



# Drug-Free Communities

Local Problems Require Local Solutions



## Issue Brief: Drug-Free Communities (DFC) Coalitions' Strategies to Prevent or Reduce Youth Use of Vaping Devices

July 2019

### Research-to-Practice Tips

Based on the data provided by DFC coalitions in their February and August 2018 progress reports, there are several actions that community coalitions can undertake in order to prevent or reduce youth vaping in their communities:

- Through data-collection and strategic planning, **ensure that the coalition's target substances and strategies align with community needs.** Vaporizers are a rapidly-emerging substance use trend, and can be used to consume nicotine, marijuana, or other substances in liquid form.
- **Educate parents, teachers, and community members about the dangers of vaping.** Collaborating on vaping with various sectors helps coalitions distribute information to a wider audience (e.g. via school newsletters, email blasts, and local meetings).
- Youth can provide valuable insight about which advertising, outreach, and education strategies will be most effective with their peers. **Empower youth to lead on vaping prevention** by involving them in assessment, planning, and implementation of activities.
- **Identify local or school policy loopholes that make it difficult to combat vaping in your community.** Work to update policies and practices to make sure smoke-free spaces are also vape-free.

### National Focus on Vaping Devices

From 2015 to 2018, the use of Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems (ENDS), referred to here as vaping, has been rising among youth.<sup>1</sup> Vaping devices work by heating a substance, typically in liquid form, until it is vaporized and can be inhaled. They can differ in size, shape, and design, with many looking similar to common objects such as USB drives or pens that may be easy for youth to use undetected. Vaping may have harmful effects due to the carcinogens, volatile organic compounds, and heavy metals such as lead that are emitted during the vaporizing process.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Monitoring the Future. (2018). National adolescent drug trends in 2018. Retrieved from <http://www.monitoringthefuture.org/pressreleases/18drugpr.pdf>. See also Table 3 <http://monitoringthefuture.org/data/18data/18drtbl3.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2019). *Tips for teens: E-cigarettes*. Retrieved from <https://store.samhsa.gov/product/tips-for-teens-e-cigarettes/pep19-12>



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Nicotine and marijuana both have the potential to be delivered using vaporizers. National data from 2017 to 2018 suggests that youth past 30-day use of nicotine delivered via vaping devices roughly doubled. Among 8<sup>th</sup> graders, past 30-day use of nicotine via vaping rose from 3.5% to 6.1%; among 10<sup>th</sup> graders it rose from 8% to 16%; and among 12<sup>th</sup> graders it rose from 11% to 20.9%. Past 30-day use of marijuana via vaping devices also increased—from 1.6% to 2.6% among 8<sup>th</sup> graders; from 4.3% to 7% among 10<sup>th</sup> graders; and from 4.9% to 7.5% among 12<sup>th</sup> graders.<sup>3</sup>

The Drug-Free Communities (DFC) Program sets the expectation that communities work to find local solutions to local problems in order to prevent or reduce youth substance use. This brief highlights the work of DFC coalitions to address preventing the use of vaping devices by youth. Specifically, in order to understand how DFC coalitions are addressing this trend locally, open-ended responses in their February and August 2018 progress reports were searched for keywords, including: E-cigarette, vaping, juul, and ENDS.<sup>4</sup> Findings suggest the DFC coalitions were engaged in a range of strategies in 2018 to address vaping locally. They also engaged in a range of activities to build capacity to address vaping locally, collect data on the issue, and develop strategic plans.

## Increasing Numbers of DFC Coalitions are Focused on Vaping

In total, 246 unique coalitions—34% of those who submitted a progress report in 2018—used at least one of the keywords in either their February or August 2018 progress report. These progress reports covered the period from August 2017 through July 2018. DFC coalitions mentioning a vaping keyword increased from the February to August progress report (19% and 31%, respectively). Still, this may be a conservative estimate of how many DFC coalitions are concerned about vaping in their community, as some may not have mentioned work they are doing. Vaping was mentioned by DFC coalitions throughout the United States (see Figure 1).<sup>5</sup> DFC coalitions in the Northeast and Midwest regions of the country were more likely to have mentioned vaping than those in the South or West regions.

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<sup>3</sup> Monitoring the Future. (2018). National adolescent drug trends in 2018. Retrieved from <http://www.monitoringthefuture.org/pressreleases/18drugpr.pdf>. See also Table 3 <http://www.monitoringthefuture.org/data/18data/18drtbl3.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> DFC coalitions submit two progress reports per year, in February and August. They are provided with multiple opportunities to share additional information about their work over the prior six months in open-word responses to broad questions about their work. The DFC progress report does not require coalitions to report on vaping, and some may be engaged in this work but not describing it in their progress reports. This search did not include additional brand names (e.g., “Blu,”) or less-common terms (e.g., “e-device”).

<sup>5</sup> Throughout this report, when incorporating anecdotes, DFC coalitions are identified by their funding year (1-10) and by the region of the United States they are located on based on U.S. census regions (see <https://www.census.gov/prod/1/gen/95statab/preface.pdf>).

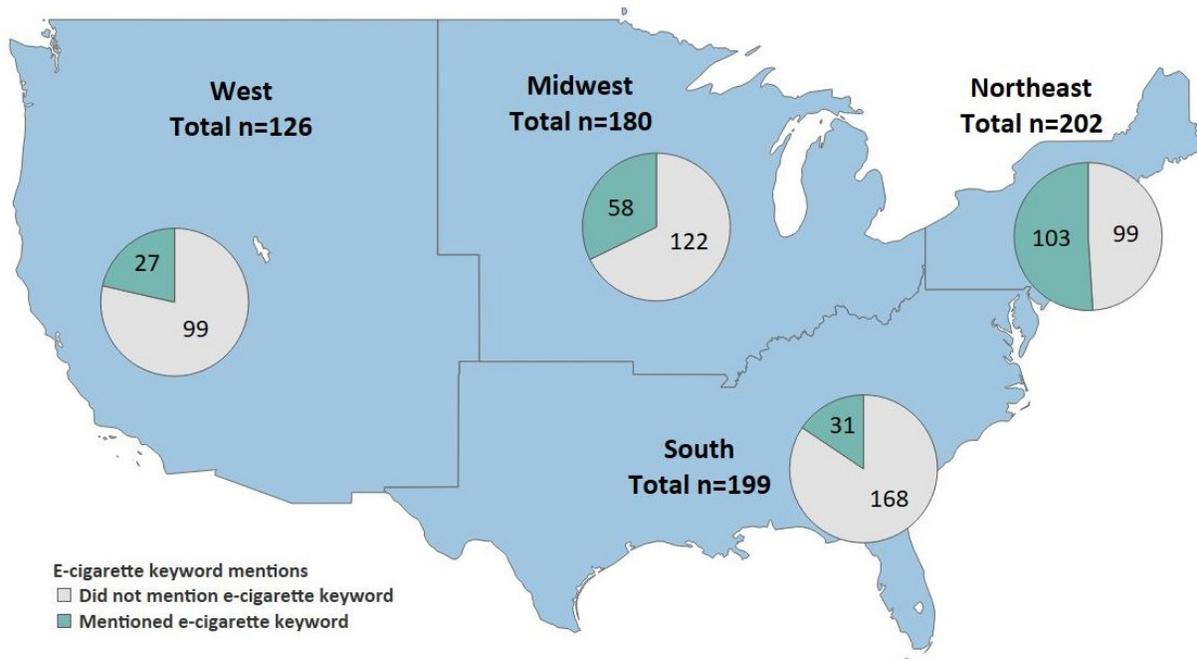


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Figure 1. Number of DFC Coalitions Mentioning Vaping, August 2018



Source: DFC August 2018 Progress Report Data; DFC coalitions in Puerto Rico included in the South region

## Strategies Implemented to Prevent or Reduce Youth Vaping

To focus on strategies, each response mentioning vaping was first coded as either mentioning one or more of the Seven Strategies for Community Change or as not indicating any strategy.<sup>6</sup> The Seven Strategies for Community Change are *Providing Information*, *Enhancing Skills*, *Providing Support*, *Enhancing Access/Reducing Barriers*, *Changing Consequences*, educating or informing the community about *Modifying/Changing Policies*, and *Changing Physical Design*. DFC coalitions who described using at least one of the seven strategies to address vaping increased from February 2018 to August 2018 (60% and 73%, respectively). Among DFC coalitions who did *not* describe using one of the seven strategies to combat vaping, many coalitions were coded as conducting other relevant work such as collecting data about vaping, writing a vaping logic model, or revising their strategic plan to address vaping. Some DFC coalitions mentioned that vaping is a concern in their community, but did not expand on their work in addressing it.

<sup>6</sup> CADCA derived the strategies from work by the University of Kansas Work Group on Health Promotion and Community Development—a World Health Organization Collaborating Centre. For more information: Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America. (2010). *The coalition impact: Environmental prevention strategies*. Alexandria, VA: National Coalition Institute. (Original work published 2008). Retrieved from <https://www.cadca.org/sites/default/files/resource/files/environmentalstrategies.pdf>



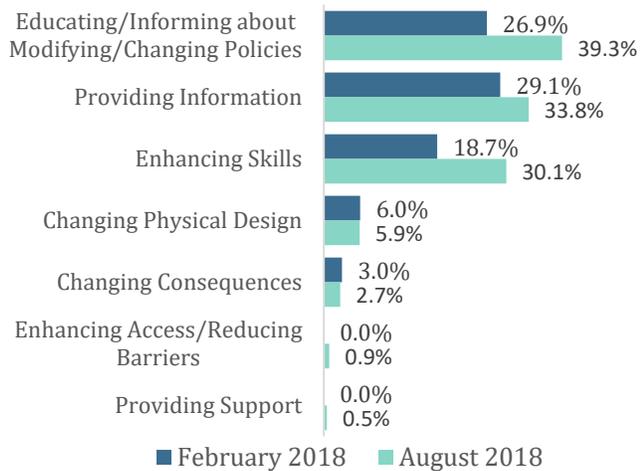
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Both overall breadth of strategies and engagement in specific strategies to address vaping increased from the February to the August 2018 progress report (see Figure 2). By August, each of the seven strategies was mentioned by at least one coalition, while in February, neither *Providing Support* nor *Enhancing Access/Reducing Barriers* strategies were mentioned. In August 2018, the three strategies most commonly used to combat vaping were educating/informing about *Modifying/Changing Policies* (39%), *Providing Information* (34%), and *Enhancing Skills* (30%).<sup>7</sup>

**Figure 2. Percent of DFC Coalitions Mentioning Vaping by Each of the Seven Strategies for Community Change**



Source: DFC 2018 Progress Reports

## Providing Information

Common *Providing Information* activities to address vaping included creating public service announcements and media campaigns, distributing newsletters to parents, adding vaping resources to the coalition website, giving short presentations, and handing out information at special events. A number of coalitions also described the content of the information they provided, and the audience for that information, revealing two common themes they focused on in *Providing Information*:

- Providing information about the health and mental health risks of vaping to youth, parents, and community members.** For example, a Year 10 coalition (South region) distributed information about vaping to youth at spring sporting events and school fundraisers. A Year 8 coalition (Midwest region) wrote that they have “focused a lot of efforts on reaching out to parents about vaping/e-cigarettes in an effort to help them understand that it’s not a harmless product.” In addition, they “connected with several of the schools with drafts of letters and information to send out to parents via email, school newsletters, websites, and any social media accounts about the dangers, and what to be looking out for.”

<sup>7</sup> Comments in the open-text fields emphasize, but are not restricted to, activities completed in the previous six months. Therefore, there may be differences between the percent of coalitions who reported *completing* an activity, and those who mentioned it in open text fields. With regards to policy changes, this analysis includes any actions DFC coalitions took to educate and inform about potential policy changes, not just about policy changes that have been completed.



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- **Providing data about vaping to school and local government officials, to inform them about the scope of the vaping problem.**<sup>8</sup> For example, one Year 3 coalition (Western region) evaluated the advertising practices of marijuana and vape stores, and shared their findings with the City Council. Some coalitions also presented youth survey data to their school officials, opening the door for future collaboration with the school sector around vaping. Note that implied here is that the DFC coalition must first collect relevant national and/or local data to share.

## Enhancing Skills

Coalitions reported providing in-depth training for youth about the health risks of vaping, and for teachers and parents about topics such as how to identify vaporizers. Some DFC coalitions focused their *Enhancing Skills* activities on training youth to act as peer leaders or peer educators. Another group that some DFC coalitions focused on for *Enhancing Skills* training was the business sector, specifically tobacco vendors. Key themes for this strategy included:

- **DFC coalitions focused on conducting parent and teacher trainings about how to recognize vaping paraphernalia, and how to tell if your child/student is vaping.** As previously noted, many vaping devices are designed to look like other home/school objects such as USB drives or pens. DFC coalitions worked to help others recognize these devices. For example, a Year 4 coalition (Northeast region) reported, “Vaping education was a large focus for staff this past reporting period. Teachers especially started reporting students charging Juuls on school-issued laptops with staff none the wiser. We did a massive teacher education push, showing them Juuls and vaping paraphernalia. We also did parent outreach to educate about the new paraphernalia. To distribute vaping education, we also partnered with [a local organization] to get information out to our new resident immigrant/refugee population as well.” Several coalitions noted the importance of understanding current parent attitudes around vaping prior to developing and delivering parent training. Some parents may be relatively unconcerned about vaping and be unaware of potential health risks, while other parents may already be concerned and eager to learn more about vaping.

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<sup>8</sup> Note that informing city officials was coded as *Providing Information* only if the DFC coalition did not specifically note that the information was associated with potential policy or law.



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- **DFC coalitions worked to ensure that local businesses are trained and up-to-date on policies around vaping, particularly regarding sales to minors.** One Year 6 coalition (South region) reported that they were “training and educating area tobacco/e-cigarette merchants on the federal Synar Amendment and laws concerning proper request and verification of identification when conducting sales of [e-cigarettes and tobacco].”<sup>9</sup>

## Educating and Informing about Modifying/Changing Policies and Changing Consequences

DFC coalitions reported engaging in a range of activities in order to educate and inform about *Modifying/Changing Policies* related to vaping. Some DFC coalitions presented data in relation to a specific piece of legislation, while others gave regular updates to local leaders to keep them informed of new trends and prevention concepts. Many also worked directly with school staff or local officials to develop policies around vaping for their community, often incorporating vaping into existing tobacco-free policies.

DFC coalitions worked to educate and inform regarding a range of community policies/laws such as:

- Restricting the density of vape shops in their communities,
- Regulating how retailers display vaping devices,
- Tightening clean-air ordinances to ban vaping in restaurants,
- Establishing smoke- and vape-free parks, and
- Raising the age for legal purchase of tobacco or vape products to 21.<sup>10</sup>

For example, one Year 10 (West region) DFC coalition’s efforts helped their municipality transition to tobacco-free parks: “This reporting period, the coalition conducted an opinion survey of park-goers, created a brochure explaining public health and safety benefits of having smoke-free parks, and provided a tobacco waste impact presentation to the park and recreation committee. There was significant mobilization of community input on the subject as well. The committee responded with a recommendation to city council to start with smoke-free park trails, and incorporate the updated [state] definition of tobacco products (which includes vaping, e-cigarettes, and hookah) into the ordinance. The [local] City Council adopted their recommendation.”

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<sup>9</sup> The Synar Amendment “requires states to have laws prohibiting the sale and distribution of tobacco products to minors.” For more information, visit <https://www.samhsa.gov/synar/about>.

<sup>10</sup> American Lung Association. (2019, April 25). Tobacco 21 laws: Tracking progress toward raising the minimum sales age for all tobacco products to 21. Retrieved from <https://www.lung.org/our-initiatives/tobacco/cessation-and-prevention/tobacco-21-laws.html>



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Many DFC coalitions reporting working with school leadership on revising school policies to prohibit the use of vaping devices and/or to clarify or change the consequences for youth caught vaping. Examples of this include:

- **Modified school enforcement policies, addressing concerns that it may be unclear if the substance being vaped is nicotine, marijuana, or flavored “e-liquid”.**<sup>11</sup> For example, “All vape pens and appliances will be treated as containing THC or other drugs and the student shall receive a nine-day drug suspension. If the child takes and passes a drug test, the suspension will be reduced to a one-day tobacco offense.” (Year 8, West region)
- **Modified school policies to focus on rehabilitation options for students with drug offenses.** For example, “The [local] Prevention Coalition worked with [our] High Schools and the Student Assistance Program Counselors to adjust the policy on tobacco products targeting vaping devices specifically. ... The policy still mandates suspension; however, it now includes a required referral to the Student Assistance Program [SAP] Counselor, who does an assessment. If necessary, the SAP provides the student with further counseling resources outside of the school. This policy change gives students the opportunity to access the support and resources that they may had difficulty with prior. It also provides them with an education.” (Year 5, Northeast region)

## Building Capacity to Prevent or Reduce Youth Use of Vaping Devices

As noted, some responses that were not coded as describing strategies were coded as describing other important coalition work related to building capacity specifically to improve the coalition’s ability to combat vaping, as well as conducting assessment, evaluation, and planning activities regarding this issue. In both February and August 2018, approximately one third (31%) of DFC coalitions noted this type of activity in their progress report.

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*“Student focus groups and key informants report a surge in the popularity of ENDS. Among the reasons cited for youth use: “they’re cheap,” “they’re discreet,” “they’re not bad for you,” and “I can walk into [a store] to buy it.” Students also report they do not view vapes as nicotine. ... [however] when student focus groups were asked if youth use flavored tobacco, they responded, “absolutely,” “ENDS are also being used for consuming marijuana.”*

*– Year 8 Coalition, Northeast region*

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<sup>11</sup> Flavored vaporizer cartridges without nicotine are available, and the percent of school students that report vaping “just flavoring” is comparable to the number that report vaping nicotine (see Monitoring the Future, footnote 4). However, students purchasing e-liquids may not always be aware of what nicotine levels they contain.



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Capacity building, evaluation, and planning activities to address vaping described by DFC coalitions included:

- Creating new partnerships,
- Creating vaping task forces,
- Providing topical training to coalition members,
- Strategic planning, and
- Revising logic models and planning documents.

**DFC coalitions used a variety of data collection methods (e.g., focus groups, community surveys) to help them to identify the vaping problem in their community and to re-prioritize their efforts to address that problem.** For example, a Year 2 (South region) DFC coalition reported, “We have been able to conduct focus groups with students and parents, complete a parent survey, gather school data, conduct key informant interviews, and complete a student survey. Through all of this data...we have had a huge increase in vape use over the last six months and wanted to work on some prevention efforts in this area, due to the high usage shown in the school data and survey data. Without the success from the assessment and being able to collect a range of data, we would not have been able to continue in the right direction.”

## Youth Involvement

Responses also revealed ways in which youth contributed to the DFC coalitions’ efforts in vaping prevention and reduction. Youth involvement was defined as active youth participation in meaningful tasks such as selecting and implementing activities.<sup>12</sup> In February 2018, twelve coalitions (9% of those who mentioned vaping) indicated that youth were actively involved in their work on vaping. In August, that number rose to 39 (18%). Some youth participated on an individual basis, while other youth engaged in the coalition through a Youth Coalition, student group, or peer education program. Youth participated in a wide variety of ways, and utilized numerous prevention strategies.

**DFC coalitions engaged youth in addressing vaping at every step in the life cycle of a project: collecting data, identifying an issue, developing an action plan, and implementing prevention activities.** Examples of this included:

- One DFC coalition **used a community mapping exercise to help youth identify issues in their community.** Then, youth selected vaping as an area of focus, and created ad campaigns, including the coalition’s first ever digital ads: “During the past six months, we spent a fair amount of time working with our youth on community assessment drawing of each of our towns... Vaping... was actually the top drug each

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<sup>12</sup> That is, activities in which youth were the recipient of services or information were not included.



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school talked about. Because our [Youth coalition] members are highly concerned about this vaping issue they decided to do a whole media campaign around it. They taped 30 and 15 second PSAs, talking about the dangerous chemicals found in e-cigarettes; unfortunately, most youth think vaping is just water and has no nicotine. At the request of our youth, [the coalition] also developed “Escape the Vape” digital ads, which is a new avenue for our coalition.” (Year 3, Midwest region)

- In another case, **youth members identified an issue at the county fair, conducted research, and gave a presentation which convinced local leaders to make a change:** “Students noticed that there was a vendor selling vaping/e-cigarette devices and tobacco products in close proximity to children’s rides, games, and attractions. They also noticed that the vendor was raffling off sneakers and items that appealed to young kids. Not only were they highly aware of the marketing to youth but they noticed a lot of teens vaping at the fair. ...Students were bothered that their peers were not aware of the high amounts of nicotine in these devices especially the Juul device. [Youth Coalition] members researched this issue further and decided they wanted to make a positive impact among their peers and in the communities. They presented their findings to the [local] Fair Executive Committee and asked if the fair would ban the sale of vaping/e-cigarette products or move them away from youth attractions. The executive board’s decision was to move the booth away from family and child attractions and will further discuss banning vaping products from the fair.” (Year 6, Northeast region)

## Youth were trained to become peer educators, informing and strengthening the DFC coalitions’ efforts to prevent or reduce vaping.

Examples of this included:

- Supporting a program for student athletes, “to help them create and deliver a vaping harms program. [Student athlete] Leaders became content experts and delivered presentations to their peers in local high schools, to elementary school 5th graders, and at two high school parent education nights and [athletics] nights.” (Year 7, Western region)
- “We took 50 youth to the Zoo for a regional youth summit about tobacco prevention and then worked with them to implement strategies to teach their peers about the dangers of tobacco, vaping, and marijuana.” (Year 5, Northeast region)

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*“One of our biggest strengths is the involvement of youth leaders in all our activities. The youth help us plan and implement alternative activities such as monthly open gym nights for Middle and High School students... As part of our vaping prevention strategies they facilitated a “vape escape” room to help their peers learn information and skills to remain vape free.”*

*– Year 3 Coalition, Northeast region*

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## Conclusions

Data from the 2018 progress reports reveal that at least one in three (34%) DFC coalitions were concerned about youth use of vaping devices to deliver substances in their communities and are working to address this challenge. Following is a summary of key themes identified in DFC responses associated with vaping.

- **DFC coalitions regularly engaged in assessment and local evaluation activities to collect local data from youth and community members (e.g., parents, teachers) in order to best inform their work.** DFC coalitions engaged in these activities in order to inform them about the issue locally and to assist in developing a strategic plan to address youth use of vaping devices.
- **Several DFC coalitions noted the importance of building capacity within the coalition to address vaping.** In some cases, they built capacity by identifying new partners to join the coalition. In other cases, the coalition established a task force focused on the issue, helping them to develop a clear action plan.
- **In order to address youth use of vaping devices, DFC coalitions engaged in a comprehensive range of strategies.** The most commonly mentioned implemented activities focused on educating and informing about *Modifying/Changing Policies*, *Providing Information*, and *Enhancing Skills*. Introducing or updating tobacco-free environments (e.g., schools, parks, restaurants) to include the use of vaping devices was a common strategy. DFC coalitions were also focused on educating youth, parents, and teachers about potential harms associated with vaping and on recognition of vaping devices.
- **Involving youth was central to many DFC coalitions in their approaches to preventing or reducing youth use of vaping devices.** Youth were engaged in assessment activities, planning and implementing activities, and in mentoring peers about vaping and its associated risks.