# County: Plymouth

# Problem Overview

Working with the school districts in the community allowed the SPF SIG Coordinator to address one of the primary concerns of the grant project – school policies. After reviewing the policies present in the county, it was clear that these school districts had worked hard to craft policies that addressed the issues of substance abuse as clearly as possible. As the Plymouth County Health Planning Committee looked at the policies and researched other school policies, it became evident that something could be done to strengthen theirs. The statistics from the 2008, 2010 and 2012 Iowa Youth Surveys demonstrated that underage drinking was on the decline in the county (a decrease of 11.3% for all grades) and that this momentum could be maintained with more action from the schools.

# Problem/ Activity Description

Le Mars Community School District’s Superintendant took on a leadership role and helped to get the issue brought before the district’s school board. As a member of the Plymouth County Health Planning Committee, he was uniquely suited to carrying this message to his district and into the rest of the county. Parents were consulted and a focus group of students was created to see what might work. The SPF SIG Coordinator concentrated on building and organizing the coalition of students, administrators, and community members that would discuss options and elect a course of action.

The groups finally decided that implementing a requirement for students to have to seek an alcohol abuse assessment from a qualified provider was the best course of action. The school board at Le Mars agreed and it was adopted at the end of 2013. The implementation began during the next year and saw Le Mars Community School Districts step up in their leadership role. Other school districts in the county also took interest. They asked questions and met with the SPF SIG Coordinator to discuss their own policy changes. The review of these policies continues, but action seems imminent over the course of the next year to two.

# Program Activity/Outcomes

Working with Le Mars Community School District to implement a school policy change that strengthened their already strong substance abuse policy was the greatest success in Plymouth County. Moreover, having the largest school district adopt a policy change set a precedent for the rest of the schools in the county. The policy implemented the language agreed upon by the subcommittees and set forth an excellent example of what could be accomplished through coalitions and open cooperation.

Additionally, two other schools have shown interest in reviewing their policies. The remaining districts have strong policies, but have continued to work openly with the SPF SIG Coordinator and the Plymouth County Health Planning Committee in reviewing their policies. This great work would not have been possible without the help of the Plymouth County Health Planning Committee, the school district administration and staff at each of the 5 districts, and the students themselves.