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## **Executive Summary Teen Assessment Project Newfound Area School District - 2003**

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### **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.