

Teacher Spotlight: How Heather Maier Uses a PSA Video Contest in the Classroom

ESCAPE THE VAPE VIDEO CHALLENGE

Heather Maier, a Family Consumer Science teacher from Hastings Middle School, has made it her mission to ensure her students understand the risks of vaping.

Heather has been teaching with the Hastings School District for the past eighteen years at both the high school and middle school. Most recently, she has been teaching Family Consumer Science to 8th grade students. Heather uses the Escape the Vape Video Challenge as a classroom activity and has incorporated the contest into her curriculum.

E-cigarettes, often called vapes, are the most-used commercial tobacco product among youth. Data from the 2023 Minnesota Youth Tobacco Survey show 13.9% of Minnesota high school students reported using an e-cigarette in the past 30 days.



E-cigarettes can contain extreme concentrations of nicotine, which is highly addictive. Nicotine exposure during adolescence can also have serious effects on brain development. Since the brain continues to develop until about age 25, nicotine can interfere with attention, learning, mood regulation, and impulse control. Youth who use nicotine may experience heightened anxiety, irritability, and difficulty concentrating, which can negatively impact their academic performance and overall wellbeing. Beyond cognitive effects, nicotine dependence can worsen mental health issues like stress, anxiety, and depression. Many young people mistakenly believe nicotine helps relieve stress, but in reality, it leads to mood fluctuations and withdrawal symptoms that amplify negative emotions.



The Escape the Vape Video Challenge tasks Minnesota middle and high school students with creating and submitting a 30-second public service announcement (PSA) to educate their peers on the dangers of vaping. Heather uses the Escape the Vape Video Challenge as an opportunity to engage her students on the topic of vaping and foster peer-to-peer education. She created a multi-day lesson plan that provides both an overview of the contest and the rules, as well as time for students to produce their videos.

“If students don’t understand the dangers of vaping and either try it out of curiosity or try it because they’re influenced to,”

warns Heather, “it can become a bigger issue of chemical dependency and a lifelong struggle.”

The first day of Heather’s lesson plan involves sharing the details of the challenge with the students, identifying a call to action, and exploring the contest website. On the second day, students spend time reviewing the contest rules. Heather then allows her students two days to work on their videos. On the final day, students share their videos with their classmates.

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By the time their videos are finished, Heather sees increased energy and excitement as students get ready to debut their creations. Not only do the students enjoy sharing their videos with other Family Consumer Science classmates, but they also get the chance to screen their videos more broadly. Heather assembles a group of students representing the student body to be trained in a Peer-to-Peer Advocacy group. This group then teaches a lesson on the dangers of vaping to the rest of the 5-7th graders at Hastings Middle School. In total, over 1,200 students in her school get to see the youth-created anti-vaping PSAs.



The Escape the Vape Video Challenge provides students an opportunity to learn about the dangers of vaping as well as hone their video and media production skills. Schools are encouraged to include this project in their curriculum and to provide students with resources to complete their videos, such as props, space to plan and film, and access to their theater teacher or advisor.

Learn more about the Escape the Vape Video Challenge and get sample lesson plans for using the contest in the classroom at [Escape the Vape Video Challenge | Youth Counter-Marketing Campaigns](https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/tobacco/initiatives/youth/campaigns.html#etv) (<https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/tobacco/initiatives/youth/campaigns.html#etv>).

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