

## **2025-2026 *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 (NJDOTS) 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 2025-2026 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 2025-2026 school year was the 16<sup>th</sup> year of the *U Got Brains Champion Schools Program*. 58 high schools (public, private and technical) from 19 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 31 schools out of the 58 participating schools completed the online survey (53%). Of the 31 schools that responded, a total of 204 students completed the survey (West Orange HS-34, Bordentown HS-18, West Milford HS-15, Piscataway-13, Kittatinny HS-12, Marine Academy of Technology and Environmental Science HS-11, Matawan Regional High School-10, Dover High School-8, Lenape Regional High School District-8, South Brunswick HS- 7, Chartertech HS for the Performing Arts- 6, Dunellen HS-6, Burlington City HS- 5, Lindenwold HS – 5, Spotswood HS-5, Steinert HS-5, Thomas A. Edison Career & Technical Academy-5, Barnegat HS- 4, Columbia HS- 4, South River HS-4, Oakcrest- 3, Bound Brook HS-2, Colts Neck 2, Edison Academy Magnet School-2, Indian Hills HS-2, Lakeland Regional HS-2, Union City-2, Hammonton HS-1, Middletown HS- 1, Red Bank Regional HS-1, Westwood HS- 1. **3%** of the

respondents were in **9<sup>th</sup> grade**; **20%** in **tenth grade**; **25%** were in **11<sup>th</sup> grade** and **51%** 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 **2025–2026 U Got Brains Champion Schools Student Survey** demonstrate that the program continues to have a positive impact on students' transportation safety knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors. A total of **204 students** completed the survey. Students reported that participation in the Champion Schools Program provided meaningful opportunities to discuss safe driving with their peers and contributed to safer driving and passenger behaviors among themselves and their friends. Survey responses also indicate measurable improvements in several key transportation safety behaviors, including reduced distracted driving, increased seatbelt use, greater compliance with New Jersey's Graduated Driver Licensing (GDL) laws, and safer pedestrian practices.

The survey highlights significant positive changes in students' self-reported behaviors before and after participating in the program. Students reported substantial reductions in phone use while driving and improvements in maintaining focus on the road. Seatbelt use increased for both drivers and passengers, and more students reported consistently following safe walking habits and stopping for pedestrians in crosswalks. Attitudes toward impaired driving remained overwhelmingly negative, with nearly all students reporting that it is unacceptable to drive after using cannabis.

### **General Conclusions**

- **Increased Awareness:** The Champion Schools Program continues to provide students with meaningful opportunities to discuss transportation safety. **91% of students** agreed or strongly agreed that participation gave students in their school opportunities to talk about the importance of safe driving.
- **Community Safety:** The program positively influenced students' perceptions of roadway safety. **90% of students** agreed or strongly agreed that they and their friends became safer drivers because of the Champion Schools Program, while **91%** felt they became safer passengers.

- **Positive Perception:** Students overwhelmingly recognized the value of peer-to-peer education and believed the program helped reinforce responsible driving, passenger, and pedestrian behaviors throughout their schools.
- **Behavioral Impact:** Students reported measurable improvements across several transportation safety behaviors.
  - **Phone Use While Driving:** Students reporting they never use their phone while driving increased from 44% before the program (89 of 204) to 77% after the program (158 of 204). Those reporting they rarely or never use their phone increased from 68% before to 85% after.
  - **Driving Focused:** Students who reported they always keep their eyes on the road increased from 45% (91 students) to 76% after the program (155 students).
  - **Speeding:** Students reporting they always or often drive over the speed limit decreased from 20% (41 of 204) to 15% (31 of 204). Meanwhile, those reporting they rarely or never speed increased from 51% before to 77% after.
  - **Seatbelt Use (Driver):** Students who reported they always wear a seatbelt while driving increased from 82% to 91% after the program.
  - **Seatbelt Use (Passenger):** Students who reported they always wear a seatbelt as a passenger increased from 70% (143 students) to 90%.
  - **Passenger Restrictions:** Compliance with New Jersey's passenger restrictions improved, with students reporting they always drive with only one passenger when no adult is present increasing from 50% before the program (103 students) to 65%.
  - **Perception of Cannabis Use While Driving:** Students who reported it is never acceptable to use cannabis while driving increased slightly from 93% to 95% after the program (193 students).
  - **Actual Self-Reported Cannabis Use While Driving:** Students reporting they never drive after using cannabis increased slightly from 95% to 95% after the program.
  - **Pedestrian & Walking Safety:** Students who reported they always follow safe walking habits increased from 53% to 80% after the program.
  - **Stopping for Pedestrians:** Students reporting they always stop for pedestrians in crosswalks increased from 79% to 88% after the program.
  - **Following New Jersey GDL Laws:** Students who reported they always follow New Jersey's Graduated Driver Licensing laws increased from 68% to 88% after the program.

Students also identified the transportation safety issues they believe have the greatest impact on their communities. The two most frequently identified concerns were **speeding (32%)** and **distracted driving (31%)**, followed by **infrastructure issues such as unsafe crossings and poor lighting (14%)**, **impaired driving (12%)**, and **seatbelt use (11%)**. When asked how these issues should be addressed, students most frequently recommended **education programs (44%)**, followed by **redesigning unsafe roads and intersections (20%)**, **increased police enforcement (19%)**, and **policy changes (13%)**.

### **Open-Ended Responses**

#### **Biggest Transportation Safety Issues Identified by Students:**

- Speeding (32%)
- Distracted driving (31%)
- Infrastructure issues (14%)
- Impaired driving (12%)
- Seatbelt use (11%)

#### **Best Ways to Address These Issues:**

- Education programs (44%)
- Redesign unsafe roads/intersections (20%)
- Increased police enforcement (19%)
- Policy changes/intervention (13%)
- Other solutions, including lower speed limits (4%)

The **2025–2026 Champion Schools Student Survey** demonstrates that the U Got Brains Champion Schools Program continues to produce meaningful improvements in transportation safety awareness and self-reported behaviors among participating students. Students reported becoming safer drivers, passengers, and pedestrians while also recognizing the importance of following New Jersey's GDL laws, avoiding distracted driving, and consistently wearing seatbelts. Although students continue to identify speeding and distracted driving as major concerns within their communities, they overwhelmingly support education as the most effective strategy for creating safer roadways. Together, these findings demonstrate that the Champion Schools Program successfully empowers students to become leaders in promoting transportation safety within their schools and communities. Feedback from participating students and faculty advisors will continue to help the Brain Injury Alliance of New Jersey strengthen and enhance the Champion Schools Program, ensuring it remains an effective

statewide peer-to-peer transportation safety initiative supported by the New Jersey Division of Highway Traffic Safety and its community partners.