Leaguetown High School is located in Central Texas and has 2,200 students enrolled in grades 9-12. Last week, a senior experienced a medical emergency during school after vaping with an e-cigarette in a bathroom. The senior was unconscious when the ambulance arrived and is now being treated for a lung infection at the hospital. The day after the incident, Principal Ariel Anderson ordered a third of the school bathrooms to be locked and assigned a teacher to each of the remaining open bathrooms. This week, Anderson re-opened all student bathrooms but removed all bathroom doors. Stall doors are still intact, and teachers are no longer assigned bathroom duty. None of the bathroom stalls nor any of the urinals are visible from the hallway. Only sinks and the drying area are visible. Anderson said this is where most of vaping occurs.

Anderson also announced stricter consequences for vaping. She said students caught vaping on campus or with e-cigarette equipment would be suspended at home for three days. Students who receive a second vaping violation will have a removal hearing for the alternative school, Anderson said. So far this year, 244 students have been caught vaping. Their punishment was a day in in-school suspension (ISS).

Teachers support Anderson’s changes and so does the Parent-Teacher Association. Students have voiced frustration over the bathroom changes, and the Student Council officers met with Anderson to ask for the return of the bathroom doors. Anderson denied the request.

Citing their right to privacy, a group of student leaders will ask the school board at its next meeting, Dec. 11, to intervene and reattach the bathroom doors. You are writing for the issue of the Press to be distributed Monday, Dec. 9.

Those supporting the principal
Vaping is getting out of control at the high school. Since it is odorless, students are puffing throughout the day, especially in bathrooms. More than 10% of the student population has been disciplined for a vaping incident. Anderson’s changes are harsh, but that is what is needed.

Those opposing the principal
Students deserve privacy in the bathroom. It’s one place where they can decompress. That can’t happen if the door is missing. Male students will be able to peer into female restrooms and vice versa. This is disconcerting, to say the least.
ARIEL ANDERSON, principal

“I agree these measures are a bit drastic, but I am at my wit’s end. E-cigarettes are dangerous, and vaping is out of control here at the school. Our bathrooms have become a social area for our vapers. Yesterday, a teacher caught three girls vaping as they were reapplying lipstick. They didn’t even flinch when the teacher walked in.

“We’ve tried education programs, but the students are not listening. It’s time to be more creative and more punitive. I told the Student Council officers that if we see a dramatic drop in e-cigarette incidents over the next few months, I will consider putting the bathroom doors back on in April or May. But until then, I have no intention of doing so. I cannot ask my faculty to stand guard in the bathrooms all day long. It’s not feasible, and teachers already are stretched too thin. This may not be a popular decision, but it is a necessary one to keep students safe. The students are a bit over-dramatic about this. I took the bathroom doors, not the stall doors. They still have privacy.”

JANELLE HORTON, senior class president

“This is seriously wrong. Who takes bathroom doors? Ms. Anderson didn’t even want to hear our arguments. She just said she was sorry for the inconvenience. I don’t know why teachers can’t patrol the bathrooms, or the school could hire more security monitors. Heck, I bet parents would even volunteer to roam the halls and bathrooms. There is a better solution. Officers from several different clubs, including the National Honor Society, the Spanish Club and the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, will be at the board meeting to oppose this breach of our privacy.”

CHARLENE ROCHA, freshman

“I’m actually not upset that they took the doors. The bathrooms here are pretty scary. Several juniors and seniors have offered their vaping pens or Juuls or whatever they are called to me when I went to the bathroom. The students were smoking right out in the open. It was pretty unnerving. At least, with the doors gone, they won’t be able to do that out in the open.”

LINDSEY AHMED, president of the PTA

“I agree with Ms. Anderson. Vaping is out of control. My son is a freshman, and he was stunned by the number of kids who vape at school. He said he’s seen kids do it during class because the e-cigarettes have no smell. Taking the bathroom doors is not ideal, but it shows that Ms. Anderson and her administration are fed up. I am frustrated that the school even has to deal with this. Parents should be the ones dealing with this. They should know if their kid is vaping, and they should stop it before it gets to school. But we have too many parents with their heads in the sand. A three-day suspension might wake everyone up.”

ANNE GARULE, parent

“I may be the one parent who is against this. If 10% of the population is vaping, 90% is not, and that 90% deserves privacy in the bathroom. The school needs to deal with the students who are vaping and punish them. Every student should not be punished for the actions of a few.”

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

According to the Centers for Disease Control, most e-cigarettes, which are odorless, contain nicotine. Nicotine is highly addictive and can harm adolescent brain development, which continues into the early to mid-20s. E-cigarettes can contain other harmful substances besides nicotine.