
CHAPTER 2

Administration of the Teen Assessment Project

This report is the result of a joint effort between the University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension, the Exeter Cooperative School District and a team of locally concerned citizens. The Exeter Cooperative School District encompasses the six towns of Brentwood, East Kingston, Exeter, Kensington, Newfields and Stratham. After the project was approved, the Teen Assessment Project team was formed which included youth, parents, school staff, and community representatives from businesses, the hospital, youth center, clergy, recreation department, police, social services and others who work with and care about youth.

The Teen Assessment Project involves four phases:

- survey development and implementation
- compiling and sharing the research data from the youth surveys
- parent and community educational efforts and
- community and school responses or actions resulting from the project.

Dr. Stephen Small of the University of Wisconsin-Madison/Extension, originator of the TAP project, developed a question bank of 475 possible questions to assess teen attitudes and worries, sexuality, alcohol and other drug abuse, health and safety, interactions with peers, family relationships and values, use of time, perceptions of school and community and future aspirations. The Exeter TAP committee used this question bank to select the 160 items to be included in the Cooperative School District Youth Survey. Some questions on school safety were locally developed to reflect community concerns. The final survey was reviewed by the TAP project director and approved for use by the UNH Institutional Review Board.

The community was informed about the project through articles written in the school and community newspapers. A letter which included a passive consent notification was sent to all parents of 7th to 12th graders explaining the project. Parents had the option to contact the school if they did not want their child to take the survey. Prior to the youth survey date, parents were able to review the survey at several locations in each school. A TAP display and sample surveys were also available at the fall open houses at both schools. A community meeting was held to provide an overview on the TAP project and give parents another

opportunity to review the survey.

In order to ensure accurate and honest responses, the survey process is designed to protect the anonymity of youth. Names were not placed on survey booklets or answer forms. Each student placed their own computer answer form into a special envelope for each home room. In the reports, youth responses are aggregated to protect identification of any individual response.

The survey was administered through extended home room periods on October 19, 1999 at Exeter High School and October 20, 1999 at the Cooperative Middle School (7th and 8th graders only). Some students were absent or tardy and did not participate in the surveys (191 at the high school and 50 at the middle school). The parents of 29 students (12 - high school; 17 - middle school) did not allow them to participate in the survey and five more students (4 - high school; 1 - middle school) refused to take the survey. Answer sheets were examined for obvious patterns, scribbles, etc and unusable answer forms were removed. A total of 2,045 surveys (1254 - high school; 791 - middle school) were useable and analyzed to produce this research report and the series of six parent newsletters entitled, "Whose Kids?...Our Kids!" This represents 89% of the student population in the 7th to 12th grades. Newsletter topics include: Parent-Teen Communication, Teenager's Use of Alcohol and Drugs, Teen Sexuality, Depression and Suicide, Parent-Teen Relationships and Working Together: Youth, Families, Schools and Communities.

It is the hope of the TAP committee that the data report will be a valuable resource:

- to parents as they strive to support the positive development of youth;
- to schools and youth serving organizations as they target curriculum and programs to meet the expressed needs of youth;
- to community members and organizations as they become more aware and supportive of youth voices;
- and to all who share in the vision of youth and adults working together to create healthier families, schools, organizations and communities.

The report speaks for youth collectively to give us a picture of the status of teens from Brentwood, East Kingston, Exeter, Kensington, Newfields and Stratham in 1999. It is our hope that it will be useful in educational and community planning, stimulate program and policy review and modifications, help secure funding and resources, and lead to changes in attitudes and behaviors that strengthen assets/protective factors in youth, families, schools and communities.