 2005, 63% in 2001, and 70% in 1995. Recent cigarette use showed a similar pattern of decline. The number of students reporting cigarette use during the previous month reached a low of 17% in 2009. This figure was 20% in 2005, 29% in 2001, and 36% in 1995. A similar percentage of students in 2009 (4%) reported being daily smokers as in 2005 (4%), down from over 10% in 1995 and 2001. Only 3% of students smoked heavily - that is, they smoked six or more cigarettes each day they smoked during the previous month. This figure is equal to 2005 and down from 9% in 2001 and 13% in 1995.

### **Use Rate and Problem Behaviors**

High rate users have established a pattern of regular use of alcohol or other drugs that is strongly associated with problems in other parts of their lives (e.g., health, school, family, criminal justice, personal relations). The New Jersey Student Health Survey presents strong correlations between reports of high rate alcohol and/or drug use and school-related violence, victimization, and poor school outcomes (e.g., health conditions, eating patterns, sexual behavior, bullying, violence, television viewing and internet usage). School-related problems attributable to high rate drinking or drug use are associated with school failure or dropping out. Without appropriate intervention, this pattern of early high rate use is predictive of still more serious use problems in the future.

<sup>1</sup> These figures are from the 2009 New Jersey Student Health Survey from the New Jersey Department of Education, Division of Student Services, Office of Educational Support Services.