
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." In Plymouth, 12% of this age group are "idle teens" (Terry & Hall, 1996).

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 Taverne, 1987; Mensch and Kandel, 1988).

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

Perceptions of School

We asked local students to respond to the statement, "*I enjoy going to school.*" Fifty-nine percent (59%) of all local youth "*strongly agreed*" or "*agreed*" they enjoyed going to school. Overall, there is very little difference between males and females (males, 59%; and females, 61%). Figure 9-1 displays the percentage of local teens by grade and gender who report they "*enjoy going to school.*"

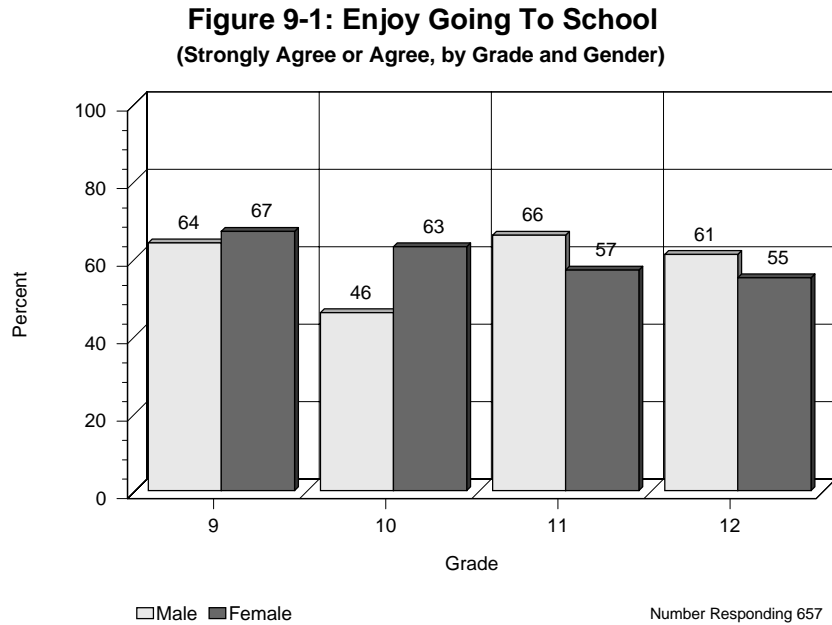
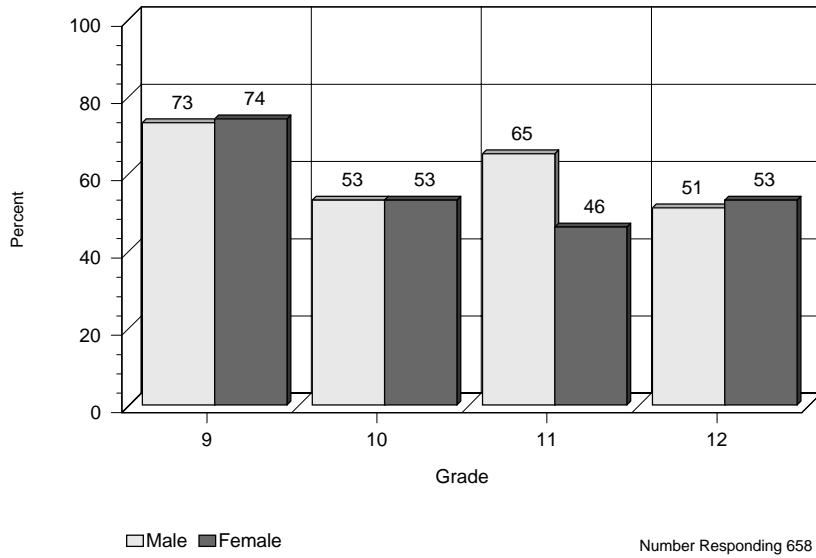


Figure 9-2 displays the percentage of students by grade and gender who "strongly agree" or "agree" with the statement, "The rules in my school are enforced fairly." Overall, 59% of students reported they felt the rules were enforced fairly.

Figure 9-2: School Rules Enforced Fairly
(Strongly Agree or Agree, by Grade and Gender)



Students were also asked whether or not they felt they were getting a "good, high quality education at their school." Seventy-six (76%) of students "agree" or "strongly agree" with that statement (males, 73%; and females, 77%). Figure 9-3 displays the information broken down by grade and gender.

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

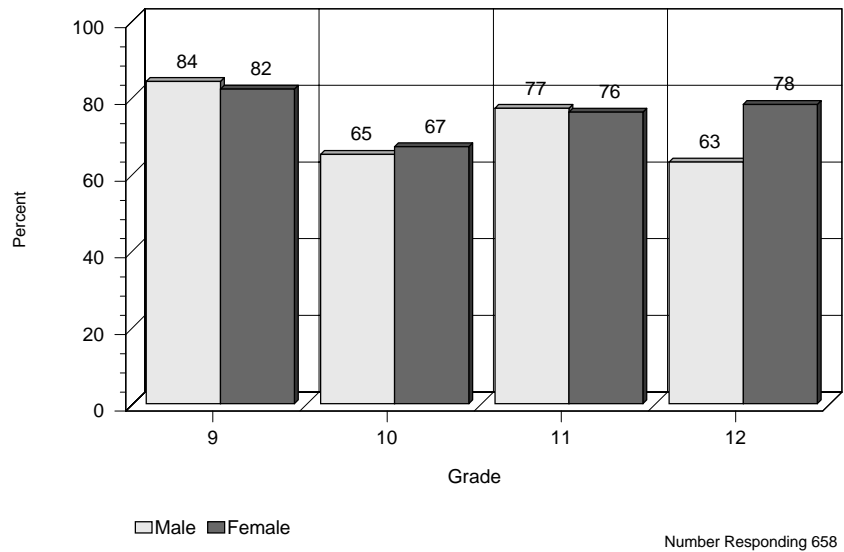


Figure 9-4 shows that overall, students are satisfied with teachers and other school staff and the services they receive. Most students feel safe at school, and more than half "strongly agree" or "agree" they feel valued in the school community. Gender differences were negligible.

Figure 9-4: Student Satisfaction with School Staff & Services (Strongly Agree or Agree)

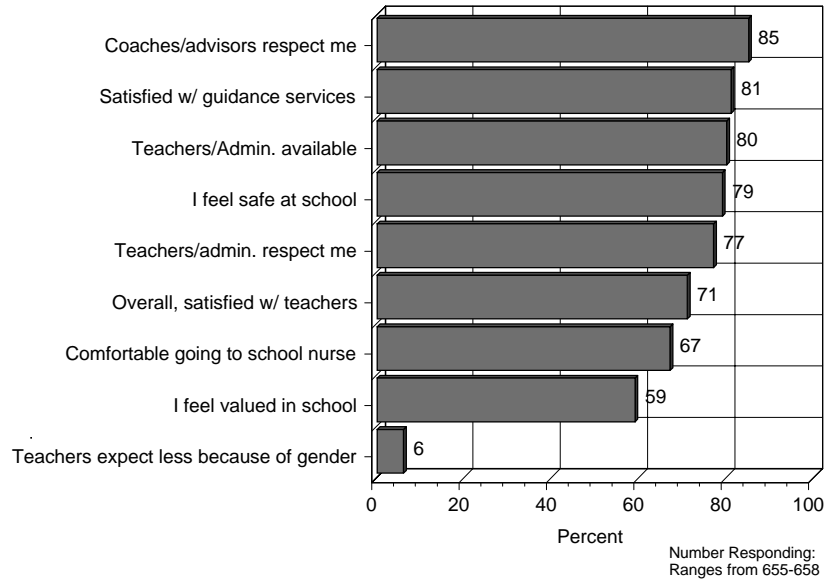
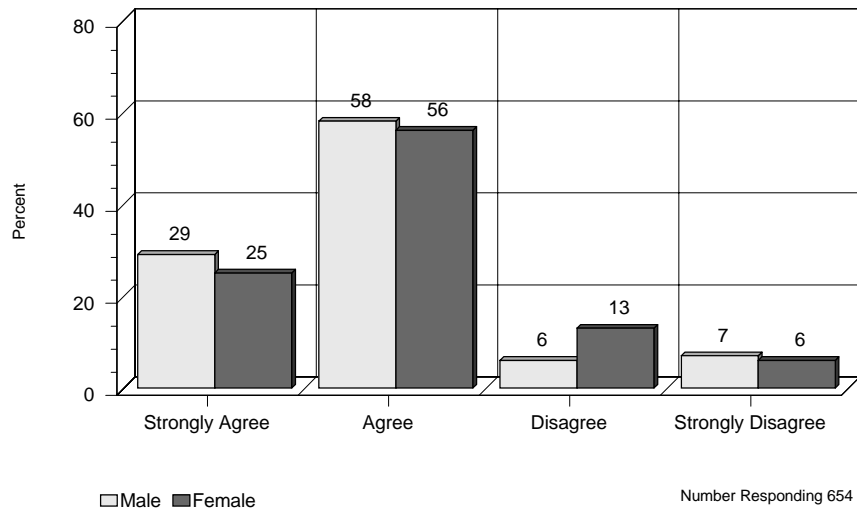


Figure 9-5 shows over three-quarters of the students "strongly agree" or "agree" they get a fair chance to participate in theater and/or music programs at school. Gender differences are slight.

Figure 9-5: Teens' Feelings About Getting a Fair Chance to Participate in Theater and/or Music Programs (By Gender)



Again, over three-quarters of the students strongly agree or agree they get a fair chance to participate in sports at school. Figure 9-6 shows that males are slightly more likely to agree than females.

Figure 9-6: Teens' Feelings About Getting a Fair Chance to Participate in Sports
(By Gender)

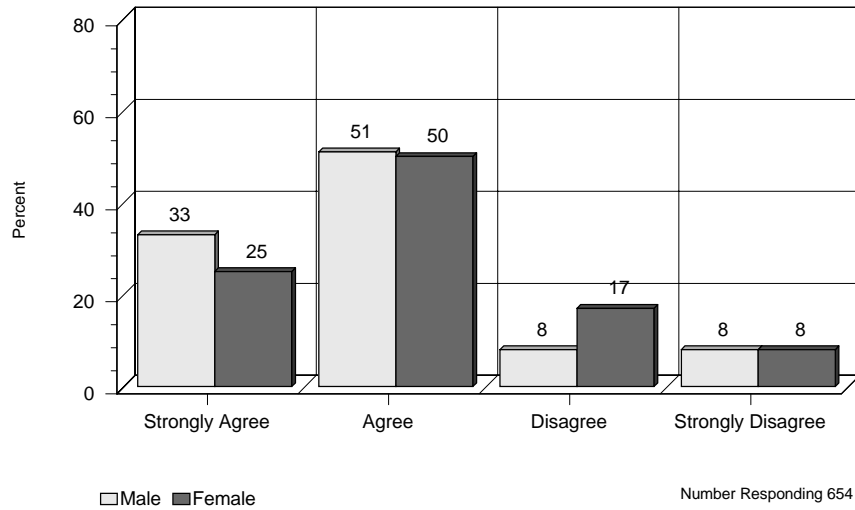
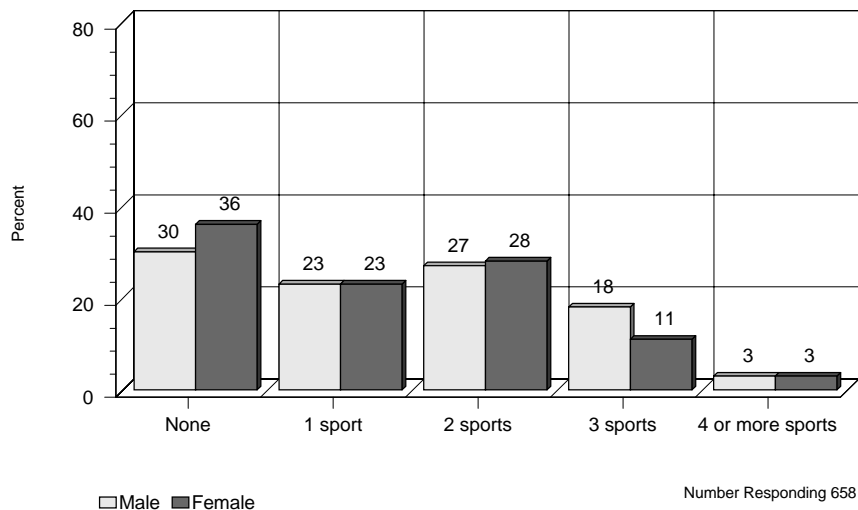


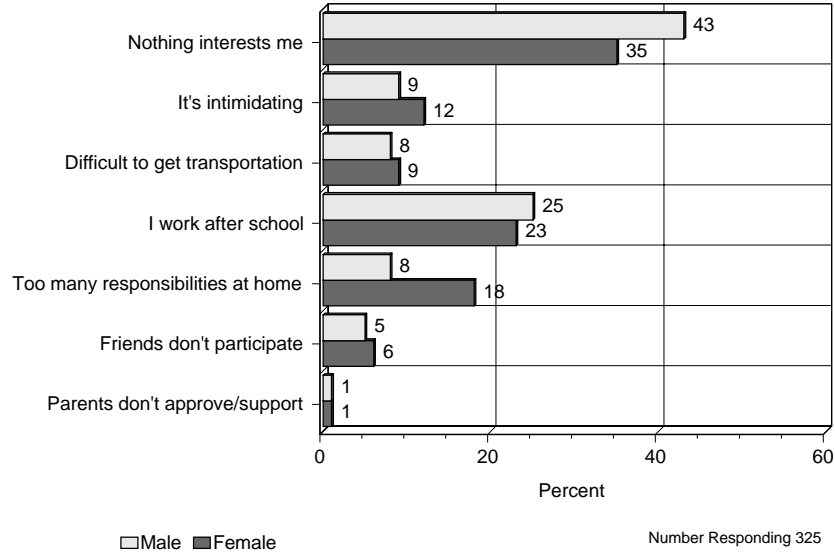
Figure 9-7 shows about two-thirds of the students plan to try out for one or more sports during the school year. Females are more likely to say they won't try out for any sports (36%), whereas males are more likely to say they will try out for three sports (18%).

Figure 9-7: Number of Competitive Sports Teens Plan to Participate in During Year
(By Gender)



The survey asked teens why they don't participate in extracurricular activities. Figure 9-8 shows the responses of those who do not participate. "Nothing interests me" was the most common response, more common from males (43%) than females (35%). Working after school was also a common reason why both males and females do not participate in extracurricular activities. Females were more likely to say they have too many responsibilities at home.

Figure 9-8: Why Teens Don't Participate in Extracurricular Activities
 (Of Those Who Don't Participate, by Gender)



Future Plans and Career Plans

When students were asked if they felt they would drop out of school before completing high school, 4% “*strongly agreed*” or “*agreed*” (males, 3%; and females, 5%). Of course, those high school students who have already dropped out are not reflected in these percentages.

Figure 9-9 shows those who strongly agreed or agreed by grade and gender.

Figure 9-9: Teens Who Feel They Will Drop Out Before They Complete High School
(Strongly Agree or Agree, by Grade and Gender)

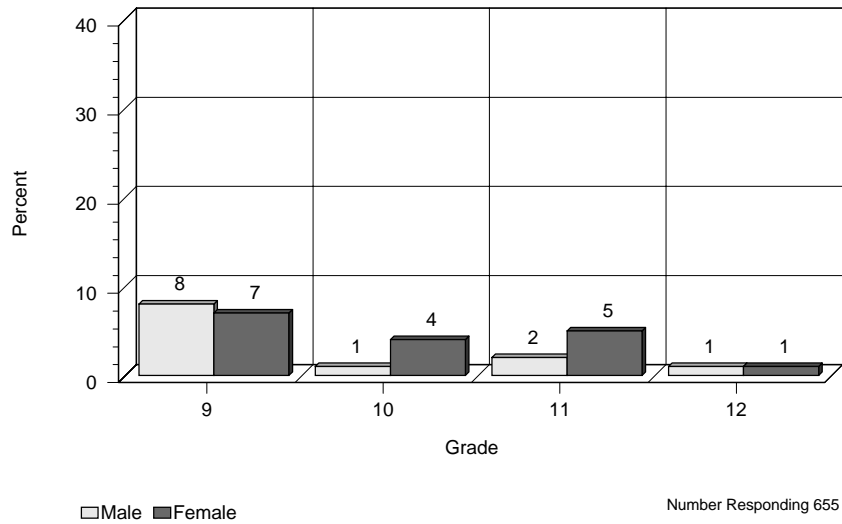
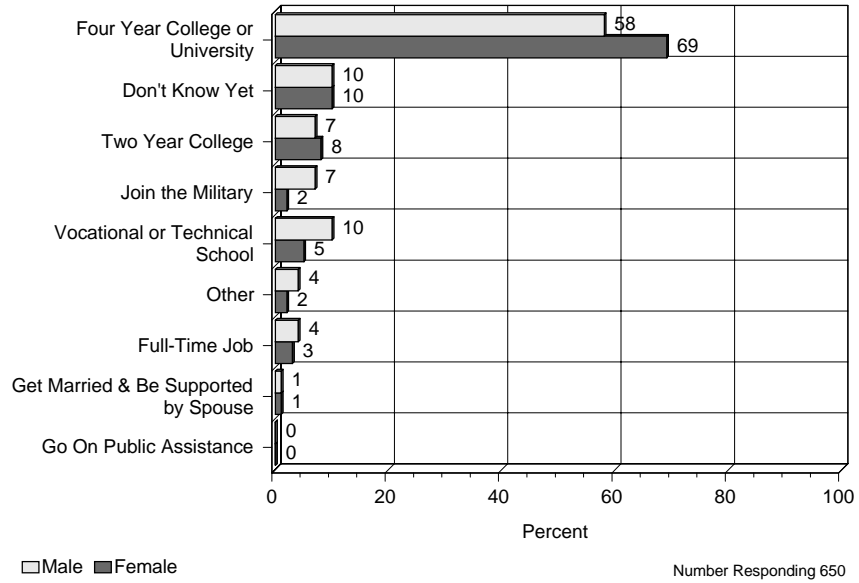


Figure 9-10 shows the future plans for high school students. "Going to a 4-year college or university" was by far the most common response by both males and females. Females, however, were more likely to say they plan to attend a 4-year college (69%) than males (58%). Males were more likely to say they plan to join the military or go to a vocational or technical school.

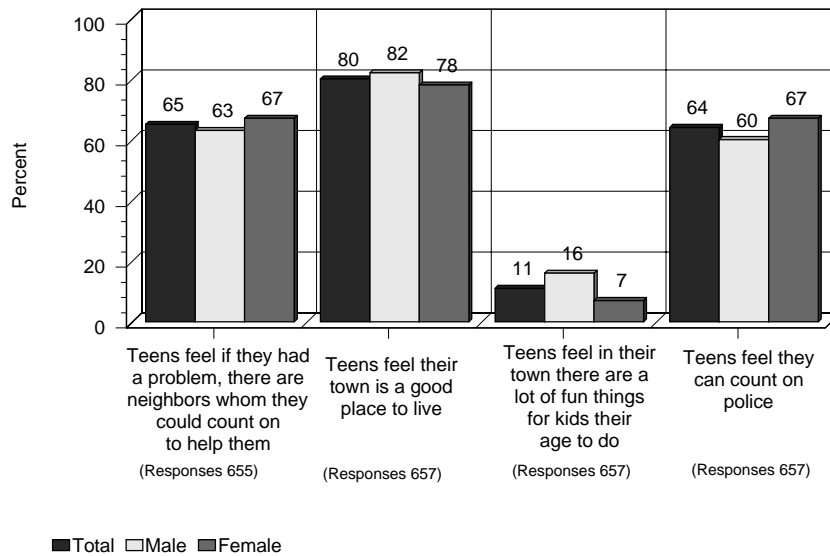
Figure 9-10: Future Plans After High School
(By Gender)



Perceptions of Community

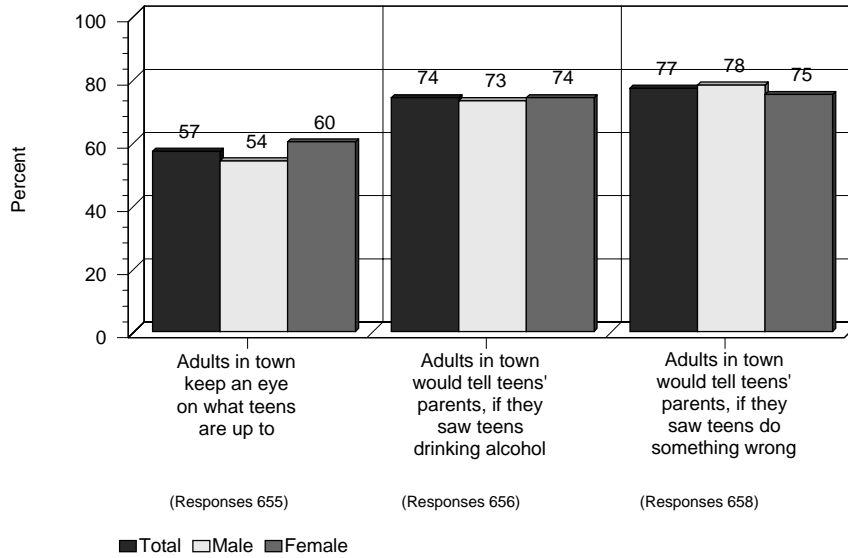
Neighborhood Support. Students told us they felt their community cared about them, and this is seen in Figure 9-11. They felt there were adults other than their parents who they could turn to. Sixty-five percent (65%) reported there are neighbors they can count on if they are in trouble and need help. Although 80% felt their town is a good place to live, only 11% thought there are a lot of fun things for kids their age to do. Over half (64%) of local teens felt they can count on police.

Figure 9-11: Neighborhood Support
(Strongly Agree or Agree, by Gender)



Neighborhood Monitoring As shown in Figure 9-12, over half of students surveyed (57%) "*strongly agreed or agreed*" the adults in their community kept an eye on what teens were up to (males, 54; and females, 60%). Seventy-four percent (74%) said that adults in town would tell their parents if they saw teens drinking alcohol (males, 73%; and females, 74%) and 77% felt that if they were to do something wrong, adults in town would tell their parents (males 78%; and females, 75%).

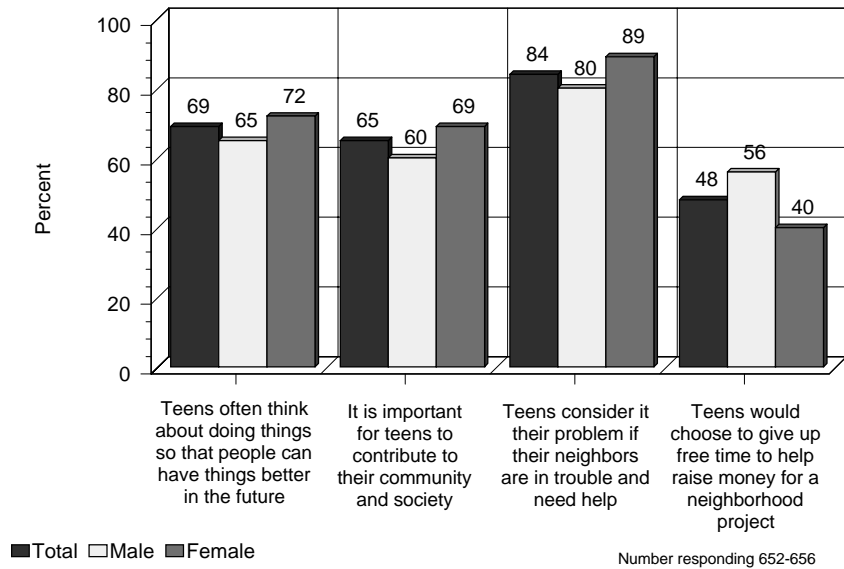
Figure 9-12: Neighborhood Monitoring
(Strongly Agree or Agree, by Gender)



Social Responsibility

Figure 9-13 shows many teens have a well-developed sense of social responsibility toward their community. About two-thirds (69%) reported they often think about doing things so that people can have things better in the future (males, 65%; and females, 72%). Sixty-five percent (65%) said they feel it is important for teens to contribute to their community and society (males, 60%; and females, 69%). More than four out of five students (84%) said they consider it their problem if their neighbors are in trouble and need help (males, 80%; and females, 89%). Forty-eight percent (48%) would give up their own free time in order to help raise money for a neighborhood project (males, 56%; and females, 40%).

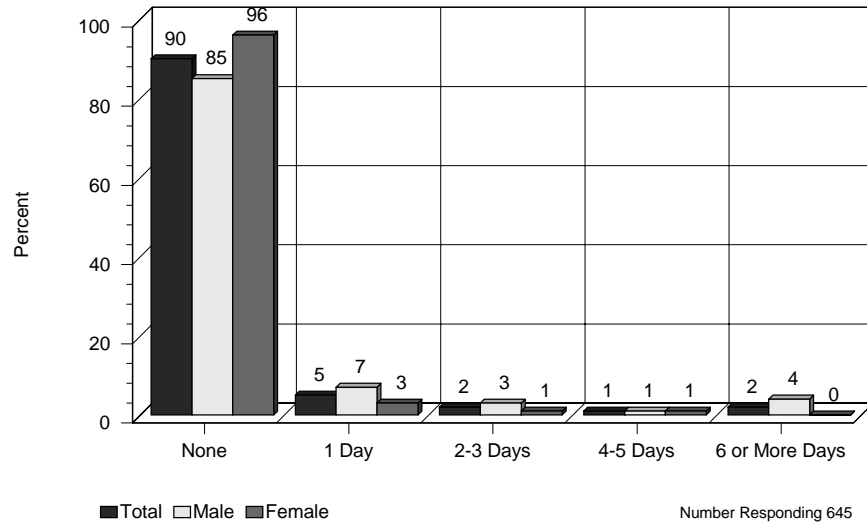
Figure 9-13: Social Responsibility
(Strongly Agree or Agree, by Gender)



Abuse and Violence in the School

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?" Figure 9-14 shows the days teens carried weapons on to school property by gender. While 15% of the males carried a weapon on to school property at some time in the past month, only 4% of the females did so.

Figure 9-14: Days Teens Carried Weapons on to School Property
(In the Past Month, by Gender)



Nationally, 8.5% (N.H., 7.4%) of youth in grades 9-12 reported they carried a weapon on to school property in the month preceding the survey (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1998). New Hampshire ranks 30th out of 33 states surveyed by the CDC.

Figure 9-15 shows almost half of the teens surveyed have had property stolen or damaged while in school. Males were more likely to have this happen to them than females (males, 48%; and females, 40%).

Figure 9-15: Number of Times Teens Have Had Property Stolen or Damaged While in School
(In the Past Year, by Gender)

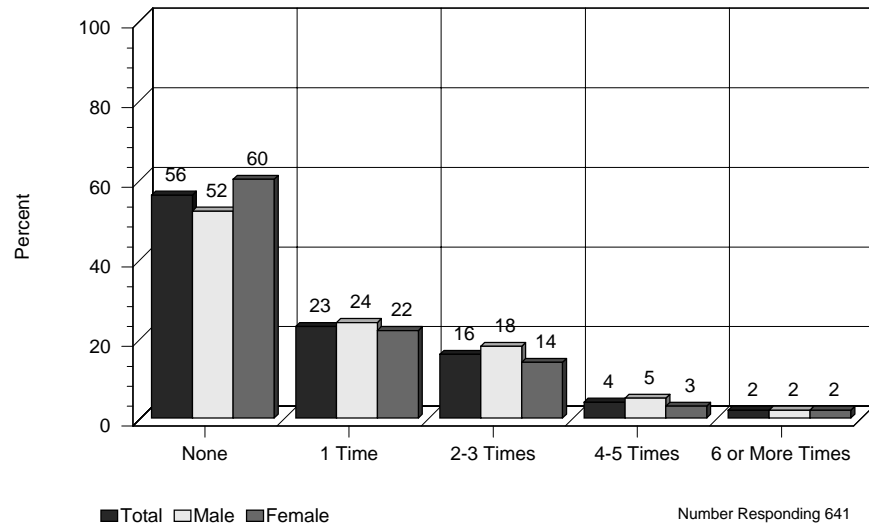


Figure 9-16 shows most teens have heard derogatory or insulting comments about other students' religion, ethnicity, or sexual orientation while in school. More males (36%) than females (28%) have heard comments “often” or “very often.”

Figure 9-16: Frequency of Hearing Insulting Comments About Someone's Religion, Ethnicity, or Sexual Orientation (In The Past Month, by Gender)

