

## **2013 YRBS Washington Central**

The Vermont Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) is given to students every two years since 1985 by the Vermont Departments of Health and Education. The survey measures the prevalence of specific personal behaviors that directly affect the health of our youth.

Last spring, 382 U-32 ninth-twelfth grade and 216 seventh and eighth grade students participated in the YRBS. The middle and high surveys differed slightly. The middle school survey included questions on fighting, bullying, suicidality, substance use, attitudes and perceptions about substance use, body image, physical activity, and youth assets. The high school survey included questions on these topics as well as self-reported height and weight, driving behaviors, other drug use, sexual behavior and orientation, and nutrition.

The YRBS is part of a larger effort to help communities increase the “resiliency” of young people by reducing high-risk behaviors and promoting healthy behaviors.

### **Alcohol**

While the trend in alcohol use among younger students has decreased over the last 18 years, older student use has trended upward, with 56% of 12th grade students reporting using alcohol within the last 30 days (compared to the statewide average of 47%). The percentage of 8th grade students reporting using alcohol within the last 30 days decreased from 23% in 2009 to 8% in 2013, while 56% of 8th grader students reported that it would be easy or very easy to get alcohol. This percentage is higher than the statewide average of 38%.

Reported binge drinking (5 or more drinks of alcohol in a row within a couple of hours) during the past 30 days decreased over the last two years among younger students; however 41% of 12th grade students reported binge drinking (up from 25% in 2011), which is much higher than the Vermont average of 30%.

### **Marijuana**

Compared to other states, Vermont has the highest prevalence of past 30 day marijuana use among 12–17- year-olds. At U-32, 21% of high school students reported having used marijuana during the past 30 days, down from 31% two years ago. Interestingly, at U-32, only 19% of 11th grader students reported having used marijuana during the past 30 days, which is significantly lower than the statewide average. However, 35% of 12th graders reported past 30-day usage.

Research has shown that as perception of harm decreases there is a tendency for use to increase. Only 56% of 7th and 8th grade students (compared to 64% of all Vermont middle school students) and only 35% of high school students perceived risk of harm from regular marijuana use.

## **Tobacco**

The percentage of U-32 students who report that they think their parents think it is wrong or very wrong for them to smoke cigarettes is 98% for middle school students, statistically higher than the statewide average, and 89% for high school students. U-32 students continue to believe tobacco is harmful, 76% of 11th grade students think that there is great risk in people harming themselves from smoking one or more packs of cigarettes/day.

Healthy development depends not only on avoiding harmful behavior, but also on strengthening positive influence. Research shows that involvement in constructive, supervised extra-curricular activities is associated with reduced likelihood of involvement in risky behaviors such as school failure, drug use, and crime. In addition, evidence is emerging that students who participate in such activities are also more likely to engage in other “thriving” behaviors. In 2013, 56% of high school students report having spent one or more hours per week volunteering their time to make their community a better place to live and 54% of high school students and 62% of middle school students agreed that in their community they felt like they mattered to people.

Copies of both surveys can be found online at:  
<http://healthvermont.gov/research/yrbs.aspx>