



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Chris Jacobs

## Jacobs Secures \$50,000 to Launch High School Program to Fight Heroin Epidemic

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(Buffalo, NY) – New York State Senator Chris Jacobs (60<sup>th</sup> SD) announced that he has secured \$50,000 in state funds to support the implementation of a High School Student Ambassador Program in the City of Buffalo. Developed by the Independent Health Foundation and Western New York United Against Drug and Alcohol Abuse, the pilot program is patterned after the successful Leadership in Training (LIT) middle school program.

“As a Co-Chair of the State Senate’s Task Force on Heroin and Opioid Addiction, I cannot emphasize enough the importance of education and peer engagement in successfully preventing our children from experimenting with drugs and other dangerous behaviors,” said Senator Jacobs. “Our students will benefit greatly from the awareness, relationship building and decision making skills they will develop in this program and I am extremely pleased to have secured the funding to expand it to the high school level.”

“I would like to thank Senator Chris Jacobs for securing funds to help establish the High School Student Ambassador Program that will develop resiliency and leaders among our youth in Buffalo by providing the appropriate resources and tools to overcome barriers and lead healthy lifestyles,” said Michael Cropp, M.D., President & CEO, Independent Health. “A profound aspect of this unique program is that it trains students to become ambassadors to help influence their peers to make better choices for their health and future success.”

Leadership in Training is a leadership and life skill development program developed more than 20 years ago by WNY United Against Drug & Alcohol Abuse. Through this program, students participate in conferences, an intensive summer program, retreats, and school-based activities. Approximately 120 students are trained each summer to become leaders and ambassadors in their schools.

For the past five years, Independent Health has partnered with Western New York United Against Drug & Alcohol Abuse on its Leadership in Training middle school program to develop a healthy ambassadors program in which middle school students are trained to educate elementary school students about the Fitness for Kids Challenge.

"It's been a long time goal of WNY United to expand the Leadership in Training program to High School. We are so grateful to Senator Jacob for his insight and support and to the Independent Health Foundation for working with us to meet this goal," said Beth Anzalone,

Executive Director of WNY United Against Drug and Alcohol Abuse. “Thank you also Medaille College for hosting the LIT program here on the college campus. We are excited to engage young High School students to help prevent risky behaviors and provide them with opportunities to learn essential leadership and life skills.”

The concept behind the high school pilot program is to highlight the resiliency of youth to overcome obstacles and avoid risky behaviors. The development phase will run approximately twelve months, and will consist of alumni from the middle school program identifying and addressing risk factors they encounter in their daily lives, including unhealthy behaviors in their schools, homes and communities. The implementation phase will begin in July 2019 and consist of a five to six week summer training program focusing on self-awareness, self-management, decision-making, relationship skill development and social awareness.

“The High School Student Ambassador Program will bridge the gap between Middle School Leadership awareness and real adult leadership and management skills,” said Dr. Will Keresztes, BPS Chief of Intergovernmental Affairs, Planning, and Community Engagement. “The District is grateful to Senator Jacobs and our partnering agencies in bringing leadership training full circle as we help to develop our students into strong and engaged citizens of Buffalo.”

Some of the goals associated with the pilot program include the encouragement of lifelong resiliency and coping mechanisms, empowering student ambassadors to provide support and take action in their local communities, and building a network to connect their classmates to appropriate resources and activities for healthy behaviors. Program partners will conduct research, collect data and measure improved outcomes in an effort to establish evidence based curriculum going forward.

“The Independent Health Foundation looks forward to the success and growth of this program through the training of peer advocates to help improve the health and lives of high school students in partnership with Western New York United Against Drug & Alcohol Abuse and Buffalo Public Schools,” said Carrie Meyer, Executive Director, Independent Health Foundation.