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WW-P program helps parents talk to kids

Group gives tips on tough topics, enables interaction

By Karen Ayres, staff writer

WEST WINDSOR – Beth Feehan has a new strategy for talking with her young daughters about drugs and alcohol.

She focuses on listening to their concerns first and tries to praise their good qualities. But most of all, she tries to remember how different things are from when she was a child.

“It’s shocking to comprehend what children are aware of and possibly doing,” said Feehan, a West Windsor resident. “We have a fear that 11-, 12- and 13-year olds are exposed to things that we dealt with when we were a lot older.”

Feehan is one of several parent facilitators in a program entitled the “Parent Leadership Corp” that began in December in Community and Grover middle schools.

The program gathers parents in small groups to discuss ways to interact with their children when discussing difficult subjects such as drugs and alcohol.

A lot of parents are concerned with talking about the new things children are being exposed to as early as sixth grade, Feehan said.

Topics range from listening techniques to stress management strategies. All sessions are conducted by trained parent leaders who have children in the West Windsor-Plainsboro school district.

“The focus is for parents to go home and get to know their children,” said Liza Miller, a guidance counselor at Community Middle School who helped develop the program.

About 10 parents gather for a six-session curriculum. Feehan said the information from the program is important, but the opportunity to network with other parents in the district is also critical.

“It’s broadening our connections within the community because our community is so large,” Feehan said. “It makes people cross over and get connected no matter where they live.”

The program is open to any parents in the district, but it started in the middle school because that age is a period of great transition, Miller said.

“If we don’t address the issues during the early middle school years, children can get over their heads by high school,” she said.

The program which started in the Hopewell Valley Regional School District last year, was developed through the Princeton Center for Leadership Training. Miller said she hopes the program will grow to include more high school and elementary school parents in West Windsor and Plainsboro.

Leaders are currently conducting registration for a session that will begin in March and another session to start in the fall. Anyone interested in joining should call either of the middle schools.