



# Parents Make A Difference!

## Teen Involvement and Academics

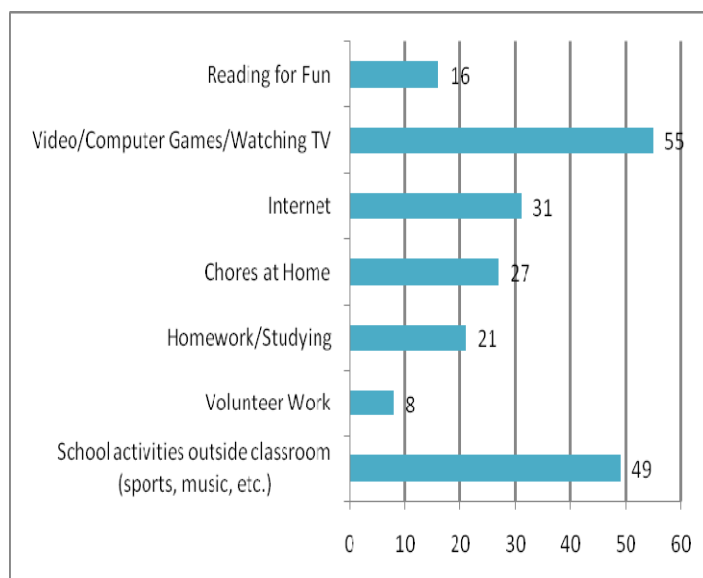
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The Southwest Wisconsin Youth Survey (SWYS) was conducted in the fall of 2005 with 3,727 – 7<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> graders from 15 CESA #3 school districts participating. A close examination of the results provides clues as to how teen involvement in school and non-school activities is related to academic performance.

SWYS indicated students surveyed worried about getting good grades. Survey results link involvement in school related co- or extra-curricular activities and involvement in structured non-school activities with academic achievement.

### How Are Teens Using Their Time?

Before we can address the benefits of teen involvement, it's helpful to know how teens are using their time. The majority of time in a teen's day is spent in school and in most cases on homework. In addition, teens in southwest Wisconsin have jobs, are involved in co-curricular and extra-curricular activities, spend time with friends, take part in non-school activities, watch television, and spend time on the Internet. The following chart shows how teens are using their "out of school" time:



In addition to the activities listed on the chart, 26% of teens also spend more than 10 hours per week on a paid job.

### Benefits of Teen Involvement

According to the survey, 68% of students involved in three or more hours of activities outside the classroom each week get As and Bs for grades. This compares to only 17% of students who did not participate in any co- or extra- curricular activities who got grades of B or above.

In addition to enhancing academic performance, involvement in the activities described above is tied to lower rates of risky teen behaviors. Sixty-two percent (62%) of teens who are involved in non-school activities (one or more hours each week) do not smoke and 59% do not drink alcohol. Sixty percent (60%) of the teens who have very high self-esteem spend time in out-of-school activities every week. Involved teens are less likely to be pressured into using drugs and less likely to ride with an intoxicated driver. Teens who are involved in out-of-school activities are also less likely to use marijuana and cocaine.

Participation in extra-curricular and out-of-school activities supports more opportunities for exploration and reflection, expression and creativity, group membership, and contributions and service. Also, part-time employment can increase self-esteem. These "assets" are factors that help promote positive outcomes and that help protect a teen from engaging in risky behaviors. Parents that help youth get involved in their school and community and help youth see themselves as successful adults contribute to the development of youth assets.

## **The Downside to Teen Involvement**

Although many teens are involved in co-curricular and extra-curricular activities, 30% of teens report that the cost of participating in school activities keeps them from participating as much as they would like to. This feeling is much more common among 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, and 9<sup>th</sup> graders than among juniors and seniors, especially among the male students.

More than 20 hours of employment each week may result in lower grades for teens. The survey indicated that 55% of those teens who are not employed get As and Bs. Of the teens who work 1-10 hours per week, 54% get As and A/Bs. However, only 25% of those who work over 20 hours per week get As and A/Bs.

Parents are often curious how time spent using the internet, playing video games, or watching television affects youth. Fifty-three percent (53%) of males and 42% of females spend over five hours each week on the Internet. Seventy-two percent (72%) of males and 68% of females spend over five hours per week playing video computer games or watching TV. Only ten percent (10%) of teens who report spending no time on the Internet and playing computer games get As, A/Bs or Bs. Only 55% of teens who spend five or more hours on the Internet and 30% of teens who spend five or more hours playing video games or watching TV report getting Bs or above. This could indicate an increased usage of the Internet for educational purposes.

## **So What Can Parents Do?**

As a parent, if your goal is supporting better grades now that can in turn lead to better opportunities for higher education and employment in the future, here are some suggestions:

**Be interested** – 69% of students who believe their parents are interested in school (what they are learning and how they are doing) get As and Bs.

**Help Your Teen Enjoy School** – 71% of students who agree or strongly agree that they enjoy going to school get As and Bs. Student satisfaction may increase with participation in co- and extra-curriculars.

**Encourage Involvement in Out-of-Classroom Activities Too** – 49% of students involved with sports, clubs, student government, 4-H, Scouts, etc., get As and Bs.

**Enforce the School Codes** – The ability to participate and compete in co- and extra-curricular activities appears to help students make better choices and get better grades. Sixty-nine percent (69%) of students who believe their parents would report school code violations to the school also get As and Bs.

**Talk to Your Teen About Their Future** – 64% of teens who have frequent talks with mom and/or dad about their job or education plans after high school also get As and Bs.

### **Encourage Involvement**

The Southwest Wisconsin Youth Survey and the other research clearly indicate that teens who participate in school activities do better academically. Also, teens that participate in community groups typically do better in school. As a parent, remember to encourage your teen and support his or her involvement in a variety of activities. You will all benefit!

"Parents Make a Difference" is a product of the Southwest Wisconsin Youth Survey (SWYS), a program of the University of Wisconsin-Extension, local school districts and UW-Platteville. This series is adapted from the UW-Extension "Whose Kids?...Our Kids!" series written by Huser, et al. This issue was written by Pam Hobson, UW-Extension Richland County (adapted from "Parents Make A Difference," Ivey et al) and edited by Amy Mitchell, UW-Extension Crawford County, Bev Doll and Tom Schmitz, UW-Extension Grant and Jessie Potterton, UW-Extension Lafayette County. Thanks are extended to the 3,747 – 7th to 12th graders from southwest Wisconsin who participated in the 2005 SWYS survey. Contact UW-Extension for further information by phone Grant County (608) 723-2125; Lafayette County (608) 776-4820; Crawford County (608)325-0223 and Richland County (608) 647-6148 or on the web at <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/cty/grant/tap/parentresources.html>