Background of PAYS:
Since 1989, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania has conducted surveys of secondary school students on their behavior, attitudes, and knowledge concerning alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs, and violence. The effort is sponsored and conducted by the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD). Currently, the Pennsylvania Youth Survey (PAYS) is administered to 6th, 8th, 10th, and 12th grade public school students and is conducted every two years through the involvement and support of local communities. The first survey was administered in 2001 and data gathered in 2001, 2003, 2005, 2007, and 2009, as well as data collected from the Generation at Risk Survey, a biennial study of drug-use prevalence rates that was conducted from 1989 through 1997, has been used to drive prevention initiatives across the state.

The PAYS is based on the Communities That Care® Youth Survey (CTCYS), which was developed from the work of Dr. J. David Hawkins and Dr. Richard F. Catalano. The CTCYS was developed from research funded by the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The resulting surveys are designed to identify levels of risk factors related to problem behaviors such as alcohol, tobacco, and other drug-use and to identify the levels of protective factors that help guard against those behaviors. In addition to measuring risk and protective factors, the CTCYS and the PAYS also measure the actual prevalence of drug-use, violence, and other antisocial behaviors among surveyed youth.

In 2007, three new categories of data were collected from Pennsylvania youth. For the first time, PAYS assessed the use of prescription medicines, including amphetamines, sedatives, tranquilizers, and narcotics, and their use for non-medical purposes. Questions were also included to assess students’ experiences with gambling. In 2003, PAYS included questions about students’ feelings – sadness, hopelessness, and worthlessness – potential symptoms of depression. In 2007, for the first time, the depression data was reported. However, it has been acknowledged that the questions are not indicative of clinical signs or symptoms of depression or suicide.

Pennsylvania outcomes are measured against national outcomes in the “Monitoring the Future” study conducted by the University of Michigan. This allows for local communities, prevention planners, and policy makers to contrast local and state data to comparable national findings. Trends in risk and protective factors, substance use, and problem behaviors can be assessed against national trends.

State Support and Funding for PAYS:
The Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD) sponsors the survey and has collaborated with other state agencies, such as the Department of Education, Department of Health, Liquor Control Board, and Department of Public Welfare. In addition to surveys administered with the support of local communities, students reflective of varying urban, suburban, and rural demographics are randomly selected to participate in a state survey analysis. PCCD values the tool for the local and aggregate state data garnered and utilizes the data to drive prevention efforts. To promote data collection in more communities, PCCD is currently working with its state partners to reduce testing duplication and demands upon schools and communities through the creation of a comprehensive survey that meets the data collection needs of various state agencies.

Validity of PAYS:
Four strategies are used to ensure the validity of the surveys:

1. Surveys of students that appear to exaggerate drug use or antisocial behaviors are eliminated. For example, the surveys of students who report four or more daily uses of inhalants, cocaine, hallucinogens, ecstasy, methamphetamines, or heroin are eliminated.
2. Surveys of students that report an unrealistically high frequency – more than 80 instances in the past year – of antisocial behaviors, including attacking someone with the intent to harm, stealing a vehicle, being arrested, and getting suspended, are eliminated.
3. Surveys of students who report any use of fictitious drugs are removed from the analysis.
4. Inconsistencies in logical responses are detected. For example, a survey would be eliminated if a student reported that they had used alcohol 3 to 5 times in the past thirty days, but had also reported that they never used alcohol in their lifetime.

**Purpose of PAYS:**
The data gathered in the PAYS provide an important benchmark for alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use and delinquent behavior among Pennsylvania youth, as well as provide school administrators, state agency directors, legislators and local communities with critical information concerning changes in patterns of use and abuse of harmful substances and behaviors. The survey assesses risk factors that are related to problem behaviors and the protective factors that help guard against them. This information allows community leaders to prioritize prevention targets and to direct prevention resources to areas where they are likely to have the greatest impact. Not only does the data aid in the selection of proven prevention programs, but it also helps to evaluate and document whether prevention and treatment programs are achieving their intended results.

**Survey Administration:**
The survey is generally administered in school settings between September and November with results reported in the spring. The survey is administered in the classroom and takes approximately one class period to administer. The survey has been offered as a paper and pencil survey and as an internet-based survey. In 2009, the cost was $1.25 per paper/pencil survey or $1.00 per internet survey. Student participation is voluntary and responses are anonymous and confidential. Students can skip any questions they are not comfortable answering.

*Online information and past results of the state-wide sample can be accessed at:* [www.pays.state.pa.us](http://www.pays.state.pa.us)

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