

Here's a peek at survey results: **Survey** from page A1

Following are some of the key findings from the Co-Operation Health survey of Farmington school district students in grades five-nine. The survey, conducted in spring 1998, was a joint effort between Farmington Public Schools and Botford Health Care Continuum:

Alcohol

- 59 percent of ninth-graders reported having had a first drink before age 15, well above the state average of 25 percent, according to the Michigan Youth Risk Behavior Survey.
- 40 percent of students in grades 6-8 had their first drinks before age 15.
- In the month prior to when the survey was taken, 16 percent of ninth-graders said they had one-five drinks, less than the 44 percent state average.

- 11 percent of students in ninth grade reported having more than five drinks in the month prior to the survey, less than the state average of 26 percent.

Marijuana

- 28 percent of students in grades five-nine reported using marijuana at least once - including 2 percent of fifth-graders, 7 percent of students in grades six-eight and 19 percent of ninth-graders. The state average, for kids ages 9-12, is 48 percent.
- 20 percent of ninth-graders, 18 percent of those in grades six-eight and 26 percent of fifth-graders do not perceive any risk in the use of marijuana.

Tobacco

- 21 percent of ninth-graders report being smokers, with 19 percent reporting

either not knowing or perceiving risk associated with smoking as a teenager.

- 10 percent of students in grades six-eight and 5 percent of fifth-graders report being smokers, with 21 percent either not knowing or perceiving risk associated with smoking as a teenager.

Communication

- There is a significant communication gap between kids and parents about the subjects of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs. About 85 percent of parents thought they delivered a message about the dangers of substances, and thought their kids heard them. But among students, 96 percent of those in grades five-nine reported never having had a serious talk with their parents about the subject.

NOTE: Farmington schools officials did not release specific figures about how many students participated in the survey. But they estimated there were between 700-850 students per grade, and that 90-95 percent answered the survey. An estimated 35 percent of parents of students in grades five-nine answered and returned the survey, which was deemed an acceptable level by Pamela O'Malley, Dunckel Middle School principal and school-community relations consultant for the district.

approach teens who might be smoking or drinking in a "respectful" way, to help them possibly rethink their actions, is one of the key components to restoring effective communication.

"Not enough of us are speaking out," said Etracene Michaelson, the district's director of Safe & Drug-Free Schools. "Technically, it's illegal to smoke under age 18. We as a society need to start responding to at-risk things that threaten health and safety of children. But we must approach them with respect and let them know we care about them. (And) not be judgmental."

Michaelson said the survey didn't specifically ask students what prompted them to dabble in substances. She did say some got involved because they apparently think "it feels good," they don't want to be outcasts among their peers; and they don't think there's a health risk.

"If you sit down with 50 kids, they'll tell you 50 different variables... We'd rather work with kids (about reason) rather than guess why."

2. to increase education and awareness of youth issues;

3. to coordinate intervention and referral services;

4. and to "get more kids involved in working along-side of us to plan activities for and by kids," Michaelson said.

All of those goals - and the survey - emerged following the successful first Call to Action coalition-building summit, in January 1998.

"We need to find out the teachable moment for people," Gorchow said. "... We also felt this effort (the survey) would support a community dialogue... We wanted to jump-start that dialogue with some objective information."

Although the survey showed that Farmington district students fall below state averages in terms of early use of alcohol, tobacco and marijuana, it isn't good enough, said several members of the Co-Operation Health partnership, formed in 1998 to identify ways to "improve the health status of our children."

other community," said Michaelson, about what the results mean. "But what (the findings) says to me is, we're not talking enough to kids about the issues."

Sending messages earlier to youngsters, and having a few years to survey them before graduation, was one reason younger kids were targeted in the survey.

"I think this follows a trend of pushing this information down," Gorchow said. "The most-vulnerable group is often considered middle school students. (That's) when children are making that all-important, difficult transition from childhood to adolescence, making choices about themselves and their bodies."


About 90-95 percent of students in grades five-nine, each with between 700-850 students, answered the survey, O'Malley said. An estimated 35 percent of parents of students in those grades answered and returned the surveys.

According to the survey, a total of 96 percent of students in grades 6-9 responded that they never had a serious talk with their parents about substances. On the other hand, about 85 percent of parents answered that they thought they did have such a discussion.

The survey focused on attitudes and behaviors about: alcohol and drug use; other health issues (bike helmets, use of suntan lotion to prevent skin cancer, for example); views of existing school prevention programs.

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More than about numbers

The survey isn't viewed as a "numbers game" measuring stick of how many students are using various substances or have other health and safety concerns. It's viewed as a starting point to help work toward achieving four community-wide goals:

- To define and promote zero tolerance issues;

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Zero tolerance

The message of the findings shouldn't be that district numbers are lower than state numbers, said Pamela O'Malley, O.E. Dunckel Middle School principal and school-community relations consultant for the district. "That's not our message... (It's that) as long as we have children who put themselves at risk, it's not an acceptable place to be."

"We're no different than any

Residents from page A1

next to the retention pond," said Peggy Lukies, North Power Road Association secretary.

Irene Kernicky is concerned about water levels once construction starts. Existing residents have wells, some of which are only 66 feet deep.

She also asked if construction vehicles would use a temporary road leading to Oakland Community College. Those details will be forthcoming, City Manager Steve Brock said. Hills Mayor Aldo Vagnozzi asked that city staff meet with homeowners before construction starts.

Nonetheless, Councilman Jerry Ellis suggested the soft-spoken Scottish native, Kernicky, deserves an honorary law degree or engineering degree for raising questions about things that have gotten by officials.

Vagnozzi commended the homeowner's group. "You've kept us on our toes," he said.

Some tension may still exist, judging by one exchange between a resident and council.

Another resident brought a rope to illustrate his concerns about the potential for a 10-foot high subdivision sign. City ordinance prohibits such signs from being any higher than 3 1/2 feet.

"I'm so glad that's why you brought the rope," Vagnozzi said. "I thought you wanted to hang a couple of us with it."

Once the sign issue was clarified, Ellis reminded the resident he would need less rope.

"That means you won't have as far to drop," the man said.

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