

# The NHSDA Report

July 4, 2003

## School Experiences and Substance Use among Youths

### In Brief

- Youths aged 12 to 17 who enjoyed going to school, felt that their assigned schoolwork was meaningful, or who felt that the things they learned in school were going to be important later in life were less likely to have used illicit drugs or alcohol in the past year compared with youths who did not have these positive attitudes toward school
- Among youths, females were more likely than males to have a positive attitude toward school and Asian, black, and Hispanic youths were more likely than white youths to have a positive attitude toward school
- The rates of past year illicit drug and alcohol use were lower for youths who had seen or heard drug or alcohol prevention messages at school in the past year compared with youths who had not seen or heard drug or alcohol prevention messages at school

The National Household Survey on Drug Abuse (NHSDA) asks respondents to report use of alcohol and various illicit drugs during the month prior to the interview. “Any illicit drug” refers to marijuana/hashish, cocaine (including crack), inhalants, hallucinogens, heroin, or prescription-type drugs used nonmedically. Youths aged 12 to 17 enrolled in school in the past year<sup>1</sup> were asked about their attitudes toward school, including whether or not they liked going to school,<sup>2</sup> if they felt that schoolwork was meaningful and important,<sup>3</sup> and if they felt that what they learned in school would be important later in life.<sup>4</sup> Youths also were asked about their past year participation in school-coordinated drug prevention programs.<sup>5</sup> In an earlier school-related NHSDA short report, the link between academic performance and substance use was investigated, and youth participation in activities was examined.<sup>6</sup>

### Prevalence of Illicit Drug and Alcohol Use Among Youths

According to the 2001 NHSDA, almost 5 million youths aged 12 to 17 (21 percent) had used an illicit drug in the past year. Over 8 million youths (34 percent) had used alcohol at least once in the past year.

### Attitudes Toward School

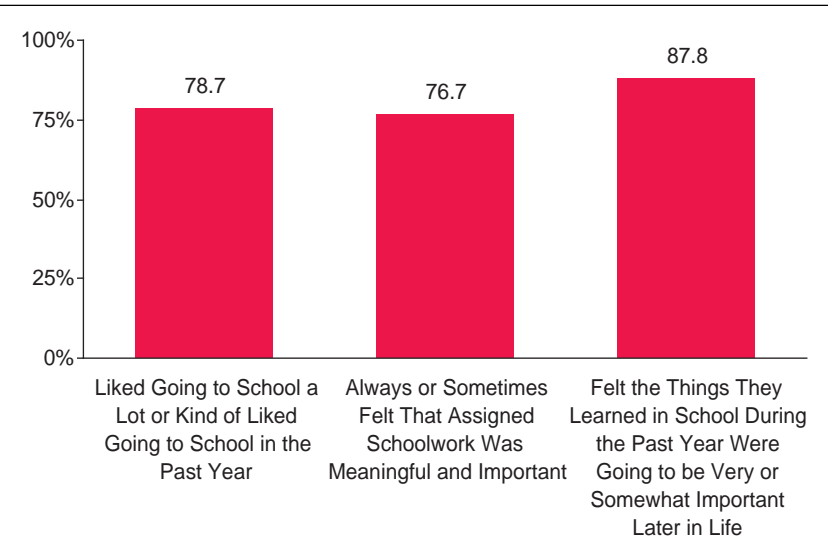
Among youths enrolled in school in the past year, the majority had positive attitudes toward school: Almost 80 percent said that they liked going to school a lot or kind of liked going to school, 77 percent felt that the schoolwork assigned to them was always or sometimes meaningful and important, and 88 percent felt that the things they learned in school in the past year would be somewhat or very important later in life (Figure 1). Among youths enrolled in school in the past year, females were more likely than males to have positive school attitudes. Asian, black, and Hispanic youths were more likely than white youths to have positive attitudes toward school. For all youths, both males and females and among all racial/ethnic groups, past year alcohol use and illicit drug use were lower among those who had positive attitudes toward school compared with those who had negative attitudes toward school (Table 1).

### Drug or Alcohol Prevention Messages

Over 75 percent of youths enrolled in school in the past year had seen or heard drug or alcohol prevention messages at school in the past year. Female youths (80 percent) were more likely than male youths (75 percent) to have seen or heard drug or alcohol prevention messages at school in the past year. Asian, white, and Hispanic youths were more likely than black youths to have seen or heard drug or alcohol prevention messages at school (Figure 2).

Overall, past year illicit drug use (20 percent) and alcohol use (34 percent) were lower for youths who had seen or heard drug or alcohol prevention messages at school in the past year than for youths who had

**Figure 1. Percentages of Youths Aged 12 to 17 Enrolled in School in the Past Year\* Reporting Positive School Attitudes: 2001**



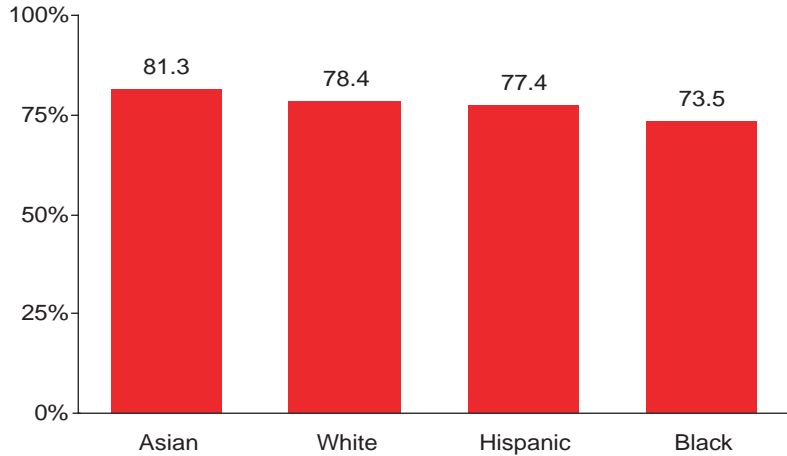
**Table 1. Percentages of Youths Aged 12 to 17 Enrolled in School in the Past Year\* Reporting Past Year Substance Use, by School Attitudes: 2001**

	Past Year Illicit Drug Use	Past Year Alcohol Use
<b>Feeling About Going to School</b>		
Liked a Lot/Kind of Liked	18.0	31.8
Didn't Like Very Much/Hated	32.4	46.6
<b>Assigned Schoolwork Was Meaningful and Important</b>		
Always/Sometimes	18.1	31.9
Seldom/Never	30.9	45.0
<b>Importance Later in Life of Things Learned in School</b>		
Very/Somewhat Important	19.1	32.5
Very/Somewhat Unimportant	35.0	52.2

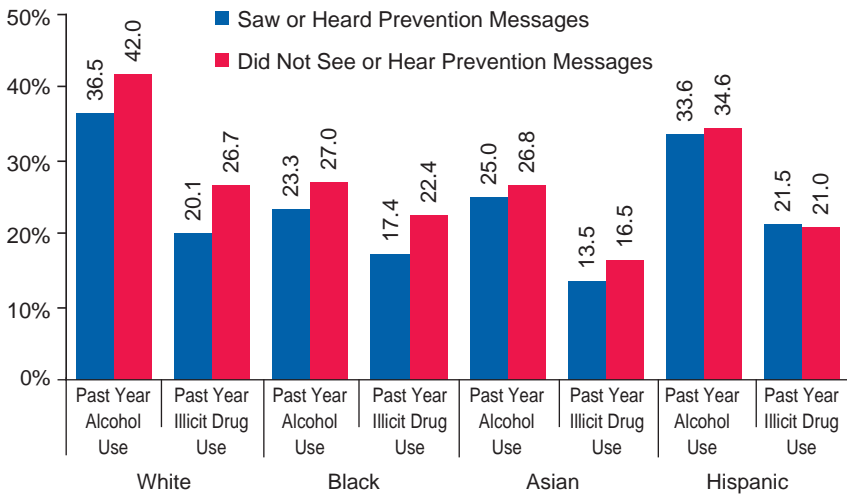
not (25 and 38 percent, respectively). However, the rate of past year alcohol use was not significantly different among female youths who had seen or heard drug or alcohol prevention messages at school (36 percent) and among female youths who had not seen or heard drug or alcohol prevention messages at

school (38 percent). Also, the rates of alcohol and illicit drug use were not significantly different for Asian and Hispanic youths who had seen or heard drug or alcohol prevention messages at school and Asian and Hispanic youths who had not seen or heard drug or alcohol prevention messages at school (Figure 3).

**Figure 2. Percentages of Youths Aged 12 to 17 Enrolled in School in the Past Year\* Reporting That They Had Seen or Heard Drug or Alcohol Prevention Messages at School in the Past Year, by Race/Ethnicity\*\*: 2001**



**Figure 3. Percentages of Youths Aged 12 to 17 Enrolled in School in the Past Year\* Reporting Past Year Substance Use, by Exposure to Drug or Alcohol Prevention Messages in School and Race/Ethnicity\*\*: 2001**



(b) somewhat important, (c) somewhat unimportant, and (d) very unimportant.

- Respondents were asked three questions about alcohol and drug prevention in school in the past year (a) whether they had a special class about drugs or alcohol; (b) whether they had films, lectures, discussions, or printed information about drugs or alcohol in a regular class; or (c) whether they had films, lectures, discussions, or printed information about drugs or alcohol outside of a regular class. If the respondent answered "yes" to any one of the three questions, he or she was considered to have heard or seen drug or alcohol prevention messages in the past year.
- Office of Applied Studies. (2002, September 6). *The NHSDA Report: Academic performance and youth substance use*. Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

**Figure and Table Notes**

\* Youths who did not report their school enrollment status or reported not being enrolled in school in the past 12 months were excluded. Youths reporting they were "home-schooled" in the past 12 months were considered to be enrolled in school.

\*\* American Indian/Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander youths were excluded from the analysis due to small sample sizes.

Source (all figures and table): SAMHSA 2001 NHSDA.

The National Household Survey on Drug Abuse (NHSDA) is an annual survey sponsored by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). The 2001 data are based on information obtained from 69,000 persons aged 12 or older, including approximately 23,000 youths aged 12 to 17. The survey collects data by administering questionnaires to a representative sample of the population through face-to-face interviews at their place of residence.

*The NHSDA Report* is prepared by the Office of Applied Studies (OAS), SAMHSA, and by RTI in Research Triangle Park, North Carolina.

Information and data for this issue are based on the following publication and statistics:

Office of Applied Studies. (2002). *Results from the 2001 National Household Survey on Drug Abuse: Volume I. Summary of national findings* (DHHS Publication No. SMA 02-3758, NHSDA Series H-17). Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

Also available on-line: <http://www.DrugAbuseStatistics.samhsa.gov>.

Additional tables available upon request.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES  
Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration  
Office of Applied Studies  
[www.samhsa.gov](http://www.samhsa.gov)



**End Notes**

- Youths who did not report their school enrollment status or reported not being enrolled in the past year were excluded. Analyses include youths who reported they were home-schooled.
- Respondents were asked how they felt overall about going to school in the past year. Response options were (a) you liked going to school a lot, (b) you kind of liked going to

school, (c) you didn't like going to school very much, and (d) you hated going to school.

- Respondents were asked how often they felt that the schoolwork they were assigned was meaningful and important. Response options were (a) always, (b) sometimes, (c) seldom, (d) never.
- Respondents were asked how important they thought the things they learned in school in the past year were going to be later in life. Response options were (a) very important,