

‘NOPE’ battles drug abuse in schools

By **Michael N. Price**, *Daily Local News*

POSTED: 10/01/14, 6:22 PM EDT |

0 COMMENTS

West Chester >> County law enforcement is teaming with a determined group of local volunteers to initiate a school-based drug abuse prevention program named NOPE to combat an ongoing and deadly heroin epidemic.

The non-profit program was announced by the Chester County District Attorney’s Office and described as an initiative that delivers personal and high-impact presentations to middle school and high school students.

NOPE – Narcotics Overdose Prevention and Education – presentations are already taking place in the county’s schools, officials said.

“Children are dying from drug overdoses here in Chester County, not just in cities like Philadelphia,” said Chester County District Attorney Tom Hogan.

“The main overdose threats are heroin and prescription drugs. NOPE gives us a tool to help educate students and parents. The goal of NOPE is simple – to save lives.”

Officials said the presentations are designed to be uncomfortable, graphic, and emotional. They also provide a look at the horrors of drug overdoses from several different perspectives.

DAILY LOCAL NEWS

The students first hear from a healthcare professional who describes the scientific interactions of drugs with a developing brain. Then, the students listen to a police officer describe the “grim task” of witnessing fatal overdoses and informing distraught families that a loved one has died. Finally, they hear from family members of those who have died describe the pain caused by the death of their children.

Schools are holding separate presentations for students and parents.

“Fighting drug and alcohol use and addiction among teens requires a community effort. Part of that effort is educating our parents and students about the dangers of drugs. NOPE is a concerted effort to help parents understand warning signs and dangers of drug use,” said West Chester Area School District Superintendent Jim Scanlon.

Heroin and prescription drug overdoses have reached troubling numbers in recent years, and officials say the problem is not slowing down. Last year 24 people died in heroin overdoses in Chester County. Law enforcement officials have consistently pointed to the rise in prescription drug abuse as a major factor in the deadly use of heroin.

Many teens first develop an addiction to prescription drugs, but when the supply runs out their addiction leads them to cheaper, more dangerous heroin.

“One in five teens has abused prescription drugs. The average age of first illegal drug use is 13 years old, a number that shocks many people. This is a plague that we must fight with a coordinated effort among parents, educators, and law enforcement. The future of our children depends on it,” Hogan said.

DAILY LOCAL NEWS

NOPE's next event for parents and community members in the West Chester School District is Thursday, Oct. 2 at 7 p.m. at West Chester East High School, 450 Ellis Lane, West Chester. In addition to West Chester Area School District, presentations are currently planned for Great Valley School District, Unionville-Chadds Ford School District, and Twin Valley School District. NOPE is communicating with the following school districts to schedule presentations: Tredyffrin/Easttown, Avon Grove, Owen J. Roberts, Coatesville, and the Chester County Intermediate Unit Technical College High School.

Follow Daily Local News staff writer Michael N. Price on Twitter @MikePriceWrites and Facebook at www.facebook.com/michaelnprice.