

CHAPTER 10

Perceptions of School and Community

Adolescents spend an increasingly greater amount of time away from home as they get older. A majority of their time is spent in school and in the broader community. It is important for adolescents to be connected to these environments and to feel there are meaningful opportunities for them to explore and practice their emerging abilities. Adolescents are more at risk for problem behaviors if they have low grades and/or drop out of school. In New Hampshire, almost 1 in 10 teens over the age of 15 is not in school, at work, or in the armed services (Terry & Hall, 1996). These teens are called “idle teens.”

Likewise, adolescents with a large amount of free time may be more vulnerable to engaging in risky behaviors such as drug use and early sexual intercourse. Knowing adolescents’ perceptions of their school and community can help adults better understand teen motivations and behaviors. For example, adolescents who are more committed to school and involved in prosocial activities are less likely to engage in risky behaviors because they perceive there is more to lose from such behaviors (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1992; Dryfoos, 1990; Elster, Lamb and Taveré, 1987; Mensch and Kandel, 1988).

Perceptions of School

We asked students to respond to the statement “*I enjoy going to school.*” Fifty-three percent (53%) of all youth checked “*agree*” or “*strongly agree*”. Overall, females reported more agreement with the statement than males (males, 49%; females, 58%). With regard to school level, middle school students reported they enjoyed school more than high school students (middle school, 58%; high school, 51%). Figure 10-1 shows the responses by grade and gender.

Figure 10-1: Enjoy Going to School
(Strongly Agree or Agree, by Grade and Gender)

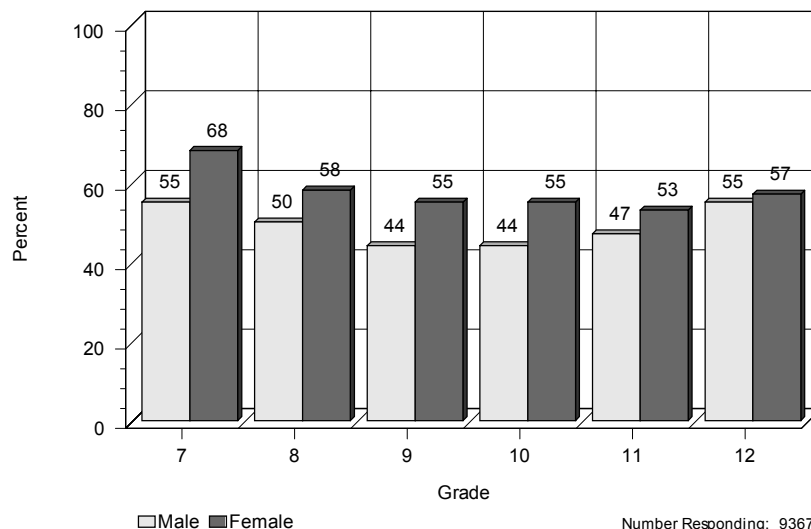
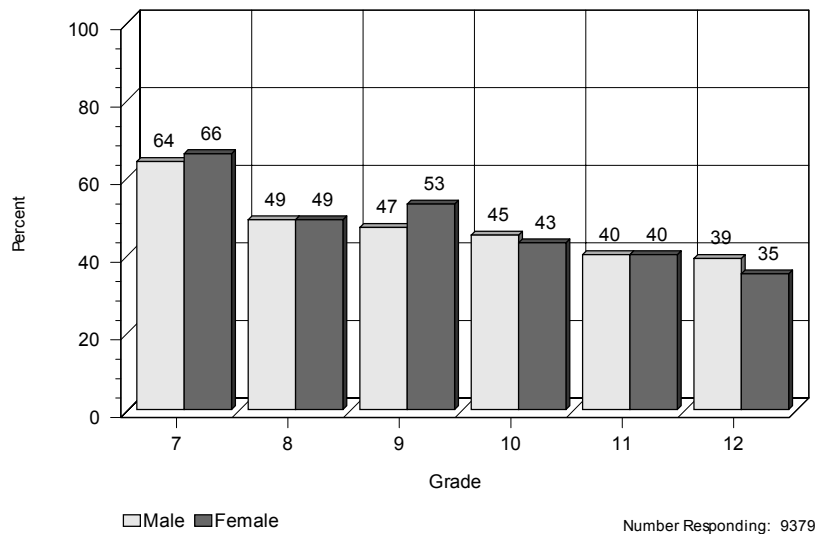


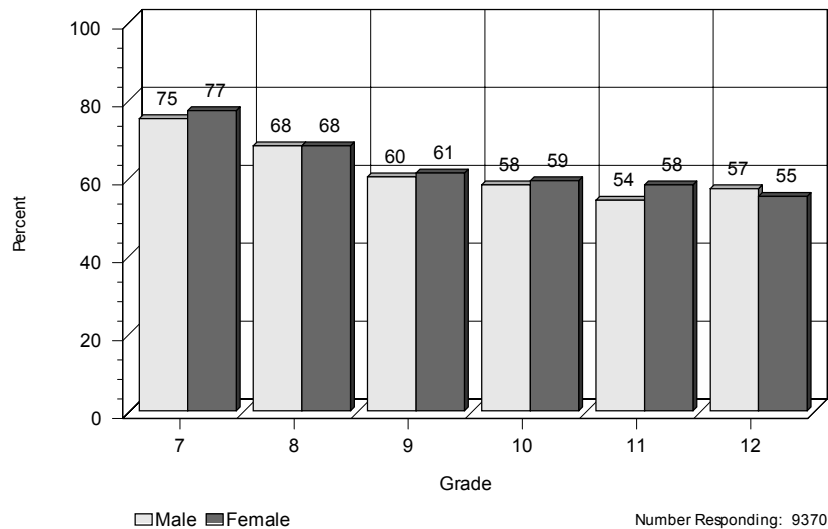
Figure 10-2 displays the percentage of students by grade and gender who “agree” or “strongly agree” with the statement “The rules in my school are enforced fairly.” Overall, 48% of students reported they felt the rules were enforced fairly. More middle school students (57%) than high school students (44%) reported they felt this way.

Figure 10-2: School Rules Enforced Fairly
(Strongly Agree or Agree, by Grade and Gender)



Students were also asked whether or not they believed they were getting a “good, high quality education at my school.” Sixty-two percent (62%) of students checked “agree” or “strongly agree” (middle school, 72%; high school, 58%; males, 62%; females, 62%).

Figure 10-3: Good Quality Education
(Strongly Agree or Agree, by Grade and Gender)



Note: Due to rounding, some graphs may not total 100%.

Future Plans and Career Plans

When students were asked if they felt they would drop out of school before completing high school, 6% answered “*strongly agree*” or “*agree*” (middle school, 6%; high school, 5%; males, 6%; females, 5%). Of course, those high school students who have already dropped out are not reflected in these percentages. Figure 10-4 shows those who “*strongly agree*” or “*agree*” they will drop out before they complete high school by grade and gender.

Figure 10-4: Teens Who Feel They Will Drop Out Before They Complete High School
(Strongly Agree or Agree, by Grade and Gender)

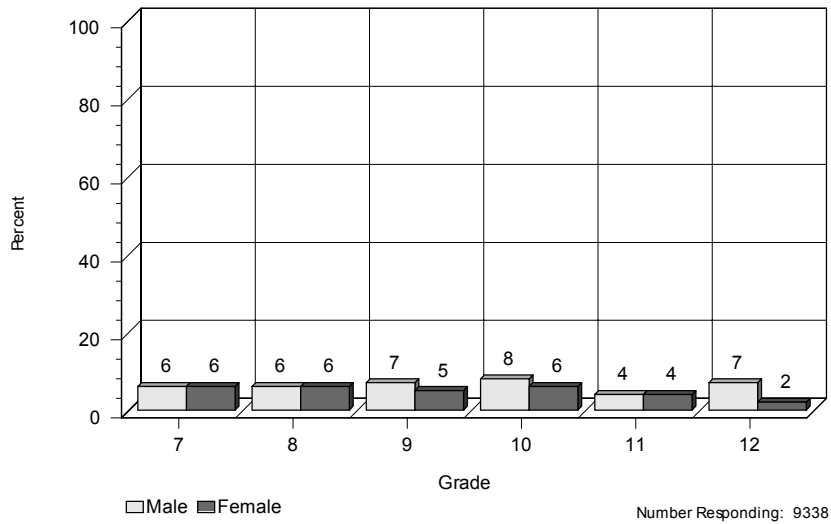


Figure 10-5 shows the future plans middle school students have for after high school graduation. Figure 10-6 shows the same plans for high school students. Sixty percent (60%) of high school students think they will “Go to a 4-year college or university”. More high school males than females chose vocational or technical school as a future option (males, 9%; females, 5%). More high school females than males thought they would attend a 4-year college after high school (males, 54%; females, 67%).

Figure 10-5: Future Plans After High School
(Middle School Students, by Gender)

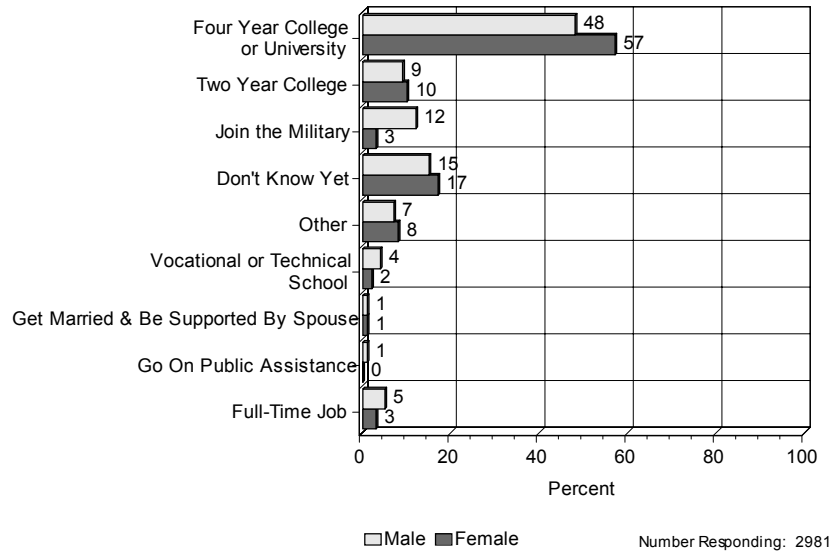
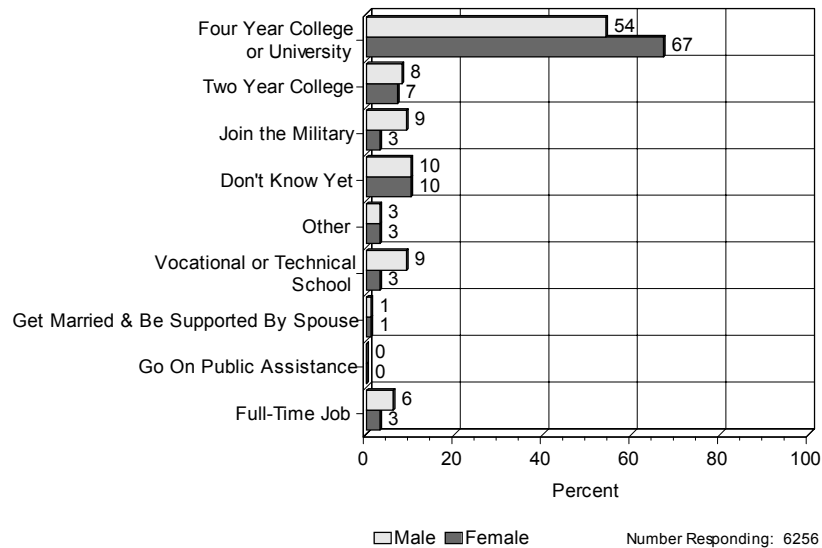


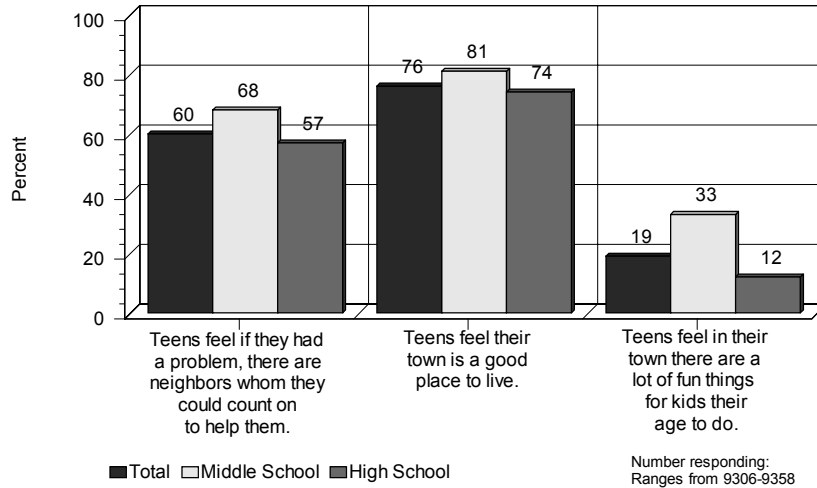
Figure 10-6: Future Plans After High School
(High School Students, by Gender)



Perceptions of Community

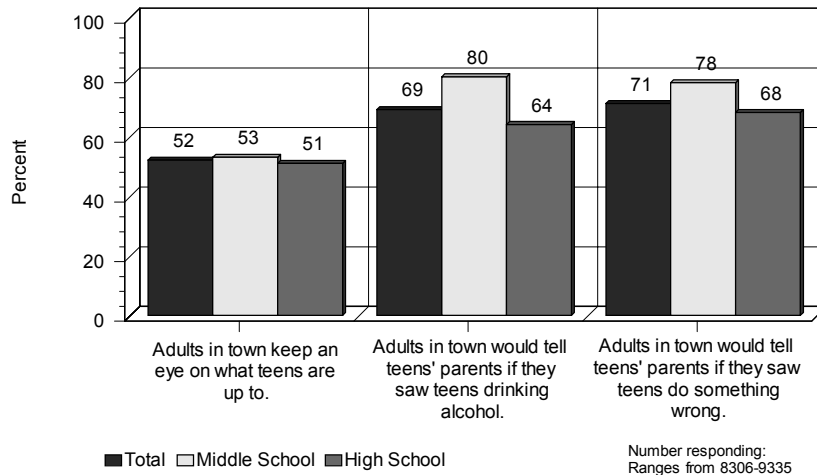
Neighborhood Support. Figure 10-7 shows what students reported about their community. Sixty percent (60%) reported there are neighbors they can count on if they are in trouble and need help. Although 76% felt their town is a good place to live, only 19% thought there are a lot of fun things for kids their age to do. Twice as many middle school students (33%) as high school students (12%) reported that there were fun things for kids their age to do in their town.

Figure 10-7: Neighborhood Support
(Strongly Agree or Agree, by School Level)



Neighborhood Monitoring. As shown in Figure 10-8, about half of the students reported that adults in town keep an eye on what teens are up to (middle school, 53%; high school, 51%). Over two-thirds (69%) of the students reported that adults in town would tell their parents if they saw teens drinking alcohol (middle school, 80%; high school, 64%). Seventy-one percent (71%) felt that if they were to do something wrong, adults in town would tell their parents (middle school, 78%; high school, 68%).

Figure 10-8: Neighborhood Monitoring
(Strongly Agree or Agree, by School Level)



Social Responsibility

Many teens have a well-developed sense of social responsibility toward their community. Almost two-thirds (66%) reported they often think about doing things “...so that people can have things better in the future.” (middle school, 68%; high school, 65%). Sixty-one percent (61%) said they feel it is important to contribute to their community and society (middle school, 65%; high school, 58%). Almost four out of five students (79%) said they consider it their problem if their neighbors are in trouble and need help (middle school, 79%; high school, 78%). Forty-six percent (46%) would give up their own free time in order to help raise money for a neighborhood project (middle school, 51; high school, 44%). Figure 10-9 shows the results by gender.

Figure 10-9: Social Responsibility
(Strongly Agree or Agree, by Gender)

