
CHAPTER 2

Administration of the Teen Assessment Project

This report is the result of a joint effort between the University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension, the Conway School District, and a team of locally concerned citizens. After the project was approved, the Teen Assessment Project Steering Committee was formed which included youth, parents, school staff, and community representatives from businesses, the hospital, youth center, clergy, recreation department, police, social services and others who work with and care about youth.

The Teen Assessment Project involves six distinct phases:

- community coalition development or enhancement
- survey development and implementation
- analyzing, interpreting and sharing survey results
- youth, parent, school and community educational efforts
- community strategies and action planning
- project impact evaluation

Dr. Stephen Small of the University of Wisconsin-Madison/Extension, originator of the Teen Assessment Project, developed a question bank of 475 possible questions to assess teen attitudes and worries, future aspirations, alcohol and other drug abuse, sexuality, use of time, diversity and perceived discrimination, personal safety, violence and delinquency, health, interactions with peers, perceptions of parental behavior and monitoring, family relationships and values, perceptions of school and neighborhood monitoring and support. The Conway School District TAP Steering Committee used this question bank to select the 160 items included in the survey. Some questions were developed locally to reflect community concerns. The final survey was reviewed by the Teen Assessment Project director and approved for use by the UNH Institutional Review Board.

The community was informed about the project through articles written in school and community newspapers. A letter containing an explanation of the project and a passive consent notification was sent to all parents of youth being surveyed in the Conway School District. Parents had the option of not having their teen participate in the survey by contacting the school. Prior to the youth survey date, parents were able to review the survey at several locations. On the day of the survey youth were given the option to not participate. They also could skip any question they chose not to answer.

Teachers were trained in survey administration procedures. Teachers administered the survey to their homeroom students. A script with specific instructions was read by the survey

administrators to maintain consistency among the classrooms. In order to ensure accurate and honest responses a number of steps were taken. The anonymity of youth was protected. Names were not placed on survey booklets or response sheets. Teachers and volunteers were instructed to not walk around the classroom while students completed the survey. Each student placed her/his own response sheet into a special envelope for the classroom. In the report, youth responses are combined to protect identification of any individual response.

The survey was administered on October 26, 2001 to 7th through 12th grade students in the Kennett Junior and Senior High Schools. Parents of 24 students (2% of 1,265 total student enrollment) denied permission for their student to participate. According to teacher reports, 29 students (2% of total student enrollment) chose not to participate. School records indicated that 104 students were absent (8% of student enrollment).

Answer sheets for 1,074 students were collected. When examined for obvious patterns and scribbles, 12 unusable answer forms were removed. Five consistency/exaggerator checks were run on these data resulting in the removal of 35 more forms. A total of 1,027 surveys (323 - junior high school; 704 - high school) were used. These 1,027 student surveys represent 81% of the student population in the 7th through 12th grades. Survey results were analyzed to produce this research report and the series of six parent newsletters entitled, "Whose Kids?...Our Kids!". Newsletter topics include: Parent-Teen Communication; Teenagers' Use of Alcohol and Other Drugs; Teen Sexuality; Teen Depression and Suicide; Parent-Teen Relationships; and Working Together: Youth, Families, Schools and Communities. It is the hope of the TAP committee that this report will be a valuable resource to:

- youth as they partner with peers and adults to strengthen their community;
- parents as they strive to support the positive development of youth;
- schools and youth serving organizations as they target curriculum and programs to meet the expressed needs of youth;
- community members and organizations as they become more aware and supportive of youth voices;
- all who share in the vision of youth and adults working together to create healthier families, schools, and communities.

This report speaks for youth collectively to give us a picture of the status of the Conway's teens. It is our hope it will be useful in educational and community planning, stimulate program and policy review and modifications, help secure funding and resources to meet established goals, and lead to changes in attitudes and behaviors that strengthen protective factors and assets in youth, families, schools, and the larger community.