

Youth Policy

and

Empowerment Project

Findings and
Recommendations
ATHLETIC POLICY

Ideas and suggestions from Maine youth designed to help schools and communities enhance and improve school alcohol and drug policy

Introduction

In June 2001, AdCare Educational Institute was awarded a grant from the Maine State Office of Substance Abuse (Department of Behavioral and Developmental Services) that was designed to decrease underage drinking. The goal of the project is to change factors in the social, legal, economic and political environment that encourage, enable or support underage drinking. The philosophy of the proposal is that, because underage drinking is a problem affecting the youth population, the most effective way to analyze and improve the environment is to directly involve the youth in the discussion.

The grant application proposed the creation of an active, diverse group of students from around the state of Maine; training them in public speaking, facilitation, and policy issues; providing opportunity for them to develop Findings and Recommendations about school drug and alcohol policy; and providing transportation and support in their efforts to work with individual schools to implement some of their Recommendations.

This document represents the second year of the project and contains the Findings and Recommendations of the youth concerning **school alcohol and drug policy for student athletes**. The document is the result of an intensive three day institute during which the youth learned from experts in the field and combined their new knowledge with their own ideas and experiences. This new work complements last year's Findings and Recommendations on general school alcohol and drug policy.

The Youth Empowerment and Policy Group fully intends that these documents further discussion and improve policy in schools around the state. The group welcomes the opportunity to interact with other youth, parent, or school groups interested in improving policy in their communities. If you or somebody you know might be interested in working with our group, please call AdCare at 626-3615.

DEFINITIONS

A **Hallmark** is an ideal. It is our goal, what we strive for.

Findings describe what the reality is. This is what really happens in practice from a youth perspective.

Recommendations are what youth think needs to be done to achieve the hallmarks. They should be remedies to the findings.

Suggested actions represent examples of how to implement the recommendations.

Hallmark A Policy is clear and concise, and an active part of the coaching and administrative process. (Written procedures need to be clearly and precisely defined and clearly understood by all)

YOUTH FINDINGS:

Policy is often not clear or concise. Athletes often routinely sign pledges because they “have to” without giving thought to the commitment or consequences.

There is a lack of follow-up during the season. Coaches do not take a pro-active approach to insure the policy is followed.

YOUTH RECOMMENDATIONS:

Any pledge document should simply state the drug free expectations and consequences for infractions.

Before signing the coach and athletes should read and discuss the document.

There should be regularly scheduled reviews of the policy by the coach and team throughout the season.

YOUTH SUGGESTED ACTION:

Have regular meetings before away games to discuss policy on use.

Have coaches/administrative staff go over policy with their athletes each season and include a question and answer time.

Have coaches and administrative staff review policy prior to the school year to insure clarity and that everyone has the same understanding of the policy.

Hallmark B Teachers/coaches have appropriate ways of responding to stories/information of drug use.

YOUTH FINDINGS:

Some teachers/coaches hear stories of drug use/abuse and are uncertain about how to respond.

YOUTH RECOMMENDATIONS:

Coaches/teachers need to be more aware of the policy and respond in a fair and impartial way. Look into a situation regardless of who the athlete is/status.

Have a system in place for reporting concerns about student/athlete drug use/stories.

YOUTH SUGGESTED ACTION:

Have a mandatory meeting between coach and athlete to clarify circumstances to determine if further action is needed.

Place suggestion box for anonymous reporting.

Make sure teachers, parents, and students understand the policy and have access to the coaches or reporting system.

Hallmark C Schools enforce policy in a fair and reasonable manner. (Consistent interpretation and enforcement)

YOUTH FINDINGS:

Policy is not always enforced fairly. Star athletes may experience a double standard/less severe consequences than others.

Consequences are sometimes inconsistent with violation with the same consequence regardless of the degree of the infraction.

Some coaches interpret policy differently (between sports).

Schools sometimes punish students whom self-report equally with those who are not forthcoming.

Schools focus on punitive sanctions rather than educational sanctions.

YOUTH RECOMMENDATIONS:

Consequences should be fairly enforced and not be based on status/ability.

Athletes who self report will receive lesser punishment or offered treatment interventions.

Coaches need to agree and maintain certain consequences for certain action before/prior to school year.

Sanctions for violations should be graduated and offer help as well as punishment.

YOUTH SUGGESTED ACTION:

Devise a plan for self reporting - range of sanctions with educational/treatment options.

School obtains additional resources for assessment/intervention.

An impartial over-site person or group reviews sanctions.

Hallmark D Schools, coaches, parents and community encourage drug free athletes all year long.

YOUTH FINDINGS:

Some contracts are for season only - gives the message that it is acceptable to use substance off-season.

Coaches/teachers do not always act as role models.

Some community members/parents furnish and condone substance use.

YOUTH RECOMMENDATIONS:

Community (everyone) continues to remind and encourage sobriety throughout the year regardless of contract.

Provide alternative drug free activities.

Find supportive community members.

YOUTH SUGGESTED ACTION:

Provide education/awareness to adults at open house, pre-season meetings, etc. Teachers/coaches/staff need to refrain from war stories or making light of alcohol use.

Drug free activities should be available as alternatives to “parties” for teams during the season.

Coaches sponsor “team night” activities during the school year.