

WINDHAM MIDDLE SCHOOL: “TAKING BACK MAINE’S FUTURE” REPORT

Program goals and objectives: Our objectives include teaching students about the opioid epidemic, brainstorming possible solutions to the problem, and presenting the information to the public. Students from WMS create front page newspaper articles to teach the public about the dangers of opioids concluding with a community open house to showcase their work. The Back to the Future themed culminating event features a DeLorean time machine.

Program results

Students were surveyed before and after participating in “Taking Back Maine’s Future,” a 7th grade cross-disciplinary project at Windham Middle School that ran from March through May 2024. Prior to the project less than 50% of the approximately 90 students could accurately identify opioids as compared to 92% after completing the project. In February, 50% of students believed that people who have a substance use disorder are homeless. After learning from University of New England Graduate students about stereotypes and the role stigma plays in the continuance of the opioid epidemic, only 20% continued to believe this as a true statement. Before starting the unit, almost 75% of students reported that one could get high off of Narcan. After a few months of exploring the ways Maine is addressing the opioid crisis, less than 15% continued to believe that one can get high from Narcan.

Students used their learning to produce a newspaper article from 30 years in the future—either a future in which Maine has resolved the opioid epidemic or one where the crisis has continued. Regardless, students were expected to propose a strategy that Maine used or could have used in the 2020s to resolve the crisis. On May 9, students presented their newspapers in a free public event that was attended by about 500 people. Gordon Smith, the Director of Opioid Response for the State of Maine, was one of the visitors. The students enjoyed talking with him about their learning and their ideas for addressing the opioid crisis.

Here are few quotes from students about key takeaways from this project:

“Some key takeaways I got from this project is how opioids can affect many people’s lives, another takeaway is using first person language just because they were addicted doesn’t mean there less of a person than you.”

“My key take aways are that I can help people who need help and use language that makes them want to get better.”

“Some key take aways for me were realizing how important this crisis is and how much it affects us, how much people actually care and work at getting this better, and looking at statistics for different affects we need to get better with.”

“learned a lot about how drugs and opioids can affect the brain and it can mess up your brain for awhile if you don’t get it treated right away. Also I learned a lot about the amount of overdoses there are in Maine and the US”

“I liked meeting people who have an important role in fixing the opioid crisis”

“talking to Gorden Smith and telling him what could help.”

“I learned about how hundreds of people die from opioids a year and how people get addicted to opioids in the first place”

“My key take aways are that I can help people who need help and use language that makes them want to get better.”

“That many people are affected by this crisis and that kids are the ones who need to change it for the future. Also that stigma around this topic is very big.”

“I will remember how addictive substances are before taking them”

Budget Update

\$4000 requested and granted.

Approximately \$3500 spent (there are still a couple of outstanding reimbursements).

If an exact figure is needed please contact Stacey Webster (swebster@rsu14.org)