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**Anti-drug education methods adapt to times**

By **ASHLEY M. SLAYTON**

Friday, January 22, 2010

The days of pumping students full of "this is your brain on drugs" public service announcements are long gone.

Drug and alcohol abuse educators these days have a more scientific approach based on results.




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Longview schools discontinued programs such as Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE) and have begun using research-based government funded programs. With that transition, drug education curriculum also has changed.

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**COMMENTING:** What do you think about the plan for improvements?  
 "To truly be effective in altering the behavior of young people (a program) must be factual and it must provide them with tools they can use for their life," said Susan Erwin Morgan, executive director of East Texas Council on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse.



Les Hassell/News-Journal Photo (ENLARGE)

ETCADA Drug Prevention Specialist Kara Odom works with students at Foster Middle School. "We're giving them the reasons why they should (say no), the skills to do it and a chance to practice those skills," Odom says of student drug education programs.

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"The practice in the past years is that we would go into the school and do one single program," Morgan said. "We used to sit the kids all in an auditorium and do an assembly. Our methods have changed."

The organization now uses more targeted methods, including providing drug prevention specialists who educate students in a classroom setting.

ETCADA's prevention programs are based on measured results. The organization tests students on their knowledge of alcohol and drug abuse and peer pressure before and after programs. It tailors the curriculum accordingly, Morgan said.

Drug prevention educators also work with teachers to identify students who are at risk for drug abuse and meet with them during group sessions for 10 weeks.

"It's a lot more personal. Many times when children grow up in families where drugs are used, their lives and decisions are affected by that," Morgan said. A lot of factors go into determining if a child is at risk. Educators study the child's home life and family income level before deciding which students are eligible

"A lot of times (prevention education) was fear based," said ETCADA Drug Prevention Specialist Kara Odom. "They would say 'don't do this.' They discovered that that didn't really work ... We're not just telling them they should say no. We're giving them the reasons why they should, the skills to do it and a chance to practice those skills."

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**Anti-drug programs**

ETCADA serves 23 counties and receives about \$744,301 annually in federal funds for its school-based prevention programs, Morgan said, but its programs are not used in every school because of a lack of funding.

DARE formerly served as the district's chief anti-drug and alcohol education program. It provides students with information about peer pressure and drug abuse through officer-led classroom sessions. Longview ISD and the Longview Police Department sponsored the program in the early 2000s. At one time, the department employed five full-time DARE instructors. Longview police and the district eventually severed ties with the national program because of the cost of funding it, said police spokesman Kevin Brownlee.

Though the program is still in place at some schools in the region, many educators count on less expensive ways. Longview ISD has leaned heavily on local resources that offer drug prevention programs. Partners in Prevention — a city administered community partnership program — and Region 7 Education Service Center — an area schools resource center — also offer free school programs.

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Through Forever Friends, a mentoring program provided by Partners in Prevention, the group stresses the importance of maintaining a drug-free lifestyle. Region 7 provides teacher workshops during the year through a Drug and Violence Education program. The organizations play a role in Red Ribbon Week, a national awareness campaign, providing pamphlets, ribbons and hosting essay contests.

Educating children at every age is critical, Morgan said. ETCADA offers three programs for students — Life Skills Training for elementary students, Youth Connection for middle school students and Project Toward No Drug Abuse, an intervention program for alternative school students and juvenile detention centers.

"It's all connected. We believe that drug abuse is often times a common thread in behaviors that harm our society. If we can prevent an addict from forming ... we can make communities healthier, strengthen families and improve quality of life for everyone," Morgan said.

Longview police have remained active in drug prevention education in Longview ISD through school resource officers. Officers are stationed at middle and high school campuses to ensure students' safety, Brownlee said. They also work with administrators to conduct prevention programs on the school's requests.

The Gregg County Sheriff's Office maintains a DARE officer in Sabine schools. The involvement has helped foster a relationship between law enforcement and students, Capt. Mike Claxton said, adding the curriculum has been updated to meet modern needs.

"What worked 10 or 15 years ago won't work now. You have to change to make your level of instruction and your awareness meet the trends," Claxton said.

The more sources reaching out to children, the better, Odom said.

"If the community's not behind something, it's not going to work. People have to be given information to make a choice. You can't make informed decisions without being informed. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure."

**Texas adolescent alcohol, drug abuse**

The Texas Department of State Health Services conducts a statewide school survey of substance use with the assistance of the Public Policy Research Institute at Texas A&M University. Anonymous surveys are reviewed from about 99,000 students from 62 school districts in grades seven through 12.

The survey indicates alcohol is the most widely used substance among secondary school students. In 2008, 63 percent of students said they had used alcohol at some point. Girls reported a 64 percent rate of alcohol use during their lifetime compared with boys who reported a 62 percent rate.

**Other findings:**

- Marijuana is the most commonly used illegal drug among grades seven through 12.
- About 6.8 percent of teens reported having used cocaine or crack cocaine during their lifetime.
- Boys are likely to use tobacco and most illegal drugs more frequently than girls.
- White students are more likely than Hispanics or black to report using unprescribed prescription drugs.

**Source:** 2008 Texas School Survey of Substance Use

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## Texas students' substance abuse

Illegal substance	% of lifetime use	% past month use
Alcohol	62.9	30.4
Tobacco	31.7	12.9
Marijuana	24.6	10
Cocaine/Crack	6.8	2.2
Hallucinogens	4.4	1.5
Steroids	1.5	.5
Ecstasy	5.1	1.8
Heroin	1.4	.5
Methamphetamine	3.5	.8
DXM/Triple C'd	.8	2.3
Coedine Cough Syrup	5.2	1.8
Xanax/Alprazolam	12.7	4.8

**Source:** 2008 Texas School Survey of Substance Use

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