

# Online alcohol program focuses on freshmen

## Parental awareness is essential

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FOR SUMNER A.M.

Alcohol remains the drug of choice in Sumner County for teens, but a new online education program for freshmen presents information to young people in a way they understand and enjoy.

"We are always looking for new and different ways to reach young people," said Pat Conner, Safe and Drug Free Schools coordinator for Sumner County. "The Internet is their medium."

AlcoholEdu for High School is an online program that gives information about the affect of alcohol on teens, measures its use and provides students with options to avoid using alcohol, particularly in social situations with their peers. It's used by all county freshmen.

In its second year of usage, AlcoholEdu is a part of the wellness class curriculum every Sumner County freshman is required to take.

Safe and Drug Free Schools counselor Beth Swindle said students navi-

gate the program at their own paces. While it is a nationwide program, it is tailored for usage in individual states. Sumner County students receive information on Tennessee laws governing underage alcohol use.

A drug prevention counselor for eight years, Swindle said she has seen many programs designed to curtail underage drinking, but she said this online program is one of the best.

"I personally think this is a better way — a student can move at his or her own pace," she said.

Gallatin High School freshman Mitchell Tuttle, who has just completed the program agreed.

"I think online is a good way to present the information," he said.

## Teen survey tracks trends

An important component in the program is the surveys teens complete about their own usage and their opinions. These surveys are done anonymously with each student having his or her own user name and password, Swindle said.

Results show that the

freshman year is a pivotal time for alcohol awareness.

"Data has shown us that there is a significant jump in alcohol use between the eighth and 10th grades," Conner said. "That is why we decided to target the ninth grade. It seems to be a transitional year."

National data shows that as students reach their senior year, more will have tried alcohol, and those who have begun to drink will drink even more.

Tuttle said most on the information presented to him in AlcoholEdu was already familiar, but that it did provide some valuable insights, particularly on how to avoid alcohol use in social settings.

"It gives you alternatives," he said.

## Numbers show some success

The Safe and Drug Free Schools department conducts an annual survey of teen drug use, including cigarettes, alcohol and marijuana.

Numbers between 2006 and 2008 show there has been some change in behavior. The survey showed an average of 50 percent of teens who took the survey

used alcohol in 2006 with that number dropping to 45 percent in 2008.

## Parents have influence

One statistic that both Conner and Sumner County Juvenile Judge Barry Brown agree on is the importance of parents understanding the effect of alcohol on their children.

AlcoholEdu data showed that out of the 1,133 students that completed the survey, of those who drank, 24 percent took alcohol from home without asking and 22 percent got it from their parents or guardians.

"Parents need to be aware of how their teens get alcohol," Conner said. "It's most likely from their own liquor cabinets."

She added giving teens and their friends alcohol to prevent them from leaving the house is irresponsible.

"You would be shocked to at the number of parties that occur when Mom and Dad are gone," Brown said.

Parents who wish to view the AlcoholEdu program online can access it through the Safe and Drug Free Schools link on the Sumner County schools' Web site at [sumnerschools.org](http://sumnerschools.org).