

2025 PAYS: Lower Dauphin Community Highlights

Pennsylvania Youth Survey



Lower Dauphin Community Participation Highlights

In 2025, Lower Dauphin School District participated in the PAYS as part of Pennsylvania's statewide effort to understand and improve youth health and wellbeing.

Lower Dauphin 2025 PAYS at a glance:

- 909 valid student surveys submitted
- Overall modified participation rate: 83.3% — well above the statewide rate of 53.6%

Grade		District Surveys
6th	Grade	269
8th	Grade	235
10th	Grade	238
12th	Grade	167
Total		909

Good News: Most Lower Dauphin Students Are Making Healthy Choices

The majority of Lower Dauphin students are not using substances. In fact, the district's alcohol lifetime rate (22.0%) is below the state average — a genuine prevention achievement. Most no-use rates are at or better than state benchmarks.

Substance	District: No Use(Past 30 Days)	State: No Use(Past 30 Days)
Alcohol	85.2%	90.9%
Marijuana	93.7%	95.7%
Vaping / Electronic Vapor Products	93.2%	93.7%

Lower Dauphin's vaping non-use rate (93.2%) is essentially at the state average (93.7%) — a strong indicator given that vaping tends to be elevated in many districts. Alcohol non-use (85.2%), while below the state, is improving consistently from year to year. The overall picture is one of a community where most students are making healthy choices and prevention is working.

Substance Use Trend Data

Alcohol: Below State Average Lifetime — With Upper-Grade 30-Day Use to Watch

Alcohol is the most commonly used substance in Lower Dauphin, but its all-grades lifetime rate (22.0%) is actually below the state average (23.3%) — a meaningful prevention win. 30-day use (14.8%) is more elevated and warrants continued attention, particularly at 10th and 12th grade.

Alcohol — Lifetime Use

Grade		District 2021	District 2023	District 2025	State 2025
6th	Grade	11.0%	10.2%	9.2%	10.8%
8th	Grade	30.2%	20.2%	17.7%	18.1%
10th	Grade	45.5%	31.6%	25.3%	24.6%
12th	Grade	55.0%	56.2%	44.3%	38.3%
All Grades		34.0%	28.2%	22.0%	23.3%

Alcohol — 30-Day Use

Grade		District 2021	District 2023	District 2025	State 2025
6th	Grade	3.8%	2.1%	3.5%	2.9%
8th	Grade	10.3%	4.9%	5.2%	5.4%
10th	Grade	18.4%	13.0%	7.8%	9.5%
12th	Grade	30.2%	28.9%	22.2%	18.1%
All Grades		14.8%	11.3%	8.4%	9.1%

Lower Dauphin's all-grades lifetime alcohol use has declined 12 points — from 34.0% in 2021 to 22.0% in 2025 — now below the state average. 6th and 8th grade 30-day rates are essentially at state levels. The area requiring continued attention: 12th grade 30-day use (22.2%) remains above the state (18.1%), and all-grades 30-day use (8.4%) is just below the state average — a near-miss worth monitoring. Binge drinking (3.7%) is modestly above the state (3.2%), consistent with elevated 12th grade use.

Vaping: Near State Average — With Important Nicotine Signal

Vaping is the second most commonly used substance in Lower Dauphin. With lifetime use at 9.7% (compared to the state's 11.5%), the district is performing better than state peers. However, among students who do vape, nicotine use is notably high.

Grade	Lifetime 2023	Lifetime 2025	State 2025	30-Day 2025	State 2025
6th Grade	2.6%	2.3%	3.9%	n/a	1.8%
8th Grade	9.6%	5.6%	9.0%	4.3%	4.6%
10th Grade	11.3%	11.5%	12.7%	4.7%	6.8%
12th Grade	33.7%	25.0%	19.7%	14.1%	11.4%
All Grades	13.4%	9.7%	11.5%	6.8%	6.3%

Among Lower Dauphin students who vaped in the past year, the substances reported:

- Just flavoring: 28.8% of vapers —below the state average of 34.0%
- Nicotine: 71.2% of vapers — well above the state average of 59.7%
- Marijuana or THC: 33.3% of vapers—slightly above the state average of 31.9%

Lower Dauphin's all-grades vaping lifetime rate (9.7%) is below the state (11.5%) — a positive finding. However, 12th grade 30-day use (14.1%) exceeds the state (11.4%), and the nicotine content among vapers (71.2%) is substantially above the state average (59.7%). Students who vape in this district are very likely to be using nicotine — making nicotine addiction prevention and cessation support a priority even as overall vaping numbers appear manageable.

Marijuana: Declining and Near or Below State Average

Marijuana use has declined meaningfully across all grades from 2021 to 2025. Lower Dauphin's rates are at or below state averages in most categories — a clear prevention success.

Grade	Lifetime 2021	Lifetime 2023	Lifetime 2025	State 2025	30-Day 2025	State 2025
6th Grade	0.0%	0.9%	1.1%	1.1%	0.0%	0.3%
8th Grade	3.9%	6.4%	1.7%	4.1%	1.7%	2.1%
10th Grade	19.7%	6.5%	8.6%	9.4%	3.9%	4.5%
12th Grade	31.5%	29.9%	22.8%	19.1%	10.8%	10.0%
All Grades	12.8%	10.1%	7.1%	8.7%	3.5%	4.3%

All-grades marijuana lifetime use (7.1%) is below the state (8.7%) and 30-day use (3.5%) is below the state (4.3%) — a genuine success. 12th grade 30-day use (10.8%) is slightly above the state (10.0%) and worth monitoring, but the overall trajectory is positive. However, among students with high depressive symptoms, marijuana lifetime use (29.6%) far exceeds the state's high-symptom figure (19.3%) — a critical linkage discussed further in the mental health section.

Cigarette, Tobacco & Nicotine Pouch Use

Measure	District 2021	District 2023	District 2025	State 2025
Cigarettes: Lifetime use (all grades)	7.6%	5.8%	5.5%	4.8%
Cigarettes: 30-day use (all grades)	2.0%	1.8%	2.4%	1.8%
Smokeless tobacco: Lifetime use (all grades)	3.6%	3.0%	1.6%	2.0%
Nicotine pouches: Lifetime use (new in 2025)	n/a	n/a	5.2%	4.4%

Lower Dauphin's tobacco picture is nuanced. Cigarette lifetime use (5.5%) is slightly above the state (4.8%), and 30-day cigarette use (2.4%) has ticked up slightly from 2023 — worth monitoring. Nicotine pouch use (5.2%) is above the state average (4.4%). Smokeless tobacco has declined and is now below the state average. The combined picture — elevated cigarette, nicotine pouch, and high nicotine-vaping rates — points to a broader nicotine dependency pattern that warrants a comprehensive, multi-product prevention approach.

Mental Health: Depression, Anxiety, and Suicidal Ideation

Lower Dauphin's 2025 mental health data tells a story of genuine improvement across nearly every indicator — and several measures are at or below state averages, which is a meaningful achievement. At the same time, some indicators remain elevated, and the district's depressive symptom-substance use link warrants close attention.

Overall Mental Health & Depressive Symptoms

- 77.6% of students report good overall mental health — above the state average of 76.4% (up from 72.6% in 2023)
- 33.0% reported feeling depressed or sad MOST days — essentially matching the state rate of 32.8% (down from 37.4% in 2021)
- 32.7% reported 'at times I think I am no good at all' — slightly above the state average of 30.4%
- 19.3% reported sometimes thinking 'life is not worth it' — essentially matching the state's 19.5%
- 19.5% reported thinking of themselves as a failure — matching the state average of 19.0%
- 13.6% reported self-harm in the past 12 months — essentially matching the state's 13.5%

Depressive Indicator	District 2021	District 2023	District 2025	State 2025
Good overall mental health (past month)	n/a	72.6%	77.6%	76.4%
Felt depressed or sad MOST days	37.4%	35.9%	33.0%	32.8%
Sometimes I think life is not worth it	25.3%	24.5%	19.3%	19.5%
At times I think I am no good at all	36.7%	36.7%	32.7%	30.4%
I am inclined to think I am a failure	24.8%	22.1%	19.5%	19.0%
Self-harm in the past 12 months	16.4%	16.4%	13.6%	13.5%

Lower Dauphin's mental health improvement from 2021 to 2025 is one of the most positive stories in this report series. Good mental health has risen from 72.6% to 77.6% — now above the state average. Persistent sadness (33.0%), self-harm (13.6%), and 'life is not worth it' (19.3%) all now closely match state benchmarks. Every indicator has improved. This is evidence that the community's mental health investments are working.

Grade-Level Mental Health Differences

Grade	District Good MH 2025	State Good MH 2025	District Depressed MOST Days	State Depressed MOST Days
6th Grade	82.9%	83.0%	31.3%	35.3%
8th Grade	76.8%	77.4%	34.5%	33.5%
10th Grade	75.7%	74.4%	32.6%	31.5%
12th Grade	73.6%	71.8%	33.8%	31.1%
All Grades	77.6%	76.4%	33.0%	32.8%

Lower Dauphin's grade-level mental health data is one of the strongest profiles in this report series. Every grade matches or exceeds the state average on good mental health — and 6th, 10th, and 12th grades all outperform state benchmarks on persistent sadness as well. This consistent cross-grade strength is a testament to the community's mental health culture and a foundation to actively protect and build upon.

Suicidal Ideation: Improvement to Celebrate — With Ongoing Vigilance

Suicide Risk Indicator	District 2021	District 2023	District 2025	State 2025
So sad, stopped doing usual activities (2+ weeks)	30.2%	27.9%	23.9%	24.0%
Seriously considered suicide	17.1%	16.8%	13.5%	13.9%
Made a suicide plan	13.0%	13.3%	11.3%	10.7%
Attempted suicide	8.1%*	4.9%*	4.4%*	4.5%
Attempt required medical treatment	28.6%	23.1%	17.6%	20.2%

**Note: The suicide attempt question was revised in 2023 from a frequency scale to a yes/no format. Interpret 2021 comparisons with caution.*

Lower Dauphin's suicide indicators have improved across every measure from 2021 to 2025 — and several now fall below the state average. Serious consideration (13.5%) is just below the state (13.9%). Attempt rates (4.4%) and medical treatment after attempt (17.6%) are both below state averages — with the medical treatment rate improving substantially from 28.6% in 2021. These trends reflect meaningful progress and should be celebrated while sustaining the supports that drove them.

Depression and Substance Use: A Critical Link in Lower Dauphin

PAYS reveals a powerful relationship between depressive symptoms and substance use in Lower Dauphin. While the district's overall rates are favorable, students with depressive symptoms show dramatically elevated substance use — in some cases exceeding state benchmarks for the same symptom group:

Substance	No Depressive Symptoms	Moderate Symptoms	High Symptoms (District)	High Symptoms (State)
Alcohol Lifetime	11.1%	24.8%	40.7%	42.4%
Alcohol 30-Day	4.2%	9.5%	14.8%	17.4%
Cigarettes Lifetime	1.9%	5.8%	14.8%	13.7%
Marijuana Lifetime	2.3%	7.9%	29.6%	19.3%
Marijuana 30-Day	0.0%	4.4%	14.8%	9.9%

- Only 3.3% of Lower Dauphin students fall in the high depressive symptoms category— below the statewide 4.2%, and among the lowest in this report series
- 70.4% fall in the moderate depressive symptoms category — slightly above the statewide 66.9%
- Marijuana lifetime use among high-symptom students (29.6%) far exceeds the state's 19.3% for the same group — the most notable outlier in this cross-tab
- Cigarette lifetime use among high-symptom students (14.8%) also slightly exceeds the state's 13.7%

Lower Dauphin has a low proportion of high depressive symptom students (3.3%) — a genuine strength. However, when students do reach high depressive symptom levels, their marijuana use is dramatically elevated — 29.6% lifetime use vs. the state's 19.3% for the same group. This finding, combined with the district's overall positive trajectory, suggests a targeted intervention for at-risk students who are self-medicating with marijuana could have an outsized protective impact.

Bullying and Mental Health

Mental Health Indicator	Not Bullied (District)	Not Bullied (State)	Bullied (District)	Bullied (State)	Skipped School (District)	Skipped School (State)
Felt so sad, stopped activities (2+ weeks)	16.5%	16.6%	43.0%	45.1%	70.3%	63.8%
Seriously considered suicide	8.2%	8.5%	27.2%	29.7%	54.1%	41.5%
Made a suicide plan	7.4%	6.4%	21.4%	23.3%	37.8%	35.2%
Attempted suicide	3.0%	2.7%	8.1%	9.7%	3.7%	3.6%

28.7% of Lower Dauphin students reported being bullied — above the state rate of 25.7%, and one area where the district trails state benchmarks. A notable finding: among students who skipped school due to bullying fear, 54.1% seriously considered suicide — significantly above the state's 41.5%. This group is among the most vulnerable in the district, and active outreach and support for school-avoidant bullying victims is a high-priority intervention.

Help-Seeking in Lower Dauphin

When Lower Dauphin students felt sad, lonely, or worried, they most commonly turned to:

Who Youth Talk To	District 2023	District 2025	State 2025
A friend	44.1%	43.1%	40.6%
A parent or caregiver	38.2%	38.5%	36.0%
Another family member	15.9%	16.8%	15.3%
A teacher or other adult at school	9.5%	7.0%	7.3%
A doctor or therapist	12.5%	10.1%	8.6%
Did not feel this way in past 30 days	19.1%	20.3%	22.5%

Lower Dauphin's help-seeking profile is one of the strongest in this report series. Students are more likely to turn to a friend (43.1% vs. 40.6% statewide), a parent (38.5% vs. 36.0%), a therapist (10.1% vs. 8.6%), and other family members (16.8% vs. 15.3%) — all above state benchmarks. This robust help-seeking culture, across multiple channels, is a major protective asset for the district and likely contributes to its improving mental health outcomes.

Risk and Protective Factors: 2025 Lower Dauphin Highlights

PAYS provides Lower Dauphin with a detailed risk and protective factor profile — identifying the underlying drivers of youth behavior and pointing prevention planners toward the most strategic opportunities.

Key Finding 1: Low School Commitment — The Top Risk

Low Commitment Toward School (57.9% at risk) is Lower Dauphin's highest-scoring risk factor — slightly above the statewide rate of 54.7%, and the clearest target for prevention planning.

- More than half of Lower Dauphin students score at risk on school commitment — a major driver of substance use and delinquency regardless of other protective factors
- Extracurriculars, student leadership, meaningful coursework, and student voice in school decisions all directly reduce this risk
- At 57.9%, this is a district-wide concern — not limited to one grade or demographic

Key Finding 2: Parental Attitudes Favorable Toward Antisocial Behavior

Parental Attitudes Favorable Toward Antisocial Behavior (49.6% at risk) is the second-highest risk factor — somewhat above the statewide rate of 43.5%. Nearly half of students are exposed to parental permissiveness toward antisocial behavior.

- Family engagement programs, parent education, and community norms messaging are the most targeted match for this risk factor
- At 49.6%, this factor affects a large segment of the student population and warrants a community-level response

Key Finding 3: Sensation Seeking

Sensation Seeking (43.7% at risk) is the third-highest risk factor in Lower Dauphin — above the statewide rate of 34.4% and a meaningful driver of experimentation with substances.

- More than 4 in 10 students are drawn to risky, novel, or rule-breaking experiences — a strong predictor of substance initiation
- Evidence-based programs channeling sensation-seeking into positive risk-taking (adventure, leadership, competitive activities) are well-matched here
- The combination of elevated Sensation Seeking alongside moderate depressive symptoms in a significant portion of students suggests some youth may be using risky behaviors as a coping mechanism

Key Finding 4: Family Protective Factors Are Lower Dauphin's Crown Jewel

Protective Factor	Lower Dauphin 2025	State 2025
Family Attachment	71.0%	70.4%
Family Opportunities for Prosocial Involvement	67.7%	66.8%
Family Rewards for Prosocial Involvement	60.9%	58.0%
Religiosity	38.9%	36.9%

Lower Dauphin's family protective factor scores are exceptional — exceeding state averages across every measure. Family Attachment (71.0%) is above the state average (70.4%). Family Rewards for Prosocial Involvement (60.9%) exceeds the state (58.0%) by nearly 3 points. Religiosity (38.9%) is above the state (36.9%). These scores, combined with the district's strong help-seeking culture, form a powerful protective foundation — one of the healthiest family-domain profiles in this report series.

Key Finding 5: School and Community Protective Factors Are the Gap to Close

Despite exceptional family protective factors, school and community scores are lower— creating an opportunity for targeted investment:

- Religiosity: 38.9% with protection — the lowest protective factor, though notably above the state average (36.9%)
- School Opportunities for Prosocial Involvement: 43.0% — below half of students have meaningful chances to participate, lead, and contribute at school
- Community Rewards for Prosocial Involvement: 44.2% — below half, suggesting students don't consistently feel recognized or valued in the broader community

The gap between Lower Dauphin's exceptional family scores and its more modest school and community scores is the clearest strategic signal in the risk/protective factor data. Expanding meaningful student participation at school — clubs, student government, service learning, mentorship — and creating community recognition opportunities for youth would directly close this gap and build on the extraordinary family foundation already in place.

Key Finding 6: Peer Environment Is a Genuine Strength

Lower Dauphin's peer-level risk environment is notably healthy:

- Friend's Use of Drugs: 11.5% at risk — well below the statewide 25.2% and one of the lowest peer-drug-risk scores across all counties and districts reviewed
- Interaction with Antisocial Peers: 17.0% at risk — below state average
- Depressive Symptoms: 34.8% at risk — below the statewide 38.7%

Lower Dauphin's peer drug risk environment (11.5% at risk) is less than half the statewide rate (25.2%). Combined with strong family attachment, above-average help-seeking across all channels, and improving mental health indicators, Lower Dauphin has one of the most robust protective environments of any community in this report series. The task is building on this strength.

Closing: What the 2025 Data Means for Lower Dauphin

The 2025 PAYS tells a genuinely encouraging story for Lower Dauphin — one of consistent progress, exceptional protective factors, and a community where most students are thriving. This is not complacency data; it is confirmation that prevention infrastructure is working, and a clear guide for where to focus next.

Lower Dauphin Strengths to Celebrate:

- Alcohol lifetime use (22.0%) is below the state average — a major milestone
- Marijuana lifetime and 30-day use are below state averages across all grades
- Good mental health (77.6%) exceeds the state average — and improved 5 points since 2023
- Every grade matches or outperforms the state on good mental health
- Suicide consideration (13.5%) and attempt rates (4.4%) are below or at state averages
- Medical treatment after attempt (17.6%) is well below the state (20.2%)
- Family Attachment (71.0%) and Family Rewards for Prosocial Involvement (60.9%) both exceed state averages
- Friend's Use of Drugs (11.5%) is less than half the statewide rate — exceptional peer environment
- Help-seeking across friends, parents, and therapists all exceed state averages
- Participation rate (83.3%) means this data is highly reliable and representative

Lower Dauphin Areas Requiring Focused Attention:

- 12th grade past 30-day alcohol use (22.2%) exceeds the state (18.1%) — senior-year prevention is needed
- Nicotine vaping: 71.2% of vapers use nicotine — well above the state's 59.7%
- Nicotine pouches (5.2%) and cigarettes (5.5%) are above state averages
- Bullying rate (28.7%) exceeds the state (25.7%) — and school-avoiding bullied students show 54.1% suicide consideration
- Among high depressive symptom students, marijuana lifetime use (29.6%) far exceeds state peers (19.3%)
- Low School Commitment (57.9%) remains the top risk factor — affecting more than half of students
- School Opportunities (43.0%) and Community Rewards (44.2%) for Prosocial Involvement are below 50%
- Sensation Seeking (43.7%) exceeds the state (34.4%) — a key driver of substance experimentation

909 Lower Dauphin students shared their voice in 2025. Their data affirms that this community is doing much right — and it shows exactly where to invest to protect every student, especially those who are struggling most. The district's exceptional family and peer protective environment gives Lower Dauphin a running start that most communities would envy. Prevention works — and the 2025 PAYS data shows that Lower Dauphin's community, families, and schools are proving it.