



Community Assessment December 2019

Executive Summary

In 2019, the Milton Substance Abuse Prevention Coalition (MSAPC), a program of the Milton Public Health Department, conducted a *Community Assessment* (CA) to learn more about the nature of youth drug and alcohol use patterns in the Town of Milton, MA. The Assessment's goals were to uncover the prevalence of, and the factors that influence, youth substance use and to determine if there were any changes since the last CA in 2016. This updated information will help to inform the types of protective policies, practices, priorities and programs that the Coalition will promote moving forward. It also will help us to evaluate whether and how our work is making an impact. After synthesizing data from a number of reports, student and parent surveys, as well as from conducting interviews and focus groups with adult leaders and students, there were a number of key findings:

FINDINGS

The three most prevalent substances used by Milton teens are:

- Alcohol (including binge drinking)
- Nicotine (used primarily in e-cigarette devices aka “vapes”)
- Marijuana used in vapes and in other forms (such as blunts and edibles)

The average 2019 Milton youth rates for vaping, marijuana and underage drinking are all higher than the 2019 national rates for their peers.

Vaping of highly addictive nicotine has skyrocketed in Milton since our last CA three years ago, but underage drinking and use of marijuana has significantly declined overall. Underage drinking is now more common among girls while marijuana use is more common for boys in Milton.

The factors generally influencing Milton youth to use these substances include easy access, a permissive and pervasive drinking culture among adults and teens alike, high rates of youth anxiety and depression, sports culture, few prosocial opportunities outside of school days, social media influences, and a strong desire to socially fit in with peers.

Based on these results, MSAPC and its partners have helped to make a big difference in lowering alcohol and marijuana use among Milton youth overall- lowering rates on average by 12 percentage points in the past three years. The heightened level of awareness and concern about substance use, and the implementation of new services, policies and programs in many town sectors have resulted in positive health improvements and is a testament to how our community can make a difference when it works concertedly together.

Background

The Coalition

The Milton Substance Abuse Prevention Coalition (MSAPC) was launched in 2014 as a program of the Milton Public Health Department and could not exist without its support. Our award-winning Coalition is among 700 others that operate across the country. MSAPC is the recipient of the Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America “CADCA” Chairman’s Award for being the outstanding coalition in 2019, and the “Community Hero Award” from South Shore Hospital’s Youth Health Connection in 2016.

Page | 2

National evaluations show that communities that work together in a coalition can substantially lower youth rates of substance use, an important time when the brain can get primed for addiction. MSAPC’s coalition is comprised of 15 adult and student community leaders who meet to plan priorities, programs and policies that will help to reduce substance misuse and the barriers to treatment. Coalition leadership and volunteer members are committed to:

- analyzing local community problems,
- raising community awareness, and
- supporting efforts to tackle these issues.

Our coalition is aligned with a growing national and state movement, seeking to bring community residents and leaders together to cooperatively address concerns about substance misuse, addiction and mental illness. Coalitions use data to clarify priorities appropriate for their local communities and employ proven, nationally developed best practices to inform their strategies. To that end, conducting regular Community Assessments is a key strategy for our coalition.

UPDATED MISSION STATEMENT

“The Milton Substance Abuse Prevention Coalition focuses on preventing and reducing youth substance abuse. Through a committed collaboration of diverse community members and sectors dedicated to a comprehensive and long-term approach, our efforts will foster a healthy, supportive and compassionate town environment.”

MSAPC focuses on youth because its mission is focused on *prevention*. Over the past decade, much has been learned about the science of addiction. We have learned that the adolescent brain is still under construction, and that getting high or drunk during this formative time gets “baked” into the brain’s architecture, potentially priming the brain for addiction later on. The process of addiction rarely begins in adulthood. Nine out of ten cases of addiction begin in adolescence and is the reason our approach is to ***delay use as long as possible***. But, in addition to the potential for addiction, substance use is a leading cause of preventable death and disability, and is often a source of motor vehicle accidents, homicides, suicides, childhood trauma, domestic violence, and crime. We subscribe to Ben Franklin’s adage: *An Ounce of Prevention is Worth a Pound of Cure*.

MSAPC, through its affiliation with the Milton Public Health Department, enjoys robust community-wide support, especially from multiple town departments such as the public schools, police department and the library as well as from health care, faith, civic and business organizations, first responders, and from our local media. These partnerships are the basis of our work and our success to date.

The Community

When conducting a Community Assessment (CA), it is helpful to understand the local context and demographics. Milton, MA is a suburban community of over 27,000 residents, bordering the cities of Boston and Quincy. Nearly 1/3 of all Milton households include children (ages 0-18). Indeed, school-aged children is the largest single age grouping of residents. The town prides itself on its historical heritage, its easy access to both urban and natural environments, and on the diversity of its population.

While Milton is considered to be an affluent community overall, with the median household income at \$126,000 (2017) and with 99% of the population covered by health insurance, it is important to note that about 4% of the population lives in poverty and many more families struggle financially. Indeed, Milton is rated as a community with a high economic variability Gini Index score.

Milton has rapidly become one of the most racially and ethnically diverse communities in the Commonwealth, outside of our large cities. Approximately 25% of its town residents are now considered to be of Black, Hispanic, Caribbean, Asian or other minority racial/ ethnic background. Additionally, 14% of residents are foreign born, mostly from Latin America and Asia. Similarly, Milton Public School student enrollment data reflects this rich diversity, with about 30% of the system's 4,200 students considered to be children of color. Different heritages bring different attitudes, beliefs and behaviors to a community, which must be understood and respected to be effective as a Coalition. (U.S. Census and MA DESE)

Methodology

A mixed method approach for collecting data was used for this Community Assessment.

Quantitative data (numerical) was collected from robust online surveys of youth and parents, as well as from statistical data maintained by local community organizations or from archived reports posted on government websites, as follows:

Quantitative Sources

- **Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS)*** was administered to all grades at Milton High School (890 students) and the Youth Health Survey was administered to all 6th and 8th grade students at Pierce Middle School in March 2019.
- **Online Parent Survey** was administered to Milton adult residents who parent 6th-12th graders in Spring 2019. Respondents were mostly female (76%), mostly Caucasian (84%) and primarily had children in the Milton Public Schools (86%). (~500 total parents)
- **Statistical Reports**, containing anonymous Milton data from the following sources: Bureau of Substance Abuse Services at the MA Department of Public Health, Beth Israel Deaconess Hospital-Milton (BID Hospital), Fallon Ambulance and Milton Police.

**The YRBS is a validated student survey that is used to survey middle and high school aged students. It was developed and is administered by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and is also administered by the state education and public health departments in Massachusetts, for comparison purposes. Milton High School students were surveyed using the core YRBS questions, with additional questions added. Pierce Middle School students were administered the Youth Health Survey (YHS), a close variation of the YRBS. Milton results were immediately available, and MSAPC hired a statistician to examine and interpret the survey data. Unfortunately, the most recent available state comparison data is from the year 2017. However 2019 national data is available for comparison: (<https://www.drugabuse.gov/trends-statistics/monitoring-future/monitoring-future-study-trends-in-prevalence-various-drugs>)*

Qualitative data was also collected from interviews with key informants who are community leaders familiar with town culture and substance abuse, as well as from group interviews (focus groups) with a variety of groupings of public high school students and adults.

Qualitative Sources

- Key Informant Interviews connected with Milton:
 - School Resource Officers (2)
 - First Responders-Law Enforcement and Fire Dept (2)
 - Local Pediatrician (1)
 - Local Psychologist (1)
 - Librarian (1)
- Focus Groups:
 - Milton Adults
 - Milton Interfaith Clergy Association (faith leaders)
 - Parents of color
 - People in recovery
 - Milton High School (MHS) Students
 - Students in Advisory (homeroom) Classes (3)
 - Student Athletes (girls) (1)
 - Student Athletes (boys) (1)

There were five Milton public High School student focus groups held in May and June of 2019. Student athletes comprised two of the groups and the groups were separated by gender. In addition to the student athletes, there were focus group discussions held in three different MHS Advisory Classrooms. Each of these three classrooms consisted of both males and females of different backgrounds. Advisory Classrooms are regularly scheduled periods of time during the school day when teachers meet with small groups of students for the purpose of advising them on academic, social, or other issues.

In each of these student focus groups, at least one experienced adult facilitator was assigned to ask students a series of semi-structured questions concerning substance use. To elicit honest answers, focus group leaders were not Milton residents, and their teachers and faculty were not present during the

discussions. The purpose of these discussions was to obtain a better understanding of perceptions, behaviors, intentions and attitudes of teens toward the three most commonly used substances by MHS students: alcohol, marijuana and nicotine.

Additionally, we have been in ongoing discussions with Milton Public Schools staff and administration.

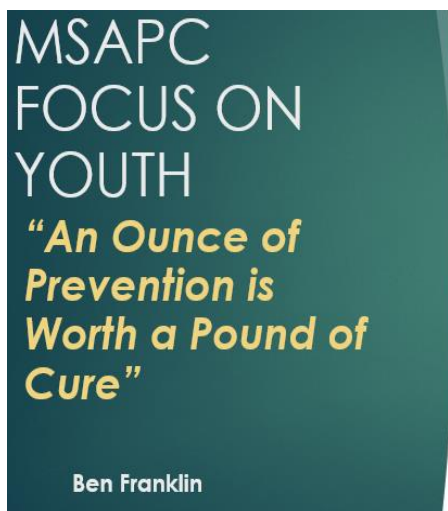
In analyzing the data, we attempted to find answers to the “root causes”, or risk factors driving youth substance use in Milton. National research indicates that the following social, individual and “environmental” conditions can influence the prevalence of substance use in a community and that strategies that address these conditions can improve outcomes. They include (but are not limited to):

- **Easy Access** to alcohol and drugs
- **Community Norms** that favor or support use
- **Enforcement of Laws** that decrease retail and social availability
- **Pricing and Promotion**, especially to kids (cost and marketing influences youth)
- **Youth Attitudes** toward drug use, such as perception of risk and harm
- **Parental Attitudes** and Behaviors toward drugs and alcohol influence the attitudes and behavior of their children
- Availability of **Prosocial Opportunities** for youth
- **Mental Health** and exposure to **Childhood Trauma**

(A detailed description of Root Causes, put forward by CADCA, use can be found in Appendix A.)

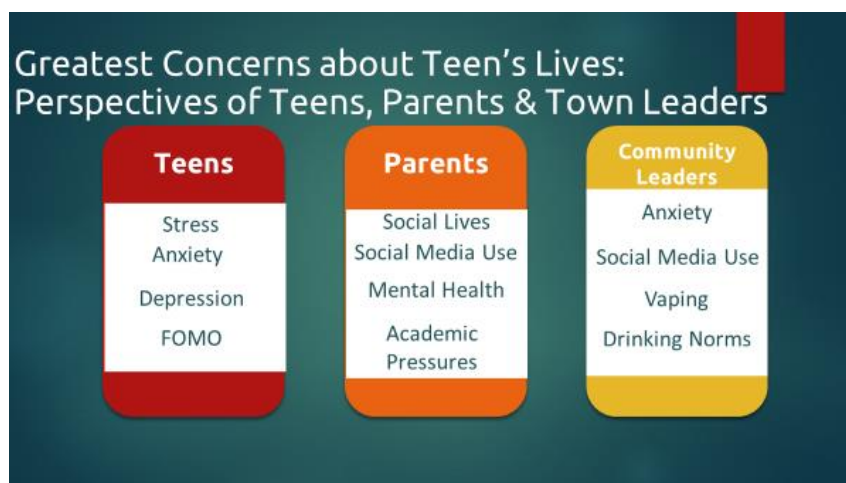
Key Findings

This Community Assessment analyzed quantitative and qualitative data to answer questions about the wellbeing of Milton youth, and specifically about the nature and extent of their alcohol and drug use in the community. The Assessment emphasizes the analysis of youth data because our Coalition is focused on *prevention*.



The Assessment also examined both community risk factors that can contribute to using substances as well as the protective factors which help to shield youth from these problems. The following results are based on the synthesized findings from both the quantitative and qualitative data.

We begin with information from different segments of the Milton community concerning their overall concerns about teens' lives, gathered from student and parent surveys as well as community interviews.



One can see that concerns about youth mental health (anxiety and depression), and their social lives (fear of missing out-FOMO) are issues of high concern expressed by teens, parents and adult community leaders alike. These are issues that often underly substance abuse.

SUBSTANCE USE PREVALENCE IN MILTON

ADULTS

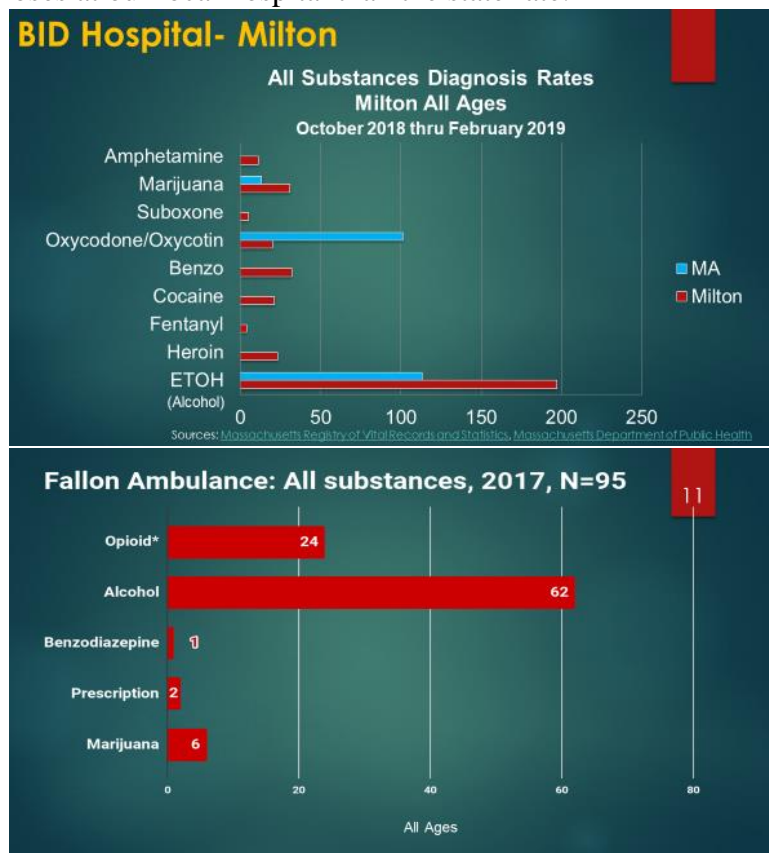
Question: What are the Most Commonly Used Substances in Milton households?

Both qualitative and quantitative data indicate that substance use disorders (SUDs) are fairly prevalent in Milton households, and that it is a hidden problem. In MSAPC's 2019 survey of about 500 parents of Milton teens, **43% indicated that an immediate family member has struggled with addiction.**

Page | 7

Digging further into the data, it appears that alcohol ("ETOH"-ethyl alcohol) is by far the number one substance that Milton households struggle with.

According to BID Hospital-Milton, Milton residents of all ages have higher than expected hospital visits related to ETOH and marijuana disorders, and this graph confirms that alcohol is by far the community's largest problem area. Adults aged 50 years and older (including seniors) have substantially higher rates of substance use diagnoses at our local hospital than the state rate.



Adult and student interviews, as well as law enforcement knowledge, substantiate the high rates of alcohol disorders in Milton.

Community Voices:

“Alcohol is a cultural and intergenerational thing in Milton”

-First Responder and Clergy

“Alcohol is #1 among all substances in Milton. It is permeating many incidents in town, like accidents. Vaping is a rising problem within the community and marijuana has resurfaced due to the legalization of recreational marijuana.”

-Milton Law Enforcement

“Alcohol is our biggest problem and there is more of it in Milton than elsewhere.”

-MHS Students

“It’s part of tradition. It’s always been this way; nothing is going to change.”

-MHS Students

Page | 8

“No one is going to stop the drinking; nevertheless, in my opinion, it is not a right of passage. It is what has been done for generations and it is dangerous. It hurts a lot of people, leads to other drugs, accidents, deaths and unhappiness. The mess at the park is the least of the problem. The future of our children is what’s at stake.”

-Social Media User

YOUTH

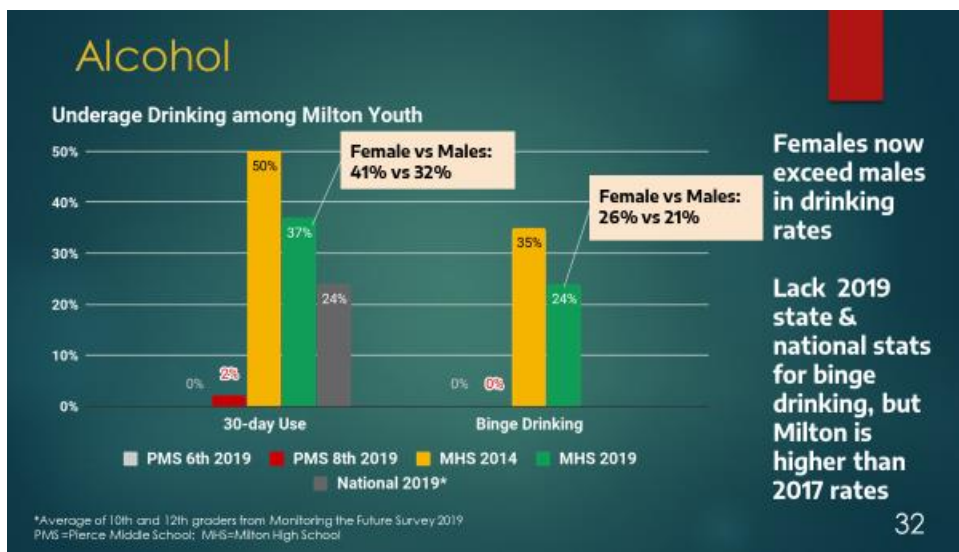
Question: What are the Most Commonly Used Substances by Milton Youth?

The three most prevalent substances used by Milton teens are **alcohol, marijuana and nicotine** (the key addictive component in cigarettes). All three drugs are used in Milton at higher rates than the national high school average (NIDA 2019 stats). While we lack 2019 national comparison data on regular binge drinking (5 or more drinks in one sitting), we expect that it will continue to remain higher than the national and state averages, as it was in 2014 when the YRBS was last administered. The statistics below represent MHS and national use in the last 30 days, because this is an indicator of active use.

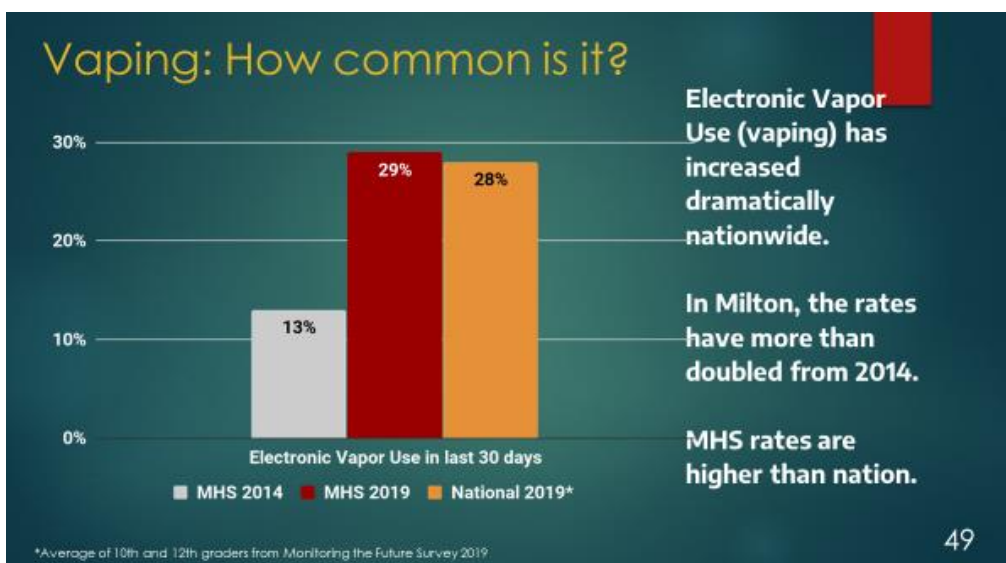
	<u>Milton</u>	vs	<u>National</u>
	MHS Past 30-day Use		Use 2019
Recent Alcohol	37%		24%
Binge Drinking	24%		N/A
Marijuana	21%		20%
Vaping	29%		28%

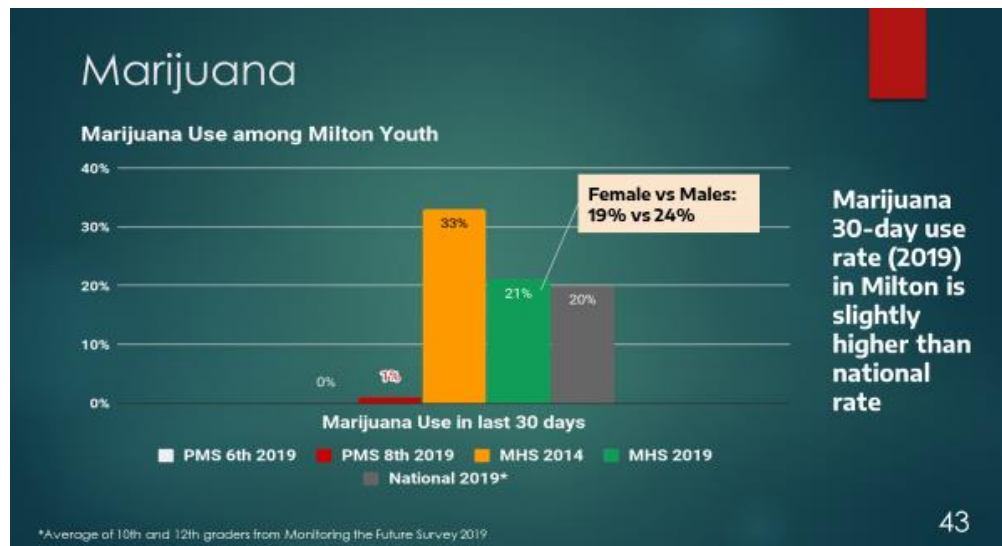
Qualitative interviews indicate that alcohol is the most frequent substance consumed regularly by students (mirroring Milton adults), and surveys indicate that youth binge drinking of five or more servings in a sitting is all too high. While we do not yet have 2019 binge drinking comparison rates on the national and state levels, we do have 2017 comparison rates and Milton is higher than that year.

The good news is that, while rates remain higher than the national averages, since 2014 when the Youth Risk Behavior Survey was last administered to MHS students, the rates of underage drinking and marijuana use substantially decreased overall.



*Vaping, however, primarily of nicotine and marijuana concentrates via electronic devices, has **dramatically increased**.* In fact, it has more than doubled since our last CA. (Vapes are also known as e-cigarettes, e-cigars, e-pipes, vape pipes, vaping pens, e-hookahs, and hookah pens). While traditional cigarette smoking is very low, flavored vaping products that contain nicotine are being heavily marketed to youth by companies such as JUUL and cigarette manufacturers, creating a new generation of addicted consumers. A December 2019 study published in the American Journal of Preventive Medicine finds that e-cigarettes are linked to an increased risk of chronic lung diseases, such as asthma, and develop in a short period of time. A state law limiting flavors has recently been passed and federal legislation is currently being considered. Menthol is often excluded or delayed in most legislation, though teens and African Americans gravitate to this flavor (JAMA 2019).





While youth marijuana use has decreased, the MHS student rates are still concerning with over one in five students reporting that they regularly use marijuana, a drug which impacts their developing brains, is associated with higher levels of developing mental illness, and can be addictive if consumed regularly. Additionally, MHS students are in cars with someone driving high on marijuana (15%) at higher rates than drunk driving, indicating a lack of appreciation of the impacts of drugged driving. An increasing trend, the most recent national estimates of drivers who operate a car under the influence of marijuana put the numbers in the millions, according to a new report from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Studies have shown that using marijuana can seriously alter a driver's judgment, perception, ability to think clearly and reaction time.

Routine underage drinking (metric is 30-day use) in Milton, as well as regular vaping of nicotine and marijuana, are above the national average compared with their peers. Milton girls now exceed boys in drinking alcohol, but boys exceed girls in using marijuana. These trends were substantiated in student focus groups. Fortunately, the use of illicit drugs such as cocaine and inhalants, or unprescribed prescription medicines are low.

Community Voices:

“Vaping is a huge problem. We receive a lot of calls. Some cases start off with the patient vaping occasionally, then they start smoking pot and cigarettes. It is a horrifying situation and we’re only seeing the beginning of the problem”

-Local Psychologist

“Our faith communities are hearing a ton of things about vaping from everyone (parents, kids, etc.)”

-Faith leaders

“We are catching kids vaping on a daily basis, in and out of school”

-School Personnel

“Kids are starting to experiment more with pills”

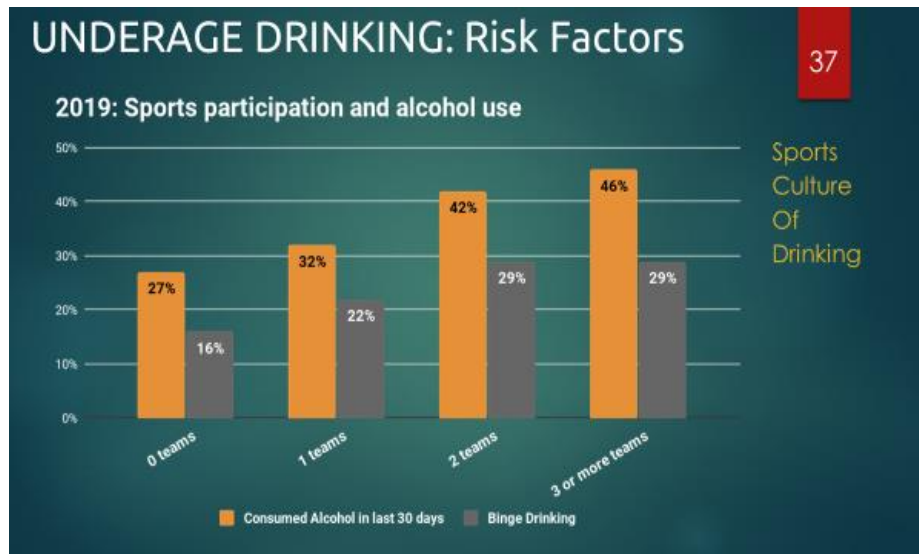
RISK FACTORS CONTRIBUTING to YOUTH SUBSTANCE USE

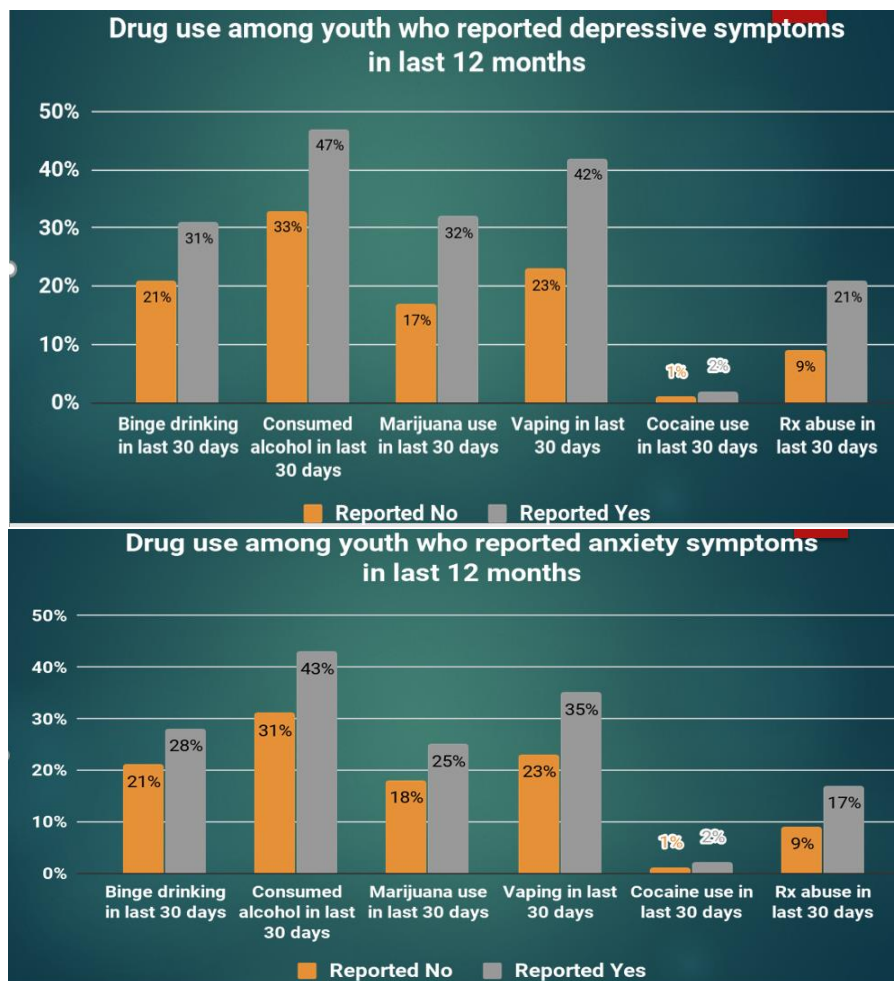
Question: Which Milton youth are at highest risk?

Pierce Middle School students are at comparably lower risk of alcohol and drug abuse than their national peers and compared to Milton High School students. Use increases precipitously around 8th and 9th grades.

While Milton teens using alcohol, marijuana and nicotine represent all backgrounds, there are some subgroups that have higher consumption rates:

- Athletes have significantly higher rates of using alcohol, and the more sports a student is involved in, the more likely they are to be using substances
- Students who struggle with anxiety and depression are also at substantially higher risk of using substances
- Students with lower academic achievement are at greater risk of using drugs, but not alcohol
- There are certain other subgroups that also have higher than expected rates of using substances, including those of Caribbean and Hispanic descent as well as LGBTQ+ students





Question: Why Do Youth Use?

The primary reasons attributed to youth using substances include the following:

- Widespread adult and youth drinking culture in Milton
 - 43% of Milton households have an immediate family member who has struggled with alcohol or drugs
 - Most adults and students believe there is a pervasive drinking culture in Milton
- Kids want to fit in with their peers and their parents are more worried about their children's social lives than they are with using substances
- Alcohol, marijuana and vapes are easy to obtain
- Kids in Milton can afford to buy substances
- Substances ease depression and anxiety, which is rampant among teens
- Vaping is being marketed to kids via social media and has become very popular
- Kids want to fit in, and they and their parents *incorrectly* perceive that most kids use substances
- There is little for kids to do in town on weekends, summer and holidays

- The “Woods” are a free and easy hangout where kids don’t need to be invited and substances are widely available. There’s not much else to do in town.
- Many parents believe that “kids will be kids”, and do not think that underage drinking is a problem—as long as they don’t drive
- Many parents lack the skills, knowledge or confidence to promote their children’s behavioral health:
 - Nearly half of parents are unfamiliar with the state’s “Social Host Liability Law” which holds them legally accountable for serving alcohol to minors
 - Nearly 1 in 5 parents do not believe they have an influence on whether their children use drugs or alcohol
 - Many parents underestimate vaping use of Milton high school students
 - Many parents don’t believe that addiction could happen to their own kids

Community Voices:

“Life is a pressure cooker for kids. Parents want them to be perfect.”

-Clergy

“There are family problems, both financial and miserable relationships. These are traumatic and stressful things for kids.”

-Local psychologist

“Kids use weed to relax and fit in.

-MHS students

“Some kids drink to cope with stress. But most drink because they want to fit in. It’s part of Milton culture; it’s the norm.”

-MHS Students

“The mentality toward marijuana has changed. Legalization of recreational marijuana has decreased the perception of risk among parents and kids.”

-Law Enforcement

“There is nothing else to do in town on the weekends except go to the Woods.

-MHS students

“Vaping is socially acceptable”

-MHS students

“Kids know that they won’t get seriously punished if they get caught drinking.”

-MHS students

“Parents are practically endorsing underage drinking and drop kids off at the Woods. Seems like there is an erosion of parental responsibility these days.

-First Responder

“Parents tell kids one thing and then do another. They are being bad role models.”

- Local psychologist, Law enforcement

“When we go to parties, there’s a lot of booze – it’s the new norm. During holiday and block parties, parents are gathering around with liquor in their hands; they can have a good time only if alcohol is involved. It’s everywhere and kids are seeing it.”

-Adults in Recovery

Question: Where, when and how are Milton youth using?

Youth are using mostly in public outdoor spaces, like the “Woods” or “Crater” at Cunningham Park, and using less frequently in their home basements or at big parties- although these locations still exist. Kids from both public and private schools hang out in the Woods, including kids from neighboring towns. Vaping has become more popular because it is hard to detect, as vaping devices release no smoke or smell, just a vapor. Therefore, doing it at home and school is more common. Moreover, alcohol, marijuana, and vaping drugs are all considered easy to get ahold of by Milton youth and youth in Milton can afford to buy these substances. Older siblings and friends are often the source.

More data on MHS student behaviors and beliefs:

- 73% said alcohol was easy to get, and older siblings were there primary source
- 55% said marijuana was easy to get, just about anywhere. Legalization has fueled a less expensive underground market, making available untested products that are more dangerous
- 51% perceive that smoking marijuana is not very risky and 15% have ridden in a car in the past month with someone who was high
- Students report that vapes are easy to get, especially from older siblings and friends, and from Quincy retailers as well as online
- Students get a hold of fake IDs

Community Voices:

I know it's a rite of passage for Milton teens to party in "The Woods" at Cunningham Park. The site of hundreds of bottles strewn across the fern covered forest floor put a pit of disgust in my stomach.

-Social Media Post 12/28/19

“Parents frequently drop their kids off at the Woods to drink.”

-First Responder, People in Recovery, and Social Media Post

“Letting the kids going to the Woods is “easy parenting”, and should be addressed.

-People in Recovery

“No one is drinking on a school night, but some kids are vaping all the time, and at younger ages, because it’s novel and hard to detect. Some are becoming addicted.”

-MHS Students

“Kids get marijuana from other kids at school or elsewhere. Everyone knows someone. You just call around and you’ll get the supply.”

-MHS Students

“There is a fueling underground market for marijuana because of the big demand. Legal shops are expensive, so kids are buying from dealers, but they are not getting the same products. And parents are not aware of this fact. Edibles are hard to detect, and we don’t know what’s in them.”

-Law enforcement

“I think there needs to be a stricter police presence regarding the student “hotspots” for drinking and drugs. A lot of Milton kids think they can get away with it and they’re right. We need to have a community wide clamp down on the nonsense.”

-Parent Comments in Survey

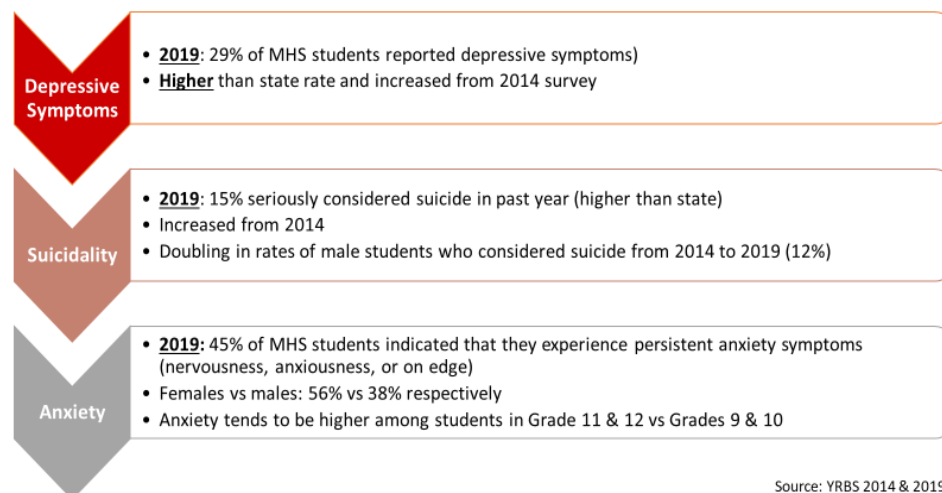
YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH

Mental health disorders are prevalent in Milton, as they are around the country. Nationwide, approximately 1 in 5 youth will experience a mental health disorder, but the vast majority of cases go untreated because of the stigma, and because of the difficulty and expense involved with accessing appropriate care.

In Milton, students reporting depression is higher than the state average: 29% of students reported having experienced depressive symptoms in the past year. Moreover, 45% reported prolonged anxiety in the past year. As many as 15% of students have seriously considered suicide in the past year, which is also higher than the state average. While female students experience anxiety and depression more frequently than males, suicidality has doubled among males from the last YRBS survey.

In Milton, depression and anxiety in youth are highly correlated with using substances, especially vaping and abusing nonprescribed prescription drugs-which can be especially dangerous.

Mental Health Issues among MHS students have increased since 2014



Source: YRBS 2014 & 2019

Community Voices:

“Mental health issues are much more prevalent than any substance issue among youth in the community.”

-Law Enforcement

“The stigma against mental health is still much greater than the stigma against substance use.”

-Law Enforcement

“Anxiety is increasing and social media isn’t helping. Even parents are constantly on their phones”

-Local Pediatrician

“Stress is the biggest issue, especially from high pressure academics and balancing so many things.”

-MHS Students

COMMUNITY FACTORS PROTECTING YOUTH

Youth Assets and Strengths

- ✓ Of the 46 questions on the Milton High School YRBS, Milton students performed better than the rest of the nation on 36 of the questions
- ✓ Substantially fewer MHS students are drinking alcohol and using marijuana than in 2014
- ✓ Illicit drugs, such as cocaine, ecstasy and inhalants are used much less than the nation
- ✓ There is a growing awareness about the dangers of vaping
- ✓ Few kids smoke cigarettes (“it’s weird”)
- ✓ Teens don’t pressure each other to use substances
- ✓ Kids know not to drive drunk
- ✓ Youth rely on their parents as their primary source of health information
- ✓ Pierce Middle School students have less risky behaviors overall than their Massachusetts peers, and use alcohol, marijuana and vaping products at much lower rates

Adult Strengths

- ✓ Most parents believe that kids using alcohol and drugs is never a good thing (although parents believe that drugs are considered worse than alcohol for kids to use)
- ✓ Most parents have spoken to their children about the dangers of, and their expectations about not, using alcohol and vaping
- ✓ More parents are aware and concerned about youth substance use (per clergy)
- ✓ Parents are good about rescuing their children if they are in trouble with their peers
- ✓ Most parents indicate they are planning to, or already, follow recommended practices with their children to curb underage drinking, recommended by the MSAPC “Rethink the Drinks” Parent Pledge
- ✓ Medical prescribing practices are improving, and more parents are monitoring their dangerous drugs at home

Community Strengths

- ✓ More town resources and data are now available through MSAPC and partners
- ✓ More town wide Prevention and Awareness events exist (Mike’s 5K, Rx Takeback Day), promoting less stigma
- ✓ Schools take substance use very seriously and have stepped up their game:

- PARENT speaker series highly regarded
- Health Education classes have increased and are liked by students and high quality, evidence-based student drug prevention programming is offered
- Social Emotional Learning/Whole Child development are emphasized in schools
- School administration is taking serious steps around JUULING, including installing detection equipment
- School Resource Officers are a valued component of school offerings
- ✓ Police take substance abuse very seriously and have also stepped up their game:
 - Police are less lenient and doing more to monitor woods and parties
 - Police have more resources to help with mental health problems
 - Milton Cares Overdose Response Team was established
- ✓ Interface Referral Service was used by 124 Milton residents at no cost since inception 1.5 yrs ago. It is funded by MSAPC; Milton Health Department Public Schools, and Police Department; BID Hospital-Milton
- ✓ Milton Interfaith Clergy Association deeply acknowledges and addresses these issues with congregants
- ✓ Milton Beth Israel Deaconess Hospital has put in place more mental health and SUD support programs in partnership with the community
- ✓ Strong business and civic partnerships are developing around these issues
- ✓ Middle School Wild Cat Den and Youth Task Force have been established by town
- ✓ Opioid overdoses and deaths appear to be substantially lower than in other MA communities
- ✓ More people are asking for help, and town has made more resources available
- ✓ More compassionate and “restorative justice” approach by town leaders

Discussion

Over the last three years, the Coalition and its partners have focused on reducing underage drinking and marijuana use, and the results have been impressive: the prevalence rates for both substances have fallen by over 13 percentage points! We attribute this mostly to increased education which has resulted in a noticeable change has occurred in the town’s understanding, attitudes, behaviors and procedures toward substance abuse and our collective efforts demonstrate how working together can make a big difference. Some of the positive and impressive developments since MSAPC’s community assessment from three years ago include:

- New school educational programs for students and parents
- New Police Programs: MiltonCares, Rx Drug Takeback Day and Mental health staff
- Greater involvement of faith, business, health care and civic organizations
- Less stigma around SUDs
- More community information (website, newsletter, articles)
- More monitoring of the WOODS and vaping in schools
- More family conversations with support from Parent PLEDGE
- Community programs: Interface Referral & Youth Task Force
- Better prescribing and pill management practices

We have made great strides but protecting teens from the harms of alcohol and drug use is work that never ends.

Through this Community Assessment, there were many good ideas that were garnered from youth and adult residents about how the coalition might prioritize its work in the future:

Recommendations

Voices from our Community Leaders and Residents:

What can we do as a community?

- **More Family Conversations**
 - "Having open lines of communications between parents and kids is important" -Person in Recovery
 - "Just bringing up the conversation about drugs and alcohol is important and good. We suggest parents have discussions regarding these topics when the atmosphere is calm, not right after the child is caught. This could help build a positive relationship between the parent and child." -Local pediatrician
 - "Punishing doesn't work. Parents should talk to kids more about alcohol and drugs"-MHS Student
 - "Children don't want to disappoint their parents. Parents have a special impact." -Parents
- **Address Policies & Consequences**
 - "The police are less lenient now. And we have no tolerance for adults violating the Social Host Liability Law" - Police
 - "There needs to be more consequences at home and in the community. Why would kids stop if no one is giving them a hard time?" -Parents and People in Recovery
- **Educate Youth and Parents**
 - "The PARENT Speaker series is great way to shift the culture and social norms around destigmatizing mental health" -Local psychologist
 - "Kids should be taught about these things at much earlier ages" -MHS Students
 - "We need some parent support groups in Milton, for those of us raising teens. -Parents

What can we do as a community?

- **Address our community culture of drinking**
 - "We need to keep taking swings at the problem of drinking with small changes over time"-First Responder
 - "Parents need to be better role models" -Psychologist
 - Letting the kids going to the Woods is "easy parenting" and should be addressed. -Person in Recovery
 - "Give kids more options" -Librarian
- **Attend to youth stress and depression**
 - "We need a community social worker for kids and families, especially to deal with these behavioral health issues." - Local psychologist
 - "We need to decide what's more important: the YRBS or the MCAS. Isn't it more important to attend to how the child is feeling than how well they perform numerically on a test? -Faith leader
- **Tackle stigma**
 - "There is still a lot of stigma around addiction and recovery. We need to show people what healthy recovery looks like and that addiction is a disease"—People in Recovery

Conclusion

Substance use disorders impact many Milton residents. In a 2019 Parent Survey, as many as 43% of Milton parents with teens indicated that someone in their immediate family is struggling with a disorder, and town statistics point mostly to alcohol misuse. Some of this has to do with the town culture and norms, easy access, parenting beliefs and attitudes as well as youth beliefs and attitudes, and some of this is due to a hereditary predilection toward addiction. Addressing our drinking culture will take time and continued effort.

Vaping nicotine and using marijuana, and the quickly changing culture that surrounds both drugs, are also areas in need of strategic attention in our town. Over the coming years, MSAPC will continue to tackle these issues, and others that may arise, to promote a healthier and more compassionate and responsive environment. We ask that you join us!

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Thank you!

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- Milton Police Department –Chief John King, including SROs
- Fallon Ambulance and Milton Fire Department
- Milton Interfaith Clergy Association
- Dr. Margie Skeer, Deborah Milbauer, Elizabeth Thomas & Denise Queally

Appendix A

Root Causes of Youth Substance Abuse

Provided by CADCA

Just as public health researchers have identified smoking and a diet high in fat as root causes (also known as risk factors) for heart disease, researchers have identified a set of risk and protective factors for adolescent health and behavior problems. The research has shown that certain conditions in children's community, school, family, and peer environments, as well as physiological and personality traits of the children themselves, are common risk and protective factors for problems such as drug abuse, delinquency, teenage pregnancy, and school failure

A root cause is an association between some characteristic or attribute of an individual, group, or environment and an increased probability of certain disorders or disease-related phenomena at some point in time. In respect to illicit drug use, proponents of root causes argue that there is a range of social, individual and environmental factors which collectively increase the risk of a young person becoming involved in problem behaviors, including problem drug use. These root causes have been identified in the community, the family, in schools and in individuals. While there are a number of root causes, the following are examples of root causes that can be addressed through community-wide environmental strategies.

Availability /access of drugs

The more available drugs are in a community and the more youth have access to these drugs, the higher the risk that young people will abuse drugs in the community. Retail availability refers to how available alcohol or other drugs from legal sources in the community. Social access refers to alcohol obtained through sources such as parents and friends, at underage parties, and at home. Perceived availability of drugs is also associated with risk. In schools where children just think that drugs are more available, a higher rate of drug use occurs.

Community norms favorable toward drug use

Norms and values can be defined as informal social rules or proscriptions defining acceptable and unacceptable behavior within a social group, organization or larger community. Norms reflect general attitudes about substance use and societal expectations regarding the levels and types of consumption considered acceptable. What is considered acceptable behavior may vary according to the location (e.g., by country or region within a particular country), occasion (e.g. at a bar, a party or at home) and across demographic subgroups (e.g., by gender, race or ethnicity).

Laws and Enforcement

Enforcement refers to enforcing policies to decrease retail and social availability as well as youth use of alcohol through threat of sanctions. Official policies might call for arrest, prosecution, and punishment to help reduce alcohol availability and alcohol-related violations. Punishment might include fines to stores that sell alcohol to minors or stiff penalties for drinking and driving. The distinguishing characteristic of the enforcement domain is the reliance on the formal criminal justice system to implement penalties. "Informal enforcement" is also an important complement to formal mechanisms. For example, "informal enforcement" might come in the form of communities being unwilling to patronize stores that sell alcohol to minors.

Price and Promotion

Research has reported high recall of alcohol advertising among youth, and investigations of youth also indicate that expectancies related to the effects of alcohol and intentions to drink can be positively influenced by

advertising. Increased exposure to alcohol ads is associated with increased consumption and with heavy or hazardous drinking. Alcohol advertisements that were rated by youth as more likeable were also endorsed with greater intention to purchase the brand and products promoted. These findings are consistent with marketing research indicating that likeable advertisements are more affective and persuasive, and that liking of advertisements is one factor that affects attitudes toward brand and product. In regards to price there is strong and consistent evidence to suggest that price increases and taxation (assuming increases pass through to retail price) have a significant effect in reducing demand for alcohol

Parental Attitudes Towards Drug Use

Parental attitudes and behavior toward drugs, crime, and violence influence the attitudes and behavior of their children. Parental approval of young people's moderate drinking, even under parental supervision, increases the risk of the young person using marijuana. Similarly, children of parents who excuse their children for breaking the law are more likely to develop problems with juvenile delinquency. In families where parents display violent behavior towards those outside the family, there is an increase in the risk that a child will become violent.

Favorable Youth Attitudes Towards Drug Use

During the elementary school years, children usually express anti-drug, anti-crime, and pro-social attitudes. They have difficulty imagining why people use drugs, commit crimes, and drop out of school. However, in middle school and later, as others they know participate in such activities, their attitudes often shift toward greater acceptance of these behaviors. This acceptance places them at higher risk. Another aspect is the perception of risk which is the extent to which young people feel that people are at risk of harming themselves if they use specific drugs. Young people who do not perceive drug use to be risky are far more likely to engage in drug use.

Primary sources:

Prioritizing Risk and Protective Factors, Community Health Institute

<http://www.bridges2prevention.org/assets/pdfs/Reg%20B%20Databook%20FINAL-MASTER%208.19.08.pdf>

Risk and Protective Factor Definitions and Construction, State of Maine, Office of Substance Abuse

<http://www.maine.gov/maineosa/survey/pdf/RandPFDef.pdf>

Logic Models for the Prevention of Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drug Problems, PIRE.

<http://www.pire.org/logicmodels.htm>

Appendix B
Milton Social Media Posts
Accessed December 30, 2019

Male 1: I know it's a rite of passage for Milton teenagers to party in "The Woods" at [Cunningham Park](#). But there is blatant disregard for our community and the environment. The site of hundreds of bottles strewn across the fern covered forest floor yesterday put a pit of disgust in my stomach. I'm not completely naive. I know I'll blink and my kids will be of age where they will want to head out to the woods. I just hope they will have the good sense to fill the empty garbage bag without my suggestion to do so.

Male 2 Just frustrating more than anything! I have no problem with letting the kids "party" as long as it's safe and they clean up.

Male 3 Kids are gonna be kids. But they can clean up after themselves.

Female 1: Kids are going to be kids? Sad that is the way parents think today

Male 4 How about putting a dumpster out there with a big sign over it: "Drink what you want. Just throw out your friggin' empties".

Female 2: Such slobs! I hope these kids don't take off school to protest climate change.

Male 5 In high school and college we used to hang out by the bridge where they freeze it over for skating. We had a good deal there and knew it, so pretty much every Saturday and Sunday morning we would go back down and clean up any mess we left the night before. There were barrels right there so it was easier.

Male 6: ..We were all kids that age at one time in our life, if they don't go there, they'll go somewhere else, it's on those kids to be somewhat smart, keep it clean, don't attract the law to know you were there

Female 3: Why do parents condone this? It's not a rite of passage. It's dangerous and not to mention, illegal!

Male 7: I know some won't believe this but parents drop them off and others use Uber and Lyft! How about parents acting like parents instead of their kids best friend dropping them off?

Female 4: Maybe parents should drop their kids off with trash bags

Female 5: Maybe parents should stop driving their kiddies up there and dropping them off so they can participate in that activity.

Female 6: So sad for all the dogs that have had their paws cut open running through the woods.

Female 7: I see the kids walking to the woods and they are younger than high school so that may be the problem.

Female 8: I think most of us adults are willing to admit the teenage drinking in Milton could be far more dangerous. If kids are going to experiment, I'm glad they'll at least be around friends and able to walk home. The issue is the mess.

Female 9: The answer isn't in the trash, it's in the allowing the woods to happen at all. I know so many teenagers involved in amazing activities that keep them too busy to go to the woods. Keep em busy and keep the woods off limits.

Male 8: I do not condone teenage drinking but whether condone it or not, it's going to happen. Maybe we should try to give them something else to do.

Male 9: It truly is a right of passage. I would be a hipacrt (sic) if I felt differently. Believe me, these will grow up to be very good people

Female 10: I remember walking my dog there about 10 years ago with two men who had grown up in Milton. One said: "Yeah, kids have been doing this for years." in a kind of "kids will be kids" tone. The other said, "This is what turned my daughter into an alcoholic." Female 11:...and so many others!

Female 11: No one is going to stop the drinking; nevertheless in my opinion it is not a right of passage. It is what has been done for generations and it is dangerous. It hurts a lot of people, leads to other drugs, accidents, deaths and unhappiness. The mess at the park is the least of the problem. The future of our children is what's at stake."