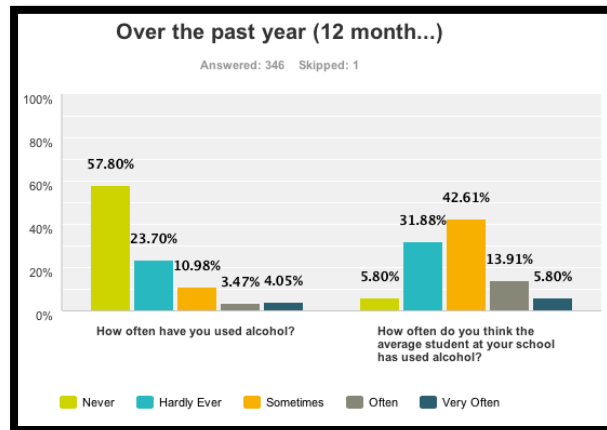


Reality Check – GWHS Students Don’t Drink As Much As You Think

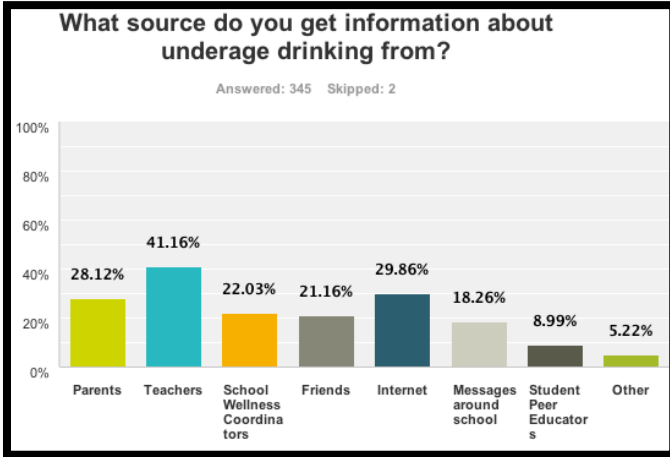
We are a group of seven students dedicated to educating peers and the community about the realities of underage drinking in the high school setting. Our group, Washington Positive Peer Pressure (WPX3) is a Friday Night Live Chapter through the Youth Leadership Institute funded by the Department of Public Health. WPX3 is comprised of students at George Washington High School (GWHS) in the Richmond District. At GWHS, our journey began early in the school year when we distributed an anonymous survey to about 350 students across all grade levels. The intention of our survey was to discover the truth about high school students’ relationship with underage drinking as well as perceptions and stereotypes that perpetuate unhealthy behaviors. We chose this topic for our survey because we felt like there were a lot of stereotypes out there associating high school students and frequent drinking. Our data results showed us that GWHS students engaged in underage drinking at a rate far less than their peer’s perceived. To showcase our findings, we have created a Positive Social Norms campaign, a messaging campaign that highlights the healthy behaviors that students reported. Our positive messages will be displayed on posters around our school and in our community in the Richmond District. The three messages we chose to highlight from our data results are explained below.

TV shows and movies about teenagers frequently show party scenes with alcohol and binge drinking. This sort of unhealthy behavior glamorized in the media negatively brands youth and creates a general assumption that many students frequently drink alcohol. However, our survey results conclude that this perception is very inaccurate. In our survey we asked the question, “In the past 12 months how often have you used alcohol?”, close to 60% of students answered that they had “Never” used alcohol in the past 12 months. Surprisingly, when students were asked a similar question about how frequently they perceived their peers to drink alcohol, less than 6% of students thought their peers “Never” drank alcohol in the past 12 months. Clearly, these two survey questions highlight the conflict between actual rates of underage drinking and perceptions associated with underage drinking.



To address these conflicting results, the message we generated reads: **"A general assumption is that many students drink alcohol. FACT CHECK! Over half of students at GWHS have never used alcohol in the past year."**

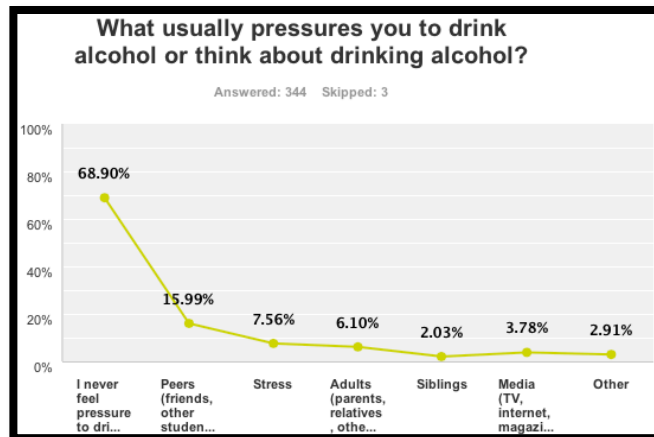
As students, we spend a lot of time at school with our teachers. Because of this, there should have been no surprise that, when students were asked, “What source do you get information about underage drinking from?” a majority of students said that their “Teachers” were their most frequent source for information about alcohol. We were extremely happy by this result because it proves that, not only are teachers educating



students about academic subjects, they are also informing students about safe and healthy behaviors. This data results inspired us to let our teachers know that we value their knowledge and we are also always listening (even when it seems like we aren't). To demonstrate this appreciation, our message is: **“Yo teachers! We get most of our information about underage drinking from you. Keep talking, we’re listening!”**

Perhaps the most surprising result we got from our survey came from the question, “What usually pressures you to drink alcohol or think about drinking alcohol?” Out of the answer choices the result most frequently selected (by about 70% of students) was, “I never feel pressured to drink alcohol”. This result led us to assume that our peers are choosing to engage in activities where the pressure to drink alcohol either does not exist or is very limited. We are very interested to learn about the ways that so many students avoid negative pressure, so we created the message: **“About 70% of students at GWHS don’t feel pressured to drink alcohol.**

What are the positive things you do to avoid the pressure? Let us know!” We have created three social media pages (facebook, twitter, and Instagram) that give our peers the opportunity to tell us about how they avoid the pressure of underage drinking. We are really excited about this “live-newsfeed” style of interaction and we hope to share some of their comments during the next school year to continue this important conversation.



We are very enthusiastic to share our data and highlight it throughout our school and neighborhood community. The value of our social norms campaign was reinforced to us by our school Principal, Ericka Lovrin, who said that our efforts are “extremely valuable because students work hard to bring out the accurate data that reflects what’s actually happening at school verses what the media outs out about teenagers”. This work is important to us because it gives us the opportunity change stereotypes about high school students. We want to change the norms that encourage and perpetuate underage drinking

by sharing the realities and positive choices youth are making. Everyone needs a reality check every once in a while and presumptions should not be the foundation for how youth in San Francisco are viewed.

The students in the Washington Positive Peer Pressure group at George Washington High School who wrote this piece are as follows: Jamie Tran (17), Francis Hill (18), Pedro Raymundo (14), and Adair Huang (14).

Edited by: Amanda Trescott, Program Coordinator of Washington Positive Peer Pressure and Patricia Barahona, Senior Director of San Francisco Programs

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