



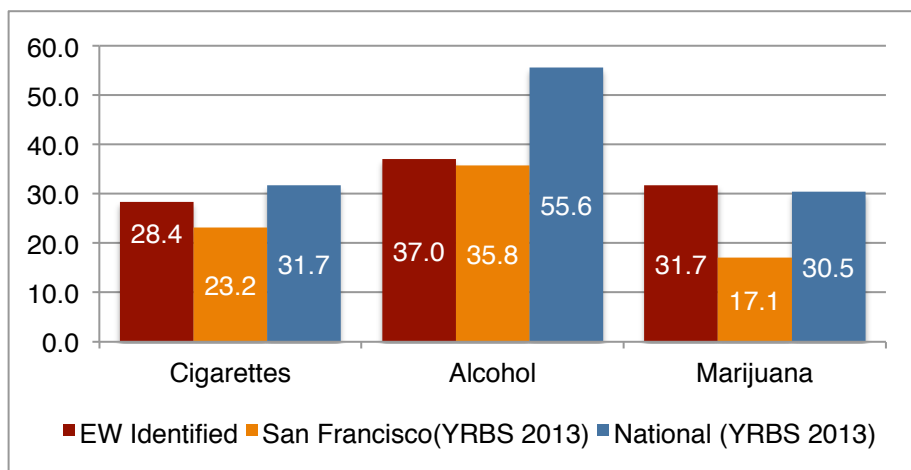
# Project Arrive Research Highlights

Using Research to Improve the Lives of SFUSD Students<sup>1</sup> – March 2015

## Exploring the Connection between Academic Risk and Substance Use

SFUSD's early warning indicator (EWI) system is designed to identify 8<sup>th</sup> grade students who are at risk of school dropout. As part of the SFUSD *Mentoring for Success* initiative, *Project Arrive* is a school-based group mentoring program designed to prevent school dropout and promote positive behaviors among 9<sup>th</sup> grade students who are flagged by the EWI system. Students meet once a week with their group mentor and their peers throughout the school year. Groups participate in a variety of activities, and mentors provide academic, social, and emotional support to students.

Risk for school dropout may also be linked to other problem behaviors in students' lives, such as substance abuse. Here, we summarize what we are learning about risk for substance abuse among SFUSD 9<sup>th</sup> grade students identified through the EWI system. The information is from all the students in our study, whether they are in Project Arrive or not\*. We also provide resources for addressing concerns about students who may be developing a substance abuse problem.



- The percentage of EWI students who reported using cigarettes and alcohol was **somewhat higher** than the San Francisco estimate but **lower** than the national estimate.
- Nearly **1 in 3** of 9<sup>th</sup> grade students identified through EWI report having used marijuana. Other data show that **16 percent** of EWI students reported using marijuana more than 1 or 2 times.
- These data point to the possibility that some students are at risk of experiencing substance use related problems that can affect their performance at school.

\*So far, we have collected data from 73 9<sup>th</sup> grade students identified through the EWI system in 5 SFUSD high schools. The graph shows the percentage of students who reported using cigarettes, alcohol, and marijuana in the previous month. For comparison, the graph shows 9<sup>th</sup> grade data from the CDC's 2013 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), including national and San Francisco data.

## How can adults talk with students about these risks? What can adults at school do if they are concerned that a student might be developing a substance abuse problem?

- **The San Francisco Wellness Initiative:** To directly address substance use, the *San Francisco Wellness Initiative* is a first line of defense. The initiative works to promote the health, well-being, and academic success of high school students at 19 SFUSD campuses. Wellness staff include *Behavioral Health Counselors* trained to provide culturally sensitive mental health and substance abuse service. You can learn more about the Initiative and find a link to the Wellness Center on your campus at <http://sfwellness.org/>.
- **Indirect Conversations about Substance Use:** It can be challenging to engage mentees in constructive conversations about sensitive topics like substance use. One strategy is to address the topic indirectly, by talking about influences on drug use (like peer pressure) and the types of skills needed to make the best decisions (reflecting on values, building a strong sense of self, assertive social skills).
- **"Tips for Teens":** The *Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration* has produced this series that covers a range of topics including underage tobacco and alcohol use and many common drugs. You can find these at <http://store.samhsa.gov/list/series?name=Tips-for-Teens&pageNumber=1>

Helpful Resources

<sup>1</sup> *Project Arrive Research Highlights* are developed through a partnership between SFUSD and Georgia State University to support, further develop, and evaluate the effectiveness of Project Arrive. For information about the Project Arrive program, contact Vida Sanford ([SanfordV@sfusd.edu](mailto:SanfordV@sfusd.edu)); for information about the research, contact Gabriel Kuperminc ([gkuperminc@gsu.edu](mailto:gkuperminc@gsu.edu)). Visit the Project Arrive website at <http://sites.gsu.edu/project-arrive>.