

Recovery High Schools

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BACKGROUND

Despite a decrease in the number of adolescents who misuse prescription opioids, youth substance abuse remains a significant issue in the United States.¹ Surveys of teens indicate that the use of drugs such as cocaine, methamphetamine, and over-the-counter cough and cold medicines remains steady among that population.² Substance misuse by teenagers carries unique risks, impacting physical growth and brain development, and contributes to the development of health problems in adulthood, like high blood pressure and heart disease. Moreover, substance misuse is more likely to occur in combination with other risky behaviors such as unprotected sex.³ The earlier a person begins to misuse or abuse substances, the more likely he or she is to develop a substance use or co-occurring disorder.

Teens who develop a substance use or co-occurring disorder and seek treatment are at a unique disadvantage since they are minors and most must return to the same communities (*e.g.*, schools) where they first developed the disorder.⁴ Research has found that high school attendance is often the main threat to recovery.⁵ One study found that most teenagers who return to their school reported that they were offered drugs on their very first day back.⁶ Teenagers who relapse are more likely to leave school.⁷

With such a vulnerable group, recovery high schools (also known as “sober schools”) have emerged as one of the most impactful and effective ways of supporting teenagers in their recovery from substance use or co-occurring disorder. First appearing in the 1970s, a recovery high school is designed specifically for students in recovery from substance use disorder or co-occurring disorders.⁸

The first recovery high schools were intended to provide post-treatment services immediately after an adolescent left a residential treatment or outpatient program and continue to evolve.⁹ In addition to providing students with an education, recovery high schools’ intense post-treatment services often include: (1) help with focusing on relapse prevention; (2) encouraging compliance with a wide range of social services to provide additional support; (3) teaching problem-solving skills so that students can learn to cope with anger, depression, and anxiety; and (4) providing a non-using social network.¹⁰ Recovery high schools also provide ancillary programs to encourage familial involvement in the teen’s recovery.¹¹



Recovery high schools can have a substantial impact on teenagers in recovery. A 2017 study found that students enrolled in recovery high schools were much more likely than those not enrolled in such schools to report being substance free six months after they were first surveyed.¹² Below are examples of established recovery high school programs.

Over the last decade, recovery high schools have received heightened interest from policymakers and funders. Beginning in 2010, multiple National Drug

Control Strategies and the 2016 Surgeon General’s report have specifically discussed the role of recovery schools in fostering community and peer-based approaches. The Surgeon General explicitly mentions the need for more research in this area, and many states, including Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Jersey, Wisconsin, and Tennessee, have passed legislation authorizing and/or funding recovery high schools.

There are currently more than 40 recovery high schools operating across the United States, with more in development. Operation of the schools varies from institution to institution; however there is a set of standards for accreditation established by the Association of Recovery Schools (ARS). Click [here](#) to view the ARS website where there is more information about the accreditation process and a list of the seven schools that are currently accredited.

NORTHSHORE RECOVERY HIGH SCHOOL-BEVERLY, MASSACHUSETTS

Featured on the 2020 MTV docuseries “16 and Recovering,”¹³ Northshore Recovery High School opened its doors in 2006 and currently enrolls students ages 14 through 21 who have been diagnosed with a substance use disorder. The school serves 30 to 50 students at a time and focuses on providing smaller class sizes for students in recovery.¹⁴ Northshore also offers individualized recovery plans and individual and group recovery counseling.¹⁵ The school is jointly funded through the Massachusetts Department of Public Health and local school districts and is one of three public recovery high schools operating within the Commonwealth.¹⁶ For more information about Northshore Recovery High School, click [here](#).

INTERAGENCY RECOVERY CAMPUS AT QUEEN ANNE-SEATTLE, WASHINGTON

Interagency Recovery Campus is the only public recovery high school in Washington State.¹⁷ The goal of the school is to maintain and provide a safe and sober environment where young people in recovery can pursue their high school diploma.¹⁸ Students self-elect to attend Interagency and must commit to actively working toward their academic

goals. Prior to the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, the school provided classroom and online learning programs. Interagency also provides job readiness assistance and “running start opportunities,” which allow students to take college courses while attending high school.¹⁹ For more information about the Interagency Recovery Campus at Queen Anne, click [here](#).

ANCHOR LEARNING ACADEMY- PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND

In 2011, the Rhode Island General Assembly passed legislation that allowed for the creation of pilot recovery high schools within the state.²⁰ A year later, the Providence Center opened Rhode Island’s first recovery high school, Anchor Learning Academy.²¹ Anchor Learning Academy incorporates clinical services into the school day to help students continue the progress they have made in treatment.²² The Academy also helps students develop recovery strategies so that they can successfully transition: (1) back to their high schools, if they chose to do so; (2) to higher education; or (3) into the workforce.²³ In 2017, the school released statistics related to the impact of the program on their students which showed that, between 2013 and 2016, for students enrolled in the school for more three months, the average student attendance for one semester increased to 86 percent.²⁴ It was also reported that student involvement with the juvenile justice system decreased by 63 percent.²⁵ In addition, the percentage of Academy graduates enrolled in higher education or employed full time soared to 80 percent.²⁶ For more information about Anchor Learning Academy, click [here](#).

RISE RECOVERY- SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS

Rise Recovery is a learning-in-recovery pilot program operating in San Antonio, Texas. A learning-in-recovery program must “meet the same state requirements for awarding a secondary school diploma . . . and is designed specifically for students recovering from substance abuse or dependency.”²⁷ The Rise Recovery program is operated in conjunction with the Anne Frank Inspire Academy, a free, public charter school.²⁸ There are, however, fees for the recovery portion of the program, which may be offset by scholarships. As with many other recovery high schools

highlighted in this document, students enrolled in Rise Recovery are required to have an individualized recovery plan that documents the activities in which they will participate to maintain their sobriety. The school employs certified peer recovery coaches to help support students in their recovery journey.²⁹ For more information about Rise Recovery, click [here](#).



THE BRIDGE WAY SCHOOL- PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA

Founded in 2011 by the non-profit Greater Philadelphia Association for Recovery Education, the Bridge Way School is Pennsylvania's first recovery high school.³⁰ Bridge Way provides students with an academic program that requires and supports sobriety through the 12-step principles utilized by programs like Narcotics Anonymous.³¹ At its inception, Bridge Way students were required to pay tuition to attend, the cost of which was often prohibitive for many.³² However, in 2019, Bridge Way School announced that students would be able to attend tuition-free thanks to the passage of legislation by the Pennsylvania General Assembly.³³ In addition to encouraging the creation of new recovery high schools, the legislation also provided additional funding avenues for students who wished to attend recovery high schools within the state.³⁴ For more information about the Bridge Way School, click [here](#).

CONCLUSION

Despite the examples highlighted above, recovery high schools remain relatively rare. The Association of Recovery High Schools, an organization comprised of recovery high schools, estimates that there are only 43 recovery high schools operating within the

United States.³⁵ This may be due to the fact that communities are not aware of the actual number of adolescents who struggle with a substance use or co-occurring disorder.³⁶ Even though 85 percent of these schools are publicly funded or have at least some form of public funding,³⁷ recovery high schools are often expensive to operate, making them less sustainable in the long term.³⁸ Moreover, recovery high schools require cooperation across a wide range of government and private organizations which may be complex and difficult to manage.³⁹ Nevertheless, Andrew Finch, co-founder of the Association of Recovery High Schools, believes that more schools are likely to open as opioid overdoses continue to rise in the United States.⁴⁰ It is likely that recovery high schools will play an increased role in recovery treatment for teenagers with a substance use or co-occurring disorder.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ "Monitoring the Future Survey: High School and Youth Trends DrugFacts," *National Institute On Drug Abuse*, last accessed Aug. 19, 2020, <https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/monitoring-future-survey-high-school-youth-trends>.
- ² *Id.*
- ³ "Teen Substance Use & Risks," *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, last accessed Sept. 1, 2020, <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/fasd/features/teen-substance-use.html>.
- ⁴ *Id.*
- ⁵ D. Paul Moberg and Andrew J. Finch, "Recovery High Schools: A Descriptive Study of School Programs and Students," *Journal of Groups in Addiction & Recovery* no. 2(2-4) (2008): 128-161, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/15560350802081314>.
- ⁶ *Id.* at 5, citing to Adolescent Drug Abuse: Clinical Assessment and Therapeutic Interventions. National Institute of Health, 1995. Web. 11 Nov. 2020.
- ⁷ *Id.*
- ⁸ "What is a Recovery High School," *Association of Recovery Schools*, last accessed Aug. 27, 2020, <https://recoveryhighschools.org/what-is-a-recovery-high-school/>.
- ⁹ Recovery High Schools: A Descriptive Study of School Programs and Students, at 1.
- ¹⁰ *Id.*
- ¹¹ *Id.*
- ¹² Andrew J. Finch, Emily Tanner-Smith, Emily Hennessy, and D. Paul Moberg, "Recovery High Schools: Effect of Schools Supporting Recovery from Substance Use Disorders," *The American Journal of Drug and Alcohol Abuse*, no. 44(2) (2017): 175-184 <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00952990.2017.1354378?journalCode=iada20>.
- ¹³ Steve Liss, *16 And Recovering*, (2020; Los Angeles: MTV Networks), <https://www.mtv.com/shows/g5miqm/16-and-recovering>.

¹⁴ “Northshore Recovery High School,” *Northshore Education Consortium*, last accessed Sept. 18, 2020, <https://www.nsedu.org/schools/northshore-recovery-high-school/>.

¹⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶ *Id.*

¹⁷ “Recovery Campus at Queen Anne,” *Interagency.seattleschools.org*, last accessed Sept. 22, 2020, https://interagency.seattleschools.org/about/campus_location/recovery_campus_at_queen_anne.

¹⁸ *Id.*

¹⁹ *Id.*

²⁰ 16 R.I. Gen. Laws Ann. § 16-95-3 (West 2011).

²¹ Lisa Tomasso, “Did You Know R.I. Has a Recovery High School?” *The Smithfield Times*, May 2017, <https://smithfieldtimesri.net/2017/05/did-you-know-r-i-has-a-recovery-high-school/>.

²² “About ALA,” Anchor Learning Academy, accessed Sept. 17, 2020, <https://providencecenter.org/anchor-academy/about>.

²³ *Id.*

²⁴ *Id.*

²⁵ *Id.*

²⁶ *Id.*

²⁷ “Learning-In-Recovery” *Rise Recovery*, last accessed Sept. 17, 2020, <https://www.riserecovery.org/about-us/our-services/learning-in-recovery/>.

²⁸ *Id.*

²⁹ *Id.*

³⁰ “The Bridge Way School,” *The Bridge Way School*, last accessed Sept. 21, 2020, <http://thebridgewayschool.org/>.

³¹ *Id.*

³² John Kopp, “Legislation Would Fund Students at Drug Recovery High Schools, But Sponsor Sees a Tough Sell,” *PhillyVoice*, Feb. 11, 2016, <https://www.phillyvoice.com/pennsylvania-lawmakers-propose-program-fund-students-attending-drug-recovery-high-schools/>.

³³ Bridge Way School, “Tuition-Free Philly Recovery High School,” *PHENND*, March 12, 2019, <http://phennd.org/update/tuition-free-philly-recovery-high-school/>.

³⁴ *Id.*

³⁵ “What is a Recovery High School.”

³⁶ Deborah Yaffe, “Recovery High Schools Make Dent in Teen Substance Abuse,” *District Administration* (June 2019), <https://districtadministration.com/recovery-high-schools-dent-teen-substance-abuse/>.

³⁷ Anna Gorman, “Inside the Specialized ‘Recovery’ High Schools Designed Just for Teens With Addiction,” *Time* (Jan. 23, 2019), <https://time.com/5509829/sober-high-school-addiction/>.

³⁸ *Id.*

³⁹ *Id.*

⁴⁰ “What is a Recovery High School.”

ADDITIONAL SOURCE

David L. Weimer, Paul Moberg, Falon French, Emily E. Tanner-Smith, and Andrew J. Finch, “Net Benefits of Recovery High Schools: Higher Cost but Increased Sobriety and Educational Attainment,” *The Journal of Mental Health Policy and Economics* 22, no. 3 (Sept. 1, 2019): 109-120, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/31811754/>.

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The Legislative Analysis and Public Policy Association (LAPPA) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization whose mission is to conduct legal and legislative research and analysis and draft legislation on effective law and policy in the areas of public safety and health, substance use disorders, and the criminal justice system.

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