

Mayor Treece and City Council Members
City of Columbia
701 E. Broadway
Columbia MO 65201

10 December 2019

Dear Mayor and City Council Members,

In November of 2018, the Youth Advisory Council conducted a survey to determine the extent to which substance abuse was an issue in Columbia Public Schools high schools. The rise in the use of e-cigarettes among youth, particularly those from the brand Juul, was something that the members of this Youth Advisory Council witnessed on an almost daily basis. With this motivation, we sought to collect data so that we might better understand this problem and how to address it.

We received over five hundred responses, predominately from Rock Bridge, Battle, and Hickman. After compiling and analyzing the results of our survey, we found several key pieces of information. First, a majority of students believe that substance abuse was a problem at their school. The most commonly used substances being nicotine, alcohol, and marijuana. This data helps in understanding where we should focus our efforts. Second, the most addictive of these three is nicotine. It's typically a more habit-forming substance, leading to its high prevalence in our schools. Finally, many students have failed to recognize the dangers or consequences of substance abuse due to the widespread de-stigmatization of vaping products, as opposed to traditional nicotine products, among high school students.

Moving forward, we believe the City Council should address the issue of youth substance abuse by regulating flavored nicotine products, as well as considering the impacts of a minimum price requirement within Columbia city limits. These recommendations are based on both our anecdotal experience with substance usage by our peers and nation-wide data indicating that low prices and flavors targeted towards minors contribute to the recent increase in new users of e-cigarette products. We also recommend using student-led groups to promote drug and illegal substance abstinence, as our data suggests that the majority of students view drug and e-cigarette use as an issue in their schools. Finally, we would like the City Council to encourage Columbia Public Schools to prioritize recovery over disciplinary action. Such policy changes would constitute important first steps toward addressing a crucial public safety concern among Columbia's youths.

We thank you for your time and consideration in regard to these recommendations.

Sincerely,

Youth Advisory Council