

Clayton, Jackson and Delaware counties target underage drinking

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BELLEVUE, Iowa -- Above-average rates of underage drinking in three area Iowa counties have prompted wide-reaching efforts to curb the destructive trend.

After one year of study, substance abuse prevention leaders in Clayton, Jackson and Delaware counties are finalizing plans to address underage alcohol consumption rates. The local efforts are part of a five-year program in 12 Iowa counties deemed to have the highest need.

County officials will be tasked with marshaling local resources and creating a "strategic prevention network" to keep alcohol out of the hands of young people.

"I think it does affect student life," said Bellevue High School senior Natalie Sullivan. "If one person sees their friend is (drinking), obviously (there is) peer pressure. ... We come from such a small community that you're friends with younger people and older people. Once you build a relationship with older people, it's not as hard to (ask them for alcohol)."

PARTNERSHIPS FOR SUCCESS

The Iowa Department of Public Health launched the Iowa Partnerships for Success program in September 2014. The project is funded by an \$8.1 million federal grant.

State officials used data, including information taken from the Iowa Youth Survey, to identify the 20 counties most in need of help addressing underage drinking. Clayton County ranked seventh-highest on the list, while Jackson County was ninth and Delaware County was 18th.

Dubuque County came in sixth. However, it was not one of the 12 counties chosen for the program.

Each county will receive a little more than \$87,000 per year, according to Julie Hibben, the program's director. The money funds a full-time Partnerships for Success coordinator who oversees local efforts to combat underage drinking.

"You create a plan, you implement that plan, and then you evaluate the plan," Hibben said.

Counties recently submitted program proposals to the state and are awaiting feedback. Jen Stolka,



Drunkest city (copy)

Clayton, Jackson and Delaware counties are among 12 high-risk Iowa counties to each receive \$87,000 per year for 5 years to develop and implement a prevention plan.

Delaware County's Partnerships for Success coordinator, said implementation could begin as early as next month.

The grant period will end in September 2019.

SCHOOL OUTREACH

In the 2014 Iowa Youth Survey, about 37 percent of 11th-graders in Jackson County reported having a drink in the past 30 days, according to Marybeth Bousman, the county's Partnerships for Success coordinator. The statewide average was 23 percent.

"In Jackson County, there are 77.5 alcohol licenses per 10,000 people in the county," Bousman said. "The state rate for that is 42.8 alcohol licenses per 10,000 people. ... It makes access easier for all individuals, including youth, having that higher percentage of alcohol licenses."

A key component of Bousman's plan is the implementation of educational alcohol diversion program in Bellevue Community Schools. The district was shown to have a higher rate of underage drinking than other school systems in the county.

Sixth-graders will be introduced to a series of comic books meant to expose the "glamorization" of alcohol, according to Bousman. In seventh grade, they will move on to peer-led discussions about substance abuse. Reinforcement will continue into eighth grade.

Middle school is a good time to reach out to students about the dangers of drinking, according to Sullivan, Bellevue High School's student body president. High school students, many of whom already have tried alcohol, might not be as receptive to the message, she said.

"They can't see the effect (alcohol) has," she said. "Whereas if we talk to the middle school, it's going to allow them to see, 'OK, this is going to affect me.'"

Schools in Clayton County also will be offered specialized curriculum addressing underage drinking, according to Tracy Yelden, the county's Partnerships for Success coordinator. Both Clayton and Delaware counties also will roll out an Iowa Department of Public Health media campaign encouraging students to think about what they give up by drinking.

OTHER IDEAS

Clayton County officials also could begin cracking down on impaired drivers through saturation patrols and safety checkpoints, Yelden said. Officials could consider adding more teeth to social host laws, which penalize adults for knowingly hosting drinking parties for children 17 years old and younger, she said.

"We're looking at maybe broadening the definition of who a social host is," Yelden said, noting that Iowa law only targets homeowners or leaseholders, not other adults who live at a residence. "I know other counties have looked at addressing the 18- to 20-year-old range because state law doesn't address that."

Alcohol sales are a "big moneymaker" in Delaware County and drinking is a "big community

culture," according to Stolka. Her job is to help "keep (alcohol) out of the hands of the kiddos."

"We are going to be focusing on best practices for community events that are selling and promoting alcohol," Stolka said, listing wristbands and beverage server training as examples.