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Editorial

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Party time

The Historic Triangle Substance Abuse Coalition has come up with a winner in the "party tipline."

Word spreads fast when kids happen to mention that their parents will be gone for the weekend. Next thing you know, Ferris Bueller is spending the rest of his day off drinking at someone else's home.

Drinking parties transcend school authority, but the tipline bridges the gap. That's good, because these parties reflect a community problem, as pointed out by Elise Emanuel of the WJC School Board.

Arguably whenever a party brews, the neighbors can call the police themselves. But the beauty of the tipline is that it enables police or the coalition to intercede before the party ever gets rolling. Preferably the sooner the better.

You can see the minds twirling among teens who resent the tipline. Some will see it as a constitutional violation of privacy, but they're wrong on two counts. The courts have long limited children's rights, and nothing protects an illegal act.

Some teens will aspire to planting false tips to distract authorities from the real party they're planning, on the theory police can't be everywhere. This argues for sanctioning the tipline to a legal footing so that false leads become misdemeanors.

The tipline will be especially useful to the loudmouth who brags about his parents being gone, only to find he's set up for the party of the year. If he himself calls the tipline and shuts down things early, everyone will be protected.

The best angle to the tipline is that it will give teens pause before planning a party, which is the whole idea. Prevention beats prosecution.

As good an idea as the tipline is, it remains hypothetical for planned parties. Once an illegal party has begun, anyone can call 911 to break it up. Less hypothetical but just as valuable for prevention is random drug-testing. The coalition has promoted this among athletes as a leadership function and a model of deterrence. The WJC administration and School Board have dragged their feet and need to pick up the pace.