

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Support is Available for Students Who Face Stress During the School Year

<Chambersburg, PA> The halls of Franklin County schools are once again filled with the sounds of students returning to the classrooms. Although the start of the school year can be filled with excitement, laughter and stories told between friends, for some, the return to classes leads to anxiety, pressure and uncertainty. Even the happiest of students may face challenges they don't share with friends and family.

According to The Foundation for a Drug Free World, teens have given the following as reasons for using drugs: to fit in, to escape or relax, boredom, to seem grown up or to rebel. These reasons match many of the pressures faced at the beginning of any school year by students to: do well in school, fit in, make friends, succeed, and make "the right choices." The pressure can become overwhelming for even the most confident students. Pennsylvania Youth Survey Data from 2013 show that 42% of Franklin County students in grades 6-12 have tried alcohol in their lifetime while nearly 58% of 10th grade students surveyed reported, at the time of the survey, having used in the past 30 days. When asked about depression, 33% of students shared they felt depressed or sad most days and 25% of students reported having been bullied or threatened at school during the previous 12 month period. With so many challenges, creating a school environment where students feel they are supported and able to succeed can be a challenge for any school district.

Knowing where to turn for friends and family members when a loved one is struggling can bring both comfort and support for all involved. In Franklin County, the 13 Student Assistance Program teams, or SAP teams, as they are commonly called, are working to help students facing challenges within the school system. These teams consist of teachers and trained community liaisons who work to identify problems and support students facing challenges. Teams meet regularly throughout the school year to address needs as they arise.

Community liaisons in both Franklin and Fulton counties are employed by Healthy Communities Partnership; the program is overseen by Christy Unger. According to Ms. Unger, the SAP teams work to identify issues such as drug and alcohol use, depression, learning needs, violence, bullying, and reasons behind absenteeism. "Its never too soon to intervene and make a referral with you see a student struggling in school or at home," shared Ms. Unger.

"Referrals often come from teachers and team members, but the team accepts student referrals from anyone who has contact with and concerns about a student," stated Ms. Unger. "The teams work with teachers and family members to identify what might be happening in a student's life. If the team feels further assistance is needed, SAP Liaisons meet with a student and discuss any issues that particular child is facing. The Liaison then works with the rest of the team and the family to make referrals to programs that may help the situation."

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Last school year, HCP's three liaisons saw 337 individual students in Franklin and Fulton counties. In addition to the individual screenings, Healthy Communities Partnership is able to offer support to students through groups in the school setting; in total, more than 100 students participated in these groups during the 2013/14 school year.

The program received funding from both Mental Health/Intellectual Disabilities/Early Intervention program in Franklin/Fulton County as well as from the Franklin/Fulton Drug and Alcohol Program. For additional information or to refer a student in 6th through 12th grades, please call Healthy Communities Partnership at 717.264.1470.

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