

What Schools Can Do:

Creative Ways Franklin County and North Quabbin Schools are Implementing DESE Guidance on Substance Use Prevention



Communities that Care

COALITION

The Partnership for Youth

2017



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Schools are Implementing DESE Guidance on
Substance Use Prevention**

Communities That Care Coalition
The Partnership for Youth
Franklin Regional Council of Governments
2017

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ Executive Summary ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

Background

Youth substance use is a significant public health concern throughout Massachusetts.

In Franklin County and the North Quabbin region, The Communities That Care Coalition (CTC) has worked for over a decade to reduce youth substance use and continues to collaborate with school and community partners on this issue. Leading up to this project, several school districts in the region contacted CTC to express interest in enhancing policies and accessing area resources to effectively address student substance use. New statewide requirements and guidance from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) on substance use policies further increased local interest in best practices.

The report shares findings from meetings with all of the 9 area districts, outlining how schools across Franklin County and the North Quabbin have created policies and practices that are in line with guidance from DESE and also respond to the needs of their local communities. Local survey data is incorporated to provide further context, and links to outside websites provide opportunities to learn more about specific programs.

Findings

- **Schools in Franklin County and the North Quabbin are leading the way by implementing highly effective, evidence-based strategies**, including the LifeSkills Curriculum as well as Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT);
- **Local schools are moving away from purely punitive responses** to violations and moving towards restorative practices, trauma-informed practices, and therapeutic responses that focus on student needs and development;
- **There is strong, local interest in increasing equity in discipline.** Across the United States, students of color and students who receive special education services are suspended and expelled at much higher rates than other students. A special section in the report connects national research on best practices to local strategies.
- **A focus on school-climate and school connectedness has many benefits**, including youth substance use prevention. In addition, the protective factors that promote emotional and physical health also reduce the risk of early substance use, bullying, truancy, school dropout, and other interconnected challenges.
- **Schools in the region have a track record of collaborating** and promoting social, emotional, and physical health. Using these strengths, they have been tailoring evidence-based strategies that meet requirements to work well in local schools.

Program Highlights Included Throughout the Report

There are many fantastic programs and strategies happening across the region that cannot be included in this summary. Examples of creative programs and strategies that meet DESE requirements are included throughout the report, with additional details in the Program Descriptions Appendix. Readers are encouraged to browse the report to find out about programs and strategies that might be relevant to your community.

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■ ■ ■ ■ ■ Introduction ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

In Franklin County and the North Quabbin, youth substance use remains a significant public health concern for students, parents, schools, and the general community. The Communities That Care Coalition (CTC) has worked for over a decade on strategies to reduce youth substance use and continues to collaborate with school and community partners to address this issue.

Leading up to this project, several school districts in the region contacted staff at Partnership for Youth who coordinate the CTC about substance use policies. The districts expressed interest in enhancing policies and accessing area resources to effectively address challenging situations related to student substance use. To assess the current status of school policies, school-based substance use prevention, and meet the needs of local districts, Partnership for Youth staff met with representatives from all area districts between March of 2016 and January of 2017.

Many thanks to everyone who met with us or provided information for this project.

Effective, well-implemented school policies and procedures have the potential to positively impact school culture and reduce student substance use.

This report shares findings from meetings with all of the area districts, including information on local trends in school policies and practices, program highlights, current challenges, and ideas for next steps to enhance existing practices. It outlines how districts across Franklin County and the North Quabbin have created policies and practices that are in line with recent guidance from The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) and also respond to the needs of their local communities. Local survey data is incorporated to provide further context.

Throughout the report, clickable links to the [Program Descriptions](#) Appendix and external websites provide an opportunity to learn more about specific programs.

Recent Changes in Legislation and Recommendations from DESE

Many school districts across the commonwealth are modifying policies and practices to adhere to [Chapter 222 of the Acts of 2012](#), legislation which took effect in 2014 and limits the use of long-term suspension.

Additional new legislation in March of 2016 and subsequent recommendations from DESE further shifted the expectations for school

policy and practice regarding substance use. DESE released a six page document, [Guidance on School Policies Regarding Substance Use Prevention](#) in September, 2016, in response to Chapter 52 of 2016, An Act Relative to Substance Use, Treatment, Education and Prevention.

The 2016 DESE guidance document encourages districts to create policy and practices in line with the six elements of a Safe and Supportive Schools Framework:

- I. Leadership**
- II. Professional Development**
- III. Access to Resources and Services**
- IV. Academic and Non-Academic Strategies**
- V. Policies, Procedures, and Protocols**
- VI. Collaboration with Families**

These six elements are color coded throughout the document according to the headings listed here.

The guidance document also includes a section on instituting a verbal screening tool like Screening, Brief Intervention and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT) for substance use disorders and lists several best practices, including:

- clearly defined goals for the policy;
- student, teacher, family, and community involvement;
- implementation of an evidence-based substance use prevention curriculum for grades 5 through 12;
- treatment options; and
- a timetable for periodic review and revision of the policy.

The information in this report on local schools' policies and practices is organized according to the Safe and Supportive Schools Framework and incorporates the additional recommendations from DESE's guidance document.

Local Innovation

*Although recent statewide requirements are increasing uniformity in substance use policies overall, **there are many creative ways to enact policies and implement programs** that fit within the framework provided by DESE.*

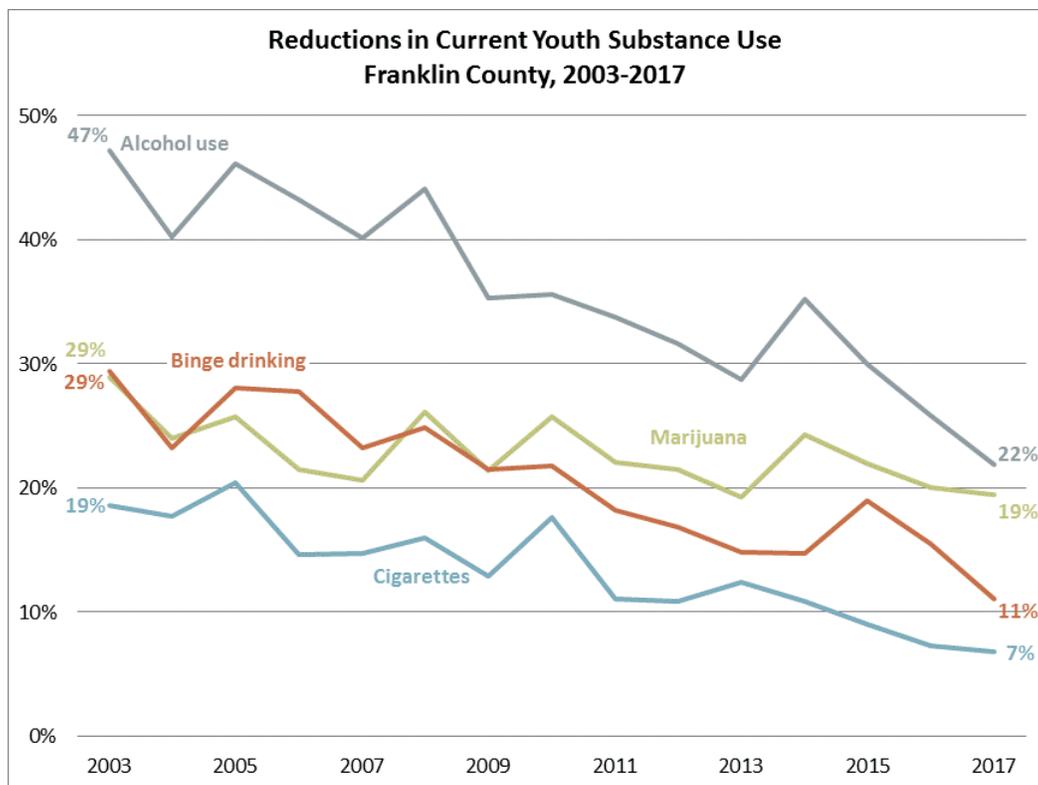
Local schools have created and instituted a variety of innovative practices and programs that:

- adhere to requirements and recommendations;
- meet the needs of local communities; and
- use a holistic approach that has multiple benefits.

Schools in Franklin County and the North Quabbin have a track record of promoting physical, social, and emotional health and well-being. Local districts have led the way on implementing the LifeSkills curriculum and have been ahead of the curve on Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT).

All of these evidence-based strategies make a difference and can be tailored to work well in local communities while meeting requirements. There is growing consensus about the importance of integrating restorative and therapeutic approaches when addressing student behavior issues. School connectedness is becoming a central goal in program planning. Local and national data supports the effectiveness of these approaches.

All 8th, 10th, and 12th grade students in the nine public school districts in Franklin County and the North Quabbin take the Annual Teen Health Survey. The anonymous survey asks about a variety of health behaviors, including substance use, and the underlying risk and protective factors, in the school, community, and family environments.



2003-2017 Teen Health Survey data shows significant reductions in student substance use.

The protective factors that promote physical and emotional health also reduce the risk of early substance use, bullying, truancy, school dropout, and other interconnected challenges.

I. Leadership

The DESE guidance document recommends:

- The school committee should work with district and school leaders to develop clearly defined goals to prevent and address substance use and abuse among youth.
- Administrators should provide leadership for multiple strategies, including education and training; social competency skill development; social norms with expectations for behavior; policies, procedures and protocols; and problem identification and referral services.

Local school administrators are exercising leadership by:

Addressing substance use with multiple strategies

District and school administrators across the region are revising and implementing substance use policies. They appreciate the multifaceted nature of comprehensive substance use prevention, which includes a general policy, specific procedures, and multiple programs to support a prevention plan.

Local district administrators have established many best practices and recognize their role in:

- development and implementation of policies and procedures and overall plan for substance use prevention and intervention;
- formation of a school environment that is supportive of substance use prevention and student health; and
- implementation of evidence-based educational curricula on alcohol, tobacco and other drugs.

Engaging in regional collaboration

Administrators in each school district designate a representative for the Regional School Health Task Force of the Communities That Care Coalition. Task Force representatives are themselves administrators or in close communication with their district's administration, and they provide leadership by working with other area schools and local substance abuse prevention coalitions to conduct the annual Teen Health Survey, shape regional strategies, collectively provide support for district-level efforts, and share information across districts.



Members of the Regional School Health Task Force in the fall of 2016

Leading on LifeSkills

Superintendents and principals have demonstrated leadership in early adoption of the highly-effective LifeSkills substance abuse prevention curriculum, which is now spreading to schools across the state, with the support of DESE. The LifeSkills program is described in more detail in section IV, Academic and Non-Academic Strategies.

To address substance use, local administrators use multiple strategies: They engage in collaboration across districts and supported implementation of LifeSkills and SBIRT.

Additional Recommendations

In addition to the best practices already in place throughout the region, some administrators and staff also work to include the entire school and larger community in substance use prevention and intervention. Community involvement is a best practice that is recommended, by DESE and other agencies. Aspects of this include:

- development of positive relationships with community agencies needed to support the substance use prevention and intervention plan; and
- inclusion of the entire school community in implementation of the plan.

Including language on leadership at the beginning of a policy or in a values statement can set the tone for the entire policy and support work on school culture. Some possible points are:

- Who is viewed as a leader in the school: e.g. administrators, other staff, teachers, the school committee, etc.
- A statement about expectations of coaches, bus drivers, paraprofessionals, maintenance staff, event chaperones, and any adult who is in contact with students, in order to help foster a sense of shared responsibility for a positive school environment.

II. Professional Development

The DESE guidance document recommends:

- All faculty and staff should receive training on signs and symptoms of substance use and be familiar with policy related to substance use prevention and intervention.
- Staff administering a screening tool or delivering a substance use prevention curriculum should be appropriately trained.

Local strategies include:

Prioritizing professional development

Many schools provide frequent training opportunities with a variety of topics to faculty and staff, and respond to staff input when choosing upcoming training topics.

Administrators who provide ample professional development opportunities said they see results.

Staff members:

- tend to stay with a district longer;
- report higher levels of job satisfaction;
- feel more valued; and
- continue to develop skills in a variety of areas.

Providing all-staff trainings

All-staff trainings ensure consistency of knowledge on targeted, important topics. In late 2016, all Greenfield High School teachers were trained on when and how to administer Narcan (Naloxone). Earlier in the year, the Gill-Montague district hosted a screening of [Paper Tigers](#), a documentary on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and ideas for providing trauma-informed support at school, which was offered as a training opportunity to all staff.

These trainings were well-received by school staff and illustrate the wide range of issues that can increase school capacity to address youth substance use prevention and health promotion.

For off-site trainings, many schools in our region send staff and faculty to participate in a professional development day on Election Day, while schools are used for polling locations.

Focusing on trauma-informed practices

Incorporating trauma-informed practices into both staff training and staff support increases school capacity to prevent and respond to substance use.

Local examples:

- ***Mohawk Trail Regional School's professional development days*** are focused on skills and knowledge related to trauma, as part of a district-wide effort on trauma-sensitivity.
- ***Pioneer, Mahar, and Gill-Montague have all recently offered optional professional development trainings*** to staff on trauma-informed practices or mental health.
- ***For staff support, Gill-Montague offers yoga for staff*** after school and using a wellness grant to promote employee wellness. Other districts are also expanding staff support options as part of an overall trauma-informed lens.
- Districts looking for ***workshops and training for teachers, administrators and staff*** may be interested in the locally created, evidence-based [Responsive Classroom](#) model which is trauma-informed and focuses on several key areas, including professional development. More info in [Program Descriptions](#) .
- Several districts are accessing training on trauma-informed practices through ***the Stress, Trauma and Resilience (STaR) program***, a project of Clinical and Support Options (CSO). More info in [Program Descriptions](#) .

Access to Resources and Services

The DESE guidance document recommends:

- School staff play a key role in identifying, supporting, and providing referrals for students with substance use related problems.
- School staff work with families to address substance use and mental health concerns.
- Schools should collaborate with substance use counseling professionals and mental health specialists to meet the needs of those students most at risk.
- School counselors should be prepared to facilitate referrals to community services for the wide variety of mental health problems that students experience, including substance use.

A. Challenges

Statewide, there is still a shortage of inpatient treatment beds available for people with substance use disorders, with disproportionately fewer beds in Western Massachusetts. We also heard from staff in some districts that their towns do not have adequate services to provide the support needed to youth after completing treatment, in order to remain substance-free once back in the same environment in which they began using.

Staff members in all districts also reported:

- ***Inadequate access to local outpatient treatment*** for young people with substance use problems and mental health concerns, including support for anxiety, depression, and trauma, all of which can increase the risk of substance use disorders.
- ***Transportation to counseling services is often a challenge for families,*** and access to substance use treatment continues to be a challenge for students across the region. Most options are too far away to be feasible, even for families with reliable transportation and a parent or guardian willing to regularly drive to an outpatient treatment facility or social service agency.

B. Local Community Solutions

Area leaders are aware of the shortage and continue to look for community solutions, under the guidance of the Opioid Task Force.

Local Treatment Resource

In the North Quabbin, a new treatment facility for adults, Heywood Hospital's [Quabbin Retreat](#) in Petersham, is slated to build a unit for adolescents within the next year.



The Quabbin Retreat in Petersham

C. Local School-Based Solutions

Local school districts have come up with a variety of creative solutions to fill some of the gaps in services.

Offering counseling and related services on-site at school is an emerging best practice that takes into account the unique characteristics of Franklin County and the North Quabbin region.

- ***Utilizing school-based counseling staff for individual student counseling***
 - ***Advantages:*** Students who violated the substance use policy or are struggling in other ways can be referred directly to in-house counseling staff, enabling students to access therapeutic support during the school day and on school grounds. Because the counselors are part of the school staff and serve on the Student Support Team, the team is able to make plans that are more informed and tailored to student needs.
 - ***Considerations:*** Effectiveness is greatly increased if school-based counselors have experience with issues related to substance use, self-medicating, and trauma. *The schools that had a higher counseling staff to student ratio reported more success in this area, likely because of capacity.*

- ***Utilizing outside resources for onsite support and learning groups***
 Collaborations with other agencies or individuals, often made possible because of dedicated grant funding, has facilitated access to additional support services
 - ***Several schools in the area are working with the Partnership for Youth*** to find funding to bring the [PreVenture Program](#) to their schools. The program screens all students in a selected grade or grades for four different personality types which put them at higher risk of substance abuse. Students are then invited to participate in two workshops to build skills tailored for their particular personality type. More info in [Program Descriptions](#)
 - ***Some schools in the region have invited agencies or therapists to offer support groups on school grounds.***
 - One example of this in the region is Center for Women & Community's [Specialized Teen Services Program](#), which offers free counseling sessions at many Hampshire County schools on trauma and abuse issues and has also offered support groups.

- ***Utilizing outside resources for onsite access to additional supports***
 - ***The CHART program at The Athol-Royalston Regional School District*** connects students and families with mental health treatment and other local resources. More info in [Program Descriptions](#) .
 - ***Heywood Hospital's telemedicine program at Ralph C. Mahar Regional School*** is a grant-funded collaboration, funded by the Health Policy Commission. It brings behavioral healthcare options to middle and high school students through telemedicine technology accessed via the guidance department.
 - ***The Bridge for Resilient Youth in Transition (BRYT) at Pioneer Valley Regional School*** supports students who return to school after absences due to serious mental or physical health issues. BRYT may be of interest to other districts in the region. More info in [Program Descriptions](#) .

Other ways to provide access to resources

Area schools find numerous creative ways to make community resources available to students. Once staff members are in the habit of thinking about fostering a trauma-informed environment at the school, ideas are incorporated across different subjects and activities. Two replicable examples are:

- ***Inviting community agencies and school clubs to table at school events*** provides opportunities for students and families who might not proactively seek out support to learn about resources and services. More info in [Program Descriptions](#) .
 - When ***Pioneer Valley Regional School*** students performed Rent in the spring of 2017, staff recognized that it was an opportunity to address some of the serious issues brought up in the musical and coordinated having resource tables at the performance.



Rent at Pioneer Valley Regional School

Photo credit: The Recorder/ Paul Franz photo

- ***Franklin County Regional Technical School's Dress Down Day Fund*** Like many Guidance Teams and Student Support Teams across the region, Franklin County Technical School's staff provide a range of supports and referrals to address acute student needs such as homelessness, significant poverty, and crisis situations. A common gap in resources for students dealing with these challenges is met creatively through the Dress Down Day Fund. The fund provides access to small amounts of money needed by students to purchase food, clothing, or other items required for school-related activities. More info in [Program Descriptions](#) .

IV. Academic and Non-Academic Strategies

The DESE guidance document recommends:

- Schools should implement an evidence-based substance abuse prevention curriculum for grades 5 to 12.
- If there are school-based mental health professionals, they should work directly with young people who are identified as at risk.
- At least one adult in the school should be designated as the point of contact and support for students who are considered to be at risk.
- Schools should consult the National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices (NREPP), a searchable registry of more than 350 substance abuse and mental health interventions that have been reviewed by the U.S Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.
<https://www.samhsa.gov/nrepp>

Academic and non-academic strategies that increase protective factors and reduce risk factors for substance use take many forms, providing benefits for youth on multiple issues.

A. Academic Strategies

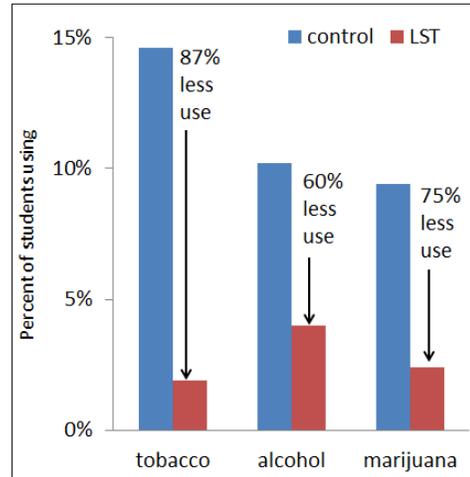
Within academic classes, especially health, several evidence-based curricula are used in the region.

LifeSkills implementation within the region

LifeSkills is the evidence-based substance use prevention curriculum used across the region. Beginning three years ago, as the impact of the opioid crisis across our region became clear, the Communities that Care Coalition spearheaded an effort to ensure that all students participate in an effective substance use prevention program in school. The Regional School Health Task Force reviewed all of the evidence-based substance use prevention curricula on the National Registry of Effective Policies and Programs, and after consulting with their individual school administrations, as a group selected the LifeSkills Training program. The districts agreed to implement the program with as much fidelity as possible, and the Coalition agreed to provide training, technical assistance, and evaluation, with support from Baystate Health Systems and The Opioid Task Force.

- **LifeSkills Research**

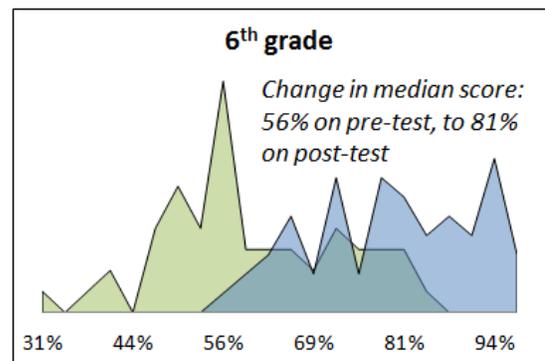
The middle school LifeSkills program has been carefully studied in more than 30 studies nationwide, and has been shown to dramatically reduce substance use rates (including prescription drug and opioid use rates), with effects lasting even when students reach their twenties. The program is also effective at reducing violence, delinquency, school dropout, risky sexual behavior, etc., AND it helps young people develop into stronger, healthier adults by building important social and emotional skills.



- **Positive Reception**

The LifeSkills program has been very well-received by students, teachers and administrators. As one local LifeSkills teacher states, “the incredible thing about LifeSkills is that it hits every note of adolescence: decision making, dealing with strong emotions, goal setting, resolving conflicts--and more. When a student said to me recently, ‘Wow, I really feel like a stronger person after doing LifeSkills in Health,’ I realized that my students are really getting the potential the LST has to offer.”

In addition, student pre-and-post-test data from Franklin County and North Quabbin students show that the students who participate in the program are learning quite a bit.



- **Next Steps**

While every local school district is working on implementing the LifeSkills program in their middle schools, some districts are running into challenges in ensuring that every student participates in the program, ensuring that all years of the program are taught, and ensuring that all lessons are included. On the other hand, a number of local school districts that have successfully implemented the middle school program have expressed interest in adding the elementary school LifeSkills curriculum and/or the high school LifeSkills curriculum in addition, in

B. Non-Academic Strategies

Non-academic strategies include a wide variety of programs that enhance student well-being and resilience, increase social-emotional skills, and foster a positive school environment.

Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT)

The DESE Guidance Document includes a section on recent legislation regarding a school-based verbal screening tool for substance use disorders. DESE clarifies that although state law requires public schools to annually screen students at two different grade levels by the 2017-2018 school year, this requirement is subject to appropriation of funding for implementation.

Franklin County and North Quabbin School Districts have been ahead of the curve in providing the verbal screening tool SBIRT as part of routine health screenings. Most local schools are implementing this evidence-based strategy in 9th grade and one additional year between 7th and 11th grade.

Several resources are available to help schools ensure successful implementation of an SBIRT program, including:

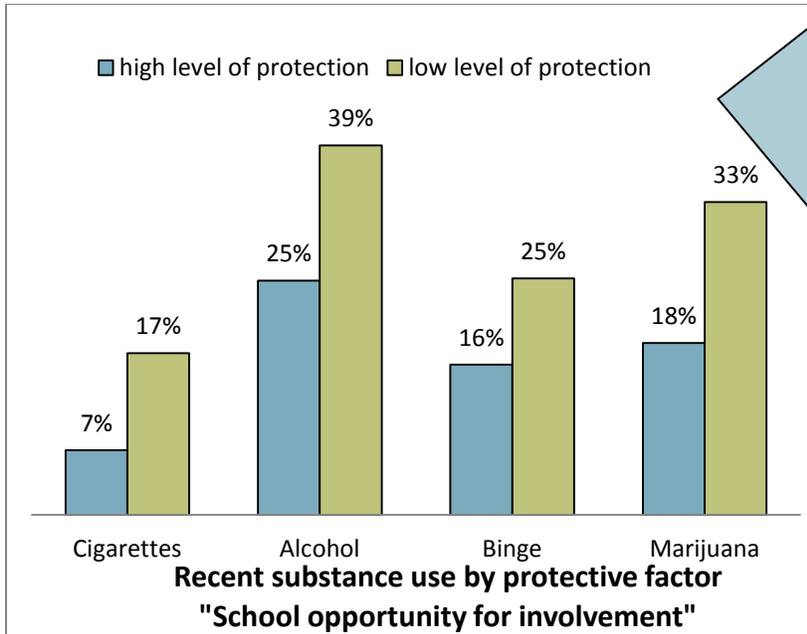
- [MASBIRT TTA/Boston Medical Center](#);
- MA Department of Public Health, Bureau of Substance Abuse Services, Coordinator of SBIRT Programs, [Carol Girard](#); and
- locally, contact [Kat Allen](#), with questions.

Advisory Programs

Most local school districts have some type of advisory program. Three of the models we heard about from local school staff are included here.

- ***Four Rivers Charter Public School uses their advisory program***, called Crew, to develop relationships with students that are deep enough to increase the likelihood that the faculty or staff members will notice when students in their Crew may need support and when to ask additional questions. More details about Crew and benefits of the program are in the [Program Descriptions](#).
- ***Athol-Royalston Regional Middle School uses a circle process*** for advisory that they find very useful. A circle process uses a talking piece that is passed around the circle, which gives each person a chance to speak without being interrupted. More details about circle process, benefits, and how to institute something similar are in the [Program Descriptions](#).

- ***Gill-Montague Regional School District has a student-led advisory program*** at Turners Falls High School. Once a student is trained in community-building circle facilitation, the student can lead part of the advisory or lead an activity or project that the advisory group does together. Benefits of student-led advisory are in the [Program Descriptions](#)



Increased opportunity for school involvement is correlated with lower substance use.

"School opportunity for involvement" is measured by the following questions on the Teen Health Survey:

- In my school, students have lots of chances to help decide things like class activities and rules.
- There are lots of chances for students in my school to get involved in sports, clubs, and other school activities outside of class.
- There are lots of chances for students in my school to talk with a teacher one-on-one.
- I have lots of chances to be part of class discussions or activities.

Student Support Teams

Schools across the region have Student Support Teams in place to address concerns about individual students or groups of students.

- To address the issue of differing perspectives, some teams start each school year with a discussion about shared values and goals, how to come to consensus, and the strength that a variety of roles and professional background can bring to the team.
- There are multiple guidance documents online about best practices for Student Support Teams, including:
 - [From DESE](#)
 - [From the San Francisco Unified School district](#)
 - [From the National Educational Psychological Services in Ireland](#)
 - [From the District of Columbia Public Schools](#)

Before and After School Options for Students

One wide-ranging but important strategy is the creation of things that encourage students to come to school early and stay late. Additional time on school grounds can be especially significant and positive for students with a less supportive home environment. Most schools in the district offer options that encourage students to spend more time at school.

The importance of extracurriculars for low-income students

[Current research](#) affirms common knowledge about the positive correlation between participation in extracurricular activities and success over time. Additionally, the gap between access to extracurriculars for low-income and middle to high-income students continues to grow, which increases the achievement gap between students of different income levels.

Sports remain one of the most popular extracurricular activities. Local schools look for ways to make sports free or affordable for students, which can have a huge benefit for low-income students.

Photo Credit: Paul Franz, courtesy of The Recorder.



Local Strategies: Ralph C. Mahar Regional School offers:

- free breakfast, lunch, and after school snacks for all students
- Free extracurricular activities, including sports
- There is a late bus available multiple days per week.

Other schools also offer many of these options, which increase accessibility for all students, promote physical health and social opportunities, enhance college applications through improved academic performance and extracurricular activities, and reduce the stress and embarrassment that can accompany the inability to afford participation in clubs and sports.

Pioneer Valley Regional School's Zero Block program is a potentially replicable opportunity for middle school students to engage in physical

activity before school. High School Varsity athletes play a variety of sports and games with the middle school students during Zero Block, which fosters positive connections between the older and younger students.

In general, the following all help to encourage students to spend more time at the school:

- food;
- transportation;
- fun activities, including those suggested by students;
- assistance with homework or projects;
- positive relationships with staff who run sports and other after-school programs; and
- a positive norm at the school about participation in after-school programs.



Photo Credit: Paul Franz, courtesy of The Recorder.

Opting-in and Skill Building

All local schools offer “opt-in” options of some kind - programs, activities, and classes that students choose to participate in, which can increase student engagement and school connectedness. As an entire learning institution that students opt-into, Franklin County Technical School is particularly aware of the power of student-selection of activities and learning opportunities and works to capitalize on those strengths.

We heard that the key components of positive opt in programs are that students build skills, feel they fit in, and see their strengths recognized. These objectives can be accomplished at other schools in multiple ways, including:

- extracurricular activities, especially those created or suggested by students;
- academic class projects with student choice;
- advisories with student input; and
- other student-led initiatives.

Several school staff members talked about the advantages of similar opportunities at their schools. One example is Greenfield High School's Green Room After School Program, run by Collaborative for Educational Services (CES). Students have the opportunity to pick from multiple activities and help to design new clubs, which range from cooking to Live Action Role Playing.

School Resource Officers

Administrators in several districts reported having a positive experience with School Resource Officers (SROs), and cite SROs as instrumental in fostering a school culture that is beneficial for substance use prevention. Other districts cited concerns about having police officers based in schools.

Regarding substance use issues, local administrators and school staff appreciated that their SROs:

- support good relationship between the school and the local police department;
- talk candidly with students about substance abuse and related issues;
- connect with the local police department on prevention efforts; and
- collaborate on school-based campaigns to reduce substance use.
 - For example, in Greenfield, the SRO created Public Service Announcements on relevant topics, including a recent PSA on responsibly hosting parties.

Because research clearly indicates that increased involvement with the criminal justice system can lead to lasting, negative outcomes for students, and that students of color and students with disabilities are more likely to be affected, ***The U.S. Department of Education*** states in its 2014 [**Resource Guide for Improving School Climate and Discipline**](#) that:

- SROs' roles should focus on protecting the physical safety of the school, preventing the criminal conduct of people other than students who may present a threat to the school, and reducing inappropriate student referrals to law enforcement; and
- schools should ensure that school-based law enforcement officers do not become involved in routine school disciplinary matters.

Recommendations for School Policy regarding SROs. The U.S. Department of Education recommends that schools:

- provide clear definitions of the officers' roles and responsibilities on campus and develop a Memorandum of Understanding between the school and police department regarding these roles;
- provide orientation training to SROs and include SROs in staff training on:
 - basic childhood and adolescent development;
 - age-appropriate responses;
 - disability issues;
 - conflict resolution and de-escalation techniques;
 - bias-free policing (including implicit or unconscious bias and cultural competence);
 - restorative justice practices; and
 - how to identify and refer for services students exposed to trauma and violence.
 - ***Two training options for SROs suggested by local school staff are Brief Motivational Interviewing and Mental Health First Aid***
- monitor the program through regular data collection and evaluation;
- utilize the SROs for planning and response to critical safety matters; and
- maintain administrators as the responsible parties for student discipline.

Recommendations for SROs. The U.S. Department of Education notes that a school resource officer may serve as a law enforcer, informal counselor, and educator and recommends that SROs:

- support positive school climate goals by developing positive relationships with students and staff;
- help to promote a safe, inclusive, and positive learning environment;
- use law enforcement remedies such as arrest, citations, ticketing, or court referrals only as a last resort;
- refer issues that are not an immediate threat to school safety to administrators, such as tardiness, loitering, use of profanity, dress code violations, and disruptive or disrespectful behaviors.

Local staff also saw opportunities for SROs to help strengthen connections between schools, community and police departments through:

- participation in local substance abuse coalitions;
- presentations at school committee meetings on their work in the schools;
- participation in school-sponsored events; and
- membership on relevant committees.

Student-led initiatives on substance use prevention

Student-led initiatives are a promising practice in prevention work

In addition to their potential to reduce substance use, they often:

- enhance school-connectedness for involved students;
- positively affect school culture;
- use innovative prevention methods that adults may not consider; and
- advance goals that the school has set with considerably less staff time.



Youth for Change members volunteered at the Winter Carnival in 2017. Photo Credit: Youth for Change

Youth for Change, a Greenfield-based student group that is part of *Greenfield Safe Schools, Safe Streets Coalition (4SC)*, is potentially replicable in the region. This youth-led prevention team is an after-school club of 7-12th graders whose mission is “to reduce the amount of substance abuse in the community through providing educational information on substance abuse, leading by example to stay drug-free, and being a familiar face in the community so that people can see our efforts and know they are supported.” Youth for Change members can be seen volunteering at a variety of community events.

The CTC’s Youth Leadership Initiative links youth groups with each other that are working on youth substance use prevention, helps to build groups’ capacity to lead effective initiatives, and holds youth summits. Schools or community members starting a new youth group on substance use prevention are welcome to contact The Youth Leadership Initiative.



Contact: Tyanna Daniel Lionheart tlionheart@communityaction.us
or the Youth Leadership Initiative [Facebook page](#).

Additional programs that may be protective as primary prevention:

- morning meditation;
- yoga;
- other physical activity programs; (See CTC's 2014 [Healthy Bodies, Active Minds](#) report for more information on local programs that promote physical activity and healthy eating.)
- mental health awareness and prevention programs;
- additional activities designed to enhance school-connectedness; and
- other after-school programs that promote positive relationship development, skill-building, and well-being.

There are many other promising practices happening across the region. The CTC's Regional School Health Task Force will continue to provide opportunities for connection and communication between school districts in order to support sharing of knowledge and ideas.

For more information about a program or strategy mentioned in this section or any part of the report, contact [Ilana Gerjuoy](#).

V. Policies, Procedures, and Protocols

The DESE guidance document recommends:

- Schools should have policies prohibiting substance use.
- Policies should address:
 - overall goals and school values
 - discipline and enforcement
 - intervention & treatment
 - guidelines for working with at-risk students
 - communication with students, staff, parents/guardians, and confidentiality
 - procedures for re-integrating students who have been absent and/or in recovery
 - screening tools, including opt-out provisions
- School staff should discuss the policies with students annually.

A. Increasing Equity in Student Discipline

Many staff and administrators across the region expressed interest in equity and fairness in student discipline. In response to this local interest, DESE guidance to schools about integrating school values into policy, and national research that demonstrates the importance of this issue, this portion of the report starts with a section on equity and student discipline.

Research on inequity in student discipline

Across the United States, students of color and students who receive special education services are suspended and expelled at much higher rates than other students, despite having equivalent rates of disruptive behavior issues.

How implicit bias affects student discipline

Research shows that implicit bias is an issue that affects all communities and schools, including those with strong intentions to promote equity. The U.S. Department of Education, the Office of Civil Rights, and multiple policy institutes point to implicit bias as a major factor in student discipline inequity.

Schools throughout the region have shown an interest in addressing issues of implicit bias and equity. Information and resources that may be useful to schools working on this issue are included in this section and throughout this report.

The Frameworks Institute outlines a **progression of the effects of implicit bias in discipline** in their 2017 [playbook on reframing school discipline](#):

- Everyone, including educators, absorb racial stereotypes and other biases from media and culture.
- This can lead to misinterpretations of some students' behavior and escalation of student-teacher disagreements.
- Some students are more likely to be suspended, expelled, referred to law enforcement, or arrested.
- This results in worse short-term and long-term outcomes for these students, such as lower achievement or involvement in the criminal justice system.

Groups of students who may be disproportionately impacted include students of color, students with disabilities, LGBTQ students, students at risk for dropping out of school, students with past behavior incidents, and those who have experienced trauma or social exclusion.

The U.S. Department of Education and policy organizations recommend that schools:

- focus on understanding and reducing implicit bias through training and policy;
- limit suspensions and expulsions to the most extreme situations; and
- consistently incorporate restorative, trauma-informed practices into student discipline.

Guiding principles for improving school climate and discipline

Given this information, schools and organizations across the country and the region are working to increase equity in school discipline. The 2014 U.S. Department of Education report, [Guiding Principles: A Resource Guide for Improving School Climate and Discipline](#), offers comprehensive, research-based guidance to address school climate and bias issues.

The report recommends that schools follow three guiding principles:

- 1) Create positive climates and focus on prevention;
- 2) Develop clear, appropriate, and consistent expectations and consequences to address disruptive student behaviors; and
- 3) Ensure fairness, equity, and continuous improvement.

The Action Steps for these guiding principles are:

- Engage in deliberate efforts to create positive school climates;
- Prioritize the use of evidence-based prevention strategies;
- Promote social and emotional learning;
- Provide regular training and supports to all school personnel;
- Collaborate with local agencies and other stakeholders; and

- Ensure that any school-based law enforcement officers' roles focus on improving school safety and reducing inappropriate referrals to law enforcement.

The report stresses that schools “commit to regular evaluation of the school’s discipline policies and practices, and monitor progress toward the school’s climate and discipline goals.” The recommended evaluation process includes collection and sharing of student discipline data and *asking for feedback from students, staff, families and a diverse group of community stakeholders*. The schedule for sharing data can be annual or when the policies are up for review, with a recommendation of at least once every 3 years.

Restorative justice: a more successful discipline model

The Frameworks Institute’s 2017 [playbook on reframing school discipline](#) defines a restorative justice model in student discipline as “practices that approach behavior issues as a learning opportunity.”

The steps and benefits involved in many restorative justice discipline models are:

- After a challenging situation, involved students have the opportunity to discuss the situation with teachers, counselors, or other students.
- Talking through situations and considering their roles leads to the development of skills to manage their emotions and behavior.
- Learning how to make amends for mistakes helps students to learn to take responsibility for their actions.
- Talking about the harm caused by their actions increases empathy and the ability to think before acting.
- As students use acquired social and emotional skills, they mature and learn how to prevent and solve problems.

Local districts are increasingly and enthusiastically adopting restorative justice approaches for student discipline. These evidence-based models are more likely to be successful in reducing bias, increasing student success for all students, increasing school-connectedness, improving school climate and increasing safety. There is excellent guidance available for schools whose administrators want to shift to an evidence-based, restorative justice model. Here are a few resources:

- [George Lucas Educational Foundation Blog list of restorative justice resources](#)
- [Teacher blog with list of additional resources for learning about restorative practices](#)
- [A guide for schools on implementing restorative justice from Illinois](#)
- [Restorative Justice Model Success Story in a California High School](#)

Restorative practices

Restorative Justice and Restorative Practices: What is the difference?

[The International Institute for Restorative Practices](#) (IIRP) distinguishes between the terms restorative practices and restorative justice in the following ways:

- ***Restorative practices*** is an umbrella term that includes restorative justice. Restorative practices are **proactive** and precede violations, including building relationships and a sense of community to prevent conflict and violations.
- ***Restorative justice***, a discipline model familiar to most districts, is **responsive**, consisting of formal or informal responses to violations and incidents after they occur.

Restorative practices focus on social capital, the positive connections between individuals, in order to create a healthy environment. Once well established, it is easier to respond effectively to violations and behavior issues and create a positive school culture.

Restorative practices are meant to foster:

- trust;
- mutual understanding;
- shared values;
- behaviors that connect people;
- cooperation;
- school connectedness; and
- a positive school culture.

Restorative practices can be integrated into schools in many ways, including:

- programs that enhance school connectedness and social-emotional skills;
- when teachers or staff members let students know how behavior affects other people or ask questions that help students to reflect on the effects of their behavior before a major incident;
- a circle process in advisory; or
- formal restorative justice processes set up to repair the harm caused by a particular situation.

Restorative practices and restorative justice in discipline: local examples

Most districts are working on integrating trauma-informed practices when responding to substance use policy violations and restorative practices when planning programs to prevent substance use and promote well-being.

Gill-Montague Regional School District uses several restorative practices that are supported by the school district and the Gill-Montague Community School Partnership (GMCSP). Staff members reported that when students' needs are met, they are also less likely to violate policies or have behavioral issues.

Restorative justice in a school setting can take quite a few forms. The options that we heard about usually include a focus on taking responsibility for behavior while looking at root causes and finding a way to repair the harm.

Gill-Montague also has a ***peer mediation program*** at Great Falls Middle School. More information and benefits of the program are in the [Program Descriptions](#).



Contact: Scott Smith, scott.smith@gmrds.org

At ***Frontier Regional School***, students may work on a research or service project related to the situation to learn more about the effects of their actions and help repair harm caused to others. Projects of this type can be creatively designed to also support a school's efforts in fostering a positive environment.

Restorative Justice Classrooms

Mohawk Trail Regional School has a restorative justice classroom which offers a remedial, in-school option for part of a suspension. See [Program Descriptions](#) for more information about how the restorative justice classroom functions.

Greenfield High School also has a restorative justice classroom, which is called the TLC Room and has some practices in common with Mohawk's classroom. See [Program Descriptions](#) for more information about how the TLC classroom functions.

The Professional Development section also highlights the growing focus on training staff on restorative practices.

B. Policy Language Updates

New legislation and other statewide requirements have led to increasing standardization of school policies across the state. The procedures, practices, and programs that support the policies can be tailored to reflect the culture and needs of each specific school.

Districts across the region are updating their policies to reflect the Chapter 222 requirements and the recent guidance from DESE. Some districts have thoroughly overhauled their policies and evaluate school culture and values in the process. Some schools have comprehensive policies that include detailed procedures.

Sources for additional policy language:

- [The Massachusetts Association of School Committees](#) (MASC) has updated their policies regarding substance use to adhere to new guidelines. These policies are brief, meet the minimum requirements, and can be adopted as is or altered by schools for use, as desired.
- [The Massachusetts Association of Superintendents](#) (MASS) also has information online in their [Legal and Policy](#) and [Legislative Update](#) sections about how to create new policy that is compliant with current legislation.
- **School websites:** There are many examples of recently updated school policies from across the commonwealth on district and school websites.



Contact: [Ilana Gerjuoy](#) at the Partnership for Youth has done research on school policies in Massachusetts and may have information on useful language for a particular need.

Clearly Defined Goals

A clear goals statement can remind readers that the school is working to create a positive environment and how the policy relates to the goals. The goals do not have to be lengthy or complex. Committees reviewing and revising policies can ask “Does this policy or procedure support the stated goals? How could it be revised to better support the goals and values of our school?”

Many schools include general statements about goals and values in a separate section, often at the beginning of the handbook. It can be beneficial

to **connect the goals and values of the school with substance use policies** specifically. The recently revised [student handbook from Melrose Public Schools](#) incorporates goals into each section. The initial paragraph on substance use is below:

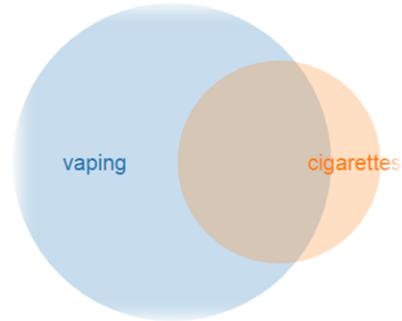
Responsibility Regarding Alcohol and Illicit Drugs: *A goal of the Melrose Public Schools is to promote and maintain a safe and drug-free learning environment for all students and staff. The use of alcohol and/or illicit drugs interferes with the learning, growth and well-being of students, families and the entire school community. Alcohol and illicit drugs do not have a place in an educational environment and will not be tolerated on school property or at any school-sponsored event.*

Descriptions of Substances in Policies: Ban use by the substance, not just by the delivery method.

Tobacco/Nicotine

2016 Franklin County and North Quabbin student health survey data reflects a significant increase in the use of e-cigarettes and vaporizers: 7% of students reported recent cigarette smoking, and 18% reported recent vaping. There may be other new forms of delivery of substances in the next few years.

A best practice is for schools to address this issue by including the most historically common delivery methods (e.g. cigarettes), up to date delivery methods (e.g. e-cigarettes and vaporizers) and also including language such as “any other device or product that delivers nicotine to a user.” This language also covers new nicotine delivery methods, chewing tobacco, and cigarettes. If a school wants to allow prescribed nicotine patches or gum for students who are attempting to quit using nicotine or tobacco products, this can be specified in the school policy.



More youth vape than smoke cigarettes, but a significant number of youth do both.

Marijuana/THC

It is beneficial to include wax, oil and edible products that have THC and use language that encompasses any product with THC or device that delivers THC. Because synthetic THC alternatives are being created, schools can also include language that addresses this issue, such as “or any product or device that delivers THC or a synthetic chemical to the user.”

All Substances

If listing substances that are not allowed, it is helpful to add a general statement such as “...or any controlled substance, including medications used not according to prescription or directions.” Many policies do not attempt to list specific substances and instead use general terms, which is an easier way to cover all substances.

Naloxone/Narcan policies

Narcan policies or procedures are increasingly common at schools across the region. Clear agreement on administering Narcan is important. Some schools have created formal policies that are approved by the School Committee, while others have implemented internal procedures that do not require School Committee approval.

C. Consequences for Violations of Student Substance Use Policies

Districts reported a relatively low number of incidents of possession of alcohol or other drugs on school property during each academic year. However, staff and administrators felt that these situations have the potential to substantially impact the students involved and the school community as a whole. Districts largely agreed that there may be more incidents that are not being identified. Well-thought-out and implemented policies help foster a school culture that discourages substance use and promotes health and well-being. Because of these factors, there was agreement that crafting effective substance use policy is worth the effort, even with small numbers of infractions identified each year.

Moving Away from Out-of-school Suspensions

Due to Chapter 222 requirements, districts are moving away from policy on student substance use that includes a 10-day out-of-school suspension as a standard consequence for possession of alcohol or other drugs on school property. Most of the districts now use in-school suspensions in combination with restorative justice or therapeutic practices, unless there is a compelling reason specific to the situation to use an out of school suspension. The disciplinary and therapeutic plan is tailored to student and community needs, in response to the individual student and current circumstances. Some local schools incorporate a plan of re-entry for each student after any type of separation from the classroom environment.

The trend towards restorative and therapeutic practices instead of a 10-day out of school suspension is supported by research, Chapter 222, and the majority of school administrators and staff with whom we spoke.

The 2014 U.S. Department of Education report [*Guiding Principles: A Resource Guide for Improving School Climate and Discipline*](#) notes that “Suspending students also often fails to help them develop the skills and strategies they need to improve their behavior and avoid future problems.”

Research reveals problems associated with punitive discipline

When student discipline revolves around suspension or expulsion, additional problems arise:

- Students at home without adult supervision are more likely to engage in risky or unhealthy behaviors;
- Separation from the school community can send a negative message and decrease a feeling of school connectedness;
- Students miss classes, and when they return to school, they are often behind;
- Students miss other activities and do not have the benefit of a positive school environment; and
- When students have a hard time catching up in class or extracurriculars, their frustration often increases, and they act out more frequently, leading to a higher likelihood of additional suspensions.
- Suspended students are less likely to graduate on time and more likely to repeat a grade, drop out of school, and become involved in the criminal justice system.
- Sources: Massachusetts Technical Assistance Partnership for Prevention ([MassTAPP](#)), Massachusetts Dept of Education, [Frameworks Institute](#)

Types of violations

Possession of a controlled substance is one of the offenses that may be subject to suspension or expulsion, according to Massachusetts General Law. c. 71, §37H, so schools still have leeway in how they respond to a student who is found to have controlled substances on school property.

If a student is caught with alcohol or other drugs on school property, the response in most districts includes:

- mandatory sessions with a school-based or community counselor; and
- in-school suspension time in a restorative justice/therapeutic classroom setting.

Being under the influence at school is not included in the list of more serious violations. Schools reported that they deal with this type of violation differently. If a student is believed to be under the influence but it’s not clear what is going on, the student may be sent to the school nurse or sent home with a parent or guardian for

the day with follow-up from guidance. If the school determines that the student was under the influence, an administrator gets involved to start a student discipline process. Because students who come to school while under the influence of alcohol or other drugs are often self-medicating, school staff reported that a therapeutic approach, taking the student's needs into consideration and offering related support, is part of any response.

Districts across the region agree that a different approach is needed when addressing ***first-time violations as opposed to repeat violations*** of substance use policies. There is also consensus on the importance of ***more serious consequences for students who possess substances for distribution*** to other students. Almost all of the districts also stressed the importance of balancing individual and community needs.

Considerations for serious violations: Two administrators shared that in certain situations, an out of school suspension provides necessary time for them to come up with a response plan and also sends a strong message to the school community that more serious violations, especially selling drugs, will not be tolerated. Within several districts, a student is sent home immediately if caught with substances or is under the influence at school and then brought back for a hearing 2 days later, as outlined in Chapter 222, to determine the rest of the consequences associated with the incident. The 2-day time period allows schools to investigate the situation further and identify issues and potential supports specific to the individual student.

Although there are certain situations that require time to plan or are particularly egregious, current research indicates that restorative practices are more successful in meeting the goals of the schools in most situations. These practices can be incorporated effectively into responses to serious violations.

Consistency and Individuality

One theme that emerged from interviews is the need to balance consistent application of policy with an individualized approach.

Consistency tends to be associated with:

- a community perception of fairness; and
- a clear message to students that there will be a consequence if they violate a substance use policy, a useful deterrent.

Individualized plans tailored to meet the needs of specific student and family situations can be more effective in:

- addressing the underlying issues associated with substance use; and
- preventing future violations.

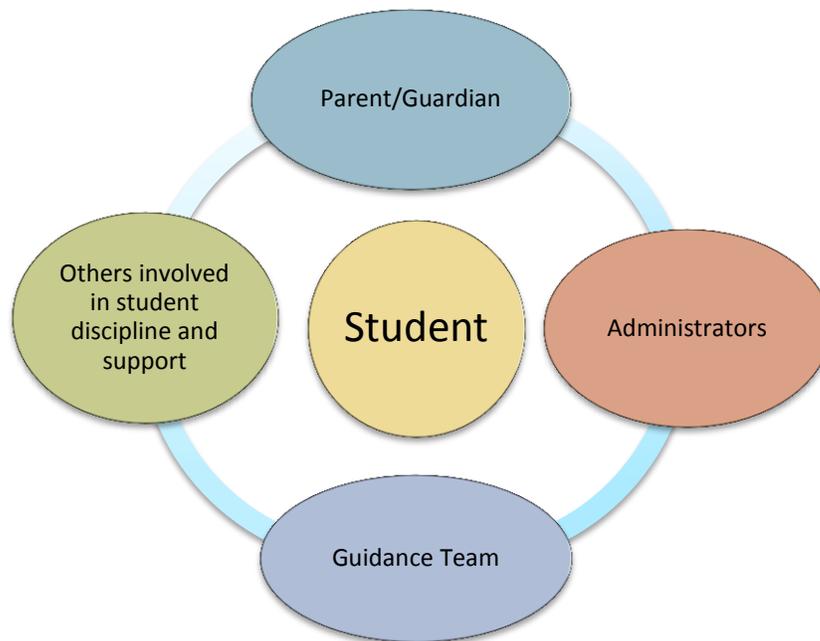
The combination of research and local interviews with school administrators and staff indicates that the best practice is to apply restorative practices which are both consistent and individualized.

Home Environments – Risk Factor or Protective Factor

Staff members across the region mentioned the importance of learning about a student’s home environment. If parents or guardians are using substances at home or if the home environment is a major stressor for the student, the approach to a violation will be less effective if it relies on parent support to prevent future substance use. In those cases, in-school suspension, in combination with therapeutic approaches, are especially likely to be more effective than out of school suspensions and purely punitive responses. An educational component about alcohol and other drugs may be important for students with home environments that actively or passively condone substance use. Similarly, a student who is feeling socially isolated may benefit from a response that enhances inclusion in the school community.

D. Increasing Community Perception of Fairness

Districts across the region were interested in increasing community perception of fairness while responding to a substance use policy violation. When students, parents, and community members perceive a school’s discipline process as fair, it not only eases pressure on administrators, but also leads to better outcomes in reducing future use. We heard several ideas from staff and administrators about best practices.



Strategies that increase perception of fairness may also reduce the likelihood of repeat violations and strengthen relationships with students and families. Local schools are already using many of the best practices listed below.

Best practices for increasing perception of fairness:

- Meet with the student and the parent(s) or guardian to fully explain the reasons behind each particular consequence;
- Provide an opportunity for the student and family to voice their concerns and ask questions about the process;
- Express care and concern for the student;
- Explain how violations of this kind affect the school community;
- Clarify that the severity of the consequence *is in line with other situations and the way that districts across the region approach these situations* – or if not, why this situation is different;
- If asked by others, explain why it is not possible to share information about consequences for other students and that what they have heard might be based on partial information.
 - E.g. the consequence for one student might be more serious because it was the fourth incident, but administrators are not allowed to share that type of information.
- Educate the student and family about substances and the adolescent brain;
- Whenever possible, incorporate aspects into the outcome that support the student’s personal development, emotional and physical health, and/or academic goals.
 - Examples include plans to restore relationships with anyone harmed, treatment and counseling plans, and academic support plans.

E. Athletics and Other Extracurricular Activities

All schools have a separate policy for athletes (usually based on a template from the Massachusetts Interscholastic Athletic Association, [MIAA](#)), that is separate from the policy for the overall student community. Administrators and other staff generally agree that the MIAA policy effectively reduces substance use by student athletes. Staff members at more than one district reported hearing from students that they choose not to use alcohol or another drug because they are on a school sports team and want to remain in good standing per MIAA policy.

The MIAA policy includes aspects that are not part of other school policies, including that if the school discovers that an athlete has been using alcohol or other substances *outside* of school, even at non-school-related activities, the athlete is subject to consequences per the MIAA.



Photo Credit:
Paul Franz, courtesy of The Recorder

The MIAA mandates consistent penalties for each type of violation to ensure that all schools implement the policy the same way. This is viewed as particularly important for star athletes or any athletes who are part of teams important to school identity and pride. MIAA is very strict and prescriptive: if there is a violation of the policy, there are minimum penalties. For student athletes, that means being banned from a certain number of events. The MIAA states that “No exception is permitted for a student who becomes a participant in a treatment program.”

Several schools also use portions of the MIAA policy for other extra-curricular activities.

Because the schools *voluntarily* extend MIAA policy to other activities, there is leeway in enforcement. This flexibility in how to enforce the policy for non-athletes may be beneficial, because involvement in extracurriculars is part of school-connectedness, which is known to be a protective factor.

A possible best practice for extending the MIAA policy is to include expectations about using substances outside of school property or events while weighing the pros and cons of banning a student from an activity or club for a certain amount of time.

- For example, disallowing a student from performing in a school play after being caught drinking at a party outside of school may not be the most effective approach for that student. However, those who support the use of MIAA-type rules for extra-curricular activities believe that the *possibility* of a removal from an activity is an incentive not to use substances, like the MIAA rules. Even if the policy rarely results in a removal from an activity, the understanding that students are expected to be substance-free in all parts of their lives may be beneficial.

F. Policy Revision Schedules

We heard from districts that policy and procedure revisions are undertaken at a variety of times. Some years, a school may embark on a complete review of all major policies or a particular policy. Choice of a particular policy is usually in response to new requirements, like Chapter 222, or a new trend, like vaping and e-cigarette use. For specific issues within a policy, including a new substance use trend or a new response, revision of the wording in one section may be all that is needed and can take far less time.

Best practices for policy revision scheduling include:

- ***Regular cycles for review of policies***, with people identified ahead of time who have agreed to work on the review and revision process.
 - The review of policies can rotate. For example, a school might look at a section of the handbook each summer so that the amount reviewed is manageable and each part is attended to at least once every 4 years.
- ***A schedule for revision of major policies*** that takes into account the availability of students, parents, and other stakeholders who will be invited to participate, with a mechanism for inviting new people to be part of the process.
- ***The ability to respond to new trends or requirements*** that come up in between the review cycle, with people identified who can work on these if a more rapid turn-around time is needed.

VI. Collaboration with Families

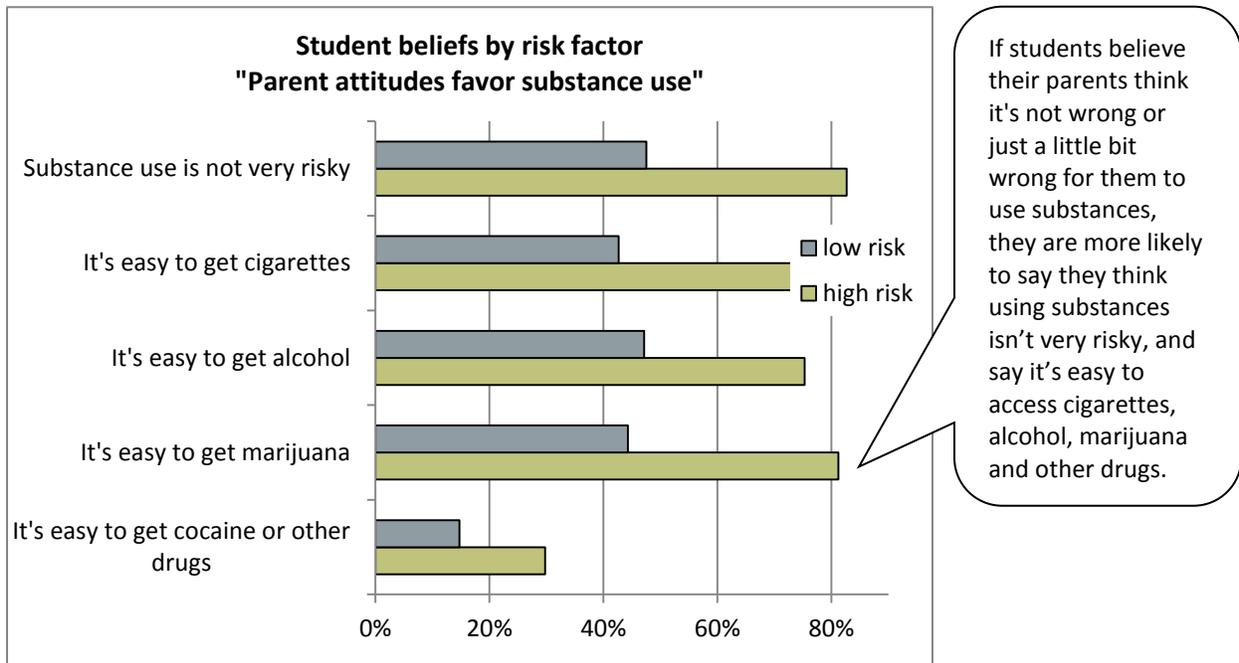
The DESE guidance document recommends:

- School-community-home collaborations are important for comprehensive prevention of substance use and abuse.
- Understandable and culturally appropriate information about the district's substance use policies should be well-publicized through multiple channels.
- Evidence-based prevention curricula contain an education component specifically designed for parents/guardians, and schools should involve parents/guardians in this way.

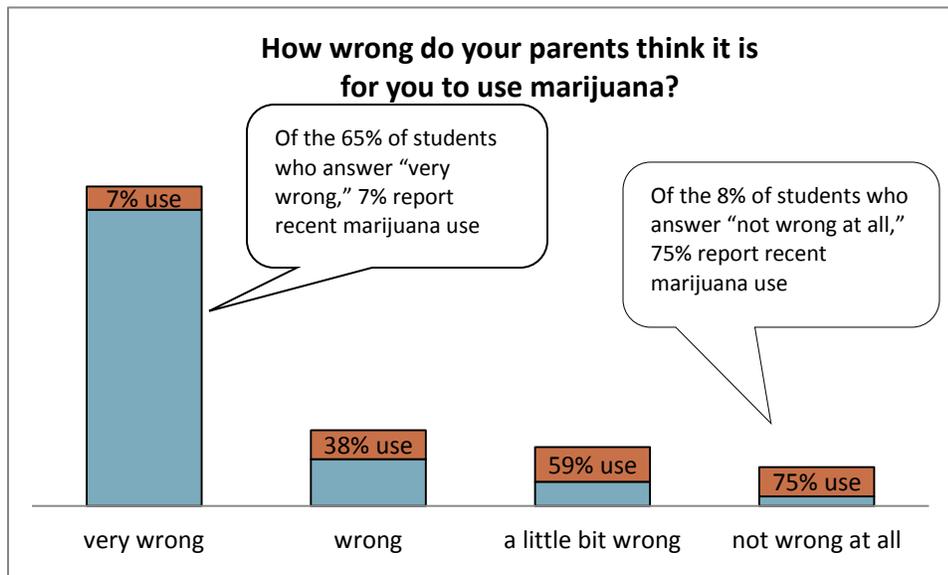
A. Family Attitudes about Substance Use

A common concern we heard from school staff members, including administrators, teachers, and other staff members who work with students, is that *although most families are very supportive of substance use prevention, some households and parents normalize substance use.*

School staff members were especially concerned about the increase in normalization of marijuana use. They reported that in some cases parents use marijuana themselves, with no clear negative consequences. In other cases parent attitudes minimize the risk of youth marijuana use by saying “At least it’s not heroin” or making other similar comments.



The good news is that across the region, most students still think that their parents care about their use of substances.



Most students (80%) say their parents think it is wrong or very wrong for them to use marijuana. Students' use of marijuana is closely associated with their perspective on their parents' belief.

Given the importance of families and parents in youth substance use prevention, schools are much more successful if they engage and collaborate with families. A number of strategies are being implemented around the region to promote family engagement.

Safe Homes Parent Network

Pioneer Valley Regional School invites parents and guardians to participate in the Safe Homes program. It is replicable within the region, and other local schools have also used this program. At the beginning of the school year, parents can opt into the program by committing to:

- supervising parties;
- keeping parties and gatherings at their homes free of alcohol and other substances; and
- welcoming contact from other parents about activities at their homes.

The contact information for participating parents is listed in a directory available to those who sign up. The program helps with community and family connection to the issue, extends prevention and structure beyond the school day, and can provide the school with further connections to parents who are invested in substance use prevention.

CTC's Parent Education Social Marketing Campaign

For nearly a decade, the Partnership for Youth has worked with the Communities That Care Coalition's Parent Education Workgroup to create educational materials

for parents, including billboards, postcards, and most recently, large format bookmarks. The current bookmarks address three themes, based on risk factors emerging from the student health survey:

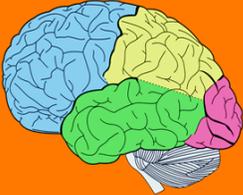
- Marijuana and the developing brain
- How to talk with teens about alcohol and other drug use
- Making time for family time

The bookmarks are available as hard copies for any school district in the region. Schools have been sending bookmarks home with mailings and giving them out at events. CTC has provided schools that do not send physical mailings home with digital versions that can be emailed or shared on social media.



Contact: [Ilana Gerjuoy](#) for hard copies or digital versions of the bookmarks.

Under Construction:



The brain is developing quickly during the teen years, changing in ways that will last a lifetime.

That means alcohol, marijuana and other drugs are more harmful to young people than they are to adults.

Talk with your kids about the risks.

**Parents still matter.
Teens still care.**

Teens are shaping their brains – and who they will become as adults – through their actions and experiences.

Did you know:

- The younger people are when they begin drinking or using other drugs, the more at risk they are for addiction.
- Marijuana can make it harder for young people to pay attention, remember, learn new things, and do well in school.

Learn more and talk with your kids about the risks.

Some helpful FREE resources for parents (Google these):



Brought to you by the
Communities that Care
COALITION
www.CommunitiesThatCareCoalition.org
Special thanks to Baystate  Health for support

Brought to you by the
Communities that Care
COALITION
www.CommunitiesThatCareCoalition.org
Special thanks to Baystate  Health for support

The front and back of CTC's bookmark about marijuana and the developing brain.

Info-sessions for Parents on MIAA Policy

Info-sessions held for parents of student athletes about MIAA policy are an opportunity to provide additional information related to substance use prevention. The Northwest District Attorney's Office has partnered with local school districts in recent years on these info-sessions. Some recommendations that we heard for successful, effective events are:

- Invite local substance abuse coalitions to collaborate on planning the event;
- Ask substance abuse coalitions, student groups that address substance use, and local agencies if they can provide resource materials for the event; and
- Consider food, childcare, and student performers to increase the number of parents who attend.



Contact: Loisel, Laurie (DAA) laurie.loisel@state.ma.us

Parent Involvement Initiative of Greenfield's Safe Schools, Safe Streets Coalition (4SC)

4SC's Parent Engagement Coordinator is starting a Parent Workgroup that will generate ideas for upcoming parent-related programming, coordinate events, and recommend content for the coalition's parent digital newsletter. This group could potentially collaborate with a parent committee affiliated with another district if there is interest and capacity among involved parents.

Additionally, interested parents and professionals from other local districts are welcome to join 4SC's Parent Involvement newsletter list.



Contact: Email Suzie Hale at suzhal1@gpsk12.org with a request to receive the newsletter.

CTC's Parent Education Workgroup

The Parent Education Workgroup engages in several activities, including:

- creating educational materials aimed at parents and guardians. The group currently creates bookmarks or postcards that schools can share with parents and guardians and an annual parent guide in the Greenfield Recorder and Athol Daily News, which provides related information and resources for parents and guardians.
- providing minigrants to provide evidence-based parent education to parents and caregivers of youth or to strengthen family connection.

B. Dissemination of Policies

Some school staff said that although they have systems in place to ensure that students and parents are aware of policies, these systems are not always effective. Staff members suspect that students and parents sign off that they have read the student handbook without actually doing so.

If there is a violation, it is helpful to have signature on file to demonstrate that the student and family had received the policy and should have been aware of it. However, this does not accomplish prevention goals. Some school staff felt that students and families do read the policies, but there are no clear ways to check.

Additional ways to ensure understanding of school policies include:

- Info-sessions with parents, similar to those done with athletes and families for MIAA policies;
- All-school assemblies to go over important aspects of policies and procedures that apply to students;
- Class discussion of interesting or important points, e.g. a conversation about why there is a substance use policy or a bullying prevention policy and why they are important; and
- A brief, open book quiz that can be done in class or at home with questions about aspects of policy and procedure about which the administration would like students to be particularly familiar. The purpose is for students to actively look through the student handbook to find the answers. The quiz can be created to be done online (for example, using Survey Monkey or a similar service), offline on a computer, or on paper.

Accessibility

All school substance use policies must be posted and easily accessible on the district website, which is true for most of the districts in the region. All districts have a student handbook that contains student-related policies and shares those with students, staff, and parents/guardians. We did not hear of the handbook being translated into Spanish or any other language.

C. Engaging Students and Families in Policy Revision and Creation

The 2016 DESE guidance document and a 2015 report from Massachusetts Technical Assistance Partnership for Prevention (MassTAPP) both recommend engaging students and families in policy creation and revision.

Policies and procedures created with participation from students, families and the community are more likely to have widespread buy in and are more likely to be seen as fair and transparent.

Increased involvement by students and parents help to increase knowledge about the policy and the school's prioritization of substance use prevention and intervention.

The MassTAPP report strongly recommends that "all school personnel, families, coalitions/prevention specialists, and community members" have a chance to be involved in the process, stating that "policies and programs that include the larger school and community are most effective." Additionally, the report notes that it is essential for interventions and policies to be culturally sensitive and culturally appropriate.

Local Examples of Engaging Students and Families in Policy Creation

Mohawk Trail Regional High School's strategy for policy creation may be a useful model for substance use policy revision. The school found multiple ways to engage students and parents when updating their dress code policy:

- Students who volunteered to be part of the process participated in student focus groups.
- To engage additional students who did not formally volunteer, students had the option to provide input during lunchtime conversations in the cafeteria.
- Community conversations outside of school hours were held for parents and students.

Through this multi-pronged approach, many students were involved in the policy creation process.

In the ***Ralph C. Mahar Regional school district***, principals meet with the student council to discuss practices and procedures related to policies. Especially at schools that serve a large geographic area, it can be difficult to engage students or parents in policy-related meetings after hours. Involving an existing group like the student council or encouraging active participation by parents in the school committee can help to overcome this barrier. Additional strategies may be created to involve less engaged students and parents.

Conclusion

In a region with a rich history of collaboration and ingenuity, we learned how local school administrators, educators, staff, and partnering community members are rising to the challenge presented by substance use prevention needs and requirements. Fortunately, statewide mandates can be fulfilled in creative ways that are both informed by research and meet local needs. We heard stories from districts across the region about the opportunity presented by the DESE requirements to do things they already wanted to do. Schools are creating exciting, innovative programs that are inspiring the whole school community, foster a positive school climate, and express individual school values.

This report highlights some of the many local school policies and programs that inspired us. We heard about others that would be wonderful additions for further conversations about substance use prevention, school climate, and youth health. We encourage continued communication with us and between districts about replicable ideas that may be tailored to benefit local communities.

Program Descriptions Appendix

1. **The Responsive Classroom**
2. **The StaR Program**
3. **The PreVenture Programme**
4. **The CHART Program, Athol-Royalston Regional School District**
5. **The Bridge for Resilient Youth in Transition (BRYT)**
6. **Tabling at school events**
7. **Franklin County Regional Technical School's Dress Down Day Fund**
8. **The Training Active Bystanders (TAB) Curriculum**
9. **Social-Emotional Learning Examples and Models**
10. **Crew at Four Rivers Charter Public School**
11. **Circle Process**
12. **Student-led advisory in Gill-Montague**
13. **Peer mediation program at Great Falls Middle School**
14. **Restorative Justice Classroom Benefits and Examples**

From **Professional Development**

1. The Responsive Classroom curriculum is a locally created, evidence-based model to teaching that focuses on four key domains: engaging academics, positive community, effective management, and developmental awareness.

- **Benefits:** The program has been shown to boost teacher effectiveness, student achievement, and school climate. The program includes workshops for teachers, administrators and staff, national conferences, informational publications and online resources. Go to [The Responsive Classroom](#) website for more information.

2. The StaR Program

Clinical and Support Options (CSO) recently received a five-year Trauma Center grant from the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). The grant program is called Stress, Trauma and Resilience (STaR) and covers the four counties in Western Massachusetts and the North Quabbin area.

- **Benefits:** The program is new and has not yet been evaluated, but the grant includes training for participating schools and community organizations about “trauma’s impact on children and how to create trauma-informed environments, deliver trauma-informed services and build resilience.”
- **Contact:** Additional information about training and other services related to the STaR program can be accessed by contacting Kristal Cleaver, STaR Grant Coordinator, at kcleaver@csoinc.org.

From **Access to Resources and Services**

3. The PreVenture Programme screens all students in a selected grade or grades (with a 5-minute web-based anonymous self-screening) for four different personality

types: anxiety sensitivity, hopelessness, impulsivity, and sensation-seeking. These traits are risk factors for early onset substance use as well as emotional or behavioral disorders. Students who score high in one of the four areas are invited to participate in two targeted, 90-minute workshops building skills that are particular to their traits.

- **Benefits:** The program has had very impressive outcomes, with reductions in substance use both among the higher-risk kids who screen in to the workshops and among the lower-risk kids who don't through impact on the community, as well as improvements in mental health outcomes for students in the workshops. The program has been used and tested in the UK, Australia, Canada, and the Netherlands with a new program starting in Richmond Virginia, so a local program would help to bring PreVenture to the United States. Learn more on the [PreVenture website](#).

4. The CHART program at The Athol-Royalston Regional School District

connects students and families with local resources. This grant-funded collaboration between Athol Memorial/Heywood Hospital, the Athol Public Schools, and CSO provides "access to mental health treatment, school based assessment, consultation and therapy for students and their families, community outreach, and ED diversion for behavioral health consumers." The school district also works closely with the North Quabbin Community Coalition, an area leader on substance use issues.

- **Benefits:** ED diversion is a preventative approach used to address issues before they escalate, providing support needed so that people are less likely to need to use the emergency department due to a mental health crisis.

5. The Bridge for Resilient Youth in Transition (BRYT) is a school-based program that supports students who return to school after absences due to serious mental or physical health issues.

- **Benefits:** BRYT offers both mental health and academic supports, bringing a perspective that both are crucial for successful reentry. BRYT's website describes its aim: "helping vulnerable students develop resilience, regain health, maintain social connection, and continue and complete their high school education." <http://www.brooklinecenter.org/bryt>. Amherst-Pelham Regional High School in Hampshire County is successfully utilizing the BRYT program through their guidance office.

6. Tabling at school events provides opportunities for students and families who might not proactively seek out support to learn about resources and services. School staff, community agencies, and even relevant student groups provide resources at events. For example, in the spring of 2017, Pioneer Valley Regional School students performed the musical *Rent*, which addresses several weighty topics, including heroin use, HIV, and the death of friends. Counseling staff had a resource table at the school during performances to provide support and information.

- **Benefits:** Tabling at school events can reach families and community members, as well as students and can strengthen relationships with community agencies and across programs within a school. Community agencies often welcome the opportunity to table at a school event or send brochures for an existing resource table.

7. Franklin County Regional Technical School's Dress Down Day Fund

provides access to small amounts of money needed by students to purchase food, clothing, or other items required for school-related activities. Every Friday, teachers and other staff members have the option of dressing casually if they donate \$2 to the Dress Down Day Fund. If a teacher knows that a particular student cannot come up with enough cash to buy a necessary item, e.g. lunch for a class field trip or a pair of work boots needed for a building site, the teacher can request money from the fund for the student.

- **Benefits:** This direct support may prevent a student from being hungry on a trip and reduces embarrassment in a variety of situations. It also has the potential to enhance school connectedness and increase the likelihood that a low-income student will continue to participate in activities that might otherwise feel impossible.

From Academic and Non-Academic Strategies

8. The Training Active Bystanders (TAB) curriculum trains students to be positive, active bystanders when they witness negative interactions among other students. Student-led trainings are an important aspect of the TAB curriculum.

- **Benefits:** Once high school students are trained as trainers, they co-lead TAB workshops in local middle schools, which increases engagement of the middle school students and provides positive social norming. Students learn about ways to intervene and how to respond to a variety of potential situations. The high school trainers are paired with community TAB trainers to teach the advanced TAB curriculum, which also provides an opportunity for positive relationships between student and adult trainers. The TAB program was locally created and is designed to meet the unique needs of local communities.
- **Contact:** Local training is available through Quabbin Mediation and more information is online at <http://www.trainingactivebystanders.org/>.

9. Social-Emotional Learning Examples and Models

Frontier Regional School District supplements its other programs with lessons that integrate communication skills, building empathy, identifying feelings and other skills throughout the elementary years. Administrators at Frontier explained that supporting opportunities to learn these skills is part of an overall philosophy throughout the district and can be integrated into academic subject lessons. For example, 6th graders practice how to how to respectfully disagree with a classmate when discussing a book or a scientific theory. Similar dialogues can be part of many academic classes at any grade level.

- **Benefits:** Increased empathy and communication skills that students apply in a practical way to a variety of topics.

Social-Emotional Learning Models:

There are quite a few other curricula available for young children that address social-emotional learning in the National Registry of Evidence-Based Programs ([NREPP](#)). These

two programs are evidence-based and have been positively received in local communities. Both of these models also offer programs for elementary age children.

- [The Second Step Middle School program](#) is an evidence-based program that supports schools in teaching and modeling positive communication, coping, and decision-making skills.
 - **Benefits:** The skills help students to deal with common challenges like peer pressure, substance abuse, and bullying. Research shows reduced aggression, and improved school climate that supports academic success, inclusion, and higher student retention.
- Also in listed in the *Professional Development* section above, the [Responsive Classroom](#) curriculum is a locally created, evidence-based model to teaching that focuses on four key domains: engaging academics, positive community, effective management, and developmental awareness.
 - **Benefits:** The program has been shown to boost teacher effectiveness, student achievement, and school climate. The program includes workshops for teachers, administrators and staff, national conferences, informational publications and online resources.

10. Crew at Four Rivers Charter Public School meets at the beginning and end of every school day. Morning Crew involves a greeting, check in, and a short activity. Most Crews have a regular order of activities throughout the week.

- **Sample weekly Crew schedule:**
 - **Monday:** Weekend update
 - **Tuesday:** Horoscopes (requested by the current group of students in that Crew)
 - **Wednesday:** Whining Wednesday, during which everyone has a chance to whine about one thing and then shares one thing that is currently going well
 - **Thursday:** Games, including Mad Libs or something similar
 - **Friday:** Weekend Plans
- **Additional Crew meetings:** In addition to the morning and day-end meetings, Crew also meets for at least 60 minutes throughout the week. The frequency of those meetings depends on the grade level of the students. Middle school students have three 30 minute Crew periods during the week. 11th and 12th graders have one 60 minute period. The school sometimes uses these meetings to prepare for student led conferences or “Passage Presentations” at the end of the year. Crews also sometimes engage in team building activities, inter-Crew competitions, or a discussion a serious topic.
- **Benefits:** The combination of consistency, flexibility, team building, fun activities, and the discussion of weekend plans allows students to relax and gives the faculty or staff member an opportunity to hear about student activities outside of school. Students talk with CREW faculty and staff members about personal issues and are aware that there is an adult who is paying attention and cares about student well-being. These relationships have led to students reporting concerns about other students and sharing personal struggles, which are very useful for substance use prevention and intervention. This model has proven to be very effective at Four

Rivers, though it would likely require some adaptations to work well in a larger school community.

11. Circle Process

There are a variety of curricula available on circle process for middle school and high school advisory and restorative justice processes.

- **Benefits:** Morning advisory circles are usually community-building circles, which build trust and connection between students and staff members in the group. In some schools and communities, a circle process is also used to respond to challenging behavior with a restorative justice framework. The Guide [Teaching Restorative Practices with Classroom Circles](#) is available online.

12. Student-led advisory in Gill-Montague

There is an existing advisory program where small groups of students meet for 30 minutes each week with one faculty member. The advisory programs has a curriculum with 5 themes: academic check-in, team-building, fun, upstanders (bullying prevention) and your future.

- **Benefits:** This peer-led system empowers students by providing the opportunity for student facilitators to learn new leadership skills, for student participants to witness peers in a leadership role, and for students to have formal input on what they learn and discuss.

13. Peer mediation program at Great Falls Middle School

The voluntary mediation program gives students the opportunity to resolve disagreements with other students or staff through a non-punitive, student-led process. Student mediators receive extensive training, participate in practice sessions, and conduct mediations during the school day. A trained staff member from The Mediation & Training Collaborative is also present for each mediation session. With guidance from the mediators, the participants create a contract, consisting of specific actions that will be taken.

- **Benefits:** Student empowerment, skill-building, buy-in and reported longer-lasting and more positive changes in relationships after mediation.
- **Contact:** Scott Smith, scott.smith@gmrdsd.org

14. Restorative Justice Classroom Benefits and Examples

- **Benefits:** Restorative justice classrooms can lead to more student reflection and buy-in after a challenging situation or incident, which can result in longer lasting change, more understanding of the student's circumstances by the school, and improved relationships between students and staff.

Mohawk Trail Regional School District's restorative justice classroom offers a remedial, in-school option for part of a suspension. The student handbook states that the classroom is "a quiet, structured and supervised classroom used to support students and staff when a student's behavior does not meet Mohawk's Code of Conduct." The classroom is also available for students who are experiencing a variety of emotional or behavioral difficulties, potentially preventing a major incident or violation. The use of the restorative justice classroom may be part of a Student Support Team response plan after an incident regarding substance use.

During a student's time in the restorative justice classroom, teachers, administrators, or counselors support academic progress and work on relationships that may have been harmed by as a result of the student's behavior. Written plans of action for change and future prevention are part of the process for restoring relationships with individuals and the community.

Greenfield High School's restorative justice classroom is called the TLC Room and has some practices in common with Mohawk's classroom. The TLC Room is staffed by one consistent staff member. If students have followed the classroom process for behavioral challenges and are still agitated or upset, they are sent to the TLC Room by their classroom teacher. If there has been an altercation with another person that causes concern, a student may be escorted to the room by an administrator. When students arrive, they are asked to fill out a form with their perspective of what happened. Once the form is completed, the staff person who coordinates the TLC Room reviews the form and discusses how to restore the situation through a positive practice.

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