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Students with Addictions Stay Sober with the Help of Recovery High Schools

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Due to the success of existing recovery high schools all over the country, and the effects of the current opioid epidemic, more schools of this type are likely to open. Opioid overdoses are still climbing, and sober schools such as the ones in Seattle help students with addictions stay sober.

“I knew what I was doing was bad,” said Marques Martinez, a student who went sober on November 15, 2016. “But I didn’t think there was another way.”

Before learning about the sober school, Martinez was using OxyContin, Xanax, and nearly every other drug he could get his hands on. He had been suspended from school for selling drugs. His parents sent him to an inpatient treatment center and enrolled him at Interagency at Queen Anne, also known as IQA.

The Seattle public school is a recovery school designed for students learning to lead sober lives, while they earn their diplomas. Martinez was skeptical at first, but once he got into the school, he knew one thing immediately: “I felt safe here.”

Right now there are only around 20 students attending classes, but more schools of this type are expected to open in the near future. Students at the IQA attend classes in math, language arts, and physical education. They can also complete other courses online.

The students meet regularly with a counselor and attend daily support group meetings based on the Alcoholics Anonymous programs.

Recent research shows that recovery schools are helping students keep away from drugs and stay in class. This is one way of channeling their energy into something productive instead of something self-destructive.

In 2017, a study conducted by Vanderbilt University associate professor Andy Finch and other researchers showed that students in recovery schools were significantly more likely to report being off drugs and alcohol six months after they were first surveyed. The average reported absences among the 134 recovery school students in the study was lower compared to other students.

Despite its growing popularity, recovery high schools are not new. They have been around since the late 1970s. In fact, about 40 of these schools operate nationwide. There are sober schools in Minnesota, Massachusetts, Texas, and other states.

And as more and more people are dying from an opioid-related overdose, more of these schools are likely to begin operating soon.

“There has been a gap in adolescent treatment for many, many years,” said Finch, who is a co-founder of the Association of Recovery Schools. “The schools are one of the programs that fill in that gap.”

Finch said that about 85 percent of recovery schools are public, or have some source of public funding. Meanwhile, there are other private recovery high schools that operate separately, or as a part of treatment centers.

Finch said that new sober schools are being planned in New York, Delaware, and Oregon. The main obstacle here is the natural challenge of starting a recovery school. Starting any school is complicated, and a sober school is even more so. Policies must be imposed and services have to be funded, not to mention the fact that students have to be recruited.

These types of schools provide hope for students who want to complete their education even as they are struggling with the effects of addiction. Illicit drug use among middle and high school students may be at record lows, but nearly 1 in 5 10th-graders reported using an illegal drug in the previous 30 days. Clearly, there is still plenty of work to be done.

If someone in the family is struggling with opioid addiction, it is important to seek help. A combination of medical detox and behavioral therapy can go a long way in the fight against drug abuse. But because every individual is affected by addiction differently, a comprehensive program tailored to their specific needs is necessary. Look for a nearby addiction treatment facility today and find out how drug treatment programs work.

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