

Addressing Teen Vaping Concerns in the Revere Public Schools

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Introduction

The use of vapes and nicotine products is a major health issue impacting students across the nation, including in the Revere, Massachusetts Public School System.

Mayor Keefe of Revere established a transition team following his election into office in January 2024. The transition team is compiled of various members of the community and serves as a focus group to address concerns, strengths, and weaknesses within the community. He included State Representative Jessica Giannino on the team. During a recent meeting, they addressed concerns from the Revere Public School (RPS) teachers about students vape and nicotine usage.



Problem

The RPS teachers and staff feel unsupported in addressing student vaping usage. There is a lack of policy in place to guide the teachers on how to discourage students from vaping and implement disciplinary action.

The development and implementation of policy is needed to support the teachers. This generation of students is not concerned with the negative health effects of vaping, which may be a result of a lack of education on the matter. Given the gap in an effective disciplinary plan, there is no incentive for students to stop vaping.

It is crucial to identify best practices and policies regarding teen vaping usage to aid RPS in addressing these issues.

Process

The end goal is addressing the RPS teachers, staff, and School Resource Officers (SROs) concerns and supporting them in handling teen vaping usage. The process included researching and compiling best practices from around the country into a handout for the RPS staff to refer to and distribute to students.

Data collection and research occurred over a 3-month time span. The research was conducted using various sources including existing Massachusetts Legislature, legislature that other states are working on, correspondence with Allyson Perron Director of Government Relations for the *American Heart Association*, the *Truth Initiative*, and *Get Outraged!*.

Following the analysis of best practices and existing measures, two handouts were developed as a proposed resource for the RPS staff and students. The handouts were presented to Rep. Giannino who plans to share it with Mayor Keefe and the rest of the transition team.

Challenges

The main challenge in this process was being able to develop an effective action plan that will support the teachers and help the students to stop vaping. Educators face a difficult time when it comes to having conversations about vaping due to student pushback.

Students may refuse to listen and acknowledge the resources available to help cease vaping. There is a discrepancy between the students vape usage and their willingness to seek help or take advantage of the help being provided. Therefore, the materials developed must be geared toward the students and presented effectively.



TEEN VAPING RESOURCES for students

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW & HOW TO GET HELP

THE FACTS.

- Smoking of any kind is banned in Massachusetts schools
- E-Cigarettes contain:
 - nicotine
 - ultrafine particles
 - Diacetyl - chemical linked to lung disease & popcorn lung
 - Benzene - chemical found in car exhaust
 - Heavy metals like nickel, tin & lead (mass.gov)
- The effects of nicotine usage include addiction, mood disorders & permanent lowering of impulse control (mass.gov)

GETTING HELP

The Truth Initiative is an organization that encourages youth to stop using vapes & tobacco

They have established a text thread to send daily reminders & give immediate support for those in need

Results show that in students who use the program, there is a 40% more likelihood that they quit vaping

YOU ARE NOT IN THIS ALONE

Quitting "cold turkey" is not effective

95% of people can NOT quit this way (Truth Initiative)

Text DITCHVAPE to 88709 and scan for more resources

TEEN VAPING RESOURCES for educators & staff

BE AWARE

Students are vaping in and out of the classroom.

Signs of Vaping Include

- Irritability, anxiety, and difficulty concentrating
- Frequent trips out of the classroom
- Unfamiliar odors in the air

PROGRAMS TO IMPLEMENT

1. EX by the Truth Initiative

The "EX" Program published by the Truth Initiative is a free program for educators and/or parents to implement. The program has 4-10 minute sessions targeted towards grades 8-12, ideally to be implemented in homeroom or as part of remediation for students caught vaping.

2. Implement over to peer influence

Nicotine cessation is not easy, in fact 95% of people can not quit cold turkey. Implementing a program where students can be connected with other students who have overcome their nicotine addiction would be very beneficial.

3. For athletes

In the MIAA handbook there is a section dedicated to the guidelines & procedures for athletes that violate vaping policies. These include requiring the student attend treatment programs & game suspension.

1 in 3 Massachusetts Teens Vape

"In 2019, 32% of Massachusetts high school students reported vaping in the past 30 days compared to 5.8% of adults (2018). 52.1% of Massachusetts high school students have tried vaping. The reported use of e-cigarettes among high school students was higher than for all other tobacco products combined." (mass.gov)

Successes

The handouts were developed and edited to be eye-catching and engaging for the students and educators. It was well received by Rep. Giannino and her staff. The handout was also shown to a teen who said that they would take the time to read it and consider the recommended interventions.

Lesson Learned

Extensive research was conducted to understand the best practices and policies regarding teen vaping. A major focus of this project was on providing materials and plans that the students would be inclined to consider.

The handouts proposed for the educators were aimed to support them, as well as to change the conversation regarding vaping. Educators have felt that they have not been supported in handling student vaping. This handout gives them guidelines to best address the students and point them in the direction of help. This new approach will turn the focus to helping students.

Next Steps

Moving forward, it is my hope that once these handouts are presented to Mayor Keefe and the transition team that they will use these resources to help address this major issue within their community. I recommend that they will provide teachers and SROs with copies for their students in the multiple diverse and dynamic languages including English, Spanish, Portuguese, and Arabic. It would be highly beneficial to dedicate 10 minutes of homeroom to review and distribute the material. I believe that the time and research that I have dedicated to this would contribute to be a meaningful part of the curriculum and be a guide for other communities to follow.

References

<https://www.mass.gov/info-details/get-the-facts-about-youth-vaping>

<https://truthinitiative.org/>