



Detect vaping in real time



Selah High School works to curb student substance use and treat adolescent addiction by using VapeDetect

Student substance use has become an increasingly pervasive problem on school campuses and can have serious consequences for students' health and safety. Selah High School in central Washington state names student safety as its number one priority and recognizes that addiction often accompanies substance abuse and limits a student's capacity to learn and grow.

On the heels of COVID-19 shutdowns, addiction prevention and treatment is particularly critical. A [recent study](#) published in the Journal of the American Medical Association asserts, "The pandemic has also been a lost year for school-based prevention and treatment efforts, meaning that abatement plans will need to be intensified to address the nicotine addiction in those adolescents who missed a year of contact with adults who might have otherwise helped them get treatment." As drug abuse remains an issue for



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students, school administrators are continually working with parents on strategies to curb vaping and treat student addiction. "Here's the thing," says Joel Starr, Assistant Principal at Selah High School, "We have kids that are addicted to vaping. We have an addiction problem. People take risks when they're addicted to stuff."

In 2022, Selah High School decided it needed more than just in-person monitoring to identify and react to vaping in school bathrooms. The school used funding from a levy to purchase eight in-

duct VapeDetect sensors. These sensors are designed to quickly and reliably detect when vaping occurs, with one sensor covering the size of a typical school bathroom. The sensors

then trigger an alert which will be sent to school staff, notifying them of an incident so that timely reaction and appropriate disciplinary action can be taken. This technology has been positively received by parents, who support the efforts of the institution to keep their children safe. The sensors also allow school staff to more accurately pinpoint which students are engaged in substance use, so they're not conducting mass searches. "When I talk to parents I can say, here's the email I got, here's the video that shows your kid was in here and this is why I did this search," Starr explains. Combined with existing video surveillance, staff can say with a high degree of certainty which students are using substances.

VapeDetect's state-of-the-art sensor systems are easily installed in bathroom vents, where they're protected from tampering and vandalism, unlike some industry competitors that install on walls or ceilings. Starr says, "The nice thing is, because it's in our ventilation system and our ceilings are very tall, it would be hard for them to get into the ventilation ducts. Kids vandalize things and when you pay for something, you want it to be in a place where it's not going to get damaged."

In a school of 1,100, Selah receives around 10–20 alerts a day. The number of alerts seemed high at first, but in relation to other schools of similar size, the number is comparable. When alerts are received (by text, app, or email), staff responds to face the offender and discuss next steps. Students are referred to the school's drug and alcohol counselor and may face in-school or out-of-school suspension. The ultimate goal is to connect students with resources to allay the underlying addiction that drives in-school vaping.

VapeDetect helps administrators ensure that students get the help they need in a timely manner and helps keep campuses safer in the process. The detectors provide a deterrent against vaping, secondhand exposure, and addiction, helping keep non-vapers away from these risky activities. This also helps to create safe spaces for those who are trying to quit using e-cigarettes but may be tempted by the presence of their peers engaging in the habit near them. "For any threat, it's about building trust and relationships with kids. As soon as they know that you didn't sign up for the job to punish kids, we're able to use a lot of different ways to help these kids out," says Starr. By working together in addressing addiction issues among students, administrators, teachers, and parents can help ensure their safety while also fostering their academic development.

