

Senator says keep teaching AIDS

By Kylee Hahn

The Iowa Legislature passed Senate File 496 in May, a sweeping educational bill that included changes to school health curriculum.

The bill struck out requirements that students learn about acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) and human papillomavirus (HPV) and the availability of a vaccine to prevent HPV.

However, Senator Ken Rozenboom, the chair of the Iowa Senate Education Committee, said AIDS and HPV still need to be covered in a school's health curriculum, along with other STDs, and thinks people may have gotten the wrong impression about the language change in SF 496.

"It appears that some folks are missing the point here and reading much more into this than they should," said Sen. Rozenboom. "This change in the law in no way changes the need to teach about AIDS and vaccines."

Sen. Rozenboom said it should be understood that legislators try to avoid being too prescriptive in Iowa Code language.

"We typically don't use specific names, such as AIDS/HIV, because as circumstances change, the law needs to be adaptable to those changes," said Sen. Rozenboom.

AIDS was discovered in 1981, and Sen. Rozenboom said lawmakers felt it was important to require it to be taught then.

"It would be like lawmakers today deciding we need to specifically require that

schools teach about the COVID virus and related vaccines," said Sen. Rozenboom.

Now that we have many years of experience treating and preventing AIDS, he said it no longer made sense to keep that specific language in the Iowa Code.

"That doesn't mean we shouldn't teach about it; rather it means that we should teach about it in the same context as the other STDs," said Sen. Rozenboom.

It is unclear if Durant will continue to teach about AIDS and HPV after SF 496 was passed in May. Durant Superintendent Mr. Joe Burnett said he read SF 496 as it is the district's choice whether to include lessons on AIDS and HPV or not.

Mrs. Margaret Buckton, a professional advocate for the Rural School Advocates of Iowa, also thinks that schools need to teach about AIDS and HPV.

"The standards still require teaching students about sexually transmitted diseases, which would include HIV/AIDS and HPV/vaccines," said Mrs. Buckton.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, HIV infections dropped from 36,500 in 2017 to 32,100 in 2021. For the age group 13 to 24-year-olds, infections dropped from 9,300 in 2017 to 6,100 in 2021.

Ms. Hannah Wachtel, the community education coordinator at Trinity Muscatine Public Health, visits the Durant schools and delivers health curriculum to grades five through twelve throughout the school year.

Ms. Wachtel covers topics such as

decision making, communication, healthy relationships, and prevention of unwanted pregnancy and STDs.

"We help students understand what HPV and HIV/AIDS are, how they are passed, common symptoms, how to reduce the risk of getting them, medications and vaccinations that are available, and where to get tested and the importance of being tested," said Ms. Wachtel.

"HPV and AIDS are very real diseases that affect people in our communities. If we can teach people, whether they be adults or students, about ways to protect themselves, it can reduce everyone's risk of contracting or passing on potentially deadly diseases."

Ms. Wachtel presents the fifth grade with two lessons about puberty and the reproductive system. She has five lessons in sixth grade with a program called Draw the Line, Respect the Line. It helps students understand more about how to handle peer pressure. Seventh and eighth graders receive five lessons from the Rights, Respect and Responsibility program.

The high school wing receives two lessons on STD prevention and birth control methods.

"The public health topics we cover continue to be approved by each respective school district," said Ms. Wachtel.

"These are important lessons that empower young people to take charge of their health to protect themselves and our community."

Durant opens food pantry run by donations

By Ava Streeter

Durant has opened its own food pantry and is looking forward to helping community members put meals on the table.

The pantry, located at 807 Third Street, opened October 7, and in the first three weeks served 41 households totaling 90 people with 21 of these people under the age of 18, and 32 of them over 65. The pantry gave out 1,253 pounds of food in October, which is almost 14 pounds per person. That does not even fill a seven-day basic need.

Mr. Justin Nelson, one of the directors of the food pantry, said up to 150 local residents have food insecurities based on USDA and US Census statistics.

According to a joint report from United Ways of Iowa and United for ALICE, in 2021, 36 percent of households in Iowa couldn't afford basic needs, one being food.

Mr. Nelson said it's important to remove the stigma of using a food pantry for

local residents, and a good way to do that is for community members to volunteer at the pantry to get first-hand experience.

"It is less about being a handout and more about a hand up," said Mr. Nelson.

It is also important for the pantry to promote itself through news articles, social media posts, and word of mouth.

"Expect to see us popping up all over and getting involved," said Mr. Nelson.

He said one of the amazing things about donating food is that it personalizes the experience.

"Whenever we donate a can of soup or a box of mac-n-cheese, we can imagine for a moment someone else sitting down to enjoy it," Mr. Nelson said. "We know we are impacting real people who have real lives just like us."

He also said the food just tastes better when it has been donated by a kind person wanting to help out.

In addition to food contributions,

Mr. Nelson said money donations have been a big help to the pantry. The money is used to buy food from a food bank or reservoir at a discounted price.

"We will always need more donations," Mr. Nelson said.

Mrs. Tessa Dierickx, the Durant school's food director, said about 25-30 percent of our total enrolled students receive free or reduced meal benefits.

"Having food available for those students on weekends or breaks is important, and the Durant Food Pantry can help provide that to families in need," Mrs. Dierickx said.

Mr. Nelson said the food pantry will definitely be a resource for local students.

"This is a topic that is top of mind for all of us at the food pantry," he said.

Mr. Nelson said food poverty in the school is the pantry's biggest concern, and in the near future he would like to provide access to after-school snacks for students to enjoy.

He also said they are always looking for ways to support the backpack program run by Mrs. Jenny Dittmer, director of the school's student services.

Mrs. Hailey Houk, who runs the Family, Career and Community Leaders of America (FCCLA) program at the school, is finding ways for her students to help out the food pantry.

Last month during Halloween, FCCLA went trick or treating for cans and other goods to give to the food pantry. They collected 747 pounds of food on Halloween night. FCCLA also plans on helping the pantry every other Wednesday to help stock and deliver supplies.

Mrs. Houk is excited for the impact FCCLA is going to make in the community. **See FOOD PANTRY, page 2**



Photo by Nic Poston

School nurse Mrs. Mary Dorris shows instructions for a dose of Narcan.

School nurse stocks Narcan

By Garrett Pearlman and Royce Richman

The Durant school nurse Mrs. Mary Dorris now stocks a nasal spray called Narcan to reverse the effects of an opioid overdose.

"I hope that I never have to administer Narcan at Durant schools, but the possibility is increasing," said Mrs. Dorris. "With the popularity of vaping or legalization of marijuana, the risk is growing."

Mrs. Dorris termed the nasal spray an "opioid antagonist, meaning it binds to the opioid to block its effects." Narcan was made available over the counter in March of this year.

"It is important to remember that Narcan can be effective but cannot always prevent an overdose death," said Mrs. Dorris.

According to the National Education Association, 30 states now authorize the use of naloxone, the generic name for Narcan, in K-12 schools.

One especially deadly opioid, fentanyl, takes a very small dose to be lethal.

Durant Police Chief Orville Randolph confirmed that there have been fentanyl-related deaths in the community.

"We have had a few in the area," said Chief Randolph. "I know we have had some deaths without going into specifics due to family privacy."

He said that fentanyl can be ingested through the skin, which makes it even more lethal. However, Narcan works quickly within a few minutes after being injected via nasal spray.

"Minutes count when somebody's not breathing," said Chief Randolph. "It's gotten to the point where the police department's been carrying Narcan for probably four or five years now in our first responder bags, and obviously the ambulance carries Narcan."

He said it's also possible for an elderly person that's prescribed an opioid for pain relief to accidentally take too much and overdose.

"We have deployed it [Narcan] a number of times already just in the last two years," said Chief Randolph. "We've had some success with it, and we've also had some not-so-good success with it where we've lost some people because of fentanyl."

When asked whether Durant police have investigated school-related cases involving fentanyl, Chief Randolph declined to comment.

Durant School Resource Officer Joshua Bujalski said that there has been a rise in fentanyl use in the Quad City area.

"There has been fentanyl that is **See NARCAN, page 2**



Photo by Kaetlyn Hansell

Durant resident Hallie Hansell donates boxes of oatmeal to the FCCLA food drive.