

## JICJ SUBSTANCE USE AND PREVENTION POLICY

Like many states across the country, Massachusetts is facing a growing epidemic of opioid addiction, and the Commonwealth is taking action to address it. Schools play an important role in preventing substance use among students and educating students about the dangers of substance abuse. Therefore, pursuant to M.G.L. Chapter 71, Section 96 (as amended by Chapter 52 of the Acts of 2016), the Oxford Public Schools has developed this policy on Substance Use Prevention and Substance Abuse Education.

The Oxford Public Schools is committed to promoting an atmosphere of safety, respect, and caring for all students, staff members, and visitors to the school that is conducive to teaching and learning. Each school principal or person who holds a comparable position shall be responsible for the implementation and oversight of this Substance Use and Prevention Policy at his or her school.

This policy is organized according to the six elements of a Safe and Supportive Schools Framework: ***Leadership; Professional Development; Access to Resources and Services; Academic and Non-Academic Strategies; Policies, Procedures, and Protocols; and Collaboration with Families.***

### **POLICY GOALS**

The Oxford Public Schools recognizes its responsibility in establishing and implementing goals regarding use and prevention of substance abuse. The goals are in observance of the six elements of a Safe and Supportive Schools Framework as follows:

#### **1. Leadership**

District leadership is essential in developing and implementing effective substance use prevention and abuse education policies in order to maintain a safe and supportive learning environment. In adopting or updating policies, the school committee will work in conjunction with district and school leaders in developing clearly defined goals to prevent and address substance use and abuse among youth. This leadership will result in strong links between identified local needs and prevention program/system designs.

#### **2. Professional Development**

Comprehensive substance use prevention programs involve the use of multiple strategies that include education and training; social competence skill development; social norms with expectations for behavior; policies, procedures and protocols; and problem identification and referral services. Through the scope of work of the district and school administrators play a key role in setting protocols for implementing referral services.

Oxford will provide training, so that all school staff know district policies, procedures, and protocols for prevention, intervention, and follow-up in preventing and responding to substance use and abuse. All faculty and staff will be provided training on the early warning signs and behaviors that indicate a student may be experiencing substance use problems, and will be aware of building-based referral systems and other protocols to follow. Staff who are

responsible for implementing substance use prevention curricula have been provided with specific training and professional development on implementing evidence-based programs and effective strategies for preventing substance use.

### **3. Access to Resources and Services**

Faculty and staff see students on a daily basis and often recognize changes in student performance, demeanor, and appearance that indicate a student may be at risk. School staff can play a key role in identifying and referring students with substance use related problems and working with their families. Educators and school counseling personnel will work in collaboration with substance use counseling professionals and mental health specialists to meet the needs of those students most at risk.

School counseling personnel have access to information and strategies necessary to facilitate referrals to community services for the wide variety of mental health problems that students experience, including substance use. The Oxford Public Schools will establish a resource list for the network of services available through the agencies in our area.

Collaboration between schools and community behavioral health providers will address student-specific issues, including interventions such as small group, individual supports, and school re-entry plans. These efforts can support school staff including consultation on general as well as student-specific challenges and plans for school and community provider responses when necessary.

### **4. Academic and Non-academic Strategies**

Integrating substance use prevention and education into schools is one of the easiest ways to reach youth and young adults. Oxford Public Schools has implemented evidence-based substance abuse prevention curriculum for grades 5 to 12. These programs will be developmentally appropriate.

School-based mental health professionals will work directly with young people who are identified as being at risk. At least one adult in the school will be designated as the point of contact and support for students who are considered to be at risk.

### **5. Policies and Protocols**

The Oxford Public Schools has a substance abuse policy that prohibits the use of alcohol, drugs and substance abuse on school grounds and at school sponsored events, whether on or off school grounds. This policy includes discipline and enforcement provisions, intervention provisions, and treatment opportunities for students and staff. Students are informed of the consequences for violating the policies. School staff discuss the policies annually with students.

Policies related to the use of verbal screening tools to screen pupils for substance use disorders will be well defined and publicized, including any opt-out provisions. (See below for more information on Verbal Screening Tools.)

The Oxford Public Schools will establish guidelines for working with at-risk students, communication with students, staff, parents/guardians, and confidentiality. Schools will include procedures for re-integrating students who have been absent and/or in recovery.

It is important to provide and maintain a safe and caring learning environment that is free of alcohol and drugs for students. The school district's approach to cases of students who are or may be using or abusing alcohol or controlled substances is one of compassion and judicious handling in order to facilitate the swift rehabilitation of the student.

If a teacher suspects that a student is under the influence of alcohol or drugs in school, the teacher should report the matter immediately to the Principal's office. If the Principal suspects a student of using or abusing alcohol or drugs, the following procedures apply:

- The student will be referred to the school nurse. After speaking to the student, if the nurse determines that physical symptoms may be present, the nurse will consult with the student's guidance counselor concerning the case. If the school nurse and the guidance counselor agree that it is in the best interest of the student, the student's parents will be notified so that appropriate action may be taken. (Testing is suggested within twenty-four (24) hours.)
- If it is believed that the student is not in possession of alcohol or drugs in school, but appears to be using or abusing alcohol or drugs outside of school, school personnel will discuss the matter with the student's parents and explore the possibility of directing them to a counseling or referral agency that can assist the student with his or her needs. (If the student is found to be in possession of alcohol or a controlled substance in school, on school grounds, or at a school-related or school-sponsored activity, he or she will be subject to disciplinary action and possible referral to law enforcement officials.)

When a Student Returns to School:

A student who has entered a treatment program will be readmitted to school when he or she submits a statement from a physician, certifying the student is free from alcohol and/or controlled substances and is physically fit to return to school, or when the administration of the Oxford Public Schools makes a determination that the student may return.

It is strongly advised that, when a student returns to school, he or she become involved in a series of conferences with his or her guidance counselor on a weekly basis.

Pending the development or availability of a substance abuse program and upon readmission to the school, the student may be assigned to an in-house drug awareness program for a number of hours as determined by the Principal or Assistant Principal.

## **6. Collaboration with Families**

Since 2014, Mass. Gen. Laws c. 71, s. 96 has required each public school to have policies regarding substance use prevention and the education of its students about the dangers of substance abuse, to notify students' parents or guardians about the policies, and to post the policies on the school's website.

The Oxford Public Schools adheres to the philosophy that families are essential partners in schools' efforts to prevent substance use. Parental input, particularly from parents of students with substance related-problems, helps identify and prioritize the needs of the school community.

Oxford Public Schools emphasizes the importance of school-community-home collaborations in weaving together the resources for comprehensive, multifaceted approaches to preventing substance use and abuse. Providing parents/guardians with information regarding the district's and school's substance use prevention and abuse education policies is critical, as they play a key role in their success. Oxford Public Schools will inform parents/guardians about the district's substance use prevention and abuse education policies on an annual basis.

The policy will be posted on the district website. The Student handbooks will also contain information on district policies, procedures, and protocols. This information will also be made available to the Parent Teacher Associations/Organizations, School Councils and other related programming. Materials will be easily understandable and culturally appropriate.

Evidence-based prevention curricula containing an education component specifically designed for parents/guardians and other actively involved family members will be developed through the Health Department. This outreach can help parents/guardians and family members to keep students safe from substance use, by modeling skills and attitudes at home, thereby supporting the prevention component of the school initiative.

Effective programing will involve parents/guardians through regular activities and by using more than one approach.

### **VERBAL SCREENING TOOLS**

State law provides that by the 2017-2018 school year, and subject to appropriation, public schools shall utilize a verbal screening tool to screen students annually, at two different grade levels, for substance use disorders. The relevant sections of the statute read as follows:

Mass. General Laws chapter 71, section 97 (as amended by St. 2016, c. 52, s. 15):

Section 97.

(a) Subject to appropriation, each city, town, regional school district, charter school or vocational school district shall utilize a verbal screening tool to screen pupils for substance use disorders. Screenings shall occur on an annual basis and occur at 2 different grade levels as recommended by the department of elementary and secondary education, in consultation with the department of public health. Parents or guardians of a pupil to be screened pursuant to this section shall be notified prior to the start of the school year. Verbal screening tools shall be approved by the department of elementary and secondary education, in conjunction with the department of public health. De-identified screening results shall be reported to the department of public health, in a manner to be determined by the department of public health, not later than 90 days after completion of the screening.

(b) A pupil or the pupil's parent or guardian may opt out of the screening by written notification at any time prior to or during the screening. A city, town, regional school district, charter school

or vocational school district utilizing a verbal screening tool shall comply with the department of elementary and secondary education's regulations relative to consent.

(c) Any statement, response or disclosure made by a pupil during a verbal substance use disorder screening shall be considered confidential information and shall not be disclosed by a person receiving the statement, response or disclosure to any other person without the prior written consent of the pupil, parent or guardian, except in cases of immediate medical emergency or a disclosure is otherwise required by state law. Such consent shall be documented on a form approved by the department of public health and shall not be subject to discovery or subpoena in any civil, criminal, legislative or administrative proceeding. No record of any statement, response or disclosure shall be made in any form, written, electronic or otherwise, that includes information identifying the pupil.

(d) The department of elementary and secondary education shall notify each school district in writing of the requirement to screen students for substance use disorders pursuant to this section. School districts with alternative substance use screening policies may, on a form provided by the department, opt out of the required verbal screening tool. The form shall be signed by the school superintendent and provide a detailed description of the alternative substance use program the district has implemented and the reasons why the required verbal screening tool is not appropriate for the district.

(e) No person shall have a cause of action for loss or damage caused by an act or omission resulting from the implementation of this section. Section 63 of St. 2016, c. 52, reads as follows:

Each city, town, regional school district, charter school or vocational school district shall implement the verbal substance use disorder screenings required by section 97 of chapter 71 of the General Laws by the 2017-2018 school year.

Further, Mass. Gen. Laws c. 71, s. 97, is subject to appropriation, which means schools and districts may voluntarily implement the actions described, but they are not required to do so unless and until funding is appropriated.

LEGAL REF: M.G.L. 71:96 71:97

[Adopted - June 25, 2018]