

Program to fill void

By EMILY GEDDE Staff Writer
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A school-based prevention program is on its way to Falls High School next fall.

In September, the school will implement Botvin *LifeSkills Training*, an evidence-based behavioral health curriculum, said BethAnne Slatinski, Planning and Implementation grant coordinator of Koochiching Area Prevention in Education, or KAPE.

“This came about because we didn’t have a law enforcement officer doing the DARE program (this year),” Slatinski said. “Locally, there isn’t an officer certified to teach the program.”

Officer Jill Elsberry, who previously taught the DARE program to sixth-grade students, relocated with her family outside of the community earlier this year. Knowing there was an absence in the program, Slatinski and other staff members set out to find a replacement.

“LifeSkills is very comparable to DARE,” Slatinski said. “Five years after the program, students are still making health decisions... It’s an evidence-based program.”

There are two phases of the grant, and FHS made it through the first one. Officials will be notified in February if the school made it through the second phase.

“One phase is our staff will be trained in the curriculum, the other is we will be fully funded,” Slatinski explained. “Even if we’re not fully funded, we still will be trained and able to do the curriculum... We’re really excited we made first cut.”

The curriculum will target sixth-grade students.

“Our goal is to teach kids how to make decisions surrounding drugs, alcohol and relationships,” Slatinski said. “They’ll also learn how to handle different types of peer pressure situations.”

In addition, the curriculum has a unit on advertising, which is a hot topic lately with vaping and e-cigarette companies targeting youth, Slatinski said.

“Kids really don’t believe a company like JUUL would specifically advertise to them,” she said. “I really like that advertising is part of it.”

Without the DARE program, this year’s sixth-grade students are still being exposed to different lessons based on similar principles of the program. Slatinski and another staff members are visiting the students once a month and doing different lessons.

“We’re making sure kids are learning what they need to learn and make healthy decisions,” she said.