

**BLACK RIVER AREA COMMUNITY COALITION**  
Student and Parent Evaluation Report 2009-2010  
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**STUDENT SURVEY**  
**School Attitudes and Behaviors**

Surveys were administered in early February of 2010 to Black River High School students in Ludlow, VT. There were a total of 137 surveys collected including 63 males and 74 females in grades 7 to 12. The survey inquired about student's opinions of the school, their personal decisions outside of school, and perceptions of bullying and drug/alcohol usage. This information will provide the community with a better understanding of student's perspectives on their community. This information should help us implement programs that will delay the onset of drug and alcohol usage, as well as improve the school. This is the fourth-consecutive year that this survey has been administered.

According to the current study, a high percentage of Black River High School students care about their education and school environment.

- 94% think that education is important.
- 82.5% agree that their grades are important to them.
- 80.3% have a favorite teacher within the school.
- 76.6% care if their homework is done correctly.
- 72.8% believe they are treated fairly by most teachers in the school.
- 71% want to earn a college degree.
- 70.1% agree that most of their classes are important to them.
- 69.1% believe the principal is fair most of the time.

From the results it is also clear that some aspects of the school need improvement.

- 58.4% believe that punishment for breaking the rules are subjective and not equal.
- 51.5% believe their school is worse in comparison to other schools.
- 49.3% find it hard to discuss problems with their teachers.
- 48.1% feel most of the school's rules are not fair.
- 41.6% feel that most teachers are not interested in anything they do or say.
- 13.9% reported bringing a weapon to school (N=19).

A student's interest in academics has been found to correlate with their teacher relationships. Whitney, Leonard, Leonard, Camelio, and Camelio (2005) reported that a teacher's positive attitude and willingness to help significantly influenced student success. They also found that teachers' encouragement and discouragement directly influenced a student's motivation to learn. Students were also asked to list characteristics they believe are important in good teachers. Affect, caring

personality, and professionalism were the three most frequent characteristics identified. Whitney et al. (2005) suggest that effective teachers create and manage learning environments in order to enhance full participation of all students, including those with disabilities. This study demonstrates how different styles of teaching enhance the knowledge retained by students.

By continuing to administer the Culture Survey we are able to compare results from previous years. The following questions showed substantial increases in percentages since last year.

	2008-2009	2009-2010
I believe my school is better in comparison to other schools.	38.8%	48.5%
I feel I have a favorite teacher in this school.	79.5%	88.3%
I believe the principal is fair most of the time.	66%	69.1%
I have stolen from a teacher.	0%	10.9%

The following items showed substantial decreases in percentages since last year.

	2008-2009	2009-2010
I feel I will fail no matter how hard I try.	17.3%	7.5%
I feel the dean of students is tough and strict.	68.6%	59.7%
I feel rules in this school are too strict.	37.7%	33.8%
I have been sent to the office.	62.2%	48.9%

## **Bullying**

Bullying poses a threat to children's social-emotional functioning and affects their perceptions of school climate. Minimal research has been conducted in order to figure out how to fix this problem. However, O'Brennan and Sawyer (2009) found that boys were more likely to be bullies, though both females and males are equally victimized. Consequently, prevention programs need to focus on male perpetrators. They also found that victims of bullying tended to display each of these three internalizing symptoms: sadness, loneliness, and worry. These symptoms can lead to personal problems succeeding in school. Overall, this research indicates that in order to have a better sense of belonging in school environments, schools need to focus on ways to reduce bullying. A better sense of belonging should lead to higher academic expectations.

On the current survey 54.3% of students reported they do not talk about bullying, and 40.3% of students reported they have never been bullied. Of the students who have been bullied, a majority reported it does not bother them (34.3%), and 39.6% reported they ignore it.

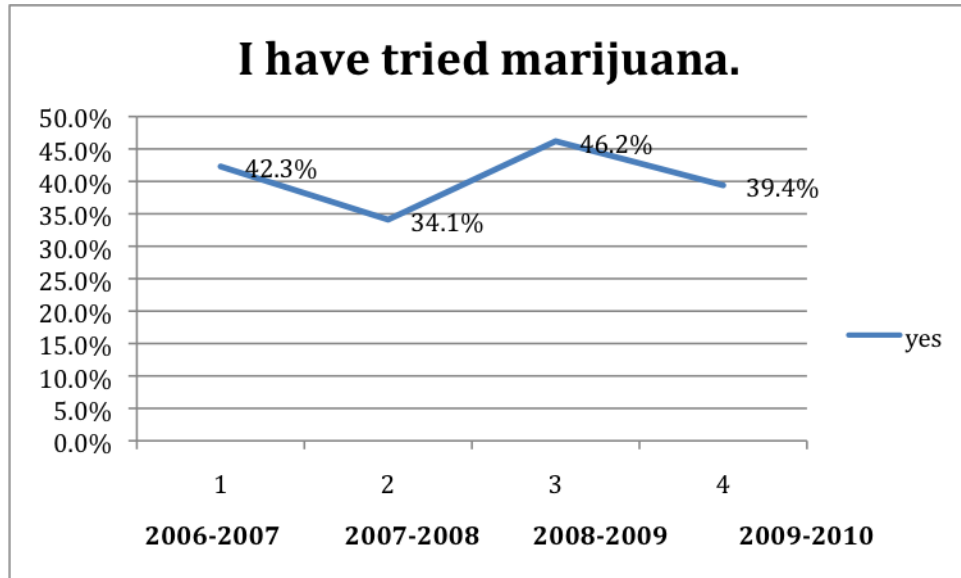
### **Drug and Alcohol Use**

Drinking has become a normative behavior among teenagers in the United States. Alcohol is reported to be the most widely used drug among teens. Despite being reported as a normal and acceptable behavior, negative health consequences of teen-alcohol use are very serious (Kuehn, 2007). Usage has been linked to problem behaviors such as violence, anti-social behaviors, and police encounters (Spijkerman, Van den Eijnden, Overbeek & Engels, 2007).

Many students (71.5%) reported that they have had a drink of alcohol. Of these, most had their first drink between the ages of 12 and 14 (39.4%). Of the options for the number of drinks consumed in one sitting, the majority of students, 49.1%, reported they have 1 to 3 drinks in one sitting.

In comparison to the 41.7% of students who reported not consuming alcohol in the last 30 days on the 2009 survey, this year 64.7% of students reported not consuming alcohol in the last 30 days.

In the year of 2008-2009, 46.2% of students reported having had tried marijuana while 39.4% reported that this year. Over the last four years the Culture Survey has shown fairly consistent reports of marijuana use by Black River students.



Adderall was the highest reported prescription drug being used at 39.1%.

65.7% of students believe youth smoke cigarettes to 'feel good'.

13.3% of students believe it is cool to drink, and only 2.2% believe you have to drink to be cool or popular.

74.1% of students believe drinking is harmful to your health, which is an increase over last year's 65.8%.

### Perceptions

There has been a rise in the misperceptions of teenage usage, showing that adults and teenagers tend to inaccurately estimate the amount of drugs, alcohol, and tobacco used (Ott & Doyle, 2005). For example, researchers found that 38% of students reported smoking cigarettes, while 64% of participants believed the typical student smoked cigarettes daily (Martens, Page, Mowry, Demann, Taylor & Cimini, 2006). Prior studies have shown that these misperceptions within the neighborhood, parents, and teenagers are important in predicting youths' decisions about risky behaviors. Researchers have found that these misperceptions typically link to problem behavior within youths and adolescents (Byrnes, Chen, Miller & Maguin, 2006).

The current survey found that students believe it is slightly easier to get marijuana (39.7%) than alcohol (38.7%). While 13.1% of students believe it is very easy for youth to obtain prescription drugs.

Out of the places that youth can obtain alcohol, 20.4% of students believe it comes from out of town. This was the highest percentage of all the options. Students believe that getting alcohol at school was the least likely way to obtain alcohol.

Research investigating family structure has found that the quality of parent-child relationships has a big influence on youths' decisions. Oman, Vesely, Tolma, & Aspy (2007) suggest that youth living in one-parent households are more likely to report using drugs or alcohol in the past 30 days. Furthermore, research has provided evidence of other factors that contribute to teenage decisions. Specifically, Bogenschneider, Wu, Raffaelli, & Tsay (1998) found that adolescents desire independence from parental control, and rebel with risky behaviors. Overall, research makes it clear that there are many interdependent factors contributing to adolescent risk taking.

## **PARENT SURVEY**

Parents' were asked to take part in a survey of their opinions and knowledge about aspects of their child's social behavior. These surveys were mailed to the parents' homes with a pre-addressed and stamped envelope during the month of January, 2010. The return rate for this year was quite low with 28 responses. We wanted to know what the parents' viewed as the largest problem for their Black River High School student.

Research shows that those communities who coordinate the neighborhood, parent and youth perceptions of drug and alcohol usage had more positive youth behavior. Research also suggests that youth's perceptions are better indicators of actual youth behavior, than are parent perceptions (Brynes et al., 2006).

Youths who have experimented with drugs/alcohol, but are not frequent users, and who come from families who hold mutual values, are less likely to have drug problems. This indicates that families should coordinate their values with their children and be honest about their experiences with drugs and alcohol. This will help maintain open and forthright communication. Without a comfortable household in which children can openly speak, they will turn to their peers for advice, which often leads to increased usage (Silverman & Silverman, 1998).

According to our data, high percentages of Black River High School parents attempt to monitor their children's behavior.

100% of parents reported that they have talked to their children about drinking or using drugs.

92.6% of parents always ask their child if other parents will be present at parties they attend.

84.6% of parents always or sometimes contact other parents to verify what their child said.

84% reported that they always wait up for their child to come home, or wake up when they arrive home.

75% of parents reported that they monitor their child's Myspace/Facebook internet account.

Only two parents reported being unfamiliar with BRACC’s programs, consequently we are unable to accurately compare the opinions of those familiar with the programs to the opinions of those not familiar.

We’ve begun to attempt to monitor the differences between student and parent opinions by asking similar questions on both surveys and comparing the results.

Curfews	Student (N=137)	Parent (N=28)
Yes	44.5%	92.6%
No	55.5%	7.4%

Internet Accounts	Student	Parent
Yes	86.9%	82.1%
No	13.1%	17.9%

First tried ALCOHOL	Student	Parent
12 or younger	42.4%	-
12 to 14	39.4%	44.4%
15 to 17	15.2%	48.1%
18 to 20	3.0%	3.7%
21+	-	3.7%

First tried MARIJUANA	Student	Parent
12 or younger	19.7%	-
12 to 14	41.1%	29.6%
15 to 17	33.9%	59.3%
18 to 20	5.4%	7.4%
21+	-	3.7%

Misperception of parents’ awareness of social behaviors among adolescents is an ongoing dilemma. As noted in the charts above, we can see that the students’ reported first trying alcohol and marijuana much earlier than the parents believe.

Promoting awareness about misperceptions and actual usage is a very beneficial method for educating parents and youths about substance abuse problems. It helps to increase knowledge within the community. Research suggests this will help to prevent new cases of usage among youth. These survey results should be fairly representative of actual usage among teens within this school district since we had responses from the majority of students. These more accurate data should reduce misperceptions, and hopefully reduce incidences of substance abuse among teens in our community.

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