

Substance Abuse Prevention and Intervention Services Program

Highlights from the 2008–2009 Statewide Evaluation

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What does this program do?

In 1989 the Washington State Legislature passed the Omnibus Alcohol and Controlled Substances Act that authorized state agencies to conduct a variety of programs that address the public's concern about the level and consequences of alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use. The Prevention and Intervention Services Program, operated by the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) with a mix of local, state, and federal (e.g., Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities) funds, places intervention specialists in schools to implement comprehensive student assistance programs that address problems associated with substance use and violence. As stated in the act (ESSHB 1793, Subpart B, Section 310, Paragraph 2), intervention specialists are to (a) provide early alcohol and other drug prevention and intervention services to students and their families, (b) assist in referrals to treatment providers, and (c) strengthen the transition back to school for students who have had problems of alcohol and other drug abuse.

Where are the local programs?

Annually, nearly \$5 million are distributed to 13 local grantees—including the 4 largest school districts (Seattle, Tacoma, Spokane, and Kent) and 9 consortia—covering virtually the entire state. Funding allocations are based on a formula that accounts for both the school enrollment and the estimated need for services of each region.

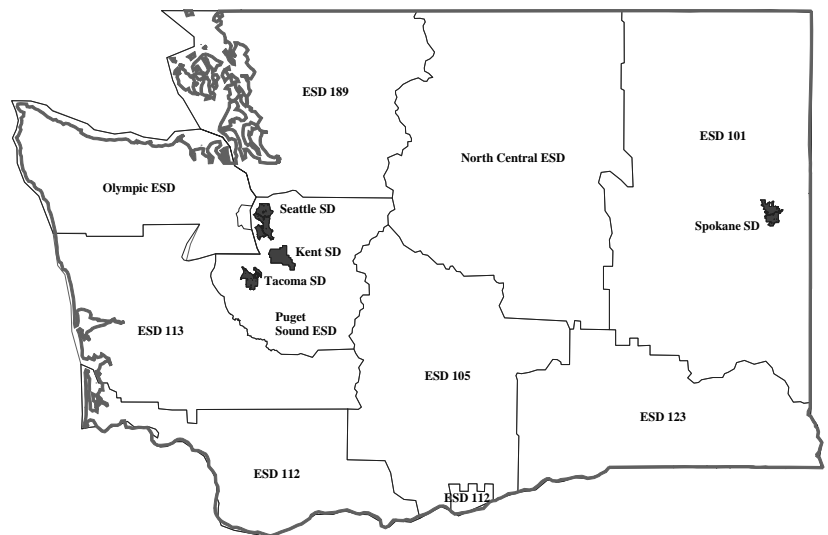
How are students served?

Universal prevention activities typically target intact classrooms or the entire school. Examples include assistance to classroom teachers in the use of age-appropriate prevention curricula, supervision of peer leadership or pledge programs, and promotion of drug-free after-school activities.

Intervention strategies involve the identification of students who are (a) at risk of initiating substance use or antisocial behavior, (b) coping with the substance use of significant others, (c) using tobacco, alcohol, or other drugs, or (d) developing a dependence on drugs. An array of counseling, peer support groups, social skills training, and individual and family interventions are used to address the particular needs of each student. When the severity of use requires services that cannot be provided in the school setting, students are referred to community services such as chemical dependency treatment. During 2008–2009, specialists served more than 18,000 students in this way.

What are the outcomes of this program?

Prevention and intervention strategies are intended to (a) promote the skills and attitudes



necessary to resist pressures to use alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs, (b) help students avoid antisocial behavior that may disrupt learning, (c) encourage students to reduce the substance use for which they were referred, and (d) remove barriers to school success. The findings of an independent statewide evaluation suggest that the program has resulted in positive outcomes in each of these areas as measured

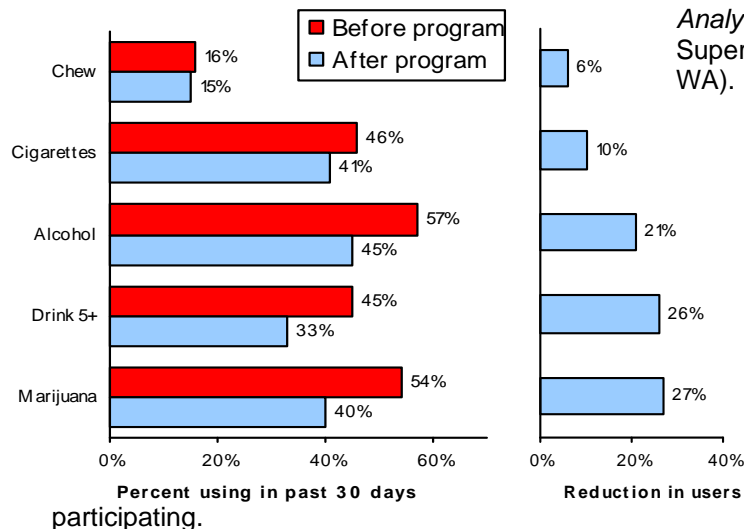
by a self-report instrument administered before and after participation in program services.

Skills and attitudes. Students reported that social skills and attitudes that help them resist drug use and other inappropriate behavior strengthened while participating in the Prevention and Intervention Services Program. Students reported modest but statistically significant gains on 9 scales including self-esteem, self-control, assertiveness, cooperation, and bonding with school. Students reported receiving greater guidance in the school setting, most likely due to the assistance provided by the intervention specialist.

Antisocial behavior. Students with an intervention goal of reducing antisocial behavior indicated modest but significant reductions in 5 of 6 behaviors including truancy and fighting.

Substance use. Students with an intervention goal of reducing substance use reported changes in their level of use:

- Significantly more students perceived moderate to high risk in 10 forms of substance use after the program.
- Significantly fewer students reported using alcohol, tobacco, and marijuana in the past 30 days after participation in the program (see the chart below). Students reported modest reductions of tobacco use but substantial reductions for other substances. For example, 27 percent fewer students reported marijuana use and 26 percent fewer students reported binge drinking (5 or more drinks) in the past 30 days after



School success. Both teacher ratings and school records provided some evidence that participation in the Prevention and Intervention Services Program can be linked to improved school success:

- Elementary and alternative school teachers observed improved classroom performance in 76 percent of the students with unsatisfactory performance at baseline.
- A small, high-participation sample of middle and high school students who were rated as dependent on alcohol or other drugs achieved a higher GPA at the end of a second school year whereas a similar, low-participation group showed a decline.

How can I learn more about this program?

To learn more about the Substance Abuse Prevention and Intervention Services Program, contact Dixie Grunenfelder in the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction in Olympia, Washington, at (360) 725-6059.

Detailed findings from an ongoing statewide evaluation are presented in *Addressing Adolescent Substance Abuse: An Evaluation of Washington's Substance Abuse Prevention and Intervention Services Program, 2008–09 Annual Report* (Deck, 2009, Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, Olympia, WA).

For more information about adolescent substance use in the state of Washington see *Washington Healthy Youth Survey 2006: Analytic Report* (Einspruch, 2007, Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, Olympia, WA).