

News

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Town officials continue anti-drug meetings

By ROB GLIDDEN
STAFF WRITER

Officials and community leaders gathered last week to discuss how to continue their anti-drug efforts through the summer and into the next school year.

The June 11 meeting was the latest in a series of gatherings organized by Schools Supt. Dr. Joseph Erardi, in response to the growing concerns about drug use within town.

Over the past several months, the discussion has led to new public groups being formed and a comprehensive survey about the presence of drugs in school.

"It was important to find out what we knew and what we didn't know," Erardi said as he recapped the survey's results. "What we found were statistics that made Southington students look like other students. What we found that we would not have found 5 or 10 years ago was the new arena of prescription drugs."

A recurring theme at these forums is the importance of fostering a connection between Southington students and the community at large. Many officials feel that more positive interaction between students and staff at the schools will help steer kids towards making better choices.

Andy Bayer, an assistant principal at Southington High School, discussed a recent lunch-

“
Enough with the pep rally talk. Lets find a concrete way to make a difference.”

John Myers,
STEPS member

eon held with a small group of randomly selected students.

"Southington High School is not immune to societal pressures regarding substance abuse," Bayer said as he reported the gist of the conversation.

Students told Bayer and a few other faculty members that though they were concerned about the presence of illegal drugs, they felt the high school was generally a safe place. They agree with the survey that alcohol was the most prominent drug in the lives of high school students, but felt that it was "no big deal" and couldn't be stopped.

In terms of reducing drug use, the students recommended more events centered on personal testimonials rather than the clinical facts taught in

health classes.

Events like this were recently provided by the activist group Parents 4 a Change.

Mary Marcuccio, speaking on behalf of the group, recalled that first-person accounts from parents whose families had been torn apart by drug use had left students in tears during their visits to classes at the high school.

Marcuccio also said the group had blossomed over the past year into a larger organization that Southington residents frequently look to for help. She said there had been several incidents where they had been contacted during a drug-related emergency and worked to quickly provide help.

"The most important thing we can provide is hands-on support in real time," she said.

Efforts are also being made at the middle schools to connect with the student population. DePaolo Middle School Principal Frank Pepe read testimonials from students and staff praising the school's mentor program, and Kennedy Middle School Principal Angelo Campagnano said the school was searching for additional presentations and events to enhance the sense of school community.

"We continue to look for new ways to reach out to students," said Kennedy Assistant Principal Pam Aldi.

This summer will also see some new initiatives designed to take this effort

further.

Youth Services Coordinator Sue Saucier said her department expected to hire a part-time coordinator to help align the efforts of the various groups in town. Lisa Crofton said she was working with the Parks and Recreation Department to put on a summer workshop for children designed to

build confidence.

John Myers and Victoria Triano represented the recently-formed group STEPS (Southington Town-Wide Efforts to Promote Success) announced their intentions to put on a massive summit drawing together children and community members from all walks of

life to try and brainstorm ways to promote healthy lifestyles.

"Enough with the pep rally talk," Myers said. "Let's find concrete ways to make a difference."

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