

# Kansas SADD Chapter Selected for National Award



Last school year, Louisburg Middle School's SADD chapter hosted a movie night, a karaoke night and a lock-in for their members; conducted a food drive and adopted a family for Christmas; volunteered for parent-teacher organization activities, community bell ringing and a local half marathon; and held awareness events in their school like Red Ribbon Week and Grim Reaper Day.

It's a pretty impressive list of activities. What's even more impressive – they accomplished it all in their first year in existence. In a short time, they've overcome challenges in their school and community with the strength of unity, and it's paid off in a big way.

It began in December 2012 when Chris Curry was hired as the school resource officer for Louisburg's school district. It didn't take long for Curry to realize that most of the problems existed in the middle school. For Curry, the dynamics at the middle school painted a very clear picture of the problem's cause – a lack of school and community activities to prevent students from making destructive decisions, like bullying or abusing substances.

"At the middle school level, sports are only for seventh and eighth graders," said Curry. "So you've basically got 130 sixth graders that, unless they're involved in band or choir, they're not involved in anything. They have no clubs to participate in."

A quick Google search for "prevention in schools" landed Curry on the homepage for Students Against Destructive Decisions (SADD), a national peer-to-peer education, prevention and activism organization dedicated to preventing underage alcohol and drug use, risky and impaired driving, and teen violence. Seeing it as a great opportunity to start an organization for middle school students, he pitched the idea to the school's principal, who immediately approved the development of a school chapter.

Curry quickly discovered that the need for an organization like SADD was an important one when his request for club officers garnered 30 applications for six positions. After Curry met with the elected officers during the summer, they kicked off the school year with a picnic, where nearly 150 students were introduced to SADD. The event filled an important need in the small town community – a fun activity that promoted positive behaviors among students.

With interest growing in the chapter and its activities, Curry and the officers decided to use the attention to draw awareness to the school's bullying issue. Developing a spirited, week-long event called Unity Week, the organization began by building a paper chain with every student's name on it, hanging it in the commons area to symbolize a unified front against bullying.

"For the first time since I had been there, we had no bullying incidents for an entire week," Curry said. "The kids literally took the whole bullying and unity thing to heart, and it's made a tremendous impact on how the kids relate to each other."

Bonded by the unity created that week, the students continued to promote positive messages throughout the school year, engaging the school and community in preventing students from bullying and abusing substances. In the spring, Curry submitted an award application to SADD National, hoping his students would be recognized for the difference they were making in Louisburg.

To his surprise, a letter came in late May with word that their SADD chapter had received the Judges' Award in the SADD National Chapter of the Year competition. With support from the town's city council, Curry traveled to Washington, D.C., to accept the award. In addition to the national recognition, Louisburg Middle School was selected as the Kansas SADD Chapter of the Year at KFP's Kansas Youth Empowerment Conference this fall.

"The kids have already made plans to meet and beat what they've done last year and make more of an impact this year," said Curry.

