



# Rural Youth Education Study

PENNSTATE



College of Agricultural Sciences

## FACT SHEET FOR EDUCATORS #4 - EXTRACURRICULAR SCHOOL ACTIVITIES AND YOUTH PERCEPTIONS OF BEHAVIOR

### What is the Rural Youth Education Study?

Fall 2006

The Rural Youth Education Study, conducted by the Pennsylvania State University, is following students in several school districts located in rural areas across Pennsylvania. Details about the RYE Study can be found by going to the project website (address on back). This fact sheet uses the first wave of data collected from both 7th and 11th grade students during the 2004/2005 school year. It focuses on the relationship of student participation in extracurricular school activities and student's own perceptions of anti-social behaviors.

### In What Activities Do Youth Participate?

The students in the RYE Study were asked if they participated in a variety of school related activities. The majority of students (over 80%), participate in some school related activity, with the most frequently identified activity for both grades being related to sports, followed by activities related to music. However, it should be noted that 18.5% of the 7th grade students and 15.4% of 11th grade students do not participate in any activity. For more detailed information on student participation in these school activities, and how participation relates to the RYE student's educational aspirations see the Fact Sheet for Educators #3.

#### Benefits to Participation in School Activities

- Builds bonds with community adults
- Builds leadership skills
- Promotes healthy peer relationships
- Promotes pro-social behaviors
- Helps youth develop goals
- Leads to better school attendance
- Is associated with higher educational aspirations
- Leads to higher self-esteem
- Channels risk taking behavior into pro-social activities

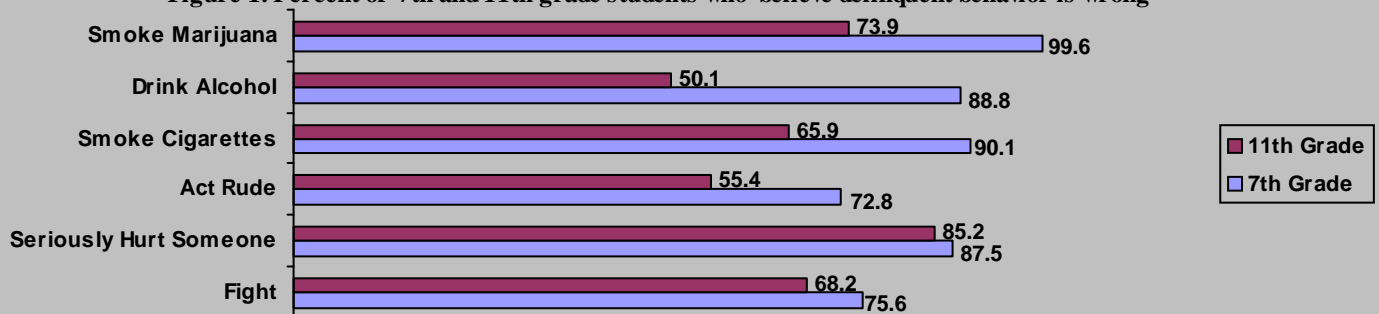


### How Do Students Perceive Delinquent Behaviors

In the RYE Study, students were asked if they believed it would be wrong for students in their grade to participate in certain behaviors. These included the use of tobacco, drugs, and alcohol as well as other delinquent behaviors. Students answered by responding to a scale of choices ranging from very wrong to not at all wrong. Figure 1 describes the percentage of students who thought these behaviors were wrong (which includes very wrong and wrong responses).

For each behavior, fewer 11th grade students believe that it would be wrong for students their age to participate in these behaviors. Although the majority of students in both 7th and 11th grade feel that fighting, hurting someone, and acting rude are wrong, it also indicates that a fairly large percentage believes that these behaviors are not wrong. Only 50.1% of 11th grade students think that drinking alcohol is wrong. A larger percentage of 7th grade than 11th grade students believe each activity is wrong.

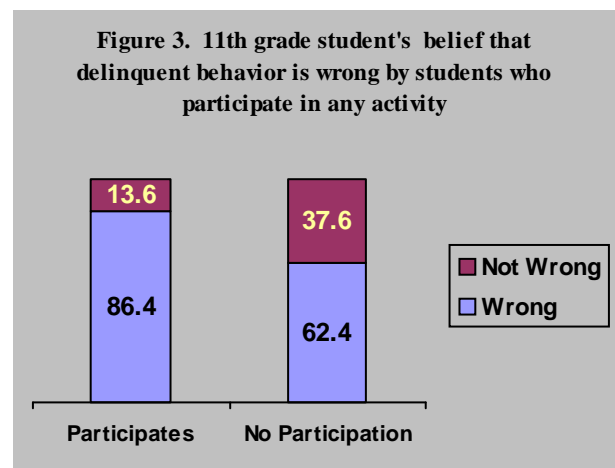
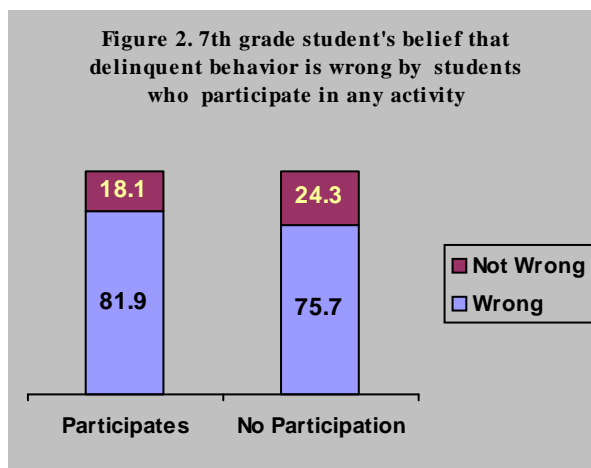
Figure 1. Percent of 7th and 11th grade students who believe delinquent behavior is wrong



## How Does Participation in School Activities Relate to Student's Attitudes About Behavior?

Adolescents enjoy a challenge that entails some risk that will lead them to a new sense of accomplishment or achievement. However, their autonomy and decision making skills are not fully developed. Because of this, it may be difficult for them to make appropriate choices about how to channel their energies. Involvement in extracurricular school activities provides healthy opportunities for risk taking beyond the home and the classroom. Activities offered outside of regular school hours channel their risk taking behaviors into pro-social activities promoting healthy outcomes.

Figures 2 and 3 describe the relationship between 7th and 11th grade student attitudes about delinquent behavior and their participation in extracurricular school activities. For these tables the attitudes of the students for each individual behavior (described in figure 1) were combined into an overall attitude scale, with behavior reported as wrong or not wrong. For students in both grades, a greater percentage of students who participate in school activities agree that delinquent behavior is wrong, compared to those who do not participate. However, the difference between students' perceptions of delinquent behaviors as wrong is greater between participants in extracurricular activities and non-participants among the 11th grade students.



These results suggest that participation in extracurricular school activities may channel risk taking behaviors for RYE students. Because attitudes toward delinquent behaviors begin early, as well as develop and change over time, it is important to begin prevention programs early and maintain them overtime. Not only is it important to provide activities that are academically engaging, activities that are challenging to youth and offer opportunity to compete in a healthy manner are important as well. In addition, programs that build life skills can be beneficial. Life skills programs that address the issues of drug and alcohol use, sexual activity, and bullying through discussion and role-playing can help youth make better choices, and practice healthy pro-social behaviors. Offering a combination of activities and programming will provide youth with the supportive environment needed to learn responsible adult behaviors.

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More information about the RYE Study can be found at the following website:

<http://fipa.aers.psu.edu/RuralYouthEdProject.htm>

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