Research Paper

School Codes - A Parenting Guidepost

by

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ABSTRACT

The Teen Assessment Project (TAP) has provided Wisconsin communities with localized data on issues affecting their teens for nearly a decade. Research from the 1997 Grant County TAP survey has found that a teen’s perception of their parent’s potential response to a school code violation is related to teen alcohol use, tobacco use and sexual intercourse. The purpose of this paper is to examine this relationship and discuss implication of the research to youth development programming.
SITUATION:

Teen alcohol use, tobacco use and sexual activity continue to be an issue of concern for parents, teachers and youth serving individuals and agencies. A 1997 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBSS\textsuperscript{1}) conducted by the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that 70% of high school students had tried smoking and 37% of high school students had smoked in the past month. That 1997 survey of 16,262 students in 151 high schools across the country found that 33% of students reported binge drinking in the past month and 80% of the students reported using alcohol at some point in their lifetime. The same study found that 48% of students had had sexual intercourse.

The Teen Assessment Project (TAP) has served as a valuable tool for providing localized research to Grant County communities on teen perceptions, concerns, behaviors and attitudes since 1989. In 1997, the third Grant County TAP survey, containing 160 items, was administered to 2837 7\textsuperscript{th} - 12\textsuperscript{th} grade students in seven Grant County Schools. As with the 1989 and 1993 Grant County TAP surveys, local teams of school personnel, community members and UW-Extension County Faculty worked with representatives of the Department of Child and Family Studies at the University of Wisconsin - Madison to develop a survey that provided the participating communities with relevant and meaningful localized data.

In addition to providing communities with valuable data on their youth, TAP has provided Grant County parents and parents in other counties with information to help them make wise parenting choices. Perhaps the strongest data is the relationship between parent monitoring and behavior and between teens’ perceptions of parental values (regarding teen sexual intercourse and alcohol use and tobacco use) and behavior (see appendix A). The 1997 Grant County TAP Survey found that a teen’s perception of their parents’ potential response to a school code violation provides another guidepost for parents trying to help their teen make healthy decisions.

In an effort to curb alcohol and other drug use among their students, schools have been developing and modifying their athletic, extra-curricular or co-curricular codes. The premise behind this effort is tied to the belief that students who participate in sports and extra-curricular activities are seen as role models\textsuperscript{*} by other students. As role models, these students’ behavior influences the behavior of other students. If these role models see the risks of using alcohol and other drugs is too high (ie, suspension from participation in athletic and extra-curricular events), these role models will not participate in these activities, alcohol and other drug use among students will consequently diminish.

\textit{Although the term role models is not used in Grant County school codes, the codes do talk about students having the “responsibility of developing leadership within our school as well as representing the school itself”\textsuperscript{2}, “observe and exemplify good citizenship”, “displaying high standards of social behavior”\textsuperscript{3} and the need to conduct themselves “at all time and in all places in a manner that will bring credit to themselves, their school and the community”\textsuperscript{4}. One of the keys to making extra-curricular/athletic/co-curricular codes work is the involvement of parents. Most schools require parents attend an orientation meeting where conditions of these codes are
explained in detail. Normally, students sign a contract agreeing to live up to the codes and parents sign the contract agreeing to do their part to see that their son or daughter live up to the conduct outlined in the agreement. School officials suspected that for parents, this effort to help their students “live up to their agreement” fell short of reporting violations of the code to school officials. Using the Teen Assessment Project (TAP) survey, Grant County school districts were able to look into students’ perceptions as to the likelihood of parental reporting of school code violations. Further analysis of the data was able to compare this perceived parental response with the teen’s patterns of alcohol use, tobacco use and sexual behavior.

OBJECTIVES

Objectives for the overall TAP survey are to provide communities with localized data on the concerns, attitudes, behaviors and perceptions of their youth. Specifically, the question and analysis related to school codes had the following objectives:

1. Determine the extent to which students think their parents would report them to school officials if the student’s parent(s) became aware of a school code violation committed by the student.

2. Determine the extent to which student’s perceptions of their parents response to a school code violation on their part relates to other student behaviors.

METHODS

SAMPLE

The data comes from the 1997 Grant County Teen Assessment Project Survey administered in the fall of 1999. The 2837 respondents were 7th to 12th grade students from seven of Grant County’s eleven school districts. The sample is 96% white, .7% Native American, .6% Hispanic, .5% Asian, .4% Black/African American, and .2% Hmong. The remaining 1.6% of students listed their race as other. The sample was divided rather evenly by gender, 49% male and 51% female. Seventy-one percent (71%) of the students reported that they lived with both parents, while 18% reported living either with their mother only, or with their mother and stepfather. The other 11% listed a variety of living arrangements including shared custody (2.7%), father only (2.3%), father and step mother (1.7%), parent and non-relative (1.6%), and other (1.6%).

MEASURES

Respondents were administered a 160-item survey that was created as part of a collaborative community based project whose function is to bring together local interest and University of Wisconsin-Extension resources. The survey development process involves providing opportunities for participating school districts to provide input into the make up of questions in the survey.
Between the fall of 1996 and the spring of 1997, seven meetings were held with school personnel, community members and the Grant County UW-Extension Family Living and 4-H Youth Agents. The purpose of the meetings, which were facilitated jointly by the agents, was to explore possible topic areas of potential research based on perceived teen issues and to develop questions that would yield usable data on these topics. Between meetings, the agents communicated with faculty and staff at the University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Child and Family Studies to refine potential questions. Through this process the issue of school codes and the need to discover to what extent parents actually supported them in local school districts was raised. The actual question developed was printed in the student’s TAP survey booklet as follows:

If you violated a school code (behavior, academic, athletic or activity) and your parents found out, what would they most likely do?

0 = They would not report the violation to school officials nor assign any consequences for my behavior
1 = They would not report the violation to school officials but would assign consequences privately
2 = They would report the violation to school officials and would support the consequences assigned by the school
3 = They would report the violation to school officials and would also assign consequences privately

In September of 1997, 7th - 12th grade students in the districts of Cassville, Iowa-Grant Lancaster, Platteville, Potosi, River Ridge and Southwestern took the TAP survey. Students recorded their responses to the 160 questions on an opscan sheet. All statistical analyses were performed by the School of Child and Family Studies at the University of Wisconsin - Madison. Responses to the question were scanned into a data base. Cross-tabs were performed to compare the students responses to the school code question with whether or not the student had sexual intercourse and the extent to which the student had engaged in alcohol use and cigarette smoking.
ANALYSIS

Frequency analysis on all questions were performed. Results were grouped by grade and gender. Responses to the question on school codes were cross-tabbed with four questions regarding student behaviors related to alcohol use, binge drinking, smoking and sexual intercourse.

RESULTS/EVIDENCE

The survey revealed that 57% of students believed that their parents would not report them to school officials if the student violated a school code and their parents found out. CHART - I on the following page shows 17% of all students felt that, if they violated a school code and their parents found out, their parents would not report them to school officials or assign any consequences for their behavior; 40% believed that their parents would not report them, but would assign consequences privately; 17% said their parents would report them to school officials and support the consequences assigned by the school; and 25% reported that their parents would report them to school officials and assign consequences privately.

Males (20%) were more likely than females (15%) to report that their parents would not report them to the school nor assign additional consequences. Twenty-six percent (26%) of females and 24% of males felt their parents would report them and assign consequences privately for violations. Thirty-nine percent (39%) of males and 42% of females said their parents would not report them to the school but would assign consequences privately. There were no gender differences to the response, my parents would report to school officials and support the consequences assigned by the school, 17% of males and females chose this response.

Responses by grade and gender can be found in appendix B. In general, females and students in lower grades were more likely to expect greater consequences for violating school codes.
CHART - I

Student response to the question “If you violated a school code (behavior, academic, athletic, or activity) and your parents found out, what would they most likely do?”:

Actual response categories:

- 0 = They would not report the violation to school officials nor assign any consequences for my behavior
- 1 = They would not report the violation to school officials but would assign consequences privately
- 2 = They would report the violation to school officials and would support the consequences assigned by the school
- 3 = They would report the violation to school officials and would also assign consequences privately

SCHOOL CODES AND ALCOHOL USE

Fifty-nine percent (59%) of Grant County teens report using alcohol, and 29% of all teens report using alcohol once a month or more. Specifically, the survey asked the students to indicate “how often” they used a variety of substances with beer/wine/hard liquor being one of the categories in question. Students were asked to choose among the following responses:

- 0 = Do not use and never have
- 1 = I have used it but don’t anymore
- 2 = A couple of times a year
- 3 = 1 to 3 times a month
- 4 = once or twice a week
- 5 = 3 to 6 days per week
- 6 = every day
When monthly alcohol use was compared with how students felt their parents would respond to a school code violation (CHART - II), 43% of the teens who said their parents would not report them to school officials or assign private consequences for a school code violation reported drinking once a month or more; 33% of those students who said their parent would not report them for a school code violation but would assign private consequences reported drinking once a month or more; 19% of the students who said their parents would report them to school officials and support the consequences assigned by the school reported drinking once a month or more; and 11% of the teens whose parents would report a school code violation and assign additional consequences privately reported drinking once a month or more.

**CHART - II**

Violation of school code, parental reporting and assigning of consequences when compared with teens who report drinking about once a month or more:

*Actual response categories:*

- 0 = They would not report the violation to school officials nor assign any consequences for my behavior
- 1 = They would not report the violation to school officials but would assign consequences privately
- 2 = They would report the violation to school officials and would support the consequences assigned by the school
- 3 = They would report the violation to school officials and would also assign consequences privately

Another aspect of teen alcohol use is binge drinking or drinking to get drunk. For purposes of the TAP survey (in Grant County and state-wide), binge drinking is defined as having five or more alcoholic drinks at one time. Of the teens in Grant County who reported drinking at least once a month, 83% of males and 86% of females reported binge drinking at least once in the month previous to the survey. Thirty-three percent (33%) of all Grant County teens reported binge drinking at least once in the month previous to the survey.

When binge drinking was compared with how students felt their parents would respond to a school code violation (CHART - III), 51% of the teens who said their parents would not report them to school officials or assign private consequences for a school code violation reported binge drinking at least once in the month previous to the survey; 37% of those students who said their parent would not report them for a school code violation but would assign private consequences
reported binge drinking at least once in the month previous to the survey; 25% of the students who said their parents would report them to school officials and support the consequences assigned by the school reported binge drinking at least once in the month previous to the survey; and 19% of the teens whose parents would report a school code violation and assign additional consequences privately reported binge drinking at least once in the month previous to the survey.

**CHART - III**

Violation of school code, parental reporting and assigning of consequences when compared with teens who report binge drinking at least once in the month prior to the survey:

- Report, assign additional consequences (3): 19%
- Report, support school consequences (2): 25%
- Not report, assign consequences (1): 37%
- Not report, no consequences (0): 51%

*Actual response categories:*

0 = They would not report the violation to school officials nor assign any consequences for my behavior
1 = They would not report the violation to school officials but would assign consequences privately
2 = They would report the violation to school officials and would support the consequences assigned by the school
3 = They would report the violation to school officials and would also assign consequences privately

**SCHOOL CODES AND TOBACCO USE**

In Grant County, teen tobacco use is on the rise. Forty-five percent (45%) of all Grant County teens surveyed in 1997 reported being current or former smokers. This compares with the 1993 Grant County TAP survey where 32% of teens reported being current or former smokers. The 1997 survey found that 29% of all teens surveyed said that they were current smokers.
Specifically, the survey asked the students to indicate “how often” they used smoking tobacco using the following response options:

- 0 = Do not use and never have
- 1 = I have used it but don’t anymore
- 2 = A couple of times a year
- 3 = 1 to 3 times a month
- 4 = once or twice a week
- 5 = 3 to 6 days per week
- 6 = every day

When daily tobacco smoking was compared with how students felt their parents would respond to a school code violation (CHART - IV), 24% of the teens who said their parents would not report them to school officials or assign private consequences for a school code violation reported smoking on a daily basis; 13% of those students who said their parent would not report them for a school code violation but would assign private consequences reported smoking daily; 8% of the students who said their parents would report them to school officials and support the consequences assigned by the school reported smoking daily; and 4% of the teens whose parents would report a school code violation and assign additional consequences privately reported smoking daily.

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**CHART - IV**

Violation of school code, parental reporting and assigning of consequences when compared with teens who report daily tobacco use:

*Actual response categories:*

- 0 = They would not report the violation to school officials nor assign any consequences for my behavior
- 1 = They would not report the violation to school officials but would assign consequences privately
- 2 = They would report the violation to school officials and would support the consequences assigned by the school
- 3 = They would report the violation to school officials and would also assign consequences privately

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0 = Not report, no consequences (0)
1 = Not report, assign consequences (1)
2 = Report, support school consequences (2)
3 = Report, assign additional consequences (3)
SCHOOL CODES AND SEXUAL INTERCOURSE

Twenty-nine percent (29%) of Grant County 7th - 12th graders surveyed report having had sexual intercourse. By 12th grade, 61% of females and 49% of males report having had sexual intercourse. Specifically, the students were asked “Have you ever had sexual intercourse? If so, how often?” Teens recorded their response using the following options:

- **0 = No**
- **1 = Used to, but not currently**
- **2 = Yes, several times a year**
- **3 = Yes about 2 or 3 times per month**
- **4 = Yes, about once a week**
- **5 = Yes, 4 or 5 times a week**
- **6 = Yes, just about every day**

When teen sexual activity was compared with how students felt their parents would respond to a school code violation (CHART - V), 45% of the teens who said their parents would not report them to school officials or assign private consequences for a school code violation reported having had sexual intercourse; 33% of those students who said their parent would not report them for a school code violation but would assign private consequences reported having had sexual intercourse; 24% of the students who said their parents would report them to school officials and support the consequences assigned by the school reported having had sexual intercourse; and 18% of the teens whose parents would report a school code violation and assign additional consequences privately reported having had sexual intercourse.

**CHART - V**

Violation of school code, parental reporting and assigning of consequences when compared with teens who report having had sexual intercourse:

*Actual response categories to chart V:*

- **Report, assign additional consequences** (3) - 18%
- **Report, support school consequences** (2) - 24%
- **Not report, assign consequences** (1) - 33%
- **Not report, no consequences** (0) - 45%

0 = They would not report the violation to school officials nor assign any consequences for my behavior
1 = They would not report the violation to school officials but would assign consequences privately
2 = They would report the violation to school officials and would support the consequences assigned by the school
3 = They would report the violation to school officials and would also assign consequences privately
EVIDENCE SUMMARY

It is important to note that student responses are based on student perceptions of what their parent would do if the student violated a school code. Whether these perceptions are based on previous experience with school code violations, communication between parent and child or speculation based on their parent’s style of parenting is unclear. Still the evidence does point out that teens who report their parents would report them to school officials for violations of school codes are less likely to have had sexual intercourse, engage in daily tobacco use, use alcohol or engage in binge drinking.

Teens who feel that their parents are willing to report them to school officials for violation of a school code and assign additional consequences are the least likely to have had sexual intercourse, use alcohol, binge drink or smoke tobacco daily. Teens who believe their parents would only report them to school officials for a violation of a school code are less likely to have had sexual intercourse, use alcohol, binge drink or smoke tobacco daily than teens who believe their parents would not report them to school officials, but would assign consequences privately for violating a school code. Finally, teens who feel their parents would not report them to school officials for violating a school or assign any consequences for their action are the most likely to report having had sexual intercourse, using alcohol, binge drinking and smoking tobacco on a daily basis.

IMPLICATIONS

Teens are subjected to a variety of messages encouraging alcohol use, tobacco use and sexual intercourse, parents and schools often feel overwhelmed and overmatched when it comes to helping teens avoid these potentially detrimental choices. The TAP survey results on school codes provides a variety of programming implications for UWEX faculty and staff:

This new research on school codes suggests a need for even stronger cooperation between the parents and the school, therefore it is in the school’s best interests to link UWEX faculty into existing parent audiences to demonstrate the effectiveness of such cooperation. One such audience is mandatory parents’ nights for students involved in athletics and/or extra-curricular activities.

Combined with state-wide TAP research on the importance of parental monitoring and communication of parental values regarding teenage alcohol use, tobacco use and sexual intercourse, the research on school codes strengthens the argument to link UWEX to existing parent audiences and to do it early. Grant County UWEX faculty have already begun reaching out to parents of students in the DARE program. DARE programs are delivered to fifth and/or sixth graders (in Grant County). Delivering parenting research and education to these parents, as opposed to parents of middle and high school youth, would likely have a greater impact on youth behaviors as their children are less likely to have engaged in negative behaviors.
The school code research can be distilled into manageable sized segments for mass media consumption. For example the opening line in a local news story could state “A UW-Extension study finds that parents who are willing to report their teens to the school for violating school codes are less likely to have kids who use tobacco, use alcohol or have sex...”

The research suggest a whole other arena of research for future TAP surveys. Communities may find ways to explore the school code issue in further depth. Issues of what works and why could be further studied.

Equipped with recent data on school codes, UW-Extension can provide relevant unbiased research to community coalitions reviewing and revising school participation codes.

The evidence suggests that the Teen Assessment Project, is a flexible tool to help local communities research and define issues related to their concerns. Unlike national surveys, the TAP survey provides local communities with ownership over the survey process and the educational efforts that result from the survey.

The evidence supports the need for parental education on the need for consistent rules and clear expectations as outlined by Bogenschneider, Small and Riley⁵.

The evidence also supports different community factions (schools, police, parents, judicial) working together to develop and enforce community norms on reporting inappropriate youth behavior.
Appendix A

Localized TAP research has provided parents with powerful evidence of the value of parental monitoring and communication of parental values. State-wide, the TAP survey found that teens who are highly monitored are less likely to drink alcohol, smoke tobacco or have sexual intercourse. The survey has also found that teens who feel that their parents believe it is wrong for teens their age to have sex, drink alcohol or smoke are less likely to have children who engage in these activities.

Parental Values

The 1997 Grant County TAP survey found that, when asked about their parents values regarding certain teen behaviors, 77% of teens agreed that their parents thought it was wrong for teenagers their age to smoke (11% disagreed, 12% were not sure), 73% agreed that their parents thought it was wrong for teenagers their age to drink alcohol (13% disagreed, 14% were not sure), and 70% agreed that their parents thought that it was wrong for teenagers their age to have sexual intercourse (9% disagreed, 21% were not sure). The table below shows how the student’s perception of parental value compares with their behavior.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Parents Approve (1)</th>
<th>Not Sure of Parent’s Value (2)</th>
<th>Parents Disapprove (3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teens who smoke once a month or more</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teens who drink once a month or more</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teens who binge drank at least once in the past month</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teens who have had sexual intercourse</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(1) Teens who report their parents do not think it is wrong for teens their age to engage in the activity
(2) Teens who report being unsure of their parents values regarding teens their age engaging in the activity
(3) Teens who report their parents think it wrong for teens their age to engage in the activity
Parental Monitoring

Using teen responses to eight parental monitoring questions on the 1997 TAP survey, the Department of Child and Family Studies at the University of Wisconsin - Madison divided Grant County students into three categories: those who are monitored at a high level, those who are monitored at a medium level, and those who are monitored at a low level. These three categories of students were compared with sexual activity and alcohol use. The table below summarizes the results.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Low Monitoring</th>
<th>Medium Monitoring</th>
<th>High Monitoring</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teens who drink once a month or more</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teens who binge drank at least once in the past month</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teens who have had sexual intercourse</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B

Student response to the question “If you violated a school code (behavior, academic, athletic, or activity) and your parents found out, what would they most likely do?“:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>0 - No report, no consequence</th>
<th>1 - No report, assign private consequence</th>
<th>2 - Report, support school consequences</th>
<th>3 - Report, assign additional private consequences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7th grade males</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7th grade females</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8th grade males</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8th grade females</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9th grade males</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9th grade females</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10th grade males</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10th grade females</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11th grade males</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11th grade females</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12th grade males</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12th grade females</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Actual response categories
0 = They would not report the violation to school officials nor assign any consequences for my behavior
1 = They would not report the violation to school officials but would assign consequences privately
2 = They would report the violation to school officials and would support the consequences assigned by the school
3 = They would report the violation to school officials and would also assign consequences privately


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