



# Parents Make A Difference!

## Teens and School Success

August 2006

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 they belong and feel close to people, including teachers and other adults.

### Parents Make A Difference!

Research shows children 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 in school and school activities.

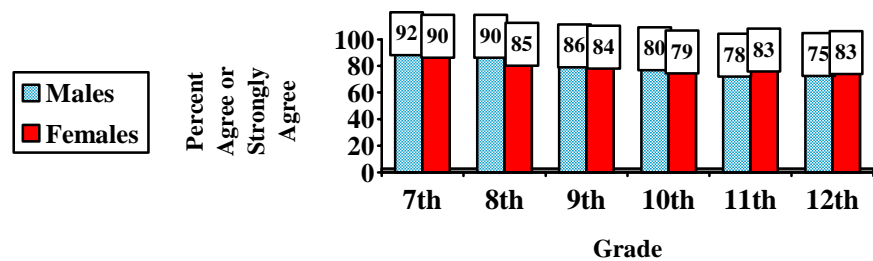
### Communicate with the School

One of the most important types of parent involvement is communication with teachers and other school officials. Just knowing teachers' names and subject areas is an important first step for parents.

It is a parent's right and responsibility to contact their teen's teachers. This can be especially effective when a parent has a compliment or good news to share and can make it easier to deal with any problems that might occur later on. Building a partnership between teachers and the school helps teens see parents working with teachers, not against them.

A recent Southwest Wisconsin Youth Survey (SWYS) of 3,727 7<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> graders found that the majority (84%) of teenagers believe their parents are interested in what they learn and how they do in school. This chart shows the students by grade and gender who "agree" or "strongly agree" that their parents are interested in what they learn and how they do in school.

My Parents are Interested In School



### Expect Success

When parents set high expectations for their children's school performance, teens are more likely to meet those expectations. Children whose parents expect them to make school a priority are also much more likely to do well in school. And when teens are working toward their "personal bests" in school, they are less likely to become depressed or involved in harmful, violent, or drug-related behaviors. Remember though, that "personal best" does not mean "perfect."

SWYS found that 70% of the teens who say their parents are interested in what they learn and how they do in school report getting A's or B's. By comparison, 45% of students who "strongly disagree" that their parents are interested in what they learn and how they are doing at school report getting A's or B's.

In general, the SWYS revealed that the more students agree their parents are interested in what they learn and how they are doing at school, the greater the likelihood that they will also report getting average grades of B's or higher in their course work at school.

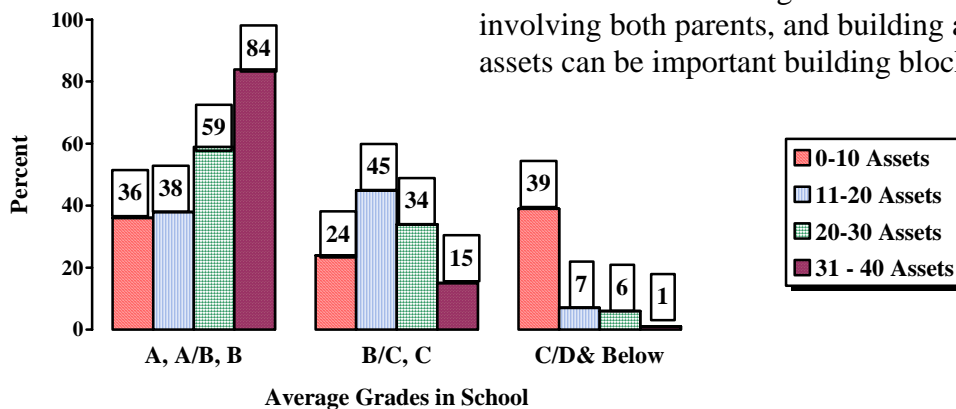
### Assets and School Success

Parenting that keeps youth involved in their school and community and helps youth see themselves in the future contributes to the development of youth assets. Assets are factors that help promote positive outcomes and help protect a teen from engaging in risky behaviors. The Southwest Wisconsin Youth Survey measured 40 youth assets including parental support, school engagement and support, family communication, helping others, and self-esteem.

Most southwest Wisconsin teens report their parents are interested in school (84%), their teachers have high expectations of them (82%) and their teachers respect and listen to them (80%). Seventy-eight percent (78%) report they enjoy going to school.

Student responses to the questions related to the 40 youth assets show that 51% of southwest Wisconsin teens report between 16-30 assets and 43% report over 30 assets. Only 6% of teens report 0-15 assets.

Generally, teens with more assets have better school success, more positive mental health, higher self-esteem, a decrease in delinquency, and greater peer acceptance. The SWYS supports this research. Eighty-four percent (84%) of teens reporting 31 to 40 assets receive A's and B's and less than 16% of teens reporting 31 to 40 assets get B/C's and below. In contrast, 64% of teens with 0 to 10 assets report receiving B/C's or lower. The chart below illustrates this.



## “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.
- ✓ **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.
- ✓ **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.
- ✓ **Be especially supportive** of your teen during transitional times; for example, when they first move to middle school, high school or move to a new school district.
- ✓ **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.
- ✓ **Use TV wisely;** that is, limit teen’s viewing and help select programs and be available to discuss the content of the shows.
- ✓ **Establish quiet time** every night for studying, reading or writing.
- ✓ **Monitor your teen’s school attendance.** Monitor the number of hours your teen works during the school year.
- ✓ **Create a positive home environment** that encourages learning.

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

“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 newsletter is adapted from the UW-Extension newsletters “Whose Kids?...Our Kids!” Teens and School Success, by Huser, et.al. and Parents Make a Difference. Teens and School Success, by Ivey, et.al. This issue of “Parents Make a Difference” was written by Pam Hobson, UW-Extension Richland County and edited by Jessie Potterton, UW-Extension Lafayette County, Amy Mitchell, UW-Extension Crawford County, and Tom Schmitz and Bev Doll, UW-Extension Grant County. Thanks are extended to the 3,727 7th to 12th graders from southwest Wisconsin who participated in the 2005 SWYS survey. Contact UW-Extension for further information: Grant County (608) 723-2125; Lafayette County (608) 776-4820; Crawford County (608) 326-0223; and Richland County (608) 647-6148. Or visit the website at: <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/cty/grant/tap/parentresources.html>