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Miramonte students chat with scientists about drugs and alcohol

By Sora O'Doherty

The Miramonte Peer to Peer Club logged in to chat with scientists from the National Institution on Drug Abuse on National Chat Day Jan. 24. In preparation, the students sent a schoolwide email to every Miramonte student asking for their top two questions on alcohol and other drugs. The club members then prioritized the questions to ask the scientists. Later they will close the circle by distributing the answers received to MHS students and parents.

According to Dr. Nora D. Volkow, NIDA Director, the national chat day is an extraordinary event that is a substantial learning opportunity for teachers and students. Each year during its National Drug and Alcohol Facts Week, top scientists from the National Institute on Drug Abuse come together for a day-long live online chat to answer students' questions about drugs and their impact on the teen brain and body. "We have seen thousands of students ask smart, heartfelt, and insightful questions to some of our nation's experts about drugs, drug use, and its effects on the brain and body," she said in a letter to teachers. The Miramonte teens asked questions about athletics and blood doping, the differences between alcohol and drugs, drug use levels in high school, use of more than one drug at a time, prescription pain killers, and quite a few questions about the effects of marijuana. In addition, they asked questions about the dangers of vaping and juuling and how to find help for addiction to nicotine.

The scientists' answers included information about the negative effects of both drugs and nicotine on athletic performance, what blood doping is and that it is banned in international sports. Roger Sorensen explained that mixing drugs can lead to fatal consequences. Steve Grant explained the differences between natural and synthetic cannabinoids, warning that synthetic cannabinoids are much stronger and their effects can be unpredictable and dangerous. Roger Little explained how marijuana can remain measurable in the blood for up to 30 days in people who use marijuana regularly.

Facts about alcohol included that alcohol is involved in more deaths around the world each year than all other drugs combined. According to Aaron White, more than 3 million people die from drinking every year. Cora Lee Wetherington answered a question about teen drinking in Europe, revealing that there is actually more binge drinking among teenagers in most European countries than in the U.S.

Dr. Volkow believes that whether you are registered to participate in the live chat, watching it online, or viewing the archived transcripts, this exercise of seeing real teens' questions about drugs can be a powerful way to help your students gain the knowledge required to make smart and healthy decisions.

The Peer to Peer Club was organized by Jaime Rich, director of ADAPT Lamorinda. The questions were asked by the student members of the Peer-to-Peer club, by Rich and by Debbie Berndt, an adult and a coalition chair.

The complete transcripts from the 2019 Chat Day can be viewed at

<https://teens.drugabuse.gov/national-drug-alcohol-facts-week/chat-with-scientists/search?year=2019>.

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