
TAPPING INTO TEEN CONCERNS, PERCEPTIONS AND BEHAVIOR PEMI-BAKER SCHOOL DISTRICT

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

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Teen Assessment Project Executive Summary For the Pemi-Baker School District

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 for use with youth in the Pemi-Baker School District. 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 changes in attitudes and behaviors that build assets/protective factors in families, schools, and communities.

A local steering committee coordinated the review and administration of a 160-item survey which asked teens about their perceptions of self, family, school, and community; their future aspirations, worries, and concerns; and their activities, both positive and problematic. The survey was administered to 9th through 12th grade students in the Pemi-Baker School District in 1999. A total of 659 surveys were used for data analysis. This represents approximately 85% of the total student population in the Pemi-Baker School District. Following are selected local TAP survey results.

Family Characteristics

The TAP survey revealed the most common living situation for local youth is living with two parents (59%). Other reported living situations include living with a single parent (15%), and living with a blended family or step-family (15%).

The majority of youth reported that each of their parents have a high school diploma, Bachelor's Degree, or higher (fathers, 83%; and mothers, 90%). Twenty-six percent (26%) of fathers and 26% of mothers have at least a high school diploma. Thirty-three percent (33%) of the fathers and 39% of mothers have a Bachelor's Degree or higher. Seven percent (7%) of all fathers and 4% of all mothers were reported to have less than a high school education.

Alcohol, Tobacco, and Drug Use

The Teen Assessment Project (TAP) survey found that many local youth use alcohol, tobacco and other drugs.

- Sixty-five percent (65%) of all youth have used alcohol at some time (males, 62%; and females, 68%). Thirty-five percent (35%) of all youth reported using alcohol once a month or more often (males, 33%; females, 37%) and 13% reported using it weekly or more often (males, 13%; females, 13%).
- Thirty-nine percent (39%) of all youth (males, 38%; females, 40%) reported binge drinking ("*5 or more alcoholic drinks in a row*") at least once in the past month with 50% of all seniors reporting binge drinking in the last month.
- Forty-six percent (46%) of all youth have smoked tobacco at some time (males, 43%; and females, 49%). Twenty-one percent (21%) reported smoking monthly or more often (males, 19%; females, 22%) and 16% reported weekly or more often use (males, 15%; and females, 17%). Weekly smoking habits peak in the 11th grade for females (23%) and in the 12th grade for males (21%).
- Thirty-nine percent (39%) of all youth have used marijuana at some time (males, 37%; and females, 41%). Nineteen percent (19%) reported monthly or more often use of marijuana (males, 21%; females, 16%), and 12% reported weekly or more often use (males, 16%; and females, 8%).
- Sixty-nine percent (69%) of all youth believe it is either "*easy*" or "*very easy*" to get beer/wine/liquor. Fifty-three percent (53%) believe it is "*easy*" or "*very easy*" to get marijuana.
- Six percent (6%) of all youth have used inhalants at some time (males, 7%; and females, 6%). Two percent (2%) of all youth have used inhalants monthly or more often (males, 2%; and females, 0%). Thirteen percent (13%) of local youth feel that using inhalants carries "*no*" or "*slight risk*" (males, 15%; and females, 11%).

These emerging dependencies put youth at risk of delayed emotional and intellectual growth; developing problems with schools, friends and families; incurring ill health and reduced longevity; accidents; suicide; and unwanted pregnancies (Pedersen & Skronidal, 1996; Pfeifer, Schector, and Yoast, 1987; Small, Silverberg & Kerns, 1993).

Sexuality Issues

Overall, 37% of all youth reported they have had sexual intercourse (males, 38%; and females, 37%). Fifty-five percent (55%) of 12th graders have had sexual intercourse. Sixty-seven percent (67%) of sexually active teens always use some form of birth control (males, 69%; and females, 65%).

A high percentage of local teens do not talk with their parents about sexuality issues. Within the past year, 51% either "*never*" or "*rarely*" talked to their mothers and 67% "*never*" or "*rarely*" talked to 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 79% who "*never*" or "*rarely*" talked to their fathers about the issue.

Eight percent (8%) of local teens reported some degree of forced sexual activity by an adult (males, 4%; and females, 12%). Two percent (2%) reported current sexual abuse by an adult and 6% reported previous sexual abuse.

Emotional Health Issues

Overall, 73% of all local teens reported feeling depressed or sad at some time during the past month (females, 83%; and males, 62%). Nineteen percent (19%) of local youth reported having serious thoughts of suicide during the past month (males, 12%; and females, 25%). Twenty percent (20%) of local youth had made plans at some time to kill themselves (males, 14%; and females, 26%) and 12% reported they had actually attempted suicide at some time in the past (males, 8%; and females, 16%).

Worries of local youth, listed from greatest to least are: getting good grades at school (65%); how they look (49%); getting along with parents at home (43%); how well their parents get along with each other (27%); not fitting in with the other kids at school (25%); that their parents drink too much or use drugs (10%); and being pressured into having sex (8%).

Parent-Teen Relations

Good communication is a key part of healthy parent-teen relationships. Many local youth felt they had not had a good talk with their mothers or fathers in the past year about whether or not it is okay to have sex, birth control, AIDS and other STDs, the risks of drinking and using drugs, and personal problems. Parents were much more likely to talk with their teens about job or education plans.

Forty-three percent (43%) of all teens reported they worried either "*very much*" or "*quite a bit*" about getting along with their parents at home (males, 44% and females, 43%). A high percentage of teens felt their parents either "*often*" or "*very often*" cared about them; 91% felt this way about their mothers and 79% for their fathers. Sixty-four percent (64%) of students felt their mothers were fair "*often*" or "*very often*" when it came to enforcing the family rules; 54%

felt this about their fathers. Parental monitoring, sharing family values, and letting teens know there would be consequences were all found to be related to lower rates of regular smoking, drinking, and sexual activity by local teens.

Student Time Use

Local youth spend the most time (at the level of 5 or more hours a week) hanging out with friends (72%). The other activities that occupy 5 or more hours per week for local youth include doing homework or studying (61%), spending time with family (55%), working for pay (46%), watching TV (45%), participating in extra-curricular school sports or activities (44%), being at home alone (39%), and engaging in non-school activities (15%).

Perceptions of School and Community

Seventy-six percent (76%) of local youth felt they were getting a good, high quality education, 59% indicated they enjoyed going to school, and another 59% felt school rules were enforced fairly.

Sixty-nine percent (69%) of the youth often think about doing things so that people can have things better in the future, 65% felt it is important for them to contribute to their community and society and 84% consider it their problem if their neighbors are in trouble and need help. An additional 48% of teens would choose to give up their free time to help raise money for a neighborhood project. Eighty percent (80%) feel their community is a good place to live. Sixty-four percent (64%) of youth feel they can count on police in their community.

Ten percent (10%) of students have carried a weapon on to school property in the past month. Forty-five percent (45%) have had property stolen or damaged in the past year, while 83% have heard other students make derogatory or insulting comments about someone's religion, ethnicity or sexual orientation in the past month.

In Closing

Youth today face many challenges as they grow and develop. The Teen Assessment Project (TAP) provides information that empowers youth, parents, neighborhoods, schools, youth-serving organizations, agencies, the spiritual community, law enforcement, and community leaders to work together to develop and implement strategies addressing concerns identified. TAP can serve as a vehicle for youth, parent, school, and community education and action. In addition, it sets a baseline from which to evaluate the impact of local efforts to encourage positive youth development in families, schools and communities.