

# SUPERINTENDENT'S CORNER: Our pledge to 'do something' about drug epidemic

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Laura Hammack

By LAURA HAMMACK, guest columnist

I am writing this column from a place of profound sadness, coupled with a little bit of anger and mixed, thankfully, with a whole bunch of resolve.

When you are a principal or a superintendent, you are blessed with the opportunity to attend a lot of happy occasions in the lives of our school family, like weddings and baby showers.

As well, you are given the important responsibility of attending many occasions for which school family members are experiencing profound sadness, at funerals or celebrations of life.

Last night (Sept. 10), I attended a celebration of life for a young man who was a father, son, grandson, brother, nephew, friend and graduate of Brown County High School. His life ended entirely too early, as it was stolen by the realities of the drug epidemic that is plaguing our community, our state and our nation.

On the morning of this past Labor Day, I was a member of a group of individuals who gathered on the front steps of Brown County High School to respond to the loss of this young man and other young people in our community. The group gathered to pray for the loss of these amazing young lives, to acknowledge the impact that drugs are having on our community and to respond with action and love to prevent another brilliant life being taken from our community too soon.

The rallying cry that has been locally adopted for our community in response to the loss of our sons and daughters to this terrible epidemic is "Do Something."

The idea is that it's time for us to get real about the impact that these drugs are having on our community.

The idea is that it's time for us to work together to make positive change happen in the lives of young people, so that none of us experience the loss that has been experienced by families in our community when their children are taken too soon.

Brown County Schools is ready to work together with our community partners to respond.

Through a grant from AT&T, we are excited to deliver a comprehensive evidenced based model to our students in Grades 9 to 12 called the Botvin LifeSkills program. The curriculum is designed to strengthen student abilities in the following areas: 1. Personal self-management skills where students develop strategies for making healthy decisions, reducing stress, and managing anger; 2. General social skills where students strengthen their communication skills and learn how to build healthy relationships; and 3. Drug resistance skills where students understand the consequences of substance use, risk-taking and the influences of the media. We are hopeful to expand this program or others with similar efficacy across other grade levels to enhance these skill sets in our students.

I was very touched that Sheriff Scott Southerland reached out to me only days after we learned of the loss of this young man, and he asked to meet to discuss ways for the schools and the sheriff's department to work together to make a positive impact on reducing drug addiction with our young people.

As a result of that meeting, the sheriff and I are in the process of organizing an event for our students where they will hear from real people who are in recovery from addiction, parents who have lost children to drug overdoses, and voices from individuals who are currently incarcerated due to their drug addiction.

Students need to understand that they can never even "experiment" with these drugs. These drugs will take their life with their first try. We won't be obtuse about this. We will be real.

A dear friend of mine recently lost her beautiful 22-year-old daughter to an addiction with heroin. She told me a story at her daughter's funeral that has stuck with me ever since.

When her daughter was in rehabilitation, my friend asked her what she would say to young people who are being faced with this drug. Her daughter said, "RUN."

We have to run toward this epidemic. I don't want to see one more mother or father say goodbye to their child before their entire story is written.

While I believe the actions that we have taken to respond are headed in the right direction, there is so much more that needs to be done.

We accept that responsibility and pledge that the schools will not put our heads in the sand when it comes to this issue.

We also want to be bold and say that we don't have the answers on how to fix this. However, we pledge to be tireless in our resolve to find them.

I do know that you'll find us out there doing something. I promise you that.

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