

Dover teacher tells board 65% of students use 'grass'

By KAY WILLIAMS

A discussion of marijuana usage by Dover High students, held at the board of education meeting Monday night, left board members feeling that "something should be done" but unsure of the most effective course of action.

The topic was introduced by Brad Swinderman, a secondary special education teacher, who told the board: "I came not to indict, but to challenge."

Swinderman, who said his own investigation into students' drug usage stemmed from an unspecified incident which occurred last winter, presented these estimates:

That 60 to 65 per cent of the students were marijuana "users" (as a Friday and Saturday night social habit); that 70 to 75 per cent had tried it at one time or another, and that a much smaller percentage had come to school "stoned" with some regularity.

"The problem is well into the junior high," the teacher stated.

THE APPARENT reasons, he said, were peer pressure, handling the complex problems of society, boredom and frustration and the desire for a "cheap thrill."

"This is an educational and community problem," Swinderman said, as he

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and school officials attempted to define the role of the school system in dealing with it.

Part of Swinderman's theory dealt with the school system. "We teach submission to the authority of superior force," he stated. "We are not fostering the concept of community and democracy and we don't develop critical thinkers."

Specifying that he was speaking of school systems and society in general, and not just Dover High, Swinderman noted that typical health classes (which he termed "plumbing courses") were not effective. "Sometimes I think the students could teach them, because they know more about what's going on than the teachers do," he commented.

HIGH SCHOOL principal Robert Schrock, who attended the session to discuss a more routine principal's report, took exception to Swinderman's comments about authority and the school system.

"It always bothers me when people just take pot-shots at the idea of authority," he said. "Schools used to be a lot tougher than they are now, and students weren't taking drugs then. We keep backing down and backing down and giving the students more and more authority and freedom and then people point the finger at us and say 'You haven't done the job.'"

The reason for the prevalence of drugs, he said, was because "people make money from it."

"Has there ever been a civilization which was based on making money which survived?" he asked. "Who is doing the selling? Who is making the records and the movies which are glamorizing the drug scene? It's the people

who are making money, and the reason is money."

Supt. Bill Kinneer, who said, "I don't know what the solution is," also commented that there was no drug usage 15-20 years ago, when there was more school authority.

BOARD MEMBER Ed West asked Swinderman, "Who are these students? Is it only the comparative failures in high school, or are they students like class officers and (band) section leaders?"

Swinderman responded that the use of marijuana "cut across all lines," including students in leadership positions, members of the National Honor Society and athletes, as well as "bummer kids."

Isabel Moore, board president, asked: "Do they think nobody cares? Is it a cry for help?"

As board members discussed methods of making teachers more aware of the problem, and possible ways of dealing with it, a 1975 June graduate who attended the meeting as an observer was solicited for comments.

"You're right that most people don't know what's going on," he responded. "But first of all, don't call it a problem, call it a situation."

"Also, don't say 'drugs.' Say 'marijuana and alcohol.' Combine these two, because they're part of the same thing for students and adults. Let's say we're all in the same boat, students and adults, and let's figure out a way to get out of it."

The youth suggested that student discussion-courses, led by the students to discuss the situation openly, might help "if it's done right."

BOARD MEMBERS, led by Mrs. Moore, stated they felt a moral responsibility to attempt a course of action. Kinneer said in-service meetings could be held for the faculty, to make them more aware.

Members stated, however, that drugs were a community problem relating to the home and the church and not just the school system.

Swinderman said he presented his statements to the board after much consideration, because "I know that many people do not really recognize the problem. We must work for better communications and take a moral stand in the community."

He said most high school students were "bored to death" and that the "system, the regimen" connected with operating the schools could be examined. "Are we helping them through the process of critical thinking? Are we educating to them instead of with them? Can we make education productive instead of repressive?"

"I have seen the problem up close, and I am worried and concerned. I am not indicting this school system, I am only saying we need to become more aware and to try to face it," he said.