

The Vaping Epidemic Among Teenagers

Dear Cook County Board of Commissioners,

Hello all, my name is Bre'ah Gandy and I am a soon to be graduating senior from Kenwood Academy in Hyde Park. I am a part of the AP Capstone program which is a two year program that involves intensive research on topics of our choice. This year, my research question was: What is Contributing to The Vaping Epidemic Among Teenagers? I did a survey based research method among high school students in Kenwood. Why is this concerning you may ask? Well, The vaping epidemic is an essential concern for many Americans because vapes are harming their children and will continue to harm future generations of children. The miseducation, targeted advertisements, social media, and fruity flavors are some of the things that have teens hooked on these highly toxic devices. While the popularity of vaping has grown over the past decade, peer pressure is also a factor. From personal experience, a student brought up how they vaped for the first time in the bathroom at school and their reason for doing it was because their friend offered it to them. Sadly, this is not the only instance. Other students have mentioned only vaping at parties to "have fun" or "look cool" which eventually turned into a habit. Manufacturers, physicians, educators, and vape distribution companies are all responsible for the turnabout. As recent as March of 2023, JUUL Labs, an e-cigarette company, is facing a lawsuit against at least six states for false advertisement and intentional advertising to minors. If we don't cap this epidemic America will be considering making room for more hospital beds.

From the survey's results, I concluded that: According to the data collected, teenagers started vaping anywhere between thirteen and seventeen years of age. However, the respondents reported vaping less often than not. Stress and anxiety combined is the leading cause of why students started to vape. Students don't believe that vaping is a good coping mechanism but still

engage in the act of it because it makes them feel good about themselves. A gap in this study was that although 59.7% of respondents did not think that vaping was a good coping mechanism, 36.8% of those students confessed that they vape because it helps them cope. So, students are aware of the risks of vaping but still turn to them. In theory, students may not feel like they have anything else to lean on when going through everyday issues. Most researchers called for primary doctors, nurses, and other physicians to push for screening and other preventive measures for adolescents to put a cap on the vaping epidemic. Research also calls for youth awareness, not falling into peer pressure, and strongly suggests seeking professional help, if needed, instead of turning to drug abuse. Based on this study's findings the best solution to cap the vaping epidemic is to continue to educate both students and parents about the health risks of vaping. Vape manufacturing companies need to make strict restrictions on underage buying and require proof of ID for all online orders. Lawmakers should make strict restrictions on the advertisements that vape companies put out in specific, age-appropriate settings. Schools should be equipped with real therapists instead of using counselors who aren't trained to treat vaping habits. Health physicians and nurses should actively screen for any abnormalities in teenagers who vape and warn them about the risks. Students should also be educated on alternative coping strategies that would not only be a safer choice for them but also a healthier one.

Thank you for taking the time to read this, it is greatly appreciated as I know all of you deeply care about the vaping epidemic just as much as I do. Please take my research into careful consideration upon making vaping laws and regulations against teenage vaping.