

Study shows decline in drug, alcohol use among 11th-graders

By Emily Mentzer
The Itemizer-Observer

POLK COUNTY — Fewer 11th-graders in Polk County have used marijuana, alcohol and tobacco or illicit drugs than their peers in the past.

Fewer 11th-graders see alcohol and marijuana use as risky behavior.

More of them did not go to school because they felt unsafe. Feelings of harassment also increased through

email and social media sites, though feeling harassed because of other things — sexual orientation, race, looks — decreased.

The results are part of the Oregon Health Authority's biennial student wellness survey. The survey is given to students in sixth, eighth and 11th grade.

Because the survey is anonymous, it cannot be used as an intervention tool, said Doug Gouge, program director for the Student

Based Mental Health Program.

While some numbers can be concerning — 22.7 percent of 11th-graders say they have used marijuana — Gouge said the flip side is 77.3 percent of them have not used.

Having this information helps Gouge and his team create campaigns of prevention, showing students that this behavior is not normal.

"Everyone isn't doing it,"

he said.

The numbers are also used to help counselors determine what kind of training and resources are needed in Polk County schools.

The survey shows that 20 percent of students in 11th grade had "seriously considered attempting suicide," and 8 percent had "actually attempted suicide."

Gouge said those numbers have encouraged counselors to get evidence-

based training in how to identify kids who are showing signs of suicide — and getting training to kids themselves.

Gouge said the Power Peers class and leadership classes at Central High School have been trained in suicide prevention, giving them the tools they might need if a fellow student begins to talk about ending his or her own life.

A suicide prevention campaign has taken to Twitter,

Instagram and Snapchat, Gouge said.

"The good news is, 80 percent of kids haven't even thought about suicide — it hasn't even crossed their minds," he said. But that doesn't mean nothing can be done to help the minority of those who have, he added.

For more information about the survey or about suicide or drug prevention: www.co.polk.or.us/bh/mental-health-services.

Eclipse: Students create their own myths



JOLENE GUZMAN/Itemizer-Observer

Third-graders at Lyle Elementary School immitate sunrays during a presentation about the Great American Eclipse, which will happen the morning of Aug. 21.



JOLENE GUZMAN/Itemizer-Observer

Students make up myths about the solar eclipse.

Continued from Page 16A

One group conjured more than 20 different tales, among them was a giant boy's equally giant bowl of ice cream causing an eclipse.

One young gridiron fan mused that a Ducks football helmet that got knocked off a player's head blocked out the sun temporarily.

In another, a child accidentally let go of her balloon, causing an eclipse.

Her father rescues the balloon before it gets too far away, bringing the sun back.

The class's favorite? The one about ice cream, natu-

rally.

Near the end of the presentation, Cuyler lead the students in a pledge committing them to telling others about the eclipse

"I solemnly pledge that I

will tell my friends and family how much fun we are going to have on eclipse day," the pledge begins.

It ends with a handy piece of advice: "Be wise: Protect your eyes."

Wednesday's presentation, myths and activities, seemed to do the trick of getting the students excited about the rare event.

As the classes left for recess in the afternoon, many students thanked Cuyler and asked if she would come back.

"You can see me on eclipse day," she said.

Eclipse

• What is really happening during an eclipse?

While the third-graders enjoyed making up stories, the eclipse happens when the moon gets between Earth and the sun, and the moon casts a shadow over Earth.

A solar eclipse can only take place at the phase of new moon, when the moon passes directly between the sun and Earth and its shadows fall upon Earth's surface.

• For more on the Great American Eclipse, see the *Itemizer-Observer's* special section in next week's issue.

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