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coalition news

Prevention news and information from the Tiverton Prevention Coalition

THS Gets Good Grades for Positive School Environment



Everyone seems to be talking about the environment these days, including experts in the field of prevention who study “school environments” — the social, academic and emotional atmosphere of a school, and how it is perceived by students, staff and community.

Researchers have found that school environments affect more than academic performance. They influence students’ emotions and health behaviors as well. In a positive school environment “learning” goes well beyond academics. Kids learn to be more resilient. They learn decision-making skills faster. They’re more focused on goals, and they are less likely to engage in high-risk behaviors when compared to kids who don’t have the benefit of a caring, supportive environment. ([Best Practices: Building Blocks for Enhancing School Environment](#))

Best Practices. Positive school environments have four major characteristics: Caring Relationships, Academic Rigor and Support, Structure and Safety, and Participation. They make up the “personality” of a school — and Tiverton High School scores high grades for each. Spend some time there and you will “feel” this environment.

“Teachers in this building truly care about our kids, not just their grades,” Vice Principal Jack McKinnon said. “Teachers want to know about kids outside the classroom, develop relationships

with the kids and like any good teacher they get concerned when they see things that just don’t seem to be right. Our kids know they always have someone to talk to.”

THS fares well academically too. With a low student teacher ratio, classroom teachers can give students the attention they need, and get to know them personally. THS scores higher than the state average for SAT math, English and writing exams and chalks up a 94 percent four-year graduation rate, compared to the state’s 81 percent.

As vice-principal, McKinnon is also the go-to person for discipline issues, most of which involve kids missing a class. At THS, discipline is not so much about punishment. It’s an opportunity to drive home a mantra at THS: Make Good Choices. Most discipline issues are the result of bad choices.

Typically, teachers handle classroom discipline issues, McKinnon said, and they deliver the same message as part of any corrective action. “Making good decisions, in essence, that’s what THS is all about. Good decisions and good choices.”

“It’s a positive environment. The kids feel safe here,” McKinnon said, though like other schools across the country, bullying can sometimes disrupt that feeling of safety. THS gives students another “rule of conduct”: Don’t be a bystander. Be an

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REBECCA'S notes

I decided to include an article about MiO energy drinks in this issue of *Coalition News* after a local mom told me that she had taken her daughter to the emergency room. Her daughter didn't feel well: unexplained tremors, upset stomach, and an uncommon irritability.

They were on their way to practice when they stopped at a local convenience store so her daughter could buy bottled water. Her daughter also bought MiO Energy and like most kids she did not read the fine print on the packaging. She squirted about half the bottle of MiO into her water. Diagnosis: caffeine overdose.

While her daughter now "knows better," the mom was concerned about other kids making the same mistake. She returned to the store the next day and suggested that products that are not recommended for kids should not be displayed so conveniently and without appropriate warning. Store management didn't move the display. Corporate management, they said, determines product placement.

While this incident is only anecdotal, it reminds me that everyone in a community shares some responsibility for creating an environment that keeps kids safe from harm — especially when told that "business as usual" may have a negative effect on kids in town.

It's a cliché but it does take a village. Parents, schools, faith communities, organizations, police officers, bus drivers, town government and local businesses all have a responsibility to keep Tiverton a safe, caring environment to raise our kids.

MiO Energy: Unsafe for Kids

MiO Energy, a "liquid water enhancer," may look kid-friendly with flavors like Green Thunder, Wicked Blue Citrus and Tropical Fusion. MiO is often displayed on coolers of bottled water in convenience stores. It's an "impulse buy" — one that kids should be warned not to make.

A whole bottle of MiO Energy contains 1,080 milligrams of caffeine, like 18 cups of coffee, which increases the risk of caf-

feine overdose for kids who typically may not label directions — "one squeeze" (one-half teaspoon), per eight ounces of water, the equivalent of one cup of coffee. If a child bumps that up to three to five squeezes, he or she may have side effects such as insomnia, nervousness, restlessness, irritability, stomach upsets, abnormally fast erratic heartbeat and muscle tremors, according to MedicalDaily.com. Even the company website advises in a Q&A that MiO Energy is not safe for kids: "We don't recommend giving MiO Energy, or any caffeinated drink, to kids."



Talk with your kids about risks associated with MiO Energy and any product advertised as an "energy booster," including Monster Energy, Red Bull and Rock Star that some teens reportedly mix with alcohol. Energy booster typically means high caffeine content. Importantly, discourage their use. For more information, check out [Energy Drinks](#), a Health Promotion from Brown University.

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Up-Stander. Simply, THS students are expected to help shape and maintain a positive environment and they learn that in any community making good choices and standing up in the face of wrong is a responsibility everyone shares.

And the THS environment offers plenty of opportunities for participation, and kids do participate. Nearly 60 percent are involved in the athletic program; others take advantage of school clubs and organizations; and every student is required to complete 75 hours of community service as part of the graduation requirement.

Good schools are good prevention. When kids learn how to make good choices, when they're more resilient, when they're more focused on personal goals and involved in their community, they have what prevention specialists call "protective factors" — the skills that kids can learn to keep themselves safe from harm. In Tiverton, our schools are definitely partners in prevention.

"It isn't just parents or teachers," McKinnon said. "It's parents and teachers, everyone working together, to give kids what they need to succeed in the future."

