

FCD UPDATE

FCD Educational Services, Inc.

A Nonprofit Organization

Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drug Education

Spring 2003

Parents and Schools: Partners in Prevention

The research is clear. The two strongest factors in protecting young people from getting into trouble with alcohol or other drugs are positive relationships with parents and school. When teachers, school administrators, and parents work together to prevent substance abuse, kids stay healthy and safe.

In one school, the parent committee sponsors an alternative, all-night, after-prom party.

As the sun rises, breakfast is served, a car is raffled, and sleepy, sober celebrants have memories to last a lifetime.

In another school, the faculty intervention team helps dozens of students a year with substance abuse issues – before they become a discipline problem.

Parents, through education and involvement, understand, and are grateful for, the committee's work.

Yet sometimes parents and schools almost appear to be working against, rather than with, each other in addressing the problem of substance abuse.

Forty members of the senior class receive their parents' blessing to go to Cancun for a spring break fling.

The school sees this as a betrayal of its drug prevention efforts.

Parents hear about an upcoming unsupervised student party and call the school head so he can do something about it.

The head wonders, why can't the parents deal with it themselves?

The school suspends six seniors because of alcohol use and their



parents threaten legal action.

Why are the parents more upset with the school than with their own kids?

The carpool monitor smells alcohol on the breath of a parent who has just arrived to pick up her child and several others.

Does the monitor say nothing and risk an accident, or say something and risk the wrath of the parent?

The school sends a letter admonishing parents who serve alcohol to minors and fail to monitor student parties in their homes.

Several parents tell the school to mind its own business.

An enlightened, coordinated stand by parents, teachers and school administrators is the most powerful force we know for keeping kids drug-free. Fortunately, more and more schools are recognizing that successful prevention requires good

communication and high levels of parent participation. As no two schools are alike, the methods of participation can vary widely, reflecting each school's unique culture and circumstances. In this issue of the *FCDUPDATE*, we look at parent involvement from the school's perspective, and talk with two school heads who are breaking new ground in getting parents behind, and at the forefront of, the school's commitment to prevention.

Some of What's Inside...

Parents at the Table

Collegiate School in Richmond, Virginia, is making a dramatic commitment to comprehensive prevention planning. Head of School Keith Evans talks about the role parents play in his school's bold and enlightened approach to society's endemic problem.

Parents in the Classroom

The Lovett School in Atlanta, Georgia, takes a strong stand when it comes to preventing student substance abuse: mandatory education for parents. In an FCD interview, Headmaster Jim Hendrix discusses this highly controversial and successful strategy.

Parents: 20 Ways to Get Involved

From newsletters to networking, education to introspection, here are 20 ways parents can make a difference in promoting a healthy school environment and protecting their children from alcohol and other drug use.

Home Safe Home

Many schools and parent associations are now adopting "safe homes pledges." View sample pledges and learn more about this increasingly popular tool for putting the cork in the bottle of teenage drinking.

Contributions and General Correspondence

FCD welcomes your comments, questions, and ideas. We would love to hear from you if you would like to learn more about anything in the newsletter, send letters to the editor, or submit a manuscript or proposal for an article.

For information about FCD's programs and services, or to schedule an FCD visit to your school or community, please contact us at:

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From FCD's President

Research shows that parent involvement is a key component of effective prevention. Children whose parents talk to them about drugs are less likely to use drugs. The more a child believes that drinking or drug use would upset his or her parents, the more likely he or she is to abstain.

Studies have identified a number of factors that illustrate the impact of parental attitudes and behaviors on adolescent use of substances. According to the research, children are less likely to abuse substances or grow up to have drinking problems in families where:

- Parents are nurturing and democratic
- Family rituals are maintained
- Parents model moderation if they do drink
- Drinking is presented in morally neutral terms
- Drunkenness is not viewed as a humorous condition
- Family members are neither pressured to drink nor singled out for choosing not to
- Family policies for drinking are clearly understood and agreed to by all family members
- Drinking is not viewed as an activity for its own sake.

Research suggests that another set of behavioral factors increases the likelihood that children will become problem drinkers:

- Parents are substance abusers
- Parents employ authoritarian, permissive, or inconsistent child-rearing methods
- Parents convey mixed messages regarding acceptable drinking practices
- Parents and children have distant or strained relationships
- Parents are uninvolved in their child's life
- Family rituals have broken down
- Parent-child communication is poor
- Child first uses alcohol or other drugs at an early age.

Obviously, these are not factors that the school can directly control. But schools can, through parent involvement and education, make parents aware of these issues and help them to understand the unique and positive role they can play in keeping their kids drug-free during childhood and adolescence.

Alex J. Packer, Ph.D.

Parents at the Table

An Interview with Keith Evans, Head of School, Collegiate School, Richmond, Virginia

For the past two years, FCD has worked closely with Head of School Keith Evans to assist the Collegiate School community in planning and implementing a broad-based approach to substance abuse prevention. FCD caught up with Keith at the recent NAIS conference and was delighted when he agreed to be interviewed by FCD president Alex Packer.

What led you to make such a strong commitment to comprehensive prevention planning at Collegiate?

Twenty years ago, I had an opportunity to serve as an intern in a residential adolescent addiction treatment center. I was astonished at the havoc that drugs and alcohol had brought to the families of these otherwise successful and promising high school students. That experience served as a point of reference for me once I began teaching and observing how schools addressed this issue.

Over time, I have also dealt with students and substance use as a disciplinary issue. Inevitably, these encounters are tinged with a sense of failure – for the student, family, and school. I think this sense of failure starts with the absence of confidence in our strategy in this area.

For the most part, I think schools have been well intentioned but shortsighted on the subject of preventing substance abuse. There has been a tendency to react strongly in times of crisis but, generally, little attention is paid to long-term strategy and changing the school's culture. The story of the big beer bash, drug bust, or student tragedy is well known in most places. But, unlike other arenas in schools, substance abuse among our students tends to catch us flat-footed and feeling helpless. My interest in comprehensive prevention planning really began out of a sense that the issue deserved a smarter approach. I believe substance use

and abuse represents the most significant threat to the health of 12- to 21-year-olds in our culture today. Yet our approach in schools has been remarkably unsophisticated relative to the challenge. We have moved forward based on intuition with little or no research or planning behind our methods and programs.

You chose parent participation as one of your priorities. What led you to this decision?

Fundamentally, substance use among our students is a family issue. Alcohol and drug use tends to happen on weekends and in the evening, not often during the school day. Having said that, it has an enormous impact on school communities and can undermine a school's success in a number of other areas. This is clearly an issue where schools and parents should form strong partnerships.

My experience has been that parents are not only willing to join in, but they are energetic and insightful when it comes to prevention. They know that it is a bigger issue than any family can manage on its own and so they welcome a coordinated effort. There is clearly a "silent majority" out there who are ready to devote the time, energy and financial resources to the cause if there is a place for them to plug in. That is a strength of comprehensive prevention planning.

Are there inherent conflicts or tensions between "school" and "home" with regard to these issues? What are some of them?

Probably the most difficult issue between school and home is drawing boundaries. I think schools struggle with an impulse to "own" this issue and to extend their influence beyond the campus and school events. For as proactive and focused as I think schools should be in preventing substance abuse, it is equally important to recognize that the school's reach is limited. Overextending is inevitably unfair to students and intrusive to parents. It can undermine and derail a wider effort as fast as anything. Conversely, in the arenas that belong to the school, the message needs to be clear, consistent and unwavering.



Keith Evans was named Head of School at The Collegiate School, in Richmond, Virginia, in 1999. Prior to Collegiate, Mr. Evans had been the Assistant Headmaster at St. Mary's Episcopal School in Memphis, Tennessee, since 1994. Upon graduating from Davidson College, he started his career as a teacher and coach at The McCallie School in Chattanooga. He went from there to graduate school at Harvard University and was named Academic Dean at Webb School in Knoxville, Tennessee, after completing his degree. In addition to his administrative work, Mr. Evans' teaching fields include religious studies, ethics, and psychology. He has two boys, ages 9 and 13, at Collegiate and is pleased to have survived the winter ski season without significant injury.

Getting boundaries right is probably the first and most difficult job in prevention planning.

What is the nature of parent involvement in prevention at Collegiate?

Our parents are integral to our planning efforts. Parent representatives are part of our coordinating committee, participating in meetings and retreats much as our faculty and staff. They also publish a newsletter, *Informed Parents at Collegiate*, and are in the process of publishing a parent prevention handbook. Just as our parents support the work of faculty and counselors in very tangible ways, the school assists with editing and providing content for these publications.

Parents at Collegiate also fund our prevention effort through the Parents Association. I can think of no better use for the money that our parents raise than to invest it in a program that provides direct support to families.

For many years, Collegiate has had a thriving Parent to Parent program and other parent education year round. These programs began before our broader prevention effort and have provided a good foundation for some new initiatives. We have been committed to having parents “at the table” from the beginning to plan this new effort and it has really made a positive difference.

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What remains to be done? What are your next goals with regard to parents and prevention?

We have really just begun down this path. While there are a lot of great ideas for next steps at Collegiate, I think our most significant challenge will always be sustaining the energy and focus over time. We try to keep in mind that it is a process of planning, implementing, gathering feedback and making adjustments. There is no magic bullet and substance use and abuse among our students will still occur well beyond our respective tenures. Our standard for success is not solving the problem once and for all, but devising a strategy that is equal to the seriousness of the issue. Did we do everything that we could? Were we intelligent and thoughtful in our efforts? Did we have the courage to confront some of the craziness that is a part of this problem? One of the most hated questions in my house is not whether one of our kids finished his

homework but whether his effort was the best that he could do. Applying the same question to substance abuse prevention, I don't think we have done our best work yet.

What advice or cautions would you offer to another school head considering ways to involve parents in the school's prevention plan?

Finding meaningful ways to involve parents is essential. Build trust from the beginning by your personal involvement and learning together. Be careful to support parents' initiatives with time and advice about the tone and direction of their work. Most of all, take it slowly. Alcohol and drug use is an enormously complicated topic. Adults operating in good faith with students' best interests at heart will still disagree from time to time. There is no substitute for the investment of time and honest conversation in this arena. On the other side, there are wonderful rewards for kids and the school in supportive and engaged parents.

**Parents in the Classroom
An Interview with Dr. Jim Hendrix, Headmaster, The Lovett School, Atlanta, Georgia**

After a major senior-class drinking incident of the sort that can happen at any school, Jim Hendrix, Headmaster of The Lovett School in Atlanta, Georgia, formed a task force of students, faculty, and parents to address the issue of alcohol and other drug use among Lovett students. The task force – and it was the students who brought it up – came to the conclusion that parents were the group most in need of support and education. This resulted in a recommendation to require all seventh grade parents and parents of new students to attend a drug education seminar. FCD president Alex Packer spoke with Jim Hendrix to learn more about this controversial approach.

What led you to institute mandatory drug education for Lovett parents?

I believe that substance abuse is more a parent problem than a student problem. Parents are lacking in information as to the magnitude and nature of high-risk behavior among their children. They're not cognizant of the serious abuse that takes place on weekends, or the increasingly early age of experimentation. So I asked myself, what would be a more effective way to address this problem?

When you first proposed mandatory education, what was the initial reaction?

I discussed it with key members of the parent association and trustees, and then took a more formal proposal to the board. It was fully endorsed and mandated for all seventh grade parents and any new parents whose children enrolled subsequent to seventh grade. It took five years to achieve exposure of every parent in grades 7–12 to the information we wanted them to have.

On a practical level, how is the program carried out?

We wait until the admissions process is complete so we know who the new families are. We then send a letter to all rising seventh-grade parents as well as new parents briefly explaining the requirement and giving the logic. We include nine different sign-up options for when they can take the course, which is eight hours long. We offer four two-hour sessions; all day Saturday sessions; Sunday afternoon sessions; and evening sessions.

How much does this cost?

It costs \$20,000 a year.

Who pays for it?

It is primarily funded by the parents association (c. 90%; remainder by school).

Some parents and educators might consider such a requirement overstepping the boundaries of the school's role and authority. Have you ever had parents refuse to participate? What happens in those cases?

I will take it to the wall. I'll meet with them and explain that it is a board

mandated obligation and a condition of re-enrollment. If parents object to the idea of a mandate from the school, I remind them that there are many other things the school mandates. Sometimes parents who are already well informed on the issues argue that it is a waste of their time. My response is that any exception would open the floodgates to other excuses. In any given year we have 125 or so parents required to take the course. Two to 10 are resistant in varying degrees. In eight years, only one family was not permitted to re-enroll.

Has The Lovett School climate changed since this program began?

I think so, particularly in terms of the openness of parent-to-parent communication, and the ostracizing of the ever-present minority of parents that believe we have to “train” students to drink before they go to college. Or that buy liquor for children. This is a recurrent problem that every school deals with. Life has become much more uncomfortable for those people as the vast majority of our parents come to recognize the dangers of this high-risk behavior.

What we have here is not a panacea, but it has improved the situation. We still have parents who allow students to go unsupervised, under the leadership of tour operators, to the Caribbean where there are no regulations on teenage drinking. Why any parents who have taken the course would allow their child to do this is beyond me. But the climate has been enhanced and parents are exercising more appropriate supervision.

Do you see mandatory parent education as something that only day schools can undertake? Is there a variation that could work for boarding schools whose parents may be flung across the globe?

I have never been involved in a boarding school!

What advice or cautions would you offer to another school head considering the implementation of required parent education?

I would urge any school to do it as I am convinced that the fundamental problem rests with parents who are remarkably unaware of the high-risk behavior of their children and the long-term consequences of it. The likelihood of lifelong problems with alcohol and other substances is increased the earlier the age of initial use. I doubt if one in 10 parents are aware of that statistic.

Be darn sure that you’re willing to part ways with parents who decide this is not for them. In my experience, it’s been viewed as a real positive that the school acknowledges substance abuse as a problem for teens today, not only at Lovett but across the country.

Don’t pretend that substance abuse is not an issue. Be proactive in building a partnership with parents. The key message is that things are very different today from when parents were that age.

So it hasn’t had a negative affect on admissions?

It is definitely not a deterrent on the admissions front. If anything, it has been an asset.

Anything else you’d like to say on this topic to the parents, teachers, school heads, and prevention specialists who will be reading this?



Jim Hendrix has had a distinguished career as an educator and historian. Prior to his appointment in 1991 as Headmaster of The Lovett School in Atlanta, Georgia, Dr. Hendrix served for nearly 15 years as Headmaster of Greensboro Day School and Ravenscroft School in North Carolina. He has taught numerous courses at the secondary and college level in U.S. history, Ancient and Medieval history, and American literature. Among his many honors, Dr. Hendrix has been a member of the Board of Trustees at Agnes Scott College, Davidson College, The Greensboro Red Cross, Friends of the Dallas Public Library, and the North Carolina Association of Independent Schools. His interests include wilderness trout fishing and backpacking, a highlight of which was a 100-mile trip retracing the Lewis and Clark route over the Lolo Trail in the Bitterroot Mountains of Northern Idaho.

Don’t pretend that substance abuse is not an issue. Be proactive in building a partnership with parents. The key message is that things are very different today from when parents were that age. It’s not random experimentation that teens are engaging in now. It’s serious and harmful abuse of alcohol and other substances. We have to take dramatic steps to reverse the culture.

Parents: 20 Ways To Get Involved

The most effective school-based prevention programs have active parent support. Here are 20 ways parents can contribute to the health and safety of their child and his or her school:

1. Form a parents prevention committee
2. Produce a parents' guidebook for the prevention of alcohol, tobacco, and other drug abuse
3. Provide input to school policies
4. Educate themselves about alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use
5. Sponsor and attend parent education presentations and workshops
6. Examine their own behaviors and attitudes regarding drinking and other drug use and how these may affect their own child's use
7. Communicate openly and honestly with their children about alcohol, drugs, and related issues
8. Be clear about their own family expectations, rules, and consequences for use
9. Participate in the interviewing and orientation of new parents
10. Write a parent newsletter
11. Create a "solidarity network" of parents who agree to take the same stand in relation to alcohol and other drug use, parties, checking up on their kids' whereabouts, etc.
12. Have parents of older students talk with parents of younger students
13. Build telephone/email chains for communication
14. Develop safe homes agreements for parents to sign
15. Become knowledgeable about the warning signs of use
16. Learn how and when to intervene
17. Organize alcohol- and other drug-free parties and events for kids
18. Establish a "network of concern" with parents at other schools in the area
19. Support students who choose not to use
20. Provide funding for prevention programs at their child's school.

Meeting the Challenge

Parent meetings should be used to articulate school alcohol, tobacco, and other drug policies: expectations, rules, consequences, and procedures for seeking help. Ideally, these will have been previously explained in the parent handbook and during the admissions and/or orientation process. But the more often the information can be presented, the more likely it is to be understood. Parent meetings should also provide parents with the latest facts about chemical dependency, teenage use and abuse of drugs, and the physiological and psychological effects of various drugs.

Over the course of thousands of parent meetings, FCD has identified a number of topics of special interest and value to parents:

- risk factors for alcohol and other drug abuse
- questions students ask about drug use
- common myths and misconceptions about drug use
- why kids "experiment"
- students' own suggestions for reducing substance use and abuse
- the role of the parent in drug abuse prevention
- recognizing early warning signs of trouble
- what to do if you suspect use
- what to say when asked about your own experiences with alcohol or other drugs
- tips for teenage parties
- responding to "...but Billy's parents let him drink"
- the concept of "teaching" children to drink responsibly
- strategies for dealing with drinking and driving
- tools for talking with children about drug-related issues.

For day schools, parent presentations can take place as part of a parent evening, assembly, or drop-in breakfast or lunch; boarding schools can include parent education as part of orientation weekends or other events that draw parents to the school. International schools and American schools abroad must deal

with a far greater diversity of cultural backgrounds and attitudes than those found in most schools. Some parents may have started giving their children wine at an early age while other parents practice a religion that forbids the use of alcohol. Cigarette smoking by teenagers may be taboo or indulged.

Creating policies that address the broad range of parent behaviors and mindsets is a challenge for any school or parent group – particularly when dealing with issues such as off-campus use. Schools must state clearly and strongly where they stand on student drinking, smoking, and other drug use. While not all parents are going to agree with the school's policies, it is important that these policies be presented to, and accepted by, parents as part of the admissions or orientation process. That way, should an incident occur, parents will have been given ample notice as to the school's rules and responses.

FCD recommends that parent meetings focus on fairly narrow age ranges; the concerns of parents with fourth graders are very different from those of parents with 10th graders. We have developed a number of interactive exercises to promote dialogue and empathy between adults and children, and some of our most successful, enjoyable, and well received parent meetings are those attended by both parents and children. Schools are in the best position to determine the most suitable and constructive formats for parent involvement. Whatever the structure, parents and schools working together to provide consistent messages will reinforce each other's efforts to keep kids healthy and safe.

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FCD is pleased to introduce our newest service: substance abuse prevention for camp communities.

Substance Abuse Prevention Planning and Policy Consultation

While many camps have an assortment of activities and policies for addressing substance abuse, few have a cohesive plan. The absence of broad-based prevention can lead to confusion, inconsistency, frustration, and higher levels of use. Our highly trained prevention specialists can:

- Evaluate current substance abuse prevention programs, policies, and procedures
- Recommend strategies and structures to strengthen the effectiveness of the camp's approach
- Provide ongoing support and review.

Essential Education for Staff, Counselors, and Counselors-in-Training

The creation and maintenance of an alcohol- and other drug-free camp community depends on the leadership and role modeling of camp administrators, staff, and counselors. Those in leadership roles must examine their own attitudes, expectations, and interactions with campers. They need to understand and enforce camp policies and rules, be knowledgeable about substance abuse and prevention, and participate

fully in the camp's overall plan for a healthy community.

FCD has developed a number of workshops designed to educate and empower camp administrators, staff, and counselors. Topics include:

- alcohol, tobacco, and other drug education
- tips and techniques for talking with young people about drug-related issues
- recognizing and helping campers who might be growing up in unhealthy homes
- dealing with drinking and driving on off-duty weekends
- supporting and encouraging non-use.

Intervention Training For Staff, Counselors, and Counselors-in-Training

Early intervention is the best way to maintain a healthy camp environment. With proper training, staff and counselors can learn simple, effective strategies for identifying and intervening on unhealthy behaviors. Intervention training topics include:

- learning effective techniques for helping a camper in trouble

- what to do if you suspect use
- understanding the effects of denial and enabling.

Interactive Group Discussions for Campers

FCD's highly trained health educators are all individuals who have achieved long-term recovery from alcohol and/or other drug addictions. This unique "I've been there" perspective not only enhances the credibility of their message, but provides young people with role models for happy, healthy, drug-free living. Having personally experienced the destructive effects of substance abuse, FCD teachers speak from the heart.

FCD instructors can lead entertaining, informative, and inspiring discussions to support non-use, motivate campers to look after each other's well being, and minimize risk-taking by teens who may be contemplating, or are already involved in, unhealthy behaviors. Age-appropriate topics include:

- How to Get High – Without Alcohol or Other Drugs
- Alcohol, Tobacco, and Marijuana: Everything You Didn't Know
- How to Help a Friend in Trouble.