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# **TAPPING INTO TEEN CONCERNS, PERCEPTIONS AND BEHAVIORS**

## **Lin-Wood Cooperative School District**

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A Report of the **Teen Assessment Project (TAP)**  
University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension (UNHCE)

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Thank you.

A copy of this report can be found online at <http://ceinfo.unh.edu>. Click on 4-H Youth Development, then TAP to find the report. Comments or suggestions can be sent to [Fran.Chickering@unh.edu](mailto:Fran.Chickering@unh.edu).

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## **Executive Summary Teen Assessment Project Lin-Wood Cooperative School District - 2003**

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The Teen Assessment Project survey has been administered twice in the Lincoln-Woodstock Cooperative School District. On November 15, 2000, 7th through 12th grade students participated in the TAP survey. The identical TAP survey was administered again on April 15, 2003 to 7th through 12th grade students. The final sample of 127 surveys represents responses from approximately 73% of the student population enrolled at the middle school and high school in 2003. This Executive Summary details the results of the 2003 survey. Chapter 13 gives information about both surveys.

### **Background Information**

In 2000 concerns about local youth issues prompted the communities of Lincoln and Woodstock to adopt the University of New Hampshire **Teen Assessment Project (TAP)** survey and process to foster the positive development of local youth. The goal of TAP is to provide communities with local research-based information that can help them better support local teens and their families. Survey results provide a vehicle for youth, parent, school, and community education and action, help secure local funding, stimulate program and policy changes, and lead to change in attitudes and behaviors that build assets/protective factors in families, schools and communities.

In 2000 a local steering committee coordinated the review and administration of a 160-item survey that asked teens about their perceptions of self, family, school, and community; their worries, concerns, and future aspirations; and their activities, both positive and problematic. The survey used in 2000 was also used in 2003. Following are some of the TAP results from the 2003 survey.

### **Overview**

Results of the Lin-Wood Cooperative School District TAP survey reveal that some teens are engaging in behaviors potentially detrimental to their health. The majority of teens (58%) reported they have at least tried alcohol. However, the majority of youth have NOT used marijuana (63%), smoking tobacco (65%), inhalants (89%), uppers (93%), hallucinogens (93%), downers (93%), cocaine (95%), chewing tobacco (98%), or narcotics (98%). The majority of teens (71%) reported they had NOT engaged in binge drinking in the past month. Sixty-two percent (62%) of youth reported they had NOT ever had sexual intercourse. Despite the fact that the majority of youth are not engaging in most of these high risk behaviors, there remains a subgroup of youth who are. For ex-

ample, on a monthly or more often basis, youth are using alcohol (28%), binge drinking (29%), smoking tobacco (13%), using marijuana (20%), and using inhalants (6%). Such substance use and other health risk behaviors put youth at risk for delayed emotional and intellectual growth; developing problems with schools, friends and families; incurring ill health and reduced longevity; accidents; suicide; and unwanted pregnancies (Pedersen & Skrondal, 1996; Pfeifer, Schector, & Yoast, 1987; Small, Silverberg, & Kerns, 1993). Given the risks accompanying these behaviors, it is incumbent upon us to attempt an understanding of what we can do to minimize the likelihood of these youth choices.

One possible action is to increase the protective factors for youth. Protective factors ‘protect’ or lessen the likelihood that youth will participate in behaviors that have negative health and social outcomes (Resnick et al., 1997). These protective factors exist at each level of the ecological model: youth, family, school, and community. Analysis of Lin-Wood Cooperative School District TAP data revealed some of the protective factors that are related to youth behaviors. In particular, within the family, the level of parental monitoring is related to teen substance use. As level of parental monitoring increases, level of teen substance use decreases. Youth who know their parents’ values and consequences for teen behaviors such as smoking, drinking alcohol, or engaging in sexual intercourse are less likely to be involved in such activities. The community also has a role to play: neighborhood support and monitoring can be protective factors against substance use. A youth’s attachment to school is a protective factor as well. We can learn from this information and establish specific actions to enhance and encourage the protective factors by all who surround the youth.

## **Select Findings**

### **Family Characteristics**

- The TAP survey revealed the most common living situation for youth is living with two parents (59%). Other common living situations include living with a single parent (16%) and living in a step-family (18%).
- The majority of youth reported that each of their parents has a high school diploma, bachelor’s degree, or higher (fathers, 95%; mothers, 97%). Forty-one percent (41%) of fathers and 33% of mothers have a high school diploma and no further degrees. Fourteen percent (14%) of fathers and 21% of mothers have a bachelor’s degree or higher.

### **Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drug Use**

- Fifty-eight percent (58%) of students surveyed have used alcohol at some time (middle school, 35%; high school, 72%). Twenty-eight percent (28%) of all youth reported using alcohol *monthly or more often* (middle school, 17%; high school, 33%). Eight percent (8%)

of all youth reported using alcohol *weekly or more often* (middle school, 4%; high school, 10%).

- Fifty-two percent (52%) of all youth reported that binge drinking (“5 or more alcoholic drinks at one time”) once or twice each weekend carries “great risk” (middle school, 63%; high school, 46%). Seventeen percent (17%) of youth feel that binge drinking once or twice each weekend carries “no risk” or “slight risk” (middle school, 17%; high school, 18%). Twenty-two percent (22%) of middle school students reported binge drinking in the past month (males, 14%; females, 29%). Thirty-five percent (35%) of high school youth reported binge drinking at least once in the past month (males, 28%; females, 38%).
- Thirty-seven percent (37%) of all youth have used marijuana at some time (middle school, 26%, high school, 44%). Twenty percent (20%) reported *monthly or more often* use of marijuana (middle school 11%; high school, 25%). Ten percent (10%) of all youth reported using marijuana *weekly or more often* (middle school, 7%; high school, 13%).
- Thirty-five percent (35%) of all youth have smoked tobacco at some time (middle school, 22%; high school, 42%). Thirteen percent (13%) reported smoking *monthly or more often* (middle school, 11%; high school, 14%). Nine percent (9%) reported *weekly or more often* use (middle school, 7%; high school, 10%).
- Seventy percent (70%) of all youth believe it is either “easy” or “very easy” to get alcohol (middle school, 54%; high school, 79%). Forty-nine percent (49%) believe it is “easy” or “very easy” to get marijuana (middle school, 24%; high school, 63%).
- Sixty-eight percent (68%) of youth reported using inhalants carries “great risk” (middle school, 61%; high school, 73%). Thirteen percent (13%) of youth feel using inhalants carries “no risk” or “slight risk” (middle school, 20%; high school, 9%). Eleven percent (11%) of all youth have used inhalants at some time (middle school, 9%; high school, 12%). Six percent (6%) of all youth have used inhalants *monthly or more often* (middle school, 4%; high school, 6%).

### **Sexuality Issues**

- Overall, 38% of all youth reported they have had sexual intercourse (middle school, 20%; high school, 48%). A greater percentage of females than males report having had sexual intercourse (males, 32%; females, 44%).

- Fifty-six percent (56%) of teens reported they were not worried at all about being pressured into having sex (males, 57%; females, 55%). Fifty-seven percent (57%) of sexually active teens “*always*” use some form of birth control (males, 67%; females, 50%). Forty-nine percent (49%) of sexually active teens reported either they or their partner “*always*” used a condom (males, 71%; females, 32%).
- A high percentage of youth reported not having had “*a good talk*” with their parents about sexuality issues. Within the past year, 58% of youth either “*never*” or “*rarely*” talked to their mothers and 73% “*never*” or “*rarely*” talked with their fathers about whether or not it is okay to have sex. Even fewer teens had birth control discussions with their parents in the past year, with 68% who either “*never*” or “*rarely*” talked to their mothers and 83% who “*never*” or “*rarely*” talked with their fathers about birth control.

### **Physical and Mental Health Issues**

- Worries of youth, listed from greatest to least are: getting good grades at school (58%); getting along with parents at home (43%); how they look (39%); how well parents get along with each other (37%); that they are too fat (22%); whether family has enough money to get by (21%); not fitting in with the other kids at school (18%); whether they are gay or straight (13%); being picked on or physically hurt by another teen (10%); that parents drink or use drugs too much (9%); that they might get pregnant or get someone pregnant (9%); being pressured into having sex (6%) and being pressured to drink or to use drugs (6%).
- Overall, 72% of all teens reported feeling sad or depressed at some time during the past month (males, 57%; females, 87%). Eighteen percent (18%) of youth reported having serious thoughts of suicide during the past month (males, 11%; females, 25%). Twenty percent (20%) of all youth had made plans at some time to kill themselves (males, 14%; females, 26%) and 16% reported that they had actually attempted suicide at some time in the past (males, 7%; females, 25%).
- Forty-three percent (43%) of students reported trying to lose weight or to keep from gaining it (males, 27%; females, 60%). Eighty-five percent (85%) of teens indicated that they exercised at least three or more times in the week before the survey (males, 88%; females, 83%).

## **Personal Safety and Violence**

- The majority of students (59%) reported that they have not been involved in a physical fight in the past year (males, 56%; females, 62%; middle school, 52%; high school, 63%). Nine percent (9%) of teens did report carrying a weapon onto school property during the month before the survey (males, 8%; females, 10%; middle school, 11%; high school 7%).
- Of the 6% who reported that sexual abuse by an adult had occurred, 4% reported that this had occurred in the past (males, 2%; females, 5%) and 2% reported sexual abuse by an adult currently (males, 0%; females, 4%).
- Sixteen percent (16%) of teens reported being made to do something sexual by another teen (males, 5%; females, 28%). Seventeen percent (17%) of youth surveyed indicated that they had been physically abused by a boyfriend, girlfriend or date (males, 9%; females, 25%; middle school, 16%; high school, 17%).

## **Parent-Teen Relations**

- The majority of youth reported their parents were there when they needed them (about mothers, 82%; about fathers, 64%) and that parents “often” or “very often” cared about them. Eighty-nine percent (89%) indicated this about their mothers; 77% about their fathers. Sixty-six percent (66%) of the students felt their mothers were fair “often” or “very often” when it came to enforcing the family rules; 55% felt this way about their fathers. Seventy percent (70%) of teens indicated that their mothers respect them and what they have to say. Sixty-six percent (66%) of youth reported this for their fathers.
- Many youth reported they had not had “a good talk” with either parent about birth control, the risk of AIDS or other STDs, whether it is okay for teens their age to have sex, the risks of drinking and using drugs, or personal problems. Parents were more likely to talk with the teens about job or educational plans.

## **Student Time Use**

- Sixty-nine percent (69%) of youth spend 5 or more hours a week hanging out with friends. The other activities that occupy 5 or more hours per week for youth include participating in extra-curricular school activities (53%); watching TV (50%); doing homework or studying (49%); working for pay (41%); being home with no adults present (36%); playing video/ computer games (28%) and engaging in non-school activities (9%).

## **Perceptions of School and Community**

- Seventy-four percent (74%) of youth felt they were getting a good, high quality education (males, 72%; females, 76%; middle school, 78%; high school, 72%). Fifty percent (50%) indicated they enjoyed going to school (males, 52%; females, 47%; middle school, 54%; high school, 47%). Thirty-one percent (31%) felt school rules were enforced fairly (males, 35%; females, 26%; middle school, 39%, high school, 26%). The majority of youth agreed that teachers in school respect and listen to them (males, 59%; females, 51%; middle school, 65%; high school, 51%).
- Eight percent (8%) of teens surveyed “*strongly agreed*” or “*agreed*” that they would drop out of school before completing high school (males, 13%; females, 3%; middle school, 9%; high school, 8%). No information was available about those students who had already dropped out of school. Sixty percent (60%) of high school students planned to go to a four year college or university after high school (males, 56%; females, 64%). Ten percent (10%) of high school students indicated they will attend a 2-year college (males, 8%; females, 11%). Six percent (6%) of high school students plan on attending a vocational or technical school (males, 6%; females, 7%).

## **Conclusions**

Areas of concern for teens documented by this report include: substance use, sexuality issues, physical and mental health, and personal safety and violence. Protective factors that can impact these behaviors are youth characteristics such as perception of substance use risk; parental characteristics such as parental consequences for behaviors, parental values about behaviors, and parental monitoring; school attachment; and neighborhood support and monitoring. The call to action must come from the community in its collaborative efforts with youth to educate the community, prioritize issues, develop a strategic plan and implement strategies to address issues and concerns. This report provides research to assist the community in those very important next steps needed to support the positive development of local youth.