

**BEYOND ZERO TOLERANCE:  
A REALITY-BASED APPROACH TO HIGH SCHOOL DRUG EDUCATION  
FROM THE SAFETY FIRST PROJECT**

Four years ago, the Safety First project worked with the California State PTA to distribute educational resources about drugs for parents of teenagers. Our written materials, including the booklet, *Safety First: A Reality-Based Approach to Teens, Drugs, and Drug Education*, by Marsha Rosenbaum, has been well received in California and beyond, with over 170,000 copies requested by parents in all 50 states, and around the world.

Over and over again, at workshops and conventions, we've heard, "We love your publications for parents, but what have you got for schools?"

Unfortunately, most American high schools do not offer effective drug education, nor do they provide interventions to assist students struggling with abuse of alcohol and/or other drugs. Those schools that do offer drug education often use expensive packages that do not reflect the realities of teenage life. To make matters worse, punishment for rule-breaking such as suspension or expulsion results in increased dropout rates, costing school districts thousands of dollars each year, and sending teenagers down the "schools to jails" pipeline.

Following the lead of the California State PTA's 2003 "Alternatives to Zero Tolerance" resolution passed at the 2003 convention, in partnership with researchers and educators, we've developed an innovative approach for high schools in the form of a new, 23-page booklet entitled, *Beyond Zero Tolerance: A Reality-Based Approach to Drug Education and Student Assistance*, by UCLA Professor Emeritus Rodney Skager.

The Beyond Zero Tolerance model incorporates three mutually reinforcing elements: *education, intervention/assistance, and restorative consequences*.

The basic tenets are as follows:

- Drug education should be honest, balanced, interactive, and delivered in a way that involves full participation of students.
- Intervention for students who need assistance should be an integral part of drug education.
- A restorative process, in which offenders identify harms they have caused and then make amends, should replace most suspensions and expulsions.

The Beyond Zero Tolerance model should be particularly attractive to high schools because:

- It can be developed within a school setting, using existing staff. The familiarity and accessibility of a trusted and respected school employee benefits students who need information, help, or simply a sympathetic ear.
- The use of school personnel saves precious resources. With proper training, one or two staff members can handle drug education and coordinated assistance services, eliminating the need for an expensive package developed and delivered by an outside organization.
- The engagement of students that results from interactive education and assistance translates into increased attendance and decreased truancy, thus avoiding loss of state funding to the school. In both the short and long run, the modest cost of implementation will add up to much less than what we currently spend on programs that do not work and, as a society, what will be absorbed later on in ruined lives and the damage they cause to others.
- Restorative practices pay for themselves by reducing disciplinary incidents and suspensions.

We are delighted to make *Beyond Zero Tolerance: A Reality-Based Approach to Drug Education and Student Assistance* available to the California State PTA. For more information, and/or to order up to 10 free copies of the booklet, please visit [www.beyondzerotolerance.org](http://www.beyondzerotolerance.org) or phone (415) 921-4987.