



ANDOVER PUBLIC SCHOOLS

36 Bartlet Street
Andover, MA 01810
(978) 623-8501
FAX (978) 623-8505

SCHOOL COMMITTEE:

Ann W. Gilbert, Chair
Joel G. Blumstein, Esq., Vice Chair
Paula Colby-Clements, Esq.
Susan K. McCready
Ted E. Teichert

Sheldon H. Berman, Ed.D
Superintendent of Schools
sheldon.berman@andoverma.us

September 25, 2015

Dear Parents,

Over the past year information in the media and the release of the video “The Other Side of Andover” have made us increasingly aware of the painful impact of substance addiction, particularly opiates, and the toll this is taking on our community.

Just last week, a 2006 Andover graduate passed away of an overdose. We are deeply saddened by this latest incident and concerned about what appears to be a growing trend nationwide. As a community, through the leadership of Chief of Police Patrick Keefe, the Substance Abuse Task Force has begun to organize across town departments to increase our efforts at the local level to prevent others from becoming addicted and to protect families from experiencing the pain that accompanies the addiction of a loved one. The Task Force has planned a month of education and community programs throughout October to raise awareness and share prevention strategies with individuals and families.

To contribute to this effort, the schools have planned an informative program that will take place on **Wednesday, October 14**. During the day, our high school students will engage in focused learning activities at the school on a broad range of health issues. That evening, a program about opiate addiction and prevention will be open to all parents at the Collins Center. A number of other events are being planned throughout the community during the month of October and we encourage parents to participate in as many of them as possible.

Another seemingly small but critically important step that each of us can take is to reduce the availability of prescription medicines in our homes. Studies have demonstrated that common pills and even liquid medications are serving as the gateway drugs for many young people who then progress to more addictive substances. Unfortunately, in an effort to impress their peers, adolescents and young adults share these medications with friends. Therefore, we need to not only clean out our own medicine cabinets but also encourage relatives and neighbors to do the same. We must act now to help shut off the supply of these introductory medicines that may have been appropriately prescribed for back pain or anxiety and now lie forgotten in a drawer. A community “pill toss” has been scheduled by the police department for this **Saturday, September 26** at West Elementary School; however, you are welcome to drop off prescription medications at the Safety Center at any time.

Opiate addiction is affecting our entire nation and is a growing concern among governors and legislators. The Substance Abuse Task Force convened by Chief of Police Patrick Keefe, which includes representation from APS, is helping the community band together for the purposes of education, prevention and intervention. We encourage you to participate in the local events and activities in order to help prevent addiction among past and future APS graduates.

Following is a document that outlines the efforts that our district's health educators, social workers and nurses are undertaking to address this issue. We hope to see you at the October 14 parent program and are eager to join hands with you to protect our young people and to give them the decision-making tools to resist taking even one step toward this crippling addiction.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Sheldon Berman".

Sheldon Berman, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools

Andover Public Schools Participation in Community-Wide Substance Abuse Prevention and Intervention

All of us who live and work in Andover are deeply troubled by the alarming increase in opiate use and addiction in our community. While this battle is being waged on many fronts across the nation, we know our own local efforts can only be successful if they are coordinated throughout the entire community. Now that school is back in session, we'd like to bring you up to date on the work the Andover Public Schools is doing across a variety of venues and in full partnership with the town.

Prevention

As a school system, the two biggest things we can do are to arm our youth with the tools they need to make healthy life choices and to provide a setting where they feel connected and supported. We approach these goals through our curriculum, by forming positive relationships with students, by offering targeted parent education programs, and through community involvement.

Ongoing Curriculum:

- Our Open Circle social/emotional program at the elementary level is aimed at increasing positive social skills and decreasing the potential for isolation and bullying.
- Our health education classes are required for all students in grades 1 through 9 and grade 11, and go deeply into topics including:
 - Risks associated with the use of alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, and other drugs.
 - Decision-making skills to prepare for real-life situations involving substance use.
 - The biological and physiological effects of drugs.
 - Self management, self advocacy, goal setting, decision making, and refusal skills.
 - Conflict resolution, stress management, mindfulness techniques, and resiliency.
- Annually, the district administers the Youth Risk Behavior Survey as a diagnostic tool to guide our prevention and intervention efforts.

What's New:

- Going forward, our health curriculum will have an increased emphasis on opiates, particularly at the middle school level.
- Training opportunities aimed at identifying signs of opiate addiction are being provided to staff.
- Andover Public Schools will conduct a major, district-wide opiate awareness and outreach event for parents and students on **Wednesday, October 14th**.

Support and Intervention: Social Work and Nursing Staff

When any staff member becomes aware of students with possible substance use or abuse issues, our social workers and/or nursing staff immediately reach out to those students to assess and discuss these concerns. These professionals are available to serve all students enrolled in the school district, and they work closely with the wider mental health community, including substance abuse treatment providers.

Ongoing Services Include:

- Education
- Counseling for a wide range of issues, including substance abuse
- Family outreach
- Referral for treatment and other support services

What's New:

- Additional professional development is being offered to enhance staff's abilities to provide early identification of opiate and other forms of substance abuse, as well as prevention and treatment strategies.
- Staff members are actively participating on Andover's Substance Abuse Task Force as well as the Merrimack Valley's Massachusetts Opioid Abuse Prevention Collaborative (MOAPC).

Community Response

The current opiate addiction problem is much more than a school problem; in fact, the data collected in Andover show that the vast majority of use and abuse incidences are taking place within the adult population. We are encouraged to see community resources being expanded through the staffing added to the Andover Police Department so that more of our residents will have access to vital services. Meanwhile, the school department is committed to assisting in the development of additional community programs for parents and residents, and currently has key district personnel not only serving on the Andover Substance Abuse Task Force, but collaborating with other town committees and organizations as well.

For more information, please see the list of resources on our website, or contact the Office of the Superintendent of Schools, 978-623-8501.