



Meeting Notes: Youth Champions Phase 2 Kickoff

Meeting Date: March 25, 2026 **Co-Chairs:** Eddie Brown, John Torres, and Angel Bruno

Focus: Moving from Phase 1 recommendations to Phase 2 implementation strategies.

I. Session Overview

The subcommittee officially launched Phase 2, focusing on actionable implementation strategies for the 2026-2027 cycle. The session was split into two breakout groups to address the first two priority topics: **Non-Punitive Data Collection** and **Responsible Education Standards**.

II. Breakout Group 1: Non-Punitive Data Collection

- **Shifting the Narrative:** The goal is to move from a policing/disciplinary model to a public health framework. Members emphasized the need to "remove the tax on honesty" so youth feel safe sharing accurate usage data without fear of suspension or arrest.
- **Key Metrics (The "Why"):** Data collection should focus on root causes, such as stress, trauma, income instability, and mental health needs.
- **Proposed Methods:**
 - **Anonymity:** Utilizing digital surveys that do not track IP addresses or student IDs.
 - **Trusted Environments:** Collecting data through community-based organizations (CBOs), youth providers, and safe community events rather than directly through law enforcement.
 - **Systemic Data:** Accessing aggregated state-level school data regarding expulsions and disciplinary actions related to cannabis to identify trends.
- **Adult Accountability:** Acknowledged the need to hold suppliers and "illegal dispensaries" accountable for youth access rather than criminalizing the young people working in or buying from those locations.



III. Breakout Group 2: Defining Responsible Education

- **Framework:** Education should be viewed as a "vitamin" (ongoing support) rather than a "vaccine" (a one-time lecture).
- **Science-Based Messaging:** Curriculums must be grounded in adolescent brain development and address the normalization of use.
- **Effective Messengers:**
 - **Pediatricians:** High levels of trust make pediatricians and community health clinics (FQHCs) ideal for early intervention and education.
 - **Peer Influencers:** Utilizing social media influencers and student leaders to deliver messages where youth already consume content.
- **Engagement Strategies:** Moving away from failed lecture models (like the original D.A.R.E.) toward skill-based learning and honest conversations that do not rely on shame.

IV. Research & Strategic Recommendations

- **University Partnerships:** Discussion on collaborating with Yale or UConn to conduct community-informed research and evaluate the effectiveness of different educational models.
- **Regional Collaboration:** Leveraging the 5 Regional Behavioral Health Action Organizations (RBHAOs) to align expertise and findings state-wide.

Meeting adjourned at 5:57pm. **Next meeting date: Wednesday May 13, 2026 4:30pm**