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Colleges ink deal to fight drug abuse

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HARTFORD -- More than a dozen college and university presidents from around the state met at the University of Hartford Friday to sign an unprecedented agreement on drug abuse and to curb excessive drinking on their campuses.

Aliza Makuch, campus program coordinator of the Governor's Prevention Partnership, called the meeting "a time for presidents to sign onto to work that has been done in the past two years."

The Governor's Prevention Partnership, in collaboration with the Departments of Mental Health and Addiction Services and Higher Education, embarked on the project in 2004.

The planning group developed an action plan to address alcohol and other drug use among Connecticut's college students. Using examples from other states with successful programs, the group identified ways to support drug prevention and intervention efforts at the campus level. The statewide action plan was finalized in June 2005.

Makuch said the initiative will:

- Create campuses, communities and a state that actively engage in prevention efforts to reduce high-risk alcohol use, drug use and the negative consequences of high-risk behavior.
- Implement science-based prevention and intervention initiatives on Connecticut campuses.
- Facilitate a support network for information sharing and action planning on statewide issues related to high-risk alcohol use, drug use and the negative consequences of high-risk behavior among Connecticut's college students.

Makuch added that the initiative will continue to recruit "key stakeholders."

The initiative is part of a federally funded grant awarded to the governor's office and administered by the Connecticut Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services.

Friday's ceremony featured presentations of proclamations signed by Gov. M. Jodi Rell, the commissioner of the Department of Mental Health and Addiction services, and the commissioner of the Department of Higher Education, and by participating university presidents.

A panel discussion included James W. Schmotter, president of Western Connecticut State

University; Walter Harrison, president of the University of Hartford, and Calvin Woodland, president of Capital Community College.

Connie Boston, director of counseling and wellness at Central Connecticut State University, represented President Jack Miller at the meeting.

Boston told The Herald that CCSU conducts a full-time substance abuse program.

"A significant portion of our students use alcohol in what we call 'a high-risk manner,'" she said. "This puts them at risk in a variety of ways."

Boston said a sound program is one that is relevant to students, has a policy that can be enforced, and involves students in development of the program.

"It should be a collaborative effort," she said.

Representatives from the governor's office, the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, the Department of Higher Education, and the Governor's Prevention Partnership also signed a commitment letter to signify their support to this initiative

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