

Wired kids: Today's youth riding the technology wave

By Ben Feller
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — Need some help navigating the Net? Your best consultant might be a kid.

At school and at home, today's children and teens are so computer savvy and comfortable online that they've become technology pacesetters, two new government studies show.

About 90 percent of people ages 5 to 17 use computers and 59 percent of them use the Internet — rates that are, in both cases, higher than those of adults. Even kindergartners are becoming more plugged in: One out of four 5-year-olds uses the Internet.

The figures come from a new Education Department analysis of computer and Internet use by children and adolescents in 2001. A sec-

ond report from the agency, based on 2002 data, shows 99 percent of public schools have Internet access, up from 35 percent eight years ago.

"Children are often the first adopters of a lot of technology," said John Bailey, who oversees educational technology for the department. "They grow up with it. They don't have to adapt to it. ... Students, by and large, are dominating the Internet population."

By the time they're age 10, 60 percent of children use the Internet. That number grows to almost 80 percent for kids who are 16.

"The dramatic increase in younger kids' use of technology is not disconnected from what's going on with their parents and their families," said Peter Grunwald, whose California research firm tracks technology trends by annually surveying

students and parents.

"Younger kids are likely to have younger parents, and it is those parents, especially mothers, who have a much higher comfort level with technology than older parents — or even younger parents of five years ago."

A substantial number of children have or plan to have their own Web sites, Grunwald said.

Like adults, young people are going online for a range of reasons, the government research shows. Almost three in four use the Internet for help with school assignments, while more than half use it for writing e-mail, sending instant messages or playing games.

Girls, who not long ago used computers and the Internet at lower rates than boys, have essentially eliminated that difference, the research shows. But there are other notable gaps.

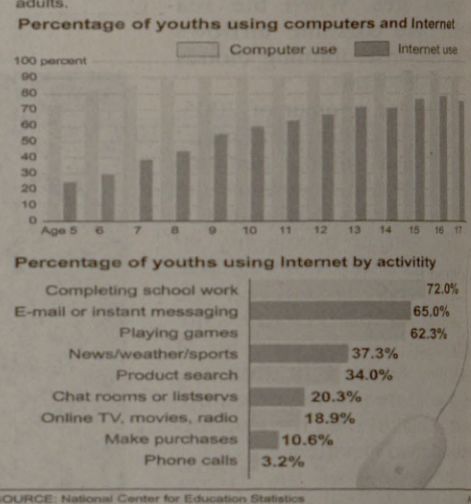
Almost two-thirds of young white people use the Internet, but less than half of black people ages 5 to 17 do, and slightly more than a third of Hispanic young people log on. Part of the reason is access — 80 percent of black students use computers at school, for example, but only 41 percent do so at home, according to the 2001 report.

"We need to address the limited access to technology that many students have outside of school," Education Secretary Rod Paige said. "There is much more we can do."

From rural areas to the suburbs to cities, almost every public school is wired for the Internet and schools now have one computer with Internet access for every five students, the research shows. As a result, more children and teens use computers at school than at home.

The kids are online

Children are leading the way to the Web. About 59 percent of youths ages 5 to 17 use the Internet — a higher rate than that of adults.



NEWS IN BRIEF

Critics blast CBS' Reagan miniseries

LOS ANGELES (AP) — The angry buzz over "The Reagans" has grown louder and more pointed. "Advertisers will bail on CBS' anti-Reagan movie," commentator Pat Buchanan predicted on "The McLaughlin Group" Sunday. Two days later, a conservative media watchdog group announced a boycott call-to-arms. But CBS isn't showing signs of regretting its excursion into political drama. Based on experience, observers say, it probably doesn't need to.

"The bottom line is, the more attention it (the miniseries) gets, the more people are going to watch it," said television analyst Marc Berman of Media Week Online.

Last season, pre-broadcast protests greeted the network's miniseries about Adolf Hitler's early years, which some feared would have the effect of fostering sympathy for the Nazi leader. "It didn't hurt the ratings. It gave it more exposure," Berman said.

Four escape from North Carolina jail

RAEFORD, N.C. (AP) — Four inmates escaped from an understaffed county jail, including a man accused of kidnapping an 11-year-old girl who was pregnant with his child and holding her captive in Mexico for years, authorities said.

The four escaped late Tuesday from the Hoke County Jail's annex. One was captured Wednesday and the others remained at large, authorities said.

The four took advantage of understaffing, the sheriff's office said. The inmates were in the jail's annex. The jail and the annex are supposed to house about 71 inmates but typically hold 90 inmates, Peterkin said.

New anti-drug campaign aimed at Hispanic youth

WASHINGTON (AP) — A new anti-drug media campaign targeting Hispanic youth urges their parents to talk to children about the dangers of marijuana and other illegal drugs.

The initiative, announced Wednesday, will be partially funded by \$31 million in federal money for anti-drug efforts by the Office of National Drug Control Policy. The rest will come from public and private organizations.

The campaign focuses on the use of marijuana by Hispanic teenagers, who showed the highest rate of use among different ethnic groups and whites according to a study done for the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

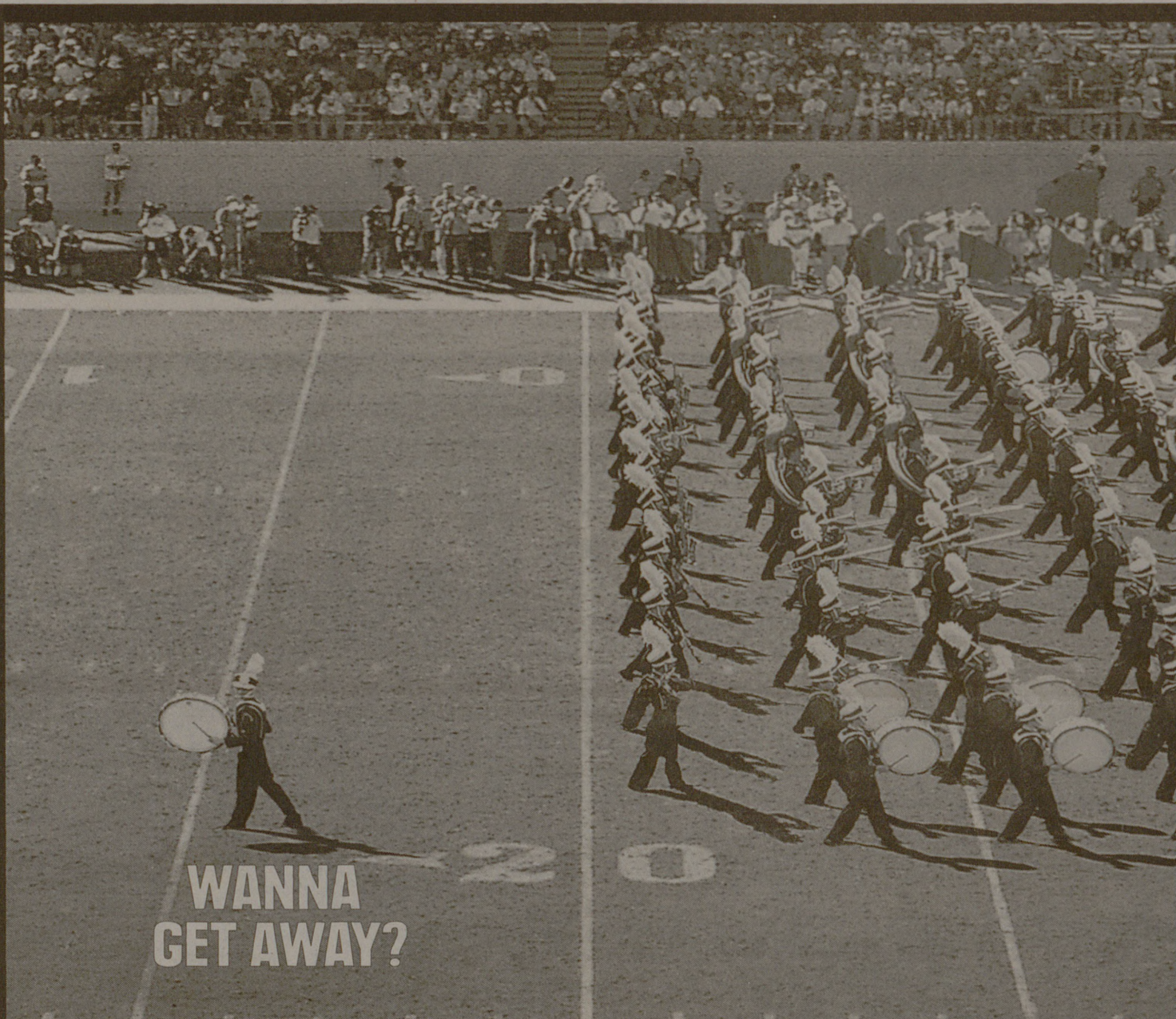
It includes an open letter to Hispanic parents urging them to learn more about the dangers of marijuana. The letter will appear in 84 newspapers in 43 metropolitan areas around the country this week. The letter is signed by leaders of 11 top health, education and advocacy organizations.

Three television ads are slated to be aired in Hispanic markets, and the Hispanic food company Goya will help distribute a bilingual booklet aimed at educating parents about drugs.

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- Las Vegas
- Los Angeles (LAX)
- New Orleans
- Oakland
(18 miles to downtown San Francisco)
- Phoenix
- Providence
(A better way to Boston)
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