

IT'S GETTING HARDER TO SNAG A CIGARETTE AT BROOKLINE HIGH

(From B-PEN – Brookline Parent Education Network)

Grabbing a smoke at Brookline High School is getting harder under a new smoking policy introduced this semester. In two significant changes, freshmen are not allowed to smoke at all, and the smoking area available for 10th-12th graders has been restricted to four “off campus” benches opposite the Schluntz Gym. The new policy opens up most of the benches in front of the school to non-smokers, allowing students, staff and visitors access to the main building without having to pass through the smoking area.

The new policy was instigated in response to last Fall’s “Conversation and Coffee: Teens and Tobacco” community forum sponsored by B-CASA (Brookline Coalition Against Substance Abuse), which was followed up with pressure from the Peer Leaders, a group of about 30 juniors and seniors working with substance abuse prevention staff. Concern was validated by the school-wide Student Health Survey of 2008, which revealed a correlation between smoking cigarettes and moving on to alcohol, marijuana and other drugs.

“Cigarettes are often the first major decision that opens the door to other unhealthy decisions and to a peer group that’s smoking,” says Mary Minott, the Coordinator of Substance Abuse Prevention at Brookline High School. “Students who smoke often do so during breaks, so they may be late to class, and they’re smoking outside in a group which takes the focus away from academics and the school day. So there are immediate reasons as well as long-term health concerns to discourage kids from smoking.” In addition, those who start smoking often find it very difficult to quit.

The new policy targets freshmen, whose particular vulnerability to transitional pressures may tempt them to smoke. The school campaign “Kicks Butts” was launched last year by the Peer Leaders, who approached BHS headmaster Dr. Bob Weintraub about reducing the smoking area. This year’s campaign kicked off at the freshmen barbeque, where the Peer Leaders handed out “Kicks Butts” buttons and asked 9th graders to sign a pledge not to smoke. (135 signed.) More activities are planned for throughout the year.

If freshmen are caught smoking, they and their parents will be asked to meet with prevention counselor Mary Minott or Hope Schroy to discuss strategies for avoiding tobacco addiction. “Parents should not assume their kids know they don’t want them to smoke,” says Minott. “It’s really important for them to have the conversation about smoking temptations at high school.”

