

Vermont School Administrators Want Tobacco 21!

Jay Nichols, Executive Director, Vermont Principals Association:

The number of young people that are 'juuling' and using other nicotine-based products in other ways is causing huge problems for school leaders and educators. More importantly, children are being targeted with fancy flavored products whose purpose is to get them hooked on nicotine and develop a next generation of addicts to nicotine for the tobacco companies to exploit for financial profit. The cause of this is great societal harm, similar to the billions of dollars of economic loss for citizens from cigarettes and the trillions of dollars of loss in health care bills that our country has paid directly or indirectly. Raising the age to 21 for any of these products is a good start in the right direction

Gar Smith, School Prevention Coordinator, South Burlington School District

We have 18 and over students in our school that 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 11-13 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 4 boys were freshmen, age 14.

Chris Oleks, Principal Stowe High School:

E-cigarette and vaping abuse, and in particular, the use and abuse of Juul devices, has led to several disruptions to the learning environment at our school. Immense amounts of administrative and counseling department time have been spent in investigating abuses of our school's policies, researching and deploying anti-vaping curricular assistance to our students and parents, and conducting follow-up to ensure that our students are not continuing to abuse these substances, and others. This is not to mention the time lost to instruction for individual students when they run into disciplinary sanctions related to these devices, and the distraction use and abuse cause to other students. We would greatly appreciate increased governmental and policy assistance in ensuring our students stay safe from the use and abuse of nicotine and other vapable substances, as schools and families cannot possibly do this work alone...

School nurse- Diane Kirson-Glitman BA BS RN Essex High School and CTE:

Over the years I have been a school nurse, the number of students who regularly smoke, who reek of cigarettes, or who are seen in clusters off campus smoking has dwindled to almost non-existent. Those who do smoke, generally come from homes with parents who smoke. Now, with vaping and juul these nicotine delivery devices, that may not produce significant vapor or smoke are being used in classrooms, locker rooms, bathrooms and hallways. The products are being used by athletes, high flyers, and generally across all demographic and achievement lines. Students as young as 14 in my school admit to using juul and continue to believe it is not harmful.

Vape devices drop out of pockets while students are seeking care in the health office. Teachers find students using juul in classes, in the bathrooms and all over the school. The technology that makes the use difficult to detect add to the thrill. Some of the devices can be hacked for other substances and complicate our substance abuse issues.

Carrie Wilson, Head of School, Bishop John A. Marshall School, Morrisville:

I fully support and embrace increasing the age requirement for both using and purchasing tobacco products and/or e-cigarettes. Tobacco use among our teens is a growing epidemic; as a principal, I see the usage impacting students in my own elementary school and I implore those making decisions to consider increasing the age requirement to 21...



For more info: Tina Zuk, American Heart Association, 802-578-3466, tina.zuk@heart.org

Mike McRaith, Principal Montpelier High School:

As children learn and grow, trends and fads are typical as part of their development. As younger students, it might be the latest songs from a movie, cartoon, or toy. For teens it might be fashion, a meme, or catch-phrase. Adding a highly addictive element like nicotine to any of the latest trends and fads takes advantage of a vulnerability that teens have, and though the teens might want to be “done with” the fad at some point, as is the case with e-cigarettes, the fad isn’t done with them. Our teens’ developmental stage is being taken advantage of in order to have regular and addicted customers. The lasting health cost impacts are damaging for the individual and the collective. If moving the age from 18 to 21 helps at all, we should make that move.

Amy Roy M.Ed., Principal, Benson Village School SVMUUSD:

If the attempt is to keep potentially habit-forming health risk choices out of the hands of young adults so their prefrontal cortexes can mature more, I am all in favor of an age raise for purchasing e-cigarettes and tobacco products. The bombardment of advertising, social media, lack of product transparency, and ease of access via the internet has made the access to these products too easy. An increase in purchase age would, at the very least, add another layer of accountability to the retailers to help prevent their products from landing in the hands of teenagers.

Dorothy Goff Goulet, PhD, Randolph Union High School:

If we are truly committed to making decisions about education and learning based upon current science, we in education are remiss if we do not support measures intended to keep students’ brains and bodies as healthy as possible. Raising the age for the purchase and use of substances aligns with our values and that commitment to help students keep as many options as possible open at the end of their schooling. An addicted student, no matter the substance or (de)vice, will have fewer viable paths to choose from.

Dana Peterson, Superintendent, P.A. Hannaford Regional Technical School District, Middlebury:

As someone who has suffered from a chronic asthmatic condition since the age of three, I can’t imagine why anyone would want to inhale any substance into their lungs that would reduce the efficiency of air intake and compromise their breathing capacity. With our knowledge of brain development and our current understanding that effective decision-making base on pre-frontal cortex formation may only be established late in one’s twenties, I would strongly advocate for delaying the legal sale of tobacco products as late as possible.

Chris Mosca, BFA St. Albans principal:

The use of e-cigarettes and vaping has been harmful to our educational environment. It is difficult to detect and the substances are highly addictive. Many students are using which has a negative impact on instruction as demonstrated by students leaving class and being distracted from their learning. Although it is challenging to get a firm number on use, we hope that our Youth Risk Behavior Survey data will provide some clarity on the extent of the problem. Our nurses and support personnel have been working diligently to educate students about the use of products like JUUL, but it seems that changing the culture concerning these substances will be a long and difficult process. Unfortunately, the acceptance of cannabis in our state and society has I suspect, led indirectly to increased risk behavior including tobacco and e-cigarette use among adolescents.

Mary Ross, Principal, Vernon Elementary School:

We owe it to young and healthy Vermonters to do all we can as leaders to discourage early addiction to the known harmful and long term impacts of tobacco use including e-cigarettes.

Bob Gulardo, Assistant Principal, Twinfield Union School, Washington Northeast, Plainfield:

As a former health educator and current school administrator, I have reviewed several articles about youth and the onset of problem behaviors, including smoking and other tobacco use. The research is fairly conclusive that the later the onset of tobacco use (beyond teenage years), the less likely one is to become a regular smoker. Moreover, if one does smoke, they are more likely to smoke less.