

A lot to learn from Minnesota Student Survey

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Two-thirds of Minnesota's high school seniors may be making pretty good decisions about alcohol, marijuana and seat belts. We have lots to do with at least 1/3. And more than half of Minnesota's 12th graders are not big fans of their school. Those are some of the key findings of a survey involving about 135,000 Minnesota 6th, 9th and 12th graders, released last week. The Minnesota Departments of Education, Health, Human Services and Public Safety cooperated in the 2007 Minnesota Student survey. More than 300 Minnesota school districts participated on a voluntary basis. You can see a summary of state results at

education.state.mn.us/MDE/Learning_Support/Safe_and_Healthy_Learners/Minnesota_Student_Survey/index.html

The survey results go on for more than 50 pages, with plenty of fascinating information. State officials have given local district leaders results for their district, and results should be available from them. I'd urge readers to check on whether their schools gave the survey, and if yes, what students reported.

Someone once said "There are 3 kinds of lies: lies, da…lies, and statistics." ("Wikipedia: says it may have been Mark Twain or British Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli) I mention this because others may interpret the results quite differently.

Then, let's recognize that while 81% of 6th graders and 76% of 9th graders in the 309 participating districts took the survey, only 58% of 12th graders in those districts responded. So the results are important, but not conclusive. However of seniors commenting,

- 61.7% said they always use seat belts, an increase from 57.3% in 2004.

- About 30% of seniors say the binge drink (five or more drinks in a row during the past 2 weeks). That was about the same as in 2004

- 36.8% reported they ride with friends after they have been using alcohol or drugs slight drop from 2004)

- 30.7% of seniors reported they used marijuana in the last year, up from 27.1% in 2004.

Sounds like about 2/3 of the students are making wise decisions about drinking, driving and use of various drugs. Our challenge is to reach the approximately 1/3 that are making dangerous decisions.

Two major Minnesota newspapers did not report statistics about students' attitudes toward school. Forty percent of 12th grade males, and 49 percent of 12th grade females said they liked school "very much or a lot." However, 35% of those guys and 33% of the girls said they liked school "a little." 25% of the senior guys and 18% of the senior girls said they either didn't like school very much or "hated it."

Political leaders of both parties have urged changes in Minnesota high schools. By senior year, some of the most dissatisfied students have left. So the fact that more than half of the seniors responding liked school only "a little" — or worse, means changes are needed.

Students, state and local officials have given us important information. I hope it is used in the coming year.

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