

Grand Island schools, town join forces to fight the opioid epidemic

By [Nancy A. Fischer](#) | Published February 5, 2018 | Updated February 5, 2018

No community is immune from the opioid epidemic.

That's why Grand Island has established an advisory committee made up of both school board and town board members to address the problem. Community members will be invited to participate.

"Grand Island is just like everywhere else," Town Supervisor Nathan McMurray said.

Cheryl Cardone, director of pupil personnel services for the school district, said two recent Grand Island graduates and a couple of parents have died of overdoses. McMurray said a parent who died this past year left behind two small children.

Celia Spacone, a town resident and the retired director of the Buffalo Psychiatric Center, who also ran unsuccessfully for a seat on the Town Board in November, has agreed to serve as a member of the new committee.

Spacone organized a community forum in September to spotlight the opioid epidemic that was attended by 50 people and attracted hundreds more on a Facebook livestream of the event. One of the speakers at that event was Alex Neutz, a 26-year-old Grand Island football star, who talked about his drug addiction.

Neutz received a full scholarship to play for the University at Buffalo and became one of UB's all-time leaders in touchdown receptions. But Neutz said he always faced anxiety, and fought through depression and injuries. He said drugs became a part of his life when he was given painkillers after a wrist injury in his sophomore year at UB.

"Painkillers took away everything, my back pain, pain from my broken wrist and also my depression and anxiety," Neutz said at the forum, adding, "But it also numbs you from the world. Before you know it you are on a downward spiral."

Neutz said addiction can transform even people who appear to have it all into people who feel like they have nothing. Those same people often also are dealing with the stigma of addiction and fear they have nowhere to turn.

School Board President Lisa Pyc echoed said the the town's "One Island, One Team Substance Abuse Coalition" had been successful, but ended due to a lack of volunteers. She said she hoped to see the program revived.

Councilman Peter Marston said he hoped the committee to address other issues, such as alcohol addiction and suicide awareness.

McMurray said he plans to have an advisory committee meeting sometime in March and will ask the public to participate.