Metcalfe County Schools

Protecting Student Health and Wellbeing

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Security

According to a 2021 report prepared by Kentucky Incentives for Prevention[i], vaping rates among Kentucky students are higher than the national average, with 24% of seniors and 17% of sophomores reporting daily use.

So, when Metcalfe County Schools' Safety Administrator and Safe Schools Coordinator, Chris Huffman, learned about the HALO Smart Sensor, which integrates with Gallagher's Command Centre to detect vaping on school grounds, it immediately caught his attention.

"It looks like a smoke detector," says Chris. "It's designed to detect factors affecting air quality, like carbon monoxide and particulate matter, and it'll also detect vaping aerosols and send instant notifications to administrators with a specific location."

With Gallagher's Command Centre already securing the K-12 school district, protecting people, property, and assets, Chris saw the opportunity to also tackle their high school's vaping problem. He reached out to Cleve Cary from Inspired Technologies, a Gallagher-certified Channel Partner, to install HALO Smart Sensors in every classroom and bathroom. The results were immediate, and surprising.

A dramatic reduction in vaping

HALO Smart Sensors were installed at the start of the 2022-2023 school year and revealed a much bigger vaping problem than Metcalfe County Schools realized.

"Right away, we had numerous notifications alerting administrators of students vaping in the restroom," Chris says. "Sometimes, you don't know you have a problem until you start looking for it, and we found that, actually, there's a lot more vaping going on than we originally thought."

Once the school realized the scope of the problem, the HALO integration with Command Centre helped them address it.

"If a student is vaping in the restroom farthest away from the office, they may be gone before administration can get there," Chris explains. "So, we integrated a camera system with the sensors, and now, when a vape alarm goes off, it triggers the camera to automatically record for 10 minutes so we know who's leaving the bathroom and can have a conversation with them to work through it."

This visibility has helped Metcalfe's teachers and administrators significantly reduce the instances of vaping throughout their schools, an achievement Chris credits to the HALO Smart Sensor and their ability to track alarms in Command Centre. "We haven't even finished the school year yet, but it's already helped us tremendously" he says. "The overwhelming majority of students are happy to have vape-free bathrooms, and parents and teachers are happy, too."

Unexpected health benefits

But vaping detection hasn't been the only HALO feature for promoting student health that Metcalfe County Schools has benefitted from.

"A while back, we got a notification about the air quality in some of our rooms," says Chris. With the ability to detect changes in temperature, humidity, and volatile organic compounds in addition to vaping aerosols, the HALO integration was able to notify administrators of a pending HVAC malfunction before it became a bigger problem.

"We brought in an HVAC team and found we were having air quality issues due to an improperly functioning air unit," he elaborates. "Obviously, poor air quality can exacerbate health problems and we don't want any of our students getting sick on our watch, so having early detection was a massive benefit."

And with asthma and allergies topping the Kentucky Department of Education's[ii] 2021-2022 list of top chronic health conditions among students, the HALO integration has helped Metcalfe County Schools maintain health standards and improve air quality to create healthier classrooms.

Creating physical and mental safe spaces

"Safety is a constant battle for schools," Chris says plainly. And while having precautions in place is critical, it's also increasingly important to make sure students feel safe when attending school. The Metcalfe community - including parents, faculty, and staff - have been vocal about supporting the district's security efforts for that very reason.

Beyond vaping reduction, the HALO Smart Sensor also picks up abnormal noises like gunshots, which trigger Command Centre's Lockdown feature. In a matter of seconds, doors are locked, safe rooms are temporarily opened, and police are called with the detection of a gunshot within the school. Preloaded safety keywords can be spoken to call for help through the sensor, which also identifies loud, aggressive language and notifies administrators of potential violence occurring in the moment.

The HALO Smart Sensor is just one in a suite of Gallagher's integrated solutions utilized by Metcalfe County Schools to increase school safety. Door locks, perimeter protections, broadcast notifications, facility and video management systems, and more are all driven by Command Centre, the heart of their school security operations, to deliver a complete integrated solution. That means if HALO picks up a gunshot, it triggers Command Centre to deploy a series of specialized events to lockdown the school, text or email notifications to faculty and parents, and alert the authorities, all designed to control the situation and minimize harm.

"The kids know we have these protections in place," explains Chris. "And that's the goal – to do everything you possibly can to create a safer school and make parents feel like their children are taken care of."

Future potential to educate students

Chris sees Metcalfe County Schools' first year integrating their Gallagher system with the HALO Smart Sensor as a success, but also recognizes that there's a lot of potential yet to be tapped.

That's because HALO doesn't just detect the presence of harmful particles in the air – it also produces a report on the specific chemical compounds present, giving teachers a powerful weapon in fighting misperceptions about the safety of vaping. And with 13% of Kentucky students[iii] reporting their first vaping experience in 8th grade, there's an opportunity to educate younger middle school students on the dangers before temptation comes their way.

"It's a powerful sensor," Chris concludes. "We see the possibilities for using it as an educational aid in addition to a harm reduction tool and we're already thinking about how to maximize HALO's functions to bring the most benefits to our students for the next school year."

Resources

[i] Sanders Jr., Daniel H., Robert J. Illback, Lisa Crabtree, Daniel Sanders III, Teresa McGeeney, Meredith Cahill, Edie G. Carter, and Reach Evaluation. Rep. STATEWIDE TRENDS (2012-2021) Related to Youth Substance Use, Mental Health, and School Safety. Louisville, KY: Kentucky Incentives for Prevention, 2021.

[ii] "Student Health Data." Kentucky Department of Education, June 7, 2023. https://education.ky.gov/districts/SHS/pages/student-health-data.aspx.

[iii] Sanders Jr., Daniel H., Robert J. Illback, Lisa Crabtree, Daniel Sanders III, Teresa McGeeney, Meredith Cahill, Edie G. Carter, and Reach Evaluation. Rep. STATEWIDE TRENDS (2012-2021) Related to Youth Substance Use, Mental Health, and School Safety. Louisville, KY: Kentucky Incentives for Prevention, 2021.

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