

# “THE PARTNERSHIP”



## CAYUGA COUNTY SAFE SCHOOLS/ HEALTHY STUDENTS PARTNERSHIP

*Key Findings from the Independent Evaluation*

January 2003

PUBLISHED BY **MAGI** EDUCATIONAL SERVICES, INC.

Volume 3, Number 3

## THOUGHTFUL INTERVENTION & PREVENTION IN PARTNERSHIP SCHOOLS POSITIVELY IMPACTS THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT & STUDENT RISK BEHAVIORS

### INTRODUCTION

Although some may perceive schools as dangerous, schools remain the safest place for a child to be. Safe schools, however, don't just happen. They are the result of numerous interrelated efforts that go beyond mere crisis response planning and instead focus on comprehensive prevention and intervention. School/community partnerships are the key to building safe schools. For the past two years, a successful school/community partnership has been thriving in central New York State. The **Cayuga County Safe Schools/Healthy Students Partnership** is a far-reaching program that seeks to foster the healthy development of children and youth by tackling head-on the incidence of harmful behaviors that can place them at risk. It involves the collaboration of schools, mental health agencies, human services, and health and law enforcement agencies in a multi-disciplinary delivery system.

Evaluation is a crucial component of the Safe Schools/Healthy Students Partnership. An important goal of the evaluation has been to provide a risk assessment of Partnership students at key points during the implementation process. In 2001, the project evaluators – MAGI Educational Services, Inc. –

completed the first such assessment by analyzing student responses to a nationally-developed student risk behavior survey. A second assessment has just been completed using 2002 survey results. The two years of survey data are presented in this edition of *The Partnership*. By examining this data, we can better understand how students' risk behaviors have changed over time and how the Partnership programs and services have contributed to this change.

Altogether, more than 2000 7<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, and 11<sup>th</sup> grade students from 5 schools were surveyed – 1000 per year. Most of the students were Caucasian (90%), with an even distribution of boys and girls.



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The results are presented as a series of *key indicators* organized into five sections:

**Section 1:** School Experiences

**Section 2:** School Behaviors

**Section 3:** Acts that Contribute to Violence

**Section 4:** Suicidal Behaviors

**Section 5:** Tobacco, Alcohol, and Drug Use

For each indicator, we discuss changes over time and highlight any statistically significant<sup>1</sup> sub-group differences. Where possible, the data are compared with New York State statistics to provide a context for interpretation. We conclude with an at-a-glance chart that summarizes the findings in a consumer-friendly manner.

## RESULTS

### SECTION 1: SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

Schools that provide a safe and supportive environment where students are engaged in meaningful learning can offer young people the promise of a fulfilling future. Without a safe environment, teachers cannot teach and students cannot learn. Research suggests that certain aspects of a school's environment can strongly influence safety by moderating conditions associated with disruptive or violent behavior. These include a school culture that challenges and respects students, values their opinion, and provides multiple opportunities for their involvement in school activities; a disciplined setting that enforces high standards of behavior; and the availability of counseling and other support services. Schools can also instill a sense of safety in students by creating an atmosphere that promotes caring and mutual support among students and staff by encouraging parents to become involved in their children's learning and by augmenting the presence of adults on campus through additional security personnel. The four indicators presented below – school climate, caring and involvement, feelings of safety, and presence of a school resource officer (SRO) – suggest that Partnership schools were largely successful in creating a responsive and safe environment conducive to learning.

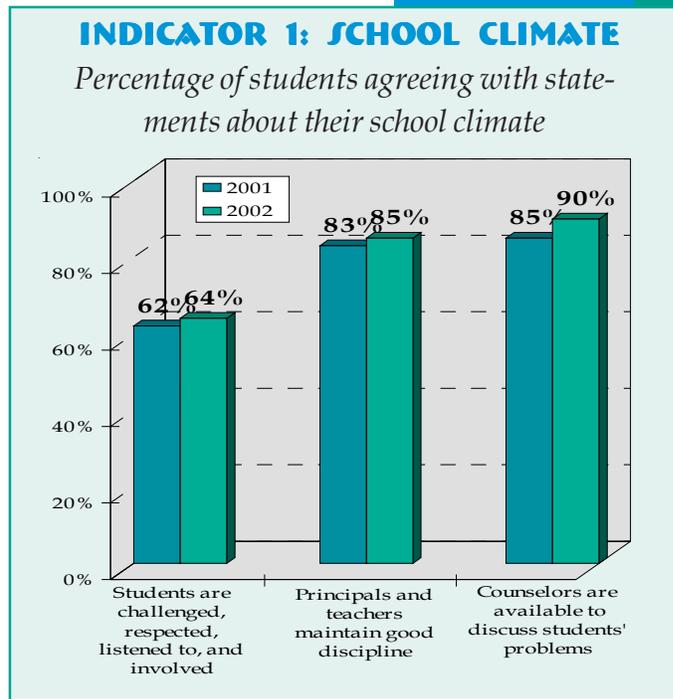


**WITHOUT  
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AND STUDENTS  
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<sup>1</sup> Use of the word "significant" throughout this report signifies statistical significance ( $p < .05$ )

◆ *The vast majority of Partnership students believed that their school provided a supportive climate.*

- In both 2001 and 2002, more than 60% of the students reported being challenged academically at school, having their opinions heard, and having opportunities to get involved in sports, clubs, and other school activities.
- A higher percentage – more than 80% – believed that their teachers maintained good discipline in the classroom, and that their principals did the same at the school level.
- Most students also reported that their school provided a counselor or another person to discuss problems when needed.



◆ *School climate ratings were highest among 11<sup>th</sup> grade students as compared with 7<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> grade students; the differences were statistically significant.*

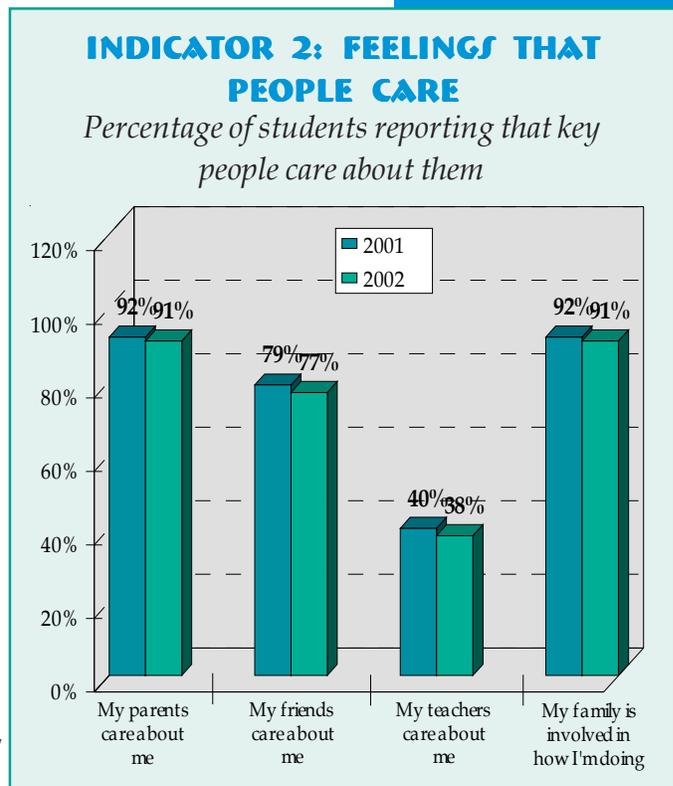
◆ *School climate ratings improved significantly from 2001 to 2002, with the greatest change occurring among 7<sup>th</sup> graders.*

◆ *More than nine out of ten Partnership students reported a close bonding with their parents.*

- Close to 80% also reported a sense of connectedness with their friends.
- However, half that amount – 40% – felt the same sense of caring and support from their teachers.

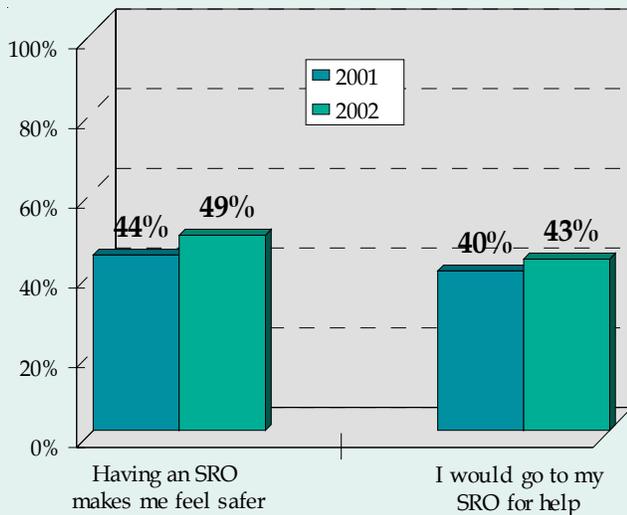
◆ *Again, there were grade level differences in the ratings, with 11<sup>th</sup> grade students providing significantly higher ratings in all areas except family involvement.*

◆ *Cross-year comparisons revealed a slight decline in the “people care” ratings, with 7<sup>th</sup> graders having the biggest decline. Still, neither the overall change from 2001 to 2002 nor the grade level changes was statistically significant.*



### INDICATOR 3: PRESENCE OF SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICER

Percentage of students reacting to the presence of an SRO in their school

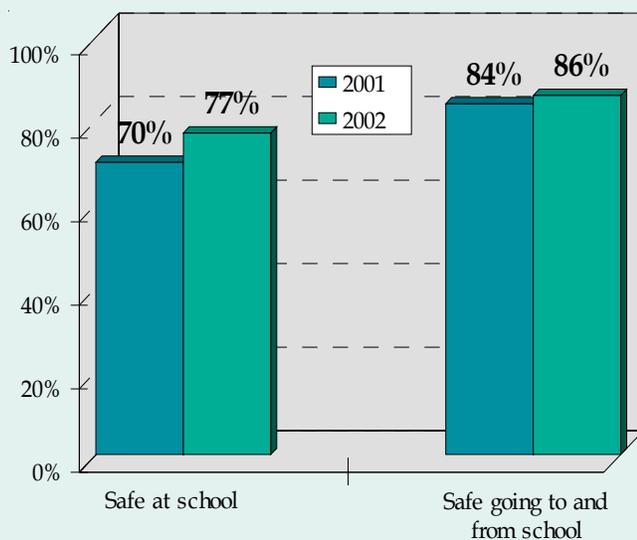


- ◆ *A large number of Partnership students— from 40% to 49%— reacted positively to the presence of an SRO in their school.*
  - In 2002, about half of the students said that an SRO made them feel safer at school as opposed to making them feel less safe (5%), or making no difference in how they felt (44%).
  - Similarly, 43% said they would go to their SRO for help if they felt threatened, compared with 25% who said they would not use their SRO, and 32% who were unsure.
- ◆ *The 2002 ratings were up from those given in 2001 for all three grade levels, especially among 7<sup>th</sup> grade students.*

- ◆ *Most Partnership students felt safe most of the time at school and traveling to and from school.*
  - Nonetheless, in both 2001 and 2002, about one-quarter of the students felt unsafe at school some of the time.

### INDICATOR 4: FEELINGS OF SAFETY

Percentage of students who felt safe at school or going to and from school most days



- ◆ *Feelings of safety varied significantly by grade, gender, and race/ethnicity.*
  - 11<sup>th</sup> grade students felt safer at school as well as traveling to and from school than either 7<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> grade students.
  - Conversely, more girls than boys, and more Asian students than students of other races/ethnicities (i.e., White, African American, Hispanic, American Indian), felt unsafe at school or going to and from school.
- ◆ *Between 2001 and 2002, feeling of safety improved overall, with a significant positive change occurring among 7<sup>th</sup> grade students.*

## SECTION 2: SCHOOL BEHAVIORS

Attendance, suspension, and extracurricular participation tell us something about the ability of a school to engage students. Higher school engagement is associated with better academic performance and lower rates of disruptive behaviors. Conversely, low engagement is one of the primary predictors of student alienation and eventual dropping out. The two indicators discussed below suggest that Partnership schools were able to engage their students on a daily basis: attendance and suspension rates were generally favorable as were rates of extracurricular involvement.

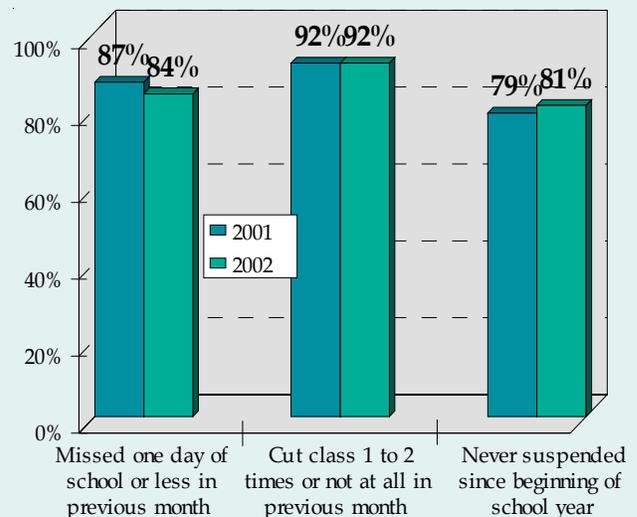
- ◆ *The vast majority of Partnership students – 85%-90% – reported that they regularly attended school and rarely cut classes.*
  - Their school and class attendance rates were in line with national statistics (U.S. Department of Education, *Data Almanac*).
- ◆ *Suspension percentages were also comparable to national estimates.*
  - 80% of the students stated that they had not been suspended during the year. Still, that one in five students had been suspended from school is of some concern.
- ◆ *Attendance and suspension rates varied significantly by grade, race/ethnicity, and gender:*
  - 7<sup>th</sup> grade students *skipped more days* of classes than either 9<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> grade students.
  - Asian students *missed fewer days* of school than students of other races/ethnicities.
  - Hispanic students were *more likely* to be suspended than students of other races/ethnicities.
  - Boys were also *more likely* to be suspended than girls.
- ◆ *In 2002, school and class attendance rates declined overall, particularly for 9<sup>th</sup> grade students. Suspension, on the other hand, improved. None of the yearly changes was statistically significant.*



**BETWEEN  
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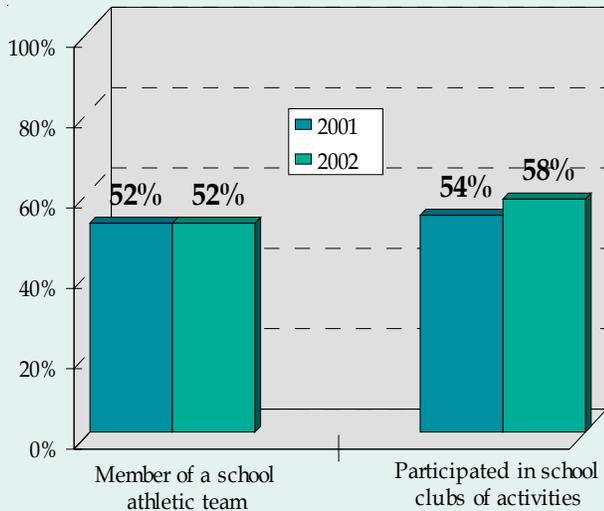
### INDICATOR 5: SCHOOL ATTENDANCE AND SUSPENSION

*Percentage of students missing school,  
cutting class, or suspended*



## INDICATOR 6: EXTRACURRICULAR PARTICIPATION

Percentage of students participating in sports or other activities since the beginning of the current school year



- ◆ In both 2001 and 2002, slightly more than half of Partnership students were members of a school athletic team, lower than the statewide figure of nearly 60%.
- ◆ A higher percentage of students, however, participated in other extracurricular activities such as the school newspaper, school yearbook, music, or art.
- ◆ Moreover, from 2001 to 2002 there was a statistically significant increase in extracurricular participation.

## SECTION 3: ACTS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO VIOLENCE

Most schools in most communities are remarkably safe. Schools are the social setting in which children and youth are most protected and least likely to be harmed. Yet, within this overall picture of relative safety, many schools experience an array of behaviors that can be disruptive and even dangerous to the learning environment. These range from the “lesser” forms of violence such as bullying, fistfights, and harassment, to more serious behaviors such as weapon possession and assault. The four indicators presented in this section indicate that Partnership schools have not been immune from behaviors contributing to violence. Still, rates of violence have largely been stable from 2001 to 2002 and compatible with statewide rates.

- ◆ In 2001, 27% of Partnership students had been in a physical fight one or more times in the 12 months preceding the survey. By 2002, however, significantly more students—32%—were involved in a physical fight.

- The increase was primarily due to a significant jump in fighting incidents among 9<sup>th</sup> grade students, i.e., from 24% who had been in a fight in 2001, to 36% who were involved in 2002.



**MOST  
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◆ *Fighting at school also increased from 2001 to 2002, as did incidents of date violence; the yearly changes, however, were minor.*

◆ *Compared with 2001 students statewide, fewer 2001 Partnership students were involved in physical fighting overall, or had experienced date violence. However, more Partnership students were involved in a physical fight at school.*

◆ *Physical fighting rates varied significantly by grade, gender, and race/ethnicity.*

- 7<sup>th</sup> grade students were the most likely to be involved in fighting, while 11<sup>th</sup> grade students were the least likely to be involved.
- Boys more so than girls, and Hispanic students more so than students of other races/ethnicities, were also more likely to be involved in fighting.

◆ *School climate also affected fighting incidents.*

- In Partnerships schools with better school climate (see Indicator 1), significantly fewer students were involved in physical fights. The opposite was true of schools with poorer climate ratings.

◆ *In both 2001 and 2002, more than one-third of Partnership students reported being bullied at school at least once during the previous 12 months.*

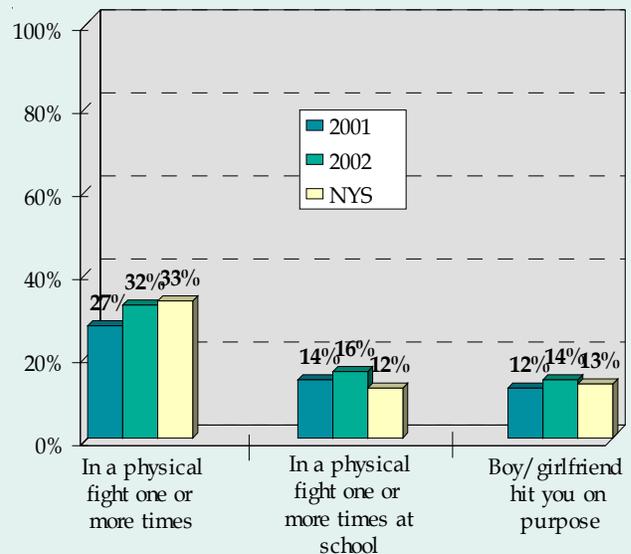
- Twice as many students – three-quarters plus – also witnessed the bullying of other students.

◆ *Reports of bullying were far more prevalent among 7<sup>th</sup> graders as compared with 9<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> graders.*

◆ *There was a slight positive change in bullying behavior from 2001 to 2002.*

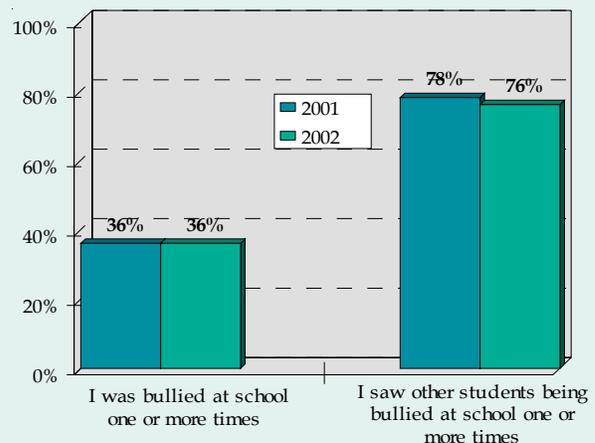
### INDICATOR 7: PHYSICAL FIGHTING AND DATE VIOLENCE

Percentage of students involved in fighting



### INDICATOR 8: BULLYING AT SCHOOL

Percentage of students who were bullied or witnessed bullying during the past 12 months

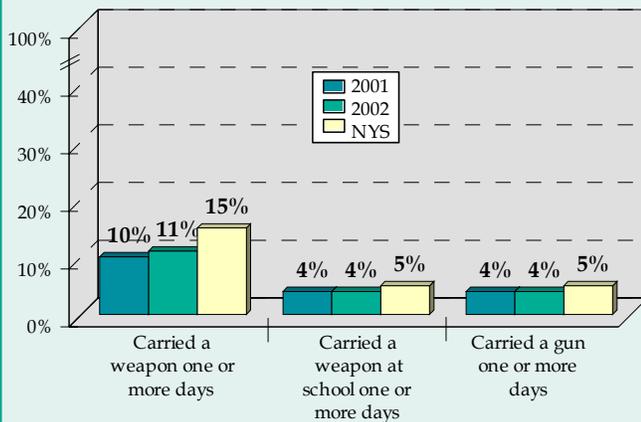


◆ *Few Partnership students were involved in serious forms of violence involving a weapon.*

- In both 2001 and 2002, 10% of the students carried a weapon at least once in the previous month (Indicator 9).
- Half as many, however, carried a gun or carried a *weapon to school* in the previous month (Indicator 9).

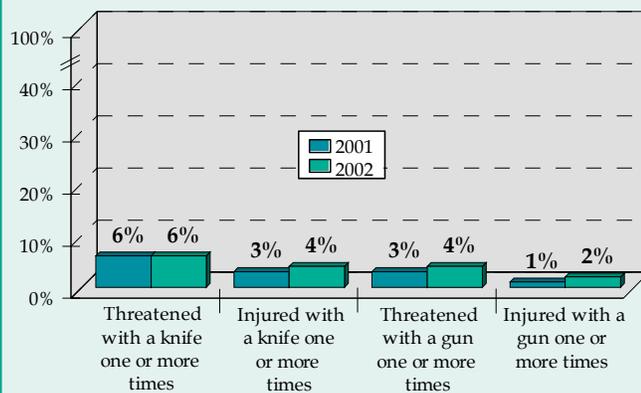
### INDICATOR 9: WEAPON POSSESSION

Percentage of students who carried a weapon during past 30 days



### INDICATOR 10: THREATS OR INJURIES WITH WEAPONS

Percentage of students who were threatened or injured with a weapon in past 12 months



- Few students also – from 1% to 6% – had been threatened or injured with a knife or a gun in the past year (Indicator 10).

- ◆ *Partnership students were less likely to carry a gun or other weapon than students statewide (Indicator 9).*
- ◆ *Weapon possession and threats or injury rates varied significantly by grade and race/ethnicity.*
  - 11<sup>th</sup> grade students were *less likely* to carry and use a weapon than 7<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> grade students.
  - Hispanic students were *more likely* to carry and use a weapon than other students.
- ◆ *School climate as well as a sense of caring and support from significant people also influenced weapon possession and use.*

- In Partnerships schools with better school climate, significantly fewer students reported carrying a weapon or being threatened or injured with a weapon.

- Also, students who believed that their parents, teachers, and friends cared a lot about them were less likely to possess and use a weapon than students who experienced a lesser degree of support from key people.

◆ *There was little change in weapon possession and use from 2001 to 2002.*

## SECTION 4: SUICIDAL BEHAVIOR

Too many young people are unhappy. An increasing number of those who are act on their feelings by turning to self-directed violence. Injury from suicidal behavior is a major public health problem in the United States and a leading cause of death among adolescents. For this reason, the identification of depression and suicidal ideation among this age group is vitally important. The indicator discussed next suggests that suicidal thoughts and behavior are a significant concern for about 1 in 8 Partnership students.

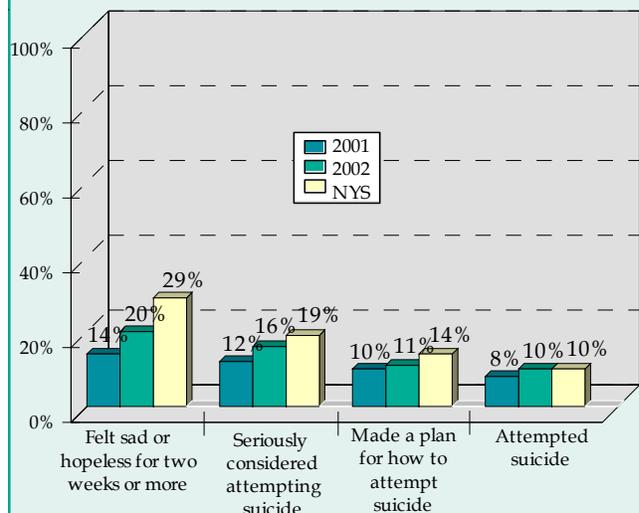
- ◆ *Between 2001 and 2002, there was a significant increase in the percentage of Partnership students who felt depressed or had considered/attempted suicide.*
  - The increase was significant across all grade levels: 7<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, and 11<sup>th</sup> grade.
  - By 2002, one in 5 students reported feelings of hopelessness, and one in ten acted on those feeling by making a suicide plan or by attempting suicide one or more times.
- ◆ *Compared with students statewide, fewer Partnership students expressed feelings of sadness, and fewer had planned or attempted suicide.*
- ◆ *Suicide behavior varied significantly by gender, with girls more likely than boys to consider and attempt harming themselves.*
- ◆ *School climate and caring/support from significant people influenced suicidal behavior.*
  - In Partnerships schools with better school climate, significantly fewer students reported feeling hopeless or having made a suicide plan/attempt.
  - Similarly, students who believed that their parents, teachers, and friends cared a lot about them were less likely to be sad or plan/attempt suicide than students who experienced a lesser degree of support from key people.



**...SUICIDAL  
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STUDENTS.**

### INDICATOR 11: SUICIDE IDEATION AND ATTEMPTS

Percentage of students who felt sad or considered/attempted suicide in past 12 months



## SECTION 5: TOBACCO, ALCOHOL, AND DRUG USE



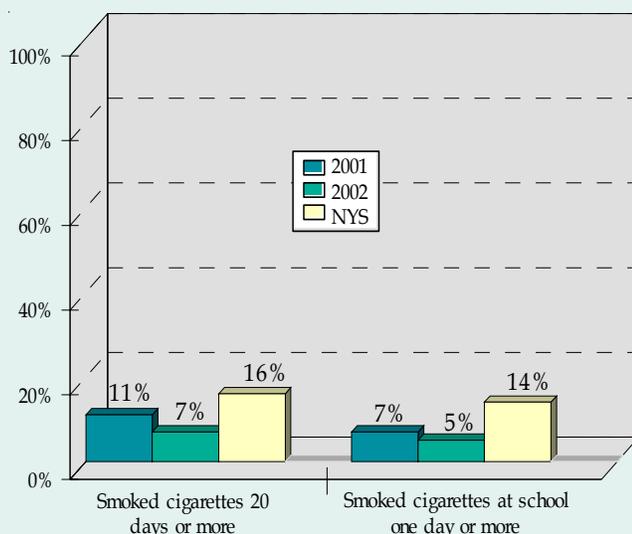
**SMOKING,  
ALCOHOL USE,  
& DRUG USE  
ARE ALL  
PREVENTABLE  
BEHAVIORS  
THAT CAN BE  
INFLUENCED  
BY  
EDUCATION.**

More than 3 million youth ages 12-17 are current smokers, and every day more than 6,000 children try smoking for the first time. Youthful smoking can have severe, lifelong consequences because a large proportion of those who begin smoking as teenagers will continue to smoke as adults. According to health statistics, five million children who are alive today will ultimately die from smoking-related illnesses unless current trends are reversed. Alcohol use among adolescents is also linked to a host of problems including motor vehicle accidents and deaths, academic difficulties, and violence. Research shows that the younger the age of drinking onset, the greater the chance that an individual will become an alcoholic. Finally, illicit drug use by youth has serious and often long-term individual, social, and economic consequences. Smoking, alcohol use, and drug use are all preventable behaviors that can be influenced by education. The indicators below present a fairly positive picture of tobacco, alcohol, and drug use among Partnership students. They suggest a decline in substance use behaviors from 2001 to 2002, with usage rates below statewide figures.

- ◆ *In 2001, 11% of Partnership students smoked cigarettes on 20 or more of the 30 days preceding the survey. By 2002, significantly fewer students – 7% – engaged in frequent smoking, and fewer smoked at school.*

### INDICATOR 12: TOBACCO USE

Percentage of students who smoked cigarettes in past 30 days



- The decrease in smoking was evident across all grade levels: 7<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, and 11<sup>th</sup> grade, but especially among 11<sup>th</sup> graders.
- ◆ *Compared with students statewide, fewer Partnership students smoked cigarettes on a frequent basis or at school.*
- ◆ *Smoking varied by grade level, with significantly fewer 7<sup>th</sup> graders indicating that they had smoked cigarettes in the previous months than 9<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> graders.*
- ◆ *School climate – particularly better school discipline – influenced smoking behavior.*
  - In Partnerships schools with better school discipline, significantly fewer students smoked.

◆ **Similar to tobacco use, alcohol use and binge drinking among Partnership students decreased from 2001 to 2002.**

- There was, however, a slight increase in the percentage of students who drank at school.

◆ **The change in alcohol consumption was most apparent among 9<sup>th</sup> grade students.**

- In 2002, 9% fewer 9<sup>th</sup> graders reported having at least one drink in the previous month – from 57% to 48%, and 6% fewer were involved in binge drinking – from 35% to 29%.

◆ **Overall, Partnership students were less likely to engage in drinking than students statewide. However, when the data are examined by grade level, the opposite conclusion is reached:**

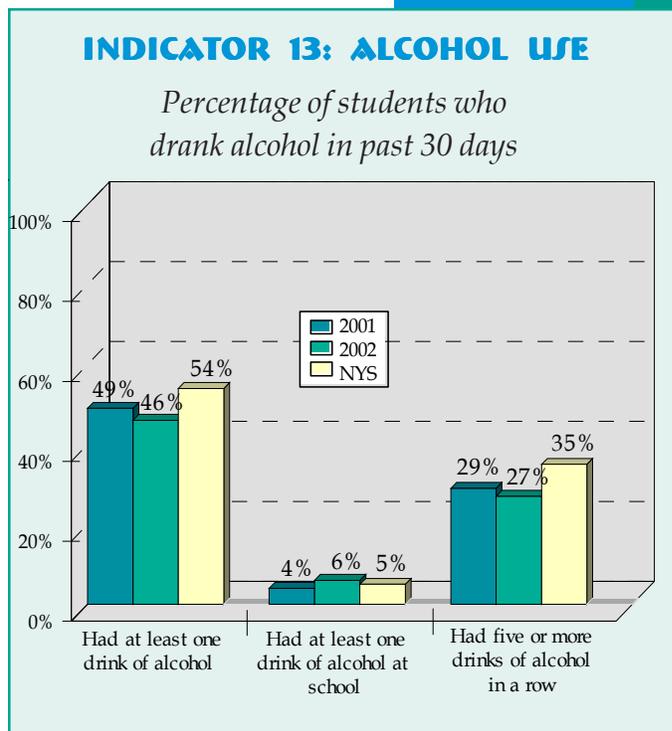
- 57% of 9<sup>th</sup> grade and 68% of 11<sup>th</sup> grade Partnership students reported drinking alcohol in the month before the survey, compared with 44% of 9<sup>th</sup> grade and 57% of 11<sup>th</sup> grade students statewide.
- Similarly, 35% of 9<sup>th</sup> grade and 46% of 11<sup>th</sup> grade Partnership students engaged in binge drinking in the previous month, compared with 25% of 9<sup>th</sup> grade and 40% of 11<sup>th</sup> grade students statewide.

◆ **Alcohol use varied significantly by grade level and parents' educational status.**

- 7<sup>th</sup> graders were *less likely* to use alcohol than 9<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> graders.
- Students whose parents were more educated were *more likely* to use alcohol.

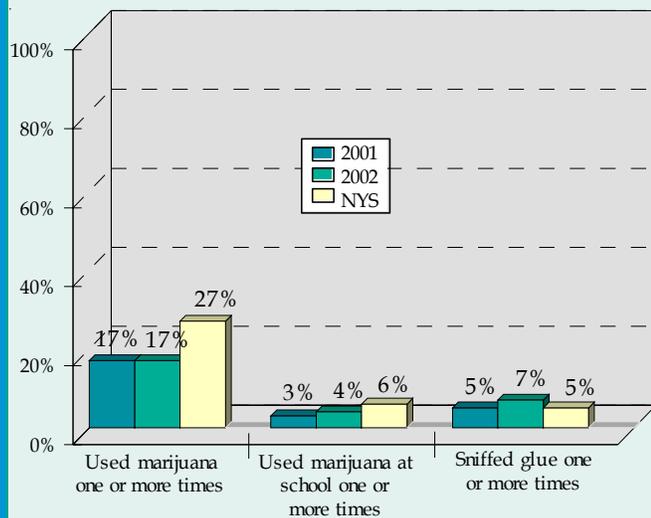
◆ **School climate – particularly better school discipline – also affected alcohol consumption.**

- In Partnerships schools with better school discipline, significantly fewer students drank alcohol or engaged in binge drinking.



## INDICATOR 14: ILLICIT DRUG USE

Percentage of students who used marijuana or sniffed glue in past 30 days



◆ Overall, the percentage of students reporting illicit drug use in the past 30 days remained relatively stable from 2001 to 2002. However, at two grade levels – 7<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> – there was a statistically significant decrease in drug use.

◆ Partnership students were less likely to use marijuana than students statewide.

◆ Drug use varied significantly by grade level and race.

➤ 7<sup>th</sup> graders were less likely to use drugs than 9<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> graders.

➤ Hispanic students more so than students of other races/ethnicities, were more likely to use drugs.

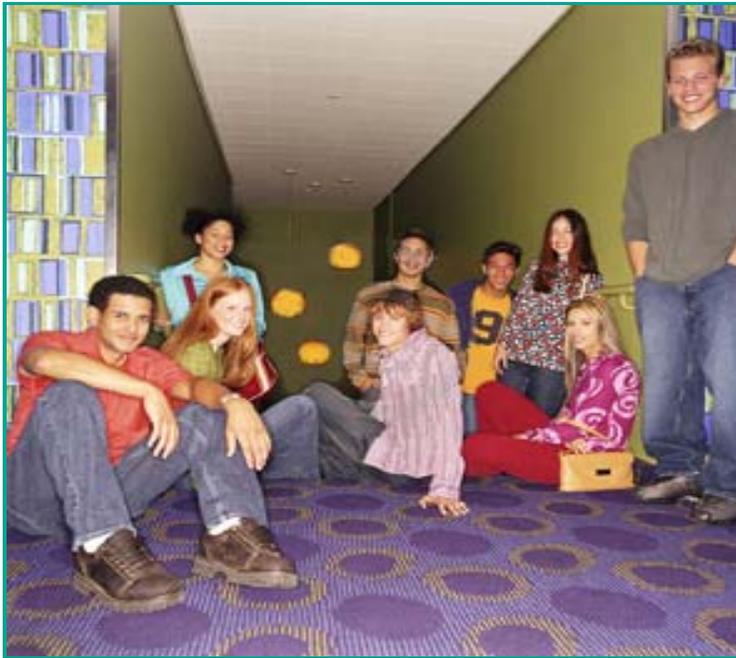
◆ School climate and caring/support from significant people influenced illicit drug use.

➤ In Partnerships schools with better school climate, significantly fewer students used marijuana or inhalants.

➤ Similarly, students who believed that their parents, teachers, and friends cared a lot about them were less likely to use marijuana or inhalants than students who experienced a lesser degree of support from key people.

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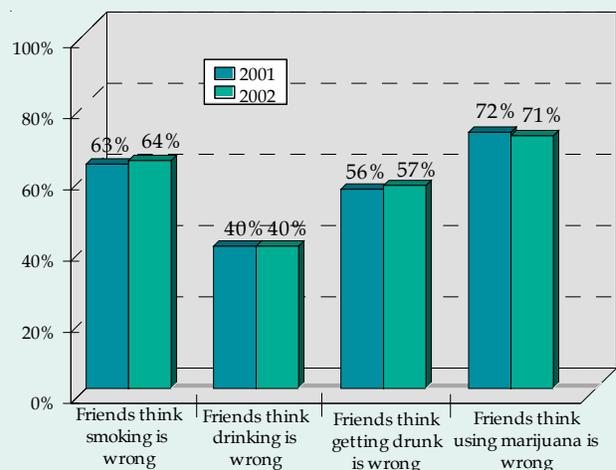


**IN PARTNERSHIP SCHOOLS WITH BETTER SCHOOL CLIMATE, SIGNIFICANTLY MORE STUDENTS REPORTED PEER DISAPPROVAL OF SMOKING, DRINKING, AND DRUG USE.**

- ◆ *The majority of Partnership students – two-thirds or more – reported peer disapproval of smoking, getting drunk once a week, and marijuana use.*
  - However, only 40% felt that their friends would think it wrong of them to drink alcohol.
- ◆ *Peer attitudes were largely unchanged from 2001 to 2002.*
- ◆ *There were, however, grade level differences and differences according to race/ethnicity.*
  - 7<sup>th</sup> graders reported *higher levels* of peer disapproval than either 9<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> graders.
  - Black students more so than students of other races/ethnicities, reported *lower levels* of peer disapproval.
- ◆ *School climate also influenced peer disapproval ratings.*
  - In Partnerships schools with better school climate, significantly more students reported peer disapproval of smoking, drinking, and drug use.

**INDICATOR 15: PEER ATTITUDES TOWARDS SUBSTANCE USE**

*Percentage of students who felt that their friends would disapprove of substance use*



## SUMMARY OF RESULTS

INDICATOR NAME	OVERALL CHANGE FROM 2001-2002	SIGNIFICANT GRADE LEVEL CHANGES FROM '01 TO '02	IMPORTANT SUBGROUP DIFFERENCES
1. School Climate	▲	7th +	11th graders reported better climate
2. Feelings that People Care	-		11th graders reported more caring
3. Presence of SRO	+	7th +	No notable differences
4. Feelings of Safety	+	7th +	11th graders felt safer Girls felt more unsafe Asians felt more unsafe
5. Attendance/ Suspension	Attendance - Suspension +	9th -	7th graders skipped more classes Asians missed fewer days of school Hispanics were suspended more often Boys were suspended more often
6. Extracurricular Participation	+		No notable differences
7. Fighting/Date Violence	-	9th -	7th graders were more often in fights Hispanics were more often in fights Boys were more often in fights Better school climate reduced fighting
8. Bullying	+	11th +	More 7th graders reported being bullied or witnessing it
9. Weapons Possession	=	7th +	11th graders were less likely to carry or use a weapon Hispanics were more likely to carry or use a weapon Better school climate reduced weapon possession/use Caring and support from key people reduced weapon possession and use
10. Threats or Injuries with Weapons			
11. Suicidal Behavior	▼	All grades	Girls were more likely to consider/attempt suicide Caring and support from key people reduced suicidal behavior
12. Tobacco Use	▲	11th +	7th graders were less likely to smoke cigarettes Strong school discipline reduced smoking behavior
13. Alcohol Use	+		7th graders were less likely to drink alcohol Students whose parents were more educated were more likely to use alcohol Strong school discipline reduced alcohol use
14. Drug Use	▲	7th + 11th +	7th graders were less likely to use drugs Hispanics were more likely to use drugs Better school climate reduced drug use Caring and support from key people reduced drug use
15. Peer Attitudes Towards Substance Use	=		7th graders reported higher levels of peer disapproval regarding tobacco, alcohol, and drug use Black students reported lower levels of disapproval Better school climate resulted in more peer disapproval

Legend: ▲ significant positive change ▼ significant negative change + positive change - negative change = no change

## CONCLUSIONS

The analyses of key risk behaviors in Partnership schools suggest that the Cayuga County Safe Schools/Healthy Students Program is having a positive impact on students. As the summary table on the page 14 reveals, a number of encouraging changes have occurred in risk behaviors from 2001 to 2002, particularly among 7<sup>th</sup> grade students – the grade level at which program activities are most concentrated. Most notable were the favorable changes in feelings of safety, bullying behavior, and tobacco, alcohol, and drug use. Significantly, school climate was a strong factor in promoting more positive behavior in these areas. Yet, despite these heartening changes, too many Partnership students continue to practice behaviors that place them at risk for acute and chronic health problems. Of particular concern are the rates of hopelessness and suicidal behavior and the level of alcohol consumption among youth, the latter of which was above the statewide average. Further-more, some of these troublesome behaviors were more evident in particular sub-populations of students. That said, the Schools/Healthy Students Program has made strong headway in enhancing the safety of many students. By thoughtfully balancing prevention and intervention, it has been able to reduce the amount of risk behavior in schools and make a positive impact on the learning environment.



### FOR MORE INFORMATION

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**SCHOOL  
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FACTOR IN  
PROMOTING  
MORE  
POSITIVE  
BEHAVIOR...**