

Outsmarting Big Tobacco: Restorative Practices for No Smoking/Vaping Enforcement in Schools

A collaboration between:
Knox County Community Health
Coalition, Camden Hills Regional
High School & MaineHealth Center
for Tobacco Independence

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"...it's an intentional and respectful way of thinking about, talking about and responding to issues and problems that arise."

- Jen Curtis, Assistant Principal of
Camden Hills High School on
restorative practices



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For more information, contact: Knox County Community Health Coalition,
beckyhbooberkcchc@gmail.com | 207-236-6313, Ext. 2 | www.penbayymca.org



Summary

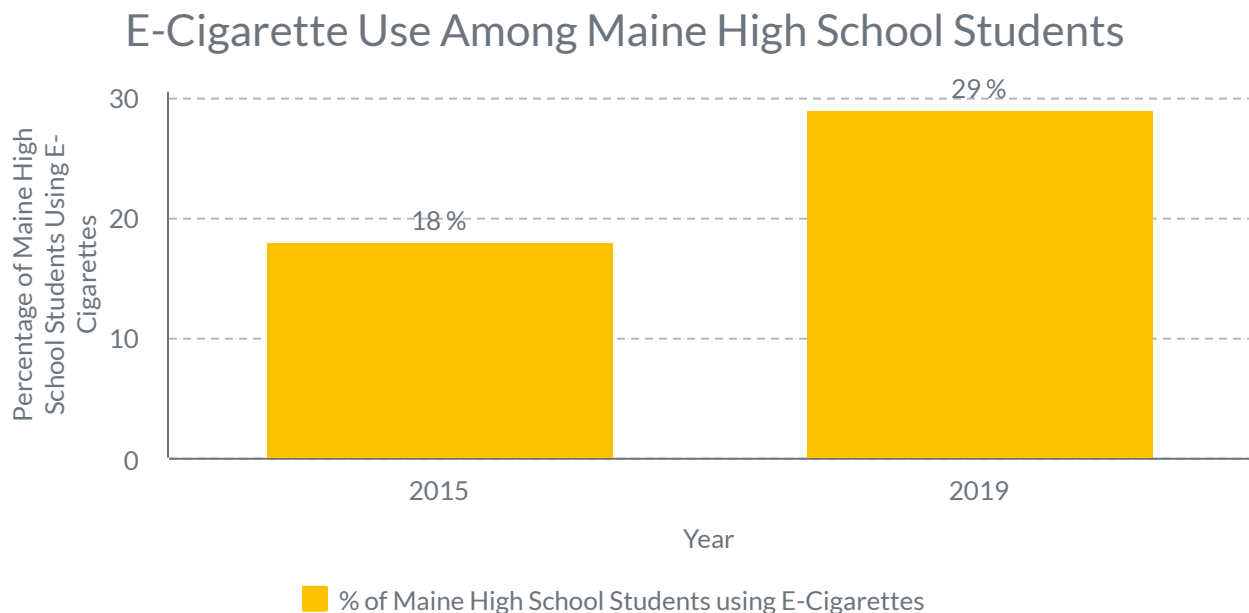
MaineHealth Center for Tobacco Independence (CTI), Knox County Community Health Coalition, and Camden Hills Regional High School collaborated with Maine School Management Association (MSMA) and Maine School Boards Association (MSBA) to discuss restorative strategies to address youth vaping in Maine schools during a virtual conference session at the MSMA/MSBA annual conference on October 29, 2021. The presentations focused on restorative approaches to help students become tobacco free, and included a comprehensive overview of the services and programs available to schools from their local District Tobacco Prevention Program (DTPP) partners located in 15 agencies across Maine, funded by Maine CDC

Public Health Challenge



Electronic cigarette use, or “vaping,” has significantly increased among youth in recent years, both nationally and in Maine. Electronic cigarette use is dangerous and has many adverse short- and long-term health effects. According to the Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey (MIYHS) from 2019, electronic cigarette use increased significantly among Maine high school students from 18% in 2015 to 29% in 2019. The trend in middle school is similar. The current use among middle school students increased from 5% in 2015 to 7% in 2019.

Suspending students from schools for infractions of school tobacco-free policies is ineffective (Guiding Principles: A Resource Guide for Improving School Climate and Discipline, US DOE, 2014). Furthermore, punitive measures such as suspension have been shown to cause more problems for students including lower test scores and graduation rates. The Truth Initiative published a policy statement in November 2021 emphasizing supportive and restorative measures for students who use tobacco on school grounds. They recommend that students who violate tobacco policies be approached in a supportive way that focuses on encouraging them to quit using tobacco products (Discipline Is Not The Answer, Truth Initiative, 2021).

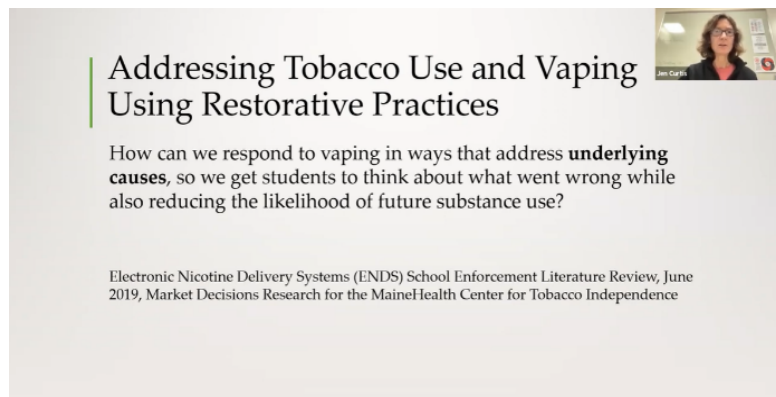




Approach

The local DTPP Tobacco Prevention Specialist in Knox County (Becky Hayes Boober) worked with Knox County schools to offer support on tobacco policy updates as well as education to students about electronic cigarettes and other tobacco products. During this process, she met a dynamic and passionate advocate for using a restorative approach to create a tobacco-free environment for students. This advocate is Jen Curtis, Assistant Principal at Camden Hills Regional High School.

The Knox County prevention specialist invited Jen Curtis to co-present with her and the director of MaineHealth's Center for Tobacco Independence (Kristen McAuley) at the upcoming MSMA/MSBA annual conference. The three presenters worked together to present an engaging presentation about an evidence-based approach to address tobacco use among youth ([link to video](#)).



Results



As part of the panel presentation, Jen Curtis provided a valuable and compelling overview of the restorative approach for addressing student tobacco infractions and how a principal or other administrator can tap into the important resources provided by their local DTPP. She explained that the heart of restorative practices is to deal not just with the symptoms you see but to talk through with the student about the underlying causes for it. She described three underlying causes for student vaping: social capital, the power of flavoring, and the belief that vaping is harmless.

"Providing education regarding the negative health effects and a process to end dependence on tobacco is a primary health objective for our students. Involving students in determining their healthy future is an important aspect of this approach." - Steven Bailey, Executive Director MSMA/MSBA

Curtis uses a restorative approach "... because it's an intentional and respectful way of thinking about, talking about and responding to issues and problems that arise". It prioritizes "student agency" and emphasizes a collaborative, strengths-based approach.

During the clip, she explains how she uses restorative dialogue and walks through the open-ended questions she uses with students. Instead of telling students what she heard they were doing, she gives them a voice and asks them what happened.

This overview of restorative practices to address student tobacco infractions was followed by information from the other presenters about emerging tobacco products and the many resources available to schools from their local DTPPs, including development of a comprehensive tobacco-free school policy that emphasizes a restorative approach. Kristen described new regulations related to tobacco use and schools and explained how schools can incorporate cessation services from the Maine QuitLink into restorative practices at schools.