

Successful Children and Youth Policy Team

December 4, 2019, Meeting Summary

Key decisions and actions are in **bold**.

SCYPT Members in Attendance:

Shawn Adcock, Gloria Addo-Ayensu, Leslie Atkins, Michael Becketts, Bob Bermingham, Karla Bruce, Laura Burgos (for Telaekah Brooks), Tisha Deeghan, Judith Dittman, Alicia Doe, Francisco Durán, Mark Ginsberg, Fred Grant, Kelly Henderson, Jessica Hudson, Teresa Johnson, Chris Leonard, Megan McLaughlin, Fahemeh Pirzadeh, Dave Rohrer, Deb Scott, Douglas Tyson, Daryl Washington, Jenna White (for Michelle Leete)

Announcement

Jesse Ellis noted that this is the last SCYPT meeting for Supervisor Cathy Hudgins (who is retiring) and Supervisor Jeff McKay (who will become Chairman of the Board of Supervisors in January). He thanked them for their ongoing leadership, engagement, and support of the SCYPT.

Discussion Item – Vaping Prevention

Ben Schwartz, of the Health Department’s Division of Epidemiology and Population Health, presented information and data on vaping-related lung injury. Recommendations from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which have been shared widely by the Health Department and FCPS, include not using vaping products that contain THC, not purchasing products “off the street,” and not modifying products. The CDC also notes that youth, young adults, and pregnant women should not vape at all, and that the only way to ensure safety is to refrain from vaping.

René Najera, also of the Division of Epidemiology and Population Health, shared analysis of 2018 Fairfax County Youth Survey data on vaping. Key findings include that about one in five students reported vaping, with Hispanic (24%) and White (22%) students are most likely to vape. Protective factors such as high personal integrity and positive relationships with adults decreased the risk.

Chris Revere, of the Health Department, shared possible policy interventions to decrease vaping. These were presented to the Board of Supervisors in a recent memo, and the Board this week asked staff to further research them and to present recommendations in the near future.

Stefan Mascoll, of the FCPS Student Safety and Wellness Office, presented FCPS’s tiered interventions for vaping that include primary prevention strategies and supports for youth who are vaping.

Jenna White shared that vaping prevention is a major initiative of the Fairfax County Council of PTAs. PTAs across the county are hosting informational presentations for parents, and the FCCPTA has developed tools and resources to help the individual PTAs do so easily.

Daryl Washington discussed Community Services Board initiatives, which include informational sessions, primarily aimed at parents, and working with FCPS to help make assessments more accessible for students and families. He noted that, while many youth seeking services from the CSB are vaping, they are not coming to the CSB with primary concerns about vaping (the primary concerns are about mental health or other substance use). A major concern is that there is not yet an evidence-based treatment for vaping addiction; traditional tobacco cessation approaches do not appear to be as effective as they are for combustible cigarette use.

Leslie Atkins asked if the data provide any indication of why youth begin vaping. Dr. Najera replied that the Fairfax data doesn't address this, but that he hopes to conduct focus groups and further explore the data for answers. National data indicates that a primary issue is lack of knowledge; many teens report believing vaping is safe. And once they begin, they get addicted to the nicotine and cannot stop.

Fred Grand asked to what extent vaping is comparable to smoking, especially in terms of nicotine intake. Dr. Najera noted that because nicotine content is unregulated, it is difficult to say, as different products can vary. Mr. Revere shared that one Juul pod is generally equivalent to a pack of cigarettes, and that it is not uncommon for someone to vape an entire pod in a day. He added that staff will be looking at potential policy recommendations regarding regulating nicotine content.

Alicia Doe pointed out that the Youth Survey data is for eighth, tenth, and twelfth graders, and asked if there is data about vaping among younger youth. Mr. Mascoll stated that, while use is most common among older teens, FCPS has seen vaping among elementary school students. It is important to target prevention efforts to younger children in order to educate students and parents before use begins.

Judith Dittman shared that, at Second Story, vaping is widespread among the individuals served in their residential programs for homeless and runaway youth. Because vaping can be difficult to notice, due to the lack of odor, staff in Second Story's community programs are unsure how common it is. Ms. Dittman stated that staff are looking for resources and ideas for effective prevention strategies.

Ms. White asked if principals have received this information and if there are initiatives targeted to Hispanic students. Teresa Johnson replied that principals haven't received this specific data yet, but will soon. Mr. Mascoll said his office is working with parent liaisons to help get information and resources to Hispanic parents and students.

Ms. White also asked if there are strategies focused on building protective factors. Ms. Johnson noted that such strategies are built in to the FCPS Strategic Plan. There are multiple initiatives focused on building protective factors; furthermore, school psychologists have been directed to work with their schools to develop school-specific strategies based on Youth Survey data.

Jessica Hudson asked to what extent the language we use is important when talking with youth about vaping. Jesse Ellis shared that it is important to use language relevant to teens. For example, the Youth Survey asks similar questions about “vaping” and about “using e-cigarettes.” About twice as many students report vaping, indicating “e-cigarette” is either an outdated term or one that is only used for a very specific set of products. Dr. Najera reiterated the importance of learning why teens begin to vape, so that interventions to address those reasons can be developed and implemented.

Discussion Item – Digital Access and Literacy

Karla Bruce and Francisco Durán presented on the work of a One Fairfax working group on digital access and literacy. “Digital access and literacy for all residents” is identified as an area of focus in the One Fairfax policy. Ms. Bruce and Dr. Durán shared some of the initial insights of the working group, as they are relevant to the SCYPT’s work.

The group identified that a high percentage of Fairfax County residents have internet access, but that low income residents are significantly less likely to have it. Furthermore, there are disparities by location. More than 12 percent of residents in the Lee and Mason Districts lack access; between 15 and 21 percent of residents in ZIP codes 22306, 22309, 22041, and 22044 lack access. Infrastructure is widespread throughout the county; affordability seems to be the key barrier. While the team is still working on strategies, likely areas for improvement include increasing awareness of existing access services and discount programs; ensuring emerging technologies do not exacerbate inequities; and ensuring access to both the internet and to devices that can access the internet.

As the group moves forward in developing recommendations, they will keep the SCYPT updated. Ms. Bruce noted that she expects the future phases of the work group to include more robust community engagement. Anyone interested in providing input should contact Ms. Bruce or Dr. Durán.

Public Comment

Norm Hall, of the Fairfax County Special Education PTA (SEPTA), stated he was glad that the digital access and literacy team recognizes the potential for new technologies to exacerbate disparities, as individuals with disabilities can experience difficulties with many devices and other technology. Assistive technology is very helpful and should be included within access initiatives. Mr. Hall is supportive of SCYPT’s work to expand school readiness opportunities. He is interested in goodness of fit measures for the vaping data presented earlier. And, related to prior SCYPT discussions on disparities in discipline in schools, he emphasized the need to engage the special education community in addressing these issues.