

## Parents On Board

Welcome to "Parents On Board", a newsletter designed for parents of Enfield's Middle and High School Students. Each month, we write on a topic of concern for the parents of today's teens. It is a different world than the one you grew up in. Parents need the latest information to be able to support, direct and assist their teens in making the right decisions for their lives today and for their futures. Each issue, we focus on a significant finding from the ERASE Regional Trends Report (year 2000) which surveyed students in grades six through twelve from the surrounding towns of Somers, Ellington, East Hartford, Vernon, and Glastonbury. The average use rates from these towns are representative of Enfield's student body seeing as urban, suburban and rural communities are represented. In this issue we focus on the start of a new school year which brings new classes, new friends and for some the transition from elementary to middle school or from middle school to high school.

### Alcohol Use Among Teens In Our Region Survey Says

- Alcohol use more than doubled between 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grades from 5% to 12%. It nearly twice is many used between the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades from 12% to 20%. It more than doubled between 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grades from 20% to 45%. It increased again between the 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades from 45% to 62%. This demonstrates that almost two-thirds of all 12<sup>th</sup> graders surveyed use alcohol.
- **Binge drinking** doubled between the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade from 3% to 6%. It grew more than 4 times between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade from 6% to 27%. It more than doubled between 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades from 27% to 55%, which means that more than half 12<sup>th</sup> graders are binge drinking. Among the 12<sup>th</sup> grade students who actually use alcohol (62%), their binge-drinking rate is 77.5% - or 3 out of every 4. Bottom line - if your 12<sup>th</sup> grader is drinking alcohol, they are most likely bingeing. **The definition of binge drinking is the consumption of 4 or more alcoholic beverages at one event for girls and 5 or more drinks for boys.**

### Turning A New Leaf

As the fall approaches and we enter a new school year, many of you are faced with sending your child to Middle School or High School for the very first time. With this new phase of life comes the difficult task of trying to balance your child's privileges while keeping them safe. Along with a new school come new classes and new friends. It is very important as a parent, to keep an eye on the new friends that your child makes and the groups and cliques they become a part of.

The transition from middle school to high school can be a very difficult one for many of our children. The new environment, new teachers and greater independence in turn can create almost a culture shock. When making such a transition, our children go from being the oldest kids in school to the youngest. They go from the kids that everyone takes note of and looks up to, to the kids that everyone overlooks and frowns upon. This may cause them to act in a way that they normally wouldn't, just to be noticed.

As shown in the Regional Trends Report, our youth are drinking alcohol at extremely high rates. Of the students surveyed, the use rates more than doubled between 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grades from 20% to 45%. Where we see these large increases from grade to grade, there are windows of opportunity to intervene. Students reported that they used in their own

home and at a friend's home most often. With this knowledge, we should be able to greatly curb some of these increases between grades by providing better supervision of our teens. According to national studies, the time that teens tend to get into the most trouble, including consuming alcohol, is between 3 pm and 6 pm. These hours tend to be hours that parents are still at work and teens are left to go home after school and entertain themselves. Unfortunately this leads to dangerous and risky behaviors. Teenagers are capable of doing things for themselves and keeping busy, but often need guidance. That's where you come in!

Getting your child involved with an activity after school such as a sports team, a job, art class or music, will lessen the gap of free time they have from when they get out of school until the time you get home from work. This is an important time for the development of our teens. While you want to encourage their growth, you still need to provide limits.

### **What's A Parent to Do?**

When your child has friends over, it is not enough to just be home. Make sure you are present as a visible figure. Check in on them and see what they are up to. Provide and encourage after school activities that will keep them happy and busy during the hours when there is little supervision. Give your teen some responsibilities around the house like chores or in the community through volunteer service. Have a discussion with your child about the rules that have been established and follow through with them. Rules and boundaries mean nothing unless there are consequences to follow.

Contact your Youth Service Bureau (YSB) at 253-5300 for ideas related to helping your child stay structured and safe. The YSB is here to help you – why not give them a call!

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