



Lexington Public Schools

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Our Schools

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By Jennifer Wolfrum, Assistant Coordinator of Physical Education and Wellness

Lexington students are smart, talented, energetic, engaging, and stressed. Academic, athletic, and performance pressures combined with pressures from family and friends can be powerful forces in a young person's life. Making healthy choices can be challenging under the best of circumstances. When students must manage multiple stressors, their choices and decisions are made that much more difficult.

To better understand and support our students, the Lexington Public Schools has conducted the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) every two or three years, since 1995. The Centers for Disease Control developed the original YRBS, which has been administered in school districts across the country since the late 1980s. The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education randomly selects high schools in the Commonwealth every two years to conduct the YRBS.

The Lexington Public Schools has partnered with Dr. Jack McDevitt, Associate Dean of the College of Criminal Justice at Northeastern University, and Dr. Amy Farrell, Assistant Professor in the College of Criminal Justice, to administer and analyze the YRBS data for Lexington High School students. Over the years, Lexington's survey has been changed and adapted to better capture and analyze the risky behavior of Lexington's youth. Lexington's use of this rich source of data has led to important changes in programs and curriculum and to targeted professional development for teachers and staff.

In the mid-1990s, the survey showed that a large number of students had contemplated suicide, which prompted a review of all programs and curriculum that might help us address this serious problem. Health and physical education teachers, school nurses, and guidance counselors joined forces through professional development trainings focused on depression and suicide to develop new lessons and programs. Since that time, the numbers of students reporting suicide ideation has steadily decreased.

This year, Drs. McDevitt and Farrell reported on the results from the 2009 YRBS, and the overall results are positive, particularly when comparing Lexington's results with those from comparable communities and state and national results.

In 2009, 11% of Lexington students reported having smoked cigarettes in the previous 30 days, compared with 13% from a regional six school report (Acton, Acton-Boxborough, Boxborough, Concord, Concord-Carlisle, Groton-Dunstable, Littleton, Maynard, Westford), 21% from Massachusetts, and 36% nationwide. In 1995, 35.4% of Lexington students had reported smoking cigarettes in the previous 30 days.

In 2009, 28% of Lexington students reported having tried marijuana in their lifetime, compared with 32% from the regional survey, 45% from Massachusetts, and 38% nationwide. In 2009, 18% of Lexington students reported using marijuana at least once in the previous 30 days, compared with 33% in 1995.

In 2009, 37% of Lexington students reported having had at least one drink of alcohol on one or more days in the previous month, compared with 38% from the regional survey, 48% from Massachusetts, and 43% nationwide. In 1995, 51% of Lexington students had reported drinking alcohol at least once in the previous 30 days.

Although there are some positive trends during the past 15 years, some concerns remain to be addressed. Members of the Physical Education and Wellness Department, together with school administrators, guidance counselors, and school nurses, will use the data in the YRBS to further review curriculum and programs and assess what else can be done to support our students as they struggle to make healthy choices.

Parents and interested members of the community are invited to attend a second YRBS presentation on Monday, May 17, from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m., at the high school (room 147/149). Drs. McDevitt and Farrell will present the Executive Summary of the 2009 YRBS and answer questions. Members of the School Health Advisory Council will also be available to discuss existing programs and plans for the future.