

## **Montpelier Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2013**

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, 245 Montpelier High ninth-twelfth grade and 180 Main Street Middle School sixth-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.

### **Cigarettes**

The number of students in grades 9-12 who reported they had smoked a cigarette during the past 30 days decreased significantly at Montpelier from 26% in 2009 to 13% in 2013.

### **Alcohol**

33% of Montpelier 9th-12th grade students reported consuming alcohol during the past 30 days. This is 5% lower than two years ago. While only 14% of 9th and 10th graders reported having consumed alcohol in the past 30 days, a whopping 50% of 11th and 12th graders reported drinking alcohol in the past 30 days. Equally troubling, 37% of those 11th and 12th graders reported that they had 5 or more drinks in a row (binge drinking) in the past 30 days.

Alcohol remains easily accessible and a relatively acceptable form of substance abuse among youth.

### **Marijuana**

At Montpelier, marijuana use among 9th-12th graders has decreased in the past 2 years from 35% in 2011 to 27% in 2013. However, this is still higher than the Vermont average of 24%. Of 11th and 12th grade students, 39% reported riding with a driver who had been smoking marijuana—statistically higher than 29% statewide.

Participation in youth programs and service to community

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. 59% of Montpelier students report having spent one or more hours per week volunteering their time to make their community a better place to live.

### **Youth valued by their community**

It stands to reason that young people respond positively when they perceive they are valued by others in their community. Above the Vermont average, 68% of 9th-12th graders and 61% of 6th-8th graders reported feeling valued in their community. Additionally 71% of high school students and 58% of middle school students agreed that teachers really care about them and give them a lot of encouragement.