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Press Release

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New School Discipline Strategy to Tackle Vaping, Alcohol Use *"Restorative Justice" Trades Suspensions for Student Support Efforts*

DOUGLAS COUNTY -- To fight the youth vaping epidemic and help students avoid alcohol and other harmful substances, the Douglas County Youth Substance Abuse Prevention Coalition (DCYSAPC) and Douglas County School District (DCSD) are piloting a restorative justice program that replaces suspensions and keeps students connected to support systems.

The program was developed in conjunction with Tri-County Health Department, the Douglas County Sheriff's Office and the 18th Judicial District.

"We're on board with solutions that keep students engaged in school and involved with their community, not sitting at home where they might feel isolated or be tempted to use substances that got them in trouble in the first place," said Principal Ben D'Ardenne of Sagewood Middle School in Parker, the first school to institute the program this fall.

The restorative justice model provides diversion programs, including community service and classes discussing the risks of substance use, rather than suspensions sometimes required of students caught on school property with tobacco products or alcohol.

Such initiatives allow students to make amends while receiving support to deal with stressors or other factors leading them to experiment with harmful substances. The DCSD and DCYSAPC have been exploring alternatives to suspensions from school and tout this initiative as a strategy to address a complex issue.

"We should build kids up and help them cope with the problems they face, connecting them with teachers, friends and caring adults who can help them avoid destructive behaviors," said Zachary Hess, Director of Health, Wellness, and Prevention for DCSD. "We're excited to see how this improves outcomes for our students and schools."

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About Douglas County Youth Substance Abuse Prevention Coalition:

Established in 2016, the Douglas County Youth Substance Abuse Prevention Coalition is a collaborative organization featuring a cross-section of community members. Participating stakeholders include mental health providers, local law enforcement agencies, first

responders, hospitals, the county school district, human services providers, the district attorney's office, the faith-based community, and youth-serving organizations, parents and community members.

The Coalition is funded by a grant from The Colorado Department of Human Services, Office of Behavioral Health, with the goals of reducing underage alcohol and marijuana consumption by youths age 12-20, and the misuse and abuse of prescription medications by those age 12-25 in Douglas County.

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About DCSD

Douglas County School District is Colorado's third largest school district and serves 68,000 students. Learn more at www.dcsdk12.org.