

# ADE DAILY NEWS CLIPS

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## Rx Drug Abuse: Schools Monitor Students, Offer Resources (Pine Bluff Commercial)

*Editor's Note: This article is part of a series produced by the Southwest Times Record in Fort Smith. The remaining articles will be published in The Commercial as space permits. The entire series will be published online at [www.pbcommercial.com](http://www.pbcommercial.com). Next: Many people do not seek help because of stigma.*

FORT SMITH — Local schools are doing what they can to monitor students so as to intervene more quickly when a child develops a substance-abuse problem or relapses into one, area school officials said.

According to Prescription Drug Abuse by Arkansas Youth, a report by the state Office of the Drug Director, 73 percent of teen study respondents say they use drugs to deal with the pressures of school; 65 percent say to look cool; 65 percent say to feel better about themselves; 55 percent say to deal with problems at home; 40 percent because being high feels good; and 26 percent because drugs are fun.

"Teenagers have a hard time knowing where they fit in," Van Buren High School counselor Renee Henson said.

Regarding prescription painkillers, 56.4 percent of teen study respondents said they use them to relax or relieve tension; 53.5 percent to feel good or get high; 52.4 percent said to experiment; 44.8 percent said to relieve physical pain; and 29.5 percent to have a good time with friends.

"It's sad to think there are children who have such severe problems they feel they have to resort to drugs to deal with them," Van Buren High School Principal Eddie Tipton said.

### Drug Testing At Greenwood, Alma

Greenwood Superintendent Kay Headley said her district randomly screens students from middle school through high school.

About 80 percent of the district's students are in the drug-screening pool. If a child participates in an extracurricular activity or drives a car to school, he or she is placed in the pool, she said. Students who test positive are tested again.

If a child does not pass a drug test, the school mandates counseling and educational programs for the student and his or her parents, Headley said. Mental health counselors meet with students and families. Professional development on student drug use is provided for teachers and is included in the

district's teen suicide intervention training. Home visits sometimes provide information that aids the counseling process, Headley said.

The district's Parent Center provides educational resources to parents, and Greenwood also provides a series of parenting classes each year. Resources are listed in the student handbooks and educational fliers are available in each school building, Headley said.

Alma High School Assistant Principal Nick Spencer said officials started random drug testing this year at Alma High School.

Alma teachers have been trained to recognize warning signs of possible drug abuse. School counselors have several resources to help students and parents, including local agencies, hot lines and referrals to outside counseling programs.

#### Fort Smith Schools

The Fort Smith School District does not differentiate among types of drugs used by students, said Communication Director Zena Featherston Marshall.

The Fort Smith district also shies away from applying a label such as "substance abuse" to students, she said.

If a student has drugs in school without permission, such as a doctor's medication prescription specific for that child and verified by the child's parent or guardian, the child is considered to have brought drugs to school, regardless whether the drug brought in is a prescription drug or one considered illegal, Featherston Marshall said.

Featherston Marshall said counseling and referrals made for Fort Smith students who have brought prescription drugs to school without permission are made through the same kind of process they'd go through if they'd brought a substance such as marijuana to school.

#### Van Buren Schools

Besides an annual Red Ribbon Week focus on awareness, Van Buren School District officials hope to offer a sober high school called Hope Academy. It will be part of the high school, housed with the Career Center on the old J.J. Izard school campus.

The first such school in the state, it will offer regular curriculum classes as well as group sessions and after-school activities starting in August. From 3-6 p.m. on school days is the main drug abuse time for adolescents, Henson said.

Students who come out of treatment programs and return to their regular high school setting face a 75 percent relapse rate, Henson said. With Hope Academy, the district hopes to make a significant dent in the relapse rate.

Henson said students can be referred to Hope Academy from Horizon, an adolescent treatment center at Western Arkansas Counseling and Guidance Center, or they may be court-referred by a juvenile judge. School counselors also will encourage students who they think would benefit to try it at least for a semester.

Tipton said Hope Academy is not a “we gotcha” kind of thing, but rather a “we’re going to help you” program.

When students are first caught using drugs, they generally say they started using at least two years earlier. “Most of the time, it is escapism, not recreation,” Tipton said.

Over the next couple of years, Van Buren will institute some changes aimed at bolstering a healthy environment, such as increasing parental involvement in decisions regarding the issue. It will mean community meetings and asking tough questions, Tipton said. Parents often have good ideas and perceptions. They know the situation in the community, and they know children, Tipton said.

Although some educators shy away from such a direct approach because they don’t want to risk giving the parents the impression there is a drug problem in the school, Tipton said, he prefers a straightforward, transparent approach.

School administrative staff are making small cultural changes, too, such as being more visible among the students. This type of change can have a positive effect on students, not just regarding substance abuse, but also emotionally and academically, Tipton said.

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## **Legislature likely to stay past Friday deadline (Pine Bluff Commercial)**

LITTLE ROCK — Legislation setting state spending priorities showed little movement Wednesday, making it likely that the General Assembly won’t meet its Friday deadline to wrap up business.

Meanwhile, the Joint Budget Committee endorsed an appropriation bill Wednesday that would grant a 2 percent raise to the state’s judges and prosecutors, and a co-chairman of the panel said he expects rank-and-file state employees to get the same pay increase in separate legislation, but not legislators or the executive branch officials.

The Senate sent to the governor Senate Bill 914 after approving a House amendment to the bill that would create a new state office to investigate suspected Medicaid fraud.

The bill, sponsored jointly by Sen. David Sanders, R-Little Rock, and Rep. Bruce Westerman, R-Hot Springs, would establish an Office of Medicaid Inspector General as part of the governor’s office.

SB 914 also would create the new criminal offense of health care fraud and direct the Office of Information Technology to test and strengthen the Medicaid payment system to detect fraud, improve accountability and automate processes for the review of claims.

The House voted 57-23 Wednesday to approve SB 1010 by Sen. Jeremy Hutchinson, R-Little Rock, which would require all mattresses sold in the state to bear a label stating whether they are all new or contain previously used materials. Selling a used mattress as new would be a Class A misdemeanor, punishable by up to a year in jail and a \$1,000 fine.

The bill goes to the governor.

In a 78-9 vote, the House passed SB 821 by Sen. Keith Ingram, D-West Memphis, which would require people being paid to collect signatures for a ballot initiative to be registered with the secretary of state's office and to sign affidavits stating they have not been convicted of any crimes.

The bill goes to the Senate for concurrence in a House amendment.

The House voted 90-0 to approve HB 1896 by Rep. Ann Clemmer, R-Benton, which would require the state Department of Education and the state Department of Higher Education to work together to study the reasons behind the high need for remedial classes among Arkansas college freshmen and to develop a way for high schools to share in the cost of offering those remedial college classes.

The bill goes to the Senate.

Also Wednesday, the Senate passed, 33-1, HB 1017, by Rep. Denny Altes, R-Fort Smith, which would allow a school district to adopt curriculum standards for an academic course on the Bible.

The bill goes to the governor.

The Senate also approved HB 1774 by Rep. James McLean, D-Batesville, which raises the minimum state funding for an adequate education for all K-12 students by 2 percent in each of the next two years. The measure also includes a 1.8 percent increase in separate funding categories for English-language programs, alternative-learning environments and professional development.

The bill passed 35-0 and goes to the governor.

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## **Bill to halt grants to Planned Parenthood fails in House committee (Pine Bluff Commercial)**

LITTLE ROCK — A bill to cut off state-issued grants to Planned Parenthood failed to clear a House committee on Wednesday.

Senate Bill 818 by Sen. Gary Stubblefield, R-Branch, failed in a 10-8 vote in the House Public Health, Welfare and Labor Committee, falling one short of the 11 votes it needed to pass out of the 20-member committee. The bill passed in the Senate last week on a 19-11 vote.

The bill would bar state grants to any entity that performs abortions or provides abortion referrals, contracts with a person or entity that performs abortions or abortion referrals or is an affiliate of a person or entity that performs abortions or abortion referrals.

Opponents said the bill unfairly targets Planned Parenthood, which receives about \$70,000 annually in federal grants awarded through the state Department of Health to provide educational programs on sexually transmitted disease prevention for high school students.

Rep. David Meeks, R-Conway, who presented the bill in committee, did not deny that the bill targets Planned Parenthood, which provides services that include abortion but does not use taxpayer dollars for abortions.

“The people of Arkansas have spoken loudly to me that they don’t want their taxpayer dollars going to Planned Parenthood. At all. Period,” he said. “They may do some good things, but overall (Arkansans) are very concerned about the abortions that are performed by this organization.”

Karen Swinton, a local health educator for Planned Parenthood, testified that education on sexually transmitted disease is especially important in Arkansas, which she said ranks seventh in the nation in teen pregnancy, third in teen births, seventh in gonorrhea, eighth in syphilis and ninth in chlamydia. Teens have the highest rate of chlamydia in the state, she said.

SB 818 “only makes our health challenges worse,” she said.

Committee Chairman Rep. John Burris, R-Harrison, said he did not know whether the committee would meet again before the end of the session. Stubblefield said later he will ask the committee to meet one more time and take up his bill again.