

Chippewa Valley schools boss invited to drug take-back effort



Ron Roberts

By [Mitch Hotts](#), The Macomb Daily

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Chippewa Valley Schools Superintendent Ron Roberts will be part of the U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Michigan's press conference Friday to talk about the National Prescription Drug Take-Back Day.

U.S. Attorney Barbra McQuade has invited several metro Detroit officials to the news conference, which will offer responsible methods of disposing of prescription drugs, while educating the public about medication abuse.

Roberts, superintendent of the 16,200-student district in northern Clinton and Macomb townships, said organizers wanted a school perspective on the prescription drug issue and were aware of the district's efforts to educate the public and reduce substance abuse.

"Our data shows it's really the older kids, in the 18- to 25-year-old range, who might get hooked on prescription drugs and opiates, those type of drugs," Roberts said. "My message will be about our role in educating our kids and our parents about alcohol use and marijuana use, which continue to be gateway drugs to prescription drugs."

Roberts said survey data for Chippewa and Dakota high schools show drug use is down, which he attributes to the proactive efforts of the Chippewa Valley Coalition for Youth and Families. It's the only coalition in Macomb County that is funded by a federal grant, he said.

"We're trying to help our kids to be as successful as they can," Roberts said. "Part of our approach is to take the message beyond the parents, who may not be aware of what their children are doing. We offer classes, literature, even messages in movie trailers at MJR Theatres at Partidge Creek. We want to get the word out."

Charlene McGunn, executive director for the coalition, said while middle and high school students still dabble with marijuana and alcohol, there is a "jump" in drug activity beyond high school.

"That's when the real abuse begins, they start taking prescription pills and then graduate to heroin," McGunn said. "These take-back programs provide the opportunity to get the word out about limiting prescriptions in the

house. Many times it's the grandparents who tend to accumulate medication and unknowingly provide access to prescription pills."

The take-back initiative is focused on addressing public safety and public health issue, officials said.

Left-over medicines that stay in home medicine cabinets are subject to abuse and contribute to the number of accidental poisonings and drug overdoses. Officials say studies show the majority of prescription drugs are acquired from family and friends, who take the drugs from the medicine cabinet.

From there, opioid addicts often resort to heroin because the street drug is cheaper and easier to find than prescription painkillers, which are coming under increased scrutiny from the federal governments. The drugs produce a euphoric high while relieving pain, which makes them highly addictive.

Scott Masi, a referral and outreach specialist from Brighton Hospital, said people need to learn their prescriptions "were written for you and no one else. And that involves re-educating our doctors, who are being re-trained about being held responsible for putting out the prescriptions."

Masi, who will be at Friday's news conference, said the "real story" here is about medication-assisted treatments such as Narcan, a life-saving antidote that reverses heroin overdoses.

"Narcan allows us to save people from overdosing but there is no infrastructure set up because these people are released from the ER within three hours and they're still craving that drug. Our emergency rooms aren't equipped to deal with this chronic behavior -- it's a disease," he said.

Friday's 11 a.m. news conference will be held at the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration's office in Detroit. Other participants include Novi Police Chief David Molloy, Farmington Hills Police Chief Chuck Nebus and Doreen Turk of the Detroit Empowerment Zone Coalition.

The Chippewa Valley Coalition will host two events for people to dispose of unused or expired medication on Saturday. Both the Clinton Township Police Department and the Macomb County Sheriff's Office will have personnel available 10 a.m.-2 p.m. to accept and dispose of the medication.

About the Author



Reach the author at mitch.hotts@macombdaily.com .