

Parents Are the Foundation

Teen Involvement

March 2007

Teens and Involvement in Activities

Sometimes kids get bored. Other times they're so busy we rarely see them. The pace of our teen's lives will change as they move through middle and high school. They have more choices and demands on their time outside of school. The 2005 SEARCH survey of 1264 Iowa County youth looked at how young people use their time out of the classroom.

According to the SEARCH Institute our teens need enriching, out of classroom activities to succeed. These activities allow youth to interact with caring adults who can encourage their skills and creativity. Chart A illustrates the change from 7th grade to 12th grade of young people's involvement in out of school activities. As you can see, involvement peaks in 9th grade and is lowest in 12th grade.

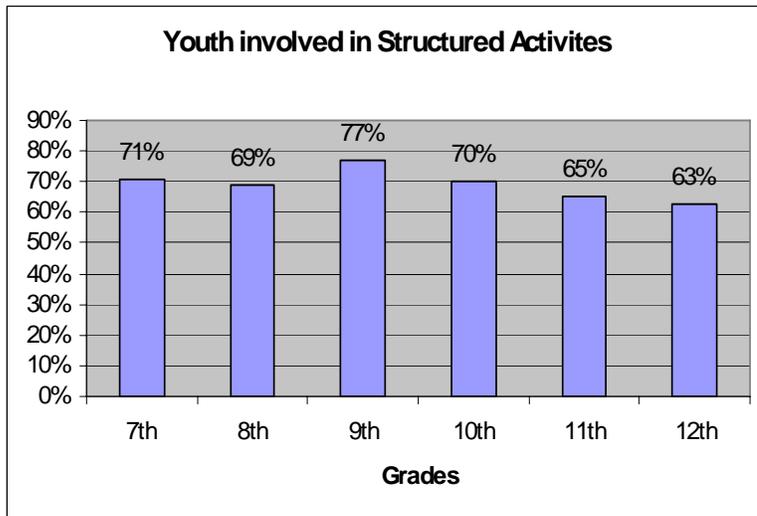


Chart A: Percentage of Iowa County students involvement in out of school activities.

The Harvard Family Research Project states that a higher participation in out of school activities increases the likelihood of scholastic achievement, higher school attendance, enjoyment in school, increased self-esteem, better teacher reports of student behavior, and smoother transition to college or jobs. Chart B shows how Iowa County youth spend their time. Over 30% of youth are not involved in any activities. As might be expected, more youth are involved in school sports and clubs than out of school activities.

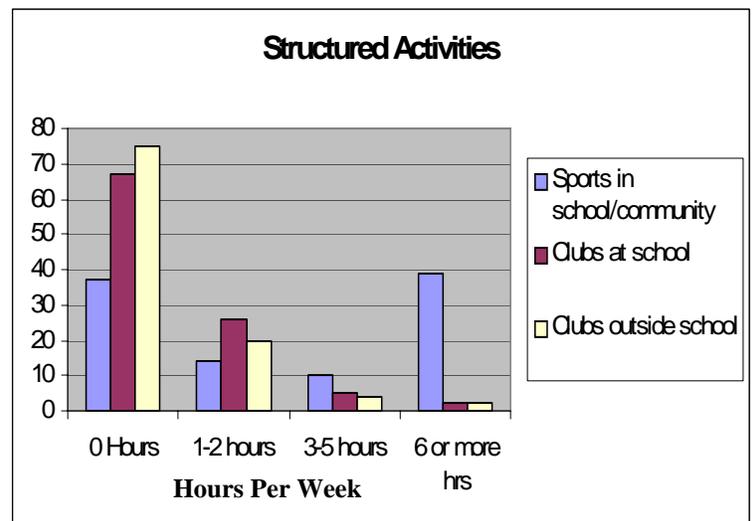


Chart B: Percentage of how Iowa County students spend their time with structured activities.

Search Institute recommends that youth spend 2 or fewer nights a week “hanging out with friends”. 32% of Iowa County 8th graders report spending three or more nights going out with friends without anything special to do. This jumps to 54% when 12th graders were asked the same question.

Use the tips on this page to promote teens involvement in activities.

Tips for Parents



Although it is important for teenagers to relax with friends, parents need to set limits that are reasonable and fair.



Talk to your children about their interests and ask them to make a six-month commitment before joining an activity. Too often young people skip from one group to another without giving any a chance.



Encourage coaches, clubs, and churches not to over schedule students.



Make your home a warming and inviting place – somewhere your kids and their friends want to be. If you feel there is too much arguing at home or your family has trouble communicating seek outside help.

Tips for Communities and Caring Adults



Volunteer to start-up or help with an existing club. Support programs that connect young and old, adults and youth, teenagers and children.



Offer to give a group a home – finding an accessible, affordable meeting space for young people is difficult. A start-up band may need a place to practice or a teacher may need space to hold a weekly juggling class or a 4-H club a place to hold a project meeting.



Make an extra-effort to invite and offer rides to youth in your neighborhood. Transportation is a major barrier for many young people to join sports, clubs or youth groups.



Use local talent at community functions. Be open to a variety of performances: reading poetry, skits, old-time radio dramas, or dance.



Keep funding in place during tight school budgets. Academics, vocational education, arts, and extra-curricular activities have in the past been viewed as separate ‘silos’ by policy makers. Try to see them as one silo, all having an important part of young people’s lives.



Coordinate activities so they don’t conflict with important extra-curricular events.



High school students may need to have fewer meetings due to other pressures on their time. Give them special projects and choices of meeting times.



Older youth are ready for the challenges of leadership and community service. To keep them involved we need to give them the opportunity to plan and carry out activities. Ask for their opinions and ideas; however be prepared to seriously consider their input. They will quickly sense when adults are giving them ‘lip service’.



Show your support by attending a young person’s performance. One of the most powerful statements is telling someone, “You did a great job!”

Parents are the Foundation!

“Parenting Teens” is a monthly, school-year newsletter containing information from the 2005 Survey of Student Resources and Assets in Iowa County Schools by America’s Promise and the Search Institute and the University of Wisconsin-Extension Iowa County. This series is adapted from the UW-Extension Teen Assessment Project “Whose Kids?...Our Kids!” newsletter series. This issue was written by Sarah Weier and edited by Ruth Schriefer and Deb Ivey. Thanks are extended to the 1,264 7th to 12th graders in Highland, Mineral Point, Pecatonica and River Valley who participated in the survey. For more information, contact us at UW-Extension Iowa County, 608-935-0391 or on the web at <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/cty/iowa/>