



Parents Make A Difference!

Teen Involvement and Academics

September-October 2003

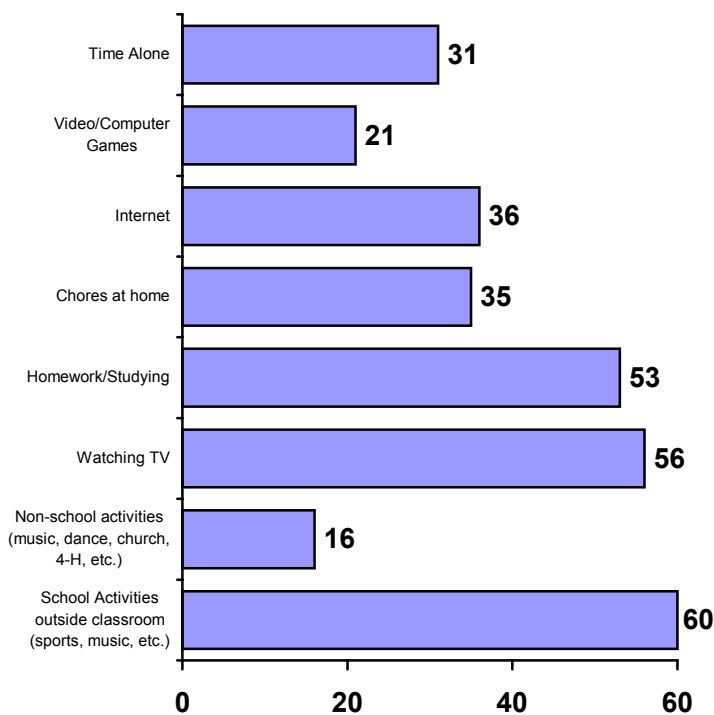
The Southwest Wisconsin Youth Survey (SWYS) was conducted in the fall of 2001 with 5,704 7th to 12th graders from 19 CESA #3 school districts participating. A close examination of the results provides clues as to how teen involvement in school and non-school activities is related to academic performance.

SWYS indicated that 96% of all 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:

Percent of Teens Spending 5 or more hours/week



In addition to the activities listed on the chart, 32% of teens also spend more than 10 hours per week on a paid job.

Benefits of Teen Involvement

According to the survey, 75% of students involved in five or more hours of school-related activities each week get As and Bs for grades. This compares to only 41% of students who did not participate in any co- or extra-curricular activities who got grades of B or above.

Seventy-four percent (74%) of teens who spend one or more hours each week in non-school activities (like music or dance lessons, church, 4-H, etc.) also report grades of As and Bs. Conversely, 54% of teens who reported no participation in out-of-school activities reported getting As and Bs.

In addition to enhancing academic performance, involvement in the activities described above is tied to lower rates of risky teen behaviors. Sixty-four percent (64%) of teens who are involved in non-school activities (one or more hours each week) do not smoke and 61% do not drink alcohol. Sixty-two percent (62%) 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, opportunities for 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, 21% 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 7th, 8th, and 9th graders than among juniors and seniors.

More than 20 hours of employment each week may result in lower grades for teens. The survey indicated that 53% of those teens who are not employed get As and A/Bs. Of the teens who work 1-10 hours per week, 56% get As and A/Bs. However, only 19% of those who work over 20 hours per week get As and A/Bs.

Thirteen percent (13%) of males and 8% of females spend over five hours each week on Internet chat rooms. Thirty-three percent (33%) of males and 7% of females spend over five hours per week playing video computer games. Sixty-nine percent (69%) of teens who report spending no time on internet chat rooms and playing computer games get As, A/Bs or Bs. Only 52% of teens who spend five or more hours on Internet chat rooms and 55% of teens who spend five or more hours playing video games report getting Bs or above.

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 – 68% 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 – 73% 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 School-Related Extra-Curriculars – 68% of students involved in 5 or more hours of school-related activities each week also get As and Bs for grades.

Encourage Involvement in Non-School Activities Too – 65% of students involved with music, dance, church, scouts, 4-H, etc. also 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. Seventy-one percent (71%) 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 – 70% 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 newsletter is adapted from the UW-Extension “Whose Kids?...Our Kids!” newsletter series. This issue of “Parents Make a Difference” was written by Ruth Schriefer and Deb Ivey, UW-Extension Iowa County and edited by Tom Schmitz, UW-Extension Grant and Lafayette County and Christina Kenney, UW-Extension Grant County. Thanks are extended to the 5,704 7th to 12th graders from southwest Wisconsin who participated in the 2001 SWYS survey. Contact UW-Extension <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/cty/grant/tap/parentresources.html> for more information, or by phone Grant County (608) 723-2125; Lafayette County (608) 776-4820; and Iowa County (608) 935-0391.