



# Whose Kids?...Our Kids!

## Merrimack School District

### Working Together: Youth, Families, Schools and Communities

Recently, the Merrimack School District, Hillsborough County UNH Cooperative Extension and community members joined together to learn more about the youth in our community by conducting the Teen Assessment Project (TAP).

Approximately 86% of the students were surveyed in the Merrimack School District. In all, information from 1940 surveys was used for this newsletter.

		<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>
371	7th graders	196	175
339	8th graders	182	157
341	9th graders	156	185
311	10th graders	155	156
326	11th graders	161	165
252	12th graders	114	138

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“Whose Kids?...Our Kids!” is a parent newsletter series of the Teen Assessment Project (TAP), a program of the University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension. Support for this project was provided by the Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities Program. The Teen Assessment Project (TAP) originated at the University of Wisconsin at Madison under the direction of Stephen A. Small, Ph.D. TAP in Hillsborough County was under the direction of Penny Turner and Carla Billingham, UNH Cooperative Extension Educators in cooperation with Charlotte W. Cross, UNH Cooperative Extension, Youth Development Specialist. For more information about TAP call Charlotte W. Cross at (603) 862-2495 or e-mail at [charlotte.cross@unh.edu](mailto:charlotte.cross@unh.edu).

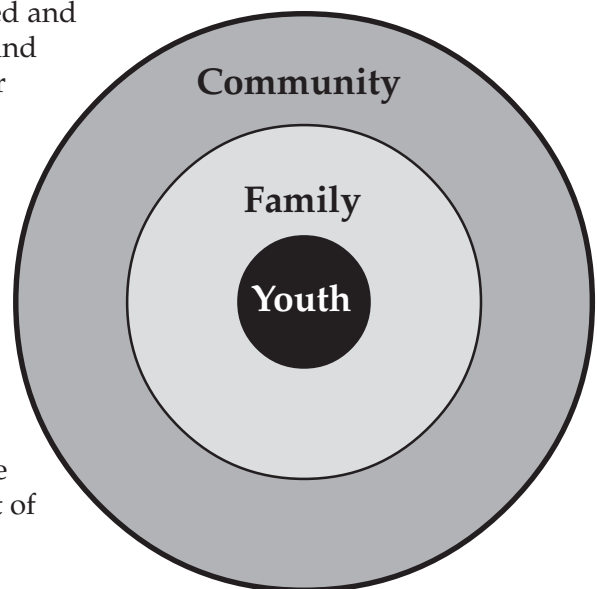
This issue of “WHOSE KIDS?...OUR KIDS!” focuses on how teens, parents, schools and the community at large can work together to address common concerns and support the positive development of local youth.

The Teen Assessment Project (TAP) survey helps us understand teen attitudes, behaviors and perceptions. The local collaborative group is encouraging everyone to work together to address issues of concern as a result of the youth survey. It is important for members of a community to look at local strengths and determine where additional youth and family supports are needed.

#### Youth Development

Youth grow up in families that are part of communities. The positive development of youth is not influenced by just one factor, but by many factors in their lives. Children do not grow up in isolation, but in ever widening environments.

They are nurtured and influenced first and foremost by their family. As they grow and develop, their peers, their school and the community in which they live also have an influence. These factors all work together to shape the development of youth.



## Examples of Protective and Risk Factors in the Lives of Youth

### Youth

#### *Protective Factors*

- well developed social and interpersonal skills
- positive perceptions of self

#### *Risk Factors*

- antisocial behavior
- social isolation

### Family

#### *Protective Factors*

- a close relationship with at least one person
- family support and guidance

#### *Risk Factors*

- poor parental monitoring
- unclear family rules, expectations, rewards

### Peer

#### *Protective Factors*

- one or more close friends

#### *Risk Factors*

- friends who engage in risky behaviors

### School

#### *Protective Factors*

- positive school experiences
- supportive teachers and administrators

#### *Risk Factors*

- low commitment to school
- academic failure

### Community

#### *Protective Factors*

- opportunities to make meaningful contributions to the community

#### *Risk Factors*

- lenient community standards and norms

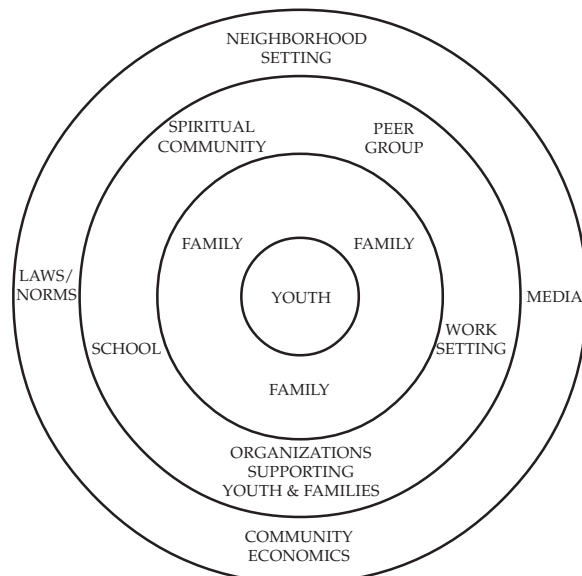
## Protective and Risk Factors

There are protective factors and risk factors in a child's life at the youth, family, school and community level. These factors relate to individual characteristics, the quality of family relationships, and peer, school and community supports.

*Protective factors* are those aspects that can increase a child's ability to resist negative influences and develop healthy life skills. Good problem solving skills, family support and caring, healthy peer influences, positive school environments and supportive neighborhoods and communities all serve as protective factors for youth.

*Risk factors* can create barriers to the development of healthy life skills and can increase the likelihood of youth being influenced in a negative way. Some examples of risk factors are negative attitudes toward self and others, a difficult temperament, poor parental monitoring, friends who engage in risky behaviors, low commitment to school and communities that lack organized youth activities. All these factors play a role in adding to the risk that youth will engage in problem behaviors.

These factors influence whether young people will develop to their full potential. Risk factors and protective factors exist at all levels in the life of a youth. Our goal as parents and community members is to reduce the number of risk factors while at the same time increasing the number of protective factors. For the most successful positive development of youth, this must be done at the youth, family, school and community level. There are no quick solutions to complex youth issues because youth grow up and interact in multiple environments.



## Things Young People Can Do to Build Protective Factors:

- Form study groups.
- Become involved in interesting and challenging opportunities through youth programs such as:
  - recreational sports
  - after school programs
  - school and community clubs
  - spiritual youth groups.
- Talk with friends and adults about boundaries, expectations and values. Support one another.
- Find chances to build relationships with younger children by:
  - tutoring
  - mentoring
  - baby-sitting
  - playing with them.
- Get involved in teen to teen programs.
- Promote treating others with respect.
- Partner with adults to evaluate community strengths and weaknesses.
- Get involved with others to complete a community project.
- Take advantage of leadership opportunities.

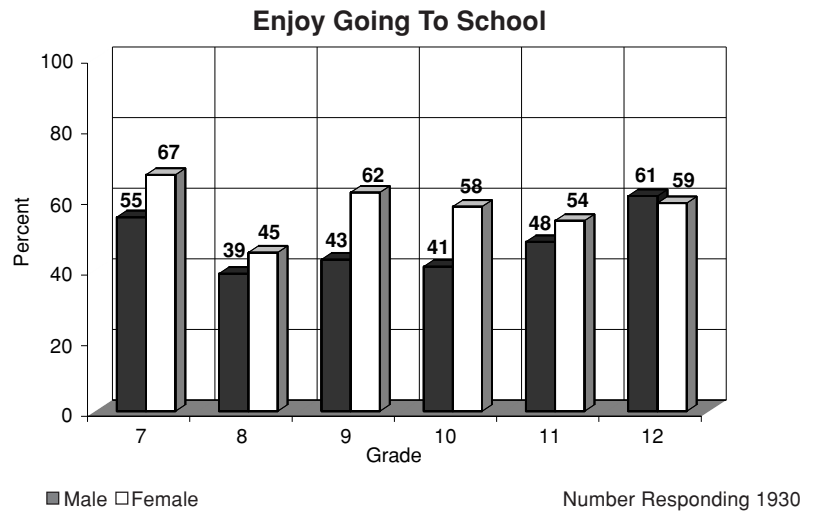
## Teens Future Plans

Kids who have a goal for the future make better decisions in the present.

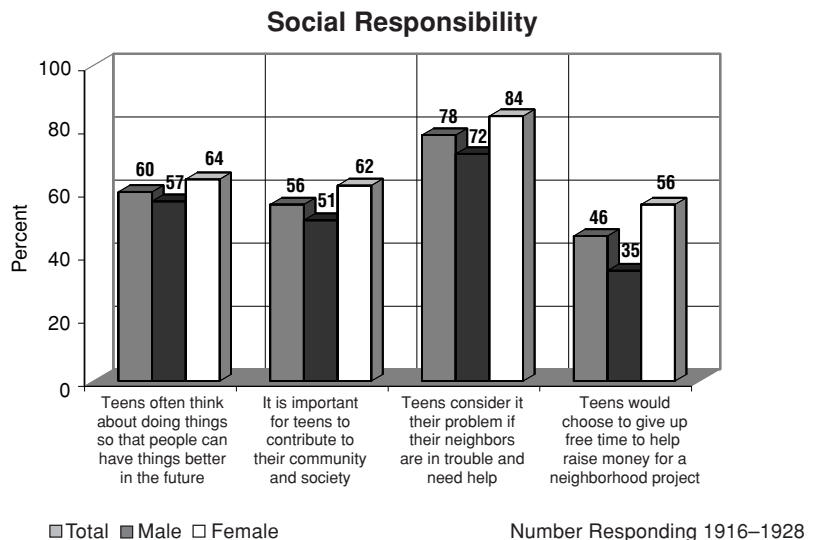
- Four Year College 61%
- Two Year College 6%
- Join the Military 7%
- Vocational or Tech School 5%
- Full-Time Job 2%
- Get Married and Be Supported by Spouse 1%
- Go On Public Assistance 1%
- Other 4%
- Don't Know 13%

## Youth

Commitment to school involves youth's interest and performance in school. Studies show a relationship between having poor grades and participating in problem behaviors like drug abuse, violence and delinquency. The TAP survey found over half of youth (64%) reported worrying quite a bit or very much about getting good grades (middle school, 63%; high school, 65%). Sixty percent (60%) of students said they are getting a "good, high quality education at their school" (middle school, 71%; high school, 54%). The chart below shows teens who "agree" or "strongly agree" they enjoy going to school.



The TAP survey show many local teens have developed a strong sense of social responsibility. Teens who are socially conscious become adults who are socially conscious. The chart below shows teens' responses to questions concerning social responsibility.



## Things Parents Can Do to Build Protective Factors

- Listen to your children. They need to know what they say is important to you.
- Talk with your children about your values and priorities.
- Do things with your children:
  - projects around the house
  - recreational activities
  - community projects.
- Help youth get the facts about the risks involved in smoking, drinking and taking drugs.
- Talk to your children about other risky behaviors.
- Set a good example by your actions.
- Ask your children for ways to make things better in their world.
- Know where your children are and what they are doing.
- Work in the community to create a range of safe and structured activities that will attract youth.

## Parental Monitoring Reduces Risky Behavior

Risk Behavior                      Percent of Teens Involved

*Smoking monthly or more often*

low monitoring                      42%  
high monitoring                      5%

*Drinking monthly or more often*

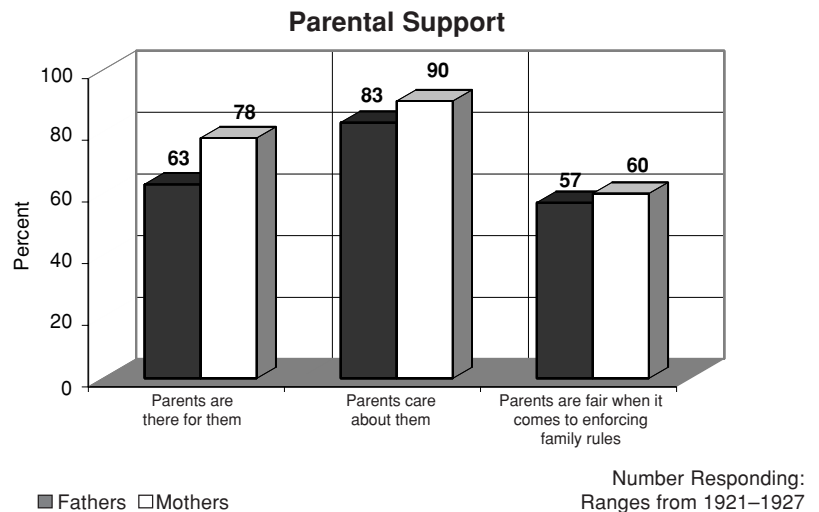
low monitoring                      58%  
high monitoring                      8%

*Sexual activity*

low monitoring                      54%  
high monitoring                      12%

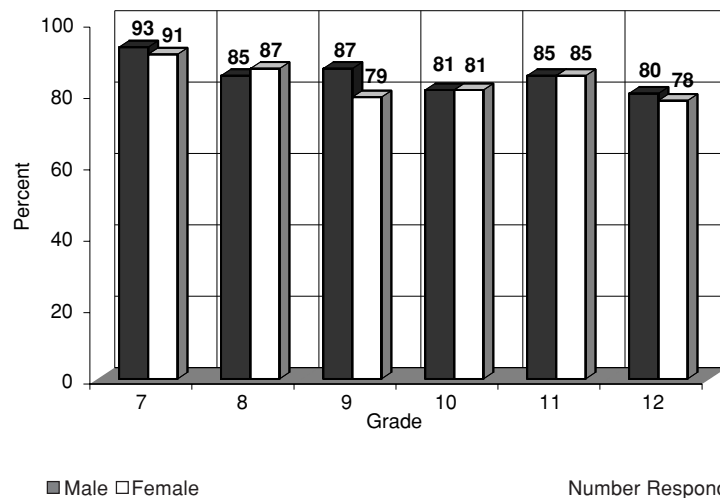
## Family

An important factor in the development of children and the general quality of the parent-teen relationship is how supportive and loving parents are. Fortunately, about 8 out of 10 local teens (78%) felt their mother was there (“often” or “very often”) when they needed her and about 6 out of 10 (63%) felt the same about their father. More than 8 out of 10 also felt their parents cared about them. A little more than half felt their parents were fair enforcing family rules.



In addition to feeling supported by parents, teens also report that their parents are interested in what they learn and how they are doing in school. Parental involvement leads to school success. The chart below shows students who “agree” or “strongly agree” their parents are interested in their school work.

## Teens Who Feel Their Parents Are Interested in What They Learn and How They Are Doing in School



## Things Community Members Can Do to Build Protective Factors

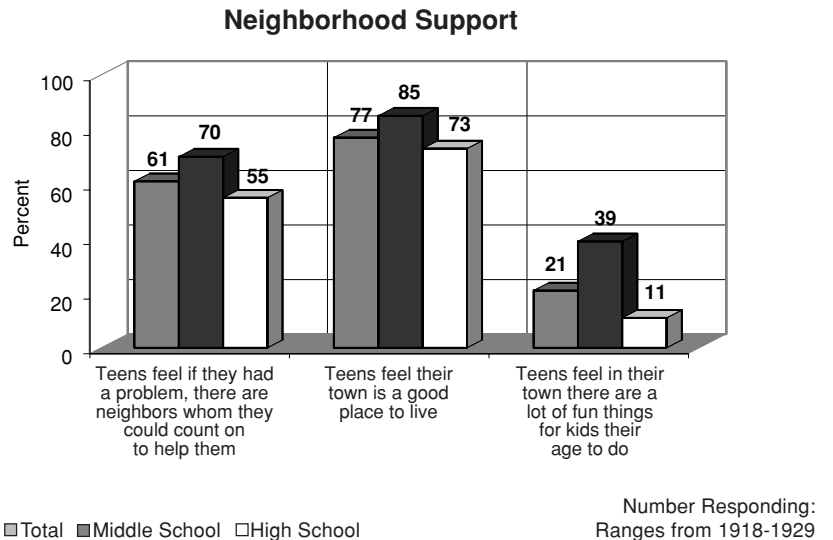
- Look at and greet every child or adolescent you see.
- Have a five-minute conversation with a child or adolescent about his or her interests.
- Send a birthday card, letter, e-mail or a “thinking of you” message to a child or adolescent.
- Invite a young person to do something you enjoy:
  - play a game
  - see a movie
  - go bowling.
- Have an open-door policy in your neighborhood so kids feel welcome in your home for refreshments, conversation or just “hanging out”.

## Other Ways to Make a Difference...

- Talk with leaders, friends, neighbors and other citizens about the vision and potential for youth in your community. Share what you think.
- Sponsor community-wide or regional events to talk about how to develop positive youth, strong families and caring communities. Work hard to include youth, parents, senior citizens, school representatives, the spiritual community, business people, the police department, youth organizations and others who care about youth.
- Gather information about what is currently happening in your community and how things could be improved with a youth focus or partnership.
- Serve on a committee or task force to work on youth issues.

## Community

Youth also need to feel supported by their communities. Local youth told us they felt their community cared about them, as can be seen in the following graph. Six out of ten youth (61%) feel they can count on their neighbors if they were having a problem. About three quarters of teens (77%) feel their town is a good place to live. However, only 1 out of 5 teens (21%) feel there are fun things for them to do in their town. There is a great opportunity for youth and adults to work together to address these issues.



The best way to foster the positive development of youth is by increasing the protective factors at **every** level of influence. To do this a collaborative approach is needed that involves the whole community.

- Youth can support one another and community efforts.
- The whole family can be involved in the child’s life including grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins.
- Parents can get to know their teen’s friends and nurture positive friendships.
- Parents can get involved in school activities and make connections with teachers and other parents.
- Teachers and guidance counselors can offer support.
- Youth serving organizations such as 4-H, mentoring programs and sports programs can give youth positive contact with other adults.
- Spiritual communities can be very supportive and increase their involvement in youth and community efforts.
- Police departments can get involved in positive activities with youth.
- Local businesses can recognize their responsibility to employees and their families by developing family-friendly policies and encouraging employees to volunteer.

## Resources for Parents and Community Members

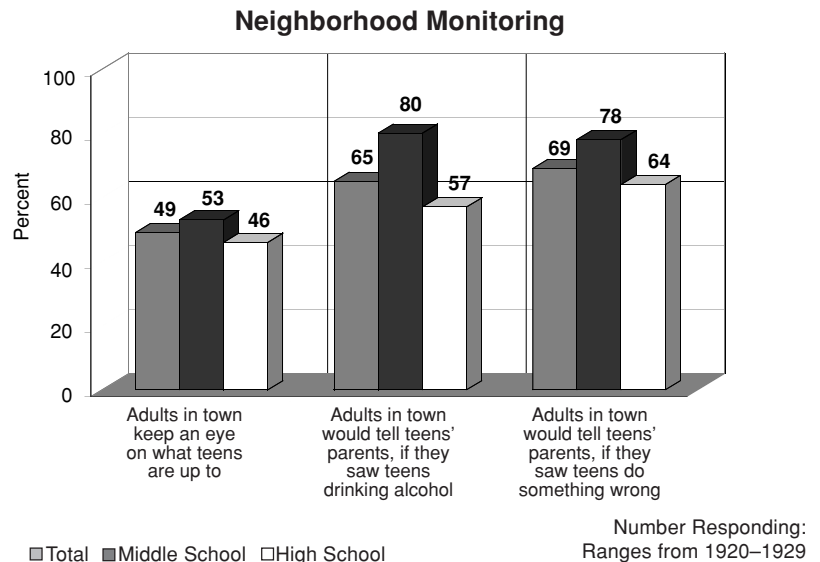
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The UNH Cooperative Extension newsletter series "Whose Kids?...Our Kids!" was based on a publication series developed at the University of Wisconsin at Madison. This newsletter, "Working Together: Youth, Families, Schools and Communities" was written and edited by Charlotte W. Cross, Extension Specialist, Youth Development, Michele L. Gagne, Program Coordinator, Karen M. Watts, Program Assistant, and Kari Doiron, Research Associate, Teen Assessment Project. Desktop publishing provided by Nicholas S. Zweig, UNHCE TAP VISTA Volunteer.

TAP survey results show teens feel monitored by their community. Half of local teens (49%) believe adults in town keep an eye on what teens are up to. About two-thirds of local teens (65%) felt adults in their town would tell their parents if they were caught drinking alcohol. Almost the same number of teens (69%) say adults in town would tell their parents if they saw them do something wrong (middle school, 78% and high school, 64%). Neighborhood monitoring and support are two important protective factors for youth.



## Reaching Out to the Community

Being involved in the community is not always easy. Listed below are some steps to help you get started.

- **Express your needs to the community.** Let your community's schools, spiritual, and community groups know what it will take for you to become involved.
- **Build relationships.** Get to know your neighbors, community leaders, other families, parents, and teachers. This is a great way to get yourself started in community involvement.
- **Share.** Share some of what you have and what you know with other people and institutions in the community. Help create a shared positive vision that everyone in the community can work toward.
- **Reflect.** Think about the things in the community that please you and trouble you. Think about what *you* can do. Talk to friends, other parents, teachers, and community groups about your ideas.

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