

Chalkboard

By

Dr. Randy C. Barrett, Superintendent
Gentry Public Schools

Last week I opened the *Chalkboard* with the question “Do we have a problem?” and ended it with “So what’s the school going to do about it?” In between the two questions I addressed in general the apparent increase in the use of illegal drugs in Benton County and in the Gentry School District.

At last Monday morning’s “principals’ meeting” the principals and I spent some time discussing the issue. None of the four principals believe that our district has any greater problem than any of our counterparts in Benton and Washington counties. Hear that carefully, none of the four said that we did not have a problem but rather that it was a common problem. Earlier visits by telephone with some of my superintendent friends in the area tended to support that view. Be that as it may, other schools having the problem does not make it okay for us to have it.

The other single prevailing thought that came out of the principals’ discussion was that the problem for those students, that may be using drugs, is not a lack of “head knowledge” concerning the dangers of drug use. All four said that the work we have done in the DARE program, the Red Ribbon activities, and the health curriculum in the classrooms should be providing ample information in that area.

The principals queried aloud as to whether students who use drugs are seeking to fill some void, some need to belong. A review of some disciplinary cases revealed that the students, which have been dealt with this year and in the past, were comprised both of students who are actively engaged in one or more extracurricular activities and those who are not so involved. Belonging or lack of belonging to school groups did not appear to be a critical attribute in identifying students who might be at risk of using drugs.

From the field of discipline, our school has sought to be pro-active with our policies. Consequences for violating school drug policies are spelled out in black and white. Those policies are reviewed each year. Our policy for drug testing student athletes has been on the books for the last five years.

We have cooperated with our local police authorities in doing random searches in the higher grades using “drug-sniffing” dogs. When students have been discovered with illicit drugs, they have faced the consequences

both in the school district and with the legal authorities. Most district citizens are aware that the school and city have a joint agreement that has resulted in the school having a SRO or school resource officer on site each day.

This year, discussions have been underway to examine our policies to include some alternate to a student being expelled as a first consequence. This is not to be viewed as a weakening of our policies or resolve but rather the realization that an intermediate step of having student violators enroll in a drug counseling and rehabilitation program might yield a better long-term result. Such an intermediate step would not relieve the student from any “outside the school” consequences with law enforcement officials.

Sometimes assumptions are made that parents know all the “in’s and out’s” of our policies. Sometimes assumptions are wrong. Either way I will close this piece with this fact and question.

Here’s the fact- for five years our local policies have allowed parents, of students less than 18 years of age, to place their child or children in our random pool of students from which we randomly draw out athletes to be drug tested. Students who test positive have some serious consequences but those consequences do not include suspension, expulsion, or referral to the police.

Here’s the question- “Why hasn’t any parent of a non-athlete chose to place their child in the pool?”