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## **CHAPTER 2**

# **Administration of the Teen Assessment Project**

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This report is the result of collaboration of the University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension with the Conway, Keene area, Monadnock Regional, Jaffrey/Rindge, Fall Mountain Regional, Gorham, Berlin, Lin-wood, Merrimack, and Peterborough School Districts, and teams of locally concerned citizens. After the projects were approved in each community, local steering committees were formed which included youth, parents, school personnel, business and spiritual communities, health professionals, law enforcement, youth and family serving agencies and organizations, policy makers and community leaders as well as others who work with and care about youth.

The Teen Assessment Project involves six phases:

- community coalition development or enhancement
- survey development and implementation
- analysis, interpretation, and dissemination of survey results
- youth, parent, school and community educational efforts
- community strategy development, action planning, and implementation of strategic plan
- 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. Local steering committees used this question bank along with additional questions to select the 160 items included in the survey. Some questions were developed locally to reflect community concerns. A common core of questions was required of each community. The final surveys were reviewed by the Teen Assessment Project Director and approved for use by the UNH Institutional Review Board. This report is based on the required core questions. Some optional questions chosen by most communities are also included.

Communities were generally informed about the project through articles written in school and community newspapers. A letter which included a passive consent notification was sent to all parents of youth being surveyed in the Conway, Keene area, Monadnock Regional, Jaffrey/Rindge, Fall Mountain, Gorham, Berlin, Merrimack, and Peterborough School Districts. Parents in the Lin-wood School District received a letter requiring active consent for student participation. Prior to the youth survey date, parents were able to review the survey at several locations. Parents could contact the school if they did not wish their teen to participate. On the day of the survey students could choose not to participate. They also could skip any question they did not want to answer.

Teachers and volunteers were trained in survey administration procedures. Wherever possible, volunteers were used for administration of the survey. Teachers remained in the room to maintain a positive classroom climate. 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 not to 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 this report, youth responses are combined to prevent identification of individual responses.

The surveys were administered in the ten school districts between January 2000 and October 2001. Answer sheets for 9,791 students were collected. Answer sheets were examined for obvious patterns and scribbles; unusable answer forms were removed. Five consistency/exaggerator checks were run on these data resulting in the removal of 324 forms. Examples of consistency/exaggerator checks include: students who reported that they daily used all drugs listed, students who reported time use activities none or all of the time; or students who reported on one question that they did not use alcohol and then reported on another that they did engage in binge drinking. Due to these data checks the number of respondents for each community differs slightly from the original report for that community. Nine forms were eliminated due to missing gender or grade data. A total of 9,458 surveys (3,063 - middle school; 6,395 - high school) were used.

This report speaks for youth collectively to give us a picture of the status of many New Hampshire teens. It is our hope it will be useful in educational and community planning, aid in stimulating program and policy review and modifications, help securing funding and resources, and lead to changes in attitudes and behaviors that strengthen assets/protective factors in New Hampshire youth, families and schools.