

# The Solution



## Message From The Chair

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**FACT:** The National Monitoring the Future Survey for 2010 indicated a major increase nationally in the use of marijuana in the last 30 days by students in 8<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades.

**FACT:** Substance Abuse Prevention Services (SAPS) of the Carolinas recently released the results of its 2010 survey of public school students in Charlotte-Mecklenburg and proportionately **more** Charlotte students in 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades admit ever using marijuana than did nationally. Nationally, 33% of 10<sup>th</sup> graders admitted having ever used marijuana – 37% of Charlotte 10<sup>th</sup> grade students admitted use. 44% of 12<sup>th</sup> grades students nationally admitted use while 53% of Charlotte students used marijuana.

**FACT:** Comparing ourselves with the NC state data for 9-12<sup>th</sup> grade students who admit marijuana use in the last 30 days, proportionately **more** Charlotte youth than youth state-wide admit use. 20% of Charlotte 10<sup>th</sup> grade students admit 30 day use compared with 17% state-wide and 30% of Charlotte seniors admit 30 day use compared with 21% state-wide.

**NOTE:** As was the case with the lifetime national comparison – local 8<sup>th</sup> grade students were less likely to have used. In fact, admitted marijuana use is significantly down for middle school youth while significantly up for high school youth.

**FACT:** There is no longer any difference between use by males and females. While the proportion of males using marijuana does not differ between Charlotte and the state, 16% of Charlotte females admit marijuana use compared with 14% of female students state-wide. This information is troubling given what we know about the negative effects of any substance use on young brains yet our youth are not getting that message about marijuana.

**FACT:** Fewer than 20% of 10<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade students see significant risk in occasional marijuana smoking while over 70% see smoking a pack of cigarettes a day as having significant risk. Only 52% of 6<sup>th</sup> grade students see significant risk in occasional marijuana smoking.

**FACT:** While 97% of all students believe that their parents would disapprove of occasional marijuana smoking, 16% of middle school students feel that peers would approve (more than would approve of drinking alcohol) and 43% of high school students feel that peers would approve of occasional marijuana use. This is significantly related to use: **45% of students who feel their peers would approve occasional marijuana use, used marijuana in the last 30 days compared with only 2% who felt their peers would disapprove.** High school students believe that 64% of high school students use marijuana occasionally; middle school students think that 22% of students in their school use marijuana. The larger the percent of students another student believes use marijuana, the greater the probability that he/she will use.

There's just one more fact coming from the SAPS data that deserves mention here: 2/3 of all students think that students who use drugs think that marijuana is natural and therefore safe to use.

We have our work cut out for us if we are to reverse these facts. It doesn't help that in these tight budget times one source to counter the misperceptions about marijuana and its effects is prevention specialists in the schools and these are the very positions most likely to be eliminated. My grandmother used to say that we are sometimes "penny-wise and dollar-foolish."

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# Results of the 2010 Youth Drug Survey are Released

According to the results of the latest Substance Abuse Prevention Services Youth Drug Survey, youth in Charlotte-Mecklenburg who choose to use drugs have pretty much settled on alcohol, marijuana and tobacco products. Between 2008 and the most recent survey in 2010, the overall use of cigarettes has gone down while the use of alcohol and marijuana has increased.

The results of the survey were released to the community at a news conference at the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Government Center on Friday, June 24<sup>th</sup> and presided over by Dr. Paul Friday, a member of the Criminal Justice faculty at UNC Charlotte and the Chairman of the Charlotte Mecklenburg Drug Free Coalition.

Substance Abuse Prevention Services (soon to become the Center for Prevention Services), in collaboration with the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) and with support from volunteers from the Charlotte Mecklenburg Drug Free Coalition, administered the self-report survey instrument to 4,273 CMS 6<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> graders in November and December of 2010.

Substance Abuse Prevention Services has been surveying the incidence and prevalence of alcohol and other drug use among school-aged youth in Charlotte-Mecklenburg since 1972.

The survey asks the students about lifetime use of a drug (defined as having used the specific drug at least once) and also asks about current use (defined as having used the drug at least once in the past thirty days).

Alcohol had the highest reported use rates in the 2010 survey and it has had the highest reported use rates every year the survey has been implemented. Lifetime use of alcohol peaked in 1986 at 69.1% among local youth. In 2010 37.8% of the students admitted to having ever used alcohol. In 2008, 14% of the survey respondents said they had used alcohol in the last thirty days. In 2010, that percentage rose to 15.3. In 2006, the percentage was 17.2.

But cigarettes, which have been the source of the second most used drug in the survey since 1972, have now clearly dropped below marijuana. For the first time since the survey began, more middle and high school students report having used marijuana in the past thirty days (12.0%) than having smoked cigarettes in the last thirty days (8.6%). On the other hand, the percentage of youth who reported smoking cigars in the past thirty days doubled from 6.2% in 2008 to 12.7% in 2010.

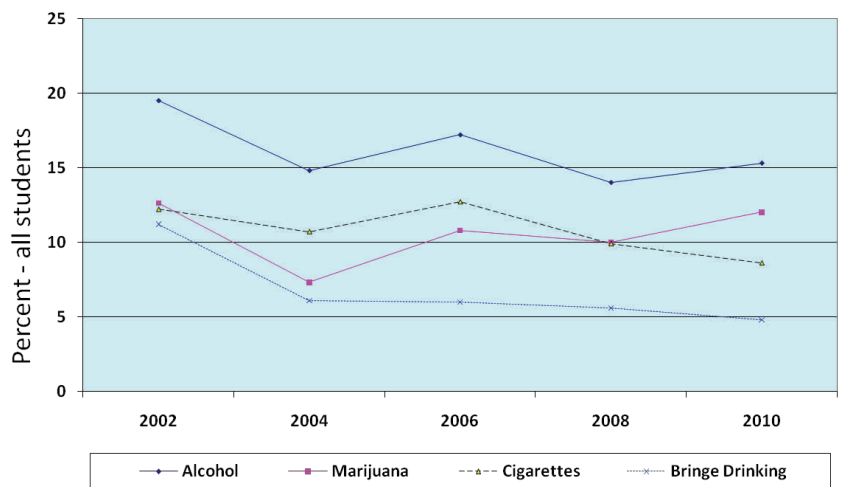
And, although the current use of alcohol among the respondents has increased between the 2008 and 2010 surveys, the percentage of current drinkers who report having engaged in binge drinking (five or more drinks in a two hour period) has gone down from 38.0% in 2008 to 28.5% in 2010.

Reported use of other drugs ranged from 6.2% of the survey respondents reporting having used an energy drink that contained alcohol in the last thirty days to one tenth of one percent (0.1%) of the respondents reporting that they had used black tar heroin in the past thirty days.

Historically, research has pointed out time and again that a perception of significant risk is the number one reason why individuals chose not to use a drug. Unfortunately, the perception of risk involved in having one or two drinks of alcohol, either occasionally or regularly and smoking marijuana occasionally has gone down among local youth between 2008 and 2010. In 2008, 31.7% of the surveyed youth saw having one or two drinks of alcohol occasionally as highly risky and 10.5% saw it as involving no risk. In 2010, the percentage of youth who saw that as highly risky dropped to 29.2% and those who saw it as involving no risk grew to 12.1%.

The changes in perception of risk involved in smoking marijuana occasionally were even larger. In 2008, 40.4% of the students surveyed saw that as highly risky while 8.3% saw it as involving no risk. In 2010, 31.5% saw it as highly risky and 12.3% saw it as involving no risk.

## Long-term trends—Current use



Substance Abuse Prevention Services, Inc. June, 24th 2011

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Finally, the results of the 2010 Youth Drug Survey offer encouragement to those who believe that the involvement of parents can have a very positive impact on the decisions of youth about the use of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs. Of the students surveyed, 87% said that their parents have strict rules against drinking alcohol and students who say that their parents have no strict rules about alcohol and other drug use are twice as likely as students who say that their parents do have strict rules to have used alcohol (rules: 13.9%; no rules: 27.9%) and/or marijuana (rules: 10.4%; no rules: 23.4%) in the past thirty days. The overwhelming majority of the students who were surveyed believe that their parents would disapprove of their using all of the drugs that they were asked about on the survey. The disapproval ranged from 99.9% believing that their parents would disapprove of their using cocaine occasionally to 92.3% believing that their parents would disapprove of their having one or two drinks of alcohol occasionally. Additionally, 96.9% of the respondents reported believing that their parents would disapprove of their smoking marijuana occasionally.



Left-Right: Alba Sanchez, Latino Program Manager, Substance Abuse Prevention Services (SAPS), Rafael Prieto, Editorial Director, Que Pasa Mi Gente, and Jane Goble-Clark, Executive Director, SAPS, at the Youth Drug Survey news conference.

Photo: Larry Clark, Jr.

## Charlotte-Mecklenburg Receives High Intensity Drug Trafficking Designation

*Below is an interview with John Emerson, Deputy Director of the Atlanta HIDTA and State Director of North Carolina HIDTA and a member of the Charlotte/Mecklenburg Drug Free Coalition.*

**DFC:** What is the significance of the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) designation and why was the Charlotte area recently given that designation?

**John Emerson:** HIDTA designation is given by the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy to areas of the country, mostly counties, that have a serious drug threat that is well documented. This threat usually involves multi-jurisdictional drug trafficking. The nominated area must also demonstrate a significant commitment to responding to the threat in the form of multi-agency task force(s) made up of agents and officers from federal, state and local agencies that work together from the same location. HIDTA resources support the task force(s) with operational funding (undercover buy money for example), equipment funds, overtime funds and at times money for prevention initiatives. The task force operations are guided by an executive board that is made up of law enforcement executives with representation on the task force(s).

Mecklenburg, Union and Gaston counties were designated in August 2010 because of the serious threat posed by Mexican drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) who are distributing large amounts of black tar heroin, cocaine, marijuana and methamphetamine. Additionally, there is the threat from the abuse of pharmaceutical drugs. At the outset, the HIDTA task force will focus on black tar heroin trafficking due to the significance of the abuse in the area.

**DFC:** What is the make-up of our regional multi-agency task force(s)?

**John Emerson:** The HIDTA task force in the Charlotte area will be called the Piedmont HIDTA. It encompasses the counties of Mecklenburg, Union and Gaston. Officers from the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department (CMPD), the Union County Sheriff's Office, the Matthews Police Department, the Gastonia Police Department, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF), the Monroe Police Department, the State Bureau of Investigation (SBI) and the

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Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) will make up the task force to combat drug trafficking in the area and beyond if dictated by the investigations. Officers from other agencies are deputized as federal agents and have the same authority to conduct investigations and make arrests as sworn federal agents. Similar HIDTA task forces exist in Raleigh, Greensboro and Asheville.

**DFC:** Are any HIDTA resources being used for prevention initiatives in the Charlotte area?

**John Emerson:** Currently, there are no prevention initiatives funded by HIDTA although one for black tar heroin and prescription drug abuse has been proposed. If funding becomes available, I am hoping that this will come about. This initiative would fund efforts to intervene with black tar heroin addicts in the designated counties to point them in the direction of treatment versus arrest.

**DFC:** Was the Charlotte area recently identified as an HIDTA because of reports that indicated a recent upsurge in illegal drug trafficking in the area or because it was simply recognized as an area with significant illegal drug trafficking and use but not necessarily as experiencing a recent upsurge?

**John Emerson:** Charlotte has been impacted for many years by illegal drug trafficking and the additional resources have been needed for a while. However, the increase in drug trafficking by Mexican drug trafficking organizations in the past 10 years, and from black tar heroin in the past 4 years, certainly helped in the justification for resources and the eventual approval.

**DFC:** Have there been any significant arrests that have resulted from the HIDTA designation or is it too soon for us to be seeing those kinds of results?

**John Emerson:** The long established DEA federal task force is conducting significant investigations and making arrests. However, we are still in the process of finalizing the use of HIDTA funds.

## Footprints Ministry Seeks New Leadership for Choices Program

Footprints Ministry was started in 1991 to help bereaved parents deal with the death of a child. The Choices program, started in 2003 by Skip and Jerry Mudge, is a part of this ministry and seeks to educate the community on the dangers of alcohol and other drug use. Skip and Jerry work throughout the community talking with middle and high school students, young men and women in the military, church groups and individuals with DWI convictions about the impact of drunk driving as well as the use of other drugs and alcohol. The central message they wish to convey is that “the choices you make can save your life or take it.”

The Choices program, which reaches 6,500 teens per year, begins by describing the unique impact of alcohol and other drugs on the adolescent brain and focuses on helping young people make healthier choices. The message of Choices is brought to light as Jerry shares her story of losing two teenaged sons. Her sons started drinking in high school, as a way to fit in, which proved fatal one night as they were involved in a motor vehicle accident. Skip and Jerry have made it their mission to help young people make better choices so that no one else has to experience the pain and the loss they have experienced.

Now, after running the program for 8 years and working in the ministry for 20, Skip and Jerry are looking for new leadership for the Choices program. Given the personal and emotional nature of the program, filling their shoes will be no small task and may call for someone who has experienced similar loss and can speak from personal experience. To maintain the integrity of the program, Skip and Jerry will work with their new leader over the next year to get training and develop presentation materials. Anyone interested in taking over this powerful program should contact Jerry Mudge at 704.509.6603 or [jerrymudge@bellsouth.net](mailto:jerrymudge@bellsouth.net).



Jerry Mudge talks with youth at the Mecklenburg County Public Health Forum at UNC Charlotte  
Photo: Julie Schmidt

## What's your story?

Do you have any upcoming events or story ideas? Send your event information, pitch ideas, or share some pictures for the next edition of The Solution. Contact Kerry Burch at [kerry.burch@carolinashealthcare.org](mailto:kerry.burch@carolinashealthcare.org)