



WESTBROOK PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Patricia Charles, Superintendent

May 16, 2011

Dear Parents,

Our recent discovery of alcohol use by middle school students prompts all of us to renew our commitment to help our children make good choices. As parents, educators, and concerned members of the community, it is even more disconcerting when we look at the research that clearly indicates the significant impact drugs, alcohol, and tobacco have on the adolescent brain. A child's brain is developing and changing well into his or her 20's. When alcohol is introduced to a child, it can have damaging short and long-term effects on coordination, speech, sleep, motor function, memory and decision making. Children also succumb much more easily to becoming drug and alcohol dependent when compared to adults (White, 2006).

When incidents of this nature occur we must redouble efforts to educate our youth and adults. The potential consequences are significant for everyone. In addition to the physical and mental effect on the child, there are school consequences ranging from suspension to expulsion for use during school or during a school-sponsored activity. There are also legal implications for parents/guardians when alcohol is available to children at home. Additionally, poor choices of this nature rob all students of the intended learning and are disruptive to the educational process.

Coincidentally, Student Awareness Day on May 20th will focus our middle schoolers on the importance of making healthy decisions. Health lessons from kindergarten through grade 12, advisory groups in grades 5-12, and special classes such as Teen Leadership, and activities like Students Against Destructive Decisions (SADD), and the Youth Asset program also reinforce this important message. A parent program on May 19 at 6:30 PM in the high school auditorium will highlight the need to monitor children who use social media websites. Westbrook children at all three schools are engaged in Internet discussions that put them at risk.

Our schools, like those across the state and nation, reflect our community. Drug and alcohol use is a serious concern for youth in Westbrook, in Connecticut, and across the country. We must work together to boost positive decision making skills and avoid risky behavior. Several agencies, in addition to school personnel, can provide information and support to families who would like to learn more or would like assistance in dealing with substance abuse. Below is the contact information:

Lyn Connery, Youth Asset Coordinator, Rushford Student Assistance Counselor, 860-399-6214

Lisa Mason, Middlesex Substance Abuse Action Council, 860-347-5959

Michelle Ciak, Westbrook Youth & Family Services, 860.399.9239 ext. 11

We take very seriously our collective responsibility to keep our children safe and urge you to talk to your child about illegal substances and risky behavior. We will continue to do so in school. I encourage you to contact me if you have additional ideas for ways we can keep our students safe and drug free.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Patricia Charles". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Patricia" and last name "Charles" clearly legible.

Patricia Charles
Superintendent

White, Aaron. "This is the Teen Brain...This is the Teen Brain on Alcohol." Florida Drug Summit. 2006. Lecture.