

---

## **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 Dover School District and the Dover Coalition for Youth. After the project was approved, the Teen Assessment Project steering committee was formed, which included representation from youth, parents, school staff, local business, health professionals, youth workers, the spiritual community, recreational leaders, law enforcement, social services professionals and others who work with and care about the well-being of youth.

The Teen Assessment Project involves four phases:

- survey development and implementation
- compiling and sharing research data from the youth surveys
- parent, school and community educational efforts
- community and school responses or actions resulting from the project

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 TAP steering committee of the Dover Coalition for Youth used this question bank to select the 160 items included in the survey. Some questions were locally developed 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 which included passive consent notification was sent to all parents of 7<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> graders explaining the project. Parents had the option of not having their teen participate in the survey by contacting Dover Middle School or Dover High School. Prior to the youth survey date, parents were able to review the survey at several locations.

In order to ensure accurate and honest responses, the survey process was designed to protect the anonymity of youth. No names were placed on survey booklets or answer forms. Each

student placed his or her own computer answer form into a special envelope for each classroom. Youth responses were reported only in aggregated form to protect identification of all individual respondents.

The survey was administered on November 9, 1999 at the Dover High School and November 15, 1999 at the Dover Middle School (7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders only). Some students were absent or tardy and did not participate in the survey (9 at the middle school and 114 at the high school). The parents of 29 students (11 - high school; 18 - middle school) did not allow them to participate in the survey. Students were informed the survey was voluntary and that they did not have to participate. Answer sheets were examined for obvious patterns, scribbles, etc and 19 unusable answer forms were removed. A total of 1,635 surveys (1,190 - high school; 445 - middle school) were useable and analyzed to produce this research report and the series of six parent newsletters entitled, "Whose Kids?...Our Kids!" This represents 83% of the student population of the 7<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grades. Newsletter topics include: Parent-Teen Communication, Teenager's Use of Alcohol and 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 steering committee this research report will be a valuable resource:

- to parents as they strive to support the positive development of youth;
- to schools and youth serving organizations as they target curriculum and programs to meet the expressed needs of youth;
- to community members and organizations as they become more aware and supportive of youth voices;
- and to 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 teens in the Dover School District. It is the project's hope it will be useful in educational and community planning, stimulate program and policy review and modifications, help secure funding and resources, and lead to changes in attitudes and behaviors that strengthen assets/protective factors in Dover's youth, families, and schools.