

Fentanyl suspected in non-fatal overdose at LCPS school

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By EVAN GOODENOW

https://www.loudountimes.com/news/fentanyl-suspected-in-non-fatal-overdose-at-lcps-school/article_afc68c82-776d-11ee-ade0-bb5eda0c898b.html

A Loudoun County Public Schools student is believed to have overdosed after taking a suspected fentanyl-laced pill provided by another student, according to the county Sheriff's Office.

The student was hospitalized on Oct. 17 at Inova Loudoun Hospital from a "suspected overdose," according to a search warrant affidavit filed in Loudoun Circuit Court on Oct. 24. The affidavit, written by Detective Patrick R. Smith, seeks information from the phone of the student who allegedly provided the pills. "Your affiant believes the phone contains evidence of distribution of controlled substances, more specifically fentanyl, in Loudoun County," Smith wrote.

Smith described the alleged victim as a "juvenile male" but didn't provide an age or say which school he attended. Smith said the boy confirmed he was given pills by the other boy when they met in a school bathroom at lunch on Oct. 16. Smith said school surveillance video confirmed the bathroom meeting. "The juvenile stated he ingested some of the pill that day and he ingested more the next day leading to his overdose," Smith wrote.

Joan Sahlgren, LCPS director of communications and community engagement, wouldn't say in an email at what school the suspected overdose occurred or how many times overdoses occur at schools annually. Sahlgren directed all questions to Sheriff's Office representatives, who didn't respond to calls or emails.

Fentanyl, a synthetic opiate, is [50 to 100 times more potent than heroin](#), according to the Drug Enforcement Administration. Because it's cheaper to produce than heroin and more potent, fentanyl production and use have surged in the last several years. The spike includes the production of fentanyl-laced pills which are often [disguised as prescription pills](#) such as M30 oxycodone pills. With demand high, the supply has been plentiful despite DEA seizures, [including in Loudoun](#).

8 Park View students overdose, fentanyl suspected

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By EVAN GOODENOW

https://www.loudountimes.com/news/8-park-view-students-overdose-fentanyl-suspected/article_7a22f2fe-782c-11ee-a266-93205e38a274.html

A series of overdoses at Park View High School in Sterling is believed to involve fentanyl-laced pills.

At least eight students have non-fatally overdosed, including seven in the last three weeks, according to [an Oct. 31 news release](#) from the Loudoun County Sheriff's Office. Four overdoses occurred at school and three students needed to be revived with the overdose antidote naloxone, which is marketed as Narcan. Two of the three revivals required CPR by school staff.

One of the overdoses occurred on Oct. 17, [the Times-Mirror reported on Oct. 30](#). It involved a male student, according to the LCSO. The victim said he purchased pills from a fellow student.

The suspected dealer sent messages on Snapchat discussing drug dealing and said he would no longer be "servin" at school, according to a search warrant affidavit filed in Loudoun Circuit Court on Oct. 31 by Detective Patrick R. Smith.

The news release said LCSO investigators have been assigned to Park View to identify who's dealing the pills.

"We know the overwhelming number of Park View students are responsible and care about the safety of their school, and we are putting all available resources into identifying who is responsible for distributing these lethal drugs," Sheriff Michael L. Chapman said. "We have also encouraged LCPS to continue its communications with the Park View community and have offered our assistance with additional educational and security measures."

LCPS Superintendent Aaron C. Spence said in the release that Park View parents received a message this week from the school division with information and resources for drug treatment. The school division is also holding grade-level assemblies and school meetings. Spence said extra administrators and counselors have been assigned to the approximately 1,400-student school and the effort is part of a division-wide fentanyl awareness initiative that began last spring with [six information sessions](#).

The training includes how to use naloxone. It is typically administered with a nasal spray.

Joan Sahlgren, LCPS director of communications and community engagement, said in an interview that at least two staffers at each of the division's 18 high schools are trained in administering naloxone and more than two have training at Park View. Additionally, all LCPS middle- and high schools are assigned school resource officers who carry naloxone.

Fentanyl is a synthetic opioid 50 to 100 times more potent than heroin.

The Park View overdoses are part of the national opioid epidemic, which includes a spike in the last couple of years of overdoses involving counterfeit M30 oxycodone pills that contain fentanyl. Fentanyl has also been found in prescription pills such as Adderall, hydrocodone and Xanax, according to the Drug Enforcement Administration.

“Distributors in the United States are selling counterfeit pills on social media, appealing to a younger audience that use these apps,” the DEA said in a 2021 fact sheet. “Minors and young adults experimenting, as well as regular substance users, believe they are buying authentic oxycodone, Adderall, Xanax, or other medicines, but are unwittingly purchasing counterfeit pills that contain lethal amounts of drugs, usually fentanyl and methamphetamine.”

Of the approximately 107,000 fatal overdoses in the U.S. last year, about 68% involved synthetic opioids, primarily fentanyl, [according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#). The CDC said there are five times as many overdose deaths annually in the U.S. than there were 20 years ago due to opioid addiction. Spence alluded to addiction in the release.

“When students come to school, we want them to learn and thrive. But, most of all we want them to live,” he said. “We must, as a community, come together to find ways to help our young people who are facing these issues.”

The release said the LCSO has investigated 18 opioid overdoses involving juveniles this year compared to 19 for all of last year. Not including Leesburg, there were 138 fatal overdoses and 745 non-fatal overdoses in the county between 2017 and 2021, according to the LCSO. Most deaths involved opioids and most victims were in their early 30s.

In the same time period in Leesburg, 23 people fatally overdosed and there were 152 non-fatal overdoses, according to the Leesburg Police Department. The youngest overdose victim was 4 and the oldest was 78, but most were in their 30s.

Anyone with information on the Park View overdoses is asked to call the LCSO at 703-777-1021. Anonymous tips can be submitted by calling 703-777-1919 or by emailing Sheriffs_Narc_Tips@loudoun.gov.

LCPS reports 10 suspected student overdoses at 6 high schools

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By EVAN GOODENOW

https://www.loudountimes.com/news/lcps-reports-10-suspected-student-overdoses-at-6-high-schools/article_fe32b976-7994-11ee-9abb-238b0173dd6c.html

When Loudoun County Public Schools held [five fentanyl-awareness sessions](#) in February and March, acting school division spokesman Daniel L. Adams wouldn't say if any students had overdosed on fentanyl. He cited privacy concerns and not receiving "consistent follow-up information" from hospitals and parents.

But in a division-wide email to parents on Nov. 1, LCPS Superintendent Aaron C. Spence said there have been 10 non-fatal suspected overdoses at six of the school division's 18 high schools since the school year began in August. He said suspected overdoses occurred at Briar Woods, Broad Run, Dominion, Loudoun County, Park View and Tuscarora high schools.

Spence defined the suspected overdoses as incidents that involved CPR, hospitalization, use of the overdose antidote naloxone, or a combination of the three. Spence said there four incidents requiring naloxone for the entire 2022-23 school year. Spence, who began as superintendent on Sept. 1, said the number of incidents are "concerning and distressing" and pledged to address them.

"Please know that we take this issue seriously. We have processes in our schools for screening students suspected of drug use. Every time we become aware of suspected drug use or an overdose in our schools, we work directly with our parents and with the Loudoun County Sheriff's Office to investigate and address the incident," he said. "And we will continue to collaborate with the Loudoun County Sheriff's Office as well as other agencies to identify needed resources and supports for all of our schools."

The announcement came a day after the Sheriff's Office [reported eight Park View students overdosed](#), including seven in the last three weeks. Four overdoses occurred at school and three of those students needed to be revived with naloxone, which is marketed as Narcan. Two of the three revivals required CPR by school staff.

One of the suspected overdoses occurred on Oct. 17. The Times-Mirror contacted LCPS on Oct. 26 about it after a search warrant affidavit was filed by the Sheriff's Office in Loudoun Circuit Court about it earlier in the day. The Oct. 26 affidavit said the boy is

believed to have overdosed after taking a fentanyl-laced pill he got from a fellow student.

Joan Sahlgren, LCPS director of communications and community engagement, wouldn't say in an Oct. 26 email at what school the suspected overdose occurred or how many times overdoses occur at schools annually. Sahlgren directed all questions to Sheriff's Office representatives, who didn't respond to calls or emails until late on Oct. 30.

"We've been waiting for county public schools to issue a statement," Thomas A. Julia, lead LCSO spokesman, said in a voicemail on the night of Oct. 30. "But they apparently have not."

The LCSO issued a news release the next day.

Sahlgren wouldn't say in a Nov. 1 email when Spence first learned of the Park View overdoses. She provided an email sent by Park View Principal Jason Jefferson to parents earlier in the week. In the email, Jefferson cites the dangers of fentanyl, a synthetic opioid 50 to 100 times more powerful than heroin, and said students are abusing it. He didn't specifically acknowledge the suspected overdoses at Park View.

"We are seeing students ingesting drugs prior to school and suffering the effects while in school," Jefferson wrote. "We are hearing reports of young people outside of school experiencing medical emergencies. And our staff and first responders are working together in critical situations to meet the crisis."

In response to delays in acknowledging the overdoses, longtime LCPS critic Republican Gov. Glenn A. Youngkin on Nov. 1 issued Executive Order 28. It directs the Department of Education to require school divisions to make division-wide notifications to parents of a "school-connected student overdose" within 24 hours while ensuring the privacy of the student.

"Transparency and community awareness are essential to ensuring the safety and well-being of Virginia's children. The Loudoun County Public Schools division reportedly waited more than 20 days to inform parents despite clear evidence of numerous incidents of overdoses among the students," said the Republican Youngkin. "Failure to promptly notify parents endangers the health and welfare of their children and limits parents' fundamental right to make decisions concerning the upbringing, education, and care of their children."

In a Nov. 2 email, Youngkin spokeswoman Macaulay Porter didn't say what penalties school divisions might face if they don't notify parents within 24 hours of a student overdose. "As the executive order dictates, parental notification for all parents within the school division should occur within 24 hours of a school-connected overdose and the

superintendent and [Virginia Department of Education] will provide additional guidance to school divisions on enhancing prompt parental notification and preventing student overdoses," she said.

In a Nov. 2 Facebook post, School Board member Denise Kofoid Corbo, At-Large, accused the administration and School Board of covering up the suspected overdoses. Corbo said a teacher alerted her on Sept. 6 of an alleged student overdose at a school and she emailed Spence and his staff requesting information and protocols regarding "student intoxication." She said her request was initially denied under board [Policy 1030](#), which Corbo said allows administrators to deny board member information requests if they believe compiling the information will take more than an hour.

"The administration and a select group of Board Members created policies that prohibit Board Members from obtaining information and restricts Board Members from doing the essential functions of their job," said the Democratic-endorsed Corbo. who [unsuccessfully sued the board in June](#) for refusing to allow her to participate in meetings from her home. "The policy further states, if information is denied, three or more Board Members must provide support for that information before the administration will consider the request. Despite my efforts, the majority of this Board have carried a common theme of silencing the truth and preventing transparency to our community. Policies should never interfere with transparency and the safety of our children!"

Corbo said she and board member Tiffany L. Polifko, Broad Run, will ask that an information item on overdose protocols be on the board's agenda for the Nov. 14 meeting.

"Notifying parents of overdoses can be done while protecting personal identifiable information," Polifko said in a Nov. 1 Facebook post. "Trust cannot be rebuilt without transparency."

Responding to Corbo's comments, School Board Chair Ian Serotkin, Blue Ridge, said in a Nov. 2 email through lead LCPS spokeswoman Natalie N. Allen that, when Spence was informed of the suspected overdoses involving Park View students, a task force was formed and "resources" were provided to students' families before their children returned to school.

Serotkin, who didn't say when Spence was notified of the Park View suspected overdoses, emphasized that fentanyl overdoses are a national problem. Of the approximately 107,000 fatal overdoses in the U.S. last year, about 68% involved synthetic opioids, primarily fentanyl, [according to the Centers for Disease Control and](#)

Prevention. He said LCPS has protocols to help students who abuse drugs, but reducing overdoses is a community-wide problem.

"Supports for juveniles suffering with addiction issues are few and far between, wait lists are long, and treatment is often cost prohibitive," the Democratic-endorsed Serotkin said. "Now is the time to come together as a community and right that wrong. Our kids deserve better, and it is up to us to do better for them.

The Sheriff's Office, school division and the Loudoun County Department of Mental Health. Substance Abuse and Developmental Services will hold a fentanyl prevention and awareness meeting at Park View at 400 West Laurel Ave. in Sterling at 10:30 a.m. on Nov. 4. The public is urged to attend.

Fentanyl forum draws 200 to Park View High School

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By EVAN GOODENOW

https://www.loudountimes.com/news/fentanyl-forum-draws-200-to-park-view-high-school/article_e75b5d54-7b31-11ee-b9d1-9f44fe911b4b.html

On the heels of an outbreak of teenagers overdosing on fentanyl — including several students at Park View High School in Sterling — officials held a fentanyl awareness and prevention forum at the school on Nov. 3.

Of the 20 opioid overdoses involving juveniles they investigated this year, 11 occurred in October, according to the Loudoun County Sheriff's Office. There were 19 overdoses investigated for all of last year. Two of the investigations last year involved deaths with both of the victims 17-years-old. All of the juvenile overdoses investigated this year have been non-fatal.

Of the juvenile overdoses this year, nine involved current Park View students and two were former Park View students, according to Sheriff Michael L. Chapman. Since the school year began in August, there have been [10 suspected overdoses at six of Loudoun County Public Schools' 18 high schools](#), according to Superintendent Aaron C. Spence.

Neither the school division nor the Sheriff's Office said anything publicly about the outbreak of overdoses until Oct. 31, a day after the Times-Mirror published a story based on a search warrant seeking information about a suspected fentanyl-related overdose at Park View.

In past years, fentanyl, a synthetic opioid 50 to 100 times more potent than heroin, was mixed with heroin that was typically snorted or injected. But in the last three years, authorities said fentanyl has often been contained in blue M-30 counterfeit oxycodone pills. And 70 percent of individual counterfeit pills seized by authorities contain two milligrams of fentanyl which is enough to kill, according to the Drug Enforcement Administration.

M-30 counterfeit oxycodone pills containing fentanyl, like the kind pictured in this Drug Enforcement Administration file photo, are frequently being bought by people who believe they are prescription pills.

Shane Todd, DEA assistant special agent in charge for Northern Virginia, said in an interview that 500,000 fentanyl pills have been seized in Virginia this year compared to 120,000 for all of last year. He said the amount seized this year is enough to kill all the approximately 8.7 million Virginians 11/2 times over.

Todd said fentanyl precursors are developed in labs in China and sent to Mexico, where the ingredients are pressed into pills. The manufacturing is primarily done by the [Cartel Jalisco Nueva Generación and the Sinaloa Cartel](#).

“They’re flooding this country with fentanyl and fentanyl pills,” Todd told the audience of approximately 200 people. “The events that happened at these high schools are happening around the country. These are not only overdoses. They are poisonings.”

Capt. Bryan Wacker, who oversees the LCSO drug and gang unit, told juveniles to never take pills that haven’t been prescribed to them by a doctor.

“Do not put in your mouth. Do not ingest it. It is that simple,” he said. “You are playing with fire.”

Wacker told parents to check their child’s phone because that’s how drug deals are often arranged. And while saying the LCSO is seeking to arrest drug dealers, he emphasized they’re not looking to punish drug users.

He noted Virginia’s [overdose immunity law](#) is designed to encourage people to call 911 when someone overdoses. The law forbids “arrest or prosecution for the unlawful purchase, possession, or consumption” of drugs by people who overdose or people who make a “good faith” effort to contact authorities about someone experiencing an overdose.

“We want you to call us,” Wacker said. “We’re not out here to try arrest every single person and throw everybody in jail. That does not solve this problem.”

Jennifer Evans, LCPS director of student mental health services, said there are student assistant specialists — licensed clinical social workers and counselors trained to work with students who abuse drugs — at all middle and high schools. She urged parents to contact them if they suspect their child has a problem.

Evans added that all middle- and high schools have the overdose antidote naloxone and have several staff trained to use it. The forum included a video on how to use naloxone, which is marketed as Narcan and typically is sold as a nasal spray that revives overdose victims. Staff from the county Department of Mental Health, Substance Abuse, and Developmental Services handed out 160 boxes of Narcan at the forum.

Chapman, a Republican running for reelection this year, stressed the need for the community to work with the LCSO and LCPS to reduce overdoses.

“We want to make sure that everybody’s on board and we get all the information we can,” Chapman told the audience. “We want to make sure we stop it before any of these teenagers die.”

In an interview before the forum, Chapman was critical of LCPS for not being more forthcoming about the overdoses that occurred in October. He cited an Oct. 31 email to Park View parents from Principal Jason Jefferson that said students were “ingesting drugs prior to school and suffered the effects while in school.” However, Jefferson never specifically acknowledged in the email that three students had overdosed at Park View and had to be revived with naloxone. Chapman noted the email only went out to Park View parents and not the entire community.

“I felt like it didn’t describe the problem properly and that’s why we put out our release,” Chapman said of the Oct. 31 news release from the LCSO that included a quote from Spence who wasn’t at the forum. “We felt it was really irresponsible to not let people know what’s really going on.”

[One of the Park View overdoses occurred on Oct. 17](#) and the victim had received a pill from a fellow student in a school bathroom, according to the LCSO. After a search warrant affidavit was filed in Loudoun Circuit Court about the overdose on Oct. 26, the Times-Mirror contacted LCPS and the LCSO that day seeking additional information. An LCPS spokeswoman wouldn’t say how many student overdoses occur annually and referred questions about the Oct. 17 overdose to the Sheriff’s Office.

Lead LCSO spokesman Thomas A. Julia said in an interview that given the fact that 11 of the 19 juvenile overdoses occurred in October, his office expected LCPS to issue a news release to the public and thought one would be issued on Oct. 27. On that day, Julia said his office had a “significant meeting” with LCPS central administration officials.

“We expected it on that day and it did not happen on that day. It did not happen on Saturday, Sunday, and it did not happen Monday,” Julia said. “So we said, ‘the public needs to know.’ And the statement that was issued at 8:30 a.m. (on Oct. 31) by the principal didn’t even mention the overdoses. It was simply a generic statement about fentanyl and Narcan.”

Julia, who wouldn’t say if any arrests have been made over the overdoses, said one of the Park View overdoses occurred on Oct. 24, but no mention was made of it by LCPS officials at the School Board meeting that night. Julia noted alerting the public about crimes often generates tips.

“So if you don’t even tell the public that you have this acute issue, nobody’s helping on the outside,” he said. “I’ve spoken to two School Board members who said they didn’t know until they saw the press release. So, there seems to be a disconnect here.”

The delay prompted Gov. Glenn A. Youngkin, a Republican, to issue [Executive Order 28](#) on Nov. 1. It directs the Virginia Department of Education to develop a rule requiring local school divisions to alert parents division-wide within 24 hours of a “school-connected student overdose.”

Loudoun County overdoses

Overdoses are the leading cause of accidental deaths in the U.S. and fatal and non-fatal overdoses, most involving opioids, have skyrocketed over the last decade.

- Excluding Leesburg, between 2017 through 2022, there were 158 fatal overdoses and 856 non-fatal overdoses in Loudoun County.
- In 2022 in the county, there were 20 fatal overdoses involving 12 men and eight women and 85% involved opioids, mostly fentanyl. The youngest victim was 17 and the oldest was 72.
- Of the 111 non-fatal county overdoses, 63 victims were men and 48 were women and 59% involved opioids. The youngest victim was 12 and the oldest was 74.
- Between 2017 through 2022, there were 29 fatal overdoses and 181 non-fatal overdoses in Leesburg.
- In 2022 in Leesburg, there were six fatal overdoses involving two men and four women with four of the six deaths involving opioids. Two involved fentanyl. The youngest victim was in his late teens and the oldest was in her 60s.

Sources: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Leesburg Police Department, Loudoun County Sheriff's Office

Student privacy concerns delayed overdose notifications, Spence says

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By EVAN GOODENOW

https://www.loudountimes.com/news/student-privacy-concerns-delayed-overdose-notifications-spence-says/article_39538da4-7f72-11ee-8772-5f43be2d0ab7.html

At a sometimes-contentious community meeting on Nov. 9, Loudoun County Public Schools Superintendent Aaron C. Spence discussed why he waited two weeks to inform parents about an outbreak of fentanyl-related student overdoses.

Of the 20 overdoses involving juveniles under investigation this year by the Sheriff's Office, 11 occurred in October and one happened on Nov. 1, according to LCSO lead spokesman Thomas A. Julia. A "community listening session" at Woodgrove High School in Purcellville was Spence's first public appearance since news broke of the overdoses.

Spence said he first learned about the outbreak when a student at Park View High School in Sterling [overdosed on Oct. 17](#) and had to be revived with the overdose antidote naloxone. On Oct. 31, a quote from Spence was included in a LCSO news release announcing at least eight Park View students had overdosed this year, including seven in a three-week period in October. Four occurred in the school.

On Nov. 1, Spence sent a division-wide email to parents stating LCPS had 10 in-school suspected overdoses at six high schools since the 2023-24 school year started in August. The delay led Republican Gov. Glenn A. Youngkin, a frequent LCPS critic, to issue [Executive Order 28](#) on Nov. 1.

It directs the Virginia Department of Education to develop a policy requiring school divisions to issue a division-wide notice to parents within 24 hours of a "school-connected overdose while always ensuring protection of student privacy."

Despite the two-week announcement delay, Spence said he promptly addressed the outbreak after a phone call with Republican Sheriff Michael L. Chapman. [Chapman has criticized LCPS](#) for not being more forthcoming about the issue saying it was "irresponsible."

The day after the call, Spence said he formed a task force to address overdoses. Their efforts included working with the LCSO and Park View staff. Spence noted LCPS held six

[community meetings about fentanyl](#) in the spring and there are “medical emergency response teams” in all 98 schools whose training includes respond to overdoses.

In addressing the delayed announcement, Spence said he had to balance student privacy and public safety concerns. Spence, who started at LCPS on Sept. 1 and began his Virginia education career in 1998, said he was unaware of a Virginia school division ever reporting a fentanyl-related overdose to the public due to “significant student privacy issues.” He said if a student is taken from the school in an ambulance and parents are notified that night that there was an overdose at the school “it is not at all complicated” for people to identify the student.

However, several parents at the meeting said the delay contradicted Spence’s pledge to improve communication and transparency when he took over as superintendent. His hiring came less than a year after LCPS was criticized in a [special grand jury report](#) for being overly secretive about two student-on-student sexual assaults in 2021.

Spence is a father of six, including two children at LCPS, and said he was “scared to death for them” about fentanyl and understands parents’ fears and complaints he should’ve alerted them sooner. In one-on-one conversations with parents and students after the meeting, parent Mark Lucero told Spence he should’ve have admitted it was a mistake not to alert parents sooner.

Lucero said he understood Spence’s privacy concerns, but compared fentanyl, a synthetic opioid 50 to 100 time potent than heroin, to a poisonous snake. Lucero, who has two children at LCPS, said parents needed to know so that they could caution their children.

“I know that you’ve done a lot, but that one important piece for me is to speak to the parents and tell them,” Lucero said. “I know Monday-morning quarterbacking doesn’t help a lot, but if you do believe it could have been done a different way or better, I think the parents would want to hear it.”

Spence said if he’d been sure he wasn’t breaking privacy laws, he would’ve been more forthcoming.

“What I’m saying is this is complicated. I want to do better. I absolutely want to do better,” Spence told Lucero. “The fact that I have people upset about it bothers me greatly. The fact that I have people who wish that we had done something differently bothers me greatly and we’re going to lean into this.”

Spence didn’t say if LCPS would comply with the 24-hour notification requirement expected soon from the state, but he told Lucero he’s had several conversations with

Virginia Superintendent of Public Instruction Lisa Coons regarding Youngkin's executive order. "As we move forward, we'll do better," he said.

In a Nov. 14 email to the Times-Mirror, Natalie N. Allen, LCPS lead spokeswoman, said the division is awaiting guidance from the state regarding the executive order. In the meantime, Allen said LCPS will continue current practices. They include alerting the Department of School Leadership and school resource officers about students possessing or being under the influence of drugs.

"Given the lack of clarity around certain terms used in EO 28 regarding parental notification, and given the lack of guidance around how to ensure and protect student privacy with respect to such notifications in practice, we are awaiting further guidance from the Commonwealth prior to adjusting our current practices," Allen said. "As soon as we receive appropriate guidance, we will work with our partners at LCSO, VDH and any other relevant organizations in order to implement this order."

Spence also addressed complaints from several parents about their children sharing bathrooms and locker rooms with transgender students. [LCPS Policy 8040](#) allows trans students to use the bathroom that matches their gender identity.

Of the approximately 83,000 students at LCPS, just [56 are defined as nonbinary](#), according to the school division, but several parents of cisgender students said sharing bathrooms and locker rooms with trans students makes their children uncomfortable and threatens their safety. Some Woodgrove staged walkout on Nov. 1 to protest the accommodations for trans students.

Parent Erin Thomas told Spence some teachers tried to prevent students from participating in the protest. She also said some students who aren't trans are abusing the policy and "flipping" daily between which sex they identify as.

"Trust is being eroded," Thomas said. "This is a very pressing issue of privacy and safety and kids do not feel safe in this school and other schools in this county."

Spence noted the School Board is still deciding whether to comply with the new [Virginia Department of Education transgender student model policy](#), which directs local school divisions to forbid trans students from using the bathroom or locker room that matches their gender identity.

Spence said it's a "complex issue." He cited [the case of Gavin Grimm](#), a trans student in Gloucester County who was denied use of a boys bathroom. A federal court ruled in 2020 that the denial violated his constitutional rights.

”It’s not as easy as me saying, ‘I think we should do that.’ It is an important conversation for us to have,” Spence said. “I am not dismissing in any way, shape, or form that kids don’t feel safe. I want to make sure we are working together to get there, but we’ve got to work through these issues.”

Spence added that staff are forbidden from preventing students from protesting. He said he would address violations if he is made aware of them.

The meeting was the sixth of 18 sessions at the county’s high schools. The tour began in September and will conclude in April. Parents and students gave feedback about what the school division does well and what it needs to improve on.

Several parents praised the hard work of teachers and said communication with administrators and teachers was good. Suggestions for improvement included increased academic rigor, better preparation for students who don’t plan to attend college, starting school days later in the morning and recruiting more bus drivers to increase routes.

Teachers say students abusing drugs need more help from LCPS

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By EVAN GOODENOW

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Responding to an October outbreak of fentanyl-related overdoses among their students, teachers at Park View High School in Sterling say Loudoun County Public Schools needs to do more.

A few teachers expressed their concerns during the public speaking portion of the Nov. 14 county School Board meeting. They included Jennifer Syron, an English Learner co-teacher in biology and geometry at Park View, where four overdoses occurred in October. Nine Park View students have overdosed inside or outside the school this year, according to the Sheriff's Office.

Additionally, two other juveniles no longer enrolled at Park View overdosed this year. In October, there were 10 student overdoses at six of the school division's 18 high schools, including Park View, according to LCPS.

Syron said Virginia law allows students as young as 14 the right to refuse inpatient and outpatient drug and mental health treatment, so it can be difficult to get them help. If parents want their child to get treatment but the child objects, Syron said parents must get a court order. Syron said students 14 and older can also refuse to be hospitalized to receive medical treatment.

"In other words, a 14-year-old child in the eighth grade, who's high on drugs at school, cannot be required to get into an ambulance to seek medical treatment unless the child is unconscious," Syron said.

If a parent can't come to the school and quickly pick up the student, Syron said it's up to school staff to monitor the student. She said the law and lack of "recovery schools" for students with drug problems create "significant challenges" to learning and safety. Syron said the juvenile consent law needs to be modified and she asked board members to build local and state networks to "support our most vulnerable students."

The rise in fentanyl-related student overdoses mirrors a national trend since the opioid epidemic began about a decade ago. In the last few years, overdoses involving counterfeit M30 oxycodone pills containing fentanyl, a synthetic opioid 50 to 100 times

more potent than heroin, have spiked locally and nationally and seizures of fake pills are up. The [Drug Enforcement Administration said](#) it's seized 86 million fentanyl pills this year compared to 48.9 million for all of last year.

Between 2017 through 2022, there were [158 fatal overdoses and 856 non-fatal overdoses in Loudoun County](#) involving adults and juveniles — many fentanyl-related — according to the Sheriff's Office. Additionally, there were 29 fatal overdoses and 181 non-fatal overdoses in Leesburg between 2017 through 2022, according to the Leesburg Police Department.

Jessica Kirkland, a Park View English teacher, said she and a few colleagues addressed the board in May about a “mounting drug crisis” at Park View and the need for LCPS to take action. She said nothing was done until news stories were published in October and November about the high number of overdoses involving Park View students.

Kirkland said LCPS must “review and revise” its policies about student drug possession and use. She said increasing in-school restrictions for students with multiple drug violations isn't enough.

“We must create and fund alternative placement options for students in drug crisis where they can receive substance abuse support, academic support, and increased supervision that can't be provided in their home school setting,” she said. “This is for the benefit, not only of students experiencing addiction and crisis, but for the students and staff in schools who are left to cope with the emotional impact and fallout of repeatedly witnessing or providing life-saving measures for students in acute medical distress.”

Lee Stewart, a Park View English teacher, said in-school restriction teachers whose classrooms students go to for their first two drug incidents lack training to help students with serious drug problems. He said they're paid less than addiction treatment specialists. Stewart added that counseling sessions with Student Assistance Specialists — licensed counselors and social workers with drug and mental health treatment expertise — are insufficient.

Stewart said the school division's overall drug policy needs to be overhauled “as soon as possible” and that students should receive “significant addiction support and intervention” after their first drug incident. “And the support should be focused on harm reduction instead of punishment,” he said.

Superintendent Aaron C. Spence, who began work on Sept. 1, has been criticized for not notifying parents promptly about the outbreak. Spence admitted he found out about the overdoses on Oct. 17, but didn't issue a [school division-wide statement to parents](#) until Nov. 1. The statement came a day after the Sheriff's Office issued a news release about

the overdoses which included a quote from Spence. [He later said](#) he delayed notification due to student privacy concerns.

Citing the delay, Republican Gov. Glenn A. Youngkin, a frequent LCPS critic, issued [Executive Order 28](#) on Nov. 1. It directs the Virginia Department of Education to develop a policy requiring school divisions to issue a division-wide notice to parents within 24 hours of a “school-connected overdose while always ensuring protection of student privacy.”

LCPS lead spokeswoman Natalie N. Allen previously said the division is awaiting guidance from the VDOE on the order. Until then, it will continue current practices which include alerting the Department of School Leadership and school resource officers about students possessing or being under the influence of drugs.

Spence denies misleading School Board about student overdoses

NOV. 27, 2023

By EVAN GOODENOW

https://www.loudountimes.com/news/spence-denies-misleading-school-board-about-student-overdoses/article_a6b00842-8d6d-11ee-807e-b7773f73e5df.html

Loudoun County Public Schools Superintendent Aaron C. Spence said a two-week delay in notifying School Board members about a series of fentanyl-related overdoses among high school students wasn't an attempt to mislead them.

“There was not a decision made to withhold information, but I accept responsibility for your lack of awareness as I did not decide or direct my team to make you aware specifically,” Spence said in a Nov. 1 email to board members. “I intend to ensure that the Board is made aware of any overdose as a matter of course.”

The email came after Spence, who said he had concerns that notifying the public about the overdoses could violate a federal student privacy law, was criticized by a School Board member and Sheriff Michael Chapman for not notifying the public.

“Aaron — I'd like to know the timeline of the incidents, the school's 'family message', the first indication that the sheriff or local media was inquiring into this, and who made the decision not to provide the board notification of 8 (?!) student OD's, four which were reportedly on campus,” Dulles District board member Jeffrey Morse said in a Nov. 1 email to fellow board member Tiffany L. Polifko, Broad Run. Spence and lead LCPS spokeswoman Natalie N. Allen were included on the email chain.

The emails, obtained by the Times-Mirror on Nov. 27 through a public records request, came in response to [an Oct. 31 news release](#) by the Loudoun County Sheriff's Office that eight students at Park View High School in Sterling overdosed after swallowing M30 fentanyl pills, including seven students in three weeks in October. Four of the overdoses occurred on the Park View campus and three required students to be revived with the the overdose antidote naloxone.

There have been at least 20 juvenile overdoses investigated countywide by the Sheriff's Office this year, compared to 19 for all of last year.

The Oct. 31 news release was distributed a day after the Times-Mirror published an article about an in-school student overdose on Oct. 17 based on information from a search warrant affidavit filed in Loudoun Circuit Court on Oct. 26. That day, an LCPS

spokeswoman referred questions from the Times-Mirror to the Sheriff's Office, which didn't respond publicly until issuing the new release five days later.

In the email to Spence, who began work in September promising greater transparency, Morse expressed exasperation and said that Spence blindsided the board.

Morse noted that Park View Student Council President Krupskaja Arguello Gomez, the school's representative at the board's Oct. 24 meeting, told board members that "drug abuse, particularly fentanyl" was a problem at the school. She said there needed to be greater awareness the problem and more early interventions.

"Our Park View school board rep mentioned this and the school board was completely unaware of the extent," Morse wrote. "When are we going to learn the hard lessons of transparency?"

In an Oct. 31 email exchange between Spence and Chapman before the news release was issued, Spence said Sheriff's Office personnel had met with school division staff at the LCPS administration building on Oct. 27 to discuss the overdoses.

The email was a follow-up to an Oct. 26 conversation after Chapman called Spence about the outbreak. In the email, Spence said he appreciated Chapman allowing him to provide a quote for the news release, but expressed unhappiness about the way the public was being notified.

"I just wanted to share my disappointment that, per our conversation, your team seems to have left the joint meeting held on Friday to discuss what's going on at Park View with an entirely different perspective than my team." Spence said. "I wish this could have been communicated to us either at the meeting or before this release was developed, recognizing again that you of course can send a release at anytime about these challenges we're facing."

Spence said in an email to board members that he didn't attend the Oct. 27 meeting.

Chapman replied that the Sheriff's Office release was in response to an email earlier that day to Park View parents from Principal Jason Jefferson. The email mentioned fentanyl and students "ingesting drugs prior to school and suffering the effects while in school," but never mentioned students overdosing inside or outside the school. Chapman called the email "very vague, evasive and boilerplate" and said the community needed specifics.

"There is nothing that specifically addresses the crisis that you and I discussed last week and a short time ago regarding Park View HS. I believe parents, students and residents of Sterling need to know what is actually occurring," Chapman said. "Not providing this

information is a disservice. Also, with the exception of the LCSO carrying Narcan there is no mention of LCPS and the LCSO working together.” Narcan is the brand name for naloxone.

On Nov. 1, Spence issued [a division-wide statement](#) saying there had been 10 suspected overdoses at six of the division’s 18 high schools since the 2023-24 school year began in August. Besides Park View, the other schools were Briar Woods, Broad Run, Dominion, Loudoun County, Park View, and Tuscarora. He said there had been just four naloxone revivals of students for the entire 2022-23 school year.

Spence noted overdoses are a national problem. [Two-thirds of the approximately 107,000 overdose deaths in the U.S. in 2022 involved fentanyl](#), according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Fentanyl is a synthetic opioid 50 to 100 time more potent than heroin and has been increasingly been distributed in the last few years through counterfeit M30 oxycodone pills which contain fentanyl.

Spence said LCPS takes the problem seriously.

“Every time we become aware of suspected drug use or an overdose in our schools, we work directly with our parents and with the Loudoun County Sheriff’s Office to investigate and address the incident,” Spence said in the Nov. 1 statement. “And we will continue to collaborate with the Loudoun County Sheriff’s Office as well as other agencies to identify needed resources and supports for all of our schools.”

In the email to board members the same day, Spence said he first learned of the outbreak after a Park View student had to be revived by a school security officer at the school on Oct. 17. He said board members are notified in a “daily digest” about “medical emergencies” at schools, but weren’t told when they involved overdoses

Spence said an “impairment screening tool” used by school nurses to detect alcohol or drug use by students had been used by school nurses 94 times since August. He said naloxone use has been tracked since it became available to staff in January. Before January, naloxone had to be administered to students by emergency responders.

Spence said about half of overdoses involving juveniles are believed to have happened outside schools, but tracking overdoses is inexact. He said naloxone use doesn’t automatically mean a person has overdosed. He cited a student given naloxone at home who turned out to be experiencing a heart condition. Spence also said parents sometimes don’t notify schools that their children have overdosed and toxicological reports are confidential.

Emails detail Park View principal's response to student overdose outbreak

DEC. 6, 2023

By EVAN GOODENOW

https://www.loudountimes.com/0local-or-not/1local/emails-detail-park-view-principals-response-to-student-overdose-outbreak/article_ba0c3150-93cf-11ee-abba-bb9b9c659e21.html

In sometimes anguished tones, Park View High School Principal Jason B. Jefferson implored Loudoun County Public Schools administrators for more help in addressing a fentanyl-related student overdose outbreak in October at the Sterling school.

“Twice within five days, my staff has had to view the lifeless body of a student who was in distress due to the effects of an ongoing epidemic in our larger community,” Jefferson wrote in an Oct. 17 email to central office administrators about two students having to be revived by staff with the overdose antidote naloxone. “This challenge causes individuals like myself to question if we are capable of doing the jobs we signed up to do. It is one thing to hear of an overdose of a student, but another to feel that you could possibly be the cause of not bringing a life back when it is nothing that you can control.”

Jefferson, who took over at Park View in 2021 and began his education career in 2002, said he previously worked in Baltimore City Public Schools and grew up in Philadelphia during the crack cocaine epidemic in the 1980s, so he was familiar with drug abuse and the right way to respond to it. He said Park View received “limited support” from LCPS leadership last year when there was another series of incidents and said more support was needed now.

“My deepest fear is that one of my students will unalive (death by suicide or homicide) themselves in my building because we are not able to respond quickly to the overdose or they have taken too much fentanyl to be saved by school staff,” Jefferson wrote. “We are in need of assistance! We need drug enforcement dogs in our school. We need a more directed substance abuse plan to appropriately address students who are suffering. We cannot expect students who are suffering to be fully engaged in the instructional program of our district.”

The emails were provided to the Times-Mirror by LCPS in response to a Freedom of Information Act request last month. In the messages, Jefferson often expresses a sense of being overwhelmed by the number of overdoses at the approximately 1,400-student school.

Eight Park View High students overdosed after swallowing M30 fentanyl pills, including seven students in three weeks in October. Four of the overdoses occurred on the Park View campus and three required students to be revived with naloxone. Park View is not alone in experiencing overdoses.

As of Dec. 5, there have been at least 12 suspected overdoses at at least seven of the school division's 18 high schools since the 2023-24 school year began in August. That compares to four naloxone revivals of students for the entire 2022-23 school year. Besides Park View, the other schools were Briar Woods, Broad Run, Dominion, Freedom, Loudoun County and Tuscarora.

[LCPS began notifying parents about student overdoses on Nov. 20](#), but has declined to name the school where a suspected overdose occurred on Nov. 28. It said disclosure might identify the student.

The notifications were in response to a [Nov. 1 executive order](#) from Republican Gov. Glenn A. Youngkin requiring Virginia school divisions to issue division-wide notices to parents within 24 hours of in-school student overdoses. The order was in response to Superintendent Aaron C. Spence not notifying the public for two weeks about the outbreak.

The Loudoun County Sheriff's Office says it has investigated 22 juvenile overdoses this year, compared to 19 for all of last year.

On Oct. 26, Times-Mirror began inquiring to the Sheriff's Office and the school division about a suspected overdose at Park View on Oct. 17; the incident was referenced in a search warrant affidavit. The Sheriff's Office responded on Oct. 31 with a press release, which detailed the series of suspected overdoses at Park View.

The release came a few hours after Jefferson emailed Park View parents about students "ingesting drugs prior to school and suffering the effects while in school." The email did not mention students overdosing on campus or include any details about the recent spate of suspected overdoses.

Sheriff Michael L. Chapman called the email "[very vague, evasive and boilerplate](#)" and said the community needed specifics.

After the Oct. 17 overdose, Jefferson emailed parents and described it as a “medical emergency.” In a separate email to central office administrators that day, Jefferson said the term was an inadequate description for the problem.

“The term medical emergency is quickly losing its impact on the school community and (is) becoming very unusual as the school community marks five days with two student overdoses that have required life saving measures to be employed,” Jefferson said. “We have had to use CPR to restore life to lifeless bodies inside of the school building. I’m sure you can imagine the impact this has on a school community and its leader.”

Earlier on Oct. 17, Scott Yurish, a Park View health and physical education teacher, emailed Jefferson about an “uptick” in drug use in a boy’s locker room bathroom.

“It’s all happening between classes, open drug use, multiple boys in stalls passing items over/under in plain sight The chemical smells and vapors are becoming intolerable,” wrote in the email. “[Dean] Brandon [Salters] has been helping, but me or any one of the male teachers standing there observing is no deterrent and they just look at us and laugh. It’s the same crew that everyone is aware of and (redacted) cusses us out every day.”

Yurish said that the locker room doors are locked during classes.

“If we could get some help, it would be greatly appreciated,” he said. “If the usual suspects could be barred from the locker room, our younger more vulnerable students could actually use the bathroom without fear.”

Near the end of October, Jefferson expressed some optimism about addressing the epidemic. In an Oct. 27 email to staff, he thanked them for their hard work and said support for them was being made available through the division’s Employment Assistance Program and the Williams Center for Wellness and Recovery, a Leesburg-based drug and mental health treatment center that works with LCPS.

In an Oct. 31 email to a person whose name was redacted, Jefferson said drug-sniffing police dogs would be in the building in the coming weeks.

“Both the LCSO and the [school] board are sending resources to us,” he said. “This is just going to take all of us working together and we have to get students who know about these things to share information with school staff.”

In response to the outbreak, an additional school nurse was assigned to the school to assist the existing nurse, according to Joan Sahlgren, LCPS communications and community engagement director. An extra school security officer was assigned to support the three other officers at the school and additional security assessments were

done. Additionally, Sahlgren said in an email that the Employee Assistance Program was made available to staff onsite and revisions to the memorandum of understanding between LCPS and the Williams Center were done so it could provide more services.

Kaine hosts discussion on opioid epidemic

JAN. 8, 2024

By EVAN GOODENOW

https://www.loudountimes.com/0local-or-not/1local/kaine-hosts-discussion-on-opioid-epidemic/article_1202d196-ae6c-11ee-8f04-afb0d0016424.html

U.S. Sen. Tim Kaine, D-Va., co-sponsored the [Disrupt Fentanyl Trafficking Act](#), a federal law passed in December requiring the Department of Defense to develop a strategy to “target, disrupt, or degrade threats to national security” caused by fentanyl trafficking in Mexico.

But at a roundtable discussion at the Loudoun Government Center in Leesburg on Jan. 8, Kaine said that, while there is a need for enforcement and interdiction, there will always be supplies of fentanyl — a synthetic opioid up to 50 times more potent than heroin — as long as there is demand for it.

He said the dynamic is similar to methamphetamine use in Virginia while he was governor, from 2006 through 2010. The state legislature then passed a [law](#) limiting over-the-counter sales of methamphetamine precursors by pharmacies to reduce meth production and use. The law reduced the problem, but Kaine said many users switched to imported meth or other drugs.

“We dealt with a symptom and we didn’t deal with the causes,” he told the panel, which included medical providers, mental health professionals and activists along with Loudoun County Board of Supervisors Chair Phyllis Randall, D-At Large, and Loudoun County Public Schools Superintendent Aaron Spence. “We really are in need of talking about causes. We’re not going to arrest our way out of the problem.”

Kaine said “tragic demand” for illegal drugs in the United States has been deadly for Central Americans and Mexicans as drug gangs wreak havoc. Some 30,000 Mexicans have been killed annually in drug-related violence since 2018, [according to the Council on Foreign Relations Center for Preventive Action](#), and Kaine said the violence exacerbates migration at the U.S. border.

“The pain that causes people to leave their communities to come to our border is related to our pain,” he said. “The pain of a population that wants to find substances and has problems with substance use disorders.”

The roundtable came a decade into the national opioid epidemic. About 68% of the roughly 107,000 fatal overdoses in the U.S. in 2022 were opioid-related, [according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#). Local overdoses mirror the national trend.

Excluding Leesburg, there were 22 fatal overdoses and 111 non-fatal reported overdoses in Loudoun County last year through Dec. 19, according to the county Sheriff's Office. Of the 22 deaths, 18 were opioid-related. Of the 111 non-fatal overdoses, 70 were opioid-related.

In Leesburg, for all of 2023, the Leesburg Police Department responded to 30 overdoses, five of which were fatal, according to LPD spokesman Officer Michael Drogin. Nine of the overdoses, including three of the deaths, were opioid-related.

The epidemic has been exacerbated by [fentanyl](#). The drug's precursors are often developed in labs in China and then sent to Mexico, where they have been used frequently in recent years to press counterfeit pills resembling oxycodone or Percocet pills.

Young people are increasingly ingesting the pills and overdosing. From 2019 through 2021, the Sheriff's Office responded to eight juvenile overdoses, all non-fatal in Loudoun County. But in 2022, deputies responded to 19, including two deaths. Last year through Dec. 19, they responded to 22 overdoses, all non-fatal.

The school division dealt with an [outbreak](#) of suspected overdoses at Park View High School in Sterling in October, with overdoses suspected at several other county high schools. Spence said there are student assistance specialists at all LCPS middle and high schools to help students with drug and mental health problems. He said the division has an "incredible team" helping students, but the problem is overwhelming, exacerbated by academic pressures, social media, and the lack of beds for young people who need treatment for mental illness or drug addiction.

"When our families need support, very often, they can't find it," Spence said. "In Northern Virginia, there are virtually no beds for children."

Spence said there need to be more regional "recovery schools" for students with drug problems to allow them to get more intensive help before returning to their regular schools. The [Chesterfield Recovery Academy](#) is the only recovery school in Virginia.

"There are things we can and should be doing, but we need more help," Spence said. "We need more places with expertise to help our kids with the expertise we don't have."

Those with the expertise are sometimes people in long-term recovery, including peer-recovery specialists, who work with people new to sobriety, according to the panelists at the Jan. 8 meeting. In Virginia, peers undergo 72 hours of training through the Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services. They must have 500 hours of paid or volunteer work in the peer recovery field to [become certified](#).

At the federal level, Kaine has co-sponsored the [Providing Empathetic and Effective Recovery \(PEER\) Support Act](#) designed to make it easier for peer counselors to become certified. Supporters of the bill, which hasn't passed the full Senate, say a criminal record shouldn't disqualify a peer from becoming certified.

Ginny Atwood Lovitt, executive director of the Fairfax County-based Chris Atwood Foundation, said most of her organization's staffers are peers. Atwood Lovitt, whose 21-year-old brother fatally overdosed in 2013, said their lived experience helps them relate to clients in a way that clinicians who haven't been addicted can't.

"You can study this for 20 years, but if you haven't been there, you just don't get it," she said. "People with lived experience have more drive, more passion, more resourcefulness than anyone else in this field."

Park View teachers ask School Board to revamp student drug policies

JAN. 13, 2024

By EVAN GOODENOW

https://www.loudountimes.com/0local-or-not/1local/park-view-teachers-ask-school-board-to-revamp-student-drug-policies/article_b021c23e-b00f-11ee-afef-5f6d63c12c64.html

For the second time in two months, Park View High School teachers asked the Loudoun County School Board to change disciplinary policies to provide more help to students with drug problems.

Three teachers spoke at the board's Jan. 9 meeting. They included Jennifer Syron, an English Learner co-teacher in biology and geometry at Park View. She was one of a handful of teachers who [spoke](#) at the board's Nov. 14 meeting about fentanyl in the wake of an outbreak at the Sterling school. Several Park View teachers also spoke out in May.

At least nine Park View students are suspected to have overdosed on fentanyl last year, including [four at the in October](#), according to the Loudoun County Sheriff's Office. On Jan. 6, the school division reported a non-fatal, suspected overdose involving a Park View student. The email to parents said the suspected overdose didn't occur on school grounds or during school hours.

Juvenile overdoses — many involving [counterfeit fentanyl pills](#) that resemble prescription pills like oxycodone and Percocet — are on the rise in Loudoun. From 2019 through 2021, the county Sheriff's Office responded to eight juvenile overdoses, all non-fatal. But in 2022, deputies responded to 19, including two deaths.

Last year through Dec. 19, deputies responded to 22 suspected overdoses, all non-fatal. The numbers don't include Leesburg.

Syron said on Jan. 9 that the current school policies, such as the one addressing repeated in-school restrictions for students caught using drugs, are "ineffective" and "potentially deadly." Syron said regulations like [Policy 8240](#), which deals with student drug use, don't account for the addictive nature of drugs like [fentanyl](#), a synthetic opioid 50 to 100 times more potent than heroin.

Experts say opioids essentially [hijack the brain](#) and most addicts use drugs to prevent painful withdrawal symptoms, rather than to get high. Given how addictive fentanyl is,

Syron said, students who use it are likely to relapse and receive more discipline, compounding their problems.

"The intensity of the cravings, the need to chase the dragon and pursue that high — in tandem with the intense fear of the physical pain experience during withdrawal — consume these children's minds and bodies," she said. "It also means that we will need to develop interventions that provide long-term support and adapt, in the time that they are in Loudoun County, to their changing needs."

Like Syron, Park View English teachers Jessica Kirkland and Megan O'Meara said Policy 8240 needs to be revamped. Kirkland called it "outdated and insufficient" to address the opioid crisis. She said teachers need more guidance and support.

"The current policy provides for no support or response beyond increasing days in ISR (in-school restrictions) and alternative placement options that don't exist," Kirkland said. "This creates a vacuum that keeps students in drug crisis in the same environment in which they experience drug crisis."

Kirkland asked the nine board members, all of whom were sworn in for the first time on Jan. 2, to work on new strategies with Superintendent Aaron Spence. A day earlier, at a [round table discussion on fentanyl](#) hosted by Sen. Tim Kaine, D-Va., Spence decried the lack of in-patient drug treatment facilities in Virginia for young people and called for creating regional "recovery schools" for students with drug problems. The [Chesterfield Recovery Academy](#) near Richmond is the only recovery school in Virginia.

O'Meara said Park View needs at least one — preferably two — full-time [student assistance specialists](#), as do other "high-needs schools." There are about 25 specialists working at 36 middle and high schools in the county.

O'Meara said the specialist assigned to Park View and another school is overworked as she tries to juggle responsibilities at both schools. O'Meara said the idea that providing high-needs schools with extra personnel is unfair to other schools is flawed.

"Allocating more more resources to high needs schools is a matter of equity and it is an urgent one," she said. "Our students lives are at risk and they deserve the support now."

Kirkland said administrators and teachers trying to assist addicted students are sometimes told they didn't sign up for the challenge when they decided on education careers. But as elected officials, Kirkland said the board did.

"It is my hope and expectation that you will prioritize this issue with the urgency and focus that is needed to better support LCPS students staff and families," she said.