

Huskie Parents,

Never bury the lead: Please tell you sons and daughters how proud we were of them today during our long Chris Herren Assembly at NNHS. Our Huskie students were focused, engaged, respectful, compassionate, and courageous.

Through his account of his personal journey, Chris brought 3400 Huskies together to face the reality of addiction and drug and alcohol abuse. It is a personal tragedy and a daunting public health crisis. Our students' questions and their sincere investment in the post-assembly de-briefing time with teachers reflected their willingness to engage in creating a culture of sobriety at NNHS. This won't happen overnight but we aspire to a sustained effort to help support every individual in danger and to partner with families in this fight.

Often following a special event the spirit and quick commitments are not sustained. We will do our best, as a team of adults and students, to make this commitment even more a part of the fabric of NNHS than it is now. Our NNHS "Healthy Huskies" team of adults and students will continue to work toward this goal. Please send us any ideas you have for continuing to educate, mobilize and unite *parents* as well as staff and students.

Chris shared many meaningful observations. The one that struck me as a potentially powerful mobilizer for students and a very family-friendly message is "RUU24/7?"—"are you you every day?" "Why is it not good enough for you to be you; why would you feel the need to change who you are by putting alcohol and drugs in your body?" We aspire to a school culture where every student is supported in loving who he or she is every day, not hollow self-esteem inflation, but a culture where individuality is sincerely appreciated.

The February "Health Huskies Letter" is attached below. Please consider the message.

Kevin Pobst

*Each month during the school year NNHS will distribute a "Healthy Huskies Letter." The goal of the newsletter is to enhance our school's partnership with families, particularly by sharing our knowledge of various topics related to your child's social, emotional, and physical health, and what our school and our families can do to promote student healthiness. Each issue will address a different health topic and will contain resources for further exploration of that topic. Staff at NNHS as well as the School, Family, Community Partnership (SFCP), will be advisors for these newsletters. We encourage parents and students to suggest topics and resources. Send suggestions to [kpobst@naperville203.org](mailto:kpobst@naperville203.org).*

## Healthy Huskies Letter

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### Perception and Reality—The *Real* Normal

There is data showing that the perception of students at NNHS regarding their peers' use of alcohol and drugs is very different from the reality of their peers' behavior. This is important because of the concept of "social norming." It's a simple but powerful concept. If a teenager thinks that it is normal to do something the teen is more likely to make that choice, conversely if they believe that it is abnormal to do something, especially something edgy or risky, they are less likely to choose that path.

For the past twelve years, an initiative in Naperville called [“The Power of Choice,”](#) which is sponsored by [360 Youth Services](#), has been working with an affiliate of the University of Illinois to survey high school students in the District 203 and 204 high schools. The annual survey asks the students to report their behavior with respect to tobacco, alcohol, and various drugs. The annual survey is answered anonymously. The survey also asks for the teens to report their perceptions of their peers’ behavior, the conversations they have with their parents, and the motivation for their choices. The research on teens’ self-reported behavior supports the validity of the data reported, as does the consistency of the statistics over a dozen years. The purpose of the data gathering and reporting is to facilitate a “social norming” campaign. As noted above, if teens have accurate information about their peers’ actual behavior – the true “normal” – their resistance to unhealthy behavior increases.

There is no doubt that drug and alcohol use among teens in DuPage County and the greater Naperville community is a serious public health problem. But the gap between perception and reality is substantial. About 40% of NNHS students admit to having consumed alcohol in the last year. Yet, 70% of students at NNHS think their peers consume alcohol. While about 22% of NNHS students state that they have used marijuana in the last year, 49% of students think their peers smoke marijuana. Eight percent of NNHS students admit to using prescription drugs illegally, but 56% think their peers do so. It is important for parents and students to know that alcohol and drug use is abnormal; teens who do not use are the norm.

Our teens also report their conversations with their parents. This is something about which parents need to be aware. While 84% of students say that their parents ask them where they are going when they go out in the evening, 80% say that their parents often do *not* ask them if there will be alcohol where they are going. Only 38% of parents ask if there will be parents present to supervise where they are going and only 16% contact those parents to verify. It is very positive that more than 85% of students know their parents disapprove of under-age drinking and of smoking marijuana or consuming prescription drugs. Teens consistently give a lot of weight in their decision making to their parents’ expectations.

Please make sure that students know that you disapprove of underage drinking and drug use. Please make sure you know where they are going when they go out at night and that you are vigilant about the supervision that will be present where they are going. Please make sure they know that drug and alcohol use among teens in our communities is abnormal, not normal. While we aspire to a normal where alcohol and drug use is much, much lower, we should be openly communicating what the real normal is.