



ASHBROOK INDEPENDENT SCHOOL

To Challenge and Nurture Academically Capable Students

From the Office of the Head of School, Dr. Christopher A. Schoberl

Is it Monday Yet? 9/29/23

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Fentanyl, an opioid many times more potent than morphine, has made headlines for its devastating role in the rising number of opioid overdoses in the United States. The recent tragedy in which a one year old child in a Bronx, NY daycare died due to fentanyl poisoning, has reignited the urgency to discuss its dangers, especially among our children.

As the Head of a PS-8 school, I think it's important for you to know that this topic is tip-top of my mind these days, and while I have no reason to believe that the students of Explorer Nation are in imminent danger of being tempted to experiment with fentanyl, it's out there and currently scaring school leaders nationwide, more than just about anything else.

For our young people, the pressures of academia, peer influence, and the developmentally normative tendency to experiment, often lead to drug use. In the past, this type of experimenting, a nightmare scenario for any parent and the sort of curiosity any caring person would discourage, might have resulted in consequences that were regrettable but nonetheless recoverable. Fentanyl, however, is a game changer.

For one thing, the presence of fentanyl has been discovered, more and more, in other "less dangerous" substances our young people typically try in initial experiments with drugs. So while they may believe that the cannabis they are smoking "is not a big deal," weed laced or cut with fentanyl makes even the single puff of a joint, fatal.

This opioid is so potent that just a few grains can cause respiratory distress and ultimately death. And because it is often mixed with other drugs, our young people, those who might know the dangers of fentanyl and would never consume it, could easily and unknowingly consume this tasteless and odorless substance when thinking they have purchased another "less harmful," or "recreational drug." What might seem like a less risky drug to experiment with to our children, could be laced with this deadly substance. This inadvertent consumption is one of the major factors driving the spike in overdoses among young people. The unpredictability of what's in street drugs makes every use of any drug a high-stakes gamble with one's life. To make matters more challenging, fentanyl is often "marketed" as brightly colored pills or counterfeit versions of common medicines or reputable brands of pharmaceuticals, or even as candy familiar to our children such as Pez, Nerds, or Sweetarts.

Moreover, the risk of fentanyl exposure is not limited to drug users. In its pure form, fentanyl can be absorbed through the skin or accidentally inhaled, posing a danger even to those around it who are unwitting secondhand users. Indeed, there are many documented cases where first responders and law enforcement personnel were exposed to fentanyl, suffering grave consequences, while trying to help fentanyl overdose victims.

The recent Bronx incident serves as a somber reminder that fentanyl doesn't discriminate by age, social status, or intent. It's a wakeup call for schools, parents, and communities to reinforce drug education and create awareness in our students. The emphasis shouldn't just be on the dangers of drug use, though this is important, but efforts should be made in four ways:

- fostering open communication between students and adults
- offering guidance for how to respond to peer pressure
- ensuring that parents are informed about the fentanyl crisis and ensuring they have access to important mental health resources
- providing school staff with access to professional development

I am confident that the environment provided by Ashbrook School, and the partnership forged with our parents, more than adequately meets the standard of open communication. In addition, the good work of Ms. Weber and our Health curriculum, along with the classroom culture provided by our teachers, is a strong antidote to the peer pressure felt in a variety of ways even by all Explorers.

In an effort to provide important mental health resources to parents and professional development to our staff and school leaders, Ashbrook School is currently planning to host an evening community event focussed on this issue, either a panel discussion or presentation, for the entire Corvallis community, so stay tuned.

In the interim, menacing shadow of fentanyl has made it imperative for students and their guardians to be more vigilant than ever. The Bronx tragedy underscores the urgent need for collective action to safeguard our youth from this lurking danger.