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**To: Editor, Red Rock News
MATFORCE Column for Red Rock News**

MARIJUANA – THE #1 THREAT TO OUR KIDS’ FUTURES

By:

Barbara U'Ren is the Superintendent of the Cottonwood-Oak Creek School District and MATForce Board Director.

Sheila Polk is the Yavapai County Attorney and Co-Chair of MATFORCE, the Yavapai County Substance Abuse Coalition.

My name is Barbara U'Ren. I am the Superintendent of Cottonwood-Oak Creek School District and a MATFORCE Board of Director. I recently called County Attorney and MATFORCE Co-Chair Sheila Polk to report a rising trend - the countywide increase of marijuana use among our kids. Together we are writing this article because we believe it is important for us to make our communities aware of this trend and the negative affect the use of marijuana can have on our youth.

Ask any school resource officer and they will tell you what many of us feared; legalizing medical marijuana makes marijuana more accessible to kids and sends the message to kids that smoking marijuana is harmless because we now call it “medicine.”

Why is this so alarming? It is alarming to me as an educator because more kids are getting their hands on marijuana and facing the consequences of possession of marijuana in school. Kids lose precious academic time because of suspensions and the legal consequences of their conduct.

Disturbing as this is from the perspective of an educator who is responsible to educate our community’s children, it is even more disturbing when we start to understand the long-term effects that marijuana has on a developing brain resulting in a loss of ambition and sinking the student into a world of procrastination and low productivity.

There is research published by the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) that clearly correlates the harmful effects of marijuana on the development of the brain.

- Marijuana disrupts the way nerve cells normally send, receive, and process information.
- Marijuana use not only places teens at risk of addiction but also impairs their memory, judgment, and ability to learn.
- Marijuana's negative effects on attention, memory and learning can last for days or weeks.
- Regular use of marijuana can lower an adolescent's IQ by 7 to 8 points.
- Marijuana damages the brain's natural reward system, compromising his ability to enjoy life without smoking pot.
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This creates a downward spiral that is marked by persistent procrastination, low productivity, low self-confidence, bad or guilty feelings, memory problems, poor school performance, family conflicts and drug addiction.

County Attorney Polk and I agree that parents and all adults have a responsibility to our children to provide a safe environment in which kids can thrive and succeed. Together, we must take measures to reduce our students' access to substances that place them at risk and send strong collective statement that marijuana in the hands of kids unfairly robs them of a successful future.

Like a slow-growing cancer, we must pay attention before more damage is done!

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