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# **TAPPING INTO TEEN CONCERNS, PERCEPTIONS AND BEHAVIORS**

## **Report for A. Crosby Kennett Junior/Senior High School**

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A Report of the Teen Assessment Project (TAP)  
University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension

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**Impact Reporting:** UNH Cooperative Extension is very interested to know how individuals and groups use “Tapping Into Teen Concerns, Perceptions and Behaviors”. If you use the information in this report for educational purposes, writing grants, planning community efforts, changing programs or policies, gaining positions for your organization, strengthening community linkages, or in any other way, please contact Charlotte Cross listed above.  
Thank you.

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## Acknowledgments

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## **Executive Summary**

### **Teen Assessment Project**

### **Kennett Junior/Senior High School**

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Concerns about local youth issues prompted the Conway School District to adopt the University of New Hampshire Teen Assessment Project (TAP) Survey for administration in Kennett Junior and Senior High Schools. The goal of TAP is to provide communities with local research-based information that can help them better support local teens and their families. Survey results provide a vehicle for youth, parent, school, and community education and action, help secure local funding, stimulate program and policy changes, and lead to change in attitudes and behaviors that build protective factors and assets in families, schools and communities.

A local steering committee coordinated the review and administration of a 160-item survey which asked teens about their perceptions of self, family, school, and community; their worries, concerns, and future aspirations; and their activities, both positive and problematic. The survey was administered to 7th through 12th grade students at Kennett Junior and Senior High Schools on October 26, 2001. A total of 1,027 surveys were used for this data analysis. This represents approximately 81% of the total student population of Kennett Junior and Senior High School. Following are selected local TAP survey results.

#### **Family Characteristics**

- The TAP survey revealed the most common living situation for local youth is living with two parents (56%). The next most common living situations include living with a single parent (16%) and living in a step-family (17%).
- The majority of youth reported that each of their parents have a high school diploma, Bachelor's Degree, or higher (fathers, 96%; mothers, 87%). Thirty percent (30%) of fathers and 33% of mothers have a high school diploma and no further degrees. Twenty-seven percent (27%) of fathers and 30% of mothers have a Bachelor's Degree or higher.

#### **Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drug Use**

The Teen Assessment Project (TAP) survey found that local youth use alcohol, tobacco and other drugs.

- Fifty-four percent (54%) of all youth have used alcohol at some time (junior high school, 29%; high school, 66%). Twenty-six percent (26%) of all youth reported using alcohol once a month or more often (junior high school, 9%; high school, 34%) and 9% reported using it weekly or more often (junior high school, 3%; high school, 12%).

- Eight percent (8%) of all junior high school youth and 27% of all high school youth reported binge drinking (“5 or more alcoholic drinks at one time”) at least once in the past month with 32% of all seniors reporting binge drinking in the last month. Twenty-three percent (23%) of youth feel that binge drinking once or twice each weekend carries “no” or “slight risk” (junior high school, 19%; high school, 24%).
- Thirty-six percent (36%) of all youth have smoked tobacco at some time (junior high school, 20%; high school, 43%). Fourteen percent (14%) reported smoking monthly or more often (junior high school, 5%; high school, 18) and 12% reported weekly or more often use (junior high school, 4%; high school, 16%).
- Thirty-eight percent (38%) of all youth have used marijuana at some time (junior high school, 16%; high school, 48%). Twenty-two percent (22%) reported monthly or more often use of marijuana (junior high school, 9%; high school, 27%) and 14% reported weekly or more often use (junior high school, 5%; high school, 19%).
- Fifty-seven percent (57%) of all youth believe it is either “easy” or “very easy” to get alcohol (junior high school, 38%; high school, 66%). Fifty-one percent (51%) believe it is “easy” or “very easy” to get marijuana (junior high school, 21%; high school, 64%).
- Nine percent (9%) of all youth have used inhalants at some time (junior high school, 7%; high school, 9%). Two percent (2%) of all youth have used inhalants monthly or more often (junior high school, 1%; high school, 2%). Fourteen percent (14%) of local youth feel that using inhalants carries “no” or “slight risk” (junior high school, 18%; high school, 13%).
- Nine percent (9%) of all youth have used Ecstasy at some time in the past (junior high school, 3%; high school, 12%). Three percent (3%) of all youth have used Ecstasy monthly or more often (junior high school, 1%; high school, 3%) and 1% reported weekly or more often use (junior high school, 1%; high school, 1%).

These emerging dependencies put youth at risk of delayed emotional and intellectual growth; developing problems with schools, friends and families; incurring ill health and reduced longevity; accidents; suicide; and unwanted pregnancies (Pedersen & Skrondal, 1996; Pfeifer, Schector, & Yoast, 1987; Small, Silverberg, & Kerns, 1993).

### **Sexuality Issues**

- Overall, 30% of all youth reported that they have had sexual intercourse (junior high school, 11%; high school, 38%). Fifty-eight percent (58%) of 12th graders have had sexual intercourse. Sixty-three percent (63%) of sexually active teens always use some form of birth control (junior high school, 38%; high school, 66%).

- A high percentage of local youth do not talk with their parents about sexuality issues. Within the past year, 58% either “never” or “rarely” talked to their mothers and 70% “never” or “rarely” talked with their fathers about whether or not it is okay to have sex. Even fewer teens had birth control discussions with their parents in the past year, with 68% who either “never” or “rarely” talked to their mothers and 79% who “never” or “rarely” talked with their fathers about the issue.

### **Physical and Mental Health Issues**

- Worries of local youth, listed from greatest to least are: getting good grades at school (66%); what they will do after high school (51%); getting along with parents at home (47%); how they look (45%); that a friend is considering suicide (44%); loss of a parent by death or divorce (40%); how well parents get along with each other (39%); that they are too fat or too thin (27%); not fitting in with the other kids at school (26%); being left alone (14%); and being pressured into having sex (13%).
- Overall, 63% of local teens reported feeling sad or depressed at some time during the past month (males, 55%; females, 72%). Nineteen percent (19%) of youth reported having serious thoughts of suicide during the past month (males, 19%; females, 19%). Eighteen percent of all youth had made plans at some time to kill themselves (males, 16%; females, 20%) and 12% reported that they had actually attempted suicide at some time in the past (males, 10%; females, 13%).

### **Personal Safety and Violence**

- Seventy-four percent (74%) of youth reported feeling safe with others at school. Eleven percent (11%) were afraid of kids in certain groups or cliques (junior high school, 9%; high school, 12%).
- Sixty-nine percent (69%) have never been a victim of sexual harassment. Sixteen percent (16%) of males and 29% of females have been sexually harassed by other students. Eight percent (8%) of males and 13% of females have been made to do something sexual by another student. Six percent (6%) of all youth reported that they had made someone do something sexual that was not wanted (males, 10%; females, 2%).
- Sixty-four percent (64%) of youth have not witnessed someone being beaten or physically abused. Fourteen percent (14%) have witnessed this at school (junior high school, 9%; high school, 16%). Ten percent (10%) reported that they had hit, pushed, or beaten a girlfriend or boyfriend (males, 11%; females, 9%).
- Nine percent (9%) of youth reported carrying a weapon onto school property in the past month (junior high school, 5%; high school, 10%; males, 15%; females, 3%).

### **Parent-Teen Relations**

- The majority of youth reported that their parents were there when they needed them (about mothers, 83%; about fathers, 67%) and that parents “often” or “very often” cared about

them. Ninety percent (90%) felt this way about their mothers; 82% about their fathers. Sixty-eight percent (68%) of the students felt that their mothers were fair “often” or “very often” when it came to enforcing the family rules; 59% felt this way about fathers. Eighty-five percent (85%) reported that their parents were interested in what they learn and how they are doing in school (junior high school, 88%; high school, 84%).

- Many local youth reported they had not had a good talk with either parent about whether it is okay to have sex, about using birth control, about AIDS or STDs, about the risks of drinking and using drugs, or about personal problems. Parents were more likely to talk with the teens about job or educational plans. However, parent impact was evident as parental monitoring, parental consequences, and parental values were all found to be related to teen behaviors of smoking, drinking alcohol, and sexual activity.

### **Student Time Use**

- Local youth spend the most time (at the level of 5 or more hours a week) doing homework or studying (60%). The other activities that occupy 5 or more hours per week for local youth include watching TV (49%); participating in extracurricular school sports or activities (49%); using the Internet (43%); staying at home with no adults present (39%); working for pay (35%); engaging in non-school activities (15%); and volunteering (8%).

### **Perceptions of School and Community**

- Fifty-six percent (56%) of local youth felt they were getting a good, high quality education (junior high school, 73%; high school, 48%). Fifty-eight percent (58%) indicated they enjoyed going to school (junior high school, 76%; high school, 50%). Fifty percent (50%) felt school rules were enforced fairly (junior high school, 69%; high school, 50%). The majority of students (58%) believe teachers encourage them to do and be the best they can (junior high school, 67%; high school, 53%).
- Six percent (6%) strongly agreed or agreed that they would drop out of school before completing high school (junior high school, 7%; high school, 6%). Junior high school students were more likely to ask for help “often” or “very often” when they were having trouble in school (junior high school, 36%; high school, 25%).
- Sixty percent (60%) of high school students planned to go to a 4-year college or university after high school. Sixty-three percent (63%) thought that the school could do more to prepare them for the future (junior high school, 51%; high school, 69%).

### **In Closing**

Youth today face many challenges as they grow and develop. The Teen Assessment Project (TAP) provides information that empowers youth, parents, neighborhoods, schools, youth-serving organizations, agencies, the spiritual community, law enforcement, and community leaders to work together to develop and implement strategies addressing concerns identified. TAP can serve as a vehicle for youth, parent, school and community education and action. In addition, it sets a baseline from which to evaluate the impact of local efforts to encourage positive youth development in families, schools, and communities.