

Prom and Graduation Season Substance Abuse Prevention Strategies and Activities

Name of strategy or activity: Riverhead Pre-Prom Red Carpet Reception & Photo Op

Description: In 2013, the Riverhead Central School District changed its prom policy requiring that all students attending the prom meet at the school and travel to the venue via coach bus (rather than limos) to prevent instances of underage drinking and drug use prior to the Senior Prom. The Riverhead Community Coalition for Safe and Drug-Free Youth designed this pre-prom event to provide a reception at which students and families can gather for photo opportunities and enjoy a safe and alcohol-free celebration. This event also provided an opportunity to provide information to families about the risks and consequences associated with underage drinking as well as the Suffolk County Social Host Law. Professional high resolution photos of the students were taken on the Red Carpet and posted on our Flickr site and were made available for the teens and their families to download the following day.

How to get started: We coordinated and developed an event timeline that determined partners' responsibilities, potential sponsors, food, supplies, entertainment, site plan and logistics. We met with senior class leaders and advisors to involve them in the planning process and ensure that the event would appeal to their individual class. We devised and executed a plan solicit partners' involvement and fund development.

Resources needed: At our event, we provide food and beverages, music, a red carpet leading to a Step & Repeat backdrop for pictures, flowers donated by a local nursery for decorations, swag bags, a "touch-up" table with mirrors, hairspray, etc., music provided by a local radio station, and a resource table for parents. Event sponsors helped offset the cost of food, beverages, and decorations. Peconic Bay Medical Center (PBMC) Health Foundation partnered with Riverhead Community Coalition for Safe and Drug-Free Youth to provide funding for the Red Carpet Reception as a public health initiative so event coordinators should seek assistance from a wide variety of resources. PTO's, booster clubs, and student fundraisers are potential avenues of financial support for a pre-prom celebration. Business partners like Tanger Outlets and Suffolk County National Bank contributed items to the swag bags as well. The Suffolk Theatre, a restored 1920's-era venue, donated the red carpet and velvet ropes. Local photographers donated the photography.

People to get on board:

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| Students | Parents |
| School Administrators | Custodial Staff! |
| Local businesses (funding, supplies, decorations.) | Volunteers |
| Local radio stations to do live broadcast and provide music | Photographers |

Steps to Success: Riverhead Community Coalition for Safe and Drug-Free Youth operates under the auspices of Riverhead Community Awareness Inc. (CAP), which has over 30 years of partnership with Riverhead Central School District and service to the surrounding community. These longstanding relationships in addition to the strength of our coalition sector leaders enabled us establish a very successful event. As with any change in policy or norms, students and parents were initially resistant to the new transportation and pre-prom policy. This uncertainty quickly diminished as students and parents experienced the Pre-Prom Red Carpet Reception. The Pre-Prom Red Carpet Reception quickly became a community event in which everyone could see the graduating class dressed up, take group pictures, and wish them well. Parents have often remarked how they wished they had an event like this when they were in high school. The Red Carpet Reception provided a safe, alcohol-free pre-prom community celebration, reduced student transportation costs, and alleviated the social pressure of parents providing alcohol at pre-prom house parties. Since its inception, we have not had one known instance of students attending the senior prom in an intoxicated state. The event has received widespread community and media support for the past three years.

For more information, contact: Riverhead Community Awareness Program, Inc. (CAP) at (631) 727-3722 or visit us at RiverheadCAP.org.