

New Phila fourth-graders complete drug-abuse prevention classes

By Nancy Molnar

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By Staff Reporter

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The training is backed by over 30 scientific studies and is recognized as a model or exemplary program by an array of government agencies including the U.S. Department of Education and the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention.

NEW PHILADELPHIA Fourth-graders at South Elementary School had a graduation party Friday, but not because they have finished their education. Their observance capped an eight-week program designed to teach them how to avoid using drugs, alcohol and cigarettes.

Children and parents reacted favorably to the lessons, called Takin' It to the Schools, which made their debut in New Philadelphia City Schools fourth-grade classes this school year.

"I think it's good that they're teaching the kids at an early age," said Michael LaBiche, who attended the pizza party that capped the sessions at South Elementary School on Friday. Waiting until high school, when students may have already been exposed to harmful options, might be too late.

Principal Jackie Triplett said the program went well, with students taking the class during lunch and recess.

"I think fourth grade is the a perfect grade level to start with, and they certainly are maturing," she said.

Fourth-grader Landon LaBiche said he learned that cocaine, marijuana and beer are not good for you.

Fellow student Asher Zimmerman said he learned about “not smoking and doing bad stuff like that. It hurts your teeth and your lungs and it’s really bad for you.”

Offering students the medical reasons for avoiding harmful substances was a valuable part of the curriculum, Michael LaBiche said.

Parents John Crites and Laura Warner said they would “absolutely” recommend that other parents allow their children to go through the Takin’ It to the Schools lessons.

“Anything that is beneficial to helping them be steered in the right path is a great thing in this world that has a lot of negativity in it,” Crites said.

Participants’ self-esteem building activities included writing positive traits about their classmates on paper drawings of diamonds. Several students said they were unaware of the attributes mentioned by others.

“So there’s things that our friends see in us that we don’t see in ourselves,” said Samantha Wottle, Takin’ It to the Schools facilitator.

“Self-esteem is one of our most important lessons,” said Tammy Thacker, Takin’ It to the Schools facilitator. “It plays in everything.”

“I think I learned to be more open to things, just to be more stress-relieved,” said student Abbie Warner. ”

Students talked about things they could do, such as taking a nap or playing a game, when they become overly stressed.

Student Makenna Smith talked about the decision-making skills she learned.

“I think I should think twice before I do things,” she said. “I think I should un-stress myself, and help other people with it, too.”

“It taught me to be careful about what I do, especially if somebody is asking me to do something that is not good for me,” said Makenna Crites.

“It taught me how to say ‘no’ to something,” said Mya McGhee. “I would walk away and just say, ‘No, not right now.’ Overall, I loved this program.”

Personal & Family Counseling Services has been offered Takin’ It to the Schools in Tuscarawas and Carroll counties since 2002. It has been in Dover, Tuscarawas Valley, Indian Valley, Newcomerstown, Garaway, Claymont, Carrollton, and this year added Connotton Valley, Brown Local and New Philadelphia City Schools. It served 2,282 students in 2017-2018 school year.

The program uses the Botvin LifeSkills Training program. It is administered primarily to students in grades four and five in the county, with a few schools continuing with it in the middle school. It is designed to help students build self-confidence and develop coping skills to combat the risk factors known to promote unsafe behaviors.

The Personal & Family Counseling staff meet with students once a week for eight weeks, with a different topic each session. Topics include self-esteem, decision making, tobacco, advertising, anger and stress management, communication skills, social skills and assertiveness. Facilitators look at eight target areas and work to develop students’ strength in these areas, according to Jodi Salvo, Takin’ It to the Schools coordinator. Each session includes both an educational component and a hands-on learning activity that demonstrates how each lesson can be applied.

Rather than merely teaching information about drugs, Salvo said, Botvin LifeSkills Training consists of three major components that cover the critical domains found to promote drug use. Research has shown that students who develop skills in these three domains are far less likely to engage in a wide range of high-risk behaviors.

The three components are:

n Drug resistance skills, which enables young people to recognize and challenge common misconceptions about tobacco, alcohol and other drug use. Through coaching and practice, they learn information and practical skills for dealing with peers and media pressure to become users.

n Personal self-management skills, in which students learn how to examine their self-image and its effects on behavior; set goals and keep track of personal progress; identify everyday decisions and how they may be influenced by others; analyze problem situations, and consider the consequences of each alternative solution before making decisions; reduce stress and anxiety, and look at personal challenges in a positive light.

n General social skills, in which students develop the necessary skills to overcome shyness, communicate effectively and avoid misunderstandings, initiate and carry out conversations, handle social requests, utilize both verbal and nonverbal assertiveness skills to make or refuse requests, and recognize that they have choices other than aggression or passivity when faced with tough situations.

Botvin LifeSkills Training is designed to use developmentally appropriate and collaborative learning strategies taught through lecture, discussion, coaching, and practice to enhance students' self-esteem, self-confidence, ability to make decisions, and ability to resist peer and media pressure.

The program was developed by Dr. Gilbert J. Botvin, a leading prevention expert. It is backed by over 30 scientific studies, Salvo said, and is recognized as a model or exemplary program by an array of government agencies including the U.S. Department of Education and the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention.

Reach Nancy at 330-364-8402 or nancy.molnar@timesreporter.com.

On Twitter: [@nmolnarTR](https://twitter.com/nmolnarTR)