HOT TOPICS

African American Teens Less Likely Than Others to Become Regular Smokers

A RAND Corporation study finds that although African American teenagers are just as likely as their peers to try smoking at a young age, the majority do not become regular smokers as adolescents and young adults. The outcomes of the study suggest that prevention programs should encourage parents to talk with their children about cigarette use in addition to helping young people avoid pro-smoking social influences.

Researchers followed more than 6,000 African American, Hispanic, Asian, and white students from ages 13 to 23. Over the course of the study, the researchers interviewed participants multiple times about their smoking habits and other substance use, social influences, and various behaviors. By age 23, regular smoking rates among Hispanics and whites were slightly over one and a half times the rate for African Americans, and about twice the rate among Asian Americans.

Particularly for African American youth, strong social forces from both family and friends offset many risk factors associated with smoking. More often they encounter parental disapproval of smoking and, after age 13, have fewer friends that smoke. Common risk factors for smoking, like poor performance in school, appeared to be counteracted by these protective factors for African American students.

Asian American teenagers encounter similar anti-smoking influences from family and peers, do well in school, and do not develop favorable beliefs about cigarette use.

READ MORE: African American Teens Less Likely Than Others to Become Regular Smokers

Are America’s Middle Schools Meeting the Needs of Young Teens?

Generally configured for young adolescents in grades 6 through 8, middle school is a critical formative period for students’ socio-emotional well-being and academic growth. School administrators and educators try to ensure that academic achievement objectives do not overshadow the developmental needs of middle school students. These needs are interrelated with academic success, and thus physical, mental, or emotional problems can impede a student’s progress. Middle school students face a multitude of transitions all at once—from dealing with the changes associated with puberty, to the way the school day is arranged, to their relationships with teachers and other students.

In a comprehensive report assessing the state of and the challenges facing American middle schools, RAND researchers offer recommendations for dealing with some of the more pressing issues for middle schools today. As well, they suggest areas in need of further research.

The researchers base their findings on an extensive review of relevant literature from the past 20 years and their own analyses of national and international data. The researchers address a broad range of topics in the report: conditions necessary for student learning, waning parental involvement during the middle school years, the piecemeal adoption and implementation of middle school reform initiatives, teacher competence and professional development, and effective leadership training for principals.

READ MORE: Focus on the Wonder Years: Challenges Facing the American Middle School

PROJECT UNDER WAY

Impact of Childhood Intervention Programs on Low-Income Children

In a joint study, researchers from RAND and UCLA are examining the impact of early childhood intervention programs on low-income children in Los Angeles County. The study will evaluate instructional practices and philosophies, emotional climate, and caregiver-child relationships in various intervention programs including Head Start, private nonprofit preschools, and family day care networks.

Researchers will identify specific instructional practices and approaches that have the potential to meaningfully enhance children’s development prior to school entry. In turn, these policies set the stage for a successful transition into kindergarten and reduce the likelihood that these at-risk children will be under-prepared as they move forward in school. The study is funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Department of Education.

For monthly email updates on all new RAND child policy publications and research projects, sign up for the Child Policy Project mailing list at www.rand.org/child/about.html.