

School Substance Abuse Response

IOWA YOUTH CONGRESS & STATE OF IOWA YOUTH ADVISORY COUNCIL

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Position:

SIYAC and IYC support amending Iowa Code 279.9 to state “The board shall administer a rehabilitation program, suspend, or expel a student for a violation of a rule described under this section”. This is to standardize the K-12 public school substance abuse responses and will provide support to steer students away from substance abuse.

Current Situation:

Although some substance abuse metrics are improving in Iowa, there is still a lot of room for growth. Iowa is ranked third in the country for meth use, and has had a 160% increase in opioid deaths for youth in 2022 compared to 2019 (Iowa Office of Drug Control Policy, 2023). Over 1 in 12 youth aged 12-17 in Iowa have met the criteria for a drug use disorder (NSDUH, 2021). Nearly 1 in 11 Iowan youth aged 12-20 report binge alcohol use in the last month (NSDUH, 2021).

Currently, Iowa Code 279.9 states that any student found guilty of the use of tobacco and the use or possession of alcoholic liquor, wine, or beer or any controlled substance may be suspended or expelled. This code section does not require suspension or expulsion as part of the punishment for students; rather suspension or expulsion is an option. In contrast rehabilitation is not explicitly provided as a potential alternative to expulsion or suspension. The lack of standardization means school response varies greatly, and students are not all supported throughout Iowa.

Rationale:

Lack of standardization of school substance abuse responses combined with the high prevalence of substance use in teens highlights the need for a proactive and preventative response. However, this response should not exclusively be suspension or expulsion. Punishing youths for substance abuse does not address the causes of substance abuse, which is considered a mental illness according to the Substance

Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). Rather, rehabilitation treatments can reduce drug use by 50%-70% percent compared to those who do not receive treatment (*Hardey, S. et al, 2022*). This highlights the need for a standardized and responsive substance abuse response in Iowa public schools.

Examples of successful rehabilitation programs include Arlington Public Schools' Second Chance Program and Denver Public Schools' Substance Use Prevention Program. These programs focus on educational elements aimed at helping students make healthier choices, emphasizing the significance of addressing substance abuse through educational initiatives rather than punitive measures. Other rehabilitation Programs like the Four Oaks Healthy Lifestyles Program can be combined with suspension to provide restorative support to students who have experienced drug addiction.

Recommended Action:

SIYAC and IYC support an amendment to Iowa Code 279.9 to state "The board shall administer a rehabilitation program, suspend, or expel a student for a violation of a rule described under this section". It shall be made clear that taking one or more of these courses of action is not optional, but required.

Additionally, we propose support for schools to encourage rehabilitation to assist students in recovering from addiction. The method of administering the rehabilitation option shall include programs from a list of organizations which provide such services vetted by the Iowa Department of Health and Human Services.

Sources:

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