

Kent County to expand positive health directive

Botvin LifeSkills Training course being piloted to ninth- and 10th-graders at Sparta, Cedar Springs high schools.

By [Justin Dawes](#)

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The Kent County Health Department plans to expand a program meant to promote positive development and prevent substance use in grade school students.

The department has been piloting the Botvin LifeSkills Training program to ninth- and 10th-grade students at Sparta High School and Cedar Springs High School.

The program is an interactive, skills-based program designed to promote positive health and personal development to help students achieve competency in the skills that have been shown to prevent substance use, violence and other health risk behaviors, the county said.

The expansion of this program is included in the work plan by the Kent County Opioid Task Force, according to a letter sent to the board by Teresa Branson, Kent County deputy administrative health officer.

“Many of our efforts related to the opioid crisis have been reactive in nature, focusing on intervention and treatment of those who already face addiction,” Branson said. “We believe that greater emphasis needs to be placed on education of youth for prevention programming.”

She said the students involved now are providing positive feedback through pre- and post-test evaluations.

There is a waitlist of schools interested in offering the program, and the department is ready to meet the “vital opportunities to expand our reach to youth with the knowledge and skills they need to make healthy choices,” Branson said.

The county recently began the program for high school-aged students at the Kent County Juvenile Detention Facility, and the Kent County Girls Court recently indicated interest in the program and is among those on the waitlist.

To support the work required by the expansion of the Botvin program, one full-time public health educator position will be created within the health department. The annual cost of salary and benefits for the position is \$79,039. The remaining \$19,590 in funding will be used to cover the costs of supplies, travel and overhead costs.

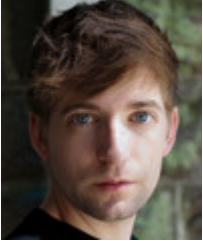
The state has designated funds for education in this area for at-risk youth. Branson said the department believes the money spent on prevention will be returned through savings in treatment and other areas, such as crime, loss of productivity and other social problems.

A total of \$98,629 in funding was awarded by Lakeshore Regional Entity for June 1, 2019, through Sept. 30, 2020, half going to the 2019 fiscal year and half going to the 2020 fiscal year.

These funds are earmarked as part of the state's liquor tax for substance use education, said Adam London, Kent County administrative health officer, so administration does not believe the status of LRE will affect these funds.

LRE, which distributes Medicaid funds to community mental health organizations in West Michigan, recently was informed by the state that its contract would be canceled due to ongoing issues, as the Business Journal previously reported.

London said the department will try to fulfill requests for the services on a first-come, first-served basis but also will try to consider the rates of substance use in certain areas.



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