

# Parents Are the Foundation

## Teens and School

January 2007

One of the best indicators of teens' school performance is whether they feel connected to their school. Feeling connected means that students have a sense that they belong and feel close to people, including teachers and other adults.

In the 2005 Search Survey of Student Resources and Assets, 70% of Iowa County teens agree or strongly agree that they care about their school. Seventy-eight percent (78%) of females report caring about their school and 64% of males do.

### Caring School Climate

Just as we want teens to feel connected to their school, we also want them to know that the school cares about them. This is another important factor in a teen's sense of belonging and connectedness. To assess student perceptions of the presence of a caring school climate in our Iowa County schools, 7<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> graders who participated in the 2005 Search Survey of Student Resources and Assets were asked questions about receiving encouragement at school and about other students and teachers caring about them.

**Chart A** illustrates that almost half of Iowa County teens report they agree or strongly agree "I get a lot of encouragement at school." Forty-six percent of males feel this encouragement and 51% of females. It should also be noted that over 35% of males and females are not sure if they get a lot of encouragement at school.

I get a lot of encouragement at my school

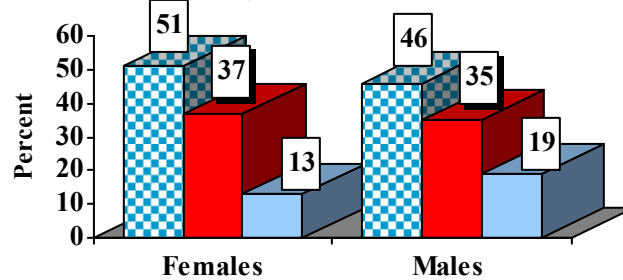


Chart A

Agree Not Sure Disagree

### Parents Matter!

Research shows teens do better in school and have more positive attitudes about school when their parents are involved in school life. Many parents become less involved with school activities as their children move from elementary to middle and on to high school. Yet teenagers clearly benefit when their parents show interest. One of the most important types of parent involvement is communication with your teen's teachers and other school officials. Just knowing teachers' names and subject areas is an important first step.

When teens in the survey were asked if their parents go to meetings or events at school, 51% of the teens reported their parents often or very often attend. However, only 46% of 12<sup>th</sup> graders report their parents often attend after school functions. Overall, only 30% of Iowa County 7<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> graders in the Search survey demonstrate the asset: Parent Involvement in Schooling. Other ways that parents can demonstrate their interest and involvement in their teen's school include helping with school work, talking to their teens about how they are doing in school and asking about homework.

### Expect Success

When parents set high expectations for their children's school performance, teens are more likely to meet those expectations. And when teens work toward their "personal bests" in school, they are less likely to become depressed or involved in harmful, violent, or drug-related behaviors (remember, though, "personal best" does not mean perfect.)

In the Iowa County survey, 78% of the teens report their parents "push me to be the best I can be." Teens whose parents expect them to make school a priority are much more likely to do well in school.

### Assets and School Success

Parenting that keeps youth involved in their school and community and helps youth see themselves in the future contributes to the development of 40 developmental assets, the building blocks or factors that promote positive outcomes and that help protect a teen from engaging in risky behaviors.

The 2005 Search Survey of Student Resources and Assets supports this research. Fifty-one percent (51%) of teens reporting 31-40 assets receive mostly A's in school and only 8% of teens reporting 0-10 assets receive mostly A's. Overall, 25% of Iowa County teens in the survey reported they receive mostly A's on their report cards.

Another question on the survey asked teens how many days of school they had missed in the last four weeks because they skipped or ditched school. Eighty nine percent (89%) of the teens reported they had skipped no days. Of the 11% who did report skipping school, 25% of these teens have 0-10 assets and 4% have 31-40 assets.

Chart B illustrates the relationship between number of assets and school success.

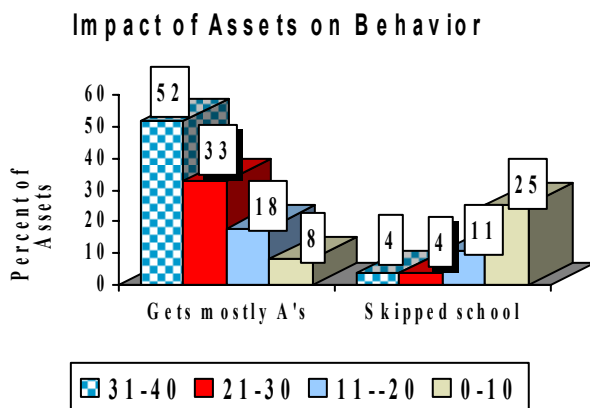


Chart B

## "DO'S" TO HELP YOUR TEEN IN SCHOOL

- ✓ Set high expectations for school success. Help your teen set reasonable goals and work toward them. Tell teens that you believe in their abilities and that is why you expect success.
- ✓ Recognize your teen's academic accomplishments. Don't assume that because your teen is maturing, they don't want or need attention from you. Sometimes, teens are pressured not to excel by peers, or to "just get by." You can offset negative expectations with positive recognition.
- ✓ Help your teen be alert by getting enough sleep, eating well and coping with difficulties.
- ✓ Know how and where your kids spend free time (especially after school). Encourage your teen to be involved in productive activities when not in school, rather than "hanging out" for large amounts of time.
- ✓ Keep a calendar that lists school events, projects and activities as well as dates of family events. This communicates to your teen that school is a family priority and helps you schedule future activities.
- ✓ Monitor your teen's school attendance.

Iowa County parents can make a difference in the success their teen experiences in school. Communicating with the school, expecting success from a teen, involving both parents, and building and supporting assets can be important building blocks to a teen's school success.

**Parents are the Foundation!**

"Parenting Teens" is a monthly, school-year newsletter containing information from the 2005 Survey of Student Resources and Assets in Iowa County Schools by America's Promise and the Search Institute and the University of Wisconsin-Extension Iowa County. This series is adapted from the UW-Extension Teen Assessment Project "Whose Kids?...Our Kids!" newsletter series. This issue was written by Deb Ivey and edited by Sarah Weier and Ruth Schriefer. Thanks are extended to the 1,264 7<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> graders in Highland, Mineral Point, Pecatonica and River Valley who participated in the survey. For more information, contact us at UW-Extension Iowa County, 608-935-0391 or on the web at <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/cty/iowa/>