



## Montclair High School sees small uptick in substance abuse cases



*COURTESY CONGERDESIGN/PIXABAY  
A pill pack sticks out of someone's pocket.*

**By ERIN ROLL**

[roll@montclairlocal.news](mailto:roll@montclairlocal.news)

Montclair High School saw an uptick in substance abuse cases between 2016-2017 and 2017-2018, according to the Department of Education.

The number of cases at the high school was low however, compared to some of its neighboring high schools in Essex County.

Montclair High School saw four substance abuse cases at the high school in 2017-2018, compared to one in 2016-2017, according to the district's school performance reports assembled by the state Department of Education. All four were reported to police.

District-wide, there were five substance abuse cases reported among Montclair's 11 schools, four of which were reported to law enforcement.

The New Jersey Department of Education said the report is based on the district's self reporting, but local officials are required by law to report its results fairly and accurately to the DOE annually. Reportable substance abuse cases include tobacco, alcohol, prescription drugs and controlled substances such as marijuana, cocaine and heroin. Information on what substances were involved in Montclair cases was unavailable.

Under New Jersey state law, the district must report to local police any student found with a controlled dangerous substance. No police involvement is required for tobacco, vaping and alcohol.

Among other Essex County high schools, Verona High School had three cases, one of which was referred to the police. Glen Ridge High School had six reports, five of which were reported to police. Columbia High School in South Orange-Maplewood had 24 reports, 21 of which were reported to police. Bloomfield High School had no reported cases of substance abuse. West Orange High School had 20 reported cases, 10 of which were reported to law enforcement. Orange High School had 10 reported cases, one of which was reported to police. And Belleville High School had 10 cases, all of which were reported to law enforcement.

The district requires that all medications, whether prescription or over-the-counter, be kept in the nurse's office, and that the nursing staff must administer them to the student.

Statewide, there were 4,463 substance abuse cases in New Jersey's schools in the 2017-2018 school year. Of those, 2,244 were reported to police.

Each school district is required by law to report cases of violence, vandalism, substance abuse, and harassment, intimidation and bullying to the state Department of Education. That information is subsequently included in the performance reports for the districts and the individual schools.

In 2018, Montclair amended its policy on substance abuse to include vaping, which had been gaining in popularity among students. Students who are caught vaping while on school property are now subject to the same actions as a student caught with a controlled dangerous substance.

DOE spokesman Mike Yapple cautioned however, that because the state changed some of its definitions and

parameters on the reporting of substance abuse cases between the two school years, it might not be possible to accurately compare numbers between 2016-2017 and 2017-2018. Incidents of students vaping, which has become a popular vice for teens, is now required to be reported to the state.

Under Montclair's district policy, a student suspected of being under the influence of a controlled substance is brought to the nurse's office for a medical evaluation. The student's parents or guardians are then contacted so they can take the student to a doctor.

The high school's student assistant counselors offer counseling to students who may be having problems. The district website also has a "Counseling Corner" section with advice for parents and students on risks of opioid addiction, as well as topics such as teen suicide.