

Keene High School Substance Abuse Research Report

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Wisdom to make a difference.

“I call this community an ostrich community with its head in the sand. Parents are afraid, parents are scared, but we have to do something.”

- Keene High School staff member, September 2013

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Abstract

Background: In 2013, a panel discussing substance abuse issues at Keene High School (KHS) was held at Keene State College (KSC). A research team of health science students attended this panel and subsequently underwent research training to investigate substance abuse among KHS students. **Objectives:** (i) To better understand why substance abuse is prevalent at KHS; (ii) to use qualitative research methods to uncover why KHS students are abusing substances; and (iii) to analyze the KHS Substance Abuse Policy to determine whether a revised policy could help decrease substance abuse at the school. **Methods:** Using focus groups and one-on-one interviews, the research team interviewed KHS students, parents, staff, and inmates with a history of substance abuse at the Cheshire County Department of Corrections (DoC). The inmates were either former KHS students or they had attended high schools in the Monadnock Region. Following data collection, the research team analyzed the KHS Substance Abuse Policy by comparing it to a model policy created by a state Governor’s Commission. **Results:** The interviews revealed several possible underlying causes for substance abuse by KHS students. Analysis of the KHS Substance Abuse Policy found the policy is: (i) outdated; (ii) does not adequately promote education; (iii) does not sufficiently support students dealing with substance abuse; and (iv) detracts from student self-efficacy. **Conclusion:** The research team recommends using this research report to “open an honest conversation” with the Keene community about KHS substance abuse. It encourages school administrators to further strengthen partnerships with such groups as the Monadnock Alcohol and Drug Abuse Coalition (MADAC) to better educate KHS students, parents, and staff. It recommends updating the KHS Substance Abuse Policy and exploring the possibility of co-hosting an educational conference with KSC about substance abuse for the Keene community.

Introduction

In 2013, a panel of substance abuse experts, the Keene police chief, the former KHS school resource officer (SRO), a city councilor, the Keene Board of Education (BoE) Chair, the KHS principal, and a concerned parent, came together to discuss the prevalence of substance abuse at KHS. According to the 2011 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBS), substance abuse by KHS students exceeds the state average in many categories including use of cocaine at least once in a student's life; the taking of over-the-counter drugs to get high; taking a prescription drug illegally one or more times; using marijuana one more more times during the past 30 days; binge-drinking; having at least one drink of alcohol on one or more of the past 30 days; and using chew tobacco (Centers for Disease Control [CDC], 2011). Information from the substance abuse panel and the YRBS was used to design research questions to explore the root cause of why KHS students are abusing substances at above-average rates. One-on-one interviews and focus groups were held with KHS students, parents, teachers, janitors, administrative staff, a narcotics detective, and inmates at the DoC with a history of substance abuse. The results of this research highlighted several possible reasons for substance abuse at KHS as well as the need to re-evaluate the school's substance abuse policy.

Background

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) of KSC approved this research. IRB approval ensures the privacy, safety, health and welfare of subjects involved in a research project. Members of the research team were required to take the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative to better understand research protocol and ethics. Informed consent forms were given to subjects involved in the project. Participation was voluntary.

The research project began in August 2013 when KSC health science students attended a substance abuse panel at KSC. The panel focused on teenage substance abuse in the Monadnock Region and, in particular, at KHS. School Principal Lynne Wagner spoke of her concern about substance abuse at KHS. Before coming to Keene, Ms. Wagner had worked at a high school in Rhode Island. She said that in her first 3 months in Keene, she had experienced twice as many substance abuse violations at KHS compared to her previous school which was an inner-city institution. Former KHS SRO Matt Griffin said he had noticed a recent “glorification” of intravenous drug use by KHS students and that IV use was seen as “cool” among teens. He felt that Generation X “...is now becoming ‘Generation RX’.” Another panelist, and KHS parent, stated that the culture at the school was “play hard, party hard.” BoE Chair Christopher Coates expressed his concerns about how substance abuse at KHS was affecting student education and success.

A detective assigned to the NH Attorney General’s Drug Task force for the Western Region, which includes Cheshire County, gave further insight into substance abuse among teens in Keene. In an interview this summer the detective, who asked to remain anonymous because of his job, stated:

“Our community doesn’t understand the full extent of drug use. There are dangerous crimes associated with it. Criminals are in and out of here to deal with drugs because the demand is here...and the culture in Keene is not helpful. The community sees (Keene) as having a peaceful lifestyle but it’s not. Drug use is a major health problem here and coke (cocaine) has always been around consistently. Both kids and adults are addicted to all kinds of drugs. I get sickened with the heroin and ‘dirty drugs’. It’s such a dark lifestyle.”

The detective added that he was particularly concerned about the community’s teens, saying:

“If you get hooked young, it’s really hard. We’ve arrested people [in Keene] who became heroin addicts at 13. (When you’re) a teen, you’re not fully capable of making rational decisions and (drug use) becomes your culture.”

The detective’s statements are supported by data from the YRBS which shows higher levels of substance abuse in many categories among KHS teens when compared to other teens in NH. One example is the use of heroin. Figure 1 shows the percentage of KHS students in 2011 who used heroin one or more times during their life compared to other teens in the state. NH is represented by the blue categories and KHS by the green categories. The graph is grouped by grade and gender.

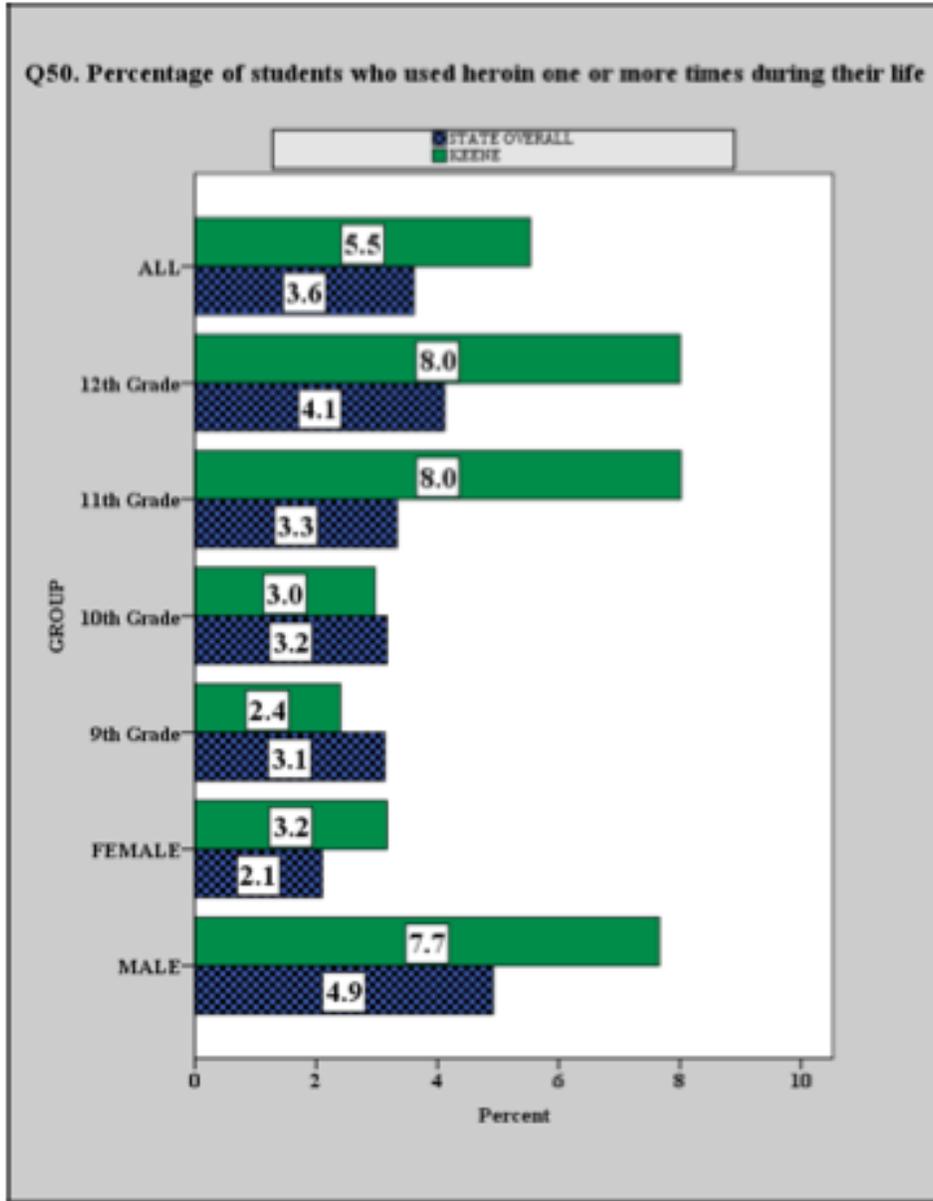


Figure 1: YRBS, grades 9th through 12th. New Hampshire Bureau of Drug and Alcohol Services, 2011.

The YRBS data, information from the detective, stories told by the substance abuse panelists, and a literature review of the Monadnock Regional Community Data Profile for Substance Abuse, the 2012 NH State Epidemiological Profile, and the Monadnock Region Strategic Plan for Prevention, all indicated the need for a research study into substance abuse among Keene's high-school population.

Methods

The research team used the 2011 YRBS data to create specific questions for the project's participants. The YRBS is a national survey that is used to assess the risky health behaviors of high school students, including substance abuse. KHS students take the YRBS every 2 years. Although the 2013 YRBS was taken by KHS students earlier this year, the results were published too late to be used for this project.

Two qualitative research methods were used to administer the interviews: Root Cause Analysis or RCA (Appendix A) and focus groups. Qualitative research allows subjects to talk more openly and in a detailed manner. In this way, researchers are able to delve more deeply into the stories behind the statistics (Creswell, 2007). For example, the 2011 YRBS found that 8.0% of KHS 12th grade students reported using heroin one or more times in their lifetime compared to 4.1% of 12th graders statewide. While this information is useful, it does not allow researchers to understand why KHS students are using heroin one or more times at nearly twice the rate of the average NH high school student.

RCA (Rooney, 2004) uses one-on-one interviews. The researcher asks the participant a question and then analyzes a participant's response more deeply by asking "why" several times. Twenty-four KHS students and 14 parents were separately interviewed in a confidential setting at the school in September 2013 using this method. An example of an RCA question used with KHS students and parents was: "More KHS students are using hard drugs like cocaine, heroin, and ecstasy than cigarettes compared to NH students overall. Why?" Focus groups consist of participants being seated in a circle and asked open-ended questions. A group of 16 people, including teachers, staff and janitors, was interviewed using this method in a confidential setting at KHS in September 2013. An example of a focus group question used with this group was: "What do you overhear in conversation in class and around the school around alcohol and drugs?"

A focus group was also used with 9 inmates (2 females, 7 males) in a confidential setting at the DoC in September 2013. A substance abuse counselor and a DoC social worker were also present. The inmates were former KHS students or had attended a high school in the Monadnock Region. All had experienced substance abuse as teens or in elementary school. An example of a focus group question asked of the inmates was: "What were the consequences of teen substance abuse on your life?"

Informed consent forms were used and participation in the project was voluntary. To ensure accuracy, all the interviews at KHS were recorded using a digital recorder and then transcribed. Because recorders were not allowed at the DoC, the research team took detailed notes. No names were used during the interviews or in the transcriptions.

Following the interviews, the research team analyzed the KHS Substance Abuse Policy which was last revised 20 years ago in 1993. Although the policy was reaffirmed in 2011, no major changes were made at that time according to BoE Policy Committee Chair Carl Panza. The research team compared the KHS policy to a model policy called the Alcohol and Other Drug Policy Recommendations for Schools 2012-2013 (New Hampshire Bureau of Drug and Alcohol Services, 2012). The model policy was created by the New Hampshire Governor's Commission on Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention, Intervention and Treatment. The research team was guided during the policy analysis by Tricia Lucas, Advocacy Director for New Futures, a non-profit organization that aims to reduce substance abuse in NH through advocacy, education, and collaboration.

Results

Section I examines the findings from the RCA interviews and focus groups. Section II describes the results from the KHS Substance Abuse Policy analysis.

Section I: RCA Interviews and Focus Group

Five main themes were identified following data analysis of the RCA interviews and focus groups: Perception, Use, Access, Impact, and Root Cause. Perception is defined as the viewpoint or 'perception' of those interviewed about substance abuse at KHS and in the broader Keene community. Use is defined as the substances that are being used and/or abused by students. Access describes how students are obtaining the substances. Impact is the consequences resulting from substance use/abuse during teenage years. Root Cause is the underlying reasons behind the use of substances by students.

Theme 1: Perception

There were 4 findings within the Perception theme: Denial, Norms, Policy, and Location.

Denial: The research team found that Keene is perceived as an idyllic New England town by many who live here. This perception insinuates that drug problems do not exist and in turn generates a feeling of denial. A parent of a male student at KHS stated:

"(There is a) false sense of security that they [students] are safe; that they're not going to have any issues if they experiment with drugs and alcohol." -KHS Parent, Sept. 2013.

A female inmate from the DoC made reference to parents who are in denial, adding:

"The attitude is, (drugs are) not in my backyard." -Female inmate, Sept. 2013

Several DoC inmates believed Keene residents are embarrassed to admit there is a drug problem. One male inmate and former Monadnock Regional High School student stated:

"Mainly, they're (people) trying to hide the problem." -Male inmate, Sept. 2013

A staff member from KHS referred to Keene as:

KSC SUBSTANCE ABUSE RESEARCH REPORT

"...an ostrich community with their head in the sand. Parents are afraid, parents are scared, but you have to do something." KHS staff member, Sept. 2013

These statements support the idea that denial about substance abuse is causing the community to 'brush the problem under the carpet'. The narcotics detective interviewed for this project confirmed this by stating:

"Our community doesn't understand the full extent of drug use. There's dangerous crimes associated with it. Criminals are in and out of here to deal drugs because there's a demand here. The culture in Keene isn't helpful." Detective, NH Attorney General's Drug Task Force, June 2013.

Norms: A norm is an acceptable standard that is set within a population. A common norm around substance abuse at KHS was that 'everyone is doing (drugs)'. A female student at KHS stated:

"So much of Keene High does it, it's hard to find a good group of friends who doesn't." KHS student, Sept. 2013.

Another student added:

"If you don't do it (drugs/drinking) then you're not cool and can't hang out with them (the cool students)...they want to be friends with them so they do what they say" -KHS Student, Sept. 2013.

Location: The research team heard that a common complaint by all interviewees was the lack of things to do in Keene. Students were bored and were using drugs and alcohol to make their lives more exciting. A former KHS student and DoC inmate said:

"In our community there's not enough for the youth to do. I would have used (drugs) a lot less if there was something to do"-Inmate, Sept. 2013.

Policy: The research team found there was a perception by students that parents of certain students were 'bigger' than the KHS Substance Abuse Policy. This meant that if a phone call was made to the administration, a consequence could be altered or reduced to benefit a student who had violated the policy. A male student at KHS said:

"People who have active parents that like to talk to the administration, get less severe punishments." -KHS male student, Sept. 2013.

A parent of a KHS student commented:

"It's a bad message to send other students, because they're looking at that thinking: 'Okay, if I do this, I better make sure my parents are able to get me out of it'" -KHS parent of a sophomore student, Sept. 2013.

Theme 2: Use

There were 4 findings within the Use theme: Students are using substances inside the school, the types of substances being used, substance use/abuse is not limited to one category of student, and students are not just using substances - they are abusing them.

Students are using in school: The research team heard that KHS students are abusing substances at school functions such as sporting events, in the school's bathrooms, and in classrooms. One sophomore female student stated:

"Kids walk around (at school) like all the time with those brown Arizona ice tea bottles. People think they're water or something but there's usually alcohol in them." KHS student, Sept. 2013.

Another female student said:

"Dark Arizona tea bottles...they carry them in their back pocket because you can't see (inside the bottle), so teachers can't say 'oh you're doing it'. They'll always have a bottle in their back pocket and you just know." KHS student, Sept. 2013.

A KHS teacher described how she detected a strong scent of marijuana in her classroom one afternoon. The scent was so strong that other students in her class began to notice it too. She pulled all the students from the back of the class where the smell was coming from into the hallway to try to discover who had brought the drug into the school but was unable to find the culprit.

KHS janitorial staff said they had found evidence of illegal substances being used in the school's bathrooms and hidden behind drop-ceiling tiles in the hallways. This type of 'evidence' was particularly prevalent during winter months when students tended to stay inside because of the cold weather.

Types of Substances Used: The research team found that that alcohol, marijuana, and chewing tobacco were among the most prevalently used substances among KHS students. However, use of heroin, cocaine, prescription drugs and 'molly' (an ecstasy derivative) were also mentioned by those interviewed.

Use Is Not Limited To One Category of Student: The research team found there was not one 'type' of student who is using. Nor is it one age group or grade level. A KHS teacher said:

"Our honors kids are doing it too. They are just smart enough to keep it "hush, hush" to keep up their image...so it's literally everywhere." KHS teacher, Sept. 2013.

One factor that did play a role in 'who used what' was socio-economic status. Students identified as lower socio-economic status by peers and KHS teachers and staff were seen as more likely to use tobacco, chewing tobacco, heroin, and alcohol. Students identified as higher socio-economic status were seen as more likely to use 'molly', marijuana, and cocaine.

Students are not just using - they are abusing: A KHS staff member said by the time some students come to KHS, they are well beyond the need for drug education and awareness:

“We can’t do prevention here because (by the time students get here), we are already into intervention and treatment. It’s too late for prevention.” KHS staff member, Sept. 2013.

A female student agreed that many students are beyond drug education by the time they arrive at KHS, saying:

“I think with things like marijuana, so many people are always on it that you can’t tell they are on it because it’s like the norm for them.” KHS student, Sept. 2013.

Theme 3: Access

There were 3 findings within the Access theme: Proximity to KSC, ID cards not being checked at stores, and parent-chaperoned parties.

Proximity to KSC: The research team found that KSC students played a role in helping KHS students get access to drugs and alcohol. An example of this was weekend parties hosted by KSC students. The research team heard that KHS students were walking into these parties without being asked if they were in high school or of ‘legal age’. KHS teachers said several of their students had friendships or were acquainted with KSC students who were recent KHS graduates and that these relationships helped high school students get illegal substances. One KHS student said that in Keene:

“They’re (drugs) really everywhere. Honestly, if you’ve never even tried to before, you can just go up to someone, ask, and they can get you drugs right away. It’s not that hard to get.”-KHS student, Sept. 2013.

An inmate and former KHS student added:

“I sold drugs to (KHS) preps, to rich kids, to jocks. They’re everywhere you go. If you want them, you’ll find them.” -Male inmate, Sept. 2013.

ID Cards Not Being Checked At Stores: According to those interviewed, the ID cards of KHS students are not consistently being checked at local stores. Many KHS students spoke about the ease of access at certain stores or bars in Keene. One student said his friend was able to purchase tobacco because he looked “old enough” when in reality he was not of age.

Parent-chaperoned parties: The research team found that parents were also playing a role in enabling KHS students to gain access to substances. Interviewees said some parents felt it was okay to host parties where drugs and alcohol were present because the parties were chaperoned. The purpose for hosting these parties at parents’ homes was to make sure their students were in a ‘safe’ drinking environment or because they did not see a problem with underage drinking. One teacher added that he had heard KHS students talk about special ‘rooms’ at these parties:

“There is a room in the back of the party that the kids talk about. That is, if they want to do heroin, cocaine or something (there), they can.” -KHS teacher, Sept. 2013.

Theme 4: Impact

There were 3 findings within the Impact theme: bullying/fighting/cliques/negative school atmosphere, sexual favors for drugs, and jail time.

Bullying/fighting/cliques/negative atmosphere: Many KHS students spoke about instances at KHS of bullying and fighting due to substance use and/or money owed for drugs. Cliques were also a factor. Students said cliques were creating a hostile environment, causing stress to some students who turn to substances as a result. One student said:

“There are cliques. I know a group of these guys and if they talk to you, you’re going to be nice because if not they’ll kill you. They think they’re the best in the school.”-KHS student, Sept. 2013.

Another student said that during the school day:

“I notice a lot of kids here, they seem like they’re always angry or upset all of the time or they’re insecure or something like that. It seems like the norm for everybody.”- KHS student, Sept. 2013.

Sexual favors for drugs: The research team found that substance use was related in some instances to sexual interactions or trading sex for drugs among KHS students. Several teachers and staff said they had overheard conversations regarding these types of transactions:

“And those that don’t have money (for drugs), or are in lower socioeconomic groups, will trade sexual services.”-KHS teacher, Sept. 2013.

Teachers and staff also spoke about seeing evidence of this type of behavior on social media sites such as Twitter with photos posted of “everything and anything”. One teacher said she had seen:

“Pictures of thongs, weed, lots and lots and lots of weed. And drinking.”-KHS teacher, Sept. 2013.

Inmates who were former KHS students also spoke about sex for drugs, saying they had seen or heard of similar experiences.

Jail Time: The research team found that several former KHS students who had begun using substances as teens, or earlier, had been incarcerated because of their substance abuse habit. A DoC social worker, who was present at the inmate focus group, said as of fall 2013, 87% of the DoC’s inmates had substance abuse issues and only 38% of these inmates had been able to obtain their high school diploma. Statistics like these reveal the impact of substance abuse on the lives and productivity of former KHS students who began using substances as teens.

Theme 5: Root Cause

There were 4 findings within the Root Cause theme: Lack of education about substance abuse in school, parental role, Guidance Counselor stigma, and lack of access to mental health services.

Lack of substance abuse education: The research team heard from all of those interviewed that there needed to be more education about substance abuse at KHS. One student illustrated this need when he said:

“Cigarettes you can get cancer from, but smoking marijuana you can’t get cancer from. That’s kind of what I heard from all my friends” -KHS Student, Sept. 2013.

Another student said:

“We haven’t really been informed in any class about the harmful use of marijuana. Like a little bit in health class we learned about alcohol...but not as much as we need, in my opinion” - KHS student, Sept. 2013.

Parents and teachers agreed that students were not getting enough education, especially about ‘hard’ drugs like heroin and cocaine:

“In all honesty, we should worry a whole lot less about the tobacco issues, and a whole lot more about the other issues going on. Tobacco is a small drop in the puddle compared to some of the other issues going on.”-KHS teacher, Sept. 2013.

Many of those interviewed said substance abuse education should be done more effectively and in greater depth in middle school or earlier. Inmates at the DoC concurred with this saying that many of them had begun using substances at elementary-school age. One inmate, and former KHS student, said:

“School could’ve taught me a lot more about addiction. I needed a lot more education about what drugs do to you and where (abuse) leads. I was in rehab by 13.”-Inmate, Sept. 2013.

Another inmate stated:

“I wasn’t really taught much about substance abuse in high school. We were taught about pot and smoking but I started with pills, not pot. And I was never taught about the dangers of IV drug use.”-Inmate, Sept. 2013.

KHS teachers said they also needed education. One teacher stated:

“I want more education about (substance abuse) symptoms – what should I look for?”- KHS teacher, Sept. 2013.

Another teacher asked for more training on how to deal with substance abuse in the classroom:

“It’s hard to know how to react to a (drug violation). You’re trying to be a detective but what’s the best way to approach a student (accused of using)? Who do you call for help? I’ve just had to learn how to deal with it myself.”-KHS teacher, Sept. 2013.

Parental role: KHS students stated that some parents were not being good role models. They felt parents were too lenient and needed to have “stronger” conversations with their children about the consequences of doing drugs. Several students said they knew of parents who were abusing drugs and that it was okay, therefore, for their children to abuse drugs too. One KHS teacher said:

“Mom and dad do it and they think it’s fine, so (the students) do it with mom or dad” - KHS teacher, Sept. 2013.

Many of the inmates told how they began using drugs with their parents and/or siblings. One inmate said:

“My dad always smoked pot...and what older people did, I did.”-Inmate, Sept. 2013.

Another inmate told how his brother and father both sold drugs and that he only had a relationship with his mother because she was “a dealer”.

Some KHS parents told the research team they felt uncomfortable talking about substance abuse issues with their children because they wanted to be ‘friends’ with them. They feared that by talking about drugs, it would adversely affect their relationship. The teachers said they were frustrated by attitudes like this. They felt that parents preferred to ignore drug problems at KHS instead of tackling them “head on”.

Guidance Counselor stigma: The research team found there appeared to be a stigma felt by students about going to a Guidance Counselor for help with substance abuse. Some KHS students said they felt uncomfortable around or unfamiliar with the school’s Guidance Office. Other students said they would be “made fun of” if they went to Guidance for help. There was also a perception by students that Guidance Counselors did not interact enough with students. One student stated:

“... counselors stay in their office all day and they never interact or anything, or come to school events. So I don’t know why anyone would like trust them I guess.” -KHS student, Sept. 2013.

There was also a concern that if a student reported they were using illegal substances to a Guidance Counselor, they would “get in trouble” for violating the school’s substance abuse policy and would face serious consequences as a result.

Lack of mental health services: The research team found there was a general belief that it was very difficult to get mental health services for students who may be using substances as a way to deal with mental illness. As a result:

“I feel people are self-medicating. Our mental health system, nationally, is broken.”- KHS staff member, Sept. 2013.

KHS teachers and staff felt the cost of mental health services, lack of healthcare insurance, and a poor awareness about mental health issues in the community, were all barriers to students getting the help they needed. One KHS staff member said:

“It is very difficult for (students) to get treatment, whether it’s a true mental health issue that they need support for, or for substance abuse...therefore sometimes the only thing that they get is jail.” -KHS staff member, Sept. 2013.

Section II: Analysis of the KHS Substance Abuse Policy

A model substance abuse policy developed by the New Hampshire Governor’s Commission on Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention, Intervention and Treatment (2012-2013) was used to identify possible areas of improvement in the current KHS Substance Abuse Policy. Included in the model policy was the example of Hanover High School’s substance abuse policy. Hanover’s policy was a good comparison for KHS because the two schools share many similarities including size of school, similar geographic location, and a college-town setting. After comparing the policies, the research team found the KHS policy:

1. Needs to be updated
2. Does not promote students staying in school
3. Detracts from student self-efficacy
4. Lacks Support/resources for students

1. Policy update needed: The KHS policy was last revised 20 years ago in 1993. Although the policy was reaffirmed in 2011, no major changes were made to the policy at that time according to BoE Policy Committee Chair Carl Panza. In November, 2013, Mr. Panza attended a class session with the research team at KSC where he agreed that the policy should be updated and revised.

2. Policy does not promote staying in school: The research team found the consequences for a student violation of the KHS Substance Abuse Policy did not help a student stay in school or successfully complete their education. Currently, the consequence for a first substance abuse offense results in a minimum of 5 days’ out-of-school (OSS) suspension. A second offense receives a 20-day OSS. During OSS, a student cannot make up classwork. Missed classwork affects GPA and the quality of a student’s educational experience. Another potential effect is the opportunity for students in OSS to participate in risky behavior at home. This is particularly true of students who do not have parental supervision during OSS or are living in a drug-taking environment.

3. Policy detracts from student self-efficacy: The model policy states that when a student is failing school, their self-efficacy is greatly inhibited. This may result in more risk-taking behaviors such as drug use. Moreover, KHS may prevent a student participating in athletics or club activities if they are failing academically. A former KHS student and current DoC inmate said she had loved playing sports - it was the one thing she did “for fun”. Yet when her grades dropped too low she was not allowed to participate in sports anymore. She felt this contributed to her using more drugs because athletics had helped her “stay clean”.

The Governor’s Commission describes the importance of self-efficacy in student education this way:

“Restrictions of privileges are the most common form of disciplinary action, such as temporary or long-term removal from a club or sports team or from school grounds or

classroom participation. It is recommended that such restrictions be used judiciously and thoughtfully as exclusion can often further ostracize a student from a sense of acceptance, stability, inclusion and self-efficacy, and self-worth” (Alcohol and Other Drug Policy Recommendations for Schools, 2013, p.19).

Support lacking: The research team found that the KHS policy could do more to support drug prevention or treatment efforts for students. According to the Governor’s Commission, a school must play an active role in getting students the help they need and be supportive of students who use substances. In other words, a school should:

“...promote a climate in which students can seek help if they are in distress from their own or others’ use of alcohol, tobacco, drugs and other impairing substances” - (Alcohol and Other Drug Policy Recommendations for Schools, 2013, p.14).

Finally, the model policy states that a school should support students who are in recovery from substance abuse, and if needed, refer students to outside resources for help in the community.

Discussion/Recommendations

Research into substance abuse at KHS has identified several significant areas of concern. The research team proposes to use this report to “initiate an open conversation in the community” around substance abuse. It makes the following recommendations to help accomplish this:

Support: The current KHS substance abuse policy is mainly focused on a consequence-based, zero-tolerance approach using OSS. Following a substance abuse violation, there are mandatory meetings for the student with a KHS team consisting of a nurse, Guidance Counselor, school resource officer, and others. However, the policy does not place enough emphasis on how to help the student with their substance abuse issues. The addition of a substance abuse counselor to KHS this year is a good first step. The research team recommends placing money in the BoE budget to make the substance abuse counselor a permanent, multi-year position. The model policy also highlights the importance of a school’s role in educating students and parents and training teachers/staff to properly recognize, handle, and implement the regulations regarding substance abuse violations within a student body. The KHS policy would particularly benefit from placing more emphasis on the role of parents. In the model policy, parents are required to participate fully in all steps of a “...suspected and confirmed policy violation and subsequent disciplinary action unless there is evidence that requiring such participation may compromise the well-being or safety of the student” (Alcohol and Other Drug Policy Recommendations for Schools, 2013, p.20).

Treatment: The model policy advocates for the creation of individualized actions plans for each student involved in substance abuse. This includes cooperative agreements with treatment institutions in the community and mandatory treatment for repeat offenses. According to the model policy, consequences such as OSS are detrimental to a student’s education and may promote substance use by the student outside of school. In-school suspensions (ISS) would be more beneficial. An ISS could help give structure to a student struggling with substance abuse and lessen the chances of risky behavior in the future. Regarding participation in athletics/club

activities, the model policy recommends suspending students from games but not from athletic practices or minor club activities because such activities help promote self-efficacy and increase the student's involvement in school. The Governor's Commission states:

“Use of out of school suspension should be reserved for extreme situations and when all other responses have been exhausted, as it often has a detrimental effect on educational and health outcomes, further exacerbating low attachment to school, educational failure and substance abuse.” (Alcohol and Other Drug Policy Recommendations for Schools, 2013, p.22).

Finally, students should also be able to refer themselves to a school substance abuse team without fear of consequences. The model policy states that students may refer themselves to the substance abuse team “...without the fear that they will be punished for violating the substance abuse policy”(Alcohol and Other Drug Policy Recommendations for Schools, 2013, p. 10).

Education: The model policy recommends allowing students to use ISS to complete school work and that this work should count for academic credit. This supports student self-efficacy and allows students to stay in a safe environment, free from substances, while continuing their education (Alcohol and Other Drug Policy Recommendations for Schools, 2013).

Conclusion

In addition to revising the KHS substance abuse policy, the research team recommends 2 potential strategies to support KHS in decreasing substance abuse among its students. Strategy I recommends deeper collaborative partnerships with substance abuse organizations in the Monadnock Region. Collaborative partnerships help provide additional education, support, and resources for both school administrators and families struggling with substance abuse issues at home. Strategy II advocates for a collaborative educational conference at KSC to help bring the community together to solve the problem of teen substance abuse. The involvement of KSC would be important for many reasons. The college's motto states: “Enter to learn, go forth to serve”. Allowing the high school and college to coordinate efforts to decrease substance abuse gives college students the opportunity to actualize the KSC motto. While substance abuse may begin with the high-school teen, it has a ripple effect on the entire community.

Strategy 1: New Futures Advocacy Director Tricia Lucas recommended partnering with the community as part of a broader effort to tackle substance abuse at KHS. A list of potential partners is provided below:

- **MADAC- Monadnock Alcohol & Drug Abuse Coalition**
 - Promotes alcohol and substance abuse reduction through educational activities. MADAC also advocates for policy change and funding for efforts toward their mission. **Phone:** 603-719-4150. **Email:** mdrew@scshelps.org.
<http://www.madacnh.org/>
- **Safe and Drug Free Schools Committee**
 - Committee of concerned community members working together to reduce alcohol and drug abuse in the Keene area.

- **MVP-Monadnock Voices for Prevention**
 - MVP strives to reduce and build resources for substance abuse in the community. **Phone:** (603) 357-1922. <http://www.monadnockvoices.org/index.html>
- **HCC-Hinsdale Community Coalition**
 - Brings adults and teens together to work on prevention and treatment of tobacco, alcohol, and other drug abuse issues. **Phone:** (603) 336-6135. **Email:** hcccoordinator@gmail.com. <http://www.hpcnh.org/>
- **Phoenix House**
 - Uses a holistic approach toward prevention, treatment and addiction programs. **Phone:** (603) 358- 4041. **Email:** abento@phoenixhouse.org (Alisa Bento) www.phoenixhouse.org/
- **WGYB-We've Got your Back**
 - A parent run organization. Parents work together to help their children make healthy decisions. **Phone:** 603-239-8390 (Angela Stebbins). **Email:** WGYBinfo@gmail.com. <https://sites.google.com/site/wgybwinnh/>

Strategy 2: The research team would like to continue to be actively engaged in helping the Keene community decrease substance abuse among its teens. One idea is to hold a collaborative conference at KSC for students, parents, teachers, substance abuse professionals, and other concerned community members. The conference would provide education on topics of concern identified in this research report. It would give community members the opportunity to learn from professionals and connect with people and organizations related to substance abuse.

~ end ~

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Appendix A

Root Cause Analysis

Root Cause Analysis (RCA) is a method used to solve problems by finding its root cause or causes. The intention of RCA is that by pinpointing *why* something happened, rather than only simply *what* happened, a problem can be properly addressed. Knowing the reason for the cause of the problem is necessary in order to prevent it from continuing (Rooney & Vanden Heuvel, 2004). RCA was used during KHS student and parent interviews to find the root causes of substance abuse at KHS. To do this, after receiving an answer to an interview question, the researchers often simply asked “Why?” With each “Why?” the answers came closer to the original (or root) cause. An example of the RCA sheet used for the KHS interviews is shown below.

TOOLS 5 WHYS

For each problem, think about why this is a problem for your region, and make a note of that in the first **WHY?** box. Then ask repeatedly: **WHY?** then, **HOW?** then **HOW?**, etc. This process should bring you to a **root cause** of this issue.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

WHY?

WHY?

WHY?

WHY?

WHY?

ROOT CAUSE

TOOLS - 5 WHYS 31