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ILLUSTRATION BY NIK SHAY

Drug culture often accepted

STORY BY SAMANTHA PEREZ

Vaping and the use of marijuana is popular among teens. And if they're not using, they often don't care if others are.

"In general, I do not have an opinion on people that smoke weed or vape, as long as they are being responsible about it, then good for them," junior Emily Walton said.

Eating edibles is one of the popular uses of marijuana, while e-cigarettes are the most popular way to inhale substances.

According to Medical News Today, edibles last longer than smoking or vaping, with the effects commonly lasting about 6-8 hours. Although that time can vary depending on how a person's body responds to it.

By 2010 vapes had been making new brands to sell. Now there's different flavors while inhaling a vape. According to tobaccofreekids.org, the sales of disposable e-cigarettes increased from 2.8 million units to 7.8 million units from February 2020 to March 2021.

The legal age of vaping is 18, yet younger people still do it.

"I do not think vape is accepted; it is more of a turn down because of how many bad impacts it has on our bodies, especially in lungs," junior Ciana Tovar said.

Nurse Christy Higginbotham deals with students who get high.

"It is common for us to find something in their backpacks or (noticing they're) acting strange in those cases," she said.

When a student gets caught with substances, security or administration will go to the nurse's office and do impairment assessments on them.

"Just from my perspective I see a lot of teenagers vaping THC," Higginbotham said. "You guys are too young to be smoking this stuff. There is a reason why the legal ages are 18-21 for smoking and other substances regardless, no matter what state."

THC stands for tetrahydrocannabinol. Based off of research on thestreet.com, oils, edibles and even medicines can be used with THC to make people feel high. The dose it has can produce a sensation to blood pressure.

Alaska has the highest of use for marijuana in the country, with 16% using. It is fully legal and used for medication. Marijuana is illegal in Kansas, even for medical reasons and even if it does not contain THC.

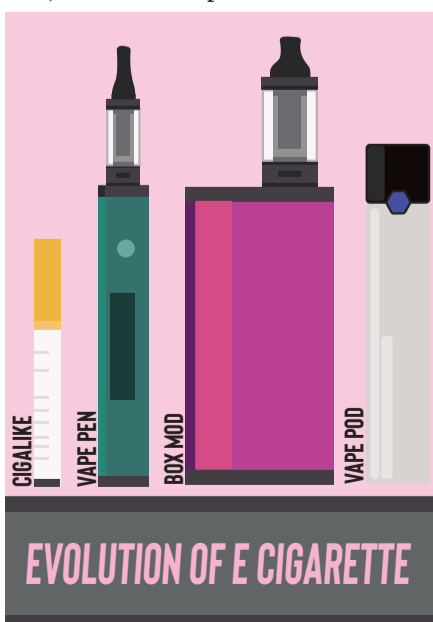
"In my opinion weed has much more of a medical excuse for society to accept," Tovar said.

Medical News Today notes that marijuana has health benefits - helping people with cancer, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, social anxiety, chronic pain, multiple sclerosis, epilepsy, mental health problems, testicular cancer and respiratory disease.

Epidiolex is a drug that contains CBD and has been approved for treating seizures.

Freshman Adriana Dollarhide is neutral with her opinion on marijuana. In her eyes it could be a bad influence for others, but knowing on the other hand it is for the benefit she does not see the issue.

"With any substance you use, wait 'til you're at least in the legal age, do not use (weed) knowing it will cause you harm," she said. "But in terms of leisure, knowing you're in a safe place where you can smoke and not hurt yourself or anybody else, in the right use, I do not see a problem."



EVOLUTION OF E CIGARETTE

ILLUSTRATION BY REESE COWDEN

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE 18

STORY BY VY NGUYEN

When senior Dione Ramos walked into the Historic County Courthouse as a first-time voter on Oct. 26, she emerged with a renewed belief in the power of her voice.

"Youth are the generation that has to live with the consequences and decisions of adults," she said. "So now that I'm a young adult, I want to finally use my voice and vote."

With the status of being a legal adult, 18-year-olds like Ramos can vote in elections, play the lottery and rent their own apartment.

But for many students, the thought of transitioning into adulthood and navigating the

real world can often usher in a mixed-bag of nostalgia, fright and excitement.

"You're going to school for eight hours a day, and it doesn't feel like anything is happening," senior Katrina Turner said.

"You're just like, 'I can't wait to go to sleep. I just can't wait to go home and do X, Y, Z.' But all of a sudden, you start high school as a freshman. And four years later, you're a senior and you're graduating."



PHOTOS BY REESE COWDEN

Senior Shallon McGowan turns 18 on Dec. 9, a milestone that brings myriad emotions.

TIME FLIES

With a fast-approaching graduation on May 8 or an upcoming 18th birthday, many seniors are looking back on the past and realizing that time can go by within the blink of an eye.

"You do things with friends and family and you don't really think about it until way later on," senior Connor Sevick said. "It takes a while to realize that it was an incredibly special moment with

people (you) care about."

As students grapple with aging, some concerns arise.

"I don't want to mess up," senior Jenna Gallegos said. "I feel like, if I do something wrong, it would ruin my life in a way. I don't want to pick the wrong college. I don't want to vote for the wrong person or date the wrong person."

Many teens feel the pressure of following a linear, orderly path as they get older.

CHILDHOOD

But while some have a secure environment to grow up in, others do not.

"Not every kid gets that opportunity," Turner said. "Some kids are working from the age of 15 so that their younger siblings can go to school."

Although 18 serves as a legal cut-off between child and adult, privilege continually plays a role in when and how young people grow up. Some are thrust into adulthood before they could ever enjoy their childhood.

But becoming an adult is still a process that students go through at some point in their lives. And it doesn't always mean dropping everything that shaped who they once were.

"I think that (being an adult and a child) can coexist," biology teacher Christina Gizzarelli said. "As an adult, in order to get through life — because life can be very difficult — you still have to have some childlike innocence or you're just going to get jaded and fall into darkness."

8 Teen Wishes

1 "Go somewhere out of state, maybe a place like Colorado to have a relaxing vacation," senior Laci Simon said.

2 "Taking a picture with my family to remember the moment when I'm no longer under their care, when I'm my own person, who is still loved and cared for," senior Jenna Gallegos said.

3 "Spend time with family," senior Katrina Turner said.

4 "Hang out with all of my friends," senior Kevin Phetsomphou said.

5 "Start working on a new skill like cooking," senior Connor Sevick said.

6 "Going on a trip," senior Kerrigan Flanders said.

GROWING UP

The uncertainty of growing up is aptly encapsulated with the Covid-19 pandemic.

"When the pandemic hit, it forced a lot of people to figure out how to grow up in a more isolated scenario," Turner said. "I have three younger siblings and it was expected of me to make sure everyone was staying on

task and everyone ate lunch and the house didn't burn down.

"That was a growing-up experience for everyone in my family because online learning, school shutdowns... It wasn't something that we thought we were ever going to do."

FUTURE

Even with multiple unknowns accompanying adulthood, many students are embracing the idea of stepping away from their past and moving toward their future — growing into the person they want to be.

"Graduation is a good way to launch into college or trade school or whatever

you're doing," Turner said. "But it should be another step on the path. It shouldn't be the peak of the mountain."

"... I'm sad to leave the relationships. But I'm ready to move on and start figuring out life from (my own) perspective and create my own definition of who I am."

Board of education members speak out

The four newly-elected Board of Education members responded to questions from The Panther's Tale. President Andy Watkins did not respond. (Responses were lightly edited for clarity and AP style)

How many of your kids have gone through the school district?

"I have two kids. They are both still in the school district. They are in fifth grade and eighth grade."

What's your role? "The role of a board member is to help determine policy, help to write policy and to approve that policy. Those policies can come from a few different sources from a high level that is the purpose of a board member. To make sure that community members, meaning taxpayers, parents, teachers, students, we are elected officials to be their voice. That's the rule of a board member."

How will you better students? "The top priority of the district should be that whatever students want to pursue after high school, we need to make sure that we are providing a path to achieve that. That requires a lot of evaluation and input from a lot of people."

Would you meet with a student board? "I think that's a good idea because what goes on at a student level and anybody who has gone through the school system and has worked in a school district will understand that there are a lot of things that adults, like teachers, board members and administrators that are around teachers, won't understand. We don't understand some of the dynamics of interactions and what is going on behind the scenes that students are involved in and, yeah, I think having a student voice to give us some insider information of what is actually going on at the school. Keep in mind that students are more than welcome to address the board in the same way that all public members are encouraged to."



Michael Blankenship



Jennifer Neel

2020, Aidan Neel graduated 2021, Talen Neel sophomore, Mia Johnson freshman and my youngest, Colton, is (in) third grade at Derby Hills."

What's your role? "Listen to the community: students, parents, teachers and taxpayers, leader/ spokesperson, provide vision

How many of your kids have gone through the school district?

"I am a mother of six. Caleb Strohming graduated 2018 (Lauren McMinn my soon-to-be daughter-in-law 2018), Bayley Johnson graduated

2020, Aidan Neel graduated 2021, Talen Neel sophomore, Mia Johnson freshman and my youngest, Colton, is (in) third grade at Derby Hills."

What's your role? "Listen to the community: students, parents, teachers and taxpayers, leader/ spokesperson, provide vision

and direction, fiscal responsibility, prioritize students, servant leadership, competence over politics - make sound decisions, best for everyone and reduce distractions and let the teachers teach; reduce mandates/unnecessary regulations, give them the tools to do their job to the best of their ability."

How will you better students? "Ensure we graduate upstanding citizens with traditional American values. Be a voice for the parents concerned about what is being taught in the classroom. Fiscally responsible — enforce accountability and transparency. Active listener and advocate for all our teachers — create an environment that inspires staff to come to work every day."

Would you meet with a student board? "If you put together a board — of course, we would be willing to meet with you and listen to concerns. I would also encourage you to bring ideas of solutions. We could sit around all day complaining, but that doesn't get us anywhere."

How many of your kids have gone through the school district? "I have a 2019 DHS graduate, eighth grader and fourth grader."

What's your role? "My role is to be an advocate for the students and their parents. I will also advocate for teachers to ensure they have all the tools they need to teach our children."

How will you better students? "I want to make sure that the education that is provided challenges

students and gives them the necessary tools they need to become successful, contributing adults to our society."

Would you meet with a student board? "Instead of a student board I encourage students to attend school board meetings where they can share their questions and concerns plus give them an opportunity to see how decisions affecting them are decided."

— Haley Waughtal