

April 24, 2023

As representatives of the Beaverton School District (BSD), we are writing in strong support of Senate Bill 238.

Two years ago after the death of several students, BSD embarked on a fentanyl awareness campaign that we dubbed, "Fake & Fatal: One Pill Can Kill." It included fentanyl-specific lessons for all middle and high school students, staff training, an outreach campaign and a virtual Community Conversation event for students and parents, attended by more than 6,500 families. Our school board also approved the use of Naloxone, a potentially overdose-reserving nasal spray, in all secondary schools. BSD was one of the first school districts in the country to address the fentanyl epidemic, largely due to the support of BSD parents Jon and Jennifer Epstein and their willingness to share their son's tragic story — [Cal's Story](#).

Since then, we have made our resources freely available to any school district in the country. We have had more than 50 districts request access. However, despite our best efforts to encourage Oregon school districts to utilize resources that have been vetted and are successfully being used in Beaverton schools today, we have had very few avail themselves of the opportunity.

The reality is the fentanyl crisis is even more dire than it was two years ago. Teens are purchasing what they think are Adderall, Percocet, OxyCodone and Xanax pills via social media. What they are getting are fake pills made from more potent fentanyl. The Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) estimates that 6 in 10 fake pills contain a potentially deadly dose of fentanyl.

Most teens who use pills do not fit our dated notion of a drug user. Often, teens are seeking out what they think are real pharmaceutical pills to deal with anxiety or other mental health struggles. Others are looking to have "some fun." They are not seeking out fentanyl. They do not know that *one pill can kill*.

Since sharing our fentanyl awareness campaign and yearly fentanyl-specific lessons in all secondary health classes, we — to our knowledge — have not lost another student to fentanyl poisoning. We believe strongly that when you equip students with knowledge and then repeat that information regularly, they are more likely to make responsible decisions. Educating parents, too, is an important component; any lesson learned at school must be reinforced at home.

Why hasn't every school district in Oregon taken a similar approach to Beaverton? Some districts lack the resources in terms of staff to create an awareness campaign, develop the curriculum and then provide professional development; this is precisely why we have made our materials available to all. But there could be another reason at play — school districts may be worried about stigmatizing themselves as "a district with a drug problem."

Let us be clear, school districts can no longer pretend that fake pills made from potentially deadly fentanyl are not a threat to their students. Fentanyl poisonings are a reality across the country and especially here in Oregon. As educators, we have a responsibility to inform our students, parents and staff about the dangers.

We implore legislators to be proactive. Every week, month or year that goes by without Oregon students learning about the dangers of fentanyl and other opioids puts them at significant risk.

Respectfully,

Dr. Gustavo Balderas

Beaverton School District Superintendent

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Former Beaverton School District Superintendent

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Beaverton School District Public Communications Officer