



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Terrence Murphy

## Make the Grade: BOCES Students Impressed with Advice from Senator Murphy, Judge Reitz & Local Drug Treatment Experts

TERRENCE MURPHY December 14, 2017

| ISSUE: **BOCES, STUDENTS, ALCOHOLISM AND DRUG ABUSE**



Yorktown, NY - More than 180 students at Putnam-Westchester BOCES Walden School in Yorktown sat on the edge of their seats on December 11, as four adults and a recovering teen explained the legal, personal, and long-term ramifications of drug abuse. Senator Terrence Murphy was joined by experts in their fields, including Judge James Reitz, Susan Salomone, Executive Director of Drug Crisis in our Backyard, Lilly Neuman, Outreach Coordinator for St Vincent Hospital Westchester, a Division of Saint Joseph's Medical Center, and "Jeff," who

proudly spoke of winning his battle against addiction.

"I have traveled across the state and seen the devastation caused by the heroin epidemic. I listened to grieving parents talk about how drugs and alcohol were killing their children," said Senator Murphy. "It starts with peer pressure, when a friend says, 'Just take a hit, just take a sip, it won't hurt you' and it snowballs from there. I developed a four-point plan with my fellow legislators to help people fighting addiction succeed in life. We can give others hope through prevention, treatment, enforcement and recovery. But we need your help. We need you to pick up the phone and call us when you, your family or friends are in trouble."

Judge Reitz, who has overseen the Drug Court in Putnam County since 2007, spoke about second chances in life. "People deserve a fighting chance. When someone has an addiction and recognizes they need help, they deserve all the help we can give them. There is nothing we can't accomplish if we work together."

Susan Salomone and Lily Neuman spoke about risk factors teens face including peer pressure, tweens genetic disposition to drugs and alcohol, and marijuana as a gateway drug. "Decisions determine your destiny," said Ms. Salomone.

Ms. Neuman's presentation was highlighted by a discussion about the chemical dopamine, which is produced naturally in the body and plays a role in the pleasure and reward pathway of the brain. "Once you introduce drugs into your system, your body begins to crave that high. It becomes a learned response. You need that high in order to feel good."

The students were enthralled by Jeff, a peer who told his story of multiple stays in treatment centers and relapses. In the deepest throes of his drug and alcohol addiction, Jeff stole from his parents, overdosed, jeopardized his health, and became violent without provocation. "You

burn everything down around you," he commented. Even after a series of arrests that left him facing serious legal issues, Jeff continued to abuse drugs and alcohol. It wasn't until Jeff took stock of the depth of his addiction that Jeff took his sobriety seriously. "I don't have bad days anymore. I only have bad moments," he said. "Now I can put my head on a pillow at night and go to sleep."