

## **2024-2025 U Got Brains Champion Schools Program**

### **Student Survey Report**

The Brain Injury Alliance of New Jersey (BIANJ) is a recipient of a New Jersey Division of Highway Traffic Safety (NJDHHS) Comprehensive Traffic Safety Grant. In 2010, to address the issue of teen driving safety, BIANJ created the *U Got Brains Champion Schools Program*. This statewide peer-to-peer program challenges teams of students, guided by a faculty advisor, to create a teen safe driving campaign in their school and community. The Champion Schools Program has been a part of the BIANJ Comprehensive Traffic Safety Grant since 2010 and has grown steadily both in the number of participating schools as well as the number of corporate and non-profit sponsors.

In 2014, the fourth year of the program, BIANJ partnered with The Research Institute at The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP) to create a student survey to help evaluate the effectiveness of the Champion Schools Program. BIANJ posted the student survey online and gave the link to the student faculty advisors for distribution within their school. CHOP then analyzed the results of the completed surveys and created a report of their findings.

For the 2024-2025 program, BIANJ used an amended version of the CHOP student survey to evaluate the effectiveness of this year's program from the perspective of the student team members. BIANJ staff posted the survey online, tallied the results and wrote the following summary report of their findings: *\*(Complete tally results are included with this summary report)*

The 2024-2025 school year was the 15<sup>th</sup> year of the *U Got Brains Champion Schools Program*. 61 high schools (public, private and technical) from 17 counties of the state participated in the program. As a prerequisite for participating, schools signed a participation agreement which stated that they would participate, to the best of their ability, in a survey of the Champion Schools Program. BIANJ Champion Schools technical support staff informed the faculty advisors of the survey at their technical support visits, in emails to the faculty advisors and during technical support conference calls. The online student survey was posted in April, and emails went out to the faculty advisors in May and June reminding them to ask their student team members to complete the survey.

Respondents from 28 schools out of the 61 participating schools completed the online survey (46%). Of the 28 schools that responded, a total of 201 students completed the survey (Lindenwold HS-22, Immaculate Heart Academy-20, West Milford HS-13, Matawan Regional HS-12, Thomas A. Edison Career and Technical Academy-12, Hammonton HS-11, Delaware Valley Regional HS-9, Kittatinny Regional HS-9, Steinert HS-9, Chartertech HS for the Performing Arts-8, Lawrence HS-7, Lenape Regional HS District-7, Long Branch HS-7, Middletown HS South-7, Bordentown Regional HS-5, Indian Hill HS-5, Union City HS-5, Boundbrook HS-4, Burlington City HS-4, Marine Academy of Technology and Environmental Science-4, Oakcrest HS-4, Mainland Regional HS-3, Marlboro HS-3, Edison Academy Magnet School-2, Piscataway HS-2, Manchester Regional Day School-1, Scotch Plain-Fanwood HS-1). **2%** of the respondents were in **9<sup>th</sup> grade**; **22%** in **tenth grade**; **44%** were in **11<sup>th</sup> grade** and **32%** were in **12<sup>th</sup> grade**.

The original survey consisted of 10 questions regarding the *U Got Brains Champion Schools Program* and 3 demographic questions. We have since added 6 new questions to the survey-2 about using cannabis/drugs while driving; 2 on safe walking habits; and 2 on what the students felt were the biggest transportation safety issues in their communities and the best way to address these issues. Below is a summary of the findings of the student surveys. For complete results, a copy of the survey along with the tallied answers from the respondents is attached.

### **General Conclusions from the Student Survey Evaluations:**

The results of the 2025 CSP Student Survey show that the *U Got Brains Champion Schools Program* continues to be highly effective in promoting safe driving awareness and behavior among students. Nearly nine out of ten students reported that the program gave them opportunities to discuss the

importance of safe driving with their peers. In addition, a strong majority felt that both they and their friends became safer drivers and passengers as a direct result of participating in the program.

Survey data highlights measurable changes in student driving behaviors. The number of students who admitted to frequently using their phones while driving dropped significantly after program involvement, while those who reported always keeping their eyes on the road rose dramatically. Speeding behavior also decreased, with fewer students saying they drive over the speed limit often or always. Seatbelt use improved both for drivers and passengers, with the majority of students now reporting that they consistently buckle up. Similarly, compliance with New Jersey's Graduated Driver Licensing laws increased, and more students reported following safe walking practices and stopping for pedestrians in crosswalks.

#### **General Conclusions:**

- **Increased Awareness:** The *U Got Brains Champion Schools Program* is a student-centered and student-driven peer-to-peer program. 89% of students reported that the program gave them opportunities to talk about the importance of safe driving.
- **Community Safety:** The Champion Schools Program helps to bring about a change in both student and community behavior when it comes to teen driving safety. 85% of students felt they and their friends became safer drivers and passengers because of the program.
- **Positive Perception:** Students reported that the Champion Schools initiative helped reinforce responsible driving and passenger behaviors. Students experience a sense of pride that comes from accomplishing something important.
- **Behavioral Impact:** Students showed significant improvements in safe driving habits (e.g., phone use, speeding, seatbelt use):
  - **Phone Use While Driving:** Before the program, 49% admitted to frequently using their phone while driving; after, 74% reported *never or rarely* using their phone.
  - **Driving Focused:** Students reporting that they *always* keep their eyes on the road rose from 9% before to 75% after.
  - **Speeding:** Those who reported driving over the speed limit "often or always" dropped from 54% before to 32% after.
  - **Seatbelt Use (Driver):** Increased from 80% "always wearing" before to 89% after.
  - **Seatbelt Use (Passenger):** Increased from 65% before to 87% after.
  - **Perception of Cannabis Use While Driving:** Most students (94%) strongly disagreed that it is acceptable to use cannabis/marijuana while driving. This number increased to 97% after the program.
  - **Actual Self-Reported Cannabis Use While Driving:** Before the program, 196 out of 201 students (98%) reported they never drive after using cannabis. Only 5 students indicated otherwise. The results were identical after the program.
  - **Pedestrian & Walking Safety:** Safe walking practices improved, with 78% following them after the program compared to 58% before.
  - **Stopping for Pedestrians:** Increased from 77% before to 90% after.
  - **Following NJ GDL Laws:** Compliance improved from 74% before to 87% after.

In response to open-ended questions, students identified the biggest transportation safety issues in their communities as distracted driving, speeding, impaired driving, inconsistent seatbelt use, and infrastructure concerns such as unsafe crossings and poor lighting. When asked how best to address these problems, the majority of students recommended education programs, followed by increased police enforcement, redesigned intersections or roadways, and targeted policy changes.

## Open-Ended Responses

### Biggest Transportation Safety Issues Noted by Students:

- Distracted driving (34%)
- Speeding (30%)
- Impaired driving (13%)
- Seatbelt use (11%)
- Infrastructure issues (10%)

### Best Ways to Address These Issues:

- Education programs (44%)
- Police/more enforcement (22%)
- Redesigning unsafe intersections/areas (18%)
- Policy changes (13%)

The 2025 CSP Student Survey demonstrates that the *U Got Brains Champion Schools Program* continues to have a meaningful impact on student awareness and driving behavior. Students reported significant improvements in key safety practices such as avoiding phone use, wearing seatbelts, driving at safer speeds, and complying with New Jersey's Graduated Driver Licensing laws. In addition to measurable behavioral change, students identified distracted and impaired driving as persistent safety concerns in their communities, with education emerging as the most supported solution. Overall, the program empowers youth to take leadership roles in promoting safer driving and passenger habits, ultimately contributing to safer schools, communities, and roadways. Feedback from the participating faculty advisors and students will help the Brain Injury Alliance of NJ to continually improve the *U Got Brains Champion Schools Program* and allows us to offer a proven, effective statewide peer-to-peer teen driving safety program. By partnering with the NJ Division of Highway Safety and our corporate sponsors, we can continue to help keep our roadways safer for New Jersey's newest drivers and their passengers.