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## ABSTRACT

This paper reports on a study that explored the results of a statewide survey conducted in 21 randomly selected counties in Montana during fall 2000. Within each county, no more than 2 school districts were selected for further study, and within each school district, students in the 5th, 7th, and 9th grades were selected to participate in the study using a 74-question instrument. Nearly 2,800 surveys were returned from more than 50 schools, including schools on 4 of Montana's 7 reservations. Approximately 2,500 usable surveys were used in the analysis. Faculty at the Montana State University College of Nursing's Center for Research and Creativity coded and entered the data. Research faculty in the MSU Department of Health and Human Development analyzed these data. Results revealed that most of today's young people are very busy in out-of-school activities, with only 17 percent of youth reporting that they are not involved in any out-of-school activities. Youth who participate in any organized out-of-school programs are less likely to engage in a variety of at-risk behaviors. Moreover, youngsters who have participated in 4-H for more than 1 year are more likely to participate in all other out-of-school activities than other youth. Those who participate in 4-H more than 1 year are also less likely to shoplift or steal, smoke cigarettes, ride in a car with someone who has been drinking, or damage property just for the fun of it. (Author/DFR)

# Final Report of the Montana Public School Students' Out-of-School Time Study

Dr. Kirk A. Astroth and Dr. George W. Haynes

Report No. 01-0301

## RESEARCH REPORT

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March 1, 2001

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# **Final Report of the Montana Public School Students' Out-of-School Time Study**

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## Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to report the results of a statewide survey conducted in twenty-one randomly selected counties in Montana during the fall months of 2000. Within each county, no more than two school districts were selected for further study, and within each school district, students in the 5<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grades were selected to participate in the study using a 74-question instrument. Nearly 2,800 surveys were returned from more than 50 schools, including schools on four of Montana's seven reservations. Approximately 2,500 usable surveys were used in the analysis. Faculty at the MSU College of Nursing's Center for Research and Creativity coded and entered the data. This data was analyzed by research faculty in the MSU Department of Health and Human Development.

Most of today's young people are very busy in out-of-school activities with only 17 percent of youth reporting that they are not involved in any out-of-school activities. Youth who participate in any organized out-of-school programs are less likely to engage in a variety of at-risk behaviors. Moreover, youngsters who have participated in 4-H for more than one year are more likely to participate in all other out-of-school activities than other youth. 4-H participants of more than one year are also less likely to shoplift or steal, smoke cigarettes, ride in a car with someone who has been drinking or damage property just for the fun of it.

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Finally, the authors wish to thank the Search Institute for granting permission to use 28 questions from their survey, *Search Institute Profiles of Student Life: Attitudes and Behaviors*, copyright © 1996 Search Institute, Minneapolis, MN. Used by permission.

*This period of time between the school bell and the factory whistle is a most vulnerable time for children. These are the hours when children are more likely to engage in at-risk behavior and are more vulnerable to the dangers that still exist in too many neighborhoods and communities.*

-Vice-President Albert Gore

## Introduction

How do Montana young people spend their time in the out-of-school hours, and how does their use of this time affect their academic, emotional, social and cognitive development? Until recently, we haven't had much information about either of these two questions. Researchers and practitioners alike have assumed that the ways in which young people spend their time in the out-of-school hours affects all aspects of their development. In addition, we have often assumed that if the experiences are positive that the outcomes would also be positive.

Unfortunately, we haven't had much data to support these assumptions. We often assume how today's young people spend their time in the out-of-school hours, but we haven't had a clear picture of how Montana youth spend this time. This report uses statewide data collected in the fall months of 2000 from nearly 2,500 students in over 50 schools to describe how young people in the 5<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grades spend their time in the out-of-school hours, what factors are associated with how this time is spent, and whether 4-H participants report any significant differences when compared to other youth.

## Background

Each day, thousands of children across Montana return to an empty home after school—if they go home at all. What these children do in the out-of-school hours can affect their development—in both positive and negative ways. As a result, when the school bell rings, the anxiety for parents often just begins. Parents worry about whether their children are safe, whether they are susceptible to involvement with drugs and crime, and whether their children have access to programs that will positively contribute to their development and growth.

Every community in Montana would like to know that their children have safe places to learn and grow both before and after school hours. In a November 1998 "listening tour" around the state at 16 locations, members of the Governor's Council on Families heard that out-of-school time programs were one of the top five needs in Montana communities. Such programs are needed because the majority of parents work and often do not get home until 6:00 PM. Parents also work during the summer months when children have large blocks of unstructured time.

In November 1999, top law enforcement officers from around the nation gathered in North Carolina and released a poll of what police chiefs thought would prevent youth violence. **Eighty-six percent** of the 566 chiefs polled said best strategy would be to expand after school programs and educational child care programs. Only 17 percent recommended prosecuting more

juveniles as adults and only 13 percent said hire more police officers. (Bozeman Daily Chronicle, December 13, 1999, p. 7)

But access to quality out-of-school programs continues to be an issue, particularly in rural states like Montana. Research clearly shows that the out-of-school hours are times of concern for parents.<sup>1</sup> For example.

- research indicates that children unsupervised after school are at significantly higher risk of truancy, stress, receiving poor grades, early experimentation with sex and substance abuse.
- juvenile crime increases by 300 percent in the hours immediately after school.
- about 29 percent of all juvenile offenses occur between 2 and 8 pm on school days. In fact, the hour immediately following the typical time of release from school—from 3:00 pm to 4:00 pm—yielded more than twice as much violent crime as the preceding hour.
- children are also at a much greater risk of being the victim of a violent crime during the hours after school.
- nationally, it is estimated that about 60 percent of 6<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grade youth spend two or more hours per school day at home without an adult.
- FBI crime reports show that juvenile arrests for violent crimes increased by 50 percent in recent years, even while adult rates were dropping.
- national studies indicate that 20 percent of eighth graders are NOT involved in any extra-curricular activities after school.<sup>2</sup> In Montana, that translates into thousands of youth who are not engaged in any structured activities in non-school hours.
- in rural areas, about 23 percent of youth report that they have few options for structured activities after school.

Experience and research shows that children and youth benefit from spending out-of-school time in community settings that provide both physical safety and a chance to develop marketable skills. Quality after-school programs, for example, can provide settings where responsible, caring adults supervise children in positive, structured activities that help them grow and develop.

By offering young people rewarding, challenging, and age-appropriate activities in a safe, structured, and positive environment, after-school programs help to reduce and prevent juvenile delinquency and to insulate children from injury and violent victimization.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Safe and Smart: Making After-School Hours Work for Kids, U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Justice, June 1998: 7-8).

<sup>2</sup> National Educational Longitudinal Study: 1988. U.S. Department of Education, Washington, D.C.

<sup>3</sup> Safe and Smart, p. 8.

Youth development occurs either by design or by happenstance, but all would agree that it occurs nevertheless. Positive youth development requires substantial parental and community investments of time, money and emotional capital. Besides providing opportunities for involvement with others, out-of-school activities provide contexts for learning and growth. Each context engages young people in a set of behaviors and rules and results in learning skills and a body of knowledge.

Across the nation, there are examples of how well-designed, intentional out-of-school programs can help youth develop practical skills as well as reduce their involvement in risk behaviors. For example,

- One study found that eighth-graders who were unsupervised for 11 or more hours per week were **twice as likely** to abuse drugs or alcohol as those under adult supervision.
- Another study concluded that latchkey children are at substantially higher risk for truancy, poor grades, and risk-taking behavior, including substance abuse.
- a 1995 study gauged the "healthiness" of communities by the prevalence of problem behaviors among youth grades 9-12 such as drug and alcohol use, sexual activity, depression and school problems. The communities with structured activities in which most youth participated (e.g. extra-curricular sports, clubs, community organizations) were **five times more likely** to be ranked among the healthiest communities.
- In a study of after-school programs receiving cooperative Extension assistance, one-third of teachers said participating children earned better grades and developed a greater interest in recreational reading.
- Fifty-three percent of children in the Los Angeles 4-H after-school program said they would watch more television if they were not in 4-H.
- Elementary students in the Los Angeles 4-H after-school program made significant progress in language arts.<sup>4</sup>

The out of school hours constitute the biggest single block of time in the life of a young adolescent.<sup>5</sup> However, until recently we did not have a very clear or accurate picture of how young people spent their time out of school. Moreover, we did not have strong research data indicating whether participation in well-designed out-of-school programs provided significant benefits to the participants when compared to peers who did not participate in such programs.

Interestingly, research by the University of Michigan indicates that since 1981, the amount of free, "unstructured" time for young children ages 3-12 years has declined by 37 percent—from 52 hours to 33 hours per week. Some of the biggest declines were in—

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<sup>4</sup> Safe Smart, pp. 10-15.

<sup>5</sup> A Matter of Time: Risk and Opportunity in the Non-School Hours, New York: Carnegie Corporation, Council on Adolescent Development. (December 1992), p.28.



- *Free play and unorganized outdoor sports, down by four hours and thirty minutes (4:30) per week. This includes video and computer games. In total time loss, this is by far the most squeezed activity for young children.*
- *TV watching, down by two hours per week (2:00).*
- *Eating and household conversations, down by one hour and forty minutes per week (1:40).*
- *Church, down by 1:10.<sup>6</sup>*

What is consuming most of young children's time these days, according to this University of Michigan study? Here are the big ones:

- *School, up by 8 hours and twenty minutes per week (8:20). This is the single most expanded child activity.*
- *Household chores, up by three hours and thirty minutes (3:30) per week.*
- *Personal care (showering, hair care, dressing), up by three hours (3:00) per week.*
- *Travel and visiting, up by two hours and thirty minutes (2:30) per week. This includes visits to non-custodial parents who sometimes live in distant cities or time spent in transit between scheduled events.*
- *Organized sports, up by two hours (2:00) per week.*
- *Studying or reading, up by one hour (1:00) per week.*
- *Other passive leisure, up by two hours and thirty minutes (2:30) per week. This includes time on computers (not games) and other activities such as library programs and museums.*

Add all this up and you can see that today's very young kids are quite busy and not in ways most adults think. While this study has begun to shed some light on how very young children are spending their time, we haven't had such a clear picture of how 5-9th graders spend their time in the out-of-school hours. In addition, we haven't been able to determine if youth who are active in out-of-school programs experience greater academic success during school.

The fundamental issue here is whether the programs and activities in which children are involved contribute to their development and growth in positive ways. Are we just keeping kids busy, or are we helping them develop the necessary skills to develop into contributing, competent adults? If today's kids are busy, is this contributing to their skills and talents, or only creating anxiety and stress?

The nature of young people's participation in out-of-school activities has been a source of concern to many over the years. In 1998, for example, a federal commission issued a report titled Protecting Youth at Work which confirmed that high school students who worked over 20 hours per week did worse in their classes, drank, and took drugs more, and had more high-risk sex than students who did not work such long hours (Committee on the Health and Safety Implications of

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<sup>6</sup> Sandra L. Hofferth and Jack Sandberg, Changes in American Children's Time, 1981-1997, November 9, 1998, Institute for Social Research and Population Studies), p. 28.

Child Labor).

The popular wisdom has been that children, families and communities would benefit in measurable ways from high-quality out-of-school programs. But how do we know what programs are high quality? What are the benefits to well-designed, out-of-school programs? As an alternative to a child spending large numbers of hours alone or with peers in inadequately supervised activities, well-planned and well-staffed programs provide safe havens where children can learn, take part in supervised recreation, and build strong positive relationships with responsible, caring adults and peers.

### **Data and Methods**

In the fall of 2000, the Montana Extension Service, in collaboration with researchers at Montana State University, conducted a survey in twenty-one randomly selected counties. Within each of these counties, up to 2 school districts were randomly selected for the study. All students in the 5<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grades were surveyed using a 74-question survey instrument comprised primarily of high quality (valid and reliable) questions taken from other national or state surveys. The questionnaire include basic demographic and family composition questions as well as questions grouped into 8 subscales: leadership, social competency, positive self-identify, relations with adults, self-confidence, empowerment, compassion, and skills.

Nearly 2,800 surveys were returned from more than 50 schools, including schools on four of Montana's seven reservations. Approximately 2,500 usable surveys were used in the analysis. Faculty at the MSU College of Nursing's Center for Research and Creativity coded and entered the data. The raw data was analyzed by research faculty in the MSU Department of Health and Human Development.

#### List of Counties Participating in Study

Big Horn	Phillips	Carbon	Custer
Stillwater	Golden Valley	Fergus	Dawson
Roosevelt	Chouteau	Petroleum	Liberty
Rosebud	Lewis & Clark	Fallon	Glacier
Treasure	Mineral	Richland	Blaine
Powder River			

## Results

Because of the nature of the questionnaire was to learn specifics about 4-H participants, the following results discuss the ways in which young people who had been in 4-H for more than one year differ from those who have been in for a shorter period of time or who haven't been involved in the program at all.

Choosing to compare youth who had been involved in 4-H for more than one year was intentional. We chose this length of time as the variable because we wanted to compare youth who had been involved in the 4-H program for a concerted period of time rather than just a brief exposure to the methods and culture of 4-H. By selecting this length of participation as the threshold, we were also able to keep a large enough data set for valid comparisons to other youth.

Although the survey instrument asked youth about the variety of groups in which they participated, we primarily separated out the 4-H participants from others. However, we also did some analysis comparing those youngsters active in out-of-school activities to those who said they did not participate in any organized, structured out-of-school activities.

### Diversity of Activities

Respondents were asked to identify up to six out-of-school programs, groups, clubs, teams or activities in which they were involved during the past year. Over 285 different activities were listed by respondents. For a rural, frontier state such as Montana, it was incredible to see the range and diversity of activities in which young people were involved.

### Rural/Urban Comparisons

We did not analyze any of the data comparing students from rural and urban areas. There are several reasons for this. First, defining any population center as "urban" in a state like Montana takes on a different meaning than when this concept is applied to other states. Only the schools in the Helena area could probably be classified as "urban" and we did not have large enough data sets to make meaningful comparisons. Second, in our survey instrument, we simply asked students if they lived in town, on a farm, or in the country but not on a farm. In retrospect, we probably would phrase this question differently in order, perhaps, to make more use of this kind of demographic information. Finally, schools in even "urban" areas might come from a rural residence, making comparisons additionally problematic.

### Gender

In our analysis of the data, we did look at some gender issues and there were some significant differences. As one might well expect, females were significantly less likely to chew tobacco than boys. This difference was true for both 4-H and non-4-H youth. A greater percentage of non-4-H boys were more likely to report, too, that they damaged property for the fun of it than girls. Non-4-H boys were also more likely to shoplift than girls. Non-4-H boys were also more likely to say that they would drive while intoxicated, but non-4-H girls were more likely to say that they smoked (see Table 1). Girls also reported that they got better grades than boys.

Table 1. Percentage of Students, by gender and participation, for selected risk behaviors.

<u>Variable</u>	<u>4-H Females</u>	<u>4-H Males</u>	<u>Non 4-H Females</u>	<u>Non-4-H Males</u>
Shoplifted	1.9*	4.1*	6.8	11.6
Drove intoxicated	2.9	6.4	3.9	5.9
Damaged property	3.4	15.1	10.2	20.2
Smoked	11.7 *	8.7*	18.5	14.5
Smokeless tobacco	2.9	12.2	3.3	9.6
Total Observations	206	172	1,019	1,043

p <.05

\* = no significant difference

### **Involvement as a Protective Factor**

In an analysis of the data, youth who are involved in out-of-school activities were found to be less likely to be involved in a whole range of at-risk behaviors when compared to youth who are not involved in any out-of-school activities. Non-active students were more likely to report that they drank alcohol, shoplifted, purposely damaged property, used drugs to get high, smoked cigarettes and other behaviors (see Table 2).

Table 2. Percentage of Students (all grades) Involved in At-Risk Behaviors.

<u>Variable</u>	<u>Active Students (all grades)</u>	<u>Non-Active Students</u>
Cheated on test/homework	35.8	26.6
Drank alcohol	18.5	22.6
Shoplifted	6.9	14.5
Used drugs	8.8	18.9
Drove while intoxicated	4.0	9.0
Rode in car with drunk driver	26.8	31.9
Purposely damaged property	13.1	19.6
Smoked cigarettes	14.0	22.6
Total Observations	2007	433

p < .05

As the data in Table 2 indicates, students who are active in out-of-school programs were more likely to report getting better grades than students who were not active in such programs. Curiously, active students were more likely to report that they had cheated on a test or on homework in the past 12 months than non-active youth. We explain this in several ways. First, we used a confounding question that included two variables—tests and homework. In retrospect, we should have referred only to cheating on tests (a more serious event than on homework).

Also, in interviews with young people, we learned that this higher reported activity of "cheating" on homework could be explained in two ways. First, young people who are very active in after-school programs are busy, don't have a lot of time to spend on homework, and are

more likely to "share" answers between each other. Second, some students indicated that they were in after-school programs where study time was part of the program, so they had time to work together on common homework assignments—which many youth said could be labeled as "cheating." What is telling in this data is how honest youth were about their behavior in this area.

Finally, since non-active students get poorer grades and are generally not committed to school work, their lower reported levels of cheating are easy to comprehend (see Table 3).

Table 3. Academic performance of Active and Non-Active Student (all grades), by percent.

<u>Grades</u>	<u>Active Students</u>	<u>Non-Active Students</u>
Mostly A's	25.5	9.2
A's and B's	37.7*	37.4*
Mostly B's	9.2*	9.2*
B's and C's	18.3	23.3
Mostly C's	3.3	5.5
C's and D's	4.3	7.4
Mostly D's	0.8	3.0
Less Than D's	0.9	4.8
Total Observations	2007	433

p <.05

\* = no significant difference

When these same variables were analyzed by individual grade level, there were fewer significant differences between active and non-active students in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade. Active and non-active students at this grade level only showed significant differences in smoking cigarettes and for the highest grades received.

However, many more differences were evident at the 7<sup>th</sup> grade level, and the differences between active and non-active students increased at the 9<sup>th</sup> grade level. Non-active students at both grade levels were less likely to get good grades and more likely to engage in a variety of at-risk behaviors than students who were involved in some sort of out-of-school activities (see Table 4). In fact, at the 9<sup>th</sup> grade level, students who do not participate in any out-of-school activities reported that they are—

- **nearly two times more likely** to smoke cigarettes
- **seven times more likely** to have carried a gun to school
- **more than twice as likely** to report that they have driven while drunk
- **nearly three times as likely** to use drugs
- **twice as likely** to have shoplifted.

Table 4. Percentage of Active and Non-Active 9<sup>th</sup> grade students engaged in at-risk behaviors.

<u>Variable</u>	<u>Active Students</u>	<u>Non-Active Students</u>
Cheated on test/homework	59.4	48.9
Drank alcohol	37.4	49.6
Shoplifted	9.6	21.9
Used drugs	15.0	42.3
Drove while intoxicated	8.0	20.4
Rode in car with drunk driver	35.7	48.2
Purposely damaged property	15.4	25.5
Carried a gun to school	1.0	7.3
Smoked cigarettes	22.9	41.6
Total Observations	625	137

p <.05

#### **4-H Youth: Making Contributions, Not Causing Trouble**

This research indicates that Montana 4-H kids are busy making contributions to improve the quality of life in their families, neighborhoods and communities. While about 17% of Montana kids are not involved in any out-of-school activities or programs, 4-H kids are very involved. Three-fourths of all 4-H members (75%) are involved in up to 4 **additional** out-of-school activities in addition to their involvement in 4-H. In fact, this research revealed that 4-H members are more likely to be involved in ALL out-of-school activities than other youth.

This research shows that 4-H participants are **more likely** than other kids--

- to succeed in school, getting more A's than other kids (see Table 5)
- to be involved as leaders in their school and the community
- to be looked up to as role models by other kids
- to help others in the community

Table 5. Performance in School for 4-H and non-4-H Youth, Percentage by type of Grades

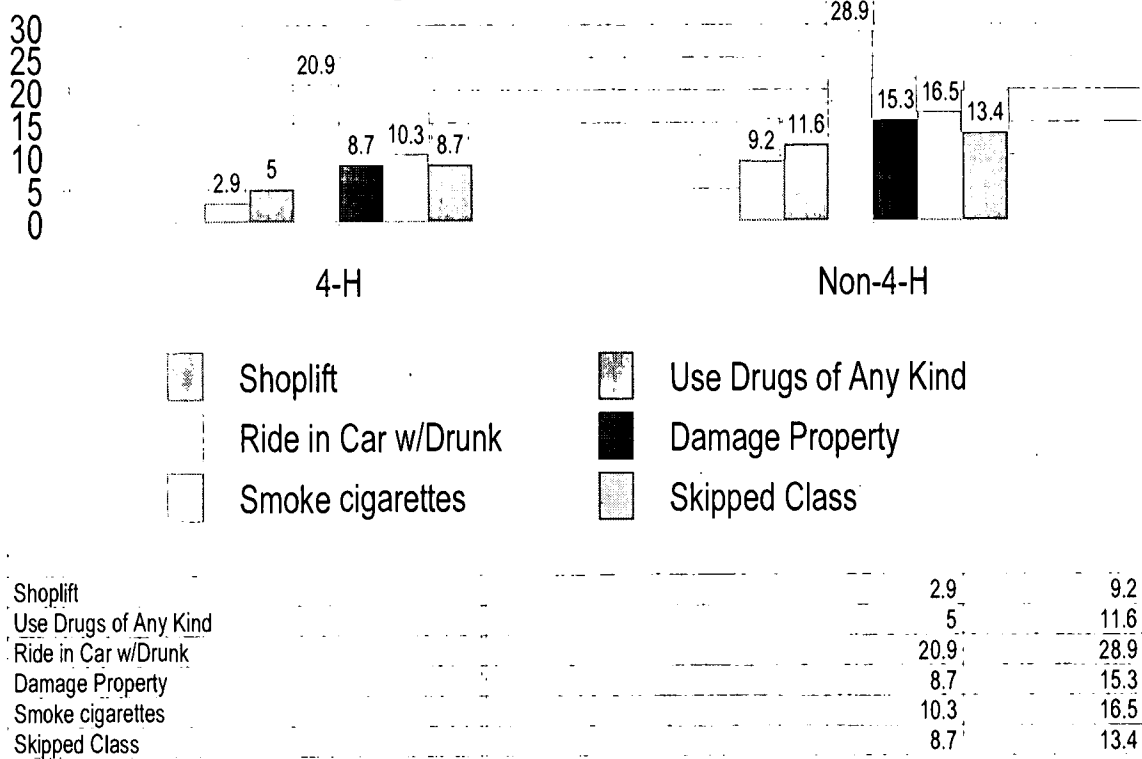
<u>Performance</u>	<u>4-H</u>	<u>Others</u>
Mostly A's	33.4	19.6
About half A's and half B's	37.5	37.7
Mostly B's	9.7	9.1
About half B's and half C's	13.5	20.8
Mostly C's	2.0	4.2
About half C's and half D's	2.4	5.6
Mostly D's	0.7	1.3
Mostly below D's	<u>0.7</u>	<u>1.9</u>
Total Observations	378	2,062

p < .05

Moreover, 4-H kids reported (see Table 6) that they are **less likely** than other kids

- to shoplift or steal (3 times less likely)
- to use illegal drugs of any kind to get high (2 times less likely)
- to ride in a car with someone else who has been drinking
- to smoke cigarettes
- to damage property for the fun of it (2 times less likely)
- to skip school or cut classes without permission

Table 6. Percentage of youth engaging in risk behaviors



4-H members also reported that they felt that their contributions were more respected and listened to by their families, by other adults and by the communities in which they live. 4-H members were more likely to report that-

- "Adults in my town or city make me feel important"
- "Adults in my town or city listen to what I have to say."
- "Adults in my town or city care about people my age."
- "In my town or city, I feel like I matter to people"
- "In my family, I feel useful and important."
- "I'm given lots of chances to help make my town or city a better place to live."



**4-H Youth: Confident**

*"4-H gave me the confidence to do more things." -7th grade 4-H member, Stillwater County, MT*

Kids in Montana 4-H have a positive self-identity which gives them the confidence to succeed in life. 4-H members tend to be distinguished from youth who haven't been in 4-H by their abilities at finding ways to make things go better when things don't go well. They reported that they feel they have more control over the things that will happen in their lives, are more likely to feel good about who they are, feel that they "have much to be proud of," and that their lives have a purpose and meaning. 4-H members said that "Ten years from now, I think I will be very happy."

4-H members are also more likely than non-members to be able to "make their own decisions," "do things on my own," set goals, try new things, and take responsibility for their actions.

**4-H Youth: Competent**

*"I have developed a better work ethic and communications skills."*

*-9th grade 4-H member, Carbon County, MT*

*"4-H has taught me leadership and commitment that I can use for the rest of my life."*

*-9th grade 4-H member, Stillwater County, MT*

Research shows that Montana 4-H youth feel more socially competent and self-assured than other youth. For example, our study revealed that they are more likely to report that they know how to resist negative peer pressures and how to "stay away from people who get me in trouble."

4-H kids were also significantly different from those who have not been in 4-H in their ability to meet and greet new people easily, feel comfortable in new situations, and volunteer to lead activities in school classes.

Kids who participate in Montana 4-H are also more likely to develop the practical and useful skills that will help them develop into capable, competent and contributing adults. 4-H youth are more likely, for example, to have developed good record keeping skills, are able to speak with ease in front of others, know how to organize their work, know how to plan ahead, and manage money wisely.

4-H kids are also more likely to take on leadership roles in their school and community. 4-H members are more likely to volunteer in class to lead activities than other youth. In the last 12 months, 4-H members showed a higher level of leadership involvement than other youth (see Table 7).

Table 7. Percentage of youth holding leadership positions.

	<u>4-H members</u>	<u>Others</u>
have been elected to a leadership position	32.0	20.0
hold a leadership position in their school	27.4	21.4
serve on as the chairperson of a committee	13.2	8.2
serve as a committee member	<u>25.3</u>	<u>17.2</u>
Total Observations	378	2,062
p < .05		

**4-H Youth: Connected**

*"4-H brought me closer to my grandfather." -9th grade 4-H member, Phillips County, MT*

*"4-H has helped get my family together." -5th grade 4-H member, Golden Valley County, MT*

4-H members in Montana are also more likely to have a positive view of their role in the community and the future than youth who have not been involved in the program. 4-H members were more likely to report that adults look at them as valuable assets to the community, that adults listen to them, and that they are given lots of chances to make their communities better places to live.

Montana 4-H members credit the program with making a significant difference in their own lives, in the quality of their family life, and in the quality of their community. For example,

- Half of all youth who have been members of 4-H agree that "my participation in 4-H has been critical to my success in life."
- More than 6 out of 10 youth who have been 4-H members say that "4-H has made a positive difference in my life."

And as adults, we know how important it is for kids to feel accepted and safe in activities during the out-of-school hours. The good news is that 7 out of 10 youth who had been in 4-H for more than a year reported that 4-H is a "safe place for learning" and that "4-H clubs are supportive environments where I feel accepted for who I am." Moreover, in 4-H clubs, today's kids overwhelmingly report (8 out of 10) that "in 4-H, I can explore my own interests."

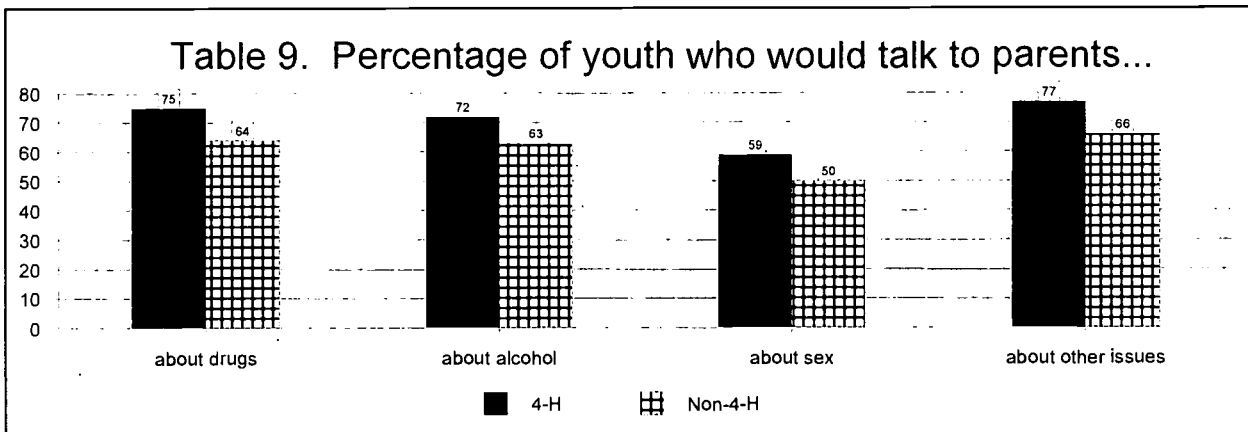
4-H kids reported that they felt they had better relationships with adults than youth who have not been in 4-H. For example, 4-H kids say they are more likely to go to another adult (besides their parent or guardian) for help about important questions in their lives (see Table 8).

Table 8. Percentage of youth who have close relationships with parents and other adults.

	<u>4-H</u>	<u>Others</u>
If you had an important question about your life, do you know of an adult (other than your parent) to whom you would feel comfortable going to for help?	76.7	66.6
In the last month, had a good conversation with one of your parents that lasted 10 minutes or more?	81.8	69.2
In the last month, had a good conversation with another adult (not parent) that last 10 minutes or more	<u>72.5</u>	<u>57.2</u>
Total Observations	378	2,062

p < .05

4-H members also were more likely to say that if they had "an important concern about drugs, alcohol, sex and any other serious issue," they would talk to their parents or guardians about it compared to those who were not 4-H members (see Table 9).



**4-H Youth: Caring and Compassionate**

*"4-H makes you think to help others and be kind."*

*-5th grade 4-H member, Dawson County, MT*

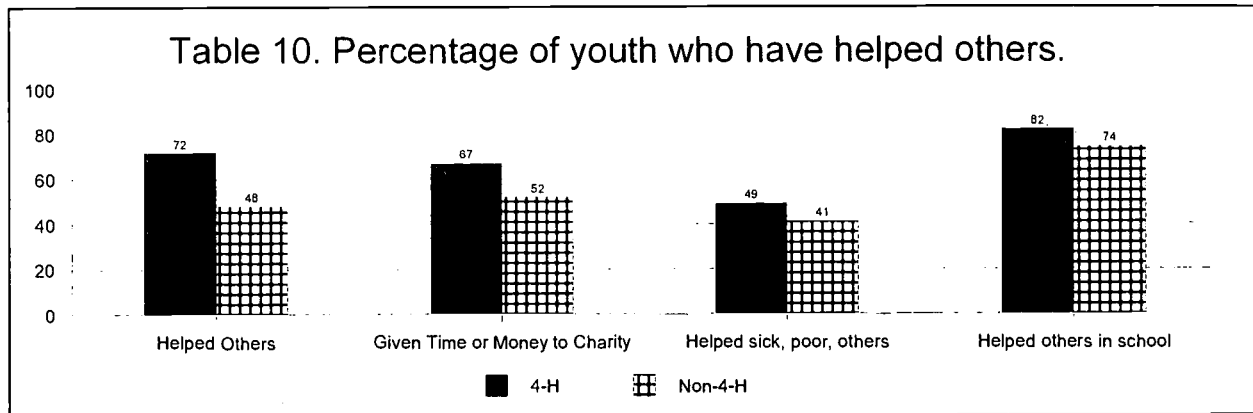
*"I can cook so my mom won't have to all the time."*

*-5th grade 4-H member, Glacier County, MT*

Our study indicates that these 4-H kids are more likely to develop a deep sense of compassion and caring for others. This research shows that 4-H members are more likely to empathize with others in difficult circumstances, and significantly differ from their peers in how much they care about other's feelings. 4-H members were also more likely to help others.

During the past 12 months, 4-H members also reported that they were more likely to have

been involved in a project to make life better for other people, give money or time to a charity or other organization that helps people, and to have spent time helping people who are poor, hungry, sick or unable to care for themselves (see Table 10).



### 4-H is Making a Difference

**Face it—we’re all concerned about today’s kids. After all, a lot can happen in the out-of-school hours. 4-H makes sure that what’s going on is constructive.**

**4-H gives kids positive ways to improve themselves, their families and their communities—through leadership training, public speaking, learning to cook, aerospace, learning about wildlife, woodworking, photography, raising a pet, to skateboarding. And a whole lot more!**

4-H is a proven, research-based program that is making a difference in the lives of today’s youth and families. Montana 4-H gives all parents opportunities to provide their children with a safe, structured, nurturing environment. This environment fosters the initiative to learn and discover while instilling strong values and morals. 4-H gives young people the competence, confidence, compassion and connections with caring adults to be able to contribute to the vitality of their communities—now and in the future.

Recently, National Quorum Research (2000) reported that Americans say building **the character and competence of youth is more important than other issues**. MSU research shows that 4-H is addressing these concerns--building tomorrow’s leaders today.

4-H promotes the full development of young people for healthy living—**through head, heart, hands and health**. While other activities and youth groups might teach basic skills and academic training, 4-H is building up young people’s competence, confidence, caring, connections and contributions.

#### **4-H Clubs are Designed to Make a Difference**

Why are 4-H participants more likely to report these higher gains than others? 4-H clubs are intentionally designed to include the **eight critical elements** necessary for positive youth

development:

- positive relationships with caring adults
- opportunities for self-determination
- an accepting and inclusive environment
- opportunities to contribute through community service
- a safe environment for learning and growing
- opportunities to develop skills and mastery
- engagement in learning
- opportunities to be an active participant in life—now and in the future

### **4-H is for all Families**

**4-H is making a difference for all kinds of kids, not just the "cream of the crop."** In fact, the National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS:88) research shows that 4-H is not just reaching those kids or families who would excel anyway. This national research conducted by the U.S. Department of Education shows that 4-H families reflect the diversity of families present in the nation as a whole. In fact, one-fifth of those who have been in 4-H before the eighth grade were from families with incomes of less than \$15,000. In addition, 4-H was more likely to attract youngsters where neither parent had completed high school than it was to attract youngsters where at least one of the parents had a graduate degree. Youth whose parents had graduate degrees were less likely to have been a 4-H member. One-fourth of 4-H members showed five or more indicators of being "at-risk." Finally, 4-H was more likely to attract youth from the **two** lowest socio-economic quartiles than from the top socio-economic quartile.

**4-H does not just attract high-achieving kids from privileged families nor is 4-H able to achieve the kind of results reported in this research summary by only working with "the best kids." Rather, 4-H is a powerful, proven program that makes a positive difference for all those who participate.**

*"4-H helped me through tough times in my life."*

*-9th grade 4-H member, Lewis & Clark County, MT*

### **Limitations**

This study reports several distinctions between 4-H and non-4-H youth where 4-H youth are shown to have a high probability of engaging in positive behaviors. This correlational study is unable to separate out the impact of the 4-H experience from the attributes of youth who join 4-H. Also, there may be other variables that influence the success of 4-H members. Perhaps 4-H members are simply less likely to be involved in risk-taking behaviors, although the NELS data cited above disputes this claim. This study can only conclude that the youth participating in 4-H and the experiences of being in 4-H influence the behavior of these young people.

Longitudinal studies could be employed to better assess the impact of the 4-H experience

on young people. However, well-developed longitudinal studies are costly and beyond the scope of this research report. Moreover, longitudinal studies like NELS show that 4-H members represent a cross-section of the population. We believe our results are valid and while we admit that there may be some selection bias in 4-H membership, longitudinal studies like NELS clearly show that 4-H members are representative of the population.

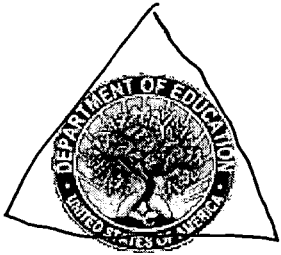
Montana 4-H--making a difference. For information on how to enroll your child, contact your local county Extension office in the blue section of your phone book under county government.

*For more information, contact: Dr. Kirk A. Astroth, Montana State University, 210 Taylor Hall, Bozeman, MT 59717 or call 406-994-3501. email: [kastroth@montana.edu](mailto:kastroth@montana.edu) Or check our web site: <http://www.montana.edu/www4h>*

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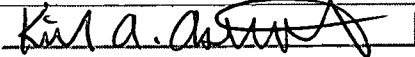
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