
TAPPING INTO TEEN CONCERNS, PERCEPTIONS AND BEHAVIORS

Pemi-Baker School District

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

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Executive Summary Teen Assessment Project 2002 Pemi-Baker School District

The Teen Assessment Project survey has been administered twice in the Pemi-Baker School District. On December 14, 1999, 9th through 12th grade students participated in the TAP survey. The identical TAP survey was administered again on November 1, 2002 to 9th through 12th grade students. The final sample of 666 surveys represents responses from approximately 79% of the student population enrolled at the high school in 2002. This Executive Summary details the results of the 2002 survey. Chapter 13 gives information about both surveys.

Background Information

In 1999 concerns about local youth issues prompted the community of Plymouth 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 1999 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 1999 was also used in 2002. Following are some of the TAP results from the 2002 survey.

Overview

Results of the Pemi-Baker School District TAP survey reveal that some teens are engaging in behaviors potentially detrimental to their health. The majority of teens (68%) reported they have at least tried alcohol. However, the majority of youth have NOT used marijuana (55%), smoking tobacco (56%), uppers (78%), performance drugs (82%), hallucinogens (87%), downers (87%), inhalants (89%), cocaine (92%), steroids (93%), or narcotics (94%). The majority of teens (63%) reported they had NOT engaged in binge drinking in the past month. Fifty-six percent (56%) 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, high school youth are using alcohol (37%), binge drinking (37%), smoking tobacco (22%), using marijuana (28%), 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 Pemi-Baker 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 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 (55%). Other common living situations include living with a single parent (18%) and living in a step-family (17%).
- The majority of youth reported that each of their parents have a high school diploma, bachelor’s degree, or higher (fathers, 95%; mothers, 96%). Thirty-three percent (33%) of fathers and 28% of mothers have a high school diploma and no further degrees. Thirty percent (30%) of fathers and 32% of mothers have a bachelor’s degree or higher.

Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drug Use

- Sixty-eight percent (68%) of students surveyed have used alcohol at some time (males, 68%; females, 67%). Thirty-seven percent (37%) of all youth reported using alcohol once a month or more often (males, 39%; females, 35%). Eighteen percent (18%) of all youth reported

using alcohol weekly or more often (males, 22%; females, 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” (males, 37%; females, 53%). Twenty-six percent (26%) of youth feel that binge drinking once or twice each weekend carries “no risk” or “slight risk” (males, 33%; females, 20%). Forty-one percent (41%) of males and 34% of females reported binge drinking at least once in the past month. Fifty-five percent (55%) of eleventh grade boys and 51% of twelfth grade boys reported binge drinking in the last month.
- Forty-five percent (45%) of all youth have used marijuana at some time (males, 52%, females, 39%). Twenty-eight percent (28%) reported monthly or more often use of marijuana (males, 34%; females, 22%) . Sixteen percent (16%) of all youth reported using marijuana weekly or more often (males, 22%; females, 11%).
- Forty-four percent (44%) of all youth have smoked tobacco at some time (males, 46%; females, 42%). Twenty-two percent (22%) reported smoking monthly or more often (males, 24%; females, 19%). Seventeen percent (17%) reported weekly or more often use (males, 18%; females, 16%).
- Sixty-seven percent (67%) of all youth believe it is either “easy” or “very easy” to get alcohol (males, 68%; females, 66%). Fifty-seven percent (57%) believe it is “easy” or “very easy” to get marijuana (males, 65%; females, 50%).
- Sixty-six percent (66%) of youth reported that using inhalants carries “great risk” (males, 65%; females, 67%). Seventeen percent (17%) of youth feel that using inhalants carries “no risk” or “slight risk” (males, 19%; females, 14%). Eleven percent (11%) of all youth have used inhalants at some time (males, 12%; females, 10%). Three percent (3%) of all youth have used inhalants monthly or more often (males, 4%; females, 2%).

Sexuality Issues

- Overall, 44% of all youth reported they have had sexual intercourse (males, 47%; females, 41%). Sixty-four percent (64%) of 12th graders have had sexual intercourse (males, 65%; females, 62%). Sixty-eight percent (68%) of teens reported they were not worried at all about being pressured into having sex (males, 76%; females, 60%). Sixty percent (60%) of sexually active teens “always” use some form of birth control (males, 53%;

females, 68%). Forty-nine percent (49%) of sexually active teens reported that either they or their partner “*always*” used a condom (males, 50%; females, 48%).

- A high percentage of youth reported not having had “*a good talk*” with their parents about sexuality issues. Within the past year, 55% of youth either “*never*” or “*rarely*” talked to their mothers and 68% “*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 65% who either “*never*” or “*rarely*” talked to their mothers and 77% 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 (64%); getting along with parents at home (44%); how they look (42%); how well parents get along with each other (28%); not fitting in with the other kids at school (27%); that their parents drink too much or use drugs (13%); and being pressured into having sex (8%).
- Overall, 71% of all teens reported feeling sad or depressed at some time during the past month (males, 59%; females, 82%). Twenty-two percent (22%) of youth reported having serious thoughts of suicide during the past month (males, 17%; females, 26%). Twenty-three percent (23%) of all youth had made plans at some time to kill themselves (males, 19%; females, 27%) and 16% reported that they had actually attempted suicide at some time in the past (males, 11%; females, 20%).
- For both the Wellness classes (Sexuality/Sexual Health and Drugs/Substance Abuse usually taken in the Freshman year) 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 (92%) and at school (83%). However, 10% of youth did report they had carried a weapon onto school property in the past month (males, 17%; females, 4%).
- Of the 7% who reported sexual abuse by an adult had occurred, 5% reported that this had occurred in the past (males, 1%; females, 8%) and 2% reported sexual abuse by an adult currently (males, 2%; females, 1%).

- Ten percent (10%) of teens reported being sexually abused by another teen (males, 5%; females, 15%). Nineteen percent (19%) of youth surveyed indicated they had been physically abused by a boyfriend, girlfriend or date (males, 14%; females, 24%). Thirty-five percent (35%) of students reported they had been put down, yelled at, or insulted by a boyfriend, girlfriend or date (males, 28%; females, 42%).

Parent-Teen Relations

- The majority of youth reported their parents were there when they needed them (about mothers, 80%; about fathers, 65%) and that parents “often” or “very often” cared about them. Eighty-nine percent (89%) indicated this about their mothers; 76% about their fathers. Sixty-two percent (62%) 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. Eighty-three percent (83%) reported their parents were interested in what they learn and how they are doing in school (males, 82%; females, 84%).
- 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

- Seventy-two percent (72%) 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 doing homework or studying (56%); being with family (55%); watching TV (49%); participating in extracurricular school sports or activities (47%); staying at home with no adults present (41%); working for pay (36%); and engaging in non-school activities (12%).

Perceptions of School and Community

- Seventy-eight percent (78%) of youth felt they were getting a good, high quality education (males, 75%; females, 81%). Fifty-three percent (53%) indicated they enjoyed going to school (males, 44%; females, 62%). Fifty-two percent (52%) felt school rules were enforced fairly (males, 49%; females, 56%). The majority of youth reported satisfaction with the school staff and services.
- Five percent (5%) of teens surveyed “*strongly agreed*” or “*agreed*” that they would drop out of school before completing high school (males, 5%; females, 5%). No information was available about those students who had already dropped out of school. Fifty-eight percent (58%) of high school students planned to go to a 4-year college or university after high school (males 48%; females 68%). Ten percent (10%) of high school students indicated they will attend a 2-year college (males, 11%; females, 9%). Nine percent (9%) of students plan on attending a vocational or technical school (males, 12%; females, 5%).

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.