

THE COMMUNITY DRUG AND ALCOHOL TASK FORCE

INTERIM REPORT

NORTHPORT-EAST NORTHPORT UNION FREE SCHOOL DISTRICT

JUNE 15, 2009

INTRODUCTION

The Board of Education passed a resolution on August 28, 2006 *“to create a Community Drug and Alcohol Task Force to review existing educational and counseling supports within the Northport-East Northport Union Free School District, as well as, the Northport-East Northport community.”* The resolution further stated that *“It shall be the goal of the Task Force to work toward the ultimate elimination of the illegal use of alcohol, drugs, and other controlled substances which pose a threat to the health and welfare of our students and staff. The Task Force shall recommend such additional supports which will enhance efforts toward a drug and alcohol-free school environment.”*

Initially, more than sixty members representing the community, law enforcement, medical professionals, educators, parents, administrators, and students convened throughout the fall and winter of 2006 to formulate recommendations to the Board of Education. A formal report was presented at the January 8, 2007 Board of Education meeting which encouraged proactive efforts within our schools and community to not only combat drug and alcohol concerns, but to also develop a parent, school, and community coalition. Research indicates there are greater reductions in drug and alcohol abuse in communities with established coalitions than in communities without a coalition. With this goal in mind, the Community Drug and Alcohol Task Force implemented several programs during the 2007-2008 school year with Board of Education support.

- A Drug and Alcohol Counselor
- The Alternative Home Instruction Program for school suspensions
- Surveys for students and parents on drug and alcohol use
- Comprehensive Parent Education Forums (Grades 6-12)
- Educational presentation for students in grades 6-12
- *Our Schools* outreach efforts

The Community Drug and Alcohol Task Force reconvened in the fall of 2008 to commence developing the necessary community outreach which is vital to success. Our Task Force sponsored an evening program on November 24, 2008 to connect with community leaders and stakeholders who could move our message forward. Approximately forty leaders and stakeholders attended expressing their support for the mission of the Community Drug and Alcohol Task Force. Follow-up meetings were scheduled during 2008-2009 which explored the community's role with this important mission. This interim report will reflect our progress and hopes for the future. Numerous meetings with an average of thirty participants explored and implemented the following initiatives:

- A Drug and Alcohol Task Force logo was designed by Phoenix Group, a local computer graphic design and e-learning company owned and operated by district residents Cliff and Rhonda Sobel. Their voluntary efforts have enabled the Task Force to now have a visual identity which will hopefully become synonymous

with our parents, community, and school district's efforts to protect our children from drug and alcohol use (Attachment A).

- Phoenix Group has also committed its resources on a voluntary basis to create an interactive website for the Community Drug and Alcohol Task Force. This website will afford parents and community members an opportunity to acquire general and specific information on drug and alcohol issues.
- The S.A.F.E. (Support Alcohol Free Environments) Homes Pledge Program was implemented through the joint efforts of our Task Force and our PTA Council organization. The primary purpose of the S.A.F.E. Homes network is to create a directory of parents who share the same core beliefs and values concerning teenage drug and alcohol use. The network encourages communication among parents in an effort to increase the safety of our youth. Participation in this program is voluntary. Parents agree through a signed statement to uphold the points of a pledge to help keep our youth safe, supervised, and drug/alcohol free. All parents who sign the pledge will be entered in our S.A.F.E. Homes directory which will be accessible through the e-School Parent Portal (Attachment B).
- Pre-prom parent/student meetings were scheduled by the high school administration to highlight the expectations for drug and alcohol free pre-prom and post-prom events. This meeting was mandatory for parents and students who wish to attend the Northport High School 2009 prom. Paul Failla, a retired Suffolk County police officer and educational consultant, was the keynote speaker. He focused on parents' responsibility to provide drug and alcohol free social settings for their children. The presentations were proactive measures taken to review acceptable prom-related behavior and activities, so students can remain safe and have fun (Attachment C).

Other initiatives were explored and are in the discussion and planning stages. These initiatives reflect the work of three sub-groups.

PARENT EDUCATION SUB-COMMITTEE REPORT

The Parent Education Group focused on researching and implementing additional opportunities to educate parents and students about issues surrounding drugs and alcohol. After an extensive analysis of the parent forums that were delivered during the 2007-2008 school year, we felt that it was necessary to continue to deliver messages that will educate our families and protect our youth against the dangers of drugs and alcohol. The committee discussed the notion of integrating brief, consistent, creative messages related to drug and alcohol use, misuse, and abuse into existing school functions and events. These messages will be age appropriate and tailored to meet the needs of each group. The committee has considered making students' participation in some school events/activities contingent upon parents attending meetings which incorporate these messages. The following school events were identified as appropriate venues to deliver the information:

Middle Schools:

- ✓ Open House
- ✓ Coaches' meetings
- ✓ Parent Meeting
- ✓ 8th Grade Overnight Trip (East Northport only)
- ✓ PTSA Meetings

High School:

- ✓ Open House
- ✓ Freshman Orientation
- ✓ Guidance Planning Nights
- ✓ Coaches' Meetings
- ✓ Driver Education
- ✓ Mandatory Parent Meeting
- ✓ Marching Band Camp Parent Meeting

The Parent Education Group recommended that the following topics be considered for inclusion in the message:

- Identify the drug/alcohol problem in our community
- Current trends in drug use in our community
- Safe Homes Program –(Parent communication network)
- What's In Your Liquor/Medicine Cabinet?
- Accessibility to Drugs and Alcohol
- Prevention Strategies
- Parental Strategies (e.g. Trust but verify...)
- School and Community Resources
- Reliable Internet Resources
- Experiences of Loss as a result of drug/alcohol use

The Parent Education Group strongly believes that we should continue to present mandatory parent forums to parents of students in grades 6-12. Each forum should contain current, valid information and have a unique, age/grade-level focus. Next year, Northport Middle School and East Northport Middle School will host a parent forum for seventh grade parents. These meetings are scheduled for Thursday, October 29, 2009 at Northport Middle School and Wednesday, November 4, 2009 at East Northport Middle School. The purpose of these parent forums is to raise awareness about drug and alcohol use and abuse in our community and to educate parents about the resources that are available to help students in need of support.

YOUTH ACTIVITIES SUB-COMMITTEE REPORT

The continuing and evolving mission of the Youth Activities sub-committee is to provide the young people in our community with opportunities to engage in healthful, safe and supervised activities during their leisure time. These activities are to be easily accessible, supervised, and must facilitate the development of the skills needed to provide our young people with the tools which will allow them to become proactive decision-makers with regard to choices concerning alcohol, tobacco, other drugs as well as their physical, social, and emotional wellness.

We began our task by taking an inventory of the community's youth oriented organizations already in place. We were pleased to discover that the Northport-East Northport Community currently plays host to numerous organizations with years of history. These organizations run the gamut from programs at the local libraries and the Parent Center, to theater, music and art programs, sporting activities, quilt making; and the list goes on. Our intent was to model structured groups which operate with great efficacy, rather than to reinvent the wheel. We then consulted with several of those organizations, hoping to utilize their methods for success in order to promote some new programs which could hopefully provide a venue of activities not currently offered in a supervised or organized fashion. These groups included but were not limited to skateboarding, extreme sports, boxing, and other wellness related activities. We also concluded that there is a need to identify, support and promote many of the programs already in existence that may not get sufficient exposure.

INITIATIVES

- Creating a recreation center (utilizing vacant space) which would provide young people with a place to engage in sports such as boxing, and other fitness related activities. There is a new basketball sports center in the planning stages in Northport on Route 25A, which may be a great place to host some type of recreation center.
- Creating a Northport-East Northport Skate Club, utilizing the new Town of Huntington Park on Bellerose Avenue.
- Showcasing our talented youth during community events such as Cow Harbor, with the help and assistance of students at Northport High School and a media program from Five Towns College, and possibly Cablevision.
- Having an area in the local paper that advertises and promotes youth oriented activities that are coming up on the calendar, using pictures of some of our local youth to encourage participation.
- Support and promote our current youth groups, such as, the YDA who have been very successful in helping many of our young people.
- The Northport Arts Coalition, Inc. will be performing a series of one act plays, supporting the Northport Community's famed love of the theater.

- The Community Drug and Alcohol Task Force will be initiating its own website, and displayed on the website will be an easily accessible perpetual listing of our available community resources for young people. There can also be a place where suggestions can be made to address the needs of all our youth.
- Utilizing community service as a way to build self esteem and provide a service for others at the same time such as the Quilt Making Project for the veterans at the Northport Veterans Affairs Medical Center. This could tie into community service hours that may be required for some students.
- Initiating fundraising projects to fund our task force, which could involve all the school children in the district.
- The Community Drug and Alcohol Task Force requests that all our youth organizations, both school and community, would be on board to proudly display and support our message to “educate and protect our children,” and we have received an enthusiastic response from all of those we have asked.
- Our vision is to eventually have the Northport–East Northport Community Drug and Alcohol Task Force message and logo on every uniform, hat, banner and community sponsored event.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH SUB-COMMITTEE REPORT

The community connection is critical to reinforcing the educational and parental guidance initiatives which educate and protect our children from drug and alcohol use. This sub-committee had lengthy discussions which focused on the community as a vital member of this coalition with this important mission. Some initiatives which may come to fruition in the future are:

1. Requesting the East Northport Chamber of Commerce and Northport Chamber of Commerce to strategically post our logo on their business and store windows.
2. Connect with Gold’s Gym to create programs concerning healthy children and relate them to the mission of the Community Drug and Alcohol Task Force.
3. Have a presence at both Cow Harbor Day and the East Northport Chamber of Commerce Annual Festival. Our group would not distribute pamphlets, but rather provide important information. We could distribute stickers with our logo for possible display in the homes of our community, signifying their support for the Community Drug and Alcohol Task Force and their participation in the S.A.F.E. Homes Program.
4. Ask local religious organizations to highlight the Community Drug and Alcohol Task Force initiatives in their newsletters and bulletins. Have our logo be a symbol with these newsletters and bulletins.

5. Partner with the Northport Runners Club to display our logo throughout the Northport Cow Harbor 10K Race.
6. Approach delicatessens and restaurants to support the efforts of the Community Drug and Alcohol Task Force.
7. Our vision is to publicize the Northport-East Northport Community Drug and Alcohol Task Force logo throughout our community, including our local governments, businesses, religious organizations, and private homes within our school district.

Many community groups have already approached the Community Drug and Alcohol Task Force to sponsor activities which may further enhance our important message. The Northport Arts Coalition, Inc. has preliminary plans to facilitate a “One-Act Play Festival” highlighting local adult and student playwrights showcasing their original productions. Some of the productions would focus on parent and student educational initiatives regarding drug and alcohol issues.

Another possible activity under the sponsorship of the Community Drug and Alcohol Task Force is a joint effort between Five Towns College video and communication students and Cablevision, Inc. to create several short five-minute videos educating and protecting our children from drug and alcohol use. These short vignettes could be viewed in various community locations, such as, our public libraries, community stores, school and religious organization settings, etc., on a continual basis.

CONCLUSION

The Community Drug and Alcohol Task Force is a viable and vital resource to our community, parents, and school district. We look forward to continuing our mission to eliminate the illegal use of alcohol, drugs, and other controlled substances which pose a threat to the health and welfare of our students and staff.