

November 19, 2019

Dear Parents and Guardians,

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), "vaping" has been linked to 1,479 cases of lung disease and 33 deaths nationwide. The Office of the Surgeon General determined as of 2018, that 1 in 5 high school students reported using e-cigarettes in the past month. This statistic was actualized in the 2017 Pennsylvania Youth Survey (PAYS) gathered from Mercer Area School District students. Survey responses indicated that 24.3% of students in 8th grade had used a vaping/e-cigarette device within a month of taking the survey, with 26.8% of 10th grade students and 20.5% of 12th grade students responding the same.

These electronic devices (also known as e-cigs, vape pens, JUULs, ENDS units, among many others) have been found to emit small particles, many that remain in the body. To make matters worse, there have been links to more dangerous substances infused in these e-liquids that have the potential for harmful, long-lasting effects and even death. In light of these news reports, student responses, and medical recommendations it has become necessary for the Mercer Area School District to adjust our policies to protect our students from this epidemic.

The Mercer Area School District will be launching a Vaping Prevention: Education and Advocacy program within the District's Health curriculum in grades K-6, 7, 9, and 11. The classroom lessons and activities, developed in part by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), will focus on prevention in age appropriate language. Additionally, Mercer Middle/High School will be rolling out a Youth Role Model/Group call TRU; Tobacco Resistance Unit in the Spring, 2020. While the specifics of the TRU group are still being developed, we are hopeful positive peer interactions and modeling will deter younger students from experimenting with vaping. Lastly, the school district included both intervention and cessation program requirements for students in possession of vaping paraphernalia while on school grounds.

At the Mercer Area School Board meeting on November 18, 2019, it was approved that the following changes be enacted immediately:

- First Offense: Student will be suspended out-of-school for three (3) days. Charges may be filed with the District Magistrate. This filing will be waived if the student completes a tobacco intervention program identified by the Mercer Area School District (cost to be paid by the parent/guardian).
- Second Offense: Student will be suspended out-of-school for five (5) days. Charges may be filed with the District Magistrate. Students would be required to complete a tobacco cessation program identified by the Mercer Area School District (cost to be paid by the parent/guardian).
- Third Offense: Student will be suspended out-of-school for five (5) days. Charges will be filed with the District Magistrate. The student will have a formal hearing with the Mercer Area School Board Disciplinary Committee.

The Mercer Area School District is committed to help end this potentially harmful epidemic, but success will not be immediate. Through the consistent enforcement, prevention, intervention, and continued collaboration with local organizations, government agencies, and law enforcement, our aim is to do everything that we can to protect the safety of our students from this epidemic. The updated information located in the student handbook can be found on the reverse side of this letter. Please do not hesitate to contact the Mercer Elementary or the Mercer Middle-High School office if you have questions about this change to the student handbook.

Sincerely,

Eric Mausser
Mercer Middle-High School Principal

Greg Acre
Mercer Elementary School Principal

Possession of Tobacco

First offense:

1. Three (3) days of out-of-school suspension
2. Charges filed with the District Magistrate

Second offense:

1. Five (5) days of out-of-school suspension
2. Charges filed with the District Magistrate
3. Completion of a tobacco intervention program identified by the School District (cost to be paid by parent/guardian)

Third offense:

1. Five (5) days of out-of-school suspension
2. Charges filed with the district magistrate
3. Completion of a tobacco cessation program identified by the School District (cost to be paid by parent/guardian)
4. Formal hearing with School Board Disciplinary Committee

Possession of Electronic Cigarette.....

First offense:

1. Three (3) days of out-of-school suspension
2. Charges MAY be filed with the District Magistrate; Filing with District Magistrate will be waived if student completes #3
3. Completion of a tobacco intervention program identified by the School District (cost to be paid by parent/guardian)

Second offense:

1. Five (5) days of out-of-school suspension
2. Charges MAY filed with the District Magistrate
3. Completion of a tobacco cessation program identified by the School District (cost to be paid by parent/guardian)

Third offense:

1. Five (5) days of out-of-school suspension
2. Charges filed with the District Magistrate
3. Formal hearing with School Board Disciplinary Committee