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Contact: Lucy Smith, student assistance coordinator, Macomb Intermediate School District, 586.228.3491.

Substance Abuse Declines in Macomb's Young Teens—MISD

Younger teens in Macomb County are using alcohol, cigarettes and marijuana less, according to the Macomb Intermediate School District's fourth aggregate report, Macomb County 2001 Alcohol and Other Drugs School Survey. The survey combines data from over half of Macomb County school districts, large and small, north and south, to create a picture of countywide substance abuse in local young people. "We've seen a dramatic decline in use by 8th and 10th graders," said Lucy Smith, MISD Student Assistance Coordinator. "This is particularly welcome news. National statistics reveal that most experimenting with gateway drugs occurs in the 7th through 10th grades. Students in those grades are particularly vulnerable because those students are physically and emotionally immature and become addicted more easily. The younger a user is, the greater the chance of addiction." "This decline means that fewer Macomb young people are at risk." 8th grade use: Macomb's survey reveals fewer eighth graders experiment, use substances regularly or use heavily. In a comparison of the eighth grade classes of 1997 and 2001, the number who had—at some time—experimented with: * Alcohol declined from 61% in 1997 to 50% in 2001; * Tobacco, from 55% to 38%; and * Marijuana, from 26% to 15%. In all other categories, the 2001 seniors reported only slightly lower numbers from previous years, declining 2-3%. Such a small decline cannot be seen as a trend, cautioned Smith, unless future numbers reveal a continuing decline. The number of eighth graders who said they had used substances in the month preceding the survey also fell. Those using alcohol declined from 37% in 1995 to 24% in 2001, while those using tobacco or marijuana declined by nearly half. (Tobacco users declined from 26% in 1995 to 13% in 2001, and marijuana users dropped from a high of 14% in 1997 to 7% in 2001.) Heavy use of alcohol and tobacco among a minority of 8th graders also fell. Binge drinking and/or heavy use (five or more drinks in a row) declined from a high of 20% in 1997 to 12% in 2001, while daily tobacco use fell by more than half, from 16% in 1995 to 7% in 2001. Smith said that a

decline in substance abuse in young teens first became apparent in the 1999 survey, which compared use in the 1998-99 school year with data going back to 1995. That decline has continued, Smith said. "What we have here is a trend, not a one-time drop in numbers." 10th grade use: Most of the students who signaled the change nearly two years ago were surveyed again in the 10th grade, and their scores are lower than those of 10th graders from 1999, she said. Experimentation by 10th graders declined as follows: *Tobacco use declined from a high of 67% in 1997 to 60% in 2001; * Marijuana experimentation declined from 44% to 37% in the same period; while * Alcohol use showed a slight decline (79% to 75%). The number of 10th graders who reported that they had used substances in the month preceding the survey also declined: * Alcohol use fell by more than half, from 54% in 1999 to 47% in 2001; * Tobacco use, from 38% in 1997 to 28% in 2001; and * Marijuana use, from 28% in 1999 to 22% in 2001. Binge drinking or heavy use of alcohol (five or more drinks in a row) dropped from a high of 34% in 1999 to 29% in 01; while daily tobacco use declined by a third, from 27% in 1997 to 18% in 2001. 12th grade use: Smith reported some declines at the 12th grade level: * Tobacco use in the month before the survey declined from a high of 46% in 1999 to 41% in 2001; * Alcohol use also declined from a high of 67% in 1995 to 61% in 2001. In all other categories, the 2001 seniors reported only slightly lower numbers from previous years, declining 2-3%. Such a small decline cannot be seen as a trend, cautioned Smith, unless future numbers reveal a continuing decline. Interpretation Overall, Smith said she was optimistic about the trends she sees emerging among young teens. "Our children are telling us that increasingly they choose not to use substances," said Smith. "Many in both 10th and 12th grade are also choosing not to drink and drive, or to ride with a driver who has been drinking. Macomb's teens are making decisions that are healthier and that save lives." "Young people are also reporting that they turn more to educators and family for advice more, although their friends continue to be their most important advisers," said Smith. Some of the reasons for this trend, according to Smith, are student-led initiatives, the enforcement of zero tolerance laws, and schools teaching about substance abuse and offering counseling to young people. "Students, parents, schools, law enforcement and the community are cooperating, and students are learning from many sources that the use of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs is not O.K," Smith said. Other data revealed in the 2001 survey shows that students, especially those in 10th grade, feel less safe at school. This is the first data collected since Columbine. Despite this, the majority of Macomb youth at all grade levels continue to feel safe at school, she reported. Dr. Thomas L. Van Valey, Western Michigan University Kercher Center, compiled the aggregate data for the survey for Social Research. Lucy Smith, MISD Student Assistance Coordinator, wrote the summary report with assistance from Dana Gire, Macomb County Office of Substance Abuse.

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