

A Message to the Community: An Analysis of Buckeye Valley Local School District Substance Abuse Prevention Efforts



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to protect our youth from the
harm caused by alcohol & other drugs

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Schools are a vital part of the fabric of any community. As such, they are seen as a strong partner and in some cases, a leader, not only for education but also student health, recreation, parent support, and overall youth development. For this reason, the community relies on the schools for much of the substance use prevention, intervention programming, and strategies. In order to better integrate these multiple roles, Buckeye Valley Local School District (BVLS) partnered with Drug-Free Delaware (DFD) to conduct an analysis of its substance abuse prevention efforts. This study resulted in recommendations for overall improvements in this area.



To conduct this analysis, DFD contracted with Epiphany Community Services (ECS) to collect and analyze data pertaining to the school district's prevention efforts. ECS collected data through key informant interviews with district administration, elementary, intermediate, middle and high school staff, listening sessions with middle and high school students, and conducted a parent survey. Statistical data was collected from multiple sources within the district. This included data information regarding suspensions and expulsions, code of conduct violations and consequences, and prevention programming. Additionally, ECS reviewed program descriptions, personnel contracts, job descriptions, and the policies and procedures within the district related to substance abuse.

Through the review of these data sources, the analysis reinforced that BVLS is committed to academic excellence and to providing a safe and supportive school environment. Outlined in this report are key points of the analysis. Included are the strengths of the district's current approach as well as its challenges. Most importantly, detailed recommendations for strengthening substance abuse prevention within BVLS have been developed. An adequate response to these recommendations requires that the administration, schools, students, and parents work collaboratively with the local community to implement comprehensive, community-wide strategies. These will strengthen prevention efforts not only in the district, but within the community as well.

Purpose



This analysis was a collaboration between DFD and BVLS to strengthen substance abuse prevention efforts within the school district and community. As part of its mission of community based prevention, DFD understood the unique role BVLS plays in the lives of children in the Buckeye Valley community. Through its work, DFD recognized the need to become more involved and supportive in the work of the school district concerning prevention efforts. DFD also wanted to provide an opportunity for the district to improve the quality of its work and share prevention efforts with the community. DFD and BVLS both agreed that a formal review of the prevention work of the district was necessary to gain an accurate picture of what BVLS is doing and what works well, and to identify areas for improvement. This analysis would also allow the district and DFD to share their successes with the community and further engage parents and community members to increase the likelihood of success in reducing youth substance use.

DFD was aware of the need for schools, communities, parents and youth to engage in active prevention strategies in order to decrease substance use in the Delaware community. DFD's existing relationship with the schools allowed for this collaboration and will help to integrate community and school prevention efforts in the future. By using a third party, an unbiased review of BVLS' prevention efforts occurred and recommendations were developed. The analysis and recommendations not only require the dedication of the district to improve its work, but also the dedication of DFD, community groups, and community members to support the district in the areas where it has expertise and resources.

This report provides an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses within the district and issues recommendations for areas in which the district can improve. It concentrates on the work within the district and stresses the necessity of community and parental engagement to fully address youth substance use.

Strengths

The analysis found that the district has several strengths in its prevention work. These include:

- Staff dedicated to ensuring all students are successful both academically and personally.

- Awareness of the issues facing its students beyond academics, home life, and mental health.
- Strong engagement with law enforcement through the use of a school resource officer.
- School welcoming outside agencies to provide prevention support.
- Active in adapting and revising school policies as related to emerging substance abuse issues.

Challenges

Despite these strengths, challenges were also identified that affect the district's ability to effectively implement prevention work:

- The failure to formalize and document informal policies and practices.
- An athletic code of conduct that is unclear as to what constitutes a violation and how violations are proven.
- A lack of coordinated district-wide prevention efforts that link efforts across all grade levels.
- Limited engagement in prevention efforts in high school beyond Teen Institute and health education.
- Lack of enforcement of policies related to substance use on school buses.

Key Findings

Analysis found that BVLS is taking a role in efforts to prevent substance abuse, but more could be done. Results indicated the need for additional resources within the district dedicated to non-academic education and support. Programming and support services should address the social and emotional issues facing students. The district lacks institutional, internal prevention education and programming beyond basic health courses. Several district policies are unclear, and the practices of the district are inconsistent. Finally, the informal prevention infrastructure limits the success of the district's prevention efforts.

Key Recommendations

ECS reviewed BVLS practices, programs, policies and infrastructure. Researchers identified several areas for improvement and made recommendations to refine the district's prevention work. While these recommendations are specific to the district, it is important to stress that these changes

alone will not change the overall substance use by youth in the Buckeye Valley community. Changes must also occur both within the community and the home to fully develop a comprehensive approach to preventing substance use by youth in the district.

Recommendations for BVLS are based upon the four areas of review: policy, practice, program and infrastructure. They include very small changes, such as revised job descriptions, to more challenging changes, such as developing policy and practice for data collection of code of conduct violations, and revising athletic code of conduct. The district will need the support of community groups and parents to implement many of these changes. Broad recommendations include:

- Clarify and strengthen the athletic/activities code of conduct and school code of conduct in relation to substance use, abuse and sales.
- Develop communication protocols between and among staff when addressing incidents related to substances issues and violations.
- Provide additional support to students beyond school administrative intervention when addressing youth substance use problems. This may include referral to services and increased support by school staff including guidance counselors and other support staff.
- Research avenues for increased funding to support prevention efforts within the district.
- Increase monitoring and documentation of student behavior in order to evaluate enforcement efforts, track at-risk students, and gain an understanding of the issues facing students.
- Increase monitoring of student behavior during class, transition periods, and bus routes.

The issue of youth substance use is not confined to schools, and it is important for the community to take its role in substance abuse prevention seriously. As such, recommendations for the community were also developed. These include:

- Actively participate in DFD to create and implement comprehensive, community-wide strategies to positively impact youth substance abuse rates and consequences.
- Create parent networks, external to the school, to work together with each other to ensure active participation in their children's choices and the monitoring of their children's activities.

- Community leaders should work together to ensure resources for the enforcement and processing of offenders as well as the monitoring of adherence to local and state laws and ordinances, and to assure swift and appropriate consequences for breaking the law.
- Adults and establishments that provide alcohol and marijuana to youths must receive swift and severe prosecution. They should be dealt with for their role in promoting and perpetuating youth substance abuse.

DISTRICT PROGRAM FINDINGS

When people think of prevention, they think of programming such as DARE, Life Skills Training, Mock Crashes and assemblies talking about the dangers of drugs and alcohol. Programming



is only the base from which most prevention efforts happen. Although they are an important part of the solution, programs alone will not solve the problem of adolescent substance abuse.

In the past BVLS has implemented several different substance abuse prevention programs, as well as substance abuse curricula

within health education across all grade levels. Critical review of the prevention programs and curricula currently being offered was an important part of this analysis. This was done to gauge the amount of direct substance abuse education youth are receiving in the school setting.

Key Findings

- The district is implementing prevention programming through the use of outside resources to provide the services.
- Limited health education is provided throughout the district with limited health requirements.
- The district strives to address student social and emotional health in addition to academics.
- The district's primary investment in substance abuse prevention programming and efforts is through staff.

Key Recommendations

- Implement evidenced based, developmentally appropriate school based prevention programming in all elementary and middle schools. All programming should fit into the district prevention plan (to be developed per recommendations) and one-time events, and programs that do not match this plan should be eliminated.
- Incorporate information on substance use and abuse in relevant core subjects such as science, biology, psychology and sociology across grade levels. This education should go beyond the message that drugs are bad, and instead address the reasons students should abstain from use.
- Implement a comprehensive, district-wide health curriculum to ensure consistent, age appropriate messaging.
- Eliminate the opt-out option for health classes in high school.
- Develop and support drug-free focused clubs and other prevention groups particularly in middle and high schools.
- Expand Teen Institute and Drug Busters to middle school.
- Continue to partner with community organizations to provide prevention education in classrooms and expand prevention programming to schools that are not using the available resources.

DISTRICT PRACTICE FINDINGS

Examination of BVLS practices was essential to understanding how school policies are carried out. For example, an examination of practice considered the consistency in enforcing consequences of student and athletic code of conduct violations. The practices demonstrated a dedication to following through on policies and to making sure expectations of students and staff were met. Despite the dedication of the district, several areas were found to be challenges for the district in implementing comprehensive prevention work.

Key Findings

- Personnel are unclear as to their specific roles and responsibilities regarding prevention and intervention.

- Inconsistent communication between staff members on substance related issues facing students.
- Lack of adult supervision during transition time, free time and bus time.
- Investigations into violations of the code of conduct vary by school.

Key Recommendations

- District office should observe and ensure all schools are following district policy related to substance use. They should also confirm that administrators understand and are adhering to their obligation. Community resources are available to assist in providing support and education in successful implementation of prevention and substance abuse related policy.
- Develop guidelines on investigations and required proof of violations of the athletic/activities code of conduct.
- All staff members that have daily interactions with students who violate the code of conduct should be informed of the violation, consequence and resulting action. Teachers need this information to follow up appropriately with students and provide additional support.
- Increase the monitoring of hallways, parking lots, buses, and other public spaces during transition periods and free time. All staff members should participate in monitoring.
- Increase communication between bus drivers and school administration to quickly address substance use issues on school buses. Reported issues should be addressed by school administration in a timely manner.

DISTRICT POLICY FINDINGS

As the district's guiding principles showing the vision for operating and expectations for students and staff, BVLS's policies were important to review in the analysis. Researchers were able to observe the way the district wants to do business and improve the quality of life for its students. This analysis shows that the district has many policies in place to direct programming and regulations. However, the district struggles in some areas to clearly define procedures.



Key Findings

- The code of conduct does not include specific consequences for specific violations but does provide guidelines for enforcement.
- The athletic/activities code of conduct is unclear as to what constitutes a violation, how violations are proven, and the consequences for breaking the code, and is not based on year-round behavior.

Recommendations

- Expand athletic/activities code of conduct to be a year round policy and not limited to the school year. The revised code of conduct should include all extracurricular activities and incorporate a no-use commitment.
- Revise the athletic/activities code of conduct to establish specific consequences for substance use. Include a requirement that any student violating the athletic code of conduct for the first time receive a chemical dependency screening and complete substance abuse education before returning to participate.
- Revise the athletic/activities code of conduct to establish specific consequences for substance use.
- Include a requirement of chemical dependency assessment for students to be reinstated after second and subsequent violations of the athletic/activities code of conduct. Students must comply with assessment recommendations and complete substance abuse education to participate.
- Increase the length of denial of participation for first offense students involved in athletics and activities. The Ohio High School Athletic Association can be used to assist in the revision of policies.
- Revise athletic/activities code of conduct so participants are required to attend practices and events but cannot participate during suspensions.
- Develop a code of conduct policy for student drivers to include the suspension of driving privileges when in violation of the policy. The revised athletic/activities code of conduct can be used as a guide in developing this policy.

DISTRICT PREVENTION INFRASTRUCTURE

Policies set the stage for the work of BVLS, and practices enable the district to demonstrate its commitment to priorities and programming. Without having a strong framework for its efforts, the district will not get the work done in a manner that is consistent, efficient and effective. A prevention infrastructure consists of clearly defined roles and responsibilities with defined goals and objectives. The infrastructure of the district's prevention activities was reviewed, and areas of both strength and weakness were identified. A strong infrastructure allows the district to have a greater uniformity in dealing with violations, interventions, programming and comprehensive education in all schools across the district.

Key Findings

- The district-wide approach to prevention lacks continuity as there is no formal infrastructure in place with a dedicated staff member to oversee and coordinate the efforts.
- Lack of coordination across the district fails to ensure that prevention activities and regulations are implemented.
- Lack of coordination throughout the district to ensure proper monitoring of student behavior occurs.

Recommendations

- Develop a district-wide prevention plan that sets expectations and parameters for prevention work in schools and incorporates prevention related policy, practice, infrastructure and program guidelines. The plan should incorporate best practices, such as Character Counts or 40 Developmental Assets, from a district level enabling a common focus and message for prevention and positive decision making. Schools should have the flexibility to implement prevention efforts unique to their schools provided all work matches the plan of the district. DFD and other community resources can provide technical assistance in plan development.
- Provide continuing education opportunities to all staff on issues related to substance abuse prevention and intervention. Local community organizations, such as Drug-Free Delaware, are resources for this type of professional development.
- Provide education and training to all staff members involved in identifying drug and alcohol use with students. This includes school nurses.

- Seek funding to expand drug testing for students participating in extracurricular activities and students with parking privileges.
- Include in all job descriptions a responsibility to supervise students and report any violations to administration. A responsibility for providing prevention education and support should be included in the job descriptions for guidance counselor, athletic director, nurse, psychologist, social worker, mental health provider, teacher, bus driver, and coach.
- Seek funding for a district-wide prevention coordinator to educate and organize prevention efforts across the district. This coordinator should also coordinate and consult on appropriate interventions.
- Continue partnerships with outside agencies to provide support and health and social services to students and their families in the district.
- Install cameras in problem areas throughout middle and high school campuses and on school buses.

CONCLUSION

It is necessary to understand that the primary role of BVLS is to educate youth. No matter what BVLS does to improve its substance abuse prevention efforts, they can all be undone if the community does not take its responsibility of prevention seriously and take action. Due to its active role in the lives of youth, BVLS has, by default, become the service provider addressing many other issues important to youth development, including the prevention of alcohol, tobacco and other drug use. Understanding this role, BVLS has undergone an open, honest and forthright process to determine what it needs to do differently in its substance abuse prevention role. The district's role is to educate and support students when they are in its care or when their community behavior affects their school experience. While dedicated to addressing the social and emotional health of its students, BVLS, as determined by this analysis, has limited prevention efforts in place. The district seeks to be consistent and provide a safe, drug-free environment despite some policy and infrastructure challenges.



The issue of youth substance use affects all areas of the community. Community members must take their role in youth development seriously. Active engagement with others including businesses, parents, organizations, community groups, youth and especially BVLS is vital to successfully addressing this issue. The Buckeye Valley community provides a number of opportunities for community engagement in efforts to decrease substance use and abuse. Recommendations for community efforts include:

- Reach out to educate school personnel about community efforts.
- Participate in DFD to create and implement comprehensive, community-wide strategies to positively impact youth substance abuse rates and consequences.
- Create parent networks, external to the school, to work together with each other to ensure active participation in their students' choices and the monitoring of their students' activities.
- Encourage parents to talk to their children about the issues, equipping them with helpful resources to initiate informed discussions. Clear and consistent rules should be set and enforced.
- Encourage the enforcement of laws pertaining to underage drinking and drug use as a priority for law enforcement.
- Community leaders should work collaboratively to ensure local ordinances are in place to establish standards of conduct for youth in the community.
- Community leaders must work together to ensure resources for the enforcement and processing of offenders and the monitoring of the adherence to local and state laws and ordinances, and to assure swift and appropriate consequences for breaking the law.
- Faith community leaders should engage their members in dialogues related to youth substance abuse and its signs and symptoms. These leaders should have the resources to offer families support when intervening with a child who is suspected of using.
- Youth must help their peers by talking to an adult when they are concerned about friends who are using.
- Local businesses should open their doors to youth and create positive opportunities for youth to convene in the community.
- Neighborhood Watch groups and neighborhood associations must watch out for and report teen parties in the neighborhood to local police.

- Local establishments must refuse to sell alcohol to minors. They should understand that this is their role in keeping youth safe and drug free.
- Adults who provide alcohol and marijuana to youths must receive swift and severe prosecution. They should be dealt with for their role in promoting and perpetuating youth substance abuse.

All community members, youth and adult, can work collectively to create a community that does not tolerate youth who abuse substances or adults who knowingly or inadvertently



support such activity. These are just a few examples of how community members can work within their communities to address youth substance use. BVLS is actively working to prevent substance use and is taking a proactive role in improving its efforts. Community members must follow the example set by the district and take action to create a safe, substance abuse free community.

**Take action to prevent substance abuse in the Buckeye Valley
Community**

Contact Drug-Free Delaware

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