
CHAPTER 9

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 Taverne, 1987; Mensch and Kandel, 1988).

Perceptions of School

We asked local students to respond to the statement "*I enjoy going to school.*" Fifty-three percent (53%) of all local youth agreed or strongly agreed they enjoyed going to school. Overall, females reported more agreement with the statement than males (males, 49%; females, 58%). With regard to school level, junior high school students reported they enjoyed school more than high school students (junior high school, 56%; high school, 52%).

Figure 9-1 displays the percentage of local teens by grade and gender who report they "enjoy going to school."

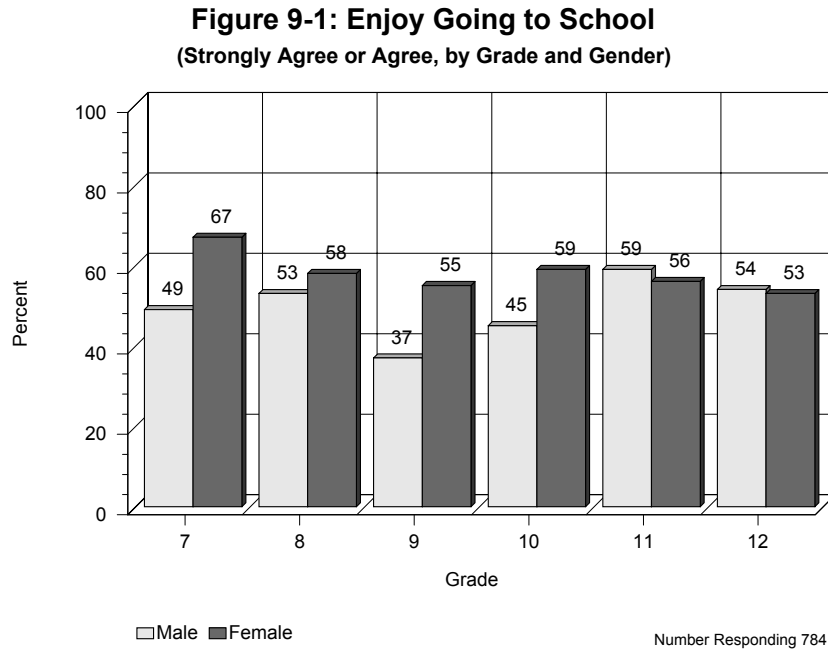
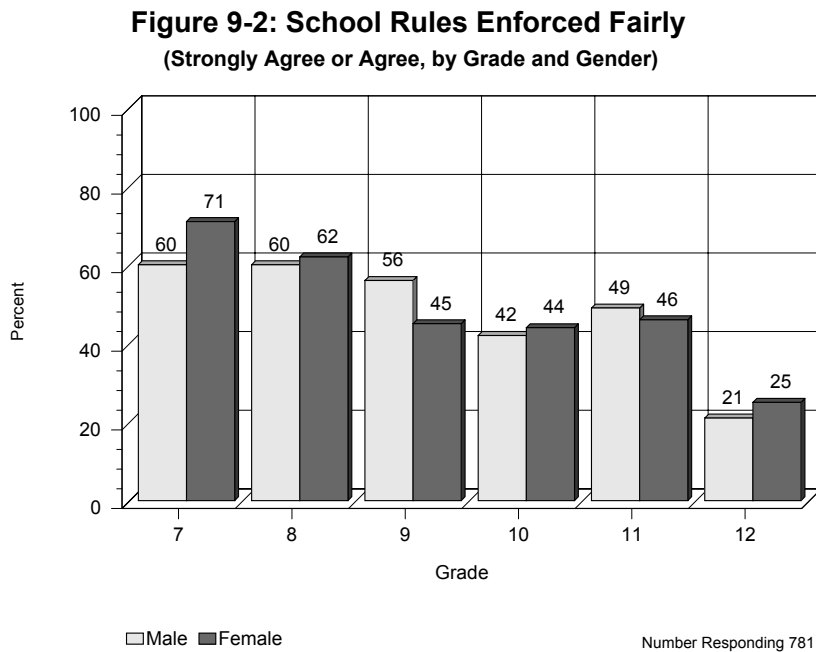


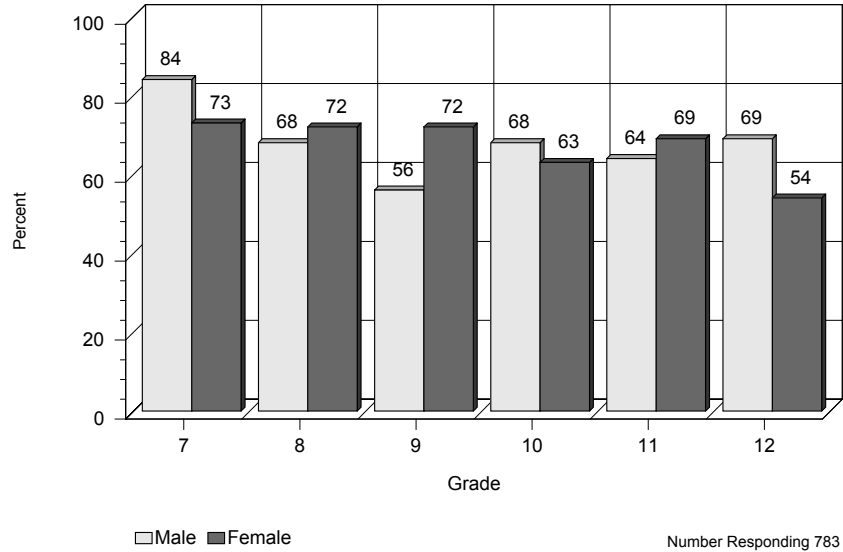
Figure 9-2 displays the percentage of students by grade and gender who "agree" or "strongly agree" with the statement "The rules in my school are enforced fairly." Overall, 49% of students reported they felt the rules were enforced fairly. More junior high school students (63%) than high school students (41%) reported they felt this way.



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

Students were also asked whether or not they felt they were getting a "good, high quality education at my school." Sixty-eight (68%) of students "agree" or "strongly agree" with that statement (junior high school, 74%; high school, 64%; males, 68%; females, 66%).

Figure 9-3: Good Quality Education
(Strongly Agree or Agree, by Grade and Gender)



We asked teens "With which adult in your school would you feel most comfortable discussing anything in confidence?". More students (20%) chose their counselor than any other person. Almost half of those surveyed (43%) responded "No adult at school" to this question. Figure 9-4 shows the responses by school level.

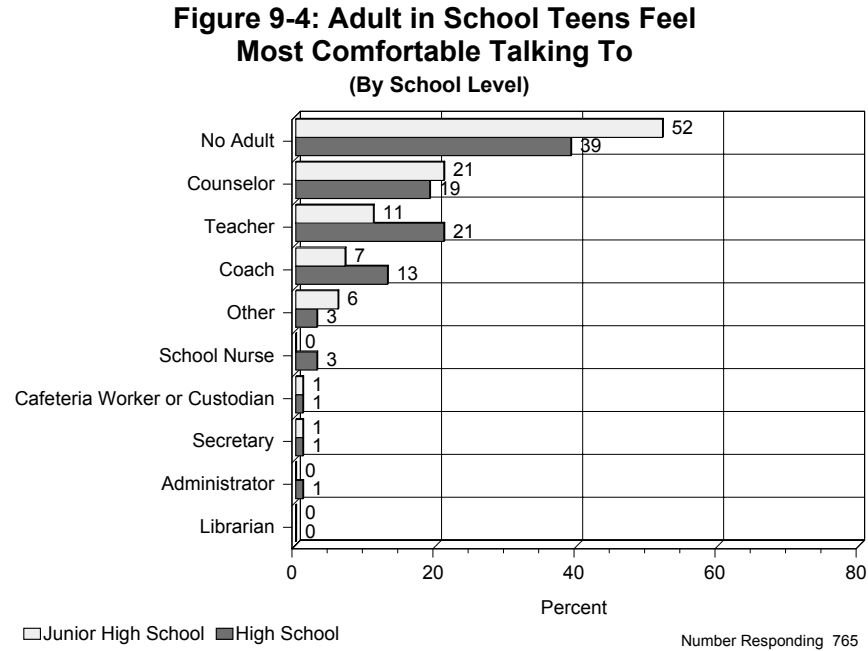
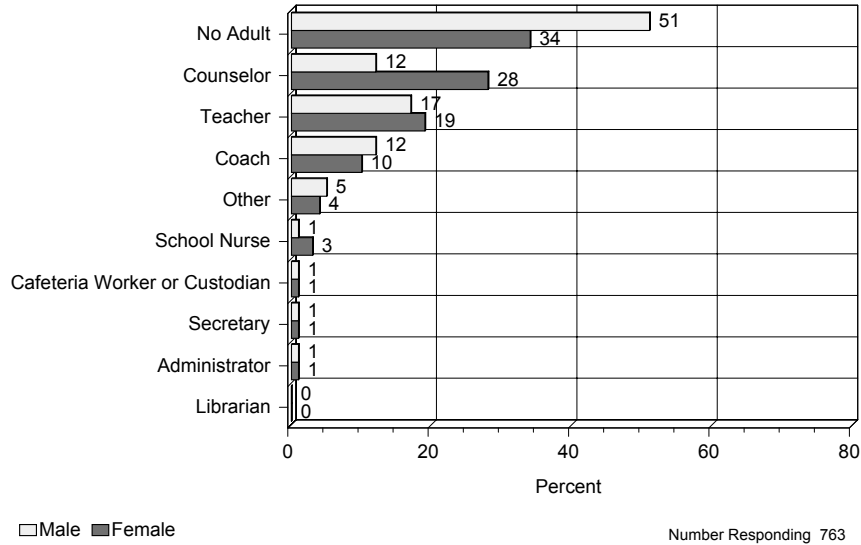


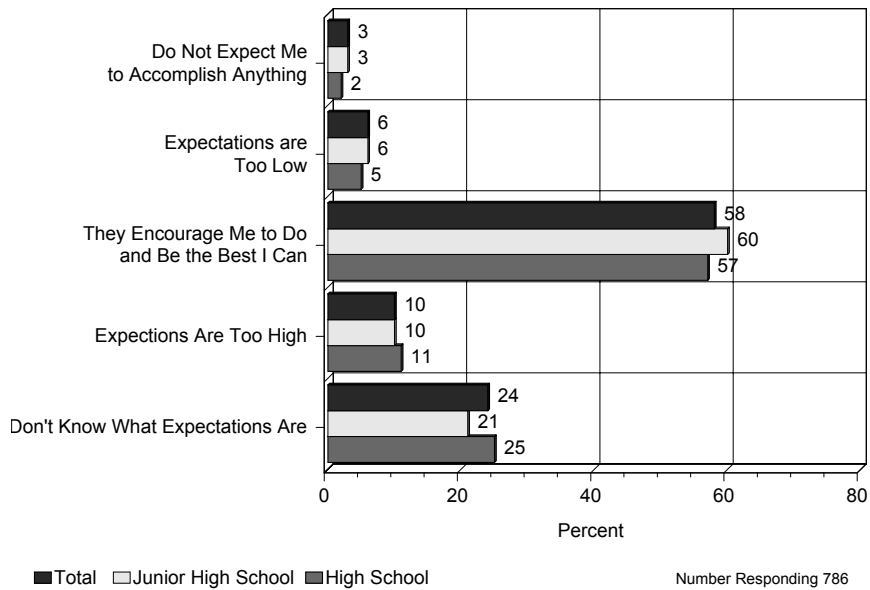
Figure 9-5 shows that more females than males consider a teacher to be someone in school they feel most comfortable talking to (males, 17%; females, 19%). More males (12%) than females (10%) responded "Coach."

Figure 9-5: Adult in School Teens Feel Most Comfortable Talking To (By Gender)

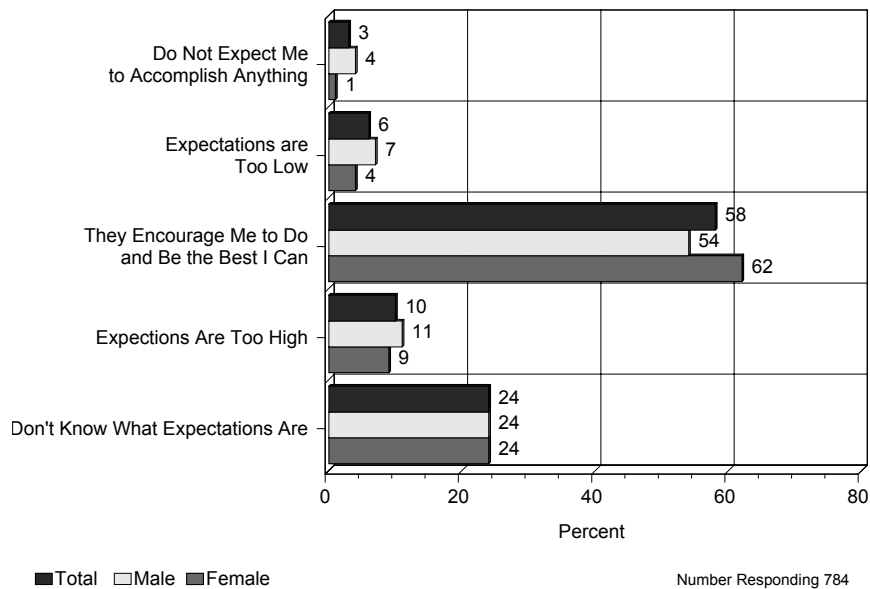


Teacher Expectations. Figures 9-6 and 9-7 show teens' perceptions of their teachers' expectations. The majority of students (58%) believe their teachers encourage them to do and be the best they can. More females feel this way than males.

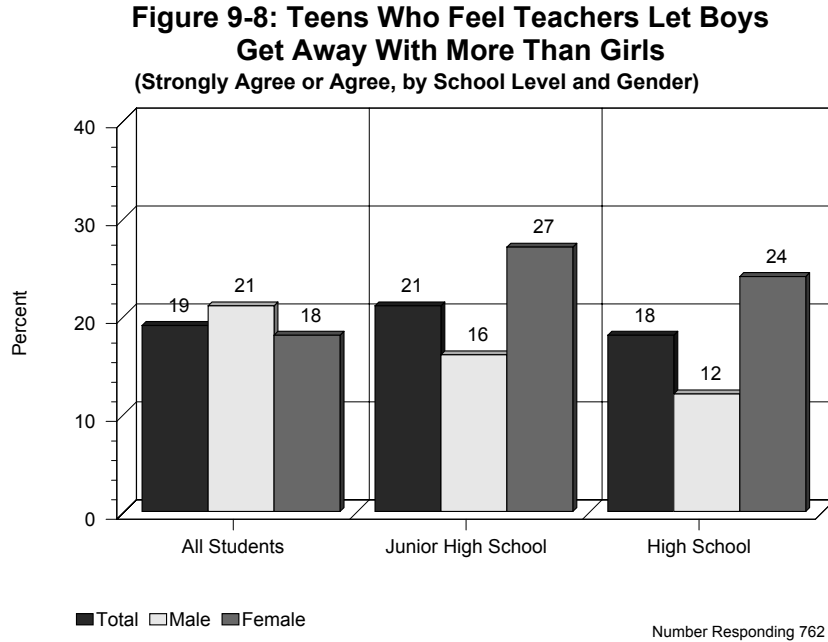
**Figure 9-6: Perceptions of Teacher Expectations
(By School Level)**



**Figure 9-7: Perceptions of Teacher Expectations
(By Gender)**

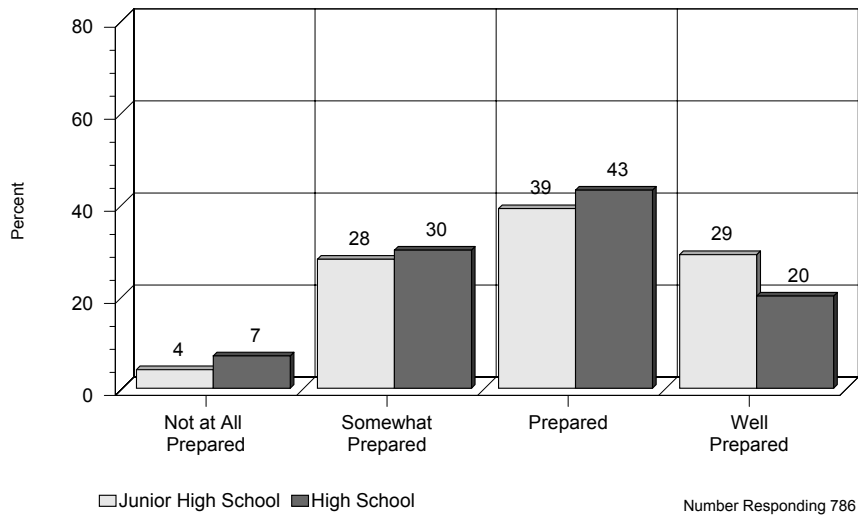


Local teens were asked if they felt teachers let boys get away with more than girls. About one out of five students (19%) strongly agreed or agreed with this statement. More females (25%) than males (14%) strongly agreed or agreed. Figure 9-8 shows the responses by school level and gender.



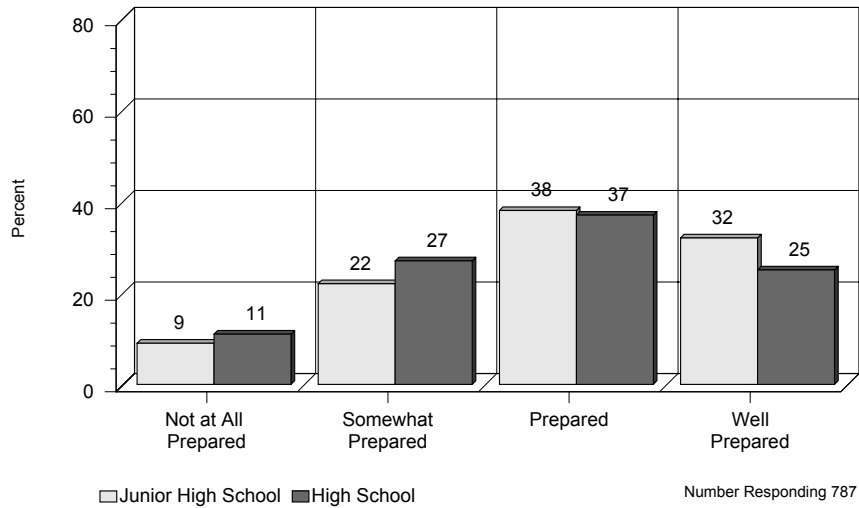
Preparation. Students were asked when they first started attending their present school, how prepared they felt in handling the classwork and homework, the new building and scheduling format, and the social changes. Sixty-five percent (65%) of students felt that they were “prepared” or “well prepared” to handle the classwork and homework when they started school. Figure 9-9 shows the responses broken down by school level.

Figure 9-9: How Prepared Teens Were to Handle Classwork and Homework When They First Started Attending Their Present School (By School Level)



Sixty-four percent (64%) of students felt “prepared” or “well prepared” to handle the social changes when they started attending their present school. Figure 9-10 reports the breakdown of data by school level.

Figure 9-10: How Prepared Teens Were to Handle Social Changes When They First Started Attending Their Present School (By School Level)



We asked local teens if they felt their school could be doing more to prepare them for the future. Almost two-thirds (61%) of the students responded “yes”. Figure 9-11 shows the responses to this question by school level and Figure 9-12 show the responses by gender.

Figure 9-11: Teens Who Feel Their School Could Do More To Prepare Them (By School Level)

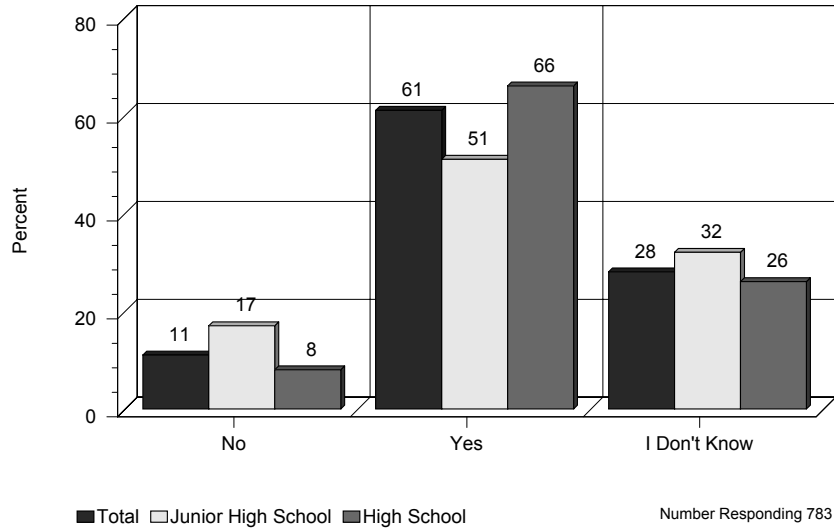
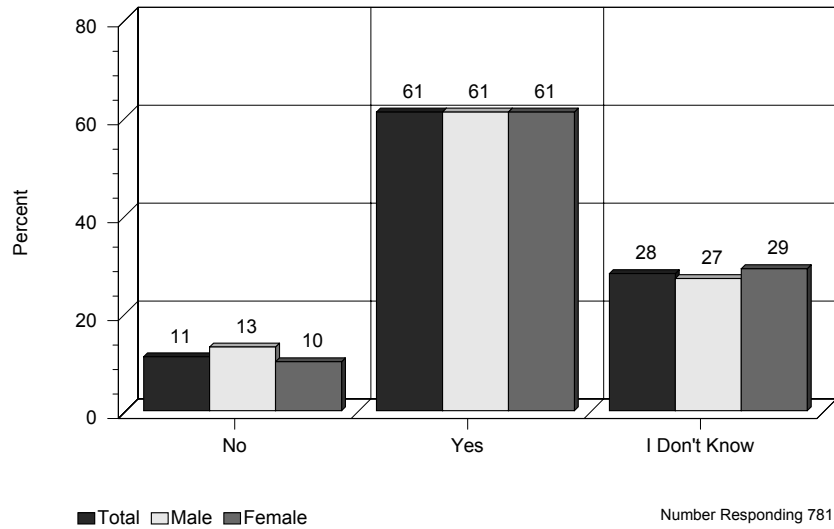


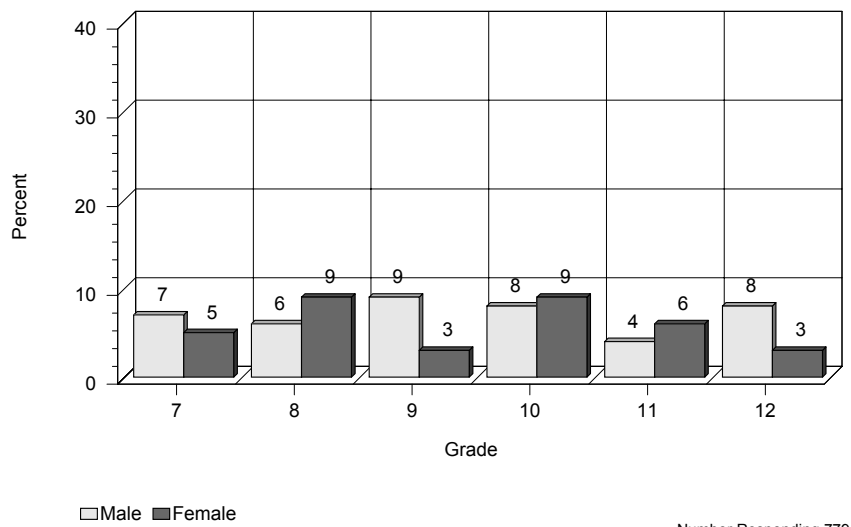
Figure 9-12: Teens Who Feel Their School Could Do More to Prepare Them (By Gender)



Future Plans and Career Plans

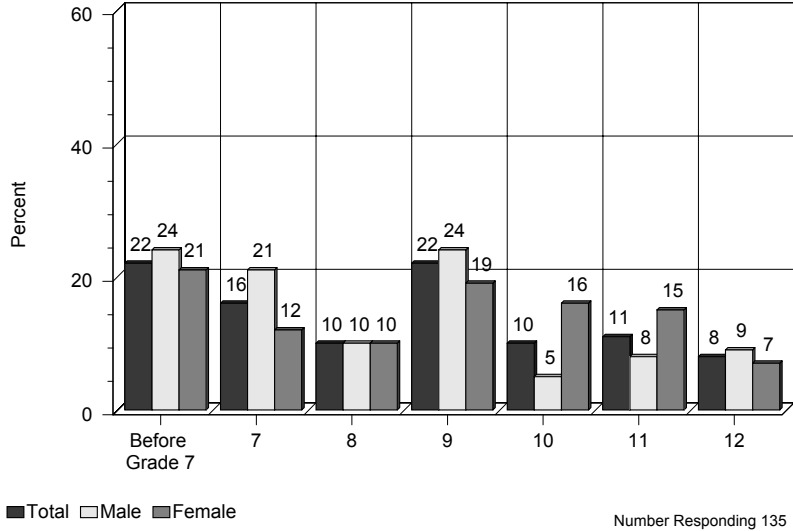
When students were asked if they felt they would drop out of school before completing high school, 7% strongly agreed or agreed (junior high school, 7%; high school, 6%; males, 7%; females, 6%). Of course, those high school students who have already dropped out are not reflected in these percentages. Figure 9-13 shows those who "*strongly agree*" or "*agree*" they will drop out before they complete high school by grade and gender.

Figure 9-13: Teens Who Feel They Will Drop Out Before They Complete High School (Strongly Agree or Agree, by Grade and Gender)



We also asked youth “If you have seriously considered dropping out of school, at what grade level did you first feel this way?” Figure 9-14 shows this information broken down by gender.

Figure 9-14: At What Grade Teens First Considered Dropping Out
 (Of Those Who Considered Dropping Out, by Gender)



Local teens were asked “If you have seriously considered dropping out of school, who have you talked this over with?” The majority (62%) of youth did discuss this issue with someone. More females than males talked it over with someone (71% vs. 53%) and more junior high school students did so than high school students (63% vs. 61%). Figure 9-15 shows this information by school level and Figure 9-16 shows this information by gender.

Figure 9-15: Who Teens Talked to About Dropping Out
(Of Those Who Considered Dropping Out, by School Level)

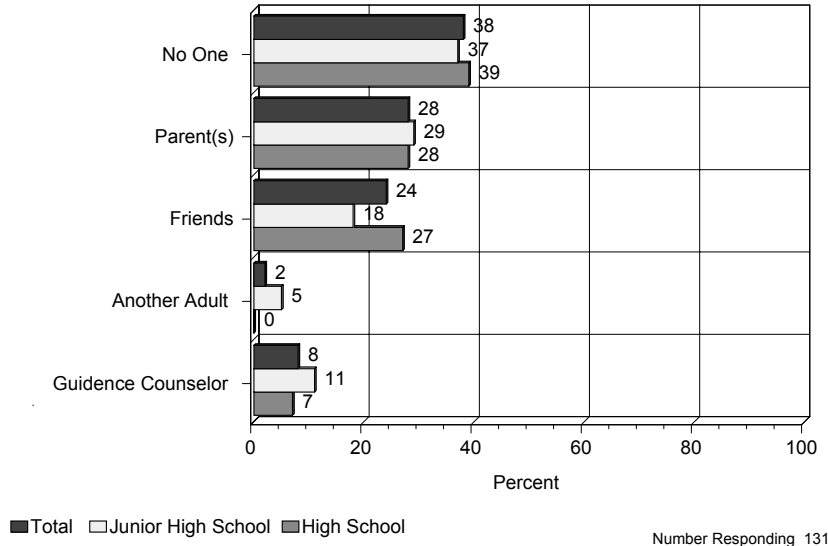


Figure 9-16: Who Teens Talked to About Dropping Out
(Of Those Who Considered Dropping Out, by Gender)

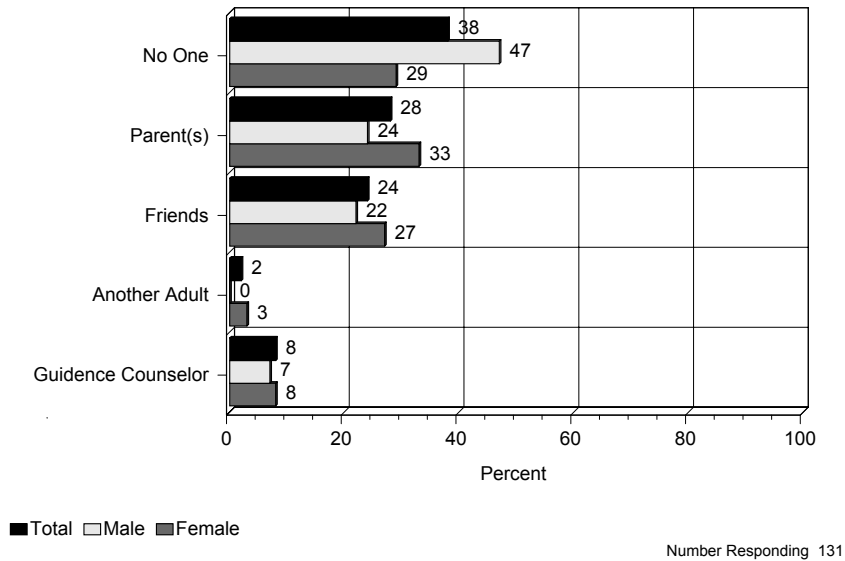
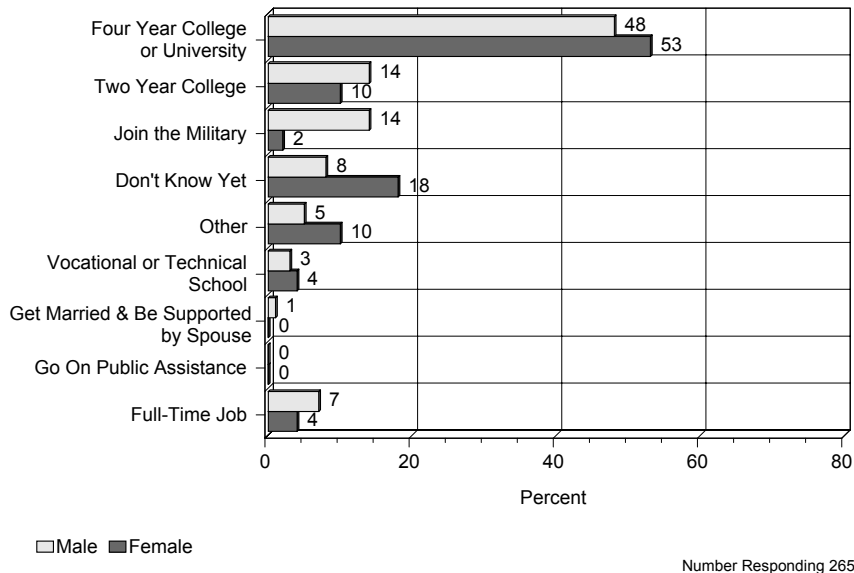
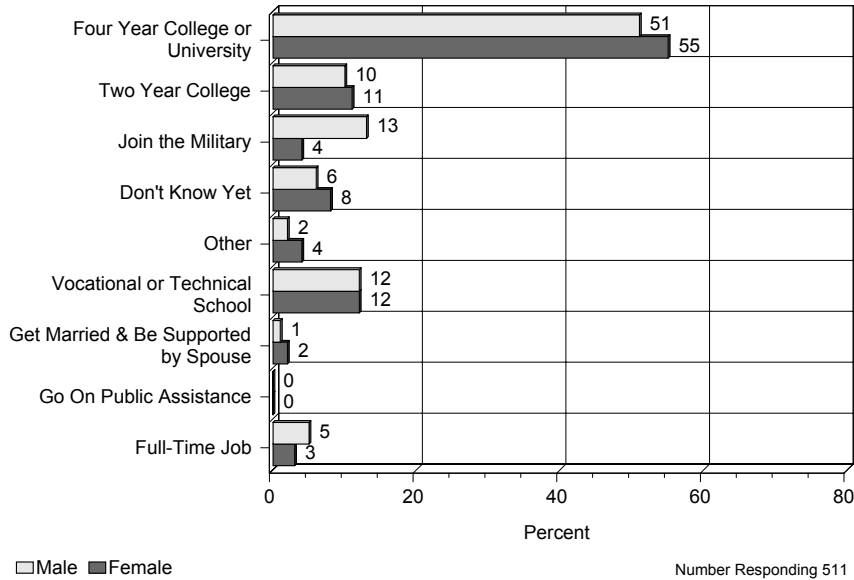


Figure 9-17 shows the future plans junior high school students have for after high school graduation. Figure 9-18 shows the same plans for high school students. "Go to a 4-year college or university" was by far the most common response by both males and females at both school levels.

**Figure 9-17: Future Plans After High School
(Junior High School Students, by Gender)**



**Figure 9-18: Future Plans After High School
(High School Students, by Gender)**



Peer Relations. We asked teens to respond to the statement “*I trust my friends.*” Of all youth surveyed, 67% responded “*always true*” or “*usually true*” to this statement and only 7% reported “*never true*” or “*almost never true*”. Figure 9-19 shows all responses broken down by school level.

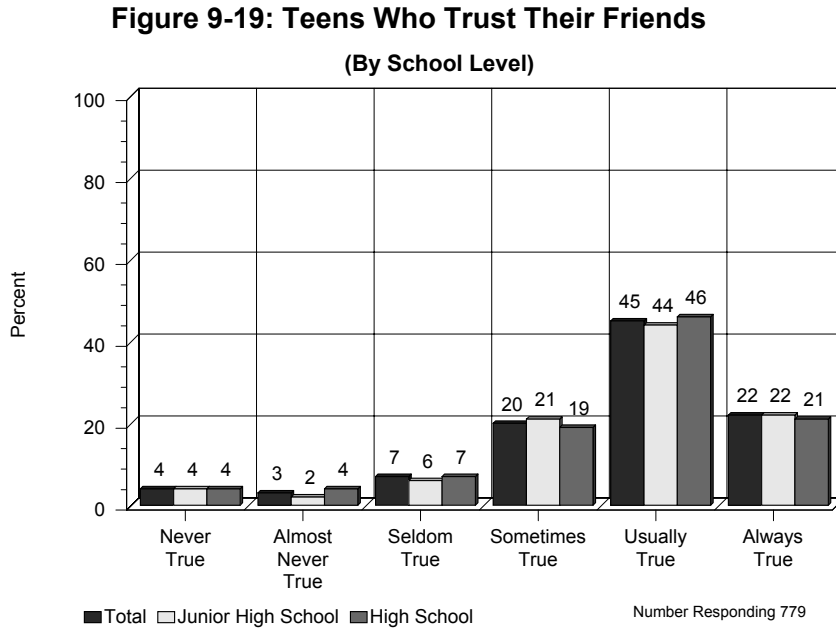
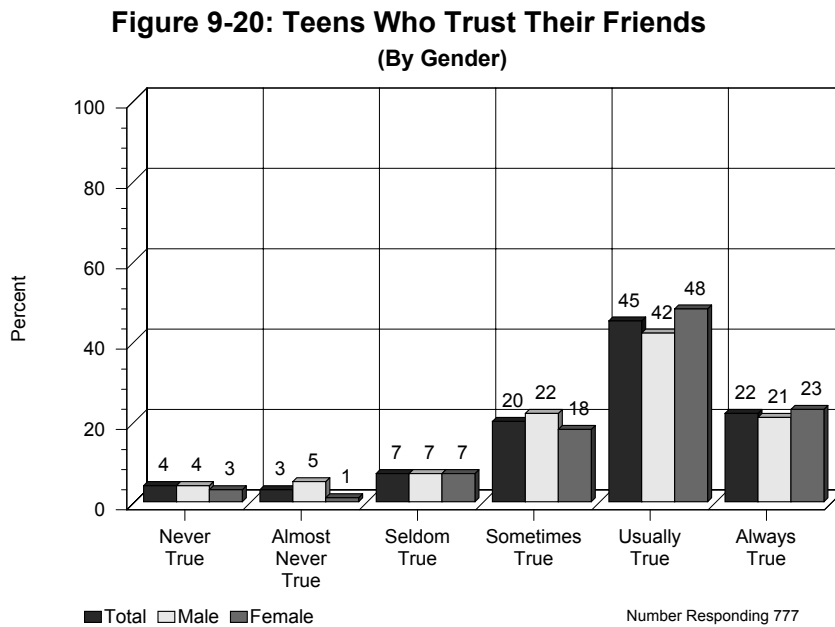


Figure 9-20 shows responses to this statement by gender.



We also asked teens to respond to the statement “*My friends care about me.*” Of all youth surveyed, 66% responded “*always true*” or “*usually true*” to this statement and only 5% reported “*never true*” or “*almost never true*”. Figure 9-21 shows all responses broken down by school level.

Figure 9-21: Teens Who Have Friends That Care About Them (By School Level)

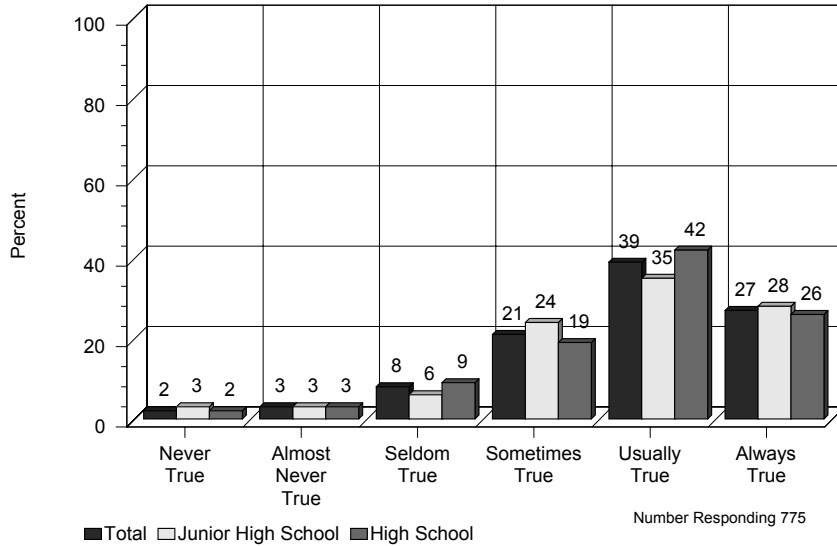
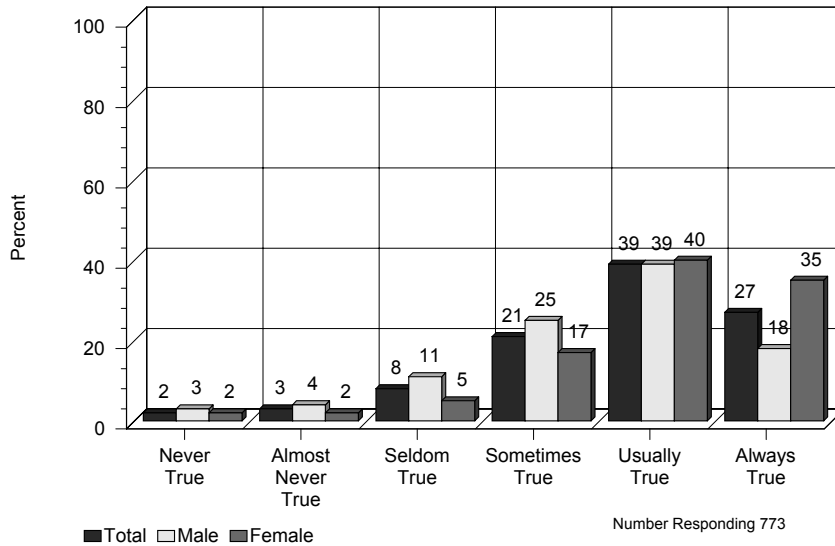


Figure 9-22 shows responses to this statement by gender.

Figure 9-22: Teens Who Have Friends That Care About Them (By Gender)



Finally, teens were asked to respond to the statement “*My friends are there when I need them.*” Of all youth surveyed, 63% responded “*always true*” or “*usually true*” to this statement and only 8% reported “*never true*” or “*almost never true.*” Figure 9-23 shows all responses broken down by school level.

Figure 9-23: Teens Who Feel Friends Are There For Them (By School Level)

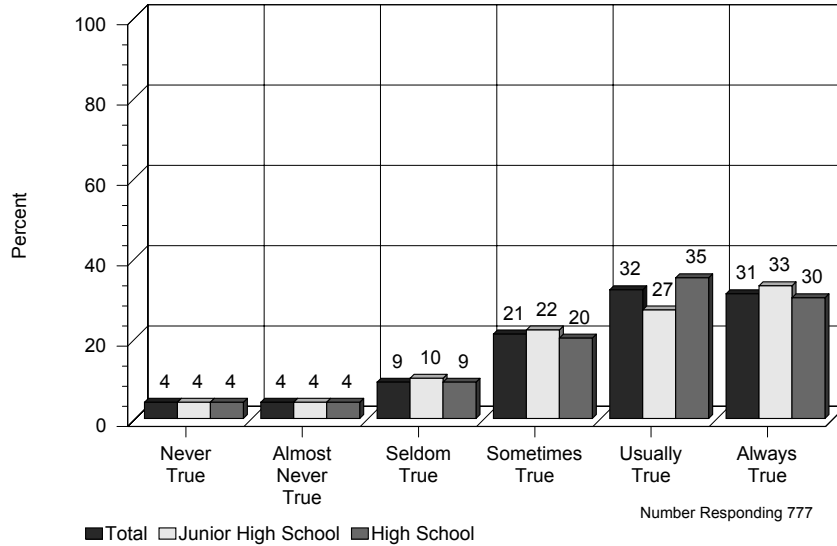
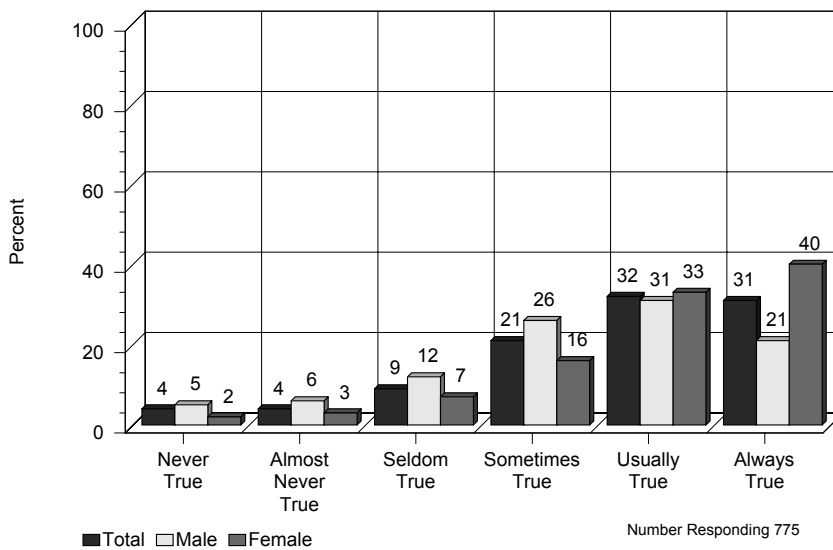


Figure 9-24 shows responses to this statement by gender.

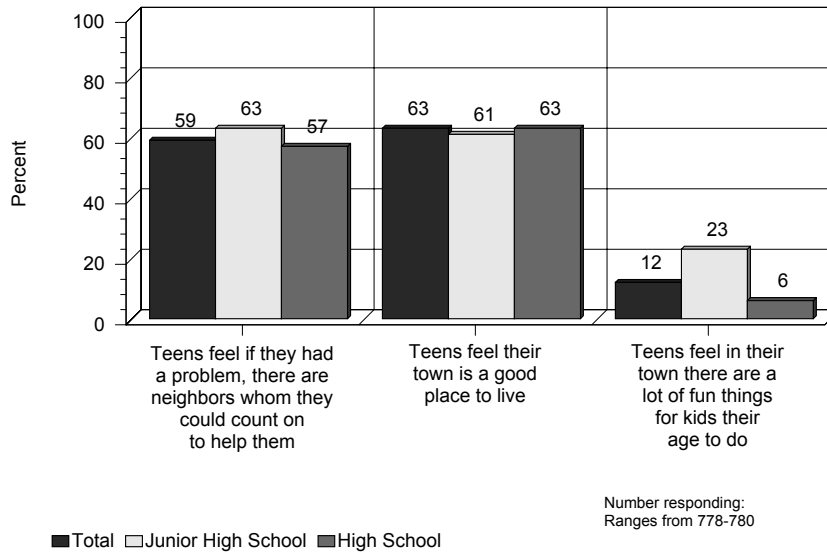
Figure 9-24: Teens Who Feel Friends Are There For Them (By Gender)



Perceptions of Community

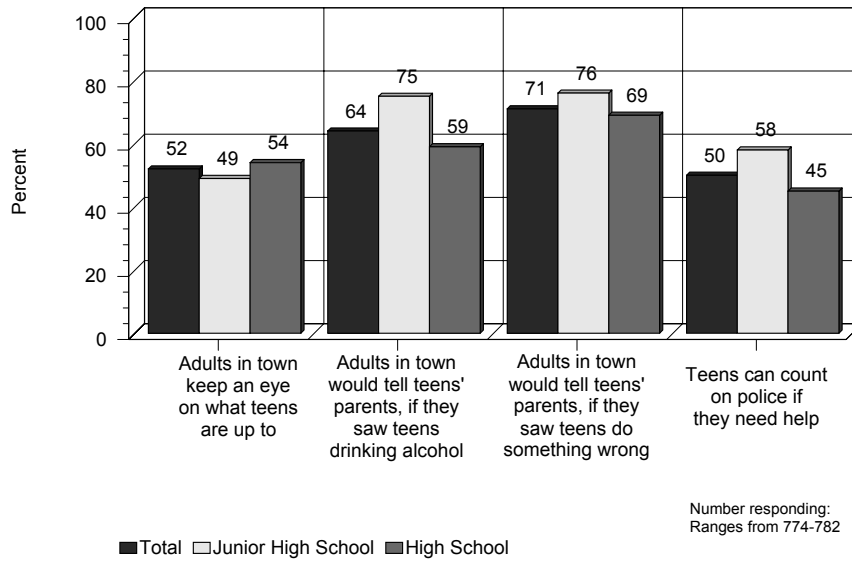
Neighborhood Support. Students told us they felt their community cared about them, and this is seen in Figure 9-25. Fifty-nine percent (59%) reported there are neighbors they can count on if they are in trouble and need help. Although 63% felt their town is a good place to live, only 12% thought there are a lot of fun things for kids their age to do. More junior high school students (23%) than high school students (6%) reported they felt there are fun things for kids their age to do.

Figure 9-25: Neighborhood Support
(Strongly Agree or Agree, by School Level)



Neighborhood Monitoring. As shown in Figure 9-26, half of the students surveyed (52%) "strongly agree" or "agree" the adults in their community keep an eye on what teens are up to (junior high school, 49%; high school, 54%). Sixty-four percent (64%) said that adults in town would tell their parents if they saw teens drinking alcohol (junior high school, 75%; high school, 59%) and 71% felt that if they were to do something wrong, adults in town would tell their parents (junior high school, 76%; high school, 69%). Fifty percent (50%) of teens believed they could count on police if they needed help (junior high school, 58%; high school, 45%).

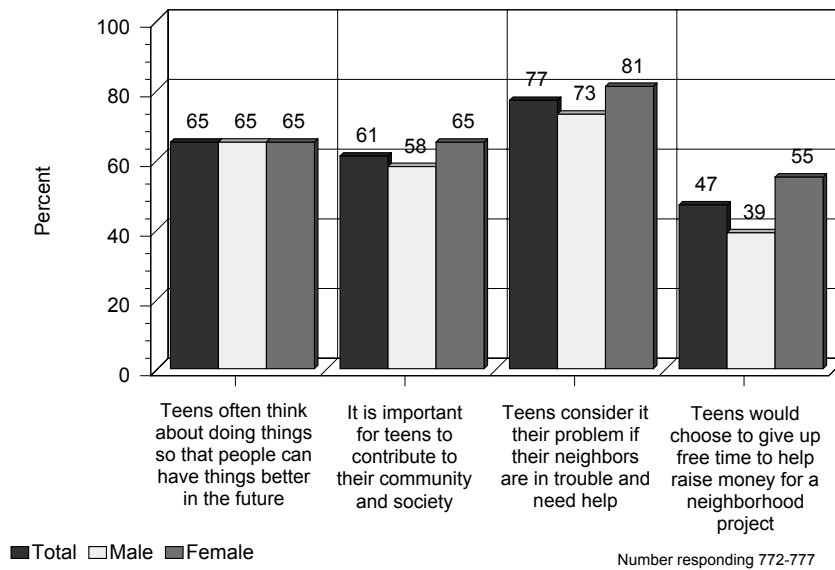
Figure 9-26: Neighborhood Monitoring
(Strongly Agree or Agree, by School Level)



Social Responsibility

Figure 9-27 shows many teens have a well-developed sense of social responsibility toward their community. Almost two-thirds (65%) reported they often think about doing things so that people "can have things better in the future" (males, 65%; females, 65%). Sixty-one percent (61%) said they feel it is important to contribute to their community and society (males, 58%; females, 65%). Almost four out of five students (77%) said they consider it their problem if their neighbors are in trouble and need help (males, 73%; females, 81%). Forty-seven percent (47%) would give up their own free time in order to help raise money for a neighborhood project (males, 39%; females, 55%).

Figure 9-27: Social Responsibility
(Strongly Agree or Agree, by Gender)



Criminal Activity. Nearly two out of five (39%) students report having shoplifted at some time in the past. Figure 9-28 shows the breakdown by school level.

**Figure 9-28: Teens Who Have Shoplifted
(By School Level)**

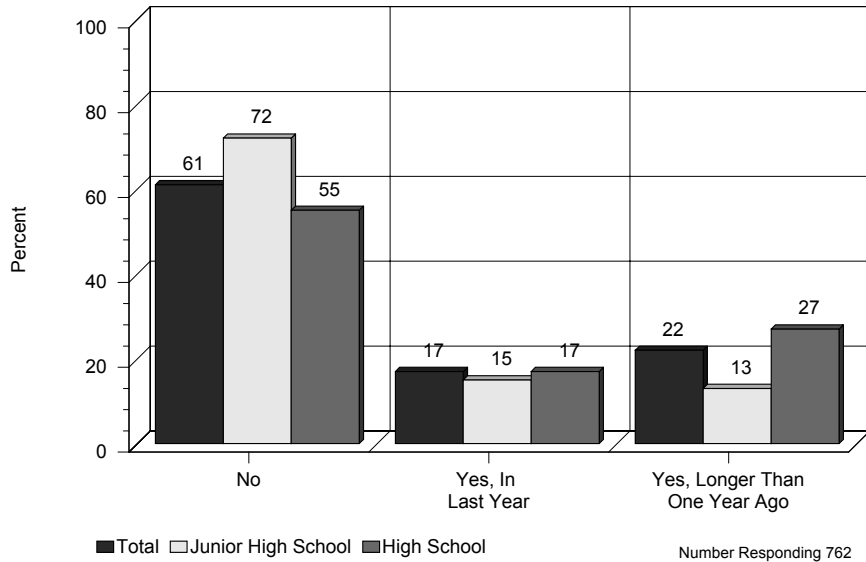
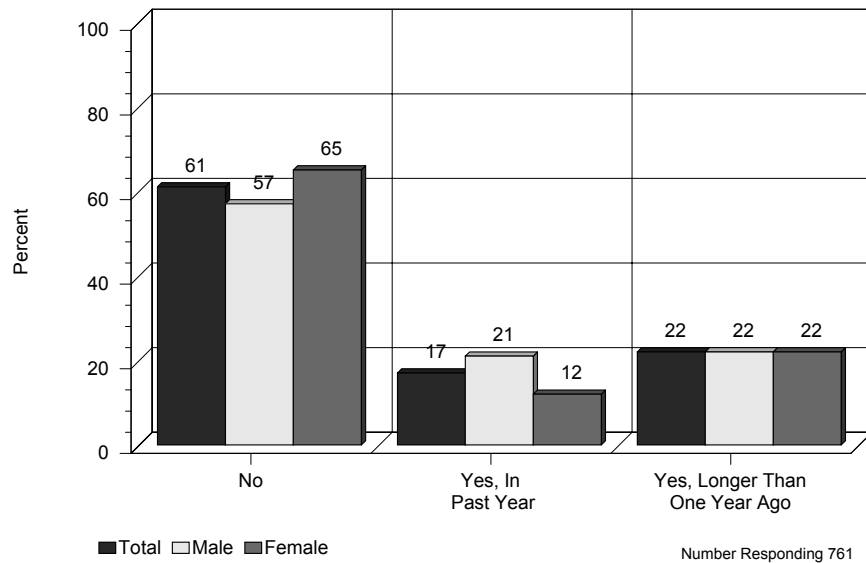


Figure 9-29 shows the breakdown by gender. More males (43%) than females (34%) report having shoplifted.

**Figure 9-29: Teens Who Have Shoplifted
(By Gender)**



Racial, Ethnic and Sexual Identity Issues. This section examines student experiences with racial, ethnic or sexual slurs and with student attitudes towards racial, ethnic and sexual differences. We asked local youth *"In your school, do students use racial, ethnic, or sexual slurs?"*. About 1 out of 3 students (31%) say that this happens *"often"* or *"very often"* in their school. Figure 9-30 shows a considerable difference between school levels. Twenty-four percent (24%) of junior high school students versus 34% of high school students believe that students in their school use racial, ethnic or sexual slurs *"often"* or *"very often."* Figure 9-31 shows a difference exists between male and female responses on this issue (males, 34%; females, 28%).

Figure 9-30: Teens Who Feel That Students in Their School Use Racial, Ethnic or Sexual Slurs (By School Level)

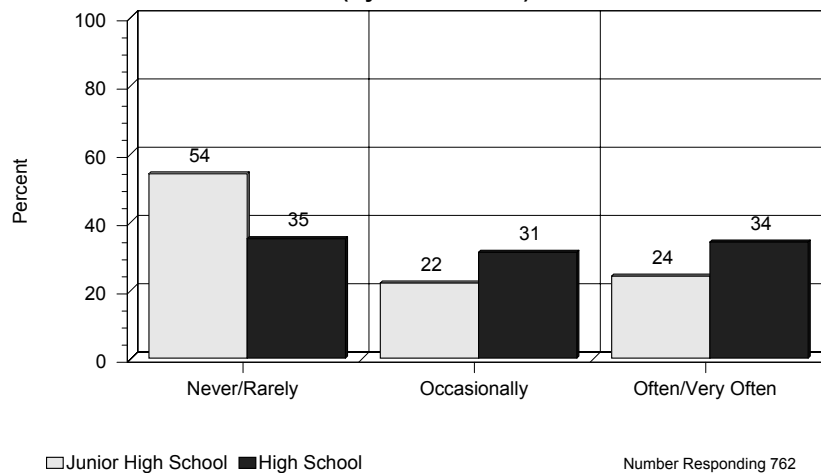
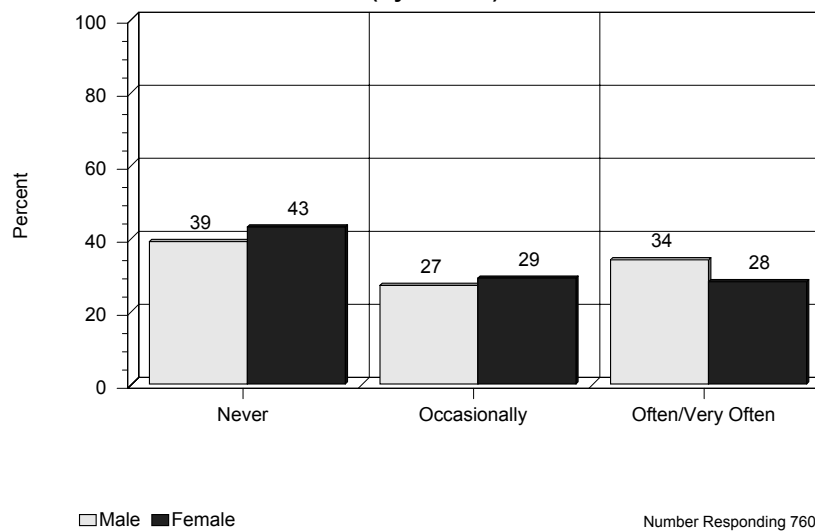


Figure 9-31: Teens Who Feel That Students in Their School Use Racial, Ethnic or Sexual Slurs (By Gender)



A number of students report being teased or harassed about being gay or lesbian. When asked "Have you ever been teased or harassed about being gay or lesbian (for example, called names like 'fag' or 'dyke')?", 18% report being harassed. Figure 9-32 shows the breakdown by school level.

Figure 9-32: Teens Who Feel Teased or Harassed About Being Gay or Lesbian (By School Level)

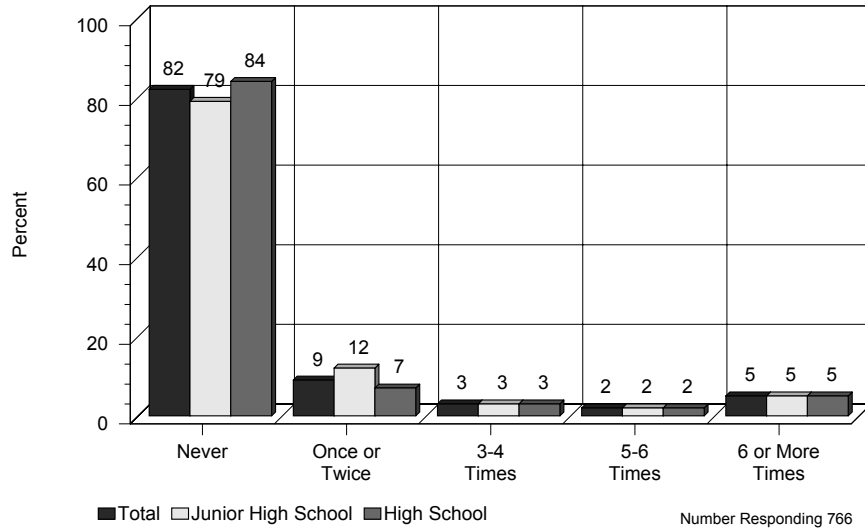
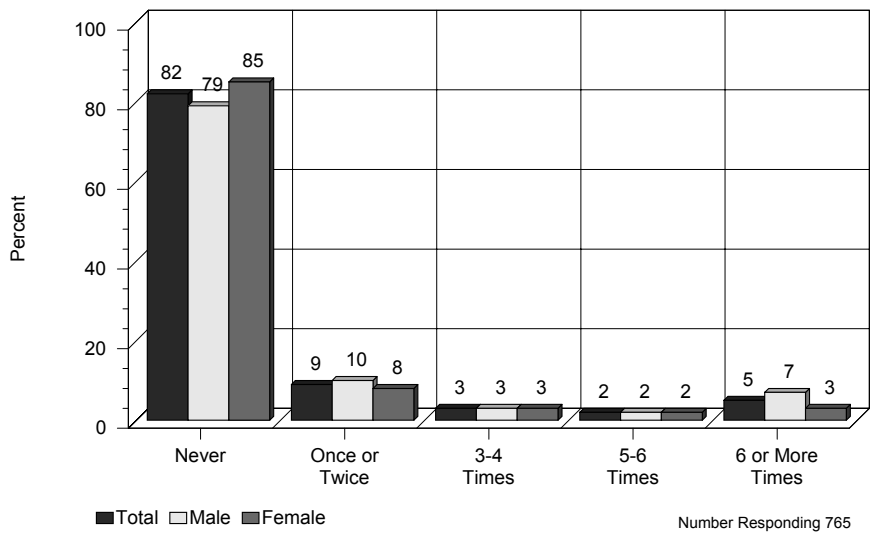


Figure 9-33 shows the breakdown by gender. More males (21%) than females (15%) report being teased or harassed.

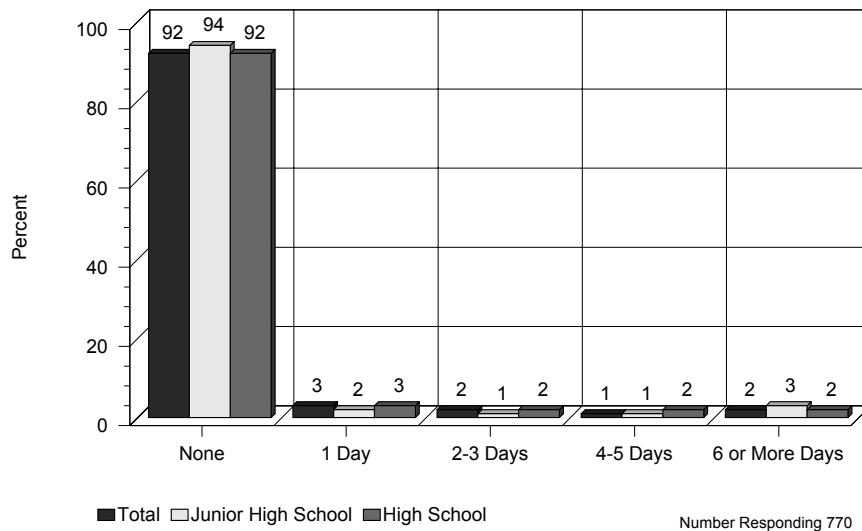
Figure 9-33: Teens Who Feel Teased or Harassed About Being Gay or Lesbian (By Gender)



School Safety and Youth Violence

Recent school tragedies have raised concerns regarding youth violence and our children's safety at school. Although multiple-victim homicide events at schools have increased, homicides at schools remain extremely rare. There has been a steady decline of both student victimizations and the number of students carrying weapons and engaging in physical fights on school grounds (U.S. Departments of Education and Justice, 1999). We asked local youth "During the **past month**, on how many days did you carry a weapon such as a gun, knife, or club onto school property?". In the month preceding the survey, 8% of local youth reported they carried a weapon (e.g., a gun, knife, club) onto school property. Figure 9-34 shows little difference between junior high school and high school students (junior high school, 7%; high school 9%).

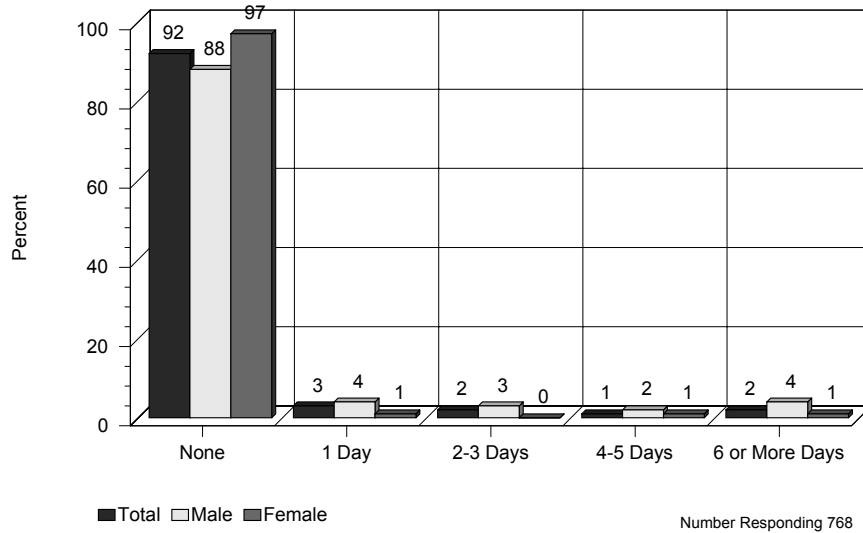
Figure 9-34: Days Teens Carried Weapons onto School Property
(In the Past Month, by School Level)



The most recent Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey (YRBS) found nationally, 6.9% (N.H., 7.5%) of youth (*grades 9-12*) reported they carried a weapon on to school property in the month preceding the survey (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2000). New Hampshire ranks 14th out of 33 states surveyed by the CDC.

Figure 9-35 shows the number of days teens carried weapons onto school property by gender. While 13% of the males carried a weapon onto school property at some time in the past month, only 3% of females did so.

Figure 9-35: Days Teens Carried Weapons onto School Property
(In the Past Month, by Gender)



When asked if they had carried a weapon onto school property, most teens (92%) said “no.” Of those who said “yes”, 7% said it was to defend themselves, while 2% said it was to harm someone. Figures 9-36 and 9-37 show responses by school level and by gender.

Figure 9-36: Teens Who Have Carried a Weapon onto School Property (By School Level)

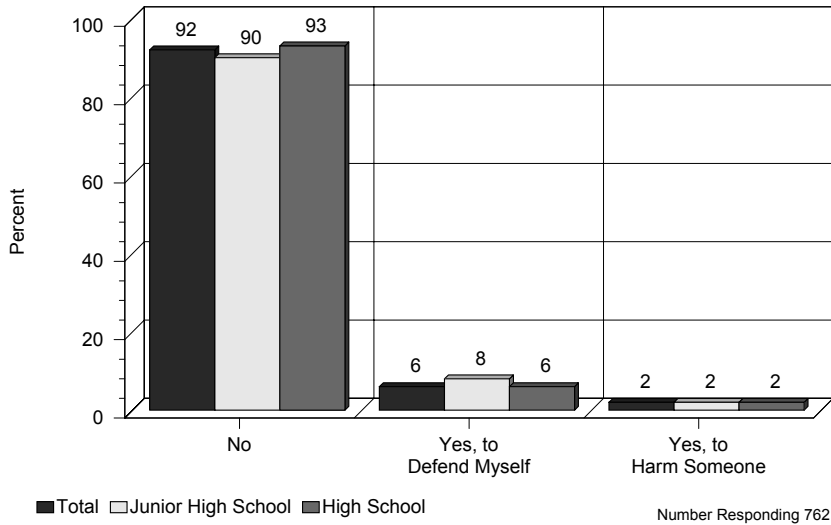
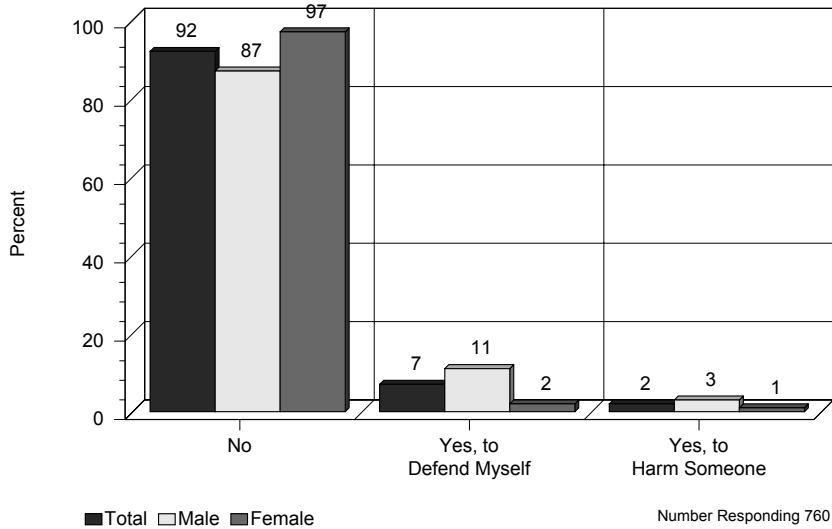
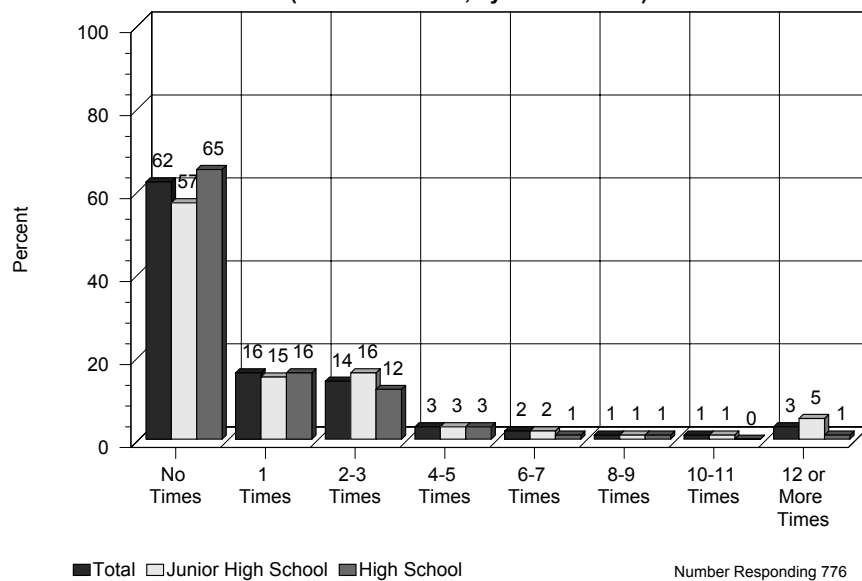


Figure 9-37: Teens Who Have Carried a Weapon onto School Property (By Gender)



Students were also asked about the number of physical fights they had been in during the past year. Thirty-eight percent (38%) of local youth have been involved in one or more physical fights in the past year. For males, the incidence of fighting decreases from junior high school to high school (junior high school males, 57%; high school males, 43%). Incidence of fighting stays the same for females from junior high to high school (junior high school females, 27%; high school females, 28%). Figure 9-38 shows 43% of junior high school students and 35% of high school students were involved in one or more fights in the past year.

**Figure 9-38: Number of Times Teens Were in a Physical Fight
(In The Past Year, by School Level)**



The most recent Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey (YRBS) found nationally, 35.7% (N.H., 32%) of high school students surveyed in grades 9-12 have been in a physical fight at least one time in the past year (Centers for Disease Control, 2000). New Hampshire ranks 30th out of the 33 states surveyed by the CDC.

Presentation Of Comparable Data

In this section, Berlin data are compared with state TAP and other national and New Hampshire statistics from the *1999 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey (YRBS)*. This survey is published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). It monitors six categories of priority health-risk behaviors among youth and adults -- behaviors that contribute to unintentional and intentional injuries; tobacco use; alcohol and other drug use; sexual behaviors that contribute to unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs); unhealthy dietary behaviors; and physical inactivity. It is administered every other year and includes a national school-based survey conducted by the CDC as well as state, territorial, and local school-based surveys conducted by education and health agencies. Although the goal is to obtain representative samples, due to a lower than expected response rate in New Hampshire, the results of the survey for New Hampshire should not be generalized to other students in the state.

The Teen Assessment Project report is a state-wide report based on five school districts surveyed from April 1998 through December 1999. A strong case can be made that these results are indicative of the behaviors, opinions, attitudes and beliefs of New Hampshire teens. These data represent 9105 teens from five different counties around the state – Merrimack, Hillsborough, Rockingham, Strafford, and Grafton. Geographically, these counties cover much of the state, excluding the northern tip. New Hampshire is a demographically homogeneous state particularly in terms of racial and ethnic make-up, and the school districts consist of students from both rural and urban communities. Due to the nature of this project, however, the survey process is not random. Therefore, results cannot be generalized to the population of New Hampshire teens.

Table 9-1: School Violence and Safety Comparison
(grades 9-12 only)

Behavior	YRBS¹ National %	YRBS N.H. % (ranking)	TAP² Multi- community %	TAP Berlin %
YRBS - Carried a weapon onto school property at least once in the 30 days preceding the survey	6.9	7.5 (14 th of 33)	-	-
TAP - Ever carried a weapon onto school property in the past month	-	-	10	9
YRBS - In a physical fight one or more times during the 12 months preceding the survey	35.7	32.0 (20 th of 33)	-	-
TAP - In a physical fight one or more times during the past year	-	-	33	35

¹ (Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey, 2000)

² (Teen Assessment Project, 2000)