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# Parenting for Prevention

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Student Assistance Services Corp., 660 White Plains Road, Tarrytown, New York, 10591, April, 2013

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## Data Driven Decisions

There have been numerous advantages to having a number of the federal Drug Free Communities grants in Westchester County in addition to the Prevention First, NY! grant from New York State. These monies have funded many activities including the third Youth Leadership Conference which was held just three weeks ago.

However, one of the greatest benefits has been the ability to collect data so that there is an answer to the question, "What is really going on in Westchester in terms of teens and alcohol and drug use?"

The grants have funded student surveys that document the use, attitudes and perceptions about alcohol and other drugs by Westchester County teens. To augment this data, a parents survey was given to Westchester County parents about their attitudes towards this issue. The results are reported in this newsletter.

The data that has been collected from students and parents has been analyzed and has provided valuable information. It has helped the Westchester Coalition for Drug and Alcohol Free Youth tailor programs that it sponsors to address the reality of what "our" teens are doing in "our" county. The initiatives are targeted, educational, enlightening, and effective for both adults and teens in terms of reducing underage drinking and drug use among our youth.

*Patricia Murphy Warble, LMSW  
CPP*



## Westchester County Parental Community Underage Drinking Survey, 2012

During the fall of 2012, a survey, that was available in both Spanish and English, was taken by 1,544 parents throughout Westchester County. The purpose of the survey was to get a clearer picture of parental attitudes and norms about underage drinking, social hosting and the knowledge that parents have about the dangers of under age drinking. The following is an overview of the results.

### Beliefs About Drinking

The first survey question asked whether it was acceptable for high school youth to drink and 41.5% of the parents report yes and 58.4% report no. The majority of parents, 92.2% felt that it was dangerous for high school students to drink five or more drinks in one sitting. In addition, 92.1% of the parents also felt that it was wrong for adults to supply high school youth, other than their own child, with alcohol.

However, 44% of the parents believe that drinking is a normal part of growing up and 55.5% disagreed with this statement. In addition, 91.8% report that their family has clear rules about alcohol. Most parents perceive that youth in their community first tried alcohol at an age between 16-18. In reality, the average age of onset for alcohol use is 13.9 as reported by Westchester youth in grades 9-12.

Parents also think that 54.3% of high school youth in their community have had at least one drink in the past month. However, the reality is that 16.1% of 9th graders, 30.1% of 10th graders, 41.1% of 11th graders and 52.8% of 12th graders are reporting they have used alcohol in the last month.

Finally, 69.5% of the parents who took the survey, do not think it is common for alcohol to be sold or provided at community events like concerts, sports events, street fairs or festivals. As a result availability of alcohol at community events is not perceived as a contributing factor to high school students drinking alcohol.

## **Social Host Law**

Westchester County has had a social host law in place since August, 2008. This law states that it is a violation for adults (21 and over) to allow underage drinking in their home or on their property.

The survey asked parents whether there was a social host law in their community. The percentage of parents who know there is a social host law in the county was 38.3%, 2.9% said no, and the majority, 59.1% said that they were not sure whether there was a social host law.

Of the parents who took the survey though, 95% thought that there should be a social host law that would penalize adults who “host” or provide alcohol to minors. Along the same lines, 69% of the parents thought that parents should be held responsible for the actions of high school youth who are caught drinking.

In terms of policies, 75% of the parents who took the survey thought that alcohol should be banned at public events that are attended by high schools students. And 88% of the parents thought that there should be mandatory beer keg registration. This would require that a name be provided so that that law enforcement could trace who purchased the keg. Overall, the results from the survey indicated that parents are in favor of laws and policies that help prevent underage drinking.

## **Perceptions of Enforcement and Consequences**

Of the parents who took the survey, 76.3% report that it is likely that if the police in their community find out about parties where high school students are drinking, they will break up the party. Also, 51.3% of the parents thought that the adult who purchased or provided alcohol to youth would be caught by the police and 50.2% thought that the police would give them a citation. In addition, 45% of the parents thought that if the person providing alcohol were caught, they would be penalized by the court.

In terms of the police enforcing the Social Host Law, 47.9% of the parents said it was likely that the police would enforce the social host law. However, 38.2% responded that it was not applicable since they were not aware that Westchester County has a Social Host Law.

## **Parenting Practices and Underage Drinking**

The next section of the survey dealt with some proactive initiatives that parents can do to protect their children. Only 12% of the parents report that they keep the alcohol in their home locked up. Yet, during the past 12 months, the majority of parents, 79.6% reported that they have talked with their children about the dangers of underage drinking.

In terms of attitudes, 45% of parents say that it is very important to them that their teen considers them a friend. Overwhelmingly, 90% reported that they made it very clear that they do not want their child to

drink alcohol, with only 10% reporting that they have difficulty enforcing rules around not smoking, drinking or using drugs.

## **Family History of Alcohol/Drug Addiction**

In answer to the question “do you or your spouse’s family have a history of drug addiction?,” 28.8% said yes, 67.7% said no and 3.5% said they did not know.

## **Conversations About Alcohol/Drugs**

The five most common reasons that parents had a conversation with their teen about drugs/alcohol were

- Going to a special event such as a party, prom, or graduation-40.9%
- Someone the teen knows but not a friend was found using drugs-36.7%
- Saw or heard a news program about drugs-29.0%
- Saw or heard an anti-drug PSA on TV, print or online-24.1%
- Children brought home material about drugs/alcohol from school-20.3%

## **Information Sources for Parents About Alcohol and Other Drug Use**

- Television news-40%
- Magazines/Newspapers/Radio-36.9%
- Internet Sources-36.1%
- Television Shows-27.7%
- TV PSA’s/Commercials-26.6%

## Marijuana

Of the parents that were surveyed, 96% disagreed with the following statement; “It’s okay if my child/teen smokes marijuana sometimes.” Only 60.8% of parents say that they have discussed the risks of using drugs with their teens three or more times. A quarter of the parents report that they have discussed it once or twice but 13.8% have never discussed this topic with their teen.

The majority of the parents responded that they thought it was important to have an organization in their community to deal with issues related to underage drinking and drug use.

There are many active, committed and vibrant substance abuse prevention coalitions, Councils, or school district committees committed to dealing with these issues and making their communities a safer place for everyone. A list of the coalitions is on the Westchester County website, [www.westchestergov.com](http://www.westchestergov.com). Patty Warble can also be called at 332-1300 and she can give you information about initiatives that are taking place and are planned in your community.



## 420, 4:20, or 4/20

*What does it mean?*

The earliest use of the term 4/20 was in 1971 among a group of teenagers in San Rafael, California, a town north of San Francisco. It has been documented that the term was used by a group of students who met at a statue of Louis Pasteur located on the grounds of San Rafael High School on April 20 at 4:20. They gathered there to search for a marijuana crop that they had heard had been abandoned in the woods of Marin County. The teenagers were never able to find the crop but 420 ultimately evolved into a code word that the teens used to refer to smoking marijuana.

It is thought that some of the parents of these students were associated with the Grateful Dead as that band began in the Bay area. The term became common among “Deadheads” and in 1990 the magazine *High Times*, published the term and later bought the web domain 420.com. The mystique of 420 grew when the clocks in Quentin Tarantino’s film *Pulp Fiction* were set at 4:20.

Since then April 20 has evolved in a counterculture holiday in North America, and on this day, at 4:20, people gather to celebrate and consume marijuana. It has become the unofficial national holiday for marijuana users. They use this day to gather in great numbers and celebrate what they perceive as the merits of using this dangerous drug. In recent years, the day has also been used to focus on the on-going problematic initiatives to promote the legalization of “medical” marijuana.



## Senator Charles Schumer Holds Press Conference at SAS



On April 3rd at Student Assistance Services' Office in Tarrytown, Senator Charles Schumer was joined by local dignitaries, including members of the county government, law enforcement, substance abuse treatment and prevention professionals, the United Way, community coalitions, and a father whose son died of a heroin overdose. Senator Schumer announced that he is introducing a bill called the Safe Prescribing Act 2013 to reclassify hydrocodone, the generic form of Vicodin, so that it will become a Schedule II narcotic. Once a drug receives this classification a written or electronic prescription from the practitioner and a new prescription is needed for each refill.

The Lower Hudson Valley like the rest of New York State has seen the level of prescription drug use and heroin use rise. Young people take prescription drugs and then graduate to the more potent painkillers like hydrocodone. Eventually, some users become addicted and then switch to heroin because it is cheaper and more accessible.

### Upcoming Events

#### *What Every Parent and Senior Should Know About Prom and Graduation Season*

This is a presentation to deal with issues associated with underage drinking and drug use during proms and graduations. It is a panel discussion with representatives from the Westchester District Attorney's Office, the Westchester County Taxi and Limousine Commission, local police, a physician, and substance abuse prevention specialists. Students also present scenarios This initiative is currently scheduled on the following dates.

**April 23** **7:00pm**  
Fox Lane High School

**May 2** **6:30 pm**  
Yonkers Riverfront Library

**May 30** **7:00pm**  
John Jay High School

#### *Similar panels will be held on:*

**April 16** **7:00pm**  
New Rochelle High School

**April 24th** **7:30pm**  
Ardsley Fire Department