

February 13, 2015

To the Honorable Rep. Ron Highland, Chair, and Members of the House Education Committee:

In 1998, the initial year for the Drug Free Communities Grant, Emporians for Drug Awareness became the first community coalition in the State of Kansas to be awarded the grant. I had been a volunteer on the coalition since 1990, and was hired as the group's first Executive Director, a position I held until 2007.

The competitive application had to be based on a need in our community that could be demonstrated by data from a reliable instrument to track the outcomes of our work over time. Fortunately, our district participated in the Kansas Communities That Care survey which was one of the approved instruments that measured behavior and perceptions among youth that the grant program was intended to address.

When I use the word 'data', I am not referring to personal information that we hear about every day when agencies' databases are hacked. I am referring to percentages of a school's students who respond to each question in a particular way. These percentages give us a snapshot of trends of both perceptions and behavior. We, in prevention, use that information to help determine evidence based strategies that will change the environment in our communities that may be contributing to our youth making poor choices. We are able to look at the total percentage of our students' results and compare it with their peers across the state. At no time are we made aware of individual responses nor are we trying to change behavior by targeting specific individuals.

Many entities or agencies – school districts, domestic violence prevention, youth mentoring, community corrections, Juvenile Justice Authority, health departments to name a few – utilize this completely anonymous information to create more healthy environments, often by leveraging funds from other agencies rather than depending on the state. The snapshot this data provides to address problem behaviors is essential to keeping our communities safe and our youth healthy.

Please feel free to contact me if you have further questions.

Respectfully,

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