

LETTER to the Editor:
If you break the rules, you pay the price
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As CEO of SSTAR, one of the city's largest providers of addiction recovery services, as well as the mother of two teenagers who were on the Westport High School European trip, I want to voice my concerns.

First of all, it was clear that this was a trip associated with the school. Teachers were chaperones; meetings about the trip were held at the school; and the bus departed from and arrived at the school. Secondly, I am appalled at the parents who are condoning the poor choices made by students on this trip. My children have traveled extensively throughout the world, and I have never thought it necessary to have them drink alcohol as a culturally enriching experience.

The teenagers who made the decision to drink made a poor choice, and the school handed out a consequence. This is what life is about, and in order to raise responsible adults, lessons need to be learned about what happens when the rules are broken.

Lastly, I do think the school administration should improve its drug and alcohol policy. Suspending students — especially giving them nine days off — does little to help a teen learn about how to make decisions.

There are evidence-based programs that help teens look at the decisions they make and assist them to determine whether their choices will move them toward meeting their goals. A combination of reflection on the actions and the consequences, plus disciplinary action would have had a greater impact.

After 30 years providing addiction treatment, it is clear to me that at its root, addiction is a pediatric disease. Of the more than 4,000 patients SSTAR treats each year, 99 percent of them have histories of alcohol or drug abuse that began in their teens. Delaying the onset of use is a critical component of fighting this disease. Parents must do all they can to prevent use in order to assure the health of the children they love.