

SIMSBURY HIGH SCHOOL

Dear Parents/Guardians,

We are writing to you today to discuss an issue that is of pressing concern for parents and educators alike – adolescent use of illegal drugs, especially marijuana. Recently, our community has seen an increase in the number of arrests of our young people for drug possession and possession with intent to sell. In addition, we have begun to see the presence of a dangerous new substance known as K2 or “spice,” which is a synthetic marijuana that is legal to sell and can be bought at local gas stations. The police are experiencing increased activity surrounding marijuana and K2 in the community and in a few troubling cases, we are seeing it right here on school grounds. We do not know the reason for the uptick that we are experiencing, but we do know that it is time for a more intense community-wide response to the issue.

Efforts to prevent drug use at Simsbury High School and to educate students about the dangers of engaging in risky behaviors are well-established. We have implemented a multi-faceted approach to prevention and awareness that starts in earnest at the middle school and continues through high school in our comprehensive health education program. Several years ago, we established the Simsbury Youth Partnership, a committee of parents, students, teachers, community members, and administrators that provide special programs for the high school population related to good decision-making. This community has been very supportive of our decision a few years ago to use passive alcohol screening devices at the door of dances and proms to ensure that those events would not be marred by students drinking before coming to the celebrations. Just this year, we partnered with the Simsbury Police to place a full-time School Resource Officer here at the high school. Students are not ignorant of our zero-tolerance policy surrounding marijuana; they know that we follow very seriously every lead that we get about drugs in the school and that the penalties are significant for those who take part.

As we all know, despite all these efforts, some teenagers continue to take dangerous risks when it comes to marijuana or K2. This issue is certainly not unique to Simsbury, as a national increase in marijuana use among teens has been well-documented in the news media. Simsbury is not the first community in Connecticut – not even the first in the Farmington Valley – to take more decisive action to address the growing problem of drugs being brought to our high school campuses.

Therefore, we are announcing that our administrative team, in cooperation with the Simsbury Police Department, will be inviting a canine unit trained in the detection of marijuana and other drugs onto our campus in the near future. It is our intention to use the canine unit periodically at Simsbury High School. These sweeps will mean that drug-sniffing dogs will be brought through the hallways, bathrooms, common areas, lockers and locker rooms, and the parking lot. Students will remain in their classrooms during the procedure, much as they do when we practice emergency “Code Red” drills. If any illicit substance is discovered, the individual student will be brought to an administrative office and subjected to further questioning and search. For those who are discovered to be in

possession of marijuana or other drugs, penalties will include suspension and the possibility of expulsion from school.

Our ultimate intent is to maintain the integrity of the educational process and to keep students safe. The disruptions and the dangers caused by drugs being present in our school are unacceptable. We are willing to accept the brief disruptions caused by the presence of drug-sniffing dogs on a periodic basis as a way to combat this problem and to send a strong message to our students and to our community. Your children will be safe while the dogs are doing their work, and those who have no cause to be concerned can continue with their studies in short order.

We offer one other piece of advice for parents – please educate yourselves about synthetic marijuana (K2 or spice). A quick internet search will reveal to you the dangers of these substances, including their addictive quality and hallucinogenic effects. We hope that such research will help you to open up a productive dialogue with your teenager. When we started to learn about K2 a few months ago, we took quick action to include it on the list of banned substances through our Board of Education policies and our Student Handbook. **Thus, while your teenager may tell you that it is a perfectly legal substance, please know that it is not permissible to be in possession of it at Simsbury High School.** We have already issued significant disciplinary consequences to students who have made the poor decision to bring K2 to Simsbury High School.

Please understand that the goal with this initiative is not to “catch kids” but rather to send a powerful message that we will not accept the presence of drugs at Simsbury High School. The administration and faculty are dedicated to educating your children not only about academics but also about challenging issues that they will face in our society. Illegal drugs are one of the most serious of those issues, and we hope that we have your support and cooperation in our efforts to maintain a drug-free school and to encourage students to grow into responsible adults.

If you have any questions or concerns, we would be happy to communicate further.

Sincerely,

Neil Sullivan
Principal

Diane Ullman
Superintendent of Schools