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Editorial

Recovery High is a positive step for New Jerseyans

The goal of Recovery High is to intercept the biggest temptation many addicts face when they get out of treatment: The drug pusher on their first day back at school.

Kudos to state Sen. Raymond Lesniak for making it a reality. The small school he created to help teen addicts stay sober will open for the first time next month, after a two-year battle for its existence. It will welcome its first class of 10 students in an unused campus space donated by Kean University.

Lesniak (D-Union) hopes to expand this pilot program, because unfortunately, the need is great: In 2004-05, a year for which there was data, more than 37,000 New Jersey students had to go to some form of rehabilitation for substance abuse.

Think of this as tens of thousands of crimes and early deaths just waiting to happen. As many as 93 percent of the young people who go back to public schools after rehab get offered drugs or alcohol the very first day they're back at school, research has shown.

Nearly 50 percent relapse within the first month.

Prevention Links, a local recovery organization, pitched the idea of Recovery High and Lesniak fought hard to fund it.

There were all kinds of roadblocks: A charter school model didn't work, because of student geographic restrictions and the

heavy emphasis on recovery services. The public school establishment was unwelcoming, and the cost of a private school was prohibitive.

Thankfully, Union County's vocational and technical schools finally agreed to be the public school partner and provide the academic component. Students at Recovery High will get the same per-pupil funding as in a regular district school, Lesniak says, and the recovery services — which cost twice as much — will be paid for through private donations.

Now he wants to expand the program so young people in other counties can have access to it. He envisions at least one school in North, Central and South Jersey, and to help make that happen, he's proposing legislation to allocate additional per-student funding for recovery school students.

"One is a small step," Lesniak said. "Three is a better start. That's what I'm hoping to achieve."

A National Institutes of Health study has found that students have a high rate of success after attending recovery schools. And if this is what it takes to help them stay sober, why not?

Hiring looks like a family affair

Four times in the past few days, the state Department of Education was asked whether there were any posting requirements for a \$92,000 job filled by a middle school math teacher who happens to be the son of Joe N. DiVincenzo, and four times the response was crickets.

Public posting and an exam are usually required for jobs that fall into the category of civil service, but a 30-year-old teacher whose father is the Essex County executive and an ally of Gov. Chris Christie has skirted one and probably both of these barriers on his magic carpet ride into state bureaucracy.

A DOE spokesman will only say that Joe G. DiVincenzo was "approved" by the Civil Service Com-

mission, and related education services to education agencies to ensure achievement of mandated goals and to meet existing and emerging needs.

If that seems vague, you probably don't qualify for a job in state government.

Bureaucrats tend to obfuscate even when the occasion doesn't call for it, and sometimes they create positions that are so nebulous they

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MARIO COLITTI GUEST COLUMNIST

Young children should play multiple sports

Hunterdon County's public schools are blessed with a plethora of sports talent. The behemoth baseball factory known as Hunterdon Central is the standard bearer for excellence throughout the state.

Our youth sports "feeder" programs are well-organized, competitive and ostensibly prepare boys and girls for the rough-and-tumble world of varsity sports. However, the ever-increasing requirements for success in competitive sports have created added pressure for young athletes to train with greater intensity at earlier ages.

Parents become motivated by prospects to obtain a college scholarship for their child, or the superficially seductive chance that little Johnny will become a professional athlete. These misguided parents push their children to specialize in one sport at a young age. This has generated an increased demand for expensive year-round sport training programs, private lessons and facilities.

According to Dr. John P. DiFiore, president of the American Medical Society for Sports Medicine at UCLA, few who specialize in one sport at a very young age make it to elite levels.

"With the exception of select sports such as gymnastics in which the elite competitors are very young, the best data we have would suggest that the odds of achieving elite levels with this method are exceedingly poor," he says. "In fact, some studies indicate that early specialization is less likely to result in success than participating in several sports as a youth, and then specializing at older ages."

DiFiore encourages children to attempt a variety of sports and activities. He says this allows children to discover sports that they enjoy, and offers them the opportunity to develop a broader array of motor skills. In addition, this may have the added benefit of limiting overuse injury and burnout.

This comports with a recent UCLA sports specialization study surveying 296 NCAA Division I male and female athletes, average age 19, which found that 88 percent participated in an average of two to three sports as children, and 70 percent did not specialize in one sport until after age 12. In a similar study of Olympians in Germany, results

found that on average, the Olympians had participated in two other sports during childhood before or parallel to their main sport. Both studies support the concept of sports diversification in adolescence — not specialization.

More alarming research conducted by John O'Sullivan, founder of Changing the Game Project, concluded:

- Children who specialize in a single sport account for 50 percent of overuse injuries in young athletes, according to pediatric orthopedic specialists.

- A study by Ohio State University found that children who specialized early in a single sport led to higher rates of adult physical inactivity. Those who commit to one sport at a young age are often the first to quit, and suffer a lifetime of consequences.

- In a study of 1,200 youth athletes, Dr. Neeru Jayanthi of Loyola University found that early specialization in a single sport is one of the strongest predictors of injury. Athletes in the study who specialized were 70 percent to 93 percent more likely to be injured than children who played multiple sports.

- Children who specialize early are at far greater risk for burnout due to stress, decreased motivation and lack of enjoyment.

- Early sport specialization in female adolescents is linked with increased risk of anterior knee pain disorders compared with multi-sport athletes, and may lead to higher rates of future ACL tears.

Sports diversification should be emphasized in every school-affiliated and independent sports program from Little League to high schools. The troubling attitude of parents who seek to relive old glory vicariously through their child, or harbor delusions of their kid's future greatness, needs to be tempered with the cold reality that specialization simply does not work.

Mario Colitti has been coaching youth baseball and basketball since 2008. He is certified by the Postive Coaching Alliance and serves on the Tewksbury-Little League Board, a volunteer entity that oversees Tewksbury Township's Little League program.