

# MIDDLETOWN TOWNSHIP BOARD OF EDUCATION

59 Tindall Road  
Middletown, NJ 07748  
Phone (732) 671-3850  
Fax: (732) 615-9351  
www.middletownk12.org

Contact: Karen L. Bilbao, Superintendent  
Phone: 732-671-3850; ext. 1002  
[bilbaok@middletownk2.org](mailto:bilbaok@middletownk2.org)

Marianne Kligman  
Media Relations, [klig30662@aol.com](mailto:klig30662@aol.com)  
732-758-9089; 732-586-1232 (cell)

## Press Release FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Pictures left to Right, Middletown Student Assistant Counselors Terry Columbo, Rosemary Richards and George Obermeier held a special parental workshop on Drug Abuse—What Every Parent Needs to Know.

### **SAC Counselors Request Parent's Help In Safeguarding Children Against Drug Abuse**

Little Silver: Terry Columbo has been a Student Assistance Counselor (SAC) in the Middletown School District for 21 years. She has a specialty in bereavement counseling and has also been dispatched to neighboring districts when a tragedy occurs. In all her 21 years, she can't recall when there hasn't been a death of a young person related to drug and alcohol abuse. In the wake of yet another death of a district high school student this spring to a drug overdose, a parental workshop was held at High School North.

Ms. Columbo stated, "It doesn't get easier, and I am getting pretty tired of picking up the mess afterward—taking care of the students and us."

She, and fellow SACs Rosemary Richards and George Obermeier gave equal parts of the presentation. Ms. Columbo pleaded with parents to "Help us help your children in what she termed a war on drugs. Drug abuse, all three SACs advised, is a ubiquitous reality in all school districts.

Superintendent Karen Bilbao stated at the onset of the meeting that Middletown is implementing all the "best practices" to prevent drug and alcohol abuse, but that we need to partner with our parents to make our efforts more effective. Therefore, Rosemary Richards arranged the workshop for the purpose of educating and empowering parents to guard against teenage drug abuse.

Ms. Richards detailed the epidemic of heroin, which has grown popular with middle class suburban teenagers since it can now be snorted rather than injected. It is powerfully addictive and users may resort to injection as their addiction grows. Indications of use include a loss of weight, apathy, lethargy, nodding off inappropriately and behavior changes. Effects of heroin include a rush euphoria, followed by drowsiness, respiratory depression and constricted pupils. Signs of overdose include vomiting, slow shallow breathing, clammy skin, convulsion, coma and sometimes death. Heroin is an expensive habit at 5 to 10 bags a day at the cost of \$10 to \$20 a bag, and addicts sometimes resort to crime to fund their habit.

Ms. Richards warned, "If you think something is wrong, something is wrong and you need to have your student drug tested."

Testing can be done by the school if requested by the parent, and the source of the request will be kept confidential. Middletown is one of a handful of school districts that conducts random drug testing, which is allowed by law of all students who participate in extra-curricular activities and sports. The district will always test any student for suspicion of drug use. Additionally, Middletown operates programs for therapeutic intervention, run by the SACS as well as Health and Driver's Education curricula that educate students on drug addiction and its dangers. Ms. Richards added that the district intends to augment that classroom instruction with specific information on how heroin affects the brain.

Ms. Richards also detailed that prescription drugs are becoming very popular with young people. In particular, the pain killer oxycontin retails on the black market for \$35 a pill. Morphine based pain killers for cancer patients, known as "blues," are also abused as well as certain stimulant drugs used to treat ADHS. These include ritalin and concerta.

Alcohol and marijuana remain the most frequently abused drugs.

Ms. Richards stated, "We tell the kids that this isn't the pot of the 1970s—the THC component is much stronger and it is often laced with other dangerous substances." She added, "We have lost more students to alcohol than any other drug. You can overdose on alcohol, students should regard being drunk as an overdose of alcohol."

George Obermeier addressed the subject of parental empowerment. He warned parents against the trap of enabling, which he termed "doing the wrong thing for the right reasons."

He stated, "We want to believe that as parents we have an influence on their lives and that they would do the right thing."

He described a scenario where the first time you find something suspicious in your child's clothing he will lie and tell you he just picked it up or a friend asked him to hold it. If you believe these denials, you are enabling and the kid has the power. Citing statements like, "He is 16 or 17. I can't do anything," indicates that parents have ceded their power to their children and their children are in control.

He advised parents to seize their power back and assert their rights. "Your kids know their rights when they are in 6<sup>th</sup> grade! They will say they are going to call DYFS (Division of Youth and Family Services) on you. Believe me, they really would prefer living with you than with foster parents. And if they say, they are leaving; tell them fine, but the car, that belongs to me. I pay the insurance. And going to college, well, I pay for that too."

He also advised parents to prohibit prom-night excursions to the Poconos or the shore and teenage sleepovers. Statistically most deadly car accidents occur on prom night, and sleepovers are an activity for elementary school students, not teenagers.

He emphasized, "If your teenager is going to a sleepover, something is going on."

Ms. Columbo further detailed the signs of drug abuse including a drop in grades, bad hygiene, new friends, a change in activities. Together these signs all point to something that is wrong. She explained that parents should seek a professional's help and the SAC counselor at the high school is their best resource. Sometimes she explained, a parent may have to seek outside agency help. They may even have to call the police.

She pleaded with parents, "Help us help you."

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