

OPINION: LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

High school coach can teach school superintendent plenty

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North Branford Superintendent of Schools Robert Wolfe could learn a lot from Timothy Curtis, an Avon teacher and high school basketball coach who last year suspended two players from his basketball team for drinking. When the school administration did not support his decision, he resigned his coaching position.

With the support of both parents and students, the Avon student-athletes eventually served their suspension and Curtis returned. He took a firm stance against underage drinking by role-model athletes, while Wolfe reversed an earlier district decision and allowed the starting quarterback and another player to be eligible for North Branford's homecoming game.

On Oct. 21, North Branford police busted a publicized high school drinking party and seized 90 beers. Among those charged for possession of alcohol were five football players, a cheerleader, and four other athletes. The parent who failed to stop the drinking from occurring in her home was also charged under a law effective Oct. 1.

Alcohol is the drug of choice for Connecticut teens. More youth drink alcohol than smoke cigarettes or marijuana and use illicit drugs combined.

According to the 2005 Connecticut School Health Survey, more than 45 percent of high school students report drinking alcohol during the past month despite being under 21, and nearly two-thirds of those who drank consumed five or more drinks in one sitting. Binge drinking is strongly associated with serious and tragic individual and social consequences, including alcohol poisonings, violence, and negative effects on adolescent brain development.

In order to participate in the Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference schools are required to develop policies on use of alcohol and drugs and coaches must discourage use. Superintendents should too.

The district's initial action to suspend the five football players was justified as a firm approach toward addressing the serious problem of underage drinking. Sadly, Wolfe's later reversal of the suspensions came at the precise time when a clear and consistent message affirming the school's concern for student health and safety and reinforcing state law was most needed. Wolfe's actions sent two troublesome messages: that underage drinking is acceptable and that student-athletes are above the law.

Matthew J. Cook

Hartford

Editor's note: Matthew J. Cook is a member of the executive committee of the Connecticut Coalition to Stop Underage Drinking.