

## All smiles

Tigers advance after win in extra innings.

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# SUPERIOR Telegram

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## Students tackle vaping epidemic with art

By Maria Lockwood  
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Superior High School students are speaking out against vaping. Their digital art and stories, created in partnership with the St. Paul-based nonprofit In Progress, could make a big impact.

"Their work has gone state-

wide," high school social worker Jane Larson told the Superior School Board at its June 7 meeting. "Marshfield Clinic has their work, Northwoods Coalition has their work and ... the national and international trainers for CADCA, which is the Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America, has their work and are sharing it. So I would expect that by the end of June

or July, their work will be being used nationally and internationally as well ... They have a lot to be proud of."

Larson has been meeting virtually with the five students outside of class time since November. Their pieces were completed in May, and will be broadcast and displayed at Superior middle and high schools.

"It was really a labor of love on everybody's part to continue through the work and get it done," Larson said.

Part of a digital Impact Stories exhibit, the three pieces offer a similar message in different ways. Noah Lawler, 17, shared his experience of vaping addiction and ways to overcome

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June 8. He waived extradition to Minnesota on Friday, June 4. Center the following day. Authorities said the girl began The prosecutor told the court he "does not believe that any receive approximately 12-14 years. Burke's next court appearance is set for July 6.

## VAPING

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it with a straightforward approach. His handheld "selfie" video is interspersed with written facts and statistics about the dangers of vaping.

"It affects countless students in their everyday life, definitely more than people think so. I just think this is really important," Lawler told the school board June 7. "That's basically why I wanted to do this, and I was happy to do it."

No faces are seen in the video by Alayna DeGraef, Elise DeGraef and Bailey Revering, just a hand drawing a portrait out of words. The story is told through audio, detailing how a history of family addiction affects the health and outlook of a teen with asthma.

Payton Preo, 15, voiced his vaping message with pen and paper. He created a 60-page comic book about a boy named Nick who struggles with loss and peer pressure, and finds himself addicted to nicotine.

"And though I don't have any personal connection with the topic of vaping, I was someone that made a comic and helped out my community," Preo told the board. "I just really wanted to do it."

The work was funded through grants from the Department of Public Instruction and the Northwest Wisconsin Lung Health Alliance.

"First and foremost, we wanted to empower and also teach the students the basics of advocacy in terms of telling their own stories," said alliance coordinator Charmaine Sawn. "Our number one goal was youth empowerment and teaching them sort of that process of storytelling through whatever medium they thought would be the best fit."

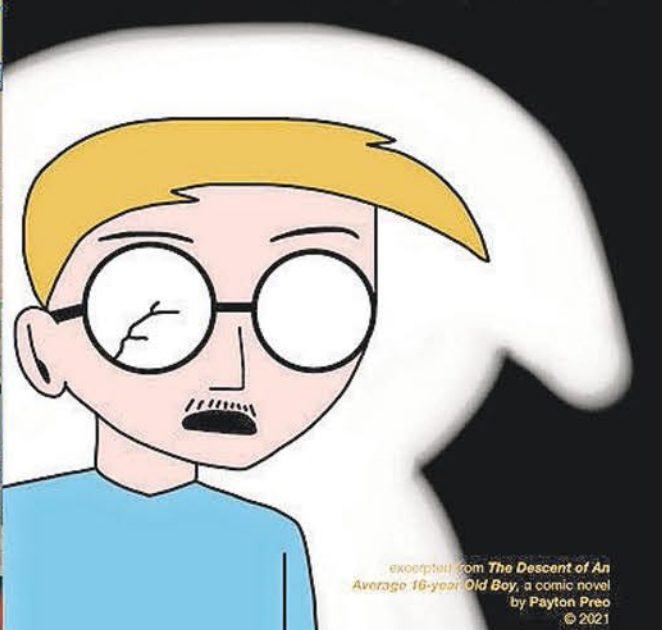
She said the students' message could be brought to the city of Superior to begin discussions on the tobacco ordinance, and possible options other than just a fine for young offenders.

Kristine Sorensen, executive director of In Progress, said she didn't think the students went into their projects with the intent to change policies, but were instead focused on educating younger stu-



"Vaping with or without nicotine has been shown to impact impulse control, especially in young adults whose brains have not fully developed yet. Some of these risks include mood disorders and permanent damage to parts of the brain responsible for memory, emotion and critical thinking."

<https://www.changgetochill.org/mental-health-vaping>



excerpt from *The Descent of An Average 16-year Old Boy*, a comic novel by Payton Preo © 2021

Photo courtesy of In Progress

A poster created by Superior High School student Payton Preo features a section from his graphic novel on vaping, "Descent of an Average 16-year-old Boy" and information about student vaping. Copies of the poster will be posted at Superior high and middle schools.

dents.

"The idea that they could share it with a fifth-grader, who ... might be seeing older kids vaping and might be able to inform them prior to falling into that, you know, they really were passionate about that, and they created works that they felt would resonate with younger audiences. I think they were all successful with that," Sorensen said.

The project was inspired by a DECA (an association of marketing students) project on the vaping epidemic two years ago, according to Larson. That team shared their message with Superior Middle School students and advanced to international competition in 2019.

COVID-19 has taken center stage in the health world, Swan said, but vaping and commercial tobacco continue to affect youth.

The Northwest Wisconsin Lung Health Alliance has worked with In Progress before. The nonprofit's mission is to pave the way for new voices in the field of digital art-making to be heard. It works with communities that lack access, from youth and urban neighborhoods to rural and tribal communities. Sorensen, one

of the group's founders, said the SHS group was wonderful to work with, and credited Larson for her passion.

"(Jane) understands the importance of the young people, the need for them to have a strong experience. And that if it's not working for them, then why are we doing it?" Sorensen said. "When you get that relationship, and you get that type of advocacy for youth, that's where we want to be."

The process usually involves a one-on-one project pairing a storyteller with a professional artist. In Preo's case, that mentorship flourished.

"We will continue to work with Payton, because Payton is much more than this project," Sorensen said.

He continues to meet every other week with his mentor, a comic and visual artist from Grand Marais, Minnesota.

The Northwestern Middle School FACT group created two videos about vaping through In Progress, as well. The videos were made in conjunction with the statewide FACT movement, Swan said, and will be distributed to the roughly 17 schools in Wisconsin that are involved with the program. They are also part of the online Impact Stories exhibit.