

**Worcester Public School**  
**Substance Use Prevention and Education Policy**

Athletic Department  
Child Study Department  
Health and Physical Education Department  
Nursing Department  
School Safety Office  
School Committee

## Introduction

Massachusetts is one of many states across the country facing a growing epidemic of opioid addiction. Schools play an important role in educating youth about the dangers of substance abuse and in preventing substance use among students. The Worcester Public Schools (WPS) is taking action to address it, in accordance with Mass. General Laws (c. 71, s.96) and with recommendations and guidance from the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH) and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), through the use of multiple prevention and intervention strategies. This updated Policy will be the district's blueprint for enhancing the capacity to prevent and respond to issues of substance use within the context of other substance use initiatives. In accordance with the 2016 amendment to the statute, the WPS will file this and related policies with the DESE beginning October 28, 2016.

## Goals

1. Increase students' understanding of the legal, social, and health consequences of alcohol and substance use to prevent use and abuse among students.
2. Provide parents and guardians with educational opportunities regarding the warning signs of substance use/abuse and referral resources.
3. Teach student's self-management, social, negotiation, and refusal skills that will empower them to make healthy decisions and avoid alcohol and substance use.

## I. Leadership

An essential component of the WPS mission is maintaining a safe and supportive learning environment. Within our Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) Framework all students are supported to achieve academic success. We aim to provide all students with the individual academic and non-academic supports needed to succeed. This is accomplished by utilizing a team approach with strong collaboration among school administrators, educators, support staff, students, families, and local community stakeholders. The Comprehensive Drug Education and Prevention Program (CDEPP), a committee comprised of the Athletic, Child Study, Health and Physical Education, Nursing, and Safety Department administrators, under the leadership of the superintendent and school committee members, help students in the WPS stay healthy, safe, engaged, and supported.

## II. Professional Development

The WPS administration will provide all school staff with tiered training to ensure that all staff are aware of the district policies, procedures, and protocols for prevention, intervention, and follow-up in the prevention and response to substance use and abuse. Training on the early warning signs and behaviors that indicate a student may be

experiencing substance use problems, to include building-based support and referral systems, will be conducted yearly in every school within the district. Qualified staff will be identified and trained as appropriate to administer all protocols and procedures related to this Policy, including but not limited to the use of a verbal screening tool. Additionally, the CDEPP will develop or seek evidence-based professional development opportunities for school staff to support implementation of curricula and effective strategies for preventing substance use among youth in the WPS.

### **III. Access to Resources and Services**

The WPS Child Study, Guidance, and Nursing Department personnel work in close collaboration in identifying and referring students with substance use problems. All schools in the WPS district have an identified team of social-emotional support staff available when students are in need of assessment, supportive counseling, and referral services both within and outside the school department. The team has an established agreement with selected community-based providers of mental health and/or substance use treatment facilities to support families in their efforts to gain access to needed services. School-based intake and re-entry procedures are in place to support students and families who may require referral to or from community-based services.

### **IV. Academic and Non-academic Strategies**

The WPS district utilizes the evidence-based Massachusetts Comprehensive Health Framework for delivering developmentally appropriate and culturally competent health education to all students in PreK-12<sup>th</sup> grade. Within this curriculum, students in grades 4-9 are provided with education to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to be competent in making health-enhancing decisions regarding the use of medications and avoidance of substances, and in communicating about substance use/abuse prevention for healthier homes, schools, and communities. This health course and an additional offering for high-school students, *Drugs and Society*, is available for all students who are interested in enrolling. The WPS health educators collaborate with local community resources, such as universities, colleges, and health agencies to help deliver learning opportunities specific to substance use, abuse, and prevention to students.

Through collaboration among the Athletic and Nursing Departments, beginning the spring of 2016, all WPS coaches will be educated annually on opiate use and misuse among athletes. All student athletes and families are provided with written educational material prior to the start of every new athletic season. The written informational hand-outs (*Substance Abuse Prevention Facts and Tips for Parents*, *Substance Abuse Prevention Facts for Teens*) and other educational resources are included on the district web site.

Beginning school year 2016-2017 school nurses will utilize a verbal screening tool to assess

7<sup>th</sup> grade students for substance use problems. Annually thereafter, beginning 2017-2018 school year, 9<sup>th</sup> grade students will also be screened by school nurses. If a student is identified to be at-risk for substance abuse, a school adjustment counselor or guidance counselor will provide supportive counseling and referral as needed.

#### **V. Policies and Protocols**

The WPS has a policy on the Possession of or Use of Drugs or Alcohol included with its overarching Code of Conduct Policy, in compliance with MGL c. 94C. This policy is intended to inform all students and their families that no drugs or alcohol are permitted on school property at any time and no student is allowed on the premises under the influence of any controlled substance or alcohol both while on school property or during school-sponsored activities. Any student charged with a violation may be expelled or have a long-term suspension imposed. This policy is implemented subject to the due process provision of the WPS Discipline Code applicable to regular and special education students.

The WPS is currently in the process of developing Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT) and Narcan Administration in School protocols.

All WPS policies and protocols are provided to all students and families in written format in the Worcester Public Schools Policies Handbook and is posted on the WPS web site at [worcesterschools.org](http://worcesterschools.org). The administration requires all parent's signatures to ensure they have received this handbook annually.

#### **VI. Collaboration with Families**

The WPS believes that families are essential partners in our efforts to prevent substance use. Family and Community Engagement are a core component of the district's Standards and Indicators which provide the structure to successfully implement MTSS. The WPS CDEPP team members are preparing to offer informational, educational, and interactive parent/guardian forums throughout the district, on an annual basis, to support the prevention component of the schools multi-faceted initiatives.