

The Case for Prescription Drug Education

Five Reasons Why High Schools Need
a Prevention Curriculum



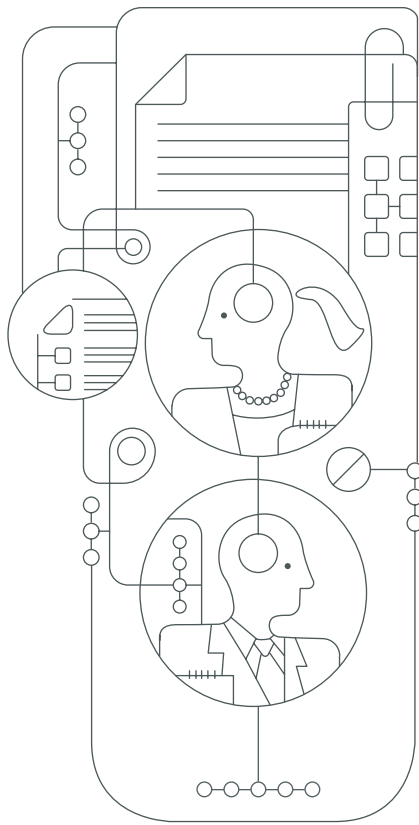
The Prescription Drug Safety Network

A first of its kind public-private partnership, the Prescription Drug Safety Network is a national coalition of K-12 schools, healthcare companies, pharmaceutical manufacturers, pharmacies, foundations, and state leaders committed to empowering young Americans with the skills and know-how to make safe and healthy decisions about prescription medications.

Learn more about our focus and find out how Network partners are using education technology and shared best practices to population-level prevention education to schools nationwide.

www.prescriptiondrugsafetynetwork.com

To learn more about bringing EVERFI's Prescription Drug Safety course to your school or district visit **www.everfi.com/RxSafety**



The U.S. faces an opioid addiction crisis. Opioid overdoses have surpassed auto accidents as the leading cause of accidental death in the US¹, and the rate of both abuse and fatal overdose continues to climb—with more than 64,000 deaths per year attributed to opioid misuse². Treatment solutions are necessary but scarce and reactive, with barely more than ten percent of those in need of addiction-related healthcare services actually receiving them³. To stem the tide of addiction, the epidemic will need to be approached from both ends—with treatment and prevention. And considering that most addictions take hold before the end of young adulthood, with ninety percent forming during the teens and early twenties⁴, prevention should start early—ideally in high school.

The potential benefits of high school opioid education are significant, with school-based programs shown to save \$18 for every \$1 spent.⁵ The investment in prevention is minimal compared to the societal expense—in both human and healthcare costs—of the addiction epidemic. In the following white paper, we'll explore five reasons why prevention education should start at the high school level—as well as offer insight into how to engage students around this topic and help them make informed decisions about prescription drugs.

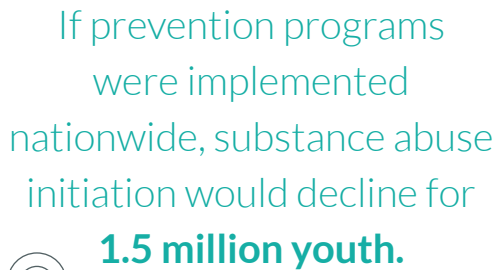
Five Reasons Why High Schools Need Prescription Drug Education

1. Kids are experimenting earlier and earlier.

Research reveals that young people are making ill-informed decisions around prescription drugs, including opioids—and that those decisions start at a young age. About a quarter of teens admit to having misused or abused a prescription drug at least once in their lifetime⁶. One in ten young people between ages 14 and 20 admit to misusing prescription painkillers within the last year⁷, and the Medicine Abuse Project reports that prescription medications are the drug of choice for children aged 12 and 13.⁸

By the time American children reach their sophomore year in college, roughly half of their classmates will have been given at least one opportunity to abuse prescription drugs⁹. With young people developing behaviors and opinions about drugs—including opioids—so early, it makes sense to begin education early. Given the stakes, ignoring prevention and education for this demographic is not really a choice.

1. <http://www.techtimes.com/articles/164522/20160612/car-crashes-no-longer-the-leading-cause-of-accidental-deaths-in-the-us.htm>
2. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/06/05/upshot/opioid-epidemic-drug-overdose-deaths-are-rising-faster-than-ever.html>
3. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2015/05/24/addiction-treatment-shortage/27181773/>
4. <https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/mind-guest-blog/opioid-addiction-is-a-huge-problem-but-pain-prescriptions-are-not-the-cause/>
5. <https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/cost-benefits-prevention.pdf>
6. <https://drugfree.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/PATS-2012-FULL-REPORT2.pdf>
7. <http://www.uofmhealth.org/news/archive/201310/er-study-finds-1-10-older-teens-misuse-rx-painkillers-and>
8. <http://medicineabuseproject.org/images/uploads/misc/EBOOK.pdf>
9. <http://www.bemedwise.org/documents/GetTheFacts.pdf>



If prevention programs
were implemented
nationwide, substance abuse
initiation would decline for
1.5 million youth.

2. Adolescent prevention is a critical component to solving the opioid crisis.

“The adolescent brain is often likened to a car with a fully functioning gas pedal (the reward system), but weak brakes (the prefrontal cortex),” according to the National Institute for Drug Abuse (NIDA). Not only are teenagers and early twenty-somethings neurologically motivated to chase pleasurable experiences and avoid pain, but their judgment and decision-making faculties are less developed than those of older individuals. NIDA reports that these biological realities can impair teens’ ability to accurately weigh risk—including the risk surrounding drug use. “For this reason,” they advise, “adolescents are a major target for prevention messages promoting healthy, drug-free behavior.”¹⁰

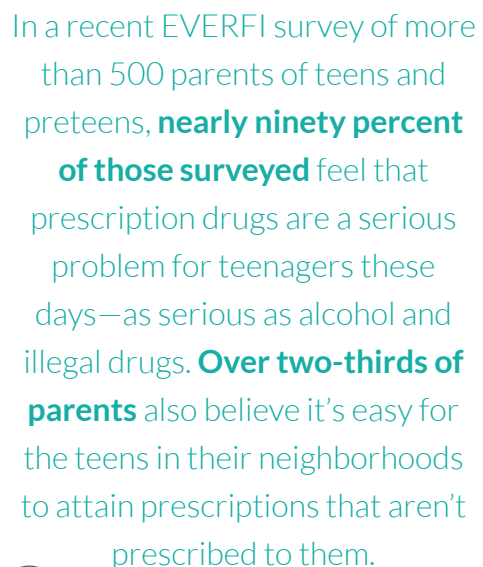
Despite a tendency for risk-taking, teenagers can effectively be educated about drug-related risks. NIDA’s research demonstrates that prevention programs for middle and high school students have positive impacts across the following personal/social competencies:

- Peer relationships
- Communication
- Self-efficacy and assertiveness
- Drug-resistance skills
- Reinforcement of anti-drug attitudes
- Strengthening of personal commitments against drug abuse

In addition, SAMHSA reports that research-based education programs are cost-effective prevention tools; for every dollar invested in prevention, we see a correlative savings of up to \$18 in treatment costs down the road.¹¹

3. Parents are concerned, but need support.

In a recent EVERFI survey of more than 500 parents of teens and preteens, nearly ninety percent of those surveyed feel that prescription drugs are a serious problem for teenagers these days—as serious as alcohol and illegal drugs. Over two-thirds of study participants also believe it’s easy for the teens in their neighborhoods to attain prescriptions that aren’t prescribed to them. Despite their fears, parents also reported being less comfortable and less prepared to discuss prescription drug abuse than other substances, like tobacco and alcohol.



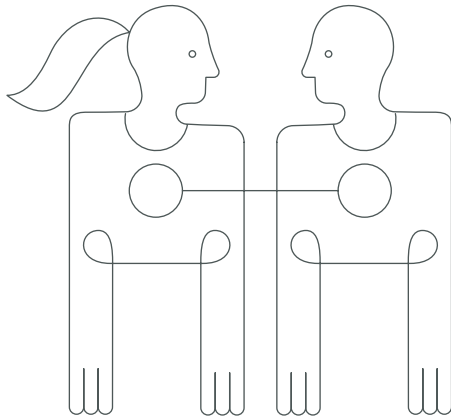
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While most parents in the survey are taking some steps to open a dialogue with their teens about prescription drug abuse—with three-quarters communicating expectations and dangers surrounding medications—there is still much room for improvement. The study revealed that less than thirty percent of parents restrict access to or lock away prescriptions—likely part of the reason they suspect it’s easy for neighborhood teens can acquire them.

Given parental concerns, school-based prevention education is likely to be welcomed by parents—and could also help families further their own conversations around this tricky topic.

10. <https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/principles-adolescent-substance-use-disorder-treatment-research-based-guide/introduction>

11. <https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/cost-benefits-prevention.pdf>



4. More states are requiring opioid education in schools but lack effective population-level resources.

Not only is school-based prevention education a good idea, but it's becoming a state imperative in many school districts across the nation. State legislators are realizing that opioid addiction is a serious problem, cutting short the lives of their citizens—as well as costing state, local, and federal governments a great deal in terms of productivity, law enforcement expenses, subsidized treatment, increases in healthcare costs, and more.

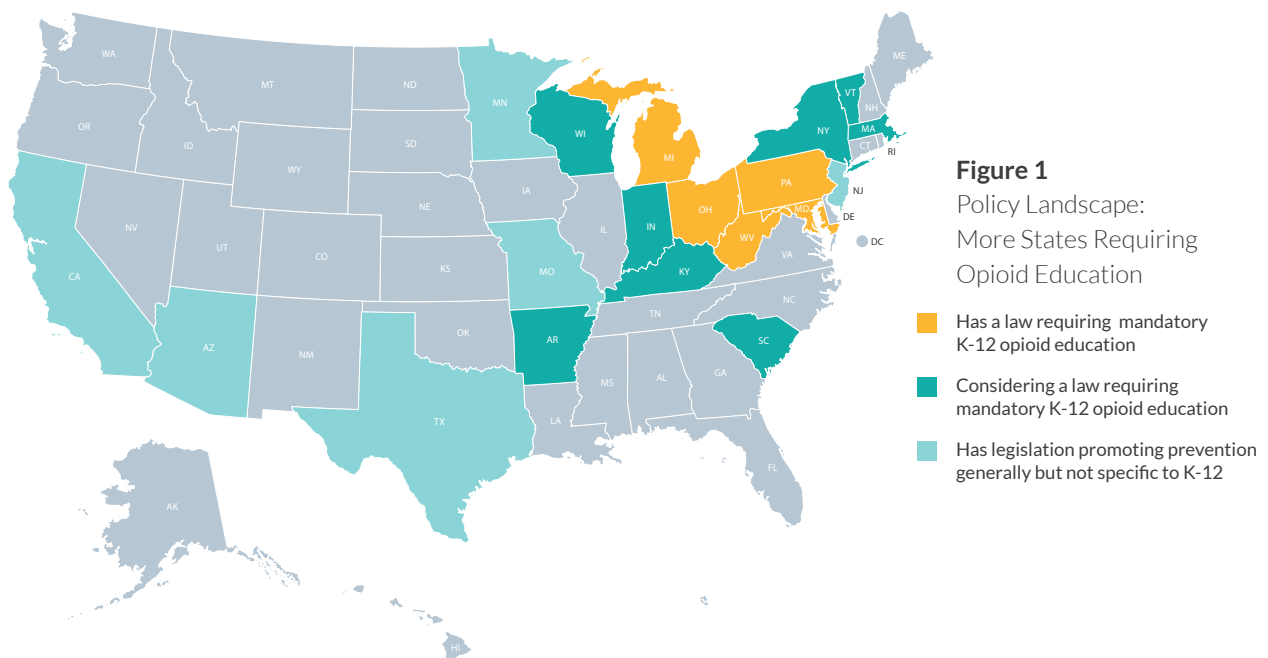
Ohio was the first state to legislatively require mandatory K-12 opioid prevention education, creating guidelines appropriate to each grade level based on the Governor's Cabinet Opiate Action Team.¹² Maryland recently followed suit with the "Start Talking Maryland Act" that expands the

state's Department of Education efforts to invest in opioid education programs—as well as ensuring schools are properly equipped and staffed to respond to possible on-site overdoses.¹³

Pennsylvania, Michigan and West Virginia also require mandatory K-12 opioid education, and another eight states are currently considering legislation.¹⁴ As more states require schools to implement opioid education, proactive educators, administrators, and communities are looking for more, and better, ways to add effective opioid prevention programs to their curricula (see figure 1).

5. Schools are the natural place to educate teens on opioid addiction, but teachers need support.

Schools are the obvious vehicle when considering the most effective way to reach the maximum number of teens with opioid prevention programs. But there's a caveat. School districts lack funding for new initiatives, and teachers are already overextended and pushed well beyond their commitment to academic instruction.



12. <http://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Learning-in-Ohio/Health-Education/Opioid-Abuse-Prevention>

13. http://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2017RS/notes/bil_0002/hb1082.pdf

14. <http://www.ncsl.org/research/health/injury-prevention-legislation-database.aspx>

Becoming Part of the Solution

In order to make true long-term progress on the opioid crisis, we must start with evidence-based prevention programming in schools, as recommended in 2017 by the White House Opioid Commission. Educators need prevention solutions that are easy to implement, don't require extensive teacher training, and don't put strain on school budgets.

While there is not yet a national mandate for school systems to provide opioid abuse education, the federal government strongly encourages in-school education programs. In an open letter to educators, administrators, and school staff, the U.S. Department of Education states that educational institutions should not only train school employees to recognize and respond to drug abuse, but should also "prevent the misuse of opioid pain relievers and other drugs by educating students about the risks of substance uses disorders."¹⁵

"I've learned that prescription drugs have to be used correctly,
with precaution, and as they are prescribed to you."

Student, West Memphis High School, AR

As legislators, parents and educators struggle to find solutions to this problem, there is a clear need for evidence-based prevention programs that can be implemented right now. EVERFI's educational program is an effective answer to this problem. Our digital course uses interactive simulations and videos to deliver a highly engaging learning experience that teaches students how to differentiate between various prescription drugs, describe the science of addiction, and demonstrate effective refusal strategies. Embedded assessments capture robust data on student progress and changes in attitudes and behaviors

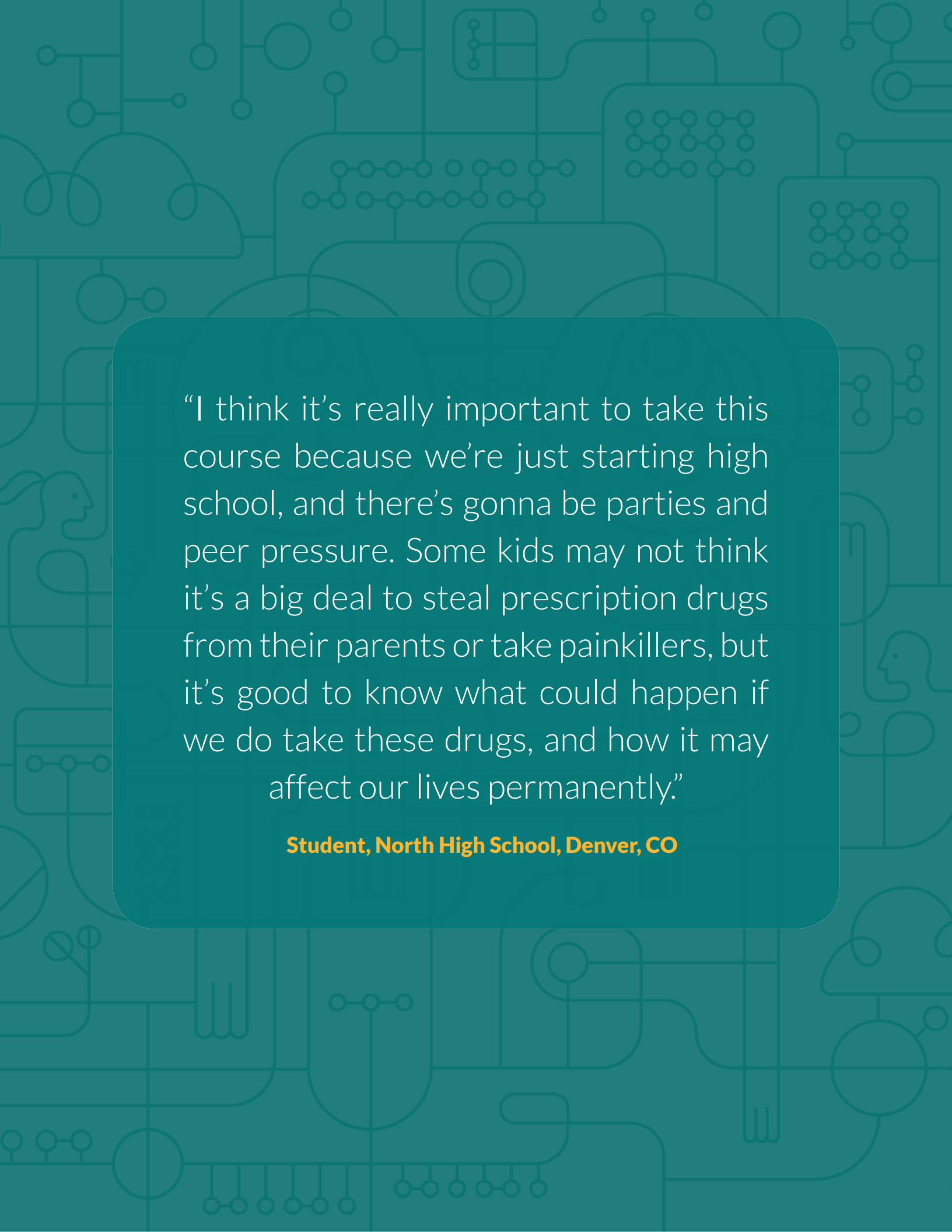
"Most, if not all, of my students have experience or knowledge
about opioids. Many have seen firsthand the effects of abusing prescriptions
because they take care of their parents. Many live in low-income housing
and routinely see painkiller and heroin use. I absolutely believe
[opioid] education would be helpful."

—Kacie Harless, Teacher, Robert Shell Juvenile Center, Barboursville, WV

By bringing our decade of experience and expertise to bear on the opioid epidemic facing the U.S., EVERFI hopes to reduce negative outcomes around prescription drugs. Together with schools, we can play a pivotal role in curbing the opioid crisis facing our nation.

To learn more about bringing this course to your
school or district visit everfi.com/RxSafety

14. <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/open-letter-substance-abuse.html>



“I think it’s really important to take this course because we’re just starting high school, and there’s gonna be parties and peer pressure. Some kids may not think it’s a big deal to steal prescription drugs from their parents or take painkillers, but it’s good to know what could happen if we do take these drugs, and how it may affect our lives permanently.”

Student, North High School, Denver, CO



EVERFI

EVERFI is the leading education technology company that provides learners of all ages education for the real world through innovative and scalable digital learning.

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