



Tipline aims to crash teen drinking parties

By Mary Vause

JAMES CITY — Heads up, teens. A tipline is coming to report any plans for underage drinking parties. The idea is to nip illegal parties in the bud, well before they get out of hand.

Any student teacher or parent who hears of an illicit party will be able to leave a message on the 24-hour line, and police will follow up.

Once WJC's attorney approves, the Historic Triangle Substance Abuse Coalition will implement the tipline, now that the School Board has unanimously

approved.

Parties when the parents are out of town are a rite of passage for teenagers and a Hollywood staple, most famously in "American Pie." But they're also a menace to society, with teens driving home drunk after they've trashed a house.

More recently, a Lafayette High football player was kicked off the team when a coach overheard him discussing a party where there'd be alcohol — and the coach showed up.

The coalition has been building the tipline for months. York Schools, local law enforcement agencies and some big subdivisions have already signed on.

The coalition plans to promote the phone

number at local schools and is seeking partnerships with churches and businesses to boost the tipline.

WJC School Board members applauded the coalition's proactive initiative to curb teen drinking.

"They recognize that it's not just a school problem," said Elise Emmanuel at last week's meeting. "It's a community problem."

The only qualm is whether the policy constitutes an invasion of privacy. "I think we should at least run this by our lawyer, because afterwards is too late," said School Board member Ron Vaught.

Superintendent Gary Mathews agreed to

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run the tipline through legal but said he does not foresee any problems. He pointed to a precedence in Fairfax County Schools and said the coalition's handling of the tipline would relieve the school system of liability.

The coalition will pay for the phone line, check messages, contact police, create tracking forms to record the outcomes of information left on the tipline, and develop a marketing campaign in the schools.

"If the attorney says it's okay, you can just implement the tipline without getting back to us," School Board member Mary Minor instructed Mathews.

Some students like the tipline but also foresee pitfalls.

"I think a tipline could be effective, because a lot more people hear about parties than just attend them," said WJC senior Sarah Lenceski in an interview Friday. "But I think people are always going to find a way to evade the police."

"I don't think a tipline would curb drinking totally, because it's hard to stop everything," said fellow senior Mark Sobczak. "But I think it would probably be helpful."

Would some students view the tipline negatively as a form of tattle-taling on their peers?

"I think that's going to be the biggest deterrent," said Lenceski. "Kids won't want to be seen as the person who's telling the police."