
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 neither in school, nor at work, nor 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 Tavere, 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 (females, 57%; males, 49%). With regard to school level, middle school and high school students reported they enjoyed school about the same (middle school, 57%; high school, 51%).

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

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

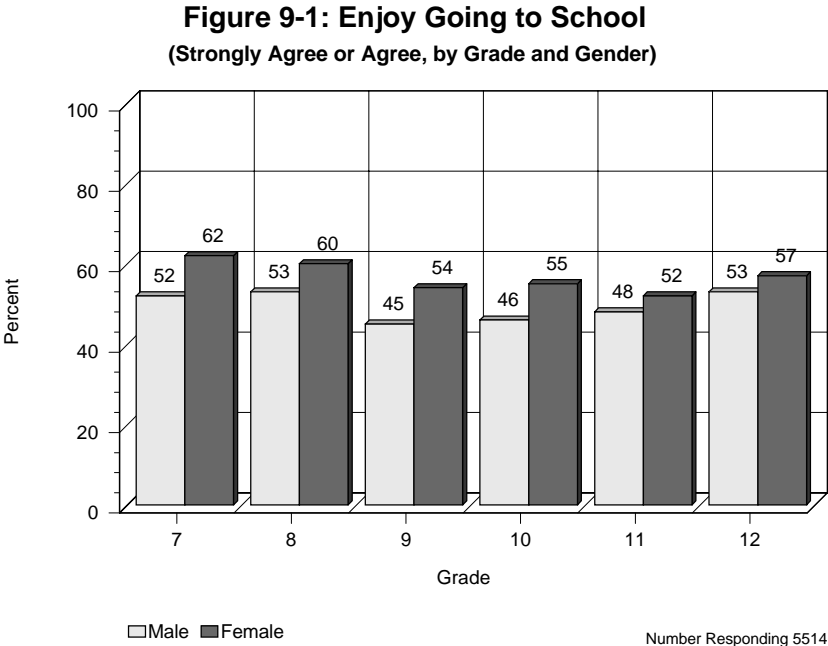
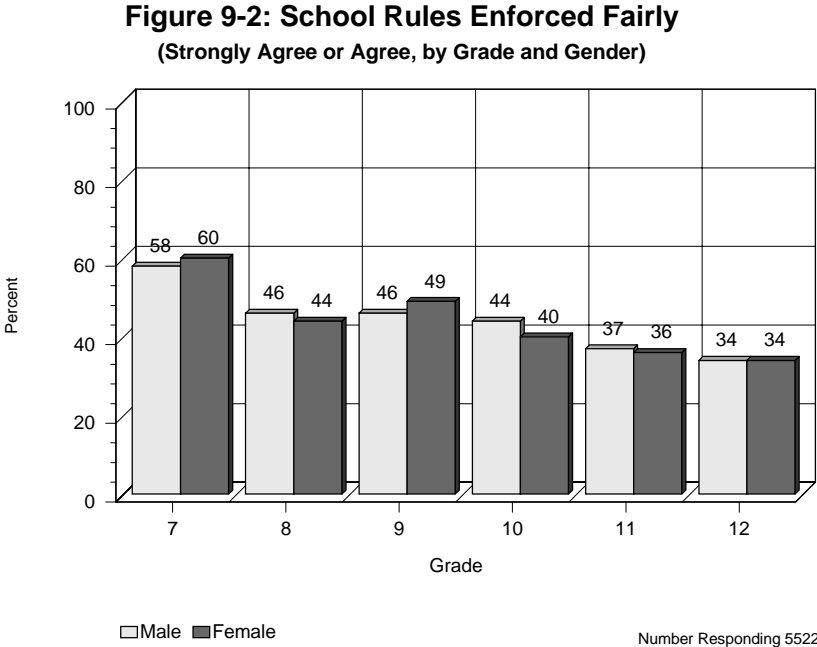
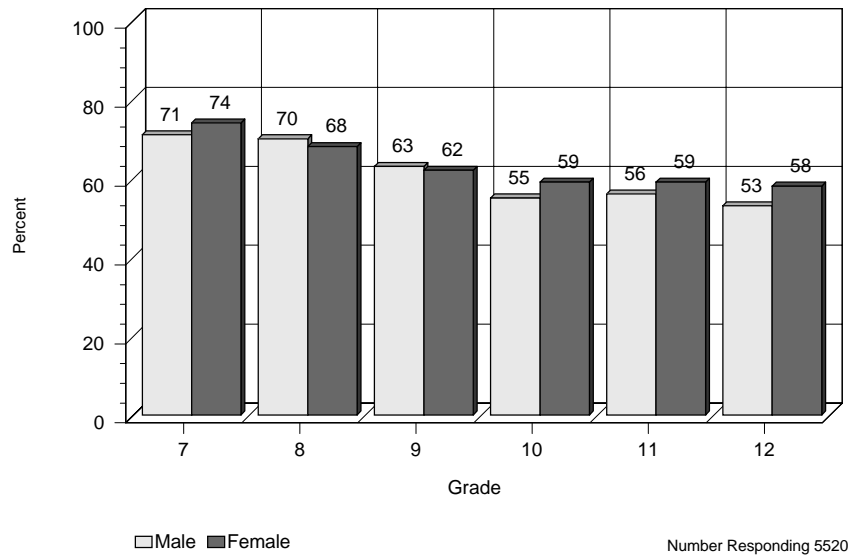


Figure 9-2 displays the percentage of students by grade and gender who "agree" or "strongly agree" with the statement "The rules in my school are enforced fairly." Overall, 44% of students reported they felt the rules were enforced fairly. More middle school students (52%) than high school students (41%) reported they felt this way.



Students were also asked whether or not they felt they were getting a "good, high quality education at their school." Sixty-two percent (62%) of students "agree" or "strongly agree" with that statement (middle school, 71%; high school, 59%; males, 61%; females, 63%). For both males and females, the level of agreement is higher in middle school than in high school (middle school males, 70%; high school males, 57%; middle school females 71%; high school females, 60%). Figure 9-3 displays the information broken down by grade and gender.

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



Teacher Expectations. Figure 9-4 and 9-5 show teens' perceptions of their teacher's expectations. The majority of students (56%) believe their teachers encourage them to do and be the best they can. Slightly more middle school students and females feel this way.

Figure 9-4: Perceptions of Teacher Expectations (By School Level)

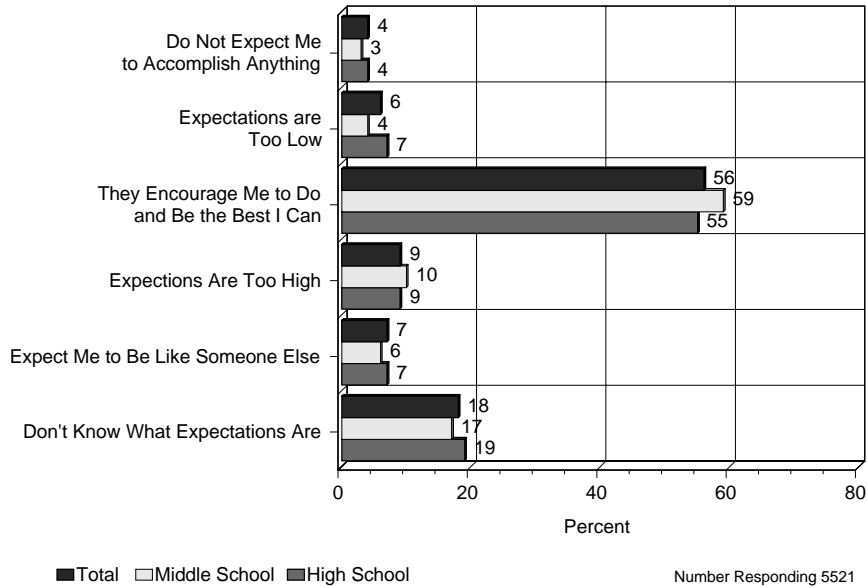
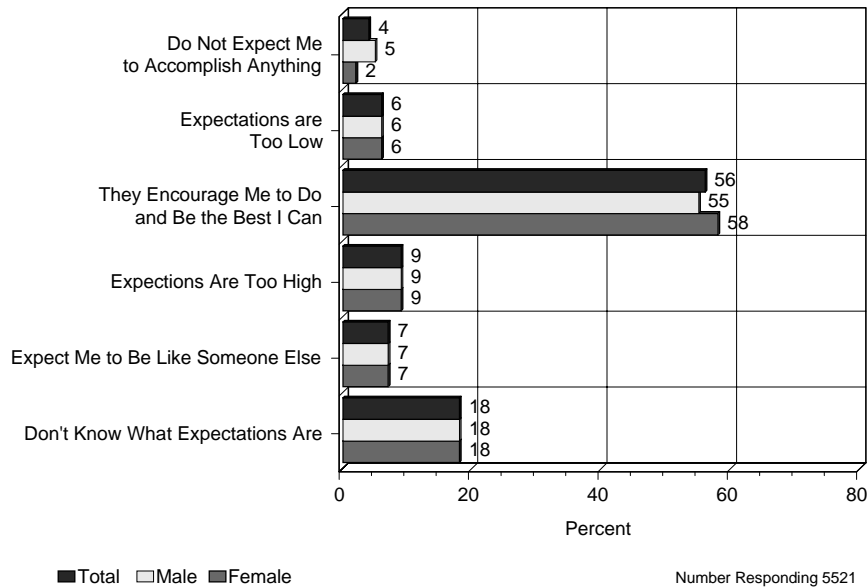


Figure 9-5: Perceptions of Teacher Expectations (By Gender)



Future Plans and Career Plans

When students were asked if they felt they would drop out of school before completing high school, 6% strongly agreed or agreed (middle school, 7%; high school, 5%; males, 6%; females, 6%). Of course, those high school students who have already dropped out are not reflected in these percentages. Figure 9-6 shows those who "strongly agree" or "agree" they will drop out before they complete high school by grade and gender.

Figure 9-6: Teens Who Feel They Will Drop Out Before They Complete High School

(Strongly Agree or Agree, by Grade and Gender)

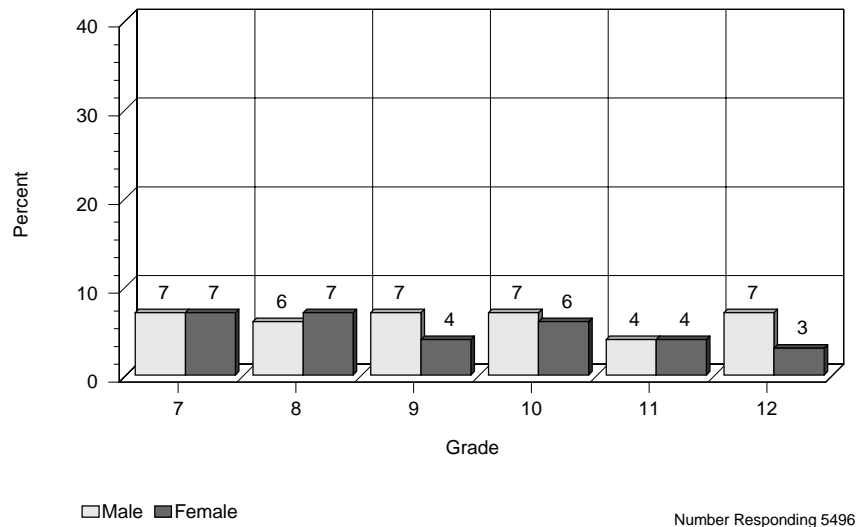
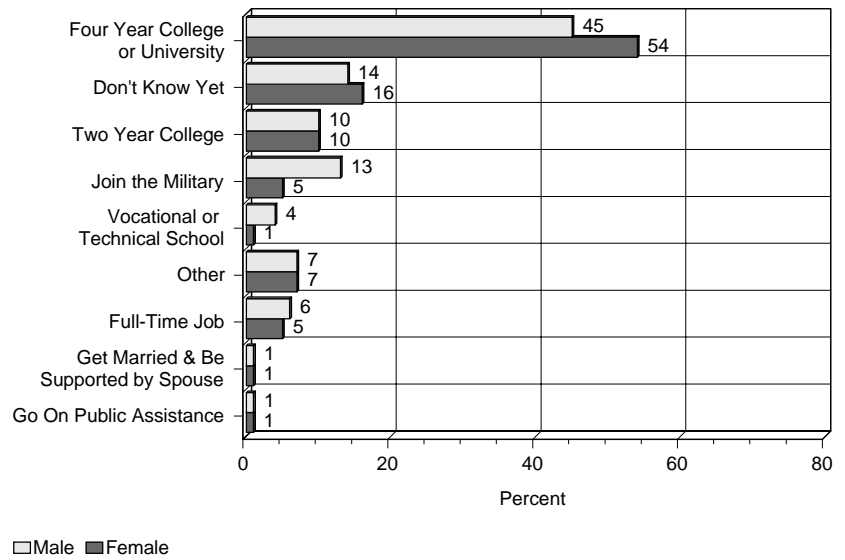
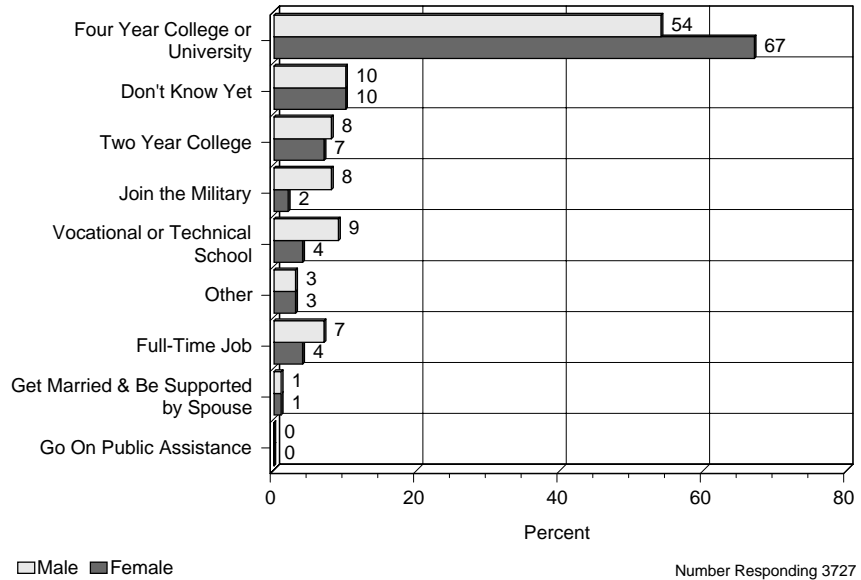


Figure 9-7 shows the future plans middle school students have for after high school graduation. Figure 9-8 shows the same plans for high school students. "Go to a 4-year college or university" was by far the most common response by both males and females at both school levels.

**Figure 9-7: Future Plans After High School
(Middle School Students, by Gender)**



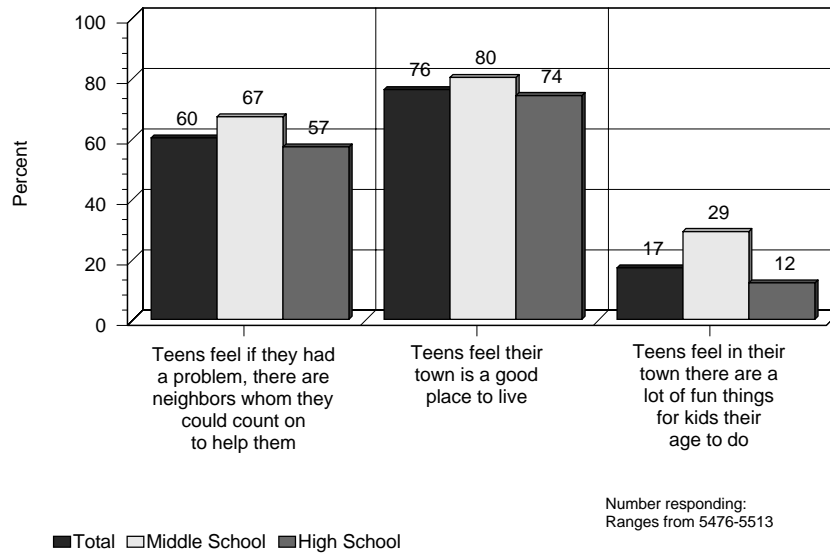
**Figure 9-8: Future Plans After High School
(High School Students, by Gender)**



Perceptions of Community

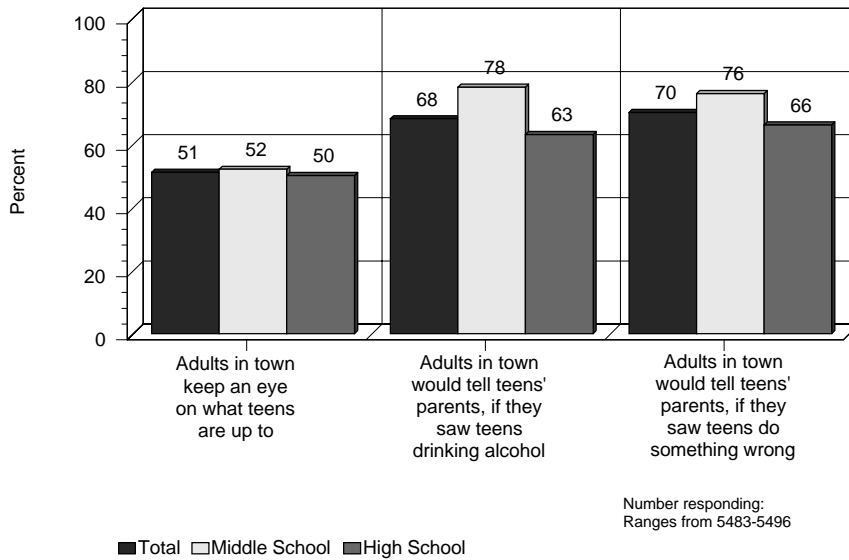
Neighborhood Support. Students told us they felt their community cared about them, and this is seen in Figure 9-9. Sixty percent (60%) reported there are neighbors they can count on if they are in trouble and need help. Although 76% felt their town is a good place to live, only 17% thought there are a lot of fun things for kids their age to do. More middle school students (29%) than high school students (12%) reported they felt there are fun things for kids their age to do.

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



Neighborhood Monitoring. As shown in Figure 9-10, half of students surveyed (51%) "strongly agree" or "agree" the adults in their community keep an eye on what teens were up to (middle school, 52%; high school, 50%). Sixty-eight percent (68%) said that adults in town would tell their parents if they saw teens drinking alcohol (middle school, 78%; high school, 63%) and 70% felt that if they were to do something wrong, adults in town would tell their parents (middle school, 76%; high school, 66%).

Figure 9-10: Neighborhood Monitoring
(Strongly Agree or Agree, by School Level)

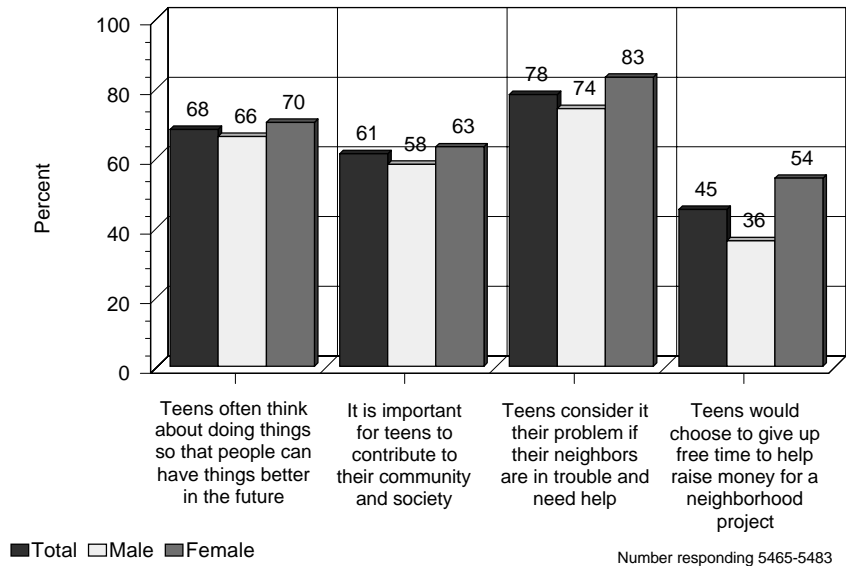


Where Teens Go for Entertainment. Local youth were asked where they most likely go for entertainment. The following tables show students' responses, broken down by their respective SAUs and towns. Keene, NH is the most popular response for all SAUs except SAU 1, where 47% of youth reported going to another location in New Hampshire for entertainment.

Social Responsibility

Figure 9-11 shows many teens have a well-developed sense of social responsibility toward their community. Two-thirds (68%) reported they often think about doing things so that "people can have things better" in the future (males, 66%; females, 70%). Sixty-one percent (61%) said they feel it is important for teens to contribute to their community and society (males, 58%; females, 63%). Almost four out of five students (78%) said they consider it their problem if their neighbors are in trouble and need help (males, 74%; females, 83%). Forty-five percent (45%) would give up their own free time in order to help raise money for a neighborhood project (males, 36%; females, 54%).

Figure 9-11: Social Responsibility
(Strongly Agree or Agree, by Gender)



Volunteer Work. We asked local youth, "Have you ever been involved in any volunteer work?" Overall, 37% reported they participate in volunteer work. Figure 9-12 shows the breakdown of responses by school level.

Figure 9-12: Teens' Involvement in Volunteer Work (By School Level)

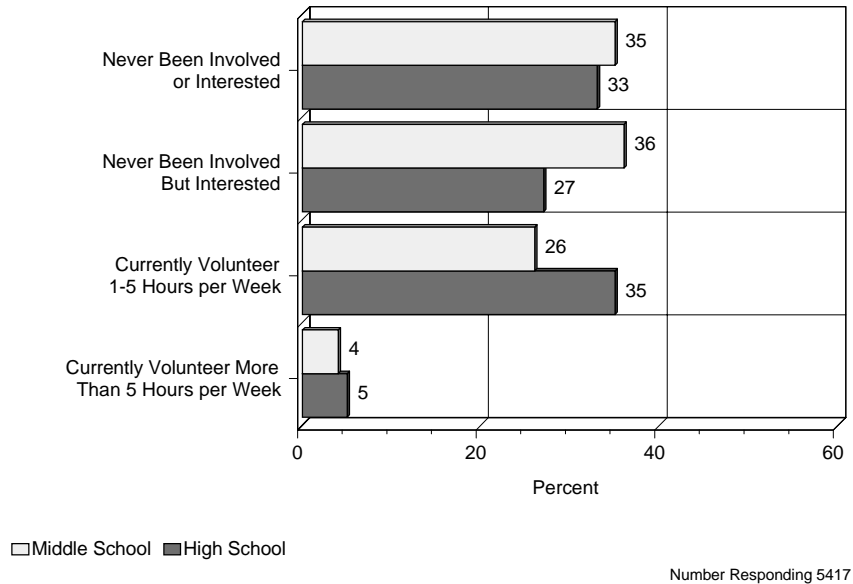
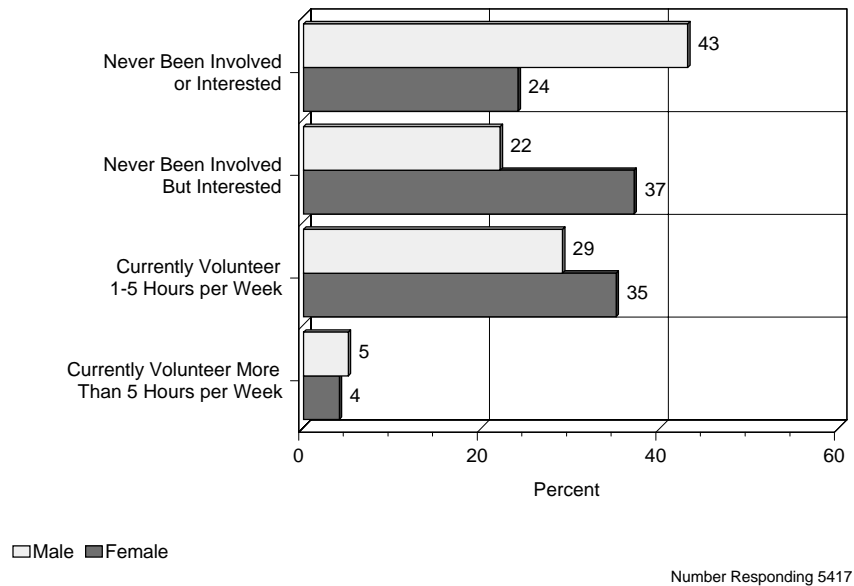


Figure 9-13 shows the breakdown by gender.

Figure 9-13: Teens' Involvement in Volunteer Work (By Gender)



Religious Activities. We asked local youth, "Do you attend religious services or participate in other religious activities (for example, choir, religious classes, youth group)?" Overall, 42% reported they participate in some kind of religious activity. Figure 9-14 shows the breakdown of responses by school level.

Figure 9-14: Level of Teens' Religious Activity (By School Level)

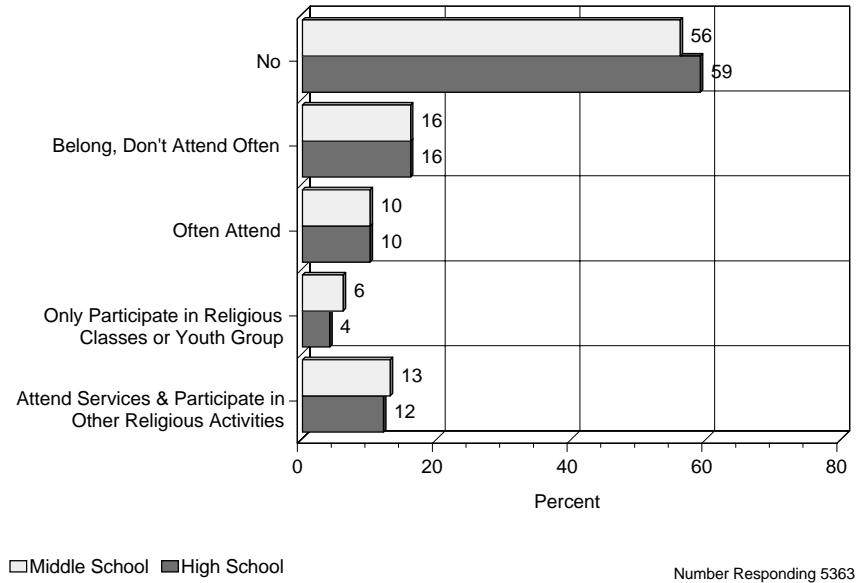
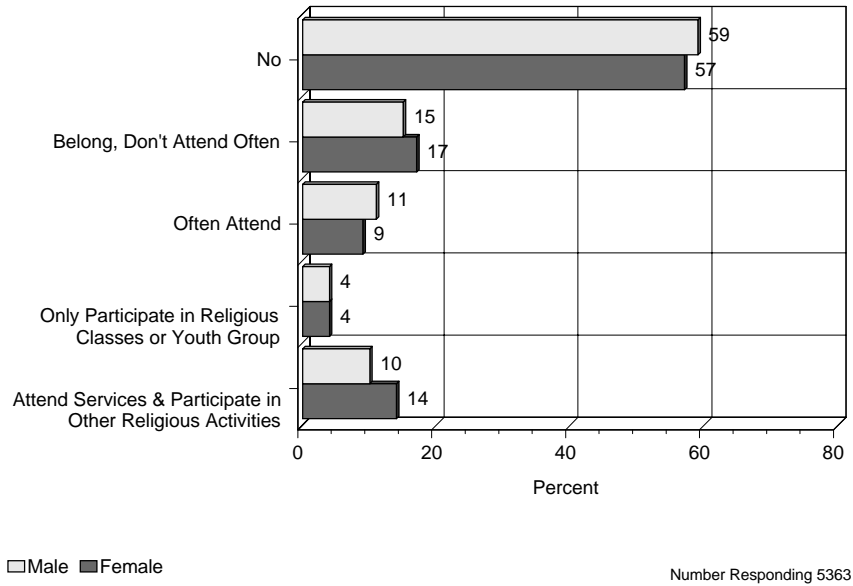


Figure 9-15 shows the breakdown of religious activity by gender.

Figure 9-15: Level of Teens' Religious Activity (By Gender)



Harassment. A number of students report being teased or harassed about being gay or lesbian. Overall, 21% report being teased or harassed about sexual identity. Figure 9-16 shows the breakdown by school level.

Figure 9-16: Teens Who Feel Teased or Harassed About Being Gay or Lesbian (By School Level)

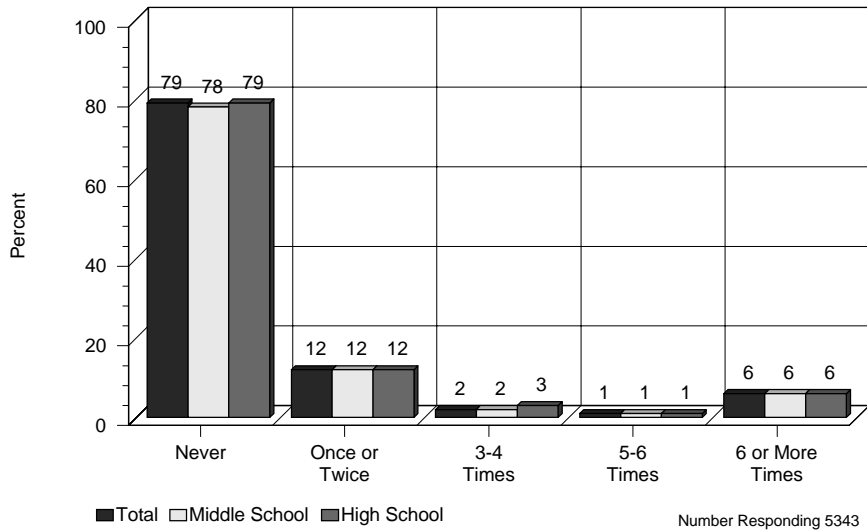


Figure 9-17 shows the breakdown by gender. Slightly more males (9%) than females (4%) report being teased or harassed 6 or more times.

Figure 9-17: Teens Who Feel Teased or Harassed About Being Gay or Lesbian (By Gender)

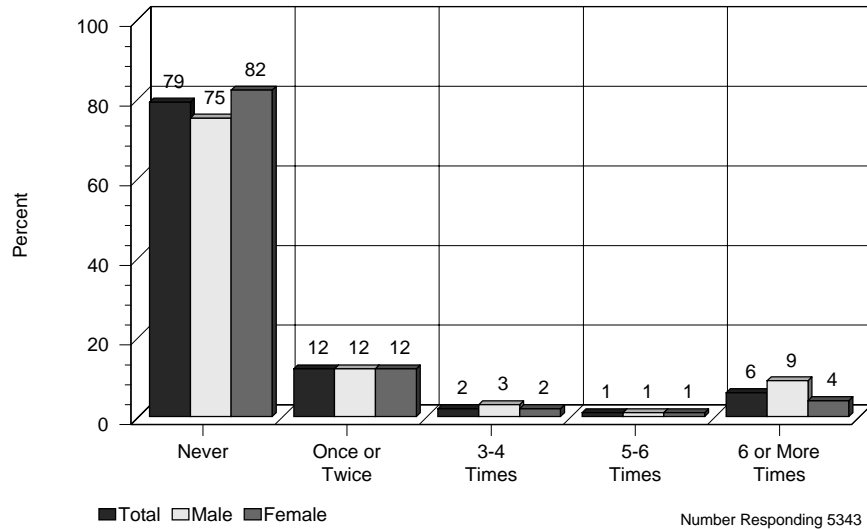
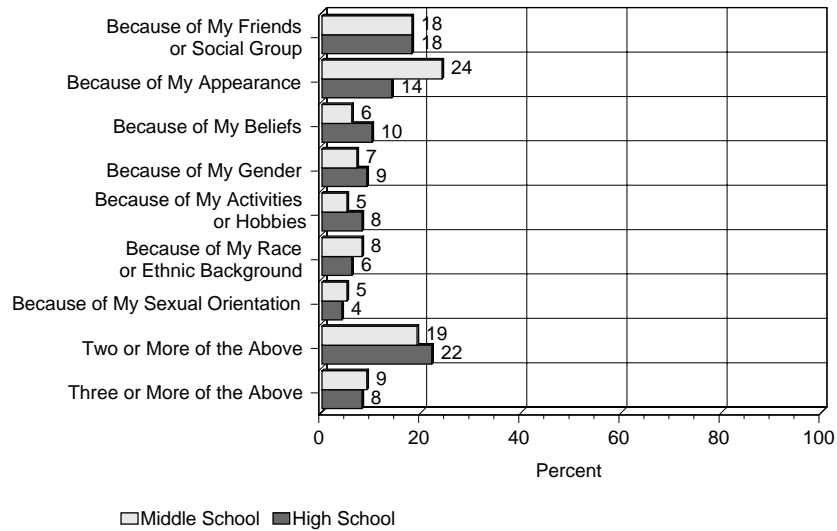


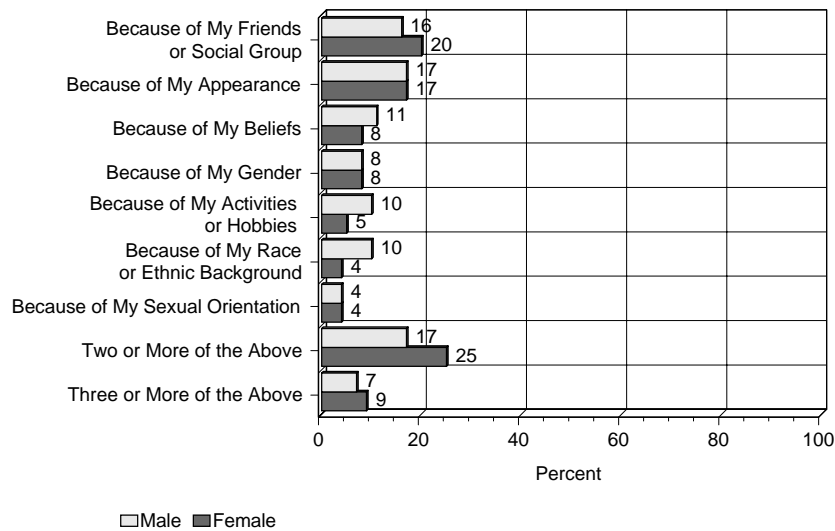
Figure 9-18 and Figure 9-19 show why teens feel they are treated differently by school level and gender, respectively. Overall, 29% of teens feel they are treated differently. The main reasons reported were because of their friends or social group (18%) and because of their appearance (17%).

Figure 9-18: Why Teens Are Treated Differently
(Of Those Who Have Been Treated Differently, by School Level)



Number Responding 1507

Figure 9-19: Why Teens Are Treated Differently
(Of Those Who Have Been Treated Differently, by Gender)



Number Responding 1507

School Safety and Youth Violence

Recent school tragedies the past few years 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 student victimization and the number of students carrying weapons and engaging in physical fights on school grounds (U.S. Departments of Education and Justice, 1999). Figure 9-20 shows the majority of youth surveyed (78%) report they feel safe with others in school. Figure 9-21 shows the response by gender.

Figure 9-20: Perceived School Safety

(By School Level)

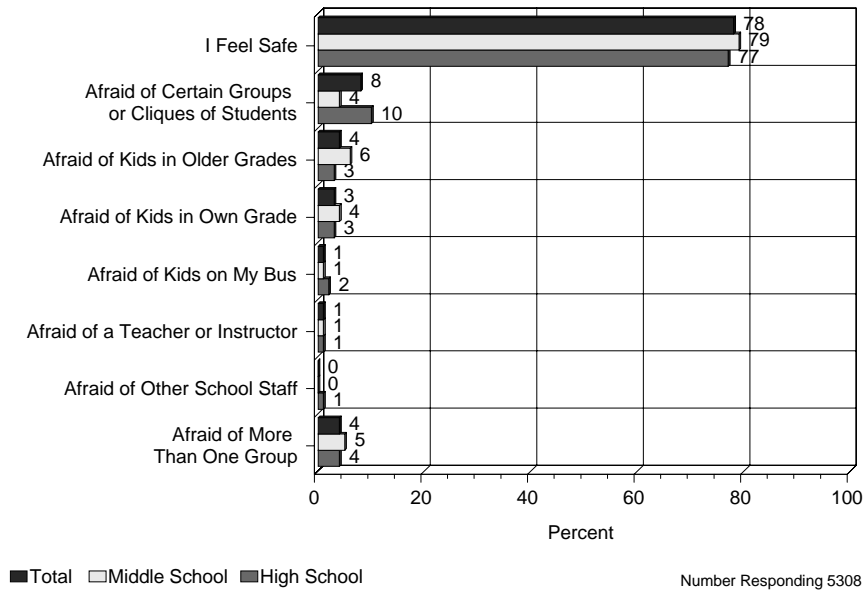
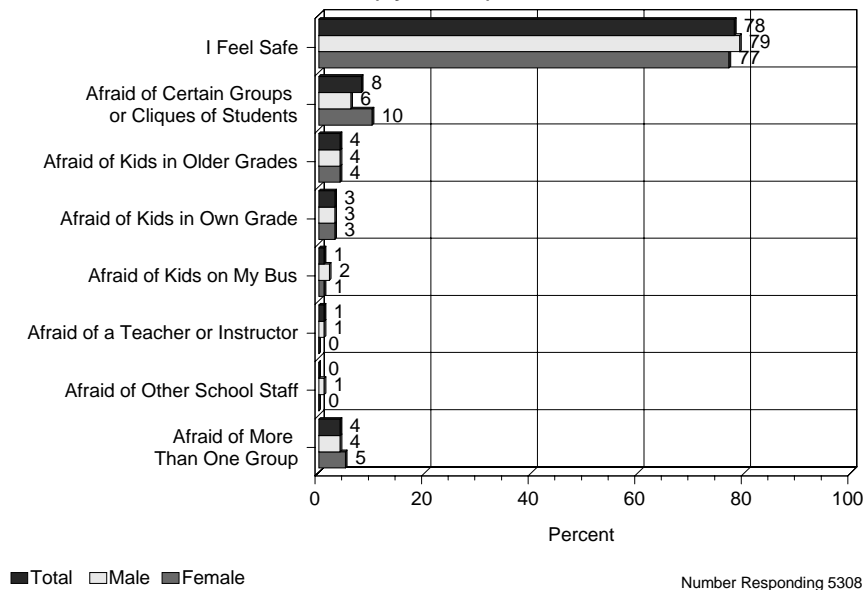


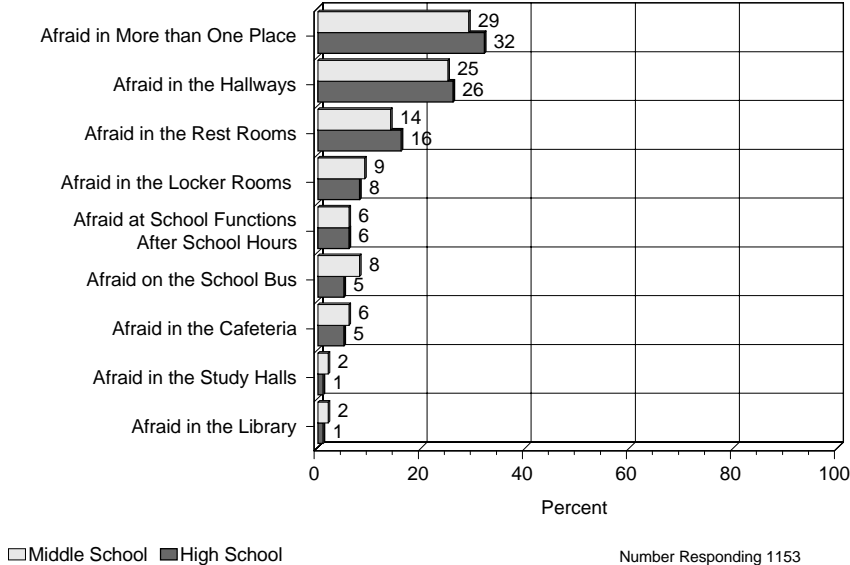
Figure 9-21: Perceived School Safety

(By Gender)



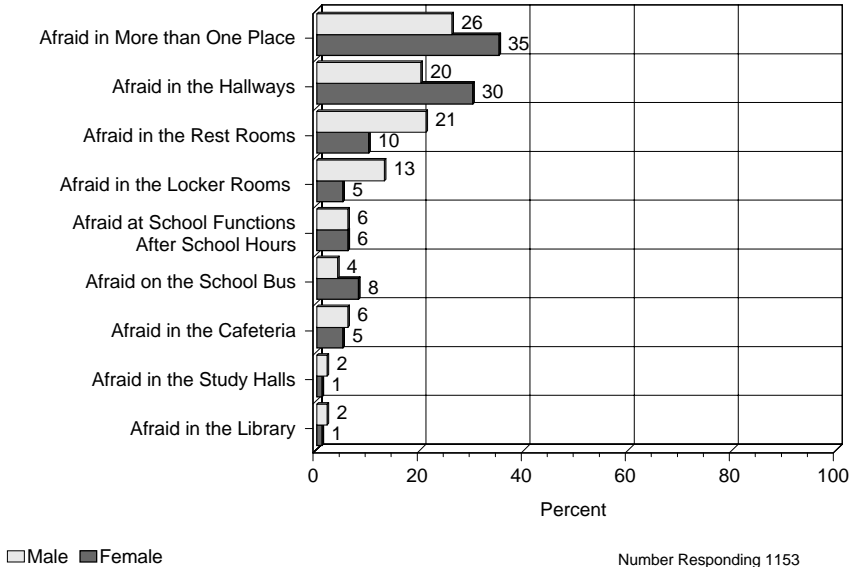
We asked students "Where at school do you feel unsafe?" Of all students surveyed, 22% reported they feel unsafe in at least one place at school. Of those who reported they feel afraid, 31% feel afraid in more than one place (middle school, 29%; high school, 32%; males, 26%; females, 35%). Figure 9-22 shows slightly more middle school students than high school students are afraid on the bus. Slightly more high school students than middle school students are afraid in more than one place.

Figure 9-22: Where at School Teens Feel Unsafe
(Of Those Who Feel Unsafe, by School Level)



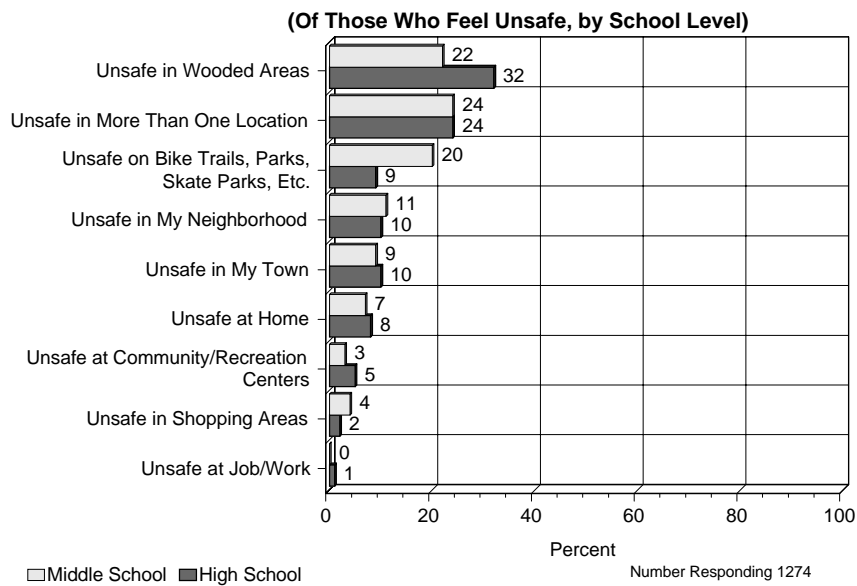
More females (30%) than males (20%) reported feeling afraid in the hallways; more males than females reported feeling afraid in the rest rooms and in the locker rooms. Figure 9-23 shows all responses of those who reported they feel afraid in at least one place at school by gender.

Figure 9-23: Where at School Teens Feel Unsafe
(Of Those Who Feel Unsafe, by Gender)



We asked students "Where in your community do you feel unsafe?" Of all students surveyed, 24% reported they feel unsafe in their community. Of those who reported they feel afraid, 24% feel afraid in more than one place (middle school, 24%; high school, 24%; males, 23%; females, 25%). Figure 9-24 shows more middle school students than high school students are afraid on bike trails, parks, skate parks, and other outdoor locations. More high school students than middle school students are afraid in wooded areas.

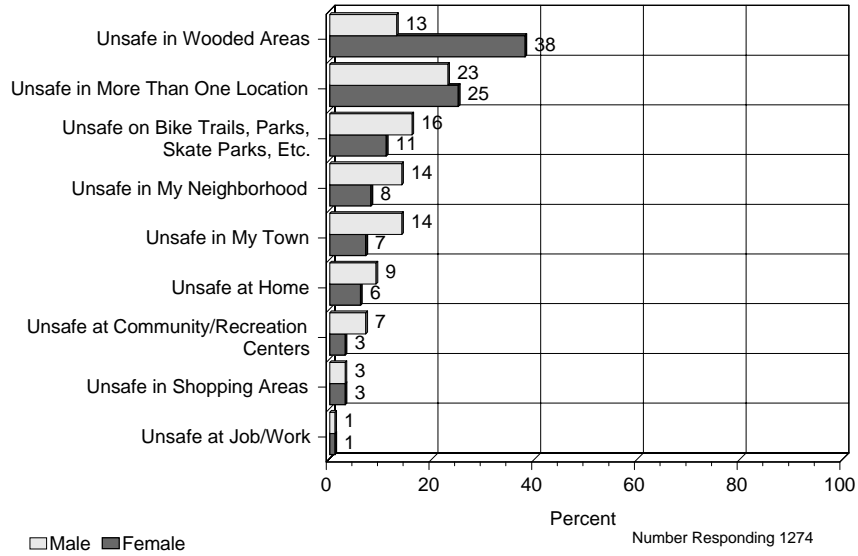
Figure 9-24: Where in the Community Teens Feel Unsafe



More females (38%) than males (13%) reported feeling afraid in wooded areas. Figure 9-25 shows all responses of those who reported they feel afraid in at least one place in the community by gender.

Figure 9-25: Where in the Community Teens Feel Unsafe

(Of Those Who Feel Unsafe, by Gender)



Local youth were asked if they have ever witnessed someone being beaten or physically abused. Forty-five percent (45%) have never seen someone being beaten or physically abused. Figure 9-26 shows more high school students than middle school students have witnessed such an act in school (middle school, 16%; high school, 30%). Figure 9-27 shows more males than females have witnessed such an act in school (males, 29%; females, 23%). Differences for other areas are slight.

Figure 9-26: Ever Witnessed Someone Being Beaten or Physically Abused (By School Level)

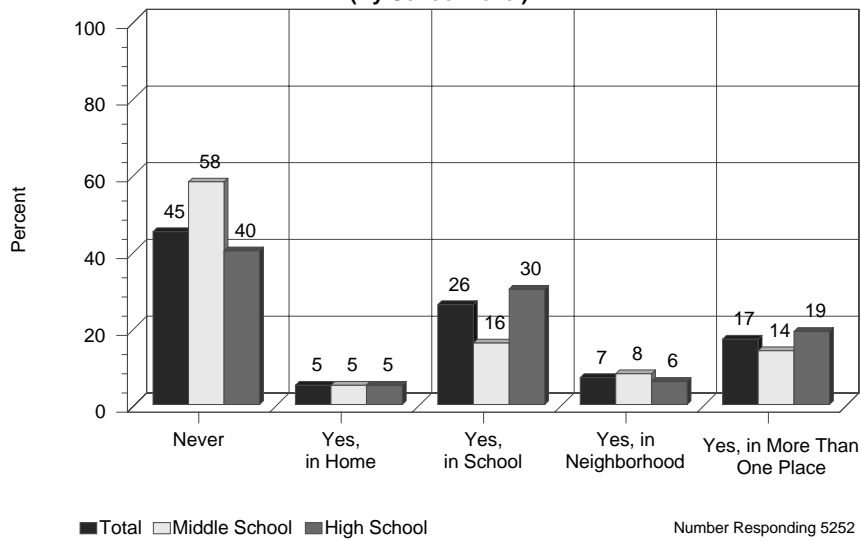
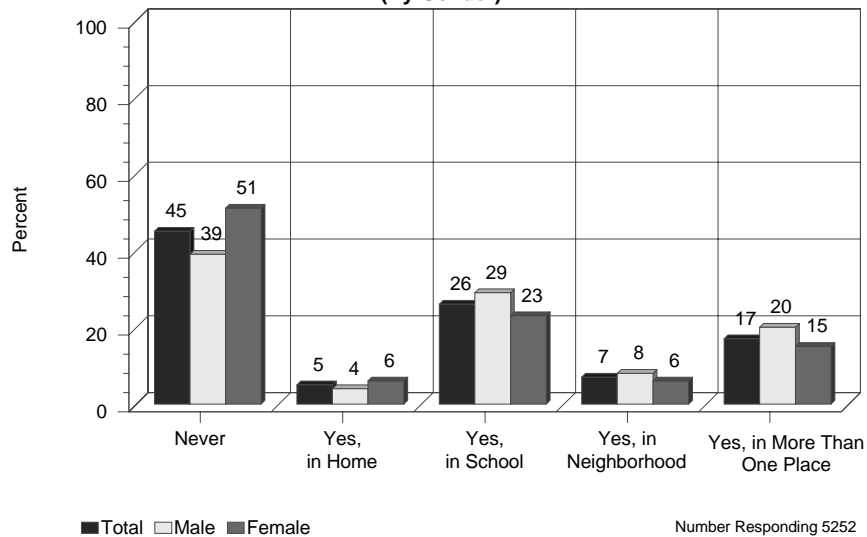


Figure 9-27: Ever Witnessed Someone Being Beaten or Physically Abused (By Gender)



We asked local youth what they thought was the best way to solve a problem if they are angry with someone or disagree with them. About one third of students (36%) would try to solve the problem by talking and trying to work it out. Figure 9-28 shows slightly more middle school students (13%) than high school students (10%) would try to solve the problem by ignoring the person.

Figure 9-28: How Teens Handle Anger and Disagreements (By School Level)

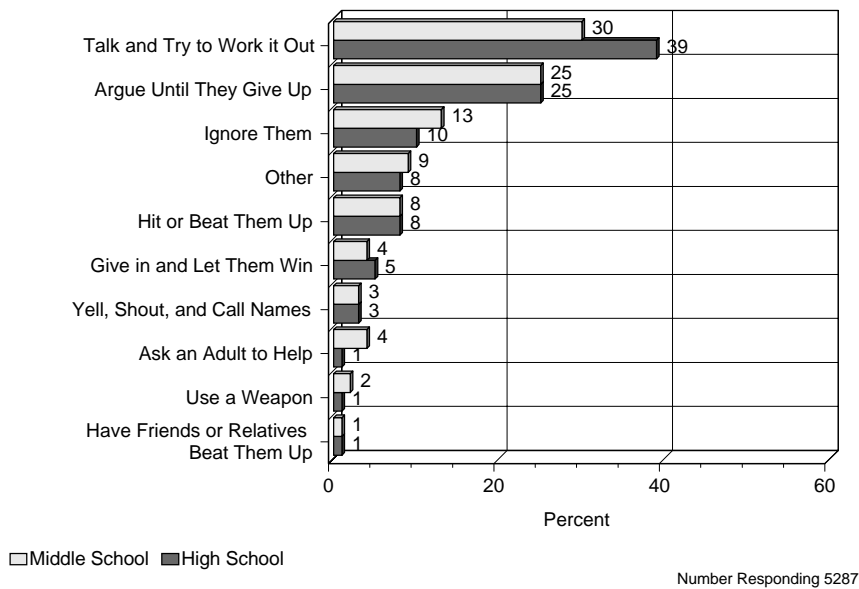
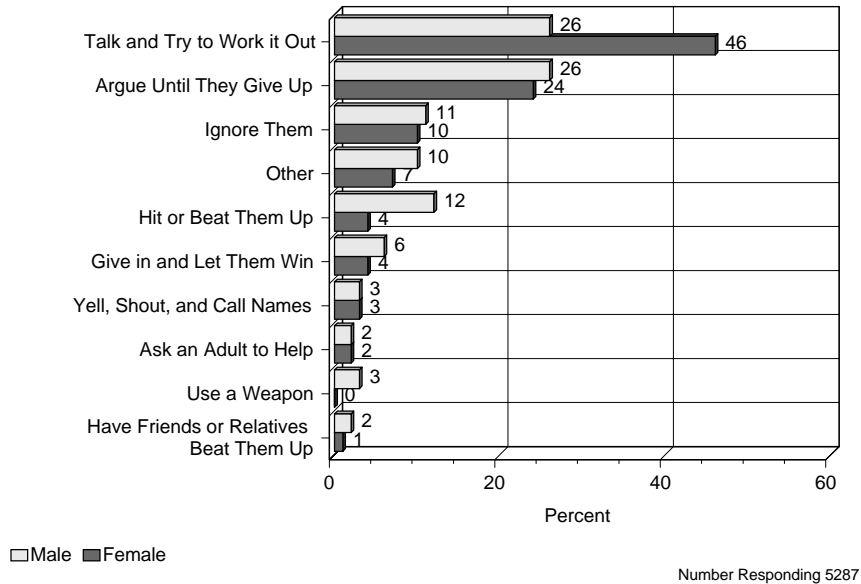


Figure 9-29 shows more males than females would hit them or beat them up when they are angry with someone or disagree with them (males, 12%; females, 4%). More females than males would talk with them and try to work out the problem (males, 26%; females, 46%).

Figure 9-29: How Teens Handle Anger and Disagreements (By Gender)



We asked teens, “What is the one main reason you would not fight when you are angry with someone?” More middle school students than high school students said they would not fight because their parents would not approve (middle school, 14%; high school, 7%). More high school students than middle school students would not fight because it is against their ethics or beliefs (middle school, 10%; high school, 24%). Figure 9-30 shows the responses by school level and Figure 9-31 shows the responses by gender.

Figure 9-30: Why Teens Would Not Fight (By School Level)

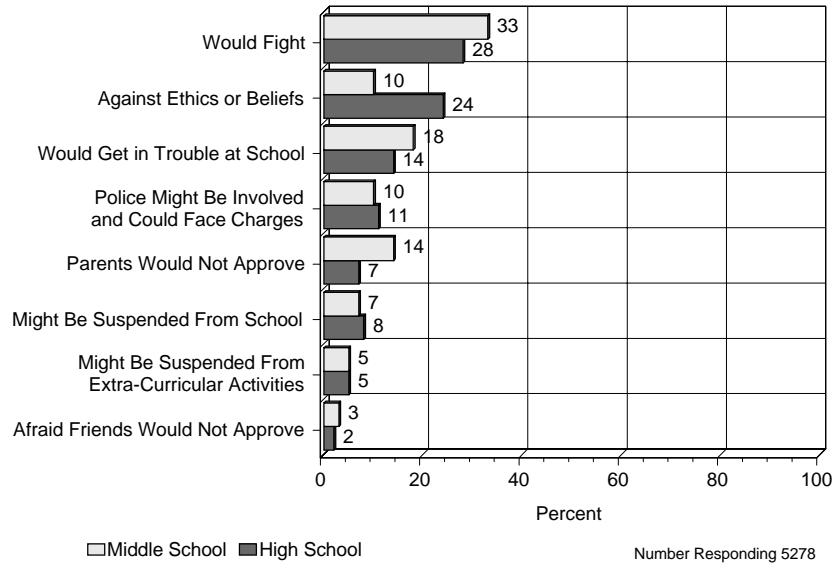
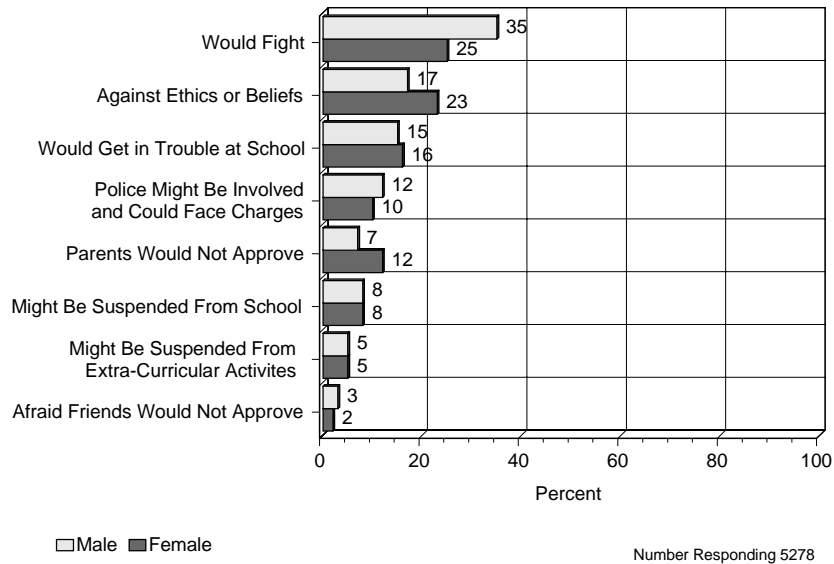
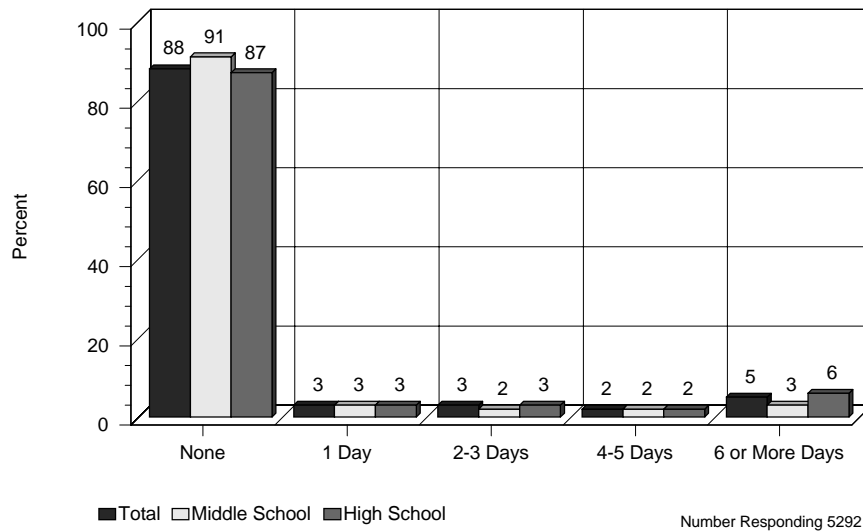


Figure 9-31: Why Teens Would Not Fight (By Gender)



We asked local youth "During the *past month*, on how many days did you carry a weapon such as a gun, knife, or club on to school property?" At the time of the survey, 13% of local youth reported they carried a weapon (e.g., a gun, knife, club) on to school property. Figure 9-32 shows slightly more high school students (6%) than middle school students (3%) have carried weapons on to school property 6 or more days in the past month.

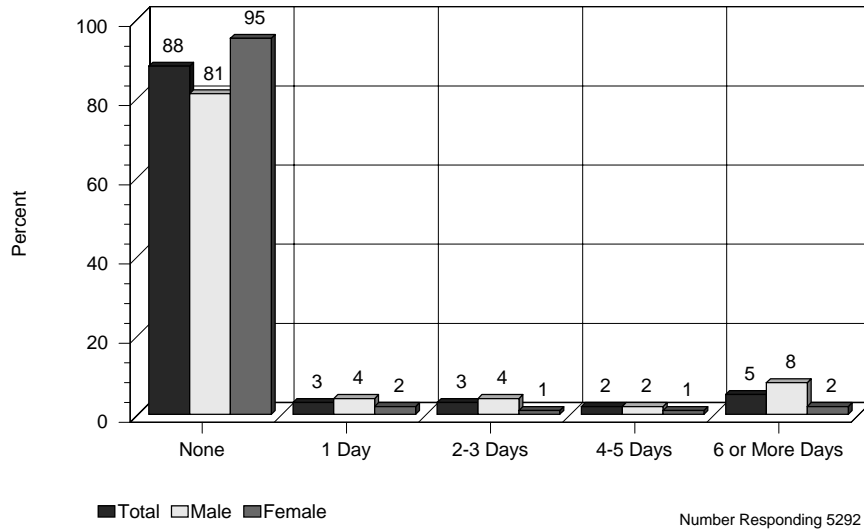
Figure 9-32: Days Teens Carried Weapons on to School Property
(In the Past Month, by School Level)



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 highest out of 33 states surveyed by the CDC.

Figure 9-33 shows the days teens carried weapons on to school property by gender. While 18% of the males carried a weapon on to school property at some time in the past month, only 6% of females did so.

Figure 9-33: Days Teens Carried Weapons on to School Property (In the Past Month, by Gender)



We asked students, "What would you do if you heard a serious threat or someone talking about plans that could injure anyone in your school?" TAP data show the majority of students (67%) would tell one or more persons (middle school, 69%; high school, 65%; males, 59% and females, 74%). Figure 9-34 shows all responses broken down by school level.

Figure 9-34: What Teens Would Do If They Heard a Serious Threat (By School Level)

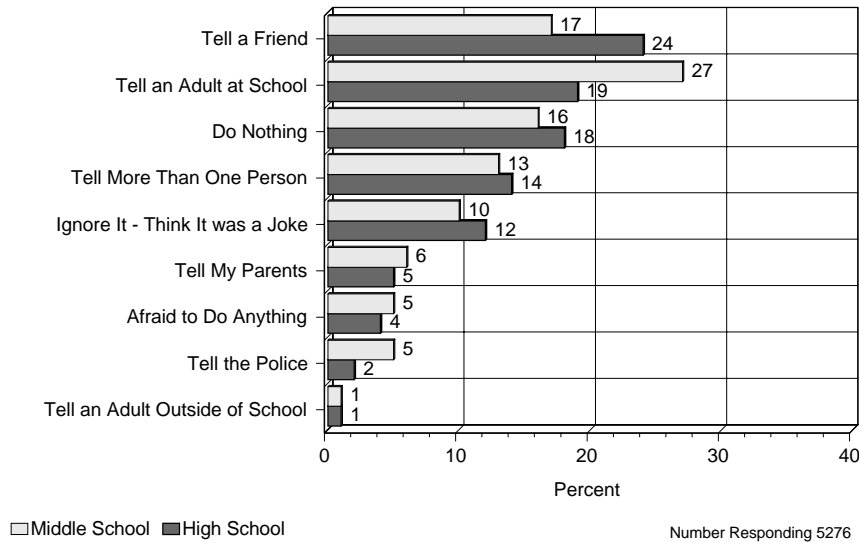


Figure 9-35 shows all responses broken down by gender.

Figure 9-35: What Teens Would Do If They Heard a Serious Threat (By Gender)

