

Less student drug abuse now than in '70s

Continued from Page 1

"The United States has the highest rate of teenage drug use of any industrialized nation," the report said, citing statistics of 61 percent of high school seniors who have used drugs and 41 percent of 1985 seniors who used marijuana during the past year.

Having followed the district's drug trends since 1967, Nutter said the problem was extreme until the mid-1970s when it leveled off. Drug problems peaked again in local schools during the 1979-80 school year.

As problems escalated, Farmington Families in Action — referred to by Nutter as the district's "right arm" in drug education — was formed by parents in 1982, offering programs in the schools and community.

In the 1970s, "It was nothing for an ambulance to be at a school two or three times a week" because of an overdose, Nicolay added.

FFA involves parents at each school building and tailors individualized programs, depending on the need and request, Nicolay said. The schools and FFA have co-sponsored programs in the district's middle and high schools, and also coordinate an elementary alcohol awareness program. Nicolay also speaks to individual classes.

ON-GOING EDUCATION for school staff members is also provided — from coaches to health teachers — about drug abuse problems and how to handle situations as they arise, Nutter said.

The Department of Education reports "drug use among children is 10 times more prevalent than parents suspect," according to recent research. It also said "many (school districts) do not recognize the degree to which their own children, their own schools and their own communities are at risk."

"We know full well we have students who use them (drugs) outside of school," Nutter said, "but without a doubt, . . . substance abuse — including alcohol — has been reduced significantly" in the schools.

A recently enacted host party ordinance by the city of Farmington Hills has also helped the effort to decrease drug and alcohol problems, Nutter said. The ordinance prohibits adult party hosts from serving liquor to minors. It authorizes a fine of up to \$500 for adult party hosts who either serve liquor to minors during a house party or look the other way when they know it is being served to minors.

"The Farmington Hills ordinance has helped immensely," Nutter added. "It has been effective." There

has been a noticeable decrease in student parties since the ordinance became law last year, he said.

Not only is there local pressure by law, but the Department of Education report also places the responsibility on parents.

It suggests parents teach standards through personal example, supervise their child's activities, know who their child's friends are and take an interest in their child's life. It also suggests the parents be knowledgeable about signs of drug use and respond appropriately to the signs.

THE REPORT recommends each school district conduct anonymous student surveys about drug use, meet with staff to identify areas of drug use and sales in the schools, keep records on drug use and sales,

and meet with parents and community to discuss the problems.

Nicolay said Farmington Schools have never taken student drug surveys, and that "it's time" to follow some of the recommendations in the report.

Superintendent of Schools Graham Lewis believes Farmington Schools today have more of a problem with alcohol abuse than with illegal drugs.

"We need to keep it in perspective," he said. "It's like terrorism — it's obviously there but not in everybody's back yard. We don't have the drug-related problems today we had a few years ago."

He said the emphasis on illegal drugs is "out of proportion to other problems," including alcohol abuse and handgun control.

Nicolay agrees that alcohol is the number-one problem in Farmington schools, and probably throughout the country, with marijuana a close second. "Those are the two most prevalent drugs used by teenagers," she said, "although many use more than one drug."

Drug and alcohol use on school grounds is addressed by the student code of conduct, which calls for immediate suspension of a student when drugs are involved, Nutter said. This concurs with the education report, which calls for defining drug

offenses and a stringent policy for offenders.

If a student is discovered with drugs or alcohol in a Farmington school, the materials are first confiscated and the incident reported to the child's parents.

He or she is then suspended for at least one day, or longer, depending on what course of action is determined in a school/parent conference.

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