



Stephens County School System

Schools Committed to Student Success

Dr. Connie Franklin
Superintendent of Schools
connie.franklin@stephenscountyschools.org

Administrative Offices
191 Big A School Road, Toccoa, GA 30577
(706) 886-9415

November 29, 2023

Dear Parents and Guardians:

The SCSS has had an exceptional start to the 2023-2024 school year. Academically, the instruction in our schools is exceptional as teachers work with students on mastering content. Athletically, the fall sports programs experienced great success under the leadership of excellent coaches. Our CTAE programs continue to grow as students' interests are met and expanded upon. Even with all of these wonderful things going on in our schools, there is a troubling topic that is impacting middle and high school students across the country.

Student safety is our number one priority. As you are likely aware, "vaping" and e-cigarette use is rising sharply among teenagers nationwide. From my perspective as Superintendent, the issue is a growing student safety concern. Vaping devices like "juuls," "dab pens," and "carts" are easily accessible, easily concealable, and odorless. However, they are not harmless.

Possession of *any* vaping device in the school safety zone is a violation of the Stephens County High School and Middle School Code of Conduct and a violation of Georgia law. The oils contained in these devices may contain harmful chemicals such as very high levels of nicotine, THC (the mood-altering chemical found in marijuana), and others. It is not possible for a student to know exactly what is in the oil being inhaled. Use of vaping devices has and can lead to medical trauma. A high concentration of addictive chemicals coupled with a teenager's need to be accepted by peers is a dangerous combination for our students. You should be aware that vaping has become popular among all student groups. There is no stereotypical student associated with vaping.

To deter students from vaping, the Stephens County School System, in partnership with the Stephens County Sheriff's Office, will begin pursuing law enforcement consequences in addition to school consequences for Code of Conduct violations related to *any form* (THC, nicotine, etc.) of vaping beginning January 4, 2024. Currently, any student with a THC vape is being charged but this will change to ANY form of vapes on January 4, 2024. Law enforcement actions pursued may include felony or misdemeanor charges resulting in arrest, or a juvenile complaint requiring the violator to appear before the Juvenile Court Judge. I encourage you to read the Georgia laws related to vaping including: O.C.G.A. 16-12-171, O.C.G.A. 16-13-1, O.C.G.A. 16-13-25, O.C.G.A. 16-13-30

The top priority for the Stephens County School System is to keep our students safe. Please join us in combating this threat to the health and safety of our students. Become familiar with vaping and talk with your children about the dangers of vaping. Plan to support the severe school and law enforcement consequences that will be imposed on students who possess or use any vaping device on school grounds. Working together, we can and will keep our students safe. Thank you for your support as we are continually "Committed to Student Success!"

Respectfully,

Dr. Connie Franklin