

SUBSTANCE ABUSE SURVEY RESULTS

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BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

There has been concern for decades over substance abuse by secondary school students. Most secondary schools now offer programs intended to reduce abuse of alcohol, drugs, and tobacco that can jeopardize the health and safety of students.

The Center for the Advancement of Public Health at George Mason University has conducted the first survey of secondary schools in Virginia concerning their policies and activities related to student substance abuse. The goal of this study has been to gain greater scientific understanding of policies, leadership, curricula, assessment and awareness activities related to this issue in Virginia secondary education.

The survey was based on a literature review of school-

based practices. In addition, individuals and organizations with expertise were contacted for input on its design.

A total of 309 public secondary schools were identified through the Virginia Department of Education. A random, stratified sample of 116 schools were sent an 8-page printed survey instrument in the spring of 2006. Schools that were alternative, special education, charter or governor's schools were not included in the sample. Care was taken to maintain a relative proportion of rural, suburban, and urban schools.

The survey was addressed to the school principal, and nearly 2/3 of the respondents were school principals. Each school was contacted up to three times. The survey response rate was 46%. Two

schools formally declined to participate. Mean responses or percentages were tabulated for each of 37 questions.

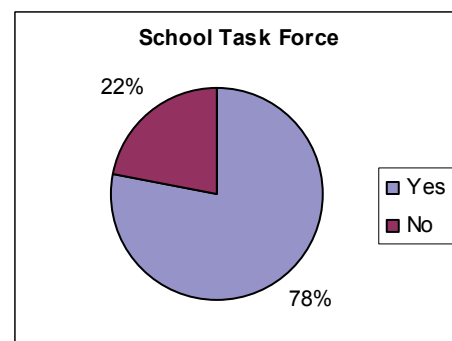
The results are summarized in this document. Broad conclusions are highlighted in the margins. Recommendations that grow out of the data and additional resources are given on the back page of this summary report.

This study of school-based substance practices in Virginia will serve as the basis for a national study to be conducted by George Mason University.

SCHOOL LEADERSHIP ON SUBSTANCE ABUSE

Secondary school principals report that they assume the primary leadership on substance abuse at most schools. Other members of the school administration, as well as counselors, also provide leadership. Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) and Parent Teacher Students Associations (PTSAs), in general, do not provide as

much leadership on this issue. Twenty-two percent of schools have a steering committee or task force convened specifically to address issues of substance abuse. Of all groups identified, those that provide the least support are local colleges and universities and local alcohol merchants.



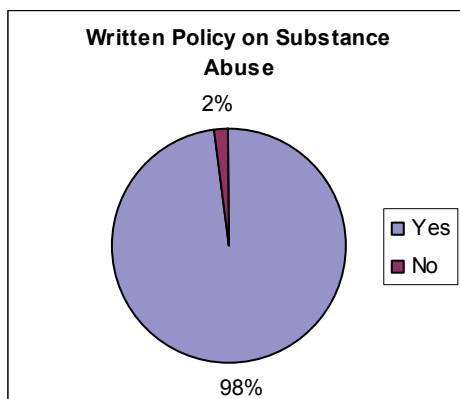
SCHOOL POLICIES ON SUBSTANCE ABUSE

Almost every school (98% of respondents) has a written policy on alcohol, tobacco, or drug use by students. Most of these substance abuse policies have been adapted from

policies developed by the local school system, and they apply to behavior of students while on school grounds or off-site at school-sponsored activities. Policies emphasize

enforcement. They place less emphasis on support, resistance strategies, or healthy living.

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Principals lead, but others could also be involved in leadership on substance abuse.

ENFORCEMENT OF SUBSTANCE ABUSE POLICIES

Alcohol

Penalties for use or possession of alcohol at school for a first offense include suspension (94%), letter to a parent or guardian (70%), referral to a counselor (56%), and arrest (36%). For a second offense, expulsion increases as a penalty (46%).

Tobacco

School policy on tobacco applies to all students. In addition, 44% of schools have a tobacco policy applicable to faculty and staff. Among consequences for a first offense is suspension (69% of schools). For a second offense, 85% of schools suspend students.

Drugs

Penalties for a first offense are suspension (83%) and expulsion (35%). One-fourth of schools refer a student to a counselor. One-third of first-time offenders are arrested. Two-thirds of schools notify parents in writing. Expulsion increases for a second offense.

Secondary schools impose stiff penalties on students found in possession of illegal substances.

CURRICULUM ON SUBSTANCE ABUSE

School systems introduce the issue of substance abuse early in the lives of students. Forty-two percent begin instruction in the early elementary grades, 77% teach the subject in late elementary school, and 77% address the topic in middle school. The curriculum on substance abuse is usually developed by the school district (77%). Most often, between 1-10 hours of instruction are spent

on substance abuse in grades 9 and 10, and between 1-5 hours in grades 11 and 12. However, more than half of schools devote 0 hours of the curriculum to substance abuse in grades 11 and 12. The curriculum is most often informational about the short and long term consequences of alcohol, drug and tobacco use and the reasons people may use them. The role of the media in promoting use of

these substances receives the least attention in the curriculum.

In grades 11 and 12, 55% of schools devote no instructional hours to substance abuse.

The curriculum provides information rather than discussion of substance abuse within a social or personal context.

PUBLIC AWARENESS EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES

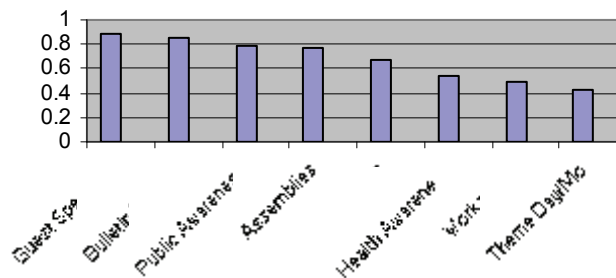
Schools increase awareness through such standard venues as guest speakers (89%), bulletin boards (86%), assemblies (77%), and exhibits (68%). Health awareness days or months are organized by 54% of schools.

Three-fourths of schools offer special activities before the prom that are designed to address substance abuse. Slightly fewer than half (44%) do so before graduation. Only a few schools emphasize substance abuse issues at spring break, holiday/New Year's break or Halloween.

Relatively fewer schools spotlight non-use, support non-users to stay non-users and publicize that many students do not engage in substance abuse. Only 37% of schools offer training or work-

shops for students who want additional information. However, 70% do have a student club or organization dedicated to substance abuse prevention.

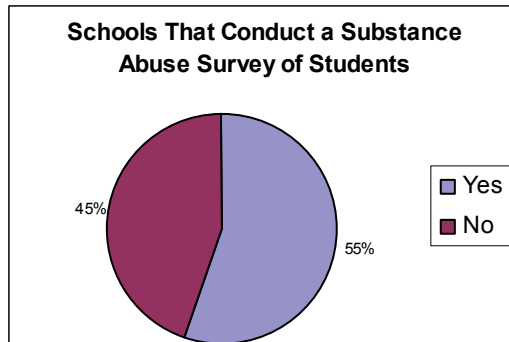
Percentage of Schools Conducting Special Events



Schools conduct a variety of standard awareness activities on substance abuse, but there are still missed opportunities.

ASSESSMENT

In order to assess the effectiveness of substance abuse prevention, schools most often review policy violations (71%). Discussion with faculty and staff are seen as forms of assessment (61% of schools). Less than one-fourth of schools undertake a formal review of programs and services.



Just over half of schools participate in or conduct a student substance abuse survey. Nearly a quarter do it every two years.

Many schools do not know the extent of substance abuse among their students. Most schools do not have strong ways of assessing the effectiveness of their prevention efforts.

ARE SCHOOLS MAKING PROGRESS?

On almost every measure, respondents indicate that there has been little change over the past three years. More than 80% perceive no change in students' use of alcohol, in heavy drinking, or in drinking to get drunk. For those who see change in drug or alcohol use by students, the change is increase rather than decrease. With student use of tobacco, half report no change. However, 39% per-

ceive a decrease in tobacco use. While 2/3 of administrators believe students' acceptance of non-use has remained the same, 1/4 report an increase in acceptance of non-use of tobacco and illicit drugs.

What do school administrators perceive as the greatest barriers to school efforts to reduce substance abuse? The top issue cited is easy access. This was followed by parental

denial. Administrators believe that efforts do not go to the root causes of the problem. Looking for a quick solution and poor enforcement of rules add to the difficulty. Further, media glamorization of alcohol, drug, and tobacco use adds to the general burden.

Administrators report little change in behaviors, attitudes or practices in the past three years.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This is the first time that an assessment has been completed on the efforts of secondary schools in Virginia to prevent substance abuse. This survey may help to determine what schools are already doing and what opportunities exist for schools to be more effective in the future. The recommendations below are based on the data from Virginia.

Schools can

- Increase knowledge by formally assessing their students about substance abuse.
 - Highlight non-use. It is easier to maintain the positive than to deal with the consequences of the negative.
 - Form a steering committee or task force specifically to address substance abuse issues.
 - Reach out to other resources, such as colleges and universities.
 - Expand the curriculum beyond information to include interactive opportunities that allow discussion within personal and social contexts.
 - Continue instruction on substance abuse in grades 11 and 12.
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SELECTED RESOURCES

National

Centers for the Application of Prevention Technologies (CAPT)

<http://www.captus.org>

Community Anti-Drug Coalition of America

<http://cadca.org>

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and SAMHSA's National Clearinghouse on Alcohol and Drug Information

<http://www.ncadi.samhsa.gov/>

National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA)

<http://www.nida.nih.gov>

National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism

<http://www.niaaa.nih.gov>

Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

<http://ojjdp.ncjrs.gov/>

Students Against Destructive Decisions

<http://www.sadd.org>

The Century Council

<http://www.centurycouncil.org>

U.S. Department of Education Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools

<http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osdfs/index.html>

State of Virginia

Commonwealth of Virginia Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control

<http://www.abc.virginia.gov/>

Commonwealth of Virginia Governor's Office for Substance Abuse Prevention

<http://www.gosap.governor.virginia.gov/programs.htm>

Safe and Drug-Free Virginia (SCFSCA)

<http://www.safeanddrugfreeva.org>

This survey report was compiled by the Center for Advancement of Public Health (CAPH) and funded through the Office of the Dean, College of Education and Human Development, George Mason University. The CAPH is located at 4400 University Drive, MS 1F5, North PE Module G, Room 23, Fairfax, VA 220030-444. Telephone (703) 993-3697; Fax (703) 993-3763; E-mail caph@gmu.edu