

## Wallingford's BOE wants new position to target drug use, other risky behaviors

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WALLINGFORD — The Board of Education wants to hire a wellness curriculum coordinator after a 2013 survey revealed risky behaviors can increase in high school.

The anonymous [99-question behavior survey](#) given to high school students, included questions on driving, drugs and alcohol, and sexual activity.

It revealed that 24.4 percent of juniors and 48.7 percent of seniors in 2013 texted or emailed while driving.

It also showed that 40.2 percent of juniors and 47.1 percent of seniors used marijuana at least once.

The position will oversee health curriculum and serve as a liaison with town departments and community organizations, including the Coalition for a Better Wallingford. The salary is \$74,000 annually.

“What we really need with the school system is for some coordination in this area, especially when DARE was lost,” said School Superintendent Salvatore Menzo. “... A district with our size, I want to make sure we’re addressing these issues.”

Wallingford eliminated its Drug Abuse Resistance Education program in 2010. Other programs have been used to teach students about drug awareness.

The position was also prompted by discussions with the Coalition for a Better Wallingford, formed in 2013 to prevent drug overdose deaths.

“In speaking with parents about their concerns about abuse occurring ... the district reflected on that and how can we best respond,” Menzo said.

While there are health teachers at the town’s high schools, the new position would not be teaching in classrooms, but rather “facilitating instruction” from kindergarten through 12th grade, as well as coordinating with the Youth and Social Services Department and Health Department.

“Their job is primarily to make certain the curriculum is up to date and implemented with fidelity,” he said. “The board also stated next year it is conducting a wellness audit, so that person as coordinator will take the recommendations of the audit and implement it.”

Ken Welch, a founder and president of the Coalition for a Better Wallingford, believes the position will help identify potential problems and provide assistance to students.

“The survey results are a morbid essay on our culture. If we don’t respond to it, it’s not going to get better,” Welch said. “Having this person there will give them confidence in evaluating a need ... and make sure whatever gets implemented they can control it and understand it and get results from it.”

He acknowledged, however, that it can be difficult because it’s “uncharted waters.”

“This is innovative and definitely a step in the right direction,” Welch said. “It’s a complicated problem; there’s a lot of different ways to attack this thing. I think in the interest of budgets, faced with the reality of the needs and kids telling us there are needs there, it’s important to address it.”

About 1,700 students at Lyman Hall and Sheehan high schools took the survey. Parents were given the option to have their child opt out.

The survey was a combined effort of the school system, Youth and Social Services Department, and the Coalition for a Better Wallingford.

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