



September 24, 2009

## Survey: Drug, alcohol use among Licking County youths above U.S. average

Group of leaders says community effort needed to change behaviors

*BY SETH ROY*  
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NEWARK -- Alcohol and drug use among teens in Licking County is higher than national averages, according to May survey results released Wednesday.

But a local group of community, business and education leaders, called Our Futures in Licking County, is attempting to change that trend.

"We're trying to work with our youth in positive moves forward in the community," said Dan Montgomery, assistant superintendent at the Licking County Educational Service Center. "This is going to be a unified, community effort."

According to the Pride survey that was administered to more than 5,000 students in seven Licking County school districts' sixth, eighth, 10th and 12th grades in May, 45 percent of seniors reported monthly alcohol use.

The study found most usage takes place in the home or at a friend's house, alcohol is the most commonly used drug, and some students began using different substances when they were as young as age 10.

The survey also concluded Licking County youth might have easier access to alcohol, tobacco and other drugs and have less parental disapproval of alcohol and tobacco use.

"We're talking about a community issue, not a school issue," said David Edelblute, court administrator for the Juvenile and Probate Divisions of Licking County Common Pleas Court.

Studies such as the Pride survey and other national data have given groups such as Our Futures in Licking County a tool to use when talking to parents or community members.

"We have much more data than we've ever had before," Edelblute said.

The group doesn't want to focus on the negatives in the survey results; it wants to improve them through positive reinforcement. The group is working with Dennis Embry, CEO and president of PAXIS Institute in Arizona, who met with community leaders Wednesday to talk about those methods.

Many of Embry's ideas, which he calls evidence-based kernels, are easy to implement and cost little, he said.

These kernels include classroom exercises such as timed games, mystery prizes, team competition and peer tutoring. In the home or overall community, many other kernels can be practiced to increase the overall psyche of children, Embry said.

Children are playing outside less today, leading them to be vitamin D deficient, he said. Also, children who have televisions in their rooms lose, on average, an hour of sleep per night.

"Our kids are feeling more depressed," Embry said.

In general, exercising can reduce attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder symptoms, depression and stress hormones, he said.

Parents also need to be aware of the way societal factors from commercials to cell-phone usage are influencing their children.

"What parents do not know are the advertisements their kids are watching about alcohol ... on networks and shows that we never see," Embry said.

But by being more involved -- and practicing the evidence-based kernels -- he asserts teen drug use, and overall behavioral issues, will decrease.

"You can test any of these simple solutions, and you will see change," Embry said.

## Additional Facts

### KEY RESULTS

Monthly use by 12th-graders:

Substance Local Nat'l

Alcohol 45% 41%

Marijuana 25% 21%

Cigarettes 27% 25%

Monthly use by eighth-graders:

Substance Local Nat'l

Alcohol 16% 14%

Marijuana 10% 7%

Cigarettes 12% 9%

Average age of onset of use of substances (the age at which students in specific grades who have

used tobacco, alcohol and other drugs began using them):

Illicit Grade Tobacco Alcohol Drug

6 11 10.9 11.5

8 11.9 11.9 12.5

10 13.2 13.4 14

12 14.3 14.6 15

Number of students surveyed: 5,097 (50.7 percent male)

Source: Our Futures in Licking County Pride Survey results of Licking County teens in May 2009

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