

The stewing storm of sweet smoke

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A teenage boy hides away in a bathroom stall as he slowly takes a small device from his pocket. Lifting the e-cigarette to his mouth, the boy inhales a puff of smoke. As he exhales, a light haze of sweet vapor fills the room. This very scene has become commonplace in high schools across the nation.

As of September 1 in the state of Texas, the legal age to buy tobacco and nicotine products, including e-cigarettes, is 21.

"It was like sophomore year with just like everybody that was in our grade was doing it," senior Ben Satler* said. "Everybody kind of just kept doing it until they got hooked on it, and now I know kids that are actually addicted to it."

According to the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, 19% of high schoolers in Texas use or have used e-cigarettes.

"I distinctly remember two years ago, it [popped] up on the scene," Biology and anatomy/physiology teacher Jessica Davis said. "I remember because, well, there was a rumor that it would happen in the bathroom."

Despite what commercial advertisements may display, when the battery of the e-cigarette heats up liquid to produce smoke, it releases aerosol into the lungs, not water vapor.

"When I first started, it was like it's just, it's a better alternative to smoking, and people have been smoking for 60 plus years," Satler said, "Then I started looking it up and like popcorn lungs, and all this started coming up, and I was like, do I really want to mess up my lungs at 15 years old?"

"Popcorn-lung" or bronchiolitis obliterans, as described by the Texas Department of Health Services, is caused by a chemical in vape flavoring called Diacetyl.

"I knew there were always health problems associated with vaping, but now I realize it is worse than I thought," junior David Ronald* said. "[It] scares me for the kids that did it not knowing the problems."

Popcorn lung occurs when Diacetyl scars tiny air sacs in the lungs, and symptoms of wheezing and shortness of breath can appear, according to the DSHS.

"My science brain was a little skeptical because I had a very tough time believing that it was a safe alternative to cigarettes," Davis said. "The combination of it being a hot liquid pulled into your lungs, which your lung tissue is always

very vulnerable, with thousands of chemicals present just can't be a good thing."

As released by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 530 cases of lung injuries connected to e-cigarettes have been reported as of September 17.

"I feel like most of the kids that are probably getting these illnesses from vaping could have also come from like illegal THC [tetrahydrocannabinol] cards," Satler said. "Those have no regulations on them where these kids are, and they could be smoking pesticides for all they know."

The CDC has also released that 16% of the illnesses reported are in youth under 18 years of age.

"I think people just want to be accepted by others and they think it's some kind of social status boost when they [smoke]," Ronald said. "People also vape because they don't want to do drugs, but they still want some kind of title similar to that."

As reports of vaping-related illnesses increase, the exact cause of lung symptoms has yet to be determined.

"I've had the debate with my own kids in this perception that it's a safer alternative to cigarettes, that it's just vapor," Principal Mark Robinson said. "That debate has made me aware of some of the misconceptions, and as a principal and a parent, I connect with this issue in a meaningful way."

In response to the spike in lung conditions connected to e-cigarette use, the Food and Drug Administration is drafting a national ban on flavored pods.

"I think [a ban] may have an impact at the youngest ages, the middle schoolers and high schoolers that are trying it," Davis said.

"I would love to see even more regulation by increasing the tax on it so that is becomes cost prohibitive for younger people."

In addition to new state-wide policies, Robinson explained that Bowie has adjusted its vaping policy to meet the urgency of the situation.

"I feel like this is like a lot of the other problems that the schools are asked to solve, but it can't just be all the schools to solve," Robinson said. "We're going to continue to be vocal and educate our students about the dangers of vaping because it's our current reality."

Within the new policy, a student can now receive three days of ISS for a first time tobacco offense.

"I didn't let nicotine control me, and I stay on task with my stuff," Satler said. "If it's really controlling someone's life outside of school,

that means that they have another major problem to deal with."

Despite an increased presence of teachers in hallways during passing periods and lunches, it can be difficult to control e-cigarette use in the bathroom.

"I'm not surprised kids are drawn to it," Davis said. "I just hope that they understand that they are hurting themselves."

Despite the prominence of vaping on campus, Bowie is officially a no-tobacco campus, meaning e-cigarettes should not be brought to school.

"We already know smoking is bad for you, but we've seen this just spread like a wildfire," Robinson said. "I would hope that anyone who reads this article would think twice and ask, do I really need to do this?" ■

*David Ronald and Ben Satler are fictional names to protect anonymous sources.

VAPING

What You Need to Know

As of September 17, 530 vaping related illnesses have been reported.

The legal age to buy tobacco or nicotine products in Texas is now 21.

Bowie policy gives three days of ISS for tobacco on campus.

E-cigarette use can lead to shortness of breath and lung infection.

Sources: texastribune.org, mercurynews.com, dshs.state.tx.us, and cdc.gov

ART BY Sumin Kim and Cade Spencer

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Mark Robinson
Principal

New policy provides teachers with silence during lunch

Brianna **Lopez**
Dispatch Photographer

When people go into the academic wings during lunch, they are greeted by the silence and emptiness of the hallways. At the beginning of the school year, the administration announced that students were no longer allowed to eat lunch in the academic halls.

"Students are invited to eat in the cafeteria, the fine arts building, the courtyard, or in the C/D hallways of the academic building," principal Mark Robinson said via a school-wide announcement.

Along with the announcement, the staff had a first-day student welcome message, shown in homeroom, that asked students to eat only in the areas mentioned in the video.

"The final thing we want to make sure you know is that students can not eat in the academic wings," assistant principal Stephanie McGraw said in the homeroom video. "Again, all of the centerpiece [in front of the library] is for you during lunch, however, hallways are for students in the academic area."

As the new policy is enforced, teachers are thrilled to have the hallways be quieter with no students disrupting their classes while they are teaching.

"Honestly, it's the best thing ever [because] last year I had a ham sandwich thrown at my door. It was thrown by a group of freshman and they later threw one again," AP environmental science teacher Ashley Spiro said. "When kids were allowed to eat



TIME FOR LUNCH: Sophomores Adelaide Sibley, Erica Lee, and Andrea Hascribein (from left to right) enjoy lunch at one of the many side-table options across camp. In accordance with the new policy, students cannot sit in A,B,F, or E hall during lunch, however, C and D hall are available for use. **PHOTO BY** Cade Spencer

anywhere, there weren't enough people to supervise. The campus would be a total mess after lunch."

However, some of the students were relatively displeased at first as they searched for a new spot in crowded common areas such as the cafeteria and fine arts building.

"I was upset with the rule because seating wasn't an issue but now seating is," sopho-

more Danny Burton said. "I just had to find a new spot to eat, which I did."

When the lunch period begins, teachers stand guard in the hallways making sure that students don't go into the academic wings. In the past, teachers have felt that groups in the wings were disruptive to their class.

"I keep an eye out for students, and I make sure kids who were sitting in the hall-

ways kindly sit in the common area," biology teacher Brandy Ramos said. "Most students are apathetic to it."

As teachers monitor the halls, they must also ensure that all students are wearing their ID's.

"I feel there are better things for them to be doing than just standing there in the middle of the hallway like soldiers," sophomore Elissa Wechsler said.

If a student does not have their ID on their lanyard, they can be asked to go to the office for a temporary ID sticker.

"It is sometimes hard to figure out which kids are from the classrooms and which ones are just wandering the halls," Ramos said.

When the policy was not enforced, students didn't notice how much of a mess they would leave on the tables, however, custodians and teachers did.

"I think the students didn't notice it that much because they didn't have to clean it up. It would be a wreck and either I or the custodians had to clean [their mess] up," Spiro said. "In the past, I had to go out with cleaning spray and paper towels and give it to students to clean up. I would just stare them down, but since I didn't really know their names, I couldn't do anything."

Despite the benefits the new policy offers to teachers, some students have mixed feelings about the loss of seating.

"I don't know, but it seems okay for now," Burton said. "No matter what, someone will be mad about this [lunch] policy." ■