

Substance Misuse Prevention for Stronger Schools

Letter to Editor

Letter to Editor #1

Prevention for the Promotion of Better Schools

When we talk about substance misuse, too often we focus on the aftermath—treatment, consequences, or enforcement. But one of the most powerful ways to prevent harm starts much earlier, and it starts in a place we all know well: our schools.

In Vermont, school-based prevention plays a vital role in helping students build the skills, support, and confidence they need to make healthy decisions. With programs led by Student Assistance Professionals (SAPs), and approaches like restorative practices and social-emotional learning, schools are working to create environments where students feel connected, supported, and seen.

This is real prevention. It's not just about avoiding substances—it's about building resilience, addressing mental health early, and giving young people the tools to thrive. When prevention is integrated into school culture, students are more likely to grow—not just academically, but emotionally and socially as well.

Research shows that evidence-based school prevention programs reduce substance misuse, improve school climate, and lead to long-term public health savings. And in communities across Vermont, students are stepping up—leading peer initiatives, presenting to school communities, and shaping healthier cultures from within.

We can't expect schools to do this alone. Prevention works best when families, communities, and policymakers work together to support it—through funding, training, and policies that treat prevention as essential, not optional.

But you don't have to work in our schools to get involved. Share your voice. Talk to your school board about the importance of school prevention being part of the overall culture in our schools—not just health class. Raise awareness of the need for it and support the funding and staffing of Student Assistance Professionals. Only together can we show how much prevention matters to parents and our greater Vermont communities.

If we want to promote better schools in Vermont, school prevention is not just part of the solution—it's the foundation.

Substance Misuse Prevention for Stronger Schools

Letter to Editor

Letter to Editor #2

Prevention Builds Better Schools in Vermont

As a Vermonter, I think a lot about what it means to keep our kids safe—not just in emergencies, but in everyday life. And one of the biggest risks facing our kids today is substance misuse. That's why I believe one of the most important places for prevention isn't out in the community or in the doctor's office—it's right in our schools.

Vermont schools are already doing incredible work to support students' mental health, resilience, and decision-making through school-based prevention programs. With the help of Student Assistance Professionals, restorative practices, and social-emotional learning, schools can create environments where kids feel supported, understood, and better equipped to navigate tough choices.

And to be truly successful these efforts shouldn't wait for high school. Prevention works best when it starts early and is reinforced consistently throughout a student's school experience. When students build these skills over time, the results last far beyond the classroom.

This kind of prevention isn't just about avoiding alcohol, cannabis, nicotine or other drugs. It's about helping students feel connected. It's about teaching them how to cope with stress, build confidence, and ask for help when they need it. When prevention is part of the everyday school experience, kids are more likely to succeed—not just in the classroom, but in life.

We're already seeing this work across the state. Programs like Getting to Y, where students analyze data and lead their own health-focused initiatives, are building leadership, pride, and real community impact. I've seen the difference when students have trusted adults and tools to manage stress. It's not just about stopping harm, it's about growing stronger, more capable kids. But here's the thing—schools can't do it alone. Prevention works best when families, schools, and communities work together. We all have a role to play.

Here's how you can get involved:

- Learn about what your local school is doing around prevention and mental health.
- Support funding and staffing for Student Assistance Professionals (SAPs).
- Talk to your school board about the importance of embedding prevention into school culture—not just health class.
- Attend community meetings. Share your voice. Show that prevention matters to parents.

If we want better schools in Vermont, school prevention is not just part of a solution—it's foundational. Let's give Vermont students every chance to thrive—by starting where they spend most of their time: in school.