

Reader questions reporting

Written by Holyoke Enterprise

Dear Editor:

I'm proud of my roots in Phillips County and often brag about how I was raised, the type of people and community I represent and the results of those interactions that make me who I am today. This is often met by a chuckle and comments about my small-town ways by my friends, students and business associates, who are often from locations much larger than Holyoke. I good-naturedly take the comments in stride as a sign of their jealousy.

I was having this type of conversation recently and an associate mentioned the story on Channel 9's news about a sexual harassment/assault case that went unreported in Holyoke, at the high school, during school hours. I got online and viewed the story and was concerned. I went online to the Holyoke Enterprise's website to view their information on the story and was unsatisfied.

The only mention of the incident was the fact that a letter had been sent to the district office reminding/outlining the process required by law when dealing with a sexual assault at a school. To read the newspaper's article by itself would imply that it's a ho-hum memo from the state to follow a procedure after 'an alleged incident between two students in December at Holyoke High School.'

I went on to read the rest of the Enterprise's article and was insulted by the statement by Dr. Tharp about how 'important it is to me that parents know that student safety is always a priority for this district.' First, with all due respect, Dr. Tharp, your feelings are not the focus so get over how important it is to you.

Second, the school and its employees by its very nature, has a fiduciary duty to protect kids while they are in the schools. Third, and largely unaddressed from what I can tell, is the WHY of the non-reporting.

In today's world everyone knows bad things happen everywhere. By standing up and reporting that something bad has happened doesn't make the person or business reporting the issue (in this case, a teacher/administrator) bad by default.

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It's an acknowledgement of a situation/issue which can then be addressed using established policies and procedures. Lack of action or an unwillingness to confront an issue by anyone associated with the incident speaks to a lack of leadership on some level.

I'm not there, don't have kids there, and don't know the teachers there now. I know addressing injustice never used to cause any hand-wringing among the teachers I used to have. What is the plan to address those who failed to do their job and protect the kids?

I went to school in Holyoke with many of those affected in some way by this event. It's awful that there is a leadership issue to address in Re-1J (based on the handling of this matter) on many levels. The lack of courage/failure to act may go all the way to the top of the organization.

That's not something I ever expected to say about Holyoke High School and the Re-1J board, but the leaders of the organization should be held accountable for the leadership vacuum that exists. I'm curious to see how things unfold.

Sincerely,

Brad Haynes, Class of 1988

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Editor's Note: The Holyoke Enterprise does not currently report juvenile cases which are under investigation. Neither are families involved in such juvenile matters identified.

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