

A Statement for Health and Change in Vermont

3/19/19

It is honor for me to write this letter on behalf of the South Burlington School District. I am Gar Smith, High School Prevention Coordinator and Lacrosse Coach. There is currently a lingering fear for the health and wellbeing of our students, which is shared in communities across Vermont and beyond. The epidemic of nicotine use through e-cigarettes is real and not decreasing. We need to do something, or this fear will grow.

One of my duties at SBHS is to work with students who are cited for violating our substance abuse policy. By October this year our School Resource Officer had already written more tickets than he had for the whole year. These numbers are going up on campus and we are managing to support the kids the best we can. It is not my intention to offer you numbers and statistics as that will already be shown to you. **My purpose is to paint a picture of life.**

The teens I speak with about nicotine use represent the full spectrum. Underachieving students from families who have a history of substance abuse; to students on the honor roll applying and getting accepted by Ivy League universities. They enter for a variety of reasons. Dealing with anxiety. Self-medicating their depression. Because their friends do it. Because their parents do it. In recognizing their dependence on nicotine, every kid can communicate clearly with me that they wish something was different and that they could stop using. **They can't stop because the number 1 reason for all kids using is availability.**

We have 18 and over students in our school who run a profitable business with our younger students by selling pods and other nicotine liquids. In the South Burlington community, our middle school students ride busses with our high school students. So now we have 18-year-old students selling to an audience of 11 to 13-year-olds. This happening every day.

There have been instances of violence connected to this drug, more than one. Notably in the first month of school there was one student who confronted another student about selling him a half empty pod. This led to 3 boys ganging up on the 1 and beating him up, breaking ribs, and being intervened with by our state's justice system. All four boys were freshmen, age 14.

Every student I talk to knows someone who uses nicotine or uses it themselves. When I ask them if they would support moving the legal age of purchasing tobacco products from 18 to 21 they are unified in saying "Yes." Please do what is best for the health of all our children now and forever.

Gratefully,
Gar Smith
School Prevention Coordinator/Lacrosse Coach
South Burlington School District