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This past summer, the district unfortunately lost student Matt McCulley to suicide. In the weeks before school, grief counseling was open for people to come to the school and talk about how they felt if they wanted. Then, once school started, it seemed as if nothing ever happened.

The school has not said a thing of his passing, and possibly even worse, no measures have been taken to prevent this from happening again. Senior Mitch Benson, a close friend of McCulley's, got a tattoo in honor of the friend he lost with a quote McCulley told him saying, "Live the good life, Mitch." "I really wish Matt would have told me what was going through his head that night," Benson said.

In the past three years, the district has lost two additional male students besides McCulley to a worldwide epidemic - suicide. While Johnston has attempted efforts to raise suicide awareness for all students in the Big Give assembly that went awry and in advisories where students did not pay attention, it does not seem to have done any more to educate students than the required 10th grade health class has.

One thing my health class did touch on was the fact that in Iowa, for the group of people ages 10-25, suicide is the second leading cause of death. People were surprised, asked "how, why, when," but none of them asked, "How can we fix it?" If that does not throw up a red flag to every single parent and school administrator, then I do not know what will.

The only success found in reaching out to students seemed to be when the Kind Campaign came and spoke to

the female student body in 2013. The Kind Campaign was founded in 2009 after two women decided to share their personal experiences with bullying and suicide. Because that campaign was exclusively for girls, none of the male student body was allowed to attend. Afterwards, nothing ever came for the male students. No speakers, no assemblies, it was just the girls.

Other schools in the metro area, however, do have suicide programs and/or groups. S.E. Polk is one of them and it is built of a club sponsor and student members, just like any other club. If that says anything, it is that it is easier than some want to think to get a group like that started here. Their high school brought Stand for the Silent, an anti-bullying/suicide prevention group based out of Oklahoma, founder Kirk Smalley who lost his son to suicide in 2009 to speak on the importance of suicide awareness. "Absolutely more schools should have groups like this in their schools," Stand for the Silent's S.E. Polk high school chapter advisor Heather Goodrich said. Goodrich has participated in several anti-bullying events, including a recent regional conference on the importance of mental health awareness.

More than just the Stand for the Silent group are taking action. As a part of the Cameron Carico +10 foundation, former middle school principal Brian Carico trains other teachers around Iowa on mental health when not working at Waukee as an associate principal.

Cameron passed away after committing suicide in 2012 and his father, Brian, has since then carried on his legacy

in spreading mental health awareness. Carico has trained teachers at S.E. Polk where Goodrich works, and he has plans to soon meet with superintendent Corey Lunn about bringing more awareness to the district staff in hopes that teachers will be more likely to pick up on the symptoms on multiple different mental disorders besides depression (anxiety, substance abuse, bipolar disorder, etc.).

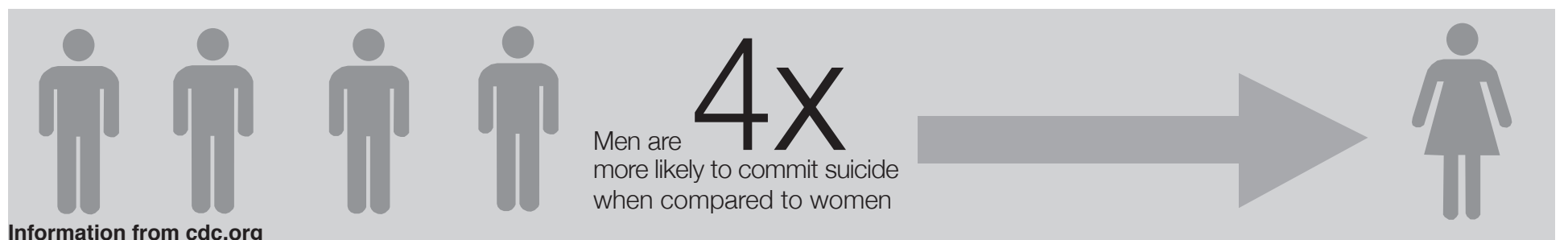
Administration cannot aim for just the girls and ignore the boys. When covering such an issue, all sides needs to be addressed. The school can still do more. It will take more than a 30 minute-long assembly to make people realize the severity, the importance, all the facts of suicide, suicidal tendencies, etc. "They don't need to straight up talk about the topic of suicide," Benson said. "But they should try some techniques that help kids manage stress, anxiety, and depression."

Benson has a good idea on what the school can do. "You have students take a personality survey and match them with students and a teacher that have similar personality traits," Benson said. "Talk about what's good in your life and things we can do to manage our feelings."

Suicide is not going away. It will take more than temporary grief counseling and once a year 10-minute-long assemblies to make things better here.

Maybe our school follows in the footsteps of S.E. Polk. Or maybe the district brings in more experts on the subject, like Carico, to educate those that need it.

We have nothing to lose as a school from educating and helping each other. We can only save lives.



Information from cdc.org