

Commentary

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 16, 1989

• THE
BASIC IDEA;
(NOT VERY
CLEARLY
PUT) ?

COMMUNITY-
BASED,
CITY SUPPORTED
ANTI DRUG
ACTION -
SUSTAINED
by a citywide
CIVIC
MEDIA

PAGE 12

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An Independent Newspaper

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Sam S. McKeel, President & Chief Executive Officer

Charles T. Price, Publisher

Raymond R. Coffey, Editor of the Editorial Pages
Mary L. Dedinsky, Managing Editor

Here's a scheme to win drug war

By Steve Sewall

President Bush's war on drugs hands Chicago the best chance we will ever get to correct our drug and gang problems.

Chicago parents, teachers and students yearn for, and are entitled to, safe, drug-free neighborhoods and schools. During the mayoral campaign, Richard Daley promised action on drugs. Now, as mayor, Daley can empower every Chicago school and neighborhood to declare its own war on gangs and drugs. Here's how:

In coming weeks, the mayor works with education, police, and community groups, and with gutsy leaders like the Rev. George Clements and Rev. Michael Pfleger, to develop a community-based battle plan.

Schools Supt. Charles Almo and Deputy Mayor Lourdes Monteagudo consult with principals, the Chicago Teachers Union and the newly elected councils to develop a voluntary safe school plan for each school. Then, in November or December, the mayor supports the Almo-Monteagudo plan with:

- Emergency local and law enforcement measures aimed at the leadership core of major gangs.
- Televised community meetings that give voice to the desire of Chicagoans to rid their schools of drugs.
- Innovative police/community/school support measures to protect at-risk schools.

- Funds for more drug education in all schools.

The school leaders' safe school plan respects three things: the importance of the democratic councils, the authority of the principal as school leader and the right of each school to decide when and how it will make itself drug free.

The first part of the plan is the school's own definition of its drug and gang problem. No school can become drug- and gang-free until it has defined its problem and, most importantly, decided that the time has come to solve it. If recent television accounts of the Homewood-Flossmoor High School situation are accurate, an undefined drug problem was somehow reduced to the relatively small problem of voluntary vs. enforced testing of school athletes.

In defining their drug problems, schools will need to gather all available information, through referendums of parents, staff and students.

The second phase of the plan is making schools safe, something that will take years and put brave people at risk. Fortunately, Chicago already has schools in rough neighborhoods that have tackled drugs and gangs effectively. Much can be learned from them.

Through our new local school councils, the "I will" city can be a "We will" city.

Steve Sewall, a Chicago educator and writer, is a board member of the Citizens Schools Committee.

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