

To Make Our Schools Safer, We Must Fight Disease of Addiction

A Letter to the Editor Published in The Southern Maryland Enterprise, 10/5/18

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Link to published letter: http://www.somdnews.com/enterprise/opinion/letters_to_the_editor/treating-disease-of-addiction-will-help-make-schools-safer/article_db88a585-62fb-5d56-b01e-39bb1979de37.html (Below version includes minor editing for emphasis and clarity.)

Following up on the Great Mills High School shooting, The Enterprise editorial of Sept. 21 asked, “Are our schools safer, six months later?” That question needs to be publicly responded to by all public officials who have responsibilities for policies affecting the health and safety of our schoolchildren.

But as a longtime parent participant in the health department’s behavioral health group, I see the published reports on **student drug use and related unhealthy behaviors and must say “no.”**

According to student responses to the 2016 behavioral health survey:

- 24% (about 2,400 kids) reported that illegal drugs continue to be offered, sold or given on school property.
- 18% (about 1,800 kids) reported that they regularly use marijuana.
- 33% (about 3,300 kids) reported that they regularly use alcohol.
- 30% (about 3,000 kids) reported suffering depression.
- Nearly 20% (about 2,000 kids) said they had at some point considered committing suicide.

Many thanks to Dr. Meena Brewster, county health officer, for her leadership in producing this important data.

And thanks to school superintendent Scott Smith and school safety director Mike Wyant for publicizing the drug prevention film “Chasing the Dragon,” which illustrates the awful devastation of drug addiction, and exposes the **gateway effect of marijuana contributing to those tragedies.**

The editorial cited the **“object terror for children”** who witnessed the school shooting. But similar terror is frequently suffered by defenseless children bullied by **drug-deranged kids allowed in the schools under flawed school policies** that fail to protect the health and safety of all kids, innocents and drug users alike.

Dangerous drug users would not be allowed in the schools under new student health protection policies that could randomly **health-screen all kids** and provide counseling and treatment for those exposed to the potentially deadly disease of addiction. County schools already provide Screening, Brief Intervention and Referral for Treatment (SBIRT) for limited purposes.

And they already provide alternative schools for offending kids who need to continue their education.

But these policies need to be tweaked to also provide badly needed preventive health screening confirmed by biologic tests.

This one school policy change alone will quickly begin **reducing the drug-related danger and terror currently prevailing in schools** if our public officials would endorse, support and promote its use. Then, we all should be able to agree—and I’m sure The Enterprise would be happy to report-- that our schools are indeed getting safer.