

Saratoga Partnership for Prevention
Prevention Needs Assessment Survey Results
Executive Summary 2008
www.saratogapartnership.org

Background

The Saratoga Partnership for Prevention is a coalition of community leaders, organizers and citizens concerned about substance use among young people in our community. The Partnership seeks to prevent and reduce alcohol, tobacco, other drug use and other adolescent problem behaviors among the youth in the Saratoga Springs City School District. Our vision is to help youth feel included and significant in their community, to support families through the teen years, and to coordinate services among local agencies. Since 2000, the Partnership has conducted science-based strategic prevention planning by analyzing a variety of data, including the results of a biannual youth and parent survey.

Youth Survey

The Prevention Needs Assessment Survey has been conducted every other year since 2000 with all 6-12 grade students in the Saratoga Springs City School District. (The exception was in 2006, when 50% of the 6-12 grade population was surveyed due to budget constraints.) The survey is based on the Risk and Protective Factor Model of Prevention, whose goal is to assess adolescent substance use, anti-social behavior, and the risk and protective factors that predict these adolescent problem behaviors. All Partnership for Prevention initiatives are based the Risk and Protective Factor Model of Prevention, whose foundation lies in identifying those factors that increase the risk of problem behaviors and then finding ways to reduce those risks. **Reducing risk and increasing protection is the best hope for long-term results for a variety of adolescent problems.** The Partnership has carefully selected three risk factors as a common focus for change: Community Laws and Norms Favorable to Alcohol and Drug Use, Family Management Problems, and Peer Attitudes Favorable to Alcohol and Drug Use.

Substance use and antisocial behavior data help raise awareness about problems and promote discussion. Risk and protective factor data help pinpoint where the community needs to take action.

Parent Survey

Anonymous parent surveys have been conducted every other year since 2000 in order to gain insight into parental attitudes and perceptions. Until 2008, parent surveys were conducted via telephone from Stewart's Shops corporate headquarters in Malta. Telephone numbers were provided by the school district with no identifying information. 2008 was the first time the Partnership used an

online survey tool. The school district notified parents of its availability and provided the URL via principal newsletters and Edline e-mail announcements. Regardless of the format, the structured interview asks parents about their perceptions of risk from substance use and their attitudes around young people's use of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs. Partnership staff analyze the results. Parents' beliefs about children's substance use are then compared to the children's reports.

Recap

What follows is a brief summary of the 2008 survey results. The results are presented along with comparisons to national data sources such as the Monitoring the Future Survey (MTF) and the Bach Harrison 8-state database. MTF data is national data collected in 8th, 10th, and 12th grades over a long period of time. Bach Harrison's database provides a means of comparing risk and protective factor data, which is not available through MTF. For the purposes of this summary, MTF comparison data is referred to as the national average, and Bach Harrison's risk and protection comparison data is referred to as the 8-state norm. Also, this summary uses the term "Lifetime Use" to identify youth who have ever used a particular substance in their lifetime, and "30-Day Use" to describe youth who use substances more regularly.

Middle School Findings

Risk and protection scores and substance use rates are going steadily in the right direction. Lifetime and 30-day use of nearly all substances by 6th and 7th graders are nearly as low as they can go. Eighth grade alcohol, binge drinking, and marijuana use has started to move up slightly in 2008, although use is still below the national average. Likewise with risk and protection for 8th graders, scores were several points in the wrong direction for the way peers perceive "Rewards for Antisocial Behavior," "Opportunities and Rewards for Prosocial Involvement," "Early Initiation of Antisocial Behavior," and "Favorable Attitudes towards Drugs and Alcohol." Even so, 8th grade use rates and antisocial behavior scores are well below the 8-state norm.

At the middle school level, kids are quite accurate in their perceptions about their peers' use of substances. Not many kids use drugs and that's well known. These perceptions change drastically in high school, which in turn affects the rate of use. Alcohol, binge drinking, cigarette and marijuana use more than triples between 8th and 9th grade.

High School Findings

Fewer than 50% of Saratoga kids use substances regularly in grades 9-11, and regular substance use is flat or down vs. 2006 among 9-12 graders. This declining use mirrors a national trend. But there is still a strong culture of use in 11th and 12th grade. In 10th grade, alcohol and binge drinking rates are finally at or below the national average, and 10th grade marijuana use is only 2 points above the national average as compared to 6-7 points in prior years. But by 12th grade, alcohol, binge drinking, and marijuana use rates are above the national average by 10 points, 15 points, and 17 points, respectively.

Risk levels have fallen in the last two years, but Saratoga is still above the 8-state norm in several categories. As has been the case in prior years, roughly 25% of 11th and 12th graders report having been “Drunk or High at School” within the past year, exceeding the 8-state norm in both grades. “Attacked to Harm” is now below the 8-state norm by roughly 5 points in grades 9-12. The two highest-risk categories for high school kids are still “Parental Attitudes Favorable to Anti-Social Behavior” and “Peer Rewards for Anti-Social Behavior.” On the other hand, Saratoga's protective factors have generally improved vs. 2006 in most domains except Family. Youth perceptions of “Opportunities for Prosocial Involvement” in the Community, School, and Individual domains exceed the 8-state norm by a wide margin. And while kids see “Opportunities” everywhere, school is the only place where they perceive “Rewards for Prosocial Involvement.” School district administrators have been increasingly involved in Partnership initiatives over the years, and the 2008 scores may reflect those efforts.

At the high school level, kids overestimate their peers’ use by a large margin. Changing this perception is an important key to changing kids’ behavior.

Gambling Activity

Gambling rates dropped significantly vs. 2006 in all grades, 6-12. (This is only the second time gambling data has been collected locally, and national comparison data is not yet available.) Survey data from 2006 and 2008 indicate that kids are already gambling at significant levels when they enter middle school (51% in 2006 vs. 38% in 2008), and that gambling peaks in 8th grade and stays roughly steady through high school. The most popular forms of gambling are “Betting on Horses,” “Betting on Sports,” “Playing the Lottery,” and “Playing Cards for Money.” Gambling is grouped on this survey as an antisocial behavior.

Parents' Attitudes

At the middle school level, there is very little gap between parents' and kids' perceptions about rules for alcohol and drug use. At the high school level, there continues to be more than a 25-point gap. Nearly 100% of parents believe their rules around substances are "very" or "perfectly clear," while roughly 76% of kids believe they are clear. While parents say they are "somewhat" or "very concerned" about underage drinking in this community, they place alcohol on the lower end of the risk continuum. If using illegal drugs is the riskiest behavior, cigarettes are next in line, followed by marijuana, alcohol and gambling. Kids' use rates exactly mirror parental attitudes.

Parental attitudes are more permissive for alcohol than for other drugs. Parents have gotten more realistic about whether their youth drink, but most (34.4%) believe they drink only "once or twice/occasionally." There is a striking discrepancy in parents' perceptions about the way kids drink and kids' reports about their behavior. In fact, 15% of 9th graders and up to 40% of 12th graders report binge drinking (5+ drinks in a row) at least once in the past month.

Conclusions

As a result of data findings early on, the school district, community, and local agencies targeted the middle school with initiatives such as D.A.R.E. All Stars Camp, Strengthening Families, and All Stars lunch groups and After School Club to support this first important transition. The 2008 survey results are further indication that those initiatives have been successful. The district is now focusing on the 9th grade transition, with an extended introductory period, a mentoring program, and a peer court for 9th grade discipline issues. There are plans to expand these initiatives in the coming year, including efforts to increase parent education, awareness, and supervision at the high school level. Community-based initiatives are in the works as well, so that a consistent no-use message begins to emerge at school, in the community, at home, and within the peer culture.