

TEXAS COMMISSION ON ALCOHOL AND DRUG ABUSE

RESEARCH BRIEFS

**Being Drug-Free:
Resiliency Factors in Texas Youth**


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BEING DRUG-FREE: RESILIENCY FACTORS IN TEXAS YOUTH

Most substance use surveys emphasize the number and characteristics of youth who use drugs; students who are drug-free are not discussed nearly as often. Yet in 1992, 37 percent of Texas secondary students had not used alcohol, tobacco, inhalants, or any illicit drugs during the school year. This paper looks at those Texas students who, despite all the pressures to use and the availability of substances, decide not to use drugs. The following resiliency factors were identified: being successful at school and participating in extracurricular activities; feeling safe at home, in the neighborhood, and in school; having friends who feel close to their parents and don't carry weapons or belong to gangs; and having parents who regularly participate in school activities.

INTRODUCTION

In this paper, drug-free is defined as abstaining from all of the substances queried in the Texas School Survey including tobacco, alcohol, inhalants, steroids and all of the illegal drugs. Being drug-free by this definition is quite an accomplishment for youth in secondary schools. Experimentation with alcohol and tobacco is common among even young adolescents, and these students are excluded from the drug-free category. The three drug-free measures mentioned in this report are lifetime drug-free, school year drug-free, and past month drug-free. Each of these measures has a different significance.

Lifetime drug-free students are those who have never tried any of the substances, not even once. Such students are rare, particularly in the later grades. In contrast, *past month drug-free* includes students who have used substances in the current school year but not in the past month. The category includes students who may use on an occasional basis, those who have used in the past but have ceased use, and those who have never tried any of the substances. Of the three mea-

asures, *school year drug-free* is perhaps the most important because it includes students who have not used any substances for a significant amount of time without excluding those who may have experimented a few times with a few substances in the more distant past. Most comparisons in this paper will be based on the percent of students who were school year drug-free.

Shown in Table 1 is the percentage of students who are school year drug-free compared on the basis of gender and race/ethnicity. Rates for younger (grades 7–9) and older (grades 10–12) secondary students are reported separately. The number in parenthesis is the percentage of students who report a given characteristic. The number on the right is the percent of that group that is school year drug-free. For example, 49 percent of the younger students are male and of these younger males 43 percent are school year drug-free.

AGE, RACE/ETHNICITY, AND SEX

The most important factor associated with being drug-free is age (Figure 1). Of students in the

Table 1 Percent of Secondary Students Who Were Drug-Free* During Past School Year, by Sex and Race/Ethnicity

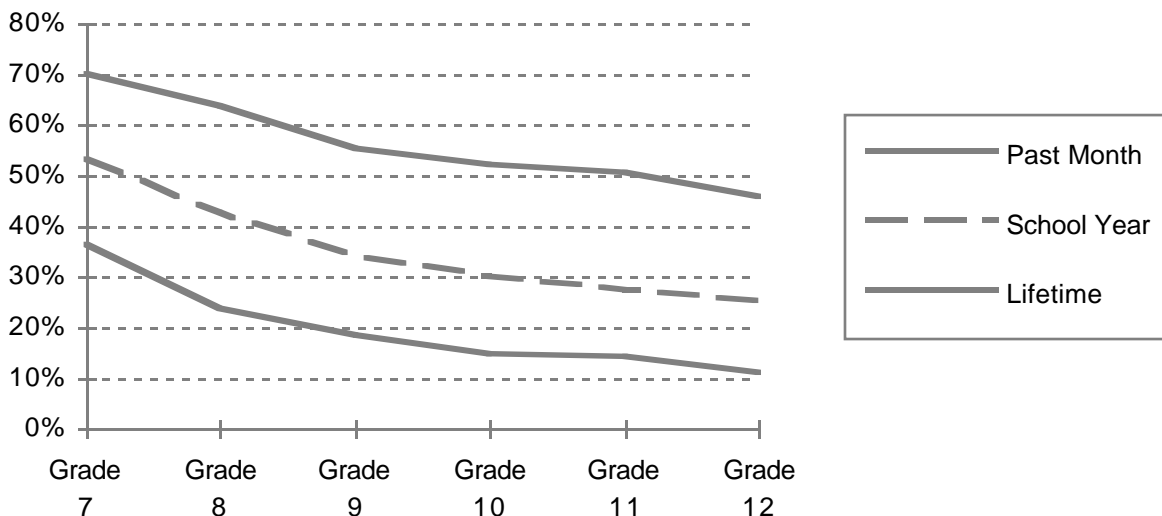
	Grades 7 through 9		Grades 10 through 12	
	% Responding	% Drug-free	% Responding	% Drug-free
Gender				
Male	(49%)	43%	(47%)	25%
Female	(51%)	44%	(53%)	30%
Race/Ethnicity				
White	(39%)	44%	(40%)	24%
Black	(19%)	44%	(24%)	32%
Hispanic	(37%)	40%	(31%)	27%
Other	(4%)	52%	(5%)	41%

* No tobacco, alcohol, inhalant, or illicit drug use

seventh grade, 36 percent have never experimented with any substance, 53 percent did not use in the past school year, and 70 percent reported no substance use within the past month. By their senior year, only 11 percent of students are lifetime drug-free, 25 percent are school year drug-free, and 46 percent are past month drug-

free. On all measures the proportion of students who are drug-free decreases most rapidly between seventh and ninth grade and more slowly between tenth and twelfth grade. For example, the percent of students who are lifetime drug-free decreases by one-half (36 percent to 18 percent) between seventh and ninth grade but only by

Fig 1 Percent of Secondary Students Who Were Drug-Free in the Past Month, Past School Year, and Ever: 1992



about one-quarter (15 percent to 11 percent) between tenth and twelfth grade. This suggests that the longer students remain drug-free, the less likely it becomes that they will use substances during their school career.

Race/ethnic differences in school year drug-free reporting patterns are greater among older than younger students. Among students in grades 10-12, those who report “other” for their race/ethnicity (5 percent of students) are more likely to be school year drug-free than white, black, or Hispanic students (41 percent compared to 24 percent, 32 percent, and 27 percent, respectively). Of the three major race/ethnic groups, black students were the most likely to be school year drug-free and white students were the least likely (Figure 2). Among younger students (grades 7-9) race/ethnic trends were similar, but among the three major race/ethnic groups, Hispanics were the least likely to be drug-free.

Females are more likely than males to be school year drug-free among students in grades 10-12 (30 percent compared to 25 percent); drug-free

rates among students in grades 7-9 were more similar (44 percent females drug-free compared to 43 percent males).

SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS

Among in-school youth one of the most difficult characteristics to measure is socioeconomic status. Students rarely know family income, and direct questions about parental occupation are too long and complex for machine readable survey forms. The Texas School Survey includes a few questions that are indirect indicators of a student’s socioeconomic status and/or disposable income: the general type of housing in which a student lives; parental educational status; whether or not the student receives an allowance; and whether or not the student holds a job (Table 2).

Although few students live in mobile homes, they appear to be somewhat less likely than other students to be school year drug-free. Younger students with a college-educated parent(s) are slightly more likely to be school year drug-free

Fig 2 Percent of Secondary Students Who Were Drug-Free During Past School Year, by Race/Ethnicity: 1992

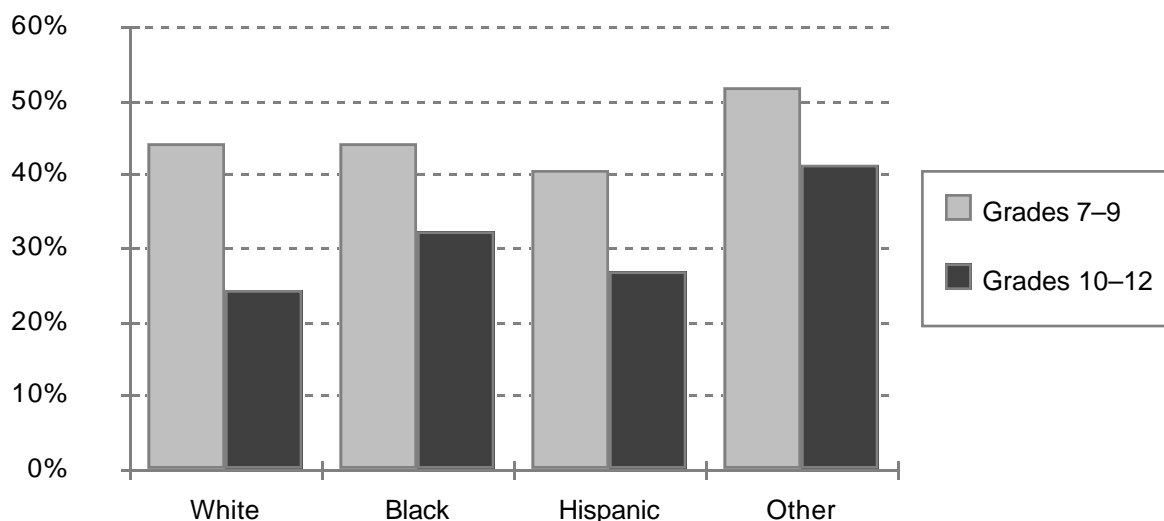


Table 2 Percent of Secondary Students Who Were Drug-Free* During Past School Year, by SES Variables: 1992

	Grades 7 through 9		Grades 10 through 12	
	<u>% Responding</u>	<u>% Drug-Free</u>	<u>% Responding</u>	<u>% Drug-Free</u>
Housing Type				
Mobile Home	(7%)	40%	(4%)	24%
Apartment/Duplex	(12%)	41%	(10%)	29%
House	(80%)	44%	(83%)	28%
Parental Education				
College	(47%)	45%	(44%)	28%
Not College	(53%)	42%	(56%)	28%
Allowance				
Yes	(53%)	42%	(41%)	28%
No	(47%)	44%	(59%)	27%
Job				
Yes	(14%)	29%	(36%)	22%
No	(86%)	45%	(64%)	31%

* No tobacco, alcohol, inhalant, or illicit drug use

than those whose parents have not achieved this educational level. Parental education is not associated with difference in school year drug-free status among older students. Students who do not hold jobs are clearly more likely to be drug-free. This result is understandable, since job earnings can enhance a student's ability to buy alcohol or other drugs.

GRADES IN SCHOOL

The percentage of students who are school year drug-free increases with typical grades made in school (Table 3). Among students in grades 7-9, 60 percent of students who normally made A's in school were school year drug-free, compared to only 23 percent of F students. Among older students (grades 10-12), 36 percent of A students were drug-free compared to 18 percent of F students.

There are even substantial differences in percent drug-free between students who usually make A's and those who usually make B's. About 60 percent of younger students who made A's were drug-free compared to only 43 percent of B students; 36 percent of older A students were drug-free, compared to 28 percent of B students.

EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Students were asked if they participated in each of 11 extracurricular activities. The more activities identified, the more likely students are to be drug-free, although differences were small (Table 4). More telling, however, are the types of activities in which students participate. Participation in band/orchestra, choir, student government, academic clubs, and service clubs is associated with higher rates of being school year drug-free. Curiously, participation in student newspapers/year-

Table 3 Percent of Secondary Students Who Were Drug-Free* During Past School Year, by Grades Made in School and Years in School District: 1992

	Grades 7 through 9		Grades 10 through 12	
	% Responding	% Drug-free	% Responding	% Drug-free
School Marks				
As	(23%)	60%	(21%)	36%
Bs	(48%)	43%	(53%)	28%
Cs	(23%)	33%	(23%)	20%
Ds	(4%)	24%	(2%)	20%
Fs	(2%)	23%	(1%)	18%
Years in School District				
1 year or less	(15%)	42%	(8%)	25%
2-3 years	(18%)	44%	(14%)	27%
4+ years	(69%)	43%	(78%)	28%

* No tobacco, alcohol, inhalant or illicit drug use

books is associated with higher rates of being drug-free among older students, but lower rates among younger students. Older students participating in athletics are less likely to be drug-free than those who do not. Students in cheerleading/drill team are slightly less likely to be school year drug-free than those who are not.

SAFETY IN THE HOME, THE NEIGHBORHOOD, AND SCHOOL

Students were asked three questions about the relative safety of their home, neighborhood and school environments (Table 5). Students were asked to rate each environment as very safe, somewhat safe, not very safe, or not safe at all. These results are interesting not only for the associations to rates of drug-free reporting but as measures of the extent to which students feel secure in their homes, neighborhoods, and schools.

Overall, responses to these questions are very similar among younger and older students. A majority rate their homes as very safe indicating

a high level of perceived security when in this environment. The most frequent answer on neighborhoods and schools is “somewhat safe,” indicating that students feel less secure in these settings. Another difference is in reporting patterns for “not very safe” and “not safe at all.” Only 3–4 percent of students rated their homes as generally unsafe (not very safe or not safe at all) while 16–18 percent reported feeling unsafe in their neighborhoods and schools. Among older students, the perceived degree of safety is unrelated to being school year drug-free. However, younger students who feel very safe at home or at school were more likely to be drug-free during the past school year than younger students with less secure feelings about those environments.

PEER VALUES AND BEHAVIORS

Students were asked “How many of your friends would you say (feel close to their parents, sometimes carry weapons like a knife or gun, care about making good grades, belong to a gang or are interested in becoming a gang member, wish

Table 4 Percent of Secondary Students Who Were Drug-Free* During Past School Year, by Extracurricular Activities: 1992

	<u>Grades 7 through 9</u>		<u>Grades 10 through 12</u>	
	<u>% Responding</u>	<u>% Drug-free</u>	<u>% Responding</u>	<u>% Drug-free</u>
Number of Activities				
0	(19%)	41%	(18%)	26%
1	(32%)	42%	(31%)	28%
2	(23%)	42%	(22%)	27%
3 or more	(26%)	47%	(29%)	29%
Athletics				
Yes	(59%)	43%	(47%)	25%
No	(41%)	43%	(53%)	30%
Band/Orchestra				
Yes	(21%)	52%	(13%)	36%
No	(79%)	41%	(87%)	26%
Choir				
Yes	(16%)	48%	(12%)	37%
No	(84%)	42%	(88%)	26%
Drama/Speech				
Yes	(15%)	44%	(14%)	28%
No	(85%)	43%	(86%)	27%
Drill Team/Cheerleader				
Yes	(11%)	41%	(11%)	26%
No	(89%)	43%	(89%)	28%
Student Government				
Yes	(5%)	49%	(11%)	32%
No	(95%)	43%	(89%)	27%
Newspaper/Yearbook				
Yes	(8%)	38%	(9%)	33%
No	(92%)	43%	(91%)	27%
Academic Clubs				
Yes	(23%)	49%	(30%)	31%
No	(77%)	41%	(70%)	26%
Service Clubs				
Yes	(9%)	45%	(15%)	32%
No	(91%)	43%	(85%)	27%
VOE/DE/Work-Study				
Yes	(5%)	45%	(12%)	24%
No	(95%)	43%	(88%)	28%
Other Clubs				
Yes	(35%)	44%	(46%)	27%
No	(65%)	43%	(54%)	28%

* No tobacco, alcohol, inhalant or illicit drug use

Table 5 Percent of Secondary Students Who Were Drug-Free* During Past School Year, by Perception of Safety: 1992

How safe do you feel...	Grades 7 through 9		Grades 10 through 12	
	% Responding	% Drug-Free	% Responding	% Drug-Free
...in your home?				
Very Safe	(66%)	47%	(70%)	28%
Somewhat Safe	(28%)	37%	(27%)	26%
Not Very Safe	(3%)	38%	(2%)	31%
Not Safe At All	(1%)	21%	(1%)	13%
Don't Know	(3%)	31%	(1%)	26%
...in your neighborhood?				
Very Safe	(28%)	45%	(31%)	26%
Somewhat Safe	(50%)	44%	(50%)	29%
Not Very Safe	(14%)	40%	(13%)	29%
Not Safe At All	(4%)	32%	(4%)	21%
Don't Know	(4%)	44%	(2%)	33%
...at school?				
Very Safe	(32%)	47%	(30%)	28%
Somewhat Safe	(46%)	42%	(50%)	28%
Not Very Safe	(12%)	41%	(12%)	27%
Not Safe At All	(4%)	30%	(4%)	28%
Don't Know	(6%)	40%	(3%)	29%

* No tobacco, alcohol, inhalant or illicit drug use

they could drop out of school)?"

Response alternatives are "none," "a few," "some," "most," and "all" (Table 6). Although these questions are nominally about peers, it is likely that answers also reflect the values, attitudes and behaviors of the respondent. That is, the student who reports that most or all of his or her friends care about making good grades likely places a high value on school performance. Correspondingly, students with most or all friends in gangs are likely to value gang membership highly.

Younger students who say all or most of their friends feel close to their parents or care about making good grades are more likely than younger

students who give other responses to be school year drug-free (50-59 percent, compared to 35-38 percent). Interestingly, older students who identify either all or none of their friends with these characteristics are more likely (36 percent and 32 percent, respectively) to be school year drug-free than other older students.

Students were asked how many of their friends wished they could drop out of school, belonged or wanted to belong to a gang, or carried weapons. Students who have no friends with these characteristics are much more likely to be school year drug-free than those who say most of their friends have these characteristics (Figure 3). The

Table 6 Percent of Secondary Students Who Were Drug-Free* During Past School Year, by Peer Values and Behaviors: 1992

How many of your friends...

	<u>Grades 7 through 9</u>		<u>Grades 10 through 12</u>	
	<u>% Responding</u>	<u>% Drug-Free</u>	<u>% Responding</u>	<u>% Drug-Free</u>
...feel close to their parents?				
None	(6%)	35%	(4%)	32%
A Few	(30%)	37%	(31%)	26%
Some	(25%)	38%	(28%)	27%
Most	(30%)	50%	(32%)	27%
All	(9%)	59%	(6%)	36%
...sometimes carry weapons?				
None	(47%)	60%	(39%)	38%
A Few	(27%)	33%	(32%)	24%
Some	(15%)	25%	(18%)	19%
Most	(8%)	19%	(8%)	16%
All	(3%)	18%	(3%)	12%
...care about making good grades?				
None	(4%)	35%	(2%)	37%
A Few	(18%)	32%	(14%)	24%
Some	(25%)	37%	(24%)	24%
Most	(35%)	47%	(45%)	27%
All	(19%)	56%	(15%)	38%
...belong to a gang or want to be a gang member?				
None	(60%)	53%	(68%)	31%
A Few	(20%)	33%	(18%)	23%
Some	(11%)	26%	(8%)	16%
Most	(7%)	19%	(4%)	15%
All	(3%)	18%	(2%)	17%
...wish they could drop out of school?				
None	(58%)	52%	(55%)	32%
A Few	(25%)	33%	(30%)	23%
Some	(11%)	28%	(10%)	23%
Most	(4%)	24%	(3%)	20%
All	(2%)	25%	(2%)	18%

* No tobacco, alcohol, inhalant or illicit drug use

generalization holds for both younger and older students. Questions about peer behavior also reveal some interesting aspects of student life in Texas today: 53 percent of younger students and 61 percent of older students have at least a few friends who carry weapons; 41 percent of younger students and 32 percent of older student have at least a few friends who belong to a gang or want to be gang members; 42 percent of younger students and 45 percent of older students have at least a few friends who wish to drop out of school.

PARENTAL PARTICIPATION IN SCHOOL ACTIVITIES

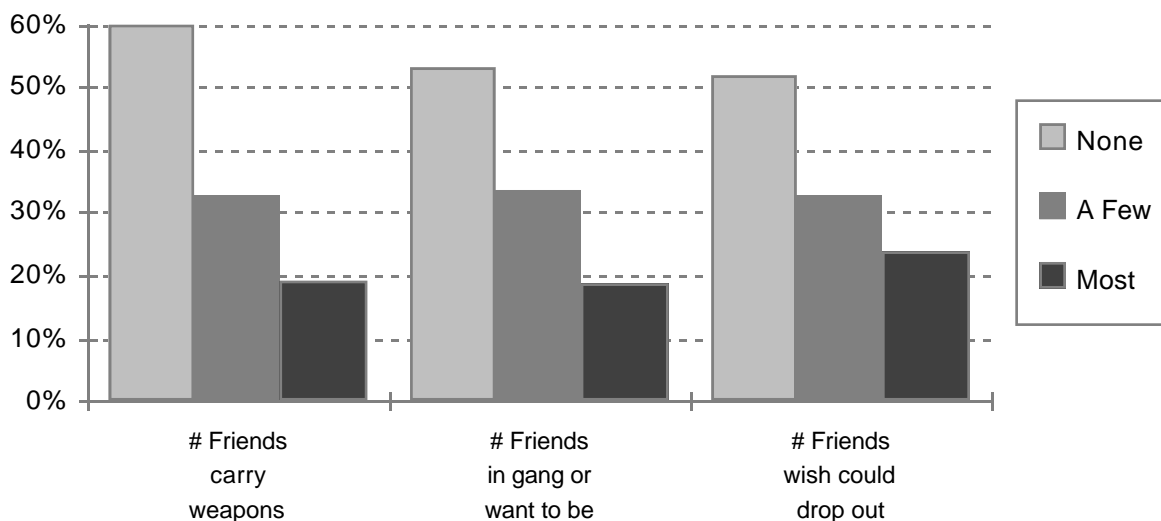
Secondary students were asked if their parents regularly attended school-sponsored open houses or PTA meetings. Students who said that their parents regularly participated in such events were significantly more likely to be school year drug-free (Table 7). The difference is greatest among younger students, where 51 percent of those with school-involved parents were

drug-free compared to only 36 percent of those who said their parents do not participate in such activities. Among older students in grades 10–12, parental school participation also appears to make a difference in drug-free status: 32 percent of those with school-involved parents were school year drug-free, compared to only 25 percent of those who indicated that their parents did not regularly participate. The percentage of students who report that their parents are active in their school-sponsored activities decreases substantially between the earlier and later grades. About 46 percent of younger students, compared to only 37 percent of older students, said that their parents regularly participated in school-related activities.

INTERPRETATION AND APPLICATION

The factors that promote resilience during a child’s development are best conceptualized within an ecological frame of reference. These resiliency factors are multiple, and are nested within the domains of the individual, family, peers, and

Fig 3 Percent of Grade 7–9 Students Who Were School Year Drug-Free, by Number of Friends With Various Behaviors: 1992



community. Findings from the present analysis reinforce the idea that multiple influences are important in helping youth achieve and maintain drug-free lives. **Individual** orientation toward grades and school is important. **Family** closeness and involvement in school activities is important. **Peer** drug use habits and orientation to family, school, and non-gang friendships are important, as well as participation with peers in school-sponsored activities. **Community** and school settings are also important in providing an economically adequate and safe environment in which youth can live and attend school. These factors help. People involved in prevention efforts can take heart from these findings, and know that there are positive factors counteracting the high risk that exists for students.

However, all youngsters today are exposed to a high-risk situation. Historic, legal, social, and economic factors combine with the normal developmental challenges of adolescence to create and perpetuate risk for drug use. When parents, schools, and communities are functioning effectively and cooperatively, they can help support drug-free behaviors and values among individual youth and their peer groups. No single strategy or focus on any single domain is likely to have a

sufficient impact on all students. In other words, what happens in school is important, but schools cannot take total responsibility for prevention. Effective prevention requires commitment at all levels, from parents, schools, communities, as well as currently drug-free youth, to work together toward the goal of a drug-free Texas.

Table 7 Percent of Secondary Students Who Were Drug-Free* During Past School Year, by Parental Activity in School Events

	Grade 7 through 9		Grades 10 through 12	
	% Responding	% Drug-free	% Responding	% Drug-free
Yes	(46%)	51%	(37%)	32%
No	(54%)	36%	(63%)	25%

* No tobacco, alcohol, inhalant, or illicit drug use