

FOCUS GROUP REPORT

During the month of January and February, 2006, focus group discussions (FGD) were held with 65 students from six different high schools in Marquette and Alger counties. These focus group discussions were facilitated by Center staff and evaluation consultant, Karen S, Dubow, Ph.D. Each school selected the youth participants. The focus group was comprised of 37 females and 28 males. The participants represented all high school levels: 13 were seniors, 24 were juniors, 23 were sophomores and five were freshman. The intent of the FGD was to learn students' perceptions, feelings, and attitudes about nutrition, religious involvement, substance use, and service learning. In addition the student input provided additional information to the 2004 Marquette-Alger Asset Survey and Sidebar Survey results.

Nutrition and Exercise Summary:

- Many students eat lunch at school.
- Students provided a variety of lunch experience descriptions including choices of food, eating environment, and locations of eating lunch.
- Student ratings of school lunch programs averaged 2.6 on a scale of 1 low and 5 high.
- Students had many suggestions as to how school lunch programs can be improved including types of food, access, space, waiting period, etc.
- Students indicated that they receive healthy messages at school through a few displayed posters, health classes, and physical education classes.
- Few suggestions were provided by students as to what schools could do to promote exercise.

Religious Involvement Summary:

- Students thought there is a decrease in student involvement in religious institutions mainly because as students get older, they have more involvement in other activities, less time, and less parent encouragement.
- Students felt that it is "taboo" to talk about religion.
- Some respondents expressed that they don't perceive religious institutions as relevant to their lives. Other respondents were very enthusiastic about their religious involvement.
- Students had few suggestions as to what churches/organization could do to get youth involved in religious activities.

Youth Substance Use Summary:

- Students thought the major reason that perceptions varied between younger and older students of what constitutes "risky" or "wrong" behavior is that as students get

older, they are more open-minded, more independent, have more exposure, and have more options.

- Students thought that alcohol is less risky than smoking cigarettes because there is more information about the dangers of smoking versus the information about drinking.
- Students acknowledged they can easily access substances from home, older friends, siblings and other means.
- Students thought youth using prescription drugs is not as prevalent as smoking or drinking but they pointed out that it is easy to get access to prescription drugs.
- Students thought that one barrier to measuring prescription drug abuse may be that youth who engage in this behavior keep it a secret, even from close friends.

Service to Others Summary:

- “Service learning” was not a familiar term with many students.
- Many students felt that opportunities for community service were disorganized, inconsistent, and poorly-explained.
- Students provided a few suggestions as to what schools could do to promote service learning.
- None of the students expressed that they were unwilling to engage in service to others.

Individual student responses to the each question by topic are in the following narrative.

Nutrition and Exercise Input

How do you rate your school lunch program? (1, low; 5 high)

2.6 average (all 6 schools combined)

1. Describe your lunch experience

- “Eew”
- Gross
- I eat pizza, cookies and milk everyday – it is the safe option
- It’s a mystery
- Good menu items are pasties, pizza and subs
- There are “tricks” to making the food taste better, like putting salt on the “government cheese” and lots of pepper on the macaroni and cheese
- On special days, there is fruit. Often the fruit is under or over ripe
- Some days, there is corn or coleslaw with the entrée
- There is snack, pop and milk machine
- Lunch: primary choice, secondary choices, tater tots at every meal, salad bar is possible choice, also “snack line.”

- Youth on free or reduced lunch do not have the option of choosing from the “snack line.”
- Always available: Salad, nachos, chicken nuggets, sugar cereal, bosco sticks
- Pay a check to the school and then use PIN#.
- Snack time 9:30am. “2 huge cookies and great milk for one dollar.”
- Vending machines accessible all day
- They took away chocolate milk at snack time and pop, but we still have candy from the vending machine
- Free and reduced lunch students are not differentiated from other students.
- All students use a “PIN #.”
- Lunch period is spent in lunchroom or student lounge, unless students are participating in a meeting or other school activity during lunch.
- The majority of students eat school lunch, but most do not eat everything that they are served.
- There is an a la carte line that has the hot lunch entrée, chicken nuggets, pizza, mozzarella sticks
- There is no food or drink allowed in the hallway
- There is a pop machine, but it is only available after school
- Everyone eats at the same time
- Organization members are allowed to take their lunch and eat in meetings.
- You can get seconds, if there is enough left
- There is free fruit with hot lunch
- Juice or cookies are extra
- The hot lunch consists of the entrée, fruit and milk
- You can check the menu 2 weeks in advance.
- There is a closed campus
- There are long lines for a la carte and for “good” hot lunch entrées
- Students able to order out (Border Grill delivers)
- Lunch room has a variety – pizza sticks, chicken patties, packaged salad, packaged carrot sticks
- Lots of preservatives so it’s extra fattening
- Nothing is good for you
- Lunch space is considered good – both cafeteria and auditorium are used for lunch; lunch line moves fast
- Our lunch ladies are awesome
- All students eat at the same time
- I feel rushed.” 35 min. lunch break
- The food here is not good
- Even the salad is just iceberg lettuce
- Closed campus; all have lunch at same time; 35 minute lunch break
- It is an open campus. “A lot” of kids go to a nearby store. When kids go to the store, they mostly eat candy and chips.

2. Do kids eat lunch?

- Most do
- Yes
- Not usually. We know when we aren't eating well or eating good foods.
- Almost all kids eat school lunch, not many brown bag it
- Some kids eat snacks out of the vending machine, some don't eat at all and go straight to the gym to hang out or play basketball
- Participant doesn't eat
- Most kids at the school eat hot lunch
- Maybe a few don't eat
- Some students never eat school lunch
- Students generally bring their lunch
- Often skip lunch.
- Most of my friends eat something
- There is a handful who go to the vending machine and get a bag of chips and that is their lunch

3. Where do you and other kids eat lunch?

- It's a closed campus; used to be open, but there were problems with smoking
- Most of us eat at school, most eat hot lunch
- Students eat in hallways, on sports deck
- Students concerned about hygiene of eating in areas not intended to be cafeteria spaces. The areas are not cleaned appropriately.
- Kids eat in the elementary gym. They can go to the big gym to hang out
- Students eat school lunch most of the time
- Few carry lunch every day
- Some skip lunch often
- Cafeteria
- In the gym, or at the store

4. How can school lunch program be improved? Describe an ideal lunch.

(including choice of food, access, space waiting period, etc)

- One day per week, have a special feature like McD's, Little Caesars, etc...
- Just get better quality food
- Try not to serve leftovers too many times
- Try to make more foods homemade, not so much prepared/frozen stuff
- More money, more workers
- The school food is O.K., sometimes it's really salty.
- There are long lines. There should be two
- More variety, bigger menu – a visual menu
- The school should let students “borrow” punches from other students' cards. If a student forgets their own card, they are not allowed to borrow a punch from someone else's card. These students do not eat.
- More variety. There are only four days in the week and they have pizza at least once per week

- The menu options are the hot lunch entrée. If the student does not want the entrée, they may choose a peanut butter sandwich or a salad.
- There is no choice of side either
- More options for beverages, not just milk.
- Food Service Staff don't wear hair nets and sometimes there is hair in the food.
- There used to be breakfast. They should bring that back.
- The food looks bad – green, rubbery hot dogs
- Texture is bad
- Some days, lunch is good
- There are no vegetarian options. There are just cookies and combos.
- More variety in the a la carte
- Open up the campus – it would help the community businesses
- If the campus was open, you could go home to eat or go outside
- More variety
- Salad bar with bread and fruit
- Students should be allowed to eat in the hallways. Students should be trusted to clean up after themselves.
- A la carte options
- Real chairs and tables
- Don't charge extra for cookies
- Have better fruit
- More fruit
- More time
- Fresh foods
- Better bread
- Don't fry everything
- Give another choice besides tater tots
- Offer chocolate milk in the morning
- Open campus (at least to upperclassmen)
- More pleasant presentation on tray; more variety
- More variety
- The waiting line sucks
- Too long to wait.
- Fried food less often
- They used to have things like fresh pineapple
- Healthier food in general
- Would like a snack time
- Vending machines get shut off – students would prefer them left on.

5. What healthy messages are you receiving from school?

- There are posters – got milk, the food pyramid
- There was a problem with smoking, now campus is closed
- Freshmen are required to take health. It used to be ¼ health and ¼ sex education. Now it is just health.

- Can take P.E courses
- P.E is required in 9th grade
- They are getting rid of pop machines next year. Students have access to the pop machine any time of day and can drink in class.
- There is a poster that lists acidity levels of different sodas posted near the pop machine.
- There are posters in the lunch room and science classes. These have the food pyramid and “100 Ways to be Healthy”
- There is an optional health class that most kids take
- There is some discussion about nutrition in biology class.
- No smoking signs
- Stay in school
- Cute little posters
- Food pyramid in health class.
- Elective “Teen Cuisine” course
- Swimming is required
- Not enough equipment in the weight room
- A few posters
- Milk posters
- “3” a day, vegetables posters
- Vending machine sells healthy drinks – juice, milk
- Only one pop machine; milk/juice available between classes
- Food pyramid poster in the lunchroom
- Health class taken any time (typically 2nd year) ½ year required
- None
- Cooking teacher encourages healthy eating
- 1st hour teachers let us bring our breakfast
- No nutrition signs/posters
- Health class
- You can come in early and workout in the weight room, if there is staff available
- You can drink pop in some classes

6. What can schools do to promote health/exercise?

- One year of P.E. required
- Nothing, we don’t really care
- Gym class required – 1 year
- Sports.
- Help out with gym memberships
- Our gym weight room is not the best thing
- Weight sets in the football locker room, but girls don’t go there.
- More fitness/sport equipment
- Gym and health
- They offer lots of sports
- The school is already doing a pretty good job.

- The school is already doing a good job.
- New state academic requirements don't leave enough time for electives
- There should be more health classes
- Have intramural sports
- They are getting health messages at home
- Intramural sports.
- Swimming – open swim, but it's not promoted to students
- Johnson's advertises during announcements

Religious Involvement Input

1. We learned from that last asset survey 46% of the young people surveyed spend one or more hours per week in a religious institution. This was a decrease from previous asset results. Why do you think there was a decrease?

- It is not fun
- Maybe some churches do not have as many activities
- Age factor – older kids don't want to hang out with younger children
- I think it has gone up
- Parents don't make older kids go
- Youth have other priorities/other activities going on
- It depends on who else is going to be there - That helps teens determine whether to be involved or not
- In our society it's looked down upon to let your religion be known
- With how disappointing everything is, it is hard to have faith
- Students more busy
- People at this age struggle with their faith
- Teachers are scared to talk about religion, so it's like a taboo
- If people don't talk about their religion, then it seems like it's not important
- I don't think students really care
- Parents stop making you go
- Science classes. Science changes what you believe
- In high school you meet all kinds of people
- Your eyes get more open
- Students lose stereotypes, see more diverse people
- Kids get older and more involved, don't have as much time
- There isn't as much time at home where parents encourage
- School activities interfere with church activities
- Some kids don't care
- Depends on what other youth are there
- Might disagree with what the church says
- Youth want to engage in behavior the church is against
- Science, evolution or other explanations

- Boring, other things are more fun

2. What could churches/organizations do to get youth involved in religious activities?

- Don't know
- More activities
- Churches are already doing all they can.
- Get your friends to go
- Nothing – you either believe or you don't.
- At my church we have Tuesday night band
- Church is kind of stereotyped
- When I was younger, I went to church camp, now I'm getting kind of old for that. I wish they had a weekend camp retreat for older kids
- I'm just too busy in the summer to go for a whole week
- People at my church come out when it's a community service type of activity – they'll come out to volunteer
- More activities, food, games
- More religious content
- More structure, don't waste my time
- They already are doing a lot
- Offer rides to activities and meetings
- Some kids just go for the free food
- Make church more interesting, fun
- Relate church to teen life, don't just lecture
- Help participate in schools, concerts – activities not just come sit in church
- At my old school they'd come hand out Bibles outside my school as we were getting on buses
- It might have encouraged some kids who were not really into it
- They could try using fads

Substance Abuse Input

1. According to the Sidebar Survey, kids have different perceptions of what would be considered “a risk” or “wrong.” For example, the percentage of younger students is higher than older students who believe that it is wrong or very wrong for “someone your age” to engage in drinking beer, smoking cigarettes, etc. Why do you think there are these various perceptions?

- As you get older, you are closer to legal age
- As you get older you see more people doing it
- Older, you are more open
- Youth are beginning to form own opinions.

- You have more independence as you get older
- You question things more as you get older
- There is more exposure as you get older, there is more of it
- There are more options as you get older
- There is better accessibility
- Kids try substances when they older and then justify it
- Kids aren't exposed to it when they are younger
- More people are doing it
- There is more pressure from peers
- You don't think it will hurt you
- In middle school, you hear more about the dangers of smoking, than you do later
- Friends do it
- Parents say they have done it
- In 8th grade you're just blind
- In four years, so many people change
- High school exposed to more things
- It's not as big a risk as other things
- Less acceptable for kids in 8th grade
- 12th graders smoking is not as unacceptable

2. According to the Sidebar Survey, students think it's less risky for alcohol use or trying marijuana over smoking cigarettes and regular marijuana use. Why do kids think it's less risky for one over another?

- I think health risks are different
- T.H.C. is used for cancer patients
- Anti-tobacco P.S.A.'s followed by beer commercials
- Most beer ads are directed at kids
- Almost everyone's parents have an occasional drink
- Smoking isn't fun
- Getting drunk or high is something people do because they think it's fun
- Do it to make friends
- There is just DARE and there is so much about smoking
- Kids justify what they do
- Pot is more socially acceptable
- Drinking prevention education focuses primarily on the dangers of driving, not as much on long-term health effects
- Don't hear much about the dangers about pot addiction
- Cigarettes are easier to get
- Parents who smoke. Their kids want them to quit
- Maybe parents don't drink in front of their kids as often as they smoke

- There is a lot of information about the dangers of not smoking, more than information about not drinking or smoking pot
- So many more people drink and smoke, so there is more info about those substance
- When you're young, you might see your parents drink a beer; as you get older you see your friends doing it.
- Cigarettes are more addictive than alcohol
- Some youth understand the risks (cancer, etc.) some don't have that information.
- Going against the rules makes them feel bigger
- The negatives of smoking are advertised more, you know why it's bad
- They are just now starting pot ads
- Drinking ads are usually just about driving. So, if you don't drive, it's O.K.
- Drinking on TV is fun
- Media doesn't show long-term effects of drinking
- Parents do it
- Parents don't talk about kids not doing it
- It's not as big an effect
- There is a big difference between drinking socially and drinking to get drunk
- Carcinogenic
- Drinking is advertised
- Drinking is done during fun activities
- At restaurants, you don't see 'no drinking' signs
- The familiarity of seeing your parents drink
- Pot is easy to justify because it grows out of the earth. Other drugs come from a lab and you don't know what's in it
- It's not a matter of right and wrong, it's a personal preference (meaning just because a person says that something is not risky doesn't mean that they personally engage in it)

3. How do kids get access to substances (be specific)?

- Older friends, siblings
- Steal it from home
- Drink at home
- Drink with parents
- Older friends
- Steal from house
- From parents
- Know people (who are 21)
- Cigs and beer are very easy to access
- Friend with a parent who doesn't care might buy
- Some parents don't care if you drink with family

- Adults, older siblings, college age people they know
- Stealing from home
- Go to a party and it's just there
- Some stores won't check your ID
- Older friends, older sibling
- parents who don't care
- People looking to make an easy buck
- Steal from siblings
- Kids look up to their older siblings.
- Older people
- I know some younger people that you could buy from
- Ask someone – anyone
- More likely an older friend than an older sibling
- Siblings can tattle on you
- They know that their parents don't care
- I know kids whose parents freely give it to them
- Stealing from parents.

4. Today, we hear about youth using prescription drugs. What do you think is happening in this area?

- It happens a lot, kids think that they are getting something out of it.
- It is not as prevalent as smoking or drinking
- It is easy to access
- There is not much in the way of education against use. One teacher brought it up
- Some kids do it
- Some talk about it and pass them right in class
- Teachers don't talk about it
- Not much about Ritalin
- They have heard of Vicodin
- We don't know, we aren't part of that group
- People abuse prescriptions
- Steal from parents' prescriptions
- They are not as easy to access as alcohol
- Kids are using them, they do have access
- Kids think that if a doctor prescribes it, can't be that harmful
- Kids think that they can make money
- Prescription drugs are so available
- Old people have a million pills

- When I had my appendix out, I didn't tell a lot of people. But then some random stranger comes up to me and asks me if he could buy my pills
- Random people ask me if I can ask my friend to sell her Anexia.
- Doctors give too much prescription drugs
- All agreed that almost all passing drugs is money-driven
- For a while it was getting bad
- It was like a fad
- Some kids thought it was easy to get
- One young person told a story about visiting a doctor who prescribed pain relievers for an injury he had suffered. He was surprised at how readily the doctor prescribed narcotics to him. He stated that it would have been easy to see how some kids in that situation might brag to his friends and then get talked into selling them. He believes that "pills are too easy to get."
- Older siblings selling younger siblings' Ritalin.
- Parents don't keep count
- Taking from grandma
- Athletes taking pain pills before a sport (football, hockey, contact sport) to not feel pain during the game – then keep using pain pills afterward
- If you're doing it, it's not something you let your friends know that you're doing
- It's not really social
- It's too easy to get
- Doctors over-prescribe

Service to Others Input

1. What does service learning mean to you?

- We have a class called academic service learning
- It is a year-long course
- It is required junior year and senior year
- One day per week is project day. The projects vary. This week's was clipping box tops.
- Two days per week the student will go to the home of an assigned senior citizen to assist them with daily activities. Students help their "senior" with things they may not be able to do:
 - Watch "Price is Right"
 - Do crafty stuff
 - Vacuum
 - Bake
 - Clean

- Visit
- Watch TV
- Shovel
- One day per week, the students spend time with their little brother or little sister. They help them with homework and have free time
- Students really like it
- The class will help them with people skills, communication skills and independence in college
- Teacher selects the project
- Students are graded in the course
- There were no complaints about the course
- Sometimes there are problems with the “littles”

(Specific questions following the preceding statements)

Is there a reflection component?

- There is reflection on their activities They utilize the Socratic seminar method
- Students engage in reflection activities on project days

How do your “littles” view you?

- Look up to us as role models
- Shout out to us in hallway
- Students don’t want to mess up in front of their “littles”
- Have heard of community service in terms of people who get in legal trouble
- Not familiar with the term
- It is not part of school at all
- The Honor Society does it
- A few years ago – it used to be a graduation requirement
- The basketball coach had the players help out with an elementary tourney
- They did a can drive for Katrina and they got extra credit for it
- Don’t think that it was right to ‘buy’ extra credit
- At one school, most of the students agreed that their particular school has a “community service” requirement for graduation, but none of the students were exactly sure how many hours of community service were required, nor did any of them know what constituted “community service” or how their community service was to be documented
- The sports teams did community service in a more organized way
- It’s ridiculous to have community service for graduation
- Last year, for the tsunami, students organized a can and coin drive. They got Jilbert’s to donate ice cream. The grade that won, got an ice cream social.
- There is a Spring Clean up Day sponsored by the Honor Society If you have good

grades, you are allowed out of school to clean the grounds

- Participants hadn't heard the term
- It's working for free
- It means helping people
- Paying off debts, probation requirement
- Something you get when you get in trouble
- It's court-ordered
- Never heard of service learning
- Community service, yes
- National Honor Society, Key Club
- If you aren't in clubs, you wouldn't know where to start
- Volunteers stereotyped as goody-goody
- Sometimes employees are rude to volunteers
- Students want bribery because it's always about yourself
- All students know about community service
- Middle school required community service
- The teacher was crazy
- Creepy
- Volunteering means: Working for free; helping the elderly
- They didn't teach you what it was about or why it was good
- Used as punishment

2 What could your school do to promote service learning?

- Other schools should adopt their academic service learning program
- Incentives
- Scholarships
- Get out of school
- Competition
- Have benefits/rewards
- Food
- T-shirts
- Currently, volunteer opportunities are announced over the loudspeaker during school
- Make it seem more fun
- Make it part of a group
- Start promoting it sooner, like K-6
- Tell us why we should do it, why it's important
- A list of options for community service

- Clarify who can document that the young people have done their community service
- I just hate how we're set on our own to do it
- It's not talked about at all
- All would be happy to volunteer if they were asked to help with a specific project
- Like to "know the pros of it,"-like to know what the school hopes to accomplish by having students do community service