
TAPPING INTO TEEN CONCERNS, PERCEPTIONS AND BEHAVIORS

Newfound Area School District

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

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Thank you.

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Table of Contents

Table of Contents	iii
Acknowledgments	vi
List of Figures	vii
List of Tables	xiv
Executive Summary	xvi
Chapter	
1. Introduction	1
Protective and Risk Factors in the Lives of Youth	3
2. Administration of the Teen Assessment Project	5
3. Characteristics of the Students and Their Families	7
Family Characteristics	8
School Characteristics	10
4. Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drug Use	12
Overall Alcohol and Other Drug Use	12
Alcohol Use	18
Parents' Role in Teen Drinking	36
Marijuana Use	39
Tobacco Use	47
Parents' Role in Teen Tobacco Smoking	52
Inhalant Use	55
Communication with Parents About Drug and Drinking Risks	59
Other Drug Use	60
Presentation of Comparable Data	61
5. Sexuality	66
Sexual Activity	66
Contraception	71
Sexually Transmitted Diseases	74
Teenage Pregnancy	76
Communication About Sexuality Issues	78

Parents' Influence in Teen Sexual Activity	80
Presentation of Comparable Data	83
6. Physical and Mental Health Issues	84
Teen Worries	84
Support and Advice	86
Teen Depression and Suicide	88
Diet	95
Health Issues and Information	98
Presentation of Comparable Data	103
7. Personal Safety and Violence	105
School Safety	105
Sexual Harassment	107
Weapons in School	108
Personal Property at School	110
Safety at Home	111
Sexual Violence: Sexual Abuse	112
Abuse by Boyfriend, Girlfriend or Date	115
Presentation Of Comparable Data	117
8. Parent-Teen Relationships	118
Parental Support and Love	118
Getting Along with Parents at Home	120
Safety at Home	121
Communication	122
Decision-Making	124
Parental Monitoring	125
Parental Values	129
Parental Consequences	131
9. Student Time Use	133
Student Time Use	133
10. Perceptions of School and Community	139

Perceptions of School	139
Future Plans and Career Plans	146
Perceptions of Community	148
Social Responsibility	150
Presentation of Comparable Data	151
11. Understanding Teen Behaviors in the Context of Adolescent Development	152
12. Multivariate Model Predicting Teen Substance Use	155
Multivariate Model	155
Creation of the Factors	156
Prediction of Increasing Substance Use	158
Conclusions	160
13. Instrument Development, Reliability and Validity	161
References	163

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The Teen Assessment Project (TAP) originated at the University of Wisconsin at Madison under the direction of Stephen A. Small, Ph.D. The University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension adapted and expanded the scope of the Teen Assessment Project for use with New Hampshire communities. The Grafton County Teen Assessment Project is under the direction of Deborah Maes, Extension Educator/Family Development in partnership with Lisa Mure, Project Coordinator of the Lin-Wood/Newfound/Pemi-Baker Community Coalition in cooperation with Charlotte Cross, Extension Specialist, Youth Development and Fran Chickering, UNH Cooperative Extension, Program Coordinator.

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List of Figures

Figure	Title	Page
1-1:	Ecological Model of Youth Development	2
3-1:	Grade and Gender of Students Taking the TAP Survey (By Grade and Gender)	7
3-2:	Family Living Situations	8
3-3:	Parents Divorced or Separated	9
3-4:	Parental Education Levels	9
3-5:	Average Student Letter Grade	10
3-6:	Average Student Letter Grade (By Gender)	10
3-7:	Average Student Letter Grade (By School Level)	11
3-8:	Honesty of Students in Answering Survey Questions (By Gender)	11
4-1:	Alcohol and Drug Use (Any Use At All)	12
4-2:	Alcohol and Drug Use (Monthly or More Often)	13
4-3:	Alcohol and Drug Use (Weekly or More Often)	13
4-4:	Alcohol and Drug Use (Any Use at All, by School Level)	14
4-5:	Alcohol and Drug Use (Monthly or More Often, by School Level)	14
4-6:	Alcohol and Drug Use (Weekly or More Often, by School Level)	15
4-7:	Alcohol and Drug Use (Use of at Least 1 Substance, by School Level)	15
4-8:	Obtainability Of Alcohol and Other Drugs (Very Easy or Easy to Get, by School Level)	16
4-9:	Perceived Risk of Alcohol and Other Drug Use (No Risk or Slight Risk, by School Level)	16
4-10:	Perceived Risk of Alcohol and Other Drug Use (Great Risk, by School Level)	17
4-11:	Age Students Had Their First Drink of Alcohol (By Gender)	18
4-12:	Frequency of Alcohol Use (Of Those Who Have Had Alcohol, by School Level)	19
4-13:	Teens Who Drink Alcohol (Any Use at All, by Grade and Gender)	20
4-14:	Teens Who Drink Alcohol (Monthly or More Often, by Grade and Gender)	21
4-15:	Teens Who Drink Alcohol (Weekly or More Often, by Grade and Gender)	22
4-16:	Perceived Risk: Take 1 or 2 Drinks of an Alcoholic Beverage Nearly Every Day (By School Level)	23
4-17:	Perceived Risk: Take 1 or 2 Drinks of an Alcoholic Beverage Nearly Every Day (By Gender)	23
4-18:	Frequency of Binge Drinking (Number of Times in the Past Month)	24
4-19:	Frequency of Binge Drinking (Number of Times in the Past Month, by School Level)	24
4-20:	Binge Drinking (At Least Once in the Past Month, by Grade and Gender)	25
4-21:	Perceived Risk: Binge Drinking Once or Twice Each Weekend (By School Level)	26

4-22:	Perceived Risk: Binge Drinking Once or Twice Each Weekend (By Gender)	27
4-23:	Perceived Risk of Binge Drinking and History of Binge Drinking in the Past Month (By Gender).	28
4-24:	Risk Behaviors Among Those Teens Who Engage in Binge Drinking vs. Those Who Don't Engage in Binge Drinking	28
4-25:	Obtainability of Alcohol	29
4-26:	Obtainability of Alcohol (By School Level)	29
4-27:	Where Teens Get Alcohol (Of Those Who Drink)	30
4-28:	Where Teens Get Alcohol (Of Those Who Drink, by School Level)	30
4-29:	Where Teens Get Alcohol (Of Those Who Drink, by Gender)	31
4-30:	Where Teens Drink Alcohol (Of Those Who Drink)	32
4-31:	Where Teens Drink Alcohol (Of Those Who Drink, by School Level)	32
4-32:	Teens Who Have Driven A Vehicle After Drinking or Using Drugs (At Least Once in the Past Month, by Grade and Gender)	33
4-33:	Frequency of Driving a Vehicle After Drinking or Using Drugs (In the Past Month, by Gender)	34
4-34:	Teens Who Have Ridden in a Vehicle With a Driver Who Had Been Drinking or Using Drugs (At Least Once in the Past Month, by Grade and Gender)	34
4-35:	Frequency of Riding in a Vehicle With a Driver Who Had Been Drinking or Using Drugs (In the Past Month, by Gender)	35
4-36:	Relationship Between Teens' Perceptions of Parental Values and Monthly Teen Drinking (By Gender)	36
4-37:	Relationship Between Levels of Parental Monitoring and Monthly Teen Drinking (By Gender)	37
4-38:	Relationship Between Teens' Perceptions of Parental Consequences and Monthly Teen Drinking (By Gender)	38
4-39:	Teens Who Use Marijuana (Any Use at All, by Grade and Gender)	39
4-40:	Teens Who Use Marijuana (Monthly or More Often, by Grade and Gender)	40
4-41:	Teens Who Use Marijuana (Weekly or More Often, by Grade and Gender)	41
4-42:	Obtainability of Marijuana	42
4-43:	Obtainability of Marijuana (By School Level)	42
4-44:	Perceived Risk: Try Marijuana Once or Twice (By School Level)	43
4-45:	Perceived Risk: Try Marijuana Once or Twice (By Gender)	43
4-46:	Relationship Between Perceived Risk of Trying Marijuana Once or Twice vs. Any Use at All of Marijuana (By Gender)	44
4-47:	Perceived Risk: Smoke Marijuana Regularly (By School Level)	45
4-48:	Perceived Risk: Smoke Marijuana Regularly (By Gender)	45

4-49: Relationship Between Perceived Risk of Smoking Marijuana Regularly and Teens’ Monthly Use of Marijuana (By Gender)	46
4-50: Age Students First Smoked a Whole Cigarette (By Gender)	47
4-51: Teens Who Smoke Tobacco (Any Use at All, by Grade and Gender)	48
4-52: Teens Who Smoke Tobacco (Monthly or More Often, by Grade and Gender)	49
4-53: Teens Who Smoke Tobacco (Weekly or More Often, by Grade and Gender)	50
4-54: Perceived Risk: Smoke One or More Packs of Cigarettes a Day (By Gender)	50
4-55: Perceived Risk of Smoking One or More Packs of Cigarettes a Day and Monthly Teen Smoking (By Gender)	51
4-56: Relationship Between Teens’ Perceptions of Parental Values and Monthly Teen Smoking (By Gender)	52
4-57: Relationship Between Levels of Parental Monitoring and Monthly Teen Smoking (By Gender)	53
4-58: Relationship Between Teens’ Perceptions of Parental Consequences and Monthly Teen Smoking (By Gender)	54
4-59: Age Students First Experimented with Inhalants (By Gender)	55
4-60: Teens Who Use Inhalants (Any Use at All, by Grade and Gender)	56
4-61: Perceived Risk: Inhalant Use (By School Level)	57
4-62: Perceived Risk: Inhalant Use (By Gender)	57
4-63: Perceived Risk of Inhalant Use and Any Use of Inhalants (By Gender)	58
4-64: Talks with Father or Mother About Risks of Drinking or Taking Drugs	59
5-1: Sexual Activity of Teens (By School Level)	66
5-2: Teens Who Have Ever Had Sexual Intercourse (By Grade and Gender)	67
5-3: Frequency of Sexual Intercourse (By Gender)	68
5-4: Age Teens First Had Sexual Intercourse (By Gender)	68
5-5: Number of Partners Teens Have Had (By Gender)	69
5-6: Number of Friends Who Have Had Sexual Intercourse (By Gender)	70
5-7: Number of Friends Who Have Had Sexual Intercourse (By School Level)	70
5-8: Birth Control Use by Sexually Active Teens (By Gender)	71
5-9: Sexually Active Teens Who Always Use Birth Control (By Grade and Gender)	72
5-10: Sexually Active Teens Who Always Use Birth Control (By School Level and Gender)	72
5-11: Method of Birth Control Used by Teens the Last Time They Had Sex (Of Those Who Have Had Sex, by Gender)	73
5-12: Method of Birth Control Used by Teens the Last Time They Had Sex (Of Those Who Have Had Sex, by School Level)	73
5-13: Condom Use by Teens (Of Those Who Have Ever Had Sex, by Gender)	74

5-14:	Teens Who Always Use Condoms (Of Those Who Have Had Sex, by Grade and Gender)	75
5-15:	What Sexually Active Teens Would Do If They Became Pregnant (By Gender)	76
5-16:	How Old Teens Want To Be When They Have Their First Child (By Gender)	77
5-17:	Teen Worries About Being Pressured Into Having Sex (By Gender)	77
5-18:	Talks with Father or Mother About Whether or Not It's Okay to Have Sex (In the Past Year)	78
5-19:	Talks with Father or Mother About Birth Control (In the Past Year)	79
5-20:	Talks with Father or Mother About AIDS or STDs (In the Past Year)	79
5-21:	Relationship Between Levels of Parental Monitoring and Teen Sexual Activity and Teen Sexual Activity (By Gender)	80
5-22:	Relationship Between Teens' Perceptions of Parental Consequences and Teen Sexual Activity (By Gender)	81
5-23:	Relationship Between Teens' Perceptions of Parental Values and Teen Sexual Activity (By Gender)	82
6-1:	Teen Worries (Quite a Bit or Very Much)	84
6-2:	Teen Worries (Quite a Bit or Very Much, by School Level)	85
6-3:	Teen Worries (Quite a Bit or Very Much, by Gender)	85
6-4:	Who Would Students Talk To About Problems (By School Level)	86
6-5:	Who Would Students Talk To (By Gender)	87
6-6:	Depression or Sadness Among Students (At Any Time in the Past Month, by Grade and Gender)	88
6-7:	Serious Thoughts About Killing Themselves (At Any Time in the Past Month, by Grade and Gender)	89
6-8:	Plans Made to Commit Suicide (At Any Time, by Grade and Gender)	90
6-9:	Plans Made to Commit Suicide (In the Past Year, by Grade and Gender)	91
6-10:	Plans Made to Commit Suicide (In the Past Month, by Grade and Gender)	92
6-11:	Suicide Attempts (At Any Time, by Grade and Gender)	93
6-12:	Suicide Attempts (In the Past Year, by Grade and Gender)	94
6-13:	Suicide Attempts (In the Past Month, by Grade and Gender)	94
6-14:	Teens Who Tried To Lose Weight Or Keep From Gaining It (In The Past Month, by Grade and Gender)	95
6-15:	What Teens Did in the Past Month To Lose Weight or Keep From Gaining It (By Gender)	96
6-16:	How Often Teens Consume Caffeine (By Gender)	97
6-17:	How Often Teens Took Over-The-Counter Medication (In the Past Month, By Gender)	98

6-18:	When Teens Last Had a Preventative Visit With a Doctor or Nurse-Practitioner (By Gender)	99
6-19:	Topics Teens Have Had Talks With Their Doctor or Nurse-Practitioner About (In the Past Two years, by Gender)	99
6-20:	Confidence Teens Have In Their Doctor or Nurse-Practitioner Respecting Their Privacy (By Gender)	100
6-21:	Usefulness of Health Class About Sexuality and Sexual Health (By Gender)	101
6-22:	Usefulness of Health Class About Drugs and Substance Abuse (By Gender)	101
6-23:	Usefulness of Health Class About Sexuality and Sexual Health (By School Level)	102
6-24:	Usefulness of Health Class About Drugs and Substance Abuse (By School Level)	102
7-1:	Students Who Feel Safe at School (Strongly Agree or Agree, by Grade and Gender) .	105
7-2:	Frequency of Hearing Insulting Comments About Someone’s Religion, Ethnicity or Sexual Orientation (In the Past Month, by Gender)	106
7-3:	Frequency of Hearing Insulting Comments About Someone’s Religion, Ethnicity or Sexual Orientation (In the Past Month, by School Level)	106
7-4:	Incidents of Sexual Harassment In School (Occasionally or Often, By Gender)	107
7-5:	Incidents of Sexual Harassment In School (Occasionally or Often, By School Level)	107
7-6:	Number of Days Teens Carried Weapons onto School Property (In the Past Month, by Gender)	108
7-7:	Number of Days Teens Carried Weapons onto School Property (In the Past Month, by School Level)	109
7-8:	Number of Times Teens Have Had Property Stolen or Damaged While in School (In the Past Year, by Gender)	110
7-9:	Number of Times Teens Have Had Property Stolen or Damaged While in School (In the Past Year, by School Level)	110
7-10:	Students Who Feel Safe at Home (Strongly Agree or Agree, by Grade and Gender)	111
7-11:	Teens Who Have Been Sexually Abused by an Adult (By Gender)	112
7-12:	Teens Who Have Been Sexually Abused By Another Teen (By Gender)	113
7-13:	Who Teens Told About The Sexual Abuse (Of Those Who Were Abused, By Gender)	114
7-14:	Physical Abuse by a Boyfriend, Girlfriend or Date (By Gender)	115
7-15:	Physical Abuse by a Boyfriend, Girlfriend or Date (By School Level)	115
7-16:	Emotional Abuse by a Boyfriend, Girlfriend or Date (By Gender)	116
7-17:	Emotional Abuse by a Boyfriend, Girlfriend or Date (By School Level)	116
8-1:	Parents Are There for Them	118
8-2:	Parental Support (Often or Very Often)	119
8-3:	Teens Who Feel Their Parents Are Interested in What They Learn and How They Are	

Doing in School (Strongly Agree or Agree, by Grade and Gender)	119
8-4: Worry About Getting Along with Parents at Home	120
8-5: Worry About Getting Along with Parents at Home (Quite A Bit or Very Much, by Grade and Gender)	120
8-6: Students Who Feel Safe at Home (By Gender)	121
8-7: Students Who Feel Safe at Home (Strongly Agree or Agree, by Grade and Gender) ...	121
8-8: Teens Who Never or Rarely Had Good Talks with Fathers (In the Past Year)	122
8-9: Teens Who Never or Rarely Had Good Talks with Mothers (In the Past Year)	123
8-10: Parents' Decision-Making Style	124
8-11: Teens Who Report Parental Monitoring of Their Behavior (A Lot of the Time or Always)	125
8-12: Teens Who Reported Parental Monitoring of Their Behavior (A Lot of the Time or Always, by Gender)	125
8-13: Teens Who Reported Parental Monitoring of Their Behavior (A Lot of the Time or Always, by School Level)	126
8-14: Relationship Between Levels of Parental Monitoring and Monthly Teen Drinking (By Gender)	127
8-15: Relationship Between Levels of Parental Monitoring and Monthly Teen Smoking (By Gender)	127
8-16: Relationship Between Levels of Parental Monitoring and Teen Sexual Activity (By Gender)	128
8-17: Teens' Perceptions of Parental Values About Health Risk Behaviors	129
8-18: Relationship Between Teens' Perceptions of Parental Values and Monthly Teen Drinking	129
8-19: Relationship Between Teens' Perceptions of Parental Values and Monthly Teen Smoking	130
8-20: Relationship Between Teens' Perceptions of Parental Values and Teen Sexual Activity (By Gender)	130
8-21: Teens' Perceptions of Parental Consequences for Health Risk Behaviors	131
8-22: Relationship Between Teens' Perceptions of Parental Consequences and Monthly Teen Drinking (By Gender)	131
8-23: Relationship Between Teens' Perceptions of Parental Consequences and Monthly Teen Smoking (By Gender)	132
8-23: Relationship Between Teens' Perceptions of Parental Consequences and Teen Sexual Activity (By Gender)	132
9-1: How Teens Spend Their Time (5 or More Hours a Week)	133
9-2: How Teens Spend Their Time (5 or More Hours a Week, by Gender)	134
9-3: How Teens Spend Their Time (5 or More Hours a Week, by School Level)	134

9-4:	How Teens Spend Their Time (16 or More Hours a Week)	135
9-5:	How Teens Spend Their Time (16 or More Hours a Week, by Gender)	135
9-6:	How Teens Spend Their Time (16 or More Hours a Week, by School Level)	136
9-7:	Relationship Between Number of Hours Working and Average Grade (Of Those Who Report Working, by Gender)	137
9-8:	Relationship Between Number of Hours Working and Monthly Use of At Least One Substance (Of Those Who Report Working, by Gender)	138
10-1:	Enjoy Going to School (Strongly Agree or Agree, by Grade and Gender)	139
10-2:	School Rules Enforced Fairly (Strongly Agree or Agree, by Grade and Gender)	140
10-3:	Good Quality Education (Strongly Agree or Agree, by Grade and Gender)	140
10-4:	Student Satisfaction with School Staff & Services (Strongly Agree or Agree)	141
10-5:	Student Satisfaction with School Staff & Services (Strongly Agree or Agree, by School Level)	141
10-6:	Teens' Feelings About Getting a Fair Chance to Participate in Theater and/or Music Programs (By Gender)	142
10-7:	Teens' Feelings About Getting a Fair Chance to Participate in Theater and/or Music Programs (By School Level)	142
10-8:	Teens' Feelings About Getting a Fair Chance to Participate in Sports (By Gender)	143
10-9:	Teens' Feelings About Getting a Fair Chance to Participate in Sports (By School Level)	143
10-10:	Number of Competitive Sports Teens Plan to Participate in During Year (By Gender)	144
10-11:	Number of Competitive Sports Teens Plan to Participate in During Year (By School)	144
10-12:	Why Teens Don't Participate in Extracurricular Activities (Of Those Who Don't Participate, by Gender)	145
10-13:	Why Teens Don't Participate in Extracurricular Activities (Of Those Who Don't Participate, by School Level)	145
10-14:	Teens Who Feel They Will Drop Out Before They Complete High School (Strongly Agree or Agree, by Grade and Gender)	146
10-15:	Future Plans After High School (Middle School Students, by Gender)	147
10-16:	Future Plans After High School (High School Students, by Gender)	147
10-17:	Neighborhood Support (Strongly Agree or Agree, by Gender)	148
10-18:	Neighborhood Support (Strongly Agree or Agree, by School Level)	148
10-19:	Neighborhood Monitoring (Strongly Agree or Agree, by Gender)	149
10-20:	Neighborhood Monitoring (Strongly Agree or Agree, by School Level)	149
10-21:	Social Responsibility (Strongly Agree or Agree, by Gender)	150
10-22:	Social Responsibility (Strongly Agree or Agree, by School Level)	150
12-1:	Multivariate Model Predicting Substance Use (Alcohol, Smoking, Marijuana)	159

List of Tables

Table	Title	Page
3-1:	Usable Surveys	8
4-1:	2001 YRBS Data: Age of First Alcohol Use (Grades 9-12 only)	18
4-2:	2001 YRBS Data: Lifetime Alcohol Use (Grades 9-12 only)	19
4-3:	2001 YRBS Data: Current Alcohol Use (Grades 9-12 only)	21
4-4:	2001 YRBS Data: Episodic Heavy Drinking (Grades 9-12 only)	25
4-5:	Comparison Data: Perceived Harmfulness of Episodic Heavy Drinking	26
4-6:	2001 YRBS Data: Drove After Drinking Alcohol (Grades 9-12 only)	33
4-7:	2001 YRBS Data: Rode With A Driver Who Had Been Drinking Alcohol (Grades 9-12 only)	35
4-8:	2001 YRBS Data: Lifetime Marijuana Use (Grades 9-12 only)	39
4-9:	2001 YRBS Data: Current Marijuana Use (Grades 9-12 only)	40
4-10:	Data Comparison: Perceived Harmfulness of Trying Marijuana	44
4-11:	Data Comparison: Perceived Harmfulness of Regular Marijuana Use	46
4-12:	2001 YRBS Data: Smoked a Whole Cigarette Before Age 13 (Grades 9-12 only)	47
4-13:	2001 YRBS Data: Lifetime Cigarette Use (Grades 9-12 only)	48
4-14:	2001 YRBS Data: Current Cigarette Use (Grades 9-12 only)	49
4-15:	Comparison Data: Perceived Harmfulness of Smoking One or Two Packs of Cigarettes a Day	51
4-16:	2001 YRBS Data: Lifetime and Current Inhalant Use (Grades 9-12 only)	56
4-17:	Other Drug Use	60
4-18:	Alcohol and Other Drug Use Comparison: Any Use At All (Grades 9-12 only)	62
4-19:	Alcohol and Other Drug Use Comparison: In the Past 30 Days/Month (Grades 9-12 only)	63
4-20:	Comparison of Alcohol Related Behaviors (Grades 9-12 only)	64
4-21:	Perceived Risk Comparison	65
5-1:	2001 YRBS Data: Sexual Intercourse (Grades 9-12 only)	67
5-2:	2001 YRBS Data: Partners During Lifetime (Grades 9-12 only)	69
5-3:	Sexuality Comparison (Grades 9-12 only)	83
6-1:	2001 YRBS Data: Seriously Considered Attempting Suicide (Grades 9-12 only)	89
6-2:	2001 YRBS Data: Made a Suicide Plan (Grades 9-12 only)	91

6-3:	2001 YRBS Data: Attempted Suicide (Grades 9-12 only)	93
6-4:	2001 YRBS Data: Thought Were Overweight: Trying To Lose Weight (Grades 9-12 only)	95
6-5:	2001 YRBS Data: Weight Control Behaviors (Grades 9-12 only)	96
6-6:	Physical and Mental Health Comparison (Grades 9-12 only)	104
7-1:	2001 YRBS Data: Carried Weapon Onto School Property (Grades 9-12 only)	108
7-2:	2001 YRBS Data: Forced Sexual Intercourse (Grades 9-12 only)	113
7-3:	Safety Comparison (Grades 9-12 only)	117
10-1:	Perception of School and Community	151



Executive Summary Teen Assessment Project Newfound Area School District - 2003

Background Information

Concerns about local youth issues prompted the community of Bristol and surrounding communities 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 2002 the Newfound Area School District decided to use the TAP survey created by the Pemi-Baker School District. The Pemi-Baker TAP committee had selected 160-items from the TAP question bank. This survey was administered in the Pemi-Baker School District in 1999 and in 2002. The survey asked teens about their perceptions of self, family, school, and community; their worries, concerns, and future aspirations; and their activities, both positive and problematic. In March 2003 the survey was administered at the Newfound Memorial Middle School and the Newfound Regional High School. A total of 579 surveys were used for data analysis. This represents approximately 83% of the total student population in these two schools. Following are selected TAP survey results.

Overview

Results of the Newfound Area School District TAP survey reveal that some teens are engaging in behaviors potentially detrimental to their health. The majority of teens (59%) reported they have at least tried alcohol. However, the majority of youth have NOT used marijuana (63%), smoking tobacco (65%), uppers (81%), performance drugs (87%), downers (89%), inhalants (89%), hallucinogens (90%), cocaine (90%), steroids (95%), or narcotics (95%). 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 example, on a monthly or more often basis, youth are using alcohol (28%), binge drinking (29%), smoking tobacco (18%), using marijuana (22%), and using inhalants (3%). 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 Newfound Area 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 (53%). Other common living situations include living with a single parent (17%) and living in a step-family (21%).
- The majority of youth reported that each of their parents have a high school diploma, bachelor’s degree, or higher (fathers, 94%; mothers, 96%). Thirty-eight percent (38%) of fathers and 38% of mothers have a high school diploma and no further degrees. Nineteen percent (19%) of fathers and 20% of mothers have a bachelor’s degree or higher.

Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drug Use

- Fifty-nine percent (59%) of students surveyed have used alcohol at some time (middle school, 44 %; high school, 68%). Twenty-eight percent (28%) of all youth reported using alcohol *monthly or more often* (middle school, 16%; high school, 35%). Eleven percent (11%) of all youth reported using alcohol *weekly or more often* (middle school, 6%; high school, 13%).

- Forty-five percent (45%) 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, 50%; high school, 42%). Twenty-five percent (25%) of youth feel that binge drinking once or twice each weekend carries “no risk” or “slight risk” (middle school, 23%; high school, 26%). Nineteen percent (19%) of middle school students and 34% of high school youth reported binge drinking at least once in the past month. Forty-nine percent (49%) of twelfth grade males reported binge drinking in the last month.
- Thirty-seven percent (37%) of all youth have used marijuana at some time (middle school, 23%, high school, 45%). Twenty-two percent (22%) reported *monthly or more often* use of marijuana (middle school 11%; high school, 27%). Fourteen percent (14%) of all youth reported using marijuana *weekly or more often* (middle school, 7%; high school, 19%).
- Thirty-five percent (35%) of all youth have smoked tobacco at some time (middle school, 27%; high school, 40%). Eighteen percent (18%) reported smoking *monthly or more often* (middle school, 12%; high school, 20%). Fifteen percent (15%) reported *weekly or more often* use (middle school, 9%; high school, 18%).
- Sixty-six percent (66%) of all youth believe it is either “easy” or “very easy” to get alcohol (middle school, 49%; high school, 75%). Forty-seven percent (47%) believe it is “easy” or “very easy” to get marijuana (middle school, 27%; high school, 59%).
- Sixty percent (60%) of youth reported using inhalants carries “great risk” (middle school, 55%; high school, 62%). Twenty-one percent (21%) of youth feel using inhalants carries “no risk” or “slight risk” (middle school, 26%; high school, 18%). Eleven percent (11%) of all youth have used inhalants at some time (middle school, 17%; high school, 8%). Three percent (3%) of all youth have used inhalants *monthly or more often* (middle school, 5%; high school, 2%).

Sexuality Issues

- Overall, 38% of all youth reported they have had sexual intercourse (middle school, 24%; high school, 46%). Sixty-six percent (66%) of 12th graders have had sexual intercourse (males, 62%; females, 69%).
- Seventy percent (70%) of teens reported they were not worried at all about being pressured into having sex (males, 75%; females, 64%). Fifty-two percent (52%) of sexually active teens “always” use some form of birth control (males, 48%; females, 55%).

percent (34%) of sexually active teens reported either they or their partner “*always*” used a condom (males, 43%; females, 27%).

- A high percentage of youth reported not having had “*a good talk*” with their parents about sexuality issues. Within the past year, 52% of youth either “*never*” or “*rarely*” talked to their mothers and 69% “*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 64% who either “*never*” or “*rarely*” talked to their mothers and 80% 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 (61%); getting along with parents at home (45%); how they look (35%); how well parents get along with each other (32%); not fitting in with the other kids at school (19%); that their parents drink too much or use drugs (17%); and being pressured into having sex (8%).
- Overall, 68% of all teens reported feeling sad or depressed at some time during the past month (males, 56%; females, 79%). Twenty-three percent (23%) of youth reported having serious thoughts of suicide during the past month (males, 19%; females, 27%). Twenty-four percent (24%) of all youth had made plans at some time to kill themselves (males, 21%; females, 28%) and 17% reported that they had actually attempted suicide at some time in the past (males, 11%; females, 22%).
- For both the health classes on Sexuality/Sexual Health and Drugs/Substance Abuse the largest percentage of teens responded that the classes were “*useful and sufficient information was given*”.

Personal Safety and Violence

- The overwhelming majority of students reported they feel safe at home (88%) and at school (70%). Less than half of the ninth grade females (42%) reported feeling safe at school. Thirteen percent (13%) of youth did report they had carried a weapon onto school property in the past month (middle school, 13%; high school, 13%).
- Of the 5% who reported sexual abuse by an adult had occurred, 4% reported that this had occurred in the past (males, 1%; females, 7%) and 1% reported sexual abuse by an adult currently (males, 1%; females, 0%).

- Ten percent (10%) of teens reported being sexually abused by another teen (males, 6%; females, 14%). Twenty-one percent (21%) of youth surveyed indicated they had been physically abused by a boyfriend, girlfriend or date (males, 16%; females, 26%). Thirty-seven percent (37%) of students reported they had been put down, yelled at, or insulted by a boyfriend, girlfriend or date (males, 32%; females, 42%).

Parent-Teen Relations

- The majority of youth reported their parents were there when they needed them (about mothers, 78%; about fathers, 62%) and that parents “often” or “very often” cared about them. Eighty-seven percent (87%) indicated this about their mothers; 78% about their fathers. Fifty-nine percent (59%) of the students felt their mothers were fair “often” or “very often” when it came to enforcing the family rules; 53% felt this way about their fathers. Eighty-two percent (82%) reported their parents were interested in what they learn and how they are doing in school (males, 85%; females, 80%).
- 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.
- Parental monitoring, parental consequences, and parental values were all found to be related to teen behaviors of smoking, drinking alcohol, and sexual activity. Youth who knew their parents’ values and the consequences for the behaviors of smoking, drinking alcohol, and sexual activity were less likely to engage in these behaviors. Similarly, those teens with high parental monitoring were less likely to engage in the behaviors of smoking, drinking alcohol, and sexual activity.

Student Time Use

- Sixty-four percent (64%) 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 being with family (59%); watching TV (52%); participating in extracurricular school sports or activities (39%); staying at home with no adults present (39%); doing homework or studying (37%); working for pay (32%); and engaging in non-school activities (11%).

Perceptions of School and Community

- Fifty-seven percent (57%) of youth felt they were getting a good, high quality education (males, 53%; females, 61%; middle school, 57%; high school, 56%). Forty-seven percent (47%) indicated they enjoyed going to school (males, 47%; females, 46%; middle school, 48%; high school, 46%). Forty-one percent (41%) felt school rules were enforced fairly (males, 45%; females, 37%; middle school, 50%, high school, 37%). The majority of youth reported satisfaction with the school staff and services. Forty-eight percent (48%) reported that they felt valued in school (middle school, 50%; high school, 47%).
- Seven percent (7%) of teens surveyed “*strongly agreed*” or “*agreed*” that they would drop out of school before completing high school (males, 7%; females, 6%; middle school, 9%; high school, 6%). No information was available about those students who had already dropped out of school. Fifty-one percent (51%) of high school students planned to go to a four year college or university after high school (males, 48%; females, 55%). Ten percent (10%) of high school students indicated they will attend a 2-year college (males, 10%; females, 11%). Nine percent (9%) of students plan on attending a vocational or technical school (males, 10%; 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.