

# You Cannot Delegate Leadership

Strong leadership from the superintendent and a school-community partnership are two key elements of the successful alcohol/drug prevention program in Burlington, Wisconsin.



*Elizabeth Houghton of Informed Networks (Deerfield, Illinois) conducts an all-day workshop for 150 parents, educators, and citizens at Burlington Junior High School.*

Dear Tom,  
It was great to see you at the conference for state superintendents. As promised, I am writing to tell you more about the alcohol/drug program we have initiated in Burlington.

Ours is a K-12 school district of approximately 3,000 students in the Milwaukee metropolitan area. We have few minorities. Our one high school has 1,150 students. The size of our community and school district is ideal for developing a strong commu-

nity emphasis.

Our alcohol/drug effort began when a citizens' advisory committee of the board of education did a marketing survey of our community. Over 300 randomly selected residents responded to a 45-minute telephone poll. Of all the areas in our curriculum, they gave top priority to increasing our emphasis on alcohol/drug education.

Ours is not a canned program, Tom. We have learned, as capsulized by one of our teachers, that "when you build a car from scratch, you will know how to fix it." Prevention is a never-ending process that changes every day and will be different in every community. Let me emphasize key aspects of our experience that might be of value to you.

## Partnership

The problem that our young people have with alcohol and drugs is a community, not a school, problem. Obviously, the school is a key influence; but parents are a child's first and most important teachers, and the family is still society's most powerful institution.

When initiating our program, we continually told people that to be effective we had to have a community partnership. There are so few partnerships in this area, we added, that we all

need to build our own programs and to learn from each other's experiences. As a result, all of our schools, public and private, and the community have united. Every school shares in our programs and participates in our grants. Workshops and training are open to parents and nonparents. Every chance we get, we reinforce the concept of partnership.

### Leadership

As I look at programs that are floundering, I think it is because the superintendent and the board of education did not make a commitment. *You cannot delegate leadership.* The board and I, as superintendent, are dedicated to this community partnership. I have no greater priority than helping youngsters become or stay chemical free.

Making your project a matter of board policy is also vital. Our board appointed a citizen/staff advisory committee to make policy recommendations. Chaired by a respected citizen, the committee met regularly for seven months before recommending a new comprehensive student philosophy and policy to the board.

We recognized early on that to have a successful program we needed leadership from the community as well. We identified a number of people we felt would give credibility to our community emphasis, shared our plans with them, and asked for volunteers. Not one person said no. As a result, we have a steering committee made up of the president of the Chamber of Commerce, the editor of our local newspaper, two high-ranking police officials, a doctor, a lawyer, a judge, several business people, a parent representative, the principal of our Catholic high school, a school board member, two clergy representatives, a senior citizen, and the superintendent. The group meets regularly and provides the community leadership essential to our program.

### Mission

Every organization needs a mission, and ours is "a community united to develop an alcohol/drug-free environ-

There is alcohol at parties I attend			
	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8
Always	12%	12%	17%
Usually	22%	20%	22%
Sometimes	28%	45%	39%
Total	62%	77%	78%

  

What is your level of use of alcohol?			
Some use—	Grade 6—48%	Grade 7—55%	Grade 8—69%
	Grade 9—81%	Grade 10—87%	Grade 11—90%
	Grade 12—87%		

  

Have you ever come to school under the influence of alcohol?			
Yes—	Grade 9—13%	Grade 10—18%	Grade 11—30%
	Grade 12—18%		

  

I know I can buy alcohol in Burlington?			
Yes—	Grade 9—18%	Grade 10—20%	Grade 11—21%
	Grade 12—31%		

  

Have your parents allowed you to attend a party where alcohol was served?			
Yes—	Grade 9—36%	Grade 10—32%	Grade 11—62%
	Grade 12—72%		

  

What is your level of use of chewing tobacco?			
Some use—	Grade 9—17%	Grade 10—14%	Grade 11—22%
	Grade 12—9%		

  

During the last two weeks have you had 3 or more drinks in a row at least once?			
Yes—	Grade 9—32%	Grade 10—48%	Grade 11—64%
	Grade 12—60%		

Fig. 1. Excerpts from Alcohol/Drug Student Survey, Grades 6-12  
Burlington Area Public and Non-public Schools

ment for our youth." A lofty goal? Yes! However, as one of our clergy representatives commented, "We don't stop practicing religion because people sin." Each member of our steering committee provides leadership to the goals and objectives we have set to achieve our mission.

### Planning

Our goal was to have a quality community prevention program in place in three years. Many programs try to do too much too soon, do not involve the community, and take a "one shot" approach. Comprehensive planning for a successful long-range program is critical.

### Local Data

Public denial is considerable. To eliminate the mentality that "yes, there is a national problem, but not in Burlington," volunteer parents and staff members designed an extensive student survey, which we administered anonymously to every public and private school student in grades 6 through 12. Our results were similar to national statistics: alcohol use is rampant (see fig. 1). Our junior high results were especially shocking.

We learned another lesson in ownership: we had volunteers tabulate the survey results. If you want to get the message out to your community that

there is a problem, just bring in 25 moms or dads and have them tabulate your surveys.

### Adult Problem/Adult Solution

We believe that the use/abuse of alcohol and drugs by our young people is a problem primarily enabled by adults and that there is an adult solution. Our experience indicates that parent pressure against teen use of alcohol may be a stronger influence than peer pressure for its use. After years of frustration as a high school principal trying to help youngsters solve their own problems, I've concluded that the adult influence is absolutely crucial.

### Funding

We expect to spend over \$25,000 this year, of which only \$5,000 is allotted in the public school budget. Fortunately, local, state, and federal funds are available. For instance, our parent training is sponsored by a grant from the United Fund, and many individuals have also made donations. Once you begin your community partnership, you will find that your local service clubs, such as the Kiwanis, Lions, and Rotary, will contribute generously.

### Curriculum

Like most school districts, we have health education programs for junior and senior high students. However,

the most critical need is a prevention program in the elementary grades. Such a program has been in place in Burlington for several years: "I Am Special," a required part of the K-6 curriculum. Every week classroom teachers teach two 30-minute lessons at each grade level.

### Training

We have also learned the value of using quality consultants for training. We will soon have over 300 staff members, citizens, and every administrator voluntarily trained in prevention/intervention techniques. Our one-week, 35-hour workshop is funded by local grants and contributions. How impressive it is to see teachers and parents being trained together.

### New Relationships

To increase awareness, a group of volunteer parents is leading a massive networking effort. Hundreds of parents have signed agreements stating

that parties will be chaperoned, that parents will verify youngsters' plans over the telephone, that alcohol and drugs will not be present at parties, that curfews will be enforced, and so on. We have also initiated an aggressive alcohol/drug-free sports program in all our junior and senior high sports.

In a relatively short period of time, our community has learned to understand such concepts as denial, enabling behavior, intervention, and the disease model of alcohol/drug dependence. We also have a relationship between our public and private schools that never existed before, and a partnership between the clergy and our schools is evolving. Parents feel more trusted and involved than they have for many years.

### The Payoff

What will be the payoff for your community should you pursue this idea? Youngsters staying healthy or getting

healthier, plus improvement in the general health of your entire community! Although our emphasis is strictly on helping youth, the program appears to be affecting adult behavior as well. Seeing adults sponsor alcohol-free parties for other adults, and the modeling influence of this for our youngsters, is encouraging. The public relations value of educators, parents, and the community working together to improve the environment for everyone is also exciting.

I wish you well if you decide to involve your community in a program similar to ours, Tom. Remember: You cannot delegate leadership! You, the superintendent, are the key variable in improving the health of your community.

Sincerely,  
Gary □

**Gary M. Fields** is Superintendent, Burlington Area School District, 100 N. Kane St., Burlington, WI 53105.



## attention. . .

### Middle/Junior High School Educators

---

#### Significant Resources from National Middle School Association

- **When the Kids Come First: Enhancing Self-Esteem.** James A. Beane and Richard P. Lipka. 95 pages, \$8.00. A courageous call for and description of a humane school in which kids grow positively in understanding themselves, their values, social relationships, and the world.
- **Interdisciplinary Teaching: Why and How.** Gordon F. Vars. 56 pages, \$6.00. Since life is "interdisciplinary," a portion of the curriculum should be also. Ways middle level teachers can provide effective interdisciplinary instruction are described and illustrated.
- **Cognitive Matched Instruction in Action.** Esther Fusco and Associates. 36 pages, \$5.00. Teachers at Shoreham-Wading River Middle School describe the Cognitive Levels Matching Project, a forerunner for planning instruction that recognizes levels of cognitive ability.
- **Positive Discipline: A Pocketful of Ideas.** William W. Purkey and David Strahan. 56 pages, \$6.00. Invitational Education applied to discipline. A much-needed positive look at classroom management featuring more than forty immediately applicable-to-the-classroom ideas.
- **The Team Process: A Handbook for Teachers.** Second and Enlarged Edition. Elliot Y. Merenbloom, 126 pages, \$8.00. A greatly enlarged edition of the best-seller original. A must for faculties seeking to implement fully the middle school concept. Comprehensive and detailed.

More than twenty other monographs and ten research annuals also available. Please request list. Orders subject to 5.5% Ohio sales tax, then add .75 handling charge to prepaid orders. All other orders will be .75 handling plus shipping cost, usually U.P.S.

Contact the National Middle School Association, Dept. AT, 4807 Evanswood Drive, Columbus, Ohio 43229 (614) 848-8211

Copyright © 1988 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.