

Here's a report on the February 8 East High United (EHU) meeting. The focus of the gathering was a report by Pam Herman, 11<sup>th</sup> grade social worker and Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse (AODA) Coordinator for East. East's half-time AODA coordinator role is funded by a grant from DPI, which funds similar positions at the other three Madison high schools. The grant was renewed for 2006 for a fifth year. In addition to her one-on-one work with students with AODA issues, Ms. Herman also works on developing and supporting student programs, including a student leadership conference; sports nights presentations; and Peers Educating Peers, a group of East students who make presentations to middle schoolers on the risks and dangers of alcohol and other drugs. She also organizes a post prom party, about which there is more below.

Ms. Herman reported that to date, she has received referrals for about 57 students for AODA-related violations. This is considerably more referrals than the numbers at the other three Madison high schools. 26 students were referred for athletic code violations. 24 of the 26 students are juniors and seniors. Two-thirds are male, and nearly three-quarters white. Ten of the referrals were for marijuana use, and 18 were for alcohol (a couple of the kids received two referrals each).

The number of referrals this year is running ahead of the numbers for the past three years. For the last three years, the total numbers of students referred for athletic code violations have been 37 in 2003-2004, 40 in 2004-2005 and 23 in 2005-2006. There is no obvious explanation for this year's increase. Eleven students have been suspended so far this year, which is in line with the numbers over the past three years. Of the suspensions, nine have been related to marijuana and two to alcohol. Nine of the students suspended are male and two are female; five are white and six are non-white. Four students have been expelled. All the expulsions have been marijuana related and have involved incidents more severe than possession or use. All four expelled students are African-American, and three of the four are male.

Ms. Herman also passed out information on 2005 Youth Survey data. The responses include those of this year's juniors and seniors from two years ago about the extent to which they used drugs or alcohol or engaged in other types of risky behavior. Along with a summary of the East responses, Ms. Herman also provided some comparable figures for the school district and for the state. In general, the numbers suggest that East students perhaps did more drinking and used marijuana more frequently than students at the other Madison high schools, although the East numbers did not seem obviously out of line with state-wide figures.

Ms. Herman reported that she has worked hard to combat the impression that there is a lot of drug use at East – though the relative number of

referrals might seem to bear this out – and has tried to change some students' perceptions that alcohol can be an expected component of some of the school's traditions, like prom and senior skip-day. She works one-on-one with students who face challenges in the AODA area, and believes that her experience in her position and students' familiarity with her role at the school has helped moderate the natural resistance of students to discuss AODA issues with those they perceive of as authority figures.

Discussion ensued among those at the meeting. Parents expressed the view that it would be helpful to have some concrete advice about what to do when kids mention that other kids are involved in drinking or drugs, or that they have witnessed, say, a drug transaction at school. The responses seemed to indicate that parents should feel free to contact Ms. Herman or Mr. Harris and pass along what they have learned. The anonymity of the students who are the source of the information can generally be maintained. It is not so useful to pass along what amounts to generalized gossip, but specific information about upcoming events that are likely to involve drugs and/or alcohol, or information about specific drug transactions can be very helpful.

In response to some questions, Mr. Harris stated that, as far as he is concerned, the message that East should be sending to its students is that use of alcohol or drugs is never okay. He is not impressed with the suggestion that some experimentation by older high school students might better equip them for what they'll experience in college or other post-high school activities. Mr. Harris also said that he is interested in starting some small groups at East for students who have had alcohol or drinking problems, or who have had to deal with challenging family situations involving drugs or alcohol.

One of Ms. Herman's initiatives was last year's first-ever post-Prom party. The party was held at Dream Lanes bowling alley from 11 pm until 2 am after the prom, and it turned out to be a success. A lot of kids showed up and they reported having a good time. There was free bowling, food and drink, and prizes were awarded throughout the evening. Ms. Herman would like to repeat the party this year, but an event like this does not happen on its own. Parent volunteers are needed. While the assistance of any parents is welcome, the help of those who have juniors in school this year is particularly sought. If you are interested in helping to plan the event or may be able to assist in some other way, please take a moment to send an email to Ms. Herman at [pherman@madison.k12.wi.us](mailto:pherman@madison.k12.wi.us) or call her at 204-1624 to let her know of your availability.

The next EHU meeting is scheduled for **Thursday, March 8th**, in the LMC (Library), starting at 7:00 PM. The principal topic will be a presentation on a

proposal for reorganizing the East's guidance, social work, and psych services departments. Please try to attend.