



February 19, 2021

Mayor Michael B. Hancock  
City and County of Denver  
1437 Bannock St, Rm 350  
Denver, CO 80202

Honorable Mayor Hancock and Denver City Councilmembers:

We are principals of Denver High Schools and Middle Schools and are gravely concerned that e-cigarette use has become rampant among our students. Our teachers and administrators are struggling to prevent students from using e-cigarettes and working diligently to identify strategies to assist students in quitting tobacco use. With the strain of resources already on our school system, including budget cuts and COVID-19, we cannot shoulder this burden alone. We urgently seek help from the City and County of Denver in addressing the e-cigarette crisis among our youth.

The City's work to adopt tobacco retail licensing and raise the minimum age of sale to 21 last year was a critical first step in keeping tobacco out of the hands of children and teens. But these policies alone do not address the skyrocketing use of tobacco products by young people. Further action is needed to prevent access to flavored tobacco products.

More than 15,500 unique e-cigarette flavors are available to kids, packaged to look like their innocuous candy counterparts. But despite kid-friendly packaging and flavors, these devices deliver nicotine, a dangerous and highly addictive neurotoxin. According to the Surgeon General, nicotine can harm adolescent brain development, which continues until about age 25. Nicotine can affect learning, attention, memory, and impulse control. Nicotine can also prime the brain for addiction to other drugs.<sup>1</sup> As educators, this is cause for alarm.

Tobacco companies target kids with multimillion-dollar marketing campaigns and appealing flavors that are specifically designed to hook kids. Further, the continuation of the sale of

menthol cigarettes perpetuates decades-long targeting of minorities, prolonging health disparities among Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, and LGBTQ communities.

Flavored tobacco products undermine Denver's efforts to reduce youth tobacco use: 81% of kids who have used tobacco started with a flavored product. Research shows that 83% of youth e-cigarette users have used a flavored product in the past month. Fifty percent (50%) of Denver schools are within 1,000 feet of a tobacco retailer. In fact, there are 23x more tobacco retailers in the City of Denver than there are McDonald's. This ease and accessibility has led to one in five Denver youth reporting use of an electronic vapor product in the last 30 days. <sup>ii</sup>

We have heard from kids, parents, teachers, and pediatricians across the country too many devastating stories of addiction and withdrawal. Some kids wake up in the night to vape or can't make it through a class period without leaving to vape or sneaking it while the teacher's back is turned. We've tried everything from disciplinary action to removing the doors from bathroom stalls to discourage vaping on school grounds. These are not solutions. We can, and must, do better.

We implore you to end the sale of all flavored tobacco products by passing a citywide sales ban of flavored tobacco products immediately. This evidenced-based strategy will reduce tobacco and nicotine addiction among youth. The health and safety of our students is our top priority. Teen vaping is a public health crisis and we need your partnership to control this epidemic.

Respectfully,

Tiffany Almon  
John F. Kennedy High School

Antonio Esquibel  
Lincoln High School

Amy Bringedahl  
Northfield High School

Travonda Favorite  
DSST: Elevate Northeast High School

Lia Brunner  
DSST: Cole High School

Caroline Gaudiani  
DSST: Green Valley Ranch Middle School

Brandi Chin  
DSST Middle School @ Noel Campus

Joe Glover  
Manual High School

Mike Christoff  
Thomas Jefferson High School

Kimberly Grayson  
Martin Luther King Jr. Early College

Boris Costa-Guerra  
West Middle School

Bill Kurtz  
DSST Public Schools

John Clark  
DSST: Montview Middle School

Mia Martinez Lopez  
West Early College

Elin Curry  
DSST: Byers

Amanda McDonald  
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Grant Erwin  
DSST: Cole Middle School

Becca Meyer  
DSST: Montview High School

Christian Sawyer  
Hamilton Middle School

Kristin Waters  
George Washington High School

Julie Stephens  
Skinner Middle School

Scott Wolf  
North High School

Bobby Thomas  
South High School

John Youngquist  
East High School

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<sup>i</sup> E-Cigarette Use Among Youth and Young Adults, A Report of the Surgeon General, 2016

<sup>ii</sup> Healthy Kids Colorado Survey Data, Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, 2019