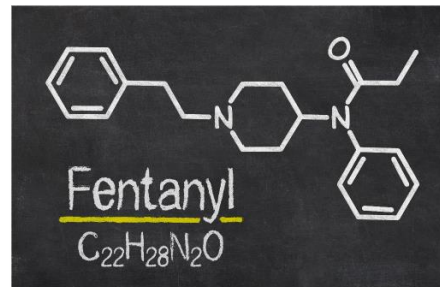




6 STUDENT DEATHS
11 On-campus NARCAN administrations
24 Off-campus student overdoses



FIGHTING FENTANYL



An Accidental Campaign

www.hayscisid.net/fentanyl

Hays Consolidated Independent School District

FIRST YEAR REPORT



The Hays CISD Communication Department team, in conjunction with the district's Safety and Security Department team, respectfully submits this report and portfolio regarding the first year of the district's *Fighting Fentanyl* campaign (July 1, 2022 to June 30, 2023) for consideration by the Texas School Public Relations Association for Star Award recognition so that others may learn from the painful journey the Hays CISD family has had to travel.

“Our goal is to keep kids alive, and not talking about the problem doesn’t solve it,” Tim Savoy, Hays CISD’s chief communication officer, said. “It makes it worse.”

THE
NEW YORKER
MAGAZINE
March 28, 2023
[\(article link\)](#)

Hays CISD Chief Communication Officer Tim Savoy
Hays CISD Chief Safety and Security Officer Jeri Skrocki
Hays CISD Director of Student Health Services Megan Benthall, MSN, RN

Contributing district communication team members are: Communication Director Harvest Coats; Website, Digital Communication Manager, and Chief Editor Linda Rosebrock; Visual Media Coordinator Moses Leos; Visual Media Specialist David White; Volunteer and Community Relations Coordinator Keyawna Glaze; Department Secretary Belen Hernandez; and District Receptionist Teri Salinas.

AN ACCIDENTAL CAMPAIGN

In the summer of 2022, as Hays CISD prepared for the upcoming school year, safety was indeed at the top of the list of concerns. Though the pandemic had slowed, the horrific school shooting in Uvalde was fresh on the minds of everyone. In Hays CISD, another threat was also present and poised to steal the precious lives of Hays CISD students faster than anyone could have imagined.

On July 26, 2023, the district learned that a 17-year-old girl had overdosed and died at home. Any loss of a young life is a tragedy. About a week later, just three days into August, another student died at home. This young man was also 17. The district hoped it was simply a terrible coincidence, but was concerned. Through partnerships fostered during the years with law enforcement and first responders, the district knew that both deaths were likely caused by accidental fentanyl overdoses, now called fentanyl poisonings.

The school year for students began on a Tuesday – August 16th. The very first weekend after classes resumed, a third student, a 15-year-old, died at home. His death was also attributed to a likely accidental overdose. If one death is a tragedy and two perhaps a terrible coincidence, there was no denying that with a third student death in less than a month, the district was facing a full-blown crisis.

With no time to waste, Hays CISD coordinated a next-day, emergency joint news conference with law enforcement and first responder partners to announce that three Hays CISD students had died from suspected fentanyl poisonings. A fentanyl awareness campaign that had only been in the early discussion phase was suddenly and, frankly, accidentally underway at full speed. To save lives, we couldn't afford to plan and then launch. We had to launch and then plan the components of the campaign as it was already occurring.

Additionally, to save lives, we had to acknowledge the problem and warn parents and students of the clear and immediate danger. Though no students had died at school, we never saw this crisis as 'not a school district problem.' From day one, the school district committed to leading awareness efforts because those dying were our students. It was never a thought to remain silent.

About two weeks after our preliminary press conference, the autopsy came back for a student who had not initially been suspected to have died from fentanyl poisoning. Sadly, the results revealed that on July 7, 2023, another 15-year-old who had died at home died because of fentanyl poisoning. He was the fourth death we learned about, but the first known to have occurred.

Our fervent hope is the campaign to fight fentanyl, developed as a result of unexpected, accidental overdose poisonings, can help save lives not just in Hays CISD, but everywhere. The campaign materials depicted in this report portfolio and on the district's fentanyl campaign home-base webpage (www.hayscisd.net/fentanyl) have been available since the start of the campaign for free to anyone, including other school districts and organizations around the country and world, to use to help spread the word – fentanyl is deadly and it's at our collective doorsteps.

With love and in solidarity
with all who are affected,



Jeri Skrocki
Chief Safety & Security Officer



Tim Savoy
Chief Communication Officer

Two handwritten signatures in blue ink. The first signature is 'Jeri Skrocki' and the second is 'Tim Savoy'.

“I’m worried. We take all safety and security issues very seriously, but this one is especially concerning. So far – and I am deeply grateful – we haven’t lost a single student to COVID or gun violence on our campuses. Both of these issues have rightfully been pressing matters for the past couple of years. We must treat the fentanyl crisis with the same urgency.”

- **Dr. Eric Wright**

Hays CISD Superintendent of Schools

Initial [Email](#) to Parents and Staff August 23, 2022

INITIAL CAMPAIGN ELEMENTS

The fentanyl campaign began with five key elements and a commitment to grow the campaign to match the crisis the district faced:

- Hold an [emergency news conference](#) announcing the first suspected fentanyl poisoning deaths
- Send a [special email from the superintendent](#) to parents regarding the threat
- Reveal the initial awareness poster that was printed and on its way to all campuses to be displayed in [English](#) and [Spanish](#)
- Announce the district's Fighting Fentanyl [webpage](#) that would serve as home-base for the campaign materials and [parent resources](#)
- Expand partnerships and plans with local law enforcement, first responders, and state and federal agencies (*City of Kyle Police Department, City of Buda Police Department, Hays County Sheriff's Office, City of San Marcos/Hays County EMS, Hays County Health Department, Hays County Commissioners Court and County Administration, State Representative Erin Zwiener, Texas Department of Public Safety, United States Drug Enforcement Agency*)

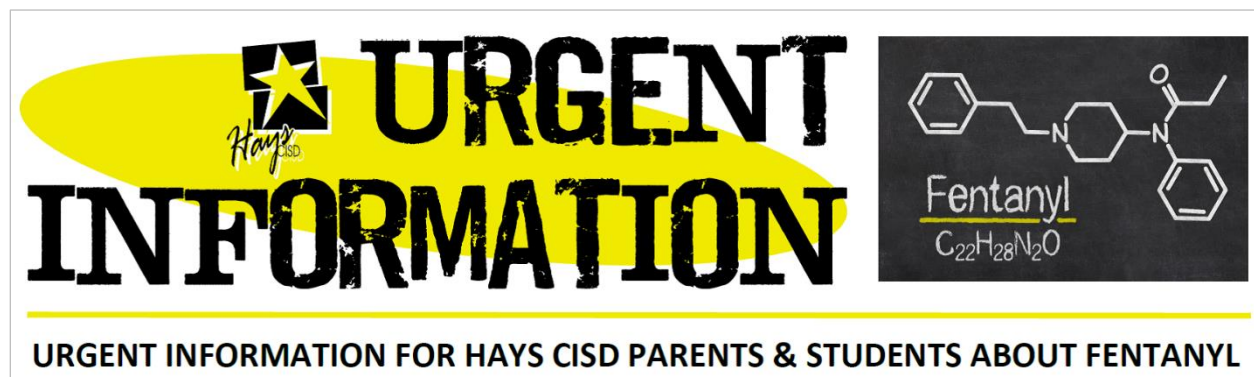
In the previous decade before the first Hays CISD student death from fentanyl, the district had invested tens of millions of dollars in hardening campuses against intruder and active shooter threats. Fortunately, and by grace and circumstance, the district had not lost a student to such violence. In the immediate years preceding the district's first fentanyl death, the district invested millions of dollars in supplies and equipment to thwart the threat posed by the pandemic. Here too the district hadn't lost a single student to COVID-19. With three known student deaths to fentanyl in less than a month, the district committed to tackling the crisis with the same seriousness and urgency it had invested in mitigating other potential threats. The difference with fentanyl – it was killing Hays CISD students at an alarming rate.



The emergency press conference held on August 24, 2022, was attended by 14 broadcast and print news organizations from both the Austin and San Antonio media markets. (A complete media count list for the campaign is included later in this report.) Within two days, Hays CISD Superintendent Dr. Eric Wright was live on national television (FOX News).

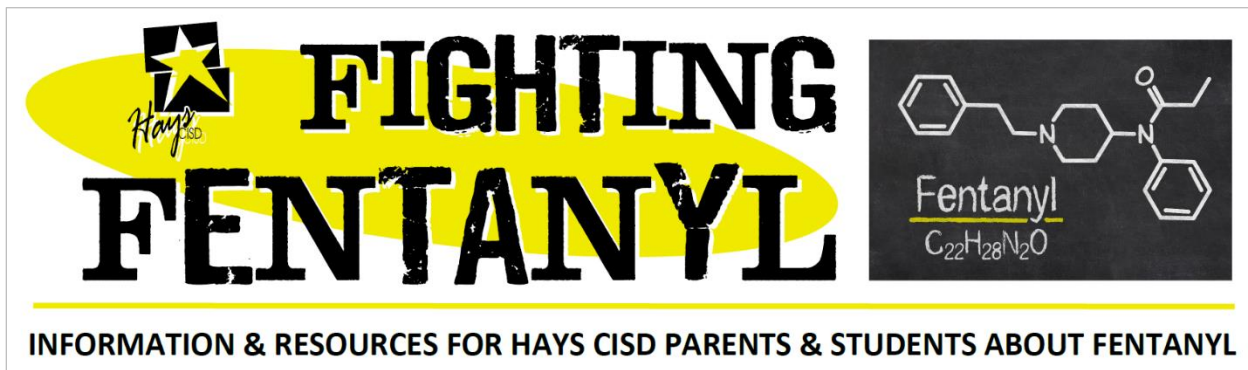
Campaign Logo

The campaign logo theme used on the web banner and the initial poster was created the day before the emergency news conference. Both elements, the website and poster, were needed in advance of the news conference to provide visual elements and to provide people with a convenient place to find all of the rapidly growing repertoires of fentanyl-related information. The initial logo, designed to be attention-getting and interesting to students, simply announced that urgent information was being communicated.



Original logo created for the emergency news conference.

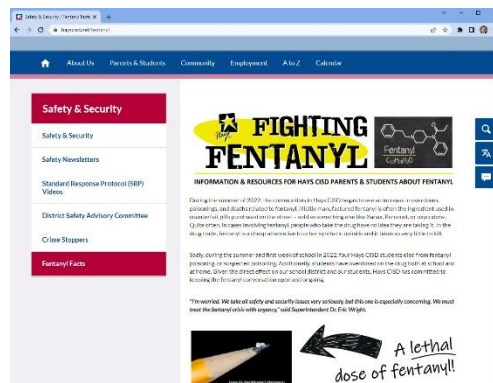
The initial logo created for the emergency news conference said, "Urgent Information." Following the campaign launch, and with a brief moment to contemplate, the district settled on a formal name for the campaign and revised the logo, while keeping the same theme and style, to say, "Fighting Fentanyl."



Refined logo to reflect a longer-term campaign.

Website Home

The website began with basic information about the Hays CISD fentanyl crisis, including the initial posters and some links for parents with information about talking to children about fentanyl and how to obtain free NARCAN (an opioid reversal medicine) to keep at home. The website has grown with the awareness campaign to include new elements as they are created, a prominent district homepage banner button, and a link that takes you to the page: www.hayscisdn.net/fentanyl.



The First Poster

When poisonous fentanyl abruptly invaded Hays CISD, there was much about the crisis the district didn't know. District officials knew what fentanyl was and that it was deadly and a growing concern nationally. Learning about the crisis and the specific dangers and challenges happened quickly. Among the first lessons was how very little fentanyl it took to be fatal. And, that students who thought they were buying common, pharmaceutical-grade opioid pills online and through local acquaintances or dealers were actually buying counterfeit pills made haphazardly with fentanyl in "back-yard" pill factories with no dosage or safety controls.

Using images from the United States Drug Enforcement Agency, the district created posters to address the lethality of fentanyl and where it was hiding. The pencil-tip image, especially, proved to be powerful, eye-opening, and alarming for parents and students, who too were not intimately familiar with the issue.



URGENT INFORMATION



URGENT INFORMATION FOR HAYS CISD PARENTS & STUDENTS ABOUT FENTANYL

Counterfeit pills containing fentanyl are in the Hays CISD area. During the summer of 2022, several Hays CISD students have experienced overdoses and tragically some have lost their lives.





A lethal dose of fentanyl!!

ANY pill you get from a friend or buy off of the street could be a counterfeit pill containing fentanyl.

Only take medication that was prescribed by a doctor, purchased at a pharmacy, and approved by parents or guardians.

Counterfeit pills are fake medications that have different ingredients than the actual medication. They may contain no active ingredient, the wrong active ingredient, or have the right ingredient but in an incorrect quantity. Counterfeit pills may contain lethal amounts of fentanyl or methamphetamine and are extremely dangerous because they often appear identical to legitimate prescription pills, and the user is likely unaware of how lethal they can be.





Left: Authentic oxycodone M30 tablets (top) (also known as Percocet) vs. counterfeit oxycodone M30 tablets containing fentanyl (bottom). Center: Authentic Adderall tablets (top) vs. counterfeit Adderall tablets containing methamphetamine (bottom). Right: Authentic Xanax tablets (white) vs. counterfeit Xanax tablets containing fentanyl (yellow).

WWW.HAYSCISD.NET/FENTANYL

This poster was produced by Hays CISD using information and photographs from the United States Department of Justice Drug Enforcement Administration, August 2022.



INFORMACIÓN URGENTE



INFORMACIÓN URGENTE PARA PADRES Y ESTUDIANTES DE HAYS CISD SOBRE EL FENTANYL

Las píldoras falsificadas que contienen fentanyl se encuentran en el área de Hays CISD. Durante el verano de 2022, varios estudiantes de Hays CISD sufrieron sobredosis y, trágicamente, algunos perdieron la vida.





Una dosis letal de fentanyl

CUALQUIER pastilla que le dé un amigo o que compre en la calle podría ser una pastilla falsificada que contenga fentanyl.

Solo tome medicamentos recetados por un médico, comprados en una farmacia y aprobados por los padres o tutores.

Las píldoras falsificadas son medicamentos falsos que tienen ingredientes diferentes a los del medicamento real. Es posible que no contengan ningún ingrediente activo, que tengan el ingrediente activo incorrecto o que tengan el ingrediente correcto pero en una cantidad incorrecta. Las píldoras falsificadas pueden contener cantidades letales de fentanyl o metanfetamina y son extremadamente peligrosas porque a menudo parecen idénticas a las píldoras recetadas legítimas y el usuario es probablemente consciente de lo letal que pueden ser.





Left: Authentic oxycodone M30 tablets (top) (also known as Percocet) vs. counterfeit oxycodone M30 tablets containing fentanyl (bottom). Center: Authentic Adderall tablets (top) vs. counterfeit Adderall tablets containing methamphetamine (bottom). Right: Authentic Xanax tablets (white) vs. counterfeit Xanax tablets containing fentanyl (yellow).

WWW.HAYSCISD.NET/FENTANYL

Este póster fue producido por Hays CISD usando información y fotografías de la Administración de Drogas de los Estados Unidos, agosto de 2022.

The initial posters, and all materials throughout the campaign, were printed in [English](#) and [Spanish](#) and displayed at all secondary schools in the district. They were also posted on district social media, the website, and attached to the superintendent's initial all-parent and staff email.



INFORMACIÓN URGENTE



INFORMACIÓN URGENTE PARA PADRES Y ESTUDIANTES DE HAYS CISD SOBRE EL FENTANYL


What Do You Tell Elementary Students?

Among the first challenges the district faced in messaging was how to address the fentanyl crisis with the youngest students. Law enforcement and district officials were concerned about a specific marketing tactic used by fentanyl-producing drug cartels – making the pills look “cool” or like candy. What would happen if a younger sibling were to find what they thought was candy in an older sibling’s room or backpack?


After searching for resources from the DEA and other established fentanyl-fighting organizations, the district was unable to find posters or resources to address fentanyl with elementary students. So, the communication team developed a poster for elementary school students from scratch. It was printed in [English](#) and [Spanish](#) and distributed to all elementary campuses. Initially, the plan was to place the posters in nurses’ offices and 4th and 5th grade areas. However, the posters proved popular and palatable enough for younger audiences that the schools (many times at parents’ request) placed the posters in areas frequented by the youngest of students.


Be
SMART!
About Medicine & Pills


ONLY take medicine from your parents, guardians, a doctor, or your school nurse.

 Medicine or pills from friends or strangers can make you **SICK**.

Some pills may look like candy but they can **HURT** you.

 **THIS IS NOT CANDY!**



This poster is supported by the Hays Consolidated Independent School District as part of its Fighting Fentanyl campaign. Photo of a fentanyl pill is courtesy of the United States Drug Enforcement Administration. Poster production date: October 2022. For fentanyl resources and reporting, visit: www.kaysad.net/fentanyl. 

Hay que ser
¡INTELIGENTE!
con los medicamentos y las píldoras

SÓLO toma medicamentos de tus padres, tutores, un médico o la enfermera de tu escuela.

 Los medicamentos o las pastillas de tus amigos o extraños pueden **ENFERMARTE**.

Algunas pastillas pueden parecer dulces, pero pueden hacerte **DAÑO**.

 **ESTO NO ES UN DULCE**



Este cartel es producido por el Distrito Escolar Independiente de Hays como parte de su campaña Fighting Fentanyl. Una foto del arco iris de fentanyl es una copia de la Administración de Control de Drogas de los Estados Unidos. Fecha de producción del cartel: octubre de 2022. Para recursos y sistemas sobre el fentanyl, visite: www.kaysad.net/fentanyl. 

The district paid for the clip art publication licenses for the pill caricatures from an online clipart vendor. This allowed the district to publish the posters and freely share them for others to publish them as well.

THE VIDEO SERIES

Throughout the year, Hays CISD produced and released a series of educational videos featuring local families and people who were affected by the fentanyl crisis. These videos featured Hays CISD parents who lost a child, those in the community who are on the front lines fighting, warning signs of fentanyl poisoning, and even an actual fentanyl poisoning caught on Hays CISD surveillance video.

The district required all secondary students, with a parental opt-out option, to watch the initial two videos and the video featuring the near-death experience of a teenage student from Hays CISD. Additionally, the videos were shared with all parents and were made freely available for other school districts and entities to use. Most of the video was produced in-house. The district paid licensing fees for the stock clips used in a few episodes so that they could be freely shared. (The video images in this section link to the [videos online](#).)

Fighting Fentanyl: The Crisis (Episode 1, Part 1) (English)



Fighting Fentanyl: Help is Here (Episode 1, Part 2) (English)



Fighting Fentanyl: Signs & Symptoms (Episode 1, Part 3) (English)



“The night of August 2nd, he asked if there was any more pizza and I told him no, unfortunately, and I could make him his tuna. He said, ‘No, I’m just going to go upstairs and go to sleep.’ I said, ‘I love you.’ He said, ‘I love you too.’ The following day - I found him in his bed asleep – what appeared to be asleep. But, he was gone, and I couldn’t bring him back.”

- **Shannon McConville**

Mother of 17-year-old Kevin McConville

First Hays CISD Fighting Fentanyl [video](#)

Fighting Fentanyl: 911 - CPR (Episode 2) (English)



Among the most powerful videos produced in the Hays CISD Fighting Fentanyl series was one that featured a real fentanyl poisoning. A current Hays CISD high school student and a recent graduate parked at a district elementary school located in a rural area, thinking they had privacy. The entire ordeal was captured on district security cameras. This video resonated with students because it showed an actual situation. The video was also widely requested and shared with news media organizations, including international news organizations from as far away as Sweden. A critical point the district emphasized was that the student who was not experiencing an overdose did the right thing – he called paramedics instead of abandoning his friend who was in distress. Had the student fled the scene, this would have been another death.

Each of the videos the district produced was branded with the campaign logos and links to find additional fentanyl resources. The district anticipates it will continue producing videos in year two of the campaign. One topic that has been a challenge to address is an interview with a current student who has experienced an overdose. The district discovered during the first year of the campaign that videos featuring parents resonated well with parents, but students were more likely to connect with videos that featured students or peers their age. The full video series is online at: www.hayscisid.net/fentanylvideos.



STUDENT INVOLVEMENT – SOCIAL MEDIA

Early in the campaign, the district realized that peer-to-peer messages were most effective in reaching students. While the adult-to-student messages were powerful, students tended to relate most to messages coming from their peers. Hays CISD engaged the students who are on the [Hays CISD Board and Superintendent Student Advisory Panel](#) to assist with the Fighting Fentanyl Campaign. This group consists of two students from each grade-level at each of the district's high schools, plus additional students appointed by the high school principals. It specifically includes a cross-section of students who are diverse and who may or may not be otherwise involved in fine arts, sports, or other clubs and activities at their campuses.

The students designed social media messages in English and Spanish to share on platforms like Instagram and Snapchat. The district also made these messages into stickers that are provided for free to students. The complete library of images in English and Spanish is online at the districts' main fentanyl page: www.hayscisid.net/fentanyl.



EXPANDING THE HAYS HOPELINE

The district maintains what it has marketed to students as the Hays HopeLine. It was originally created in 2013 to report bullying and cyberbullying. In later years, school safety threats were added as a specific category. For the 2022-2023 school year, the district added Fentanyl as a specific topic for reporting. Students have been encouraged to use the HopeLine to either self-report a concern about their own use or addictions, or to report a worry about their friends or peers. During the first year of the fentanyl campaign, about three dozen students specifically reached out using the HopeLine to report concerns. Dozens more reported directly to a district adult – a teacher, coach, administrator, or counselor.

Upon receiving a report, the district was able to attempt to intervene and connect the students who needed it with further, intensive addiction treatment.

1. STRESSED OUT 6. HOPELESS
2. OVERWHELMED 7. AFRAID
3. BULLIED 8. MISUNDERSTOOD
4. DEPRESSED 9. SAD
5. ANGRY

Of all the things you might be feeling,
here's one you can cross off the list –

ALONE.

Hays HopeLine

Reach Out. Speak Up. Get Help. Find Hope.

Find Hays HopeLine on the new Hays CISD app.
Apple & Android versions available

Use the virtual app from any computer:
www.hayscisd.net/hopeline

Hays CISD

Tip LINE

Category
Bullying
Bullying
Cyberbullying
Fentanyl
Harassment
Other Crisis
Personal Crisis
Safety Concern

Email Address

Phone Number

Submit Tip

Powered by **FINALSITE**

www.hayscisd.net/hopeline

INVOLVING LAWMAKERS & LEADERS

The fight against fentanyl is larger than any one school district, jurisdiction, agency, political affiliation, or level of government. Everyone has a role and a responsibility regarding this crisis.

One challenge that was entirely out of control of the district was the lack of intensive, in-patient treatment options for students who are experiencing addictions. When students reached out to the district because of heightened awareness regarding fentanyl, the district discovered that most treatment referral programs were either full or had months-long wait times to be evaluated.

Additionally, the district discovered that there was no central reporting repository for fentanyl overdoses and deaths. Without this, it is difficult to know the true extent of the problem in any particular region of the state. With COVID-19, data was created and tracked extensively. This is not the case with fentanyl. Sometimes, fentanyl overdoses are reported through EMS. Others are reported to law enforcement. Still others are never reported at all.

The district informally blocked the fentanyl crisis into three general areas for the purposes of targeting how it could be most effective in the fight. First, is the front-line, law enforcement arena. Second, is awareness and education about the problem. Third, is finding appropriate treatment for students who are genuinely addicted to opiates.

The district, being in the education business, is readily and skillfully equipped to tackle the awareness campaign. This has been the focus of the district's efforts because it is in the control of the district. Additionally, since the district has received tremendous attention from media and lawmakers, the district adopted the approach of educating policymakers about what it sees as critical needs in other areas outside of the district's control – specifically the need for expanded treatment options for students suffering from true addictions. So, as part of the Hays CISD Fighting Fentanyl campaign, the district has readily engaged all media and all policymakers who have expressed interest in learning about the Hays CISD fentanyl story.

Nearly immediately following the initial news conference that launched the campaign, Senator John Cornyn reached out to offer help and learn from the Hays CISD experience. The senator and his office staff have remained engaged to date.

Additionally, the district has worked closely with State Representative Erin Zwiener, county elected officials, and city elected officials.



U.S. Senator John Cornyn has been actively interested in Hays CISD's Fighting Fentanyl campaign and involved in trying to help make a difference. Pictured with the senator (at left) at a meeting on October 11, 2022, is: a Hays CISD mother who lost her child to fentanyl, Hays CISD Chief Communication Officer Tim Savoy, and police leadership from cities in Hays CISD.



On February 23, 2023, Hays CISD hosted a roundtable discussion regarding fentanyl, including parents who lost children to the drug, students on the Hays CISD Board and Superintendent Student Advisory Panel, law enforcement leadership from the county and cities within the district, and district leadership.

The Hays CISD communication and safety teams had to leave the 2023 TSPRA conference a day early to help coordinate a roundtable discussion panel on fentanyl with U.S. Senator John Cornyn. The effort was worth it because it garnered media attention from both the San Antonio and Austin media markets. Hays CISD has accommodated as much discussion of the crisis, and issues surrounding the crisis, as possible.

During the roundtable the senator heard from Hays CISD parents who lost their children, law enforcement leadership on the front lines of the fentanyl battle, and students who represent the student-led portion of the Hays CISD Fighting Fentanyl campaign.



Senator Cornyn talks with students about their student-led part of the Fighting Fentanyl campaign.

Following the roundtable discussion, Senator Cornyn spoke with members of the Hays CISD Board of Trustees who were in attendance. He emphasized that local governments, especially schools, play a critical role in the fight against fentanyl.

Senator Cornyn has introduced several bills aimed at fighting fentanyl. It is a top priority for him.



Senator Cornyn talks with members of the Hays CISD Board of Trustees.

"We are being impacted hard. I think what we're doing differently is we're hitting it head-on," said Jeri Skrocki, who oversees safety and security at Hays Consolidated Independent School District's 26 campuses. "Our goal was transparency and really making sure that we were communicating that this is out here...."



May 15, 2023

[\(story link\)](#)

RED RIBBON WEEK – RENEWED URGENCY

Red Ribbon Week, a national movement to educate youth and encourage drug prevention, had a renewed urgency in Hays CISD in 2022 - 2023. With fentanyl taking the lives of students and causing dozens of others to overdose, the Texas Joint Counter-Drug Taskforce reached out and asked to visit Hays CISD schools with an emphasis on fentanyl prevention. They, along with mascot Enny the Eagle, landed their helicopter and held assemblies at six Hays CISD elementary schools.



This series of photos is of the crew visiting Fuentes Elementary on October 18, 2023. The Taskforce, based in Austin, is comprised of members from the US Army, US Air Force and the Drug Enforcement Agency. Their visit was part of the Drugs Demand Reduction Outreach Program which focuses on assisting local schools by educating students on making healthy choices and saying no to peer pressure.



“Our students are dying from this, and we have to do what we can,” Savoy said. [Tim Savoy, Hays CISD Chief Communication Officer] “This is not just something that you’re seeing elsewhere. This is really happening in our community.”



February 11, 2023

[\(story link\)](#)

FOREVER 15 PROJECT

Noah Adam Rodriguez was a 15-year-old student at one of Hays CISD's high schools. His death, the first weekend of the 2022-2023 school year, prompted the district to call for the initial emergency news conference that launched the Fighting Fentanyl campaign. Noah's parents, Janel Rodriguez Dunn and Brandon Dunn, founded the Forever 15 Project in Noah's honor. The non-profit, a tremendous success in its own right, has been instrumental in aiding Hays CISD in its fight against fentanyl.

Janel held fentanyl awareness assemblies at all Hays CISD secondary schools and is now frequently asked to present to testify at various places around the country and before lawmakers including the United States Congress. Additionally, the Forever 15 Project was able to secure funding to place billboards around the state, including in Hays CISD, featuring Hays CISD students who had died from fentanyl poisoning.

"Our son, Noah, grew up surrounded by family in Buda, Texas. He was always an easy-going, happy child. Noah was an honor roll student, a football player since the age of 4, a big brother to two little sisters and one two-week old brother. He had just started his sophomore year of high school. He had attended two days of classes and then the weekend came. He told his friends, 'See you Monday!' Unfortunately, Monday never came for Noah. At midnight on Sunday, August 21, 2022, we received a call that Noah had 'overdosed.' An hour later he was



gone. ONE PILL changed our lives forever. We decided that we would use this tragedy to launch Forever 15 Project and begin spreading awareness and information on fentanyl poisoning. Through our various speaking engagements to both students and families, we have reached countless people and shared the dangers, tell-tale signs, and provided resources for those at risk or those who know someone at risk." – Janel & Brandon



Through the Forever 15 Project, families of Hays CISD students who died from fentanyl poisoning raised money to purchase billboard space around Texas that brings awareness to the crisis.

The billboard images were also used to create banners, printed by the Forever 15 Project. These banners were distributed to Hays CISD campuses and offices and are on display to serve as a reminder that fentanyl remains a threat.

For the assemblies in 2022-2023, Janel and school officials presented to 33 different groups of students – every grade level at every secondary school. Hays CISD has six middle schools with 6th – 8th graders (18 presentations), three comprehensive high schools with 9th – 12th graders (12 presentations), and there were three additional presentations for the district's self-paced high school program and the district's disciplinary alternative campus. The presentations were timed toward the end of the school year (and after the video series) to remind students about fentanyl dangers going into the summer of 2023.



This Forever 15 Project banner hangs at Live Oak Academy, among other schools and offices in Hays CISD.



The Forever 15 Project presents about fentanyl to students at Chapa Middle School during the spring semester of 2023.

DRUG FREE SUMMER '23

As summer 2023 approached, the district's biggest fear was a potential repeat of the devastating summer of 2022, during which four of Hays CISD's six student deaths occurred. In addition to the Forever 15 Project assemblies, the district created a sticker that students could put on laptops or notebooks. It was designed with the same logo pattern and colors as the primary campaign logo. Additionally, the sticker contains a QR code that links to the district's fentanyl homepage. The district printed and distributed 15,000 of the stickers.



ADDITIONAL 1ST-YEAR CAMPAIGN HIGHLIGHTS

- September 2022 – Texas Education Agency asked, and was granted, permission to use Hays CISD fentanyl campaign materials to share across the state as part of the initial set of materials TEA provided as resources.



- November 2022 – Hays CISD participates in the “[Friday Night Lights Against Opioids](#)” initiative created by the Texas Attorney General’s office to help combat the greater opioid crisis, of which fentanyl is a part.



As part of the campaign in conjunction with the Forever 15 Project, students were given bracelets to remind them of the dangers of fentanyl. These bracelets were for Johnson High School.

- November 2022 – Hays CISD participates as the featured guest for the Texas School Safety Center Learning Lab Podcast: ‘[When the Opioid Crisis Arrives at Your Doorstep](#)’
- February 2023 – Hays CISD participates in a panelist slot for a United States Department of Education webinar with an anticipated audience size of up to 10,000- [Lessons from the Field Webinar - Part 2: Preventing and Addressing Fentanyl Use](#).
- June 2023 – Hays CISD and the Forever 15 Project present two sessions at the Texas School Safety Center Conference in San Antonio, Texas, for a combined audience of approximately 500 people.

NEWS MEDIA COVERAGE

One of the greatest assets of the Fighting Fentanyl campaign has been the news media coverage. They have amplified the story and the message worldwide. The district has garnered local, state, national, and international attention at major networks and with major publications. Of the 637 traditional media stories in which the district participated in 2022 – 2023, 207 of them – nearly a third – were about fentanyl. The organizations that covered the campaign are listed in the chart below:

Local (Austin Media Market)	State (Texas)	National
<p><i>Each of these organizations covered multiple stories on the Hays CISD fentanyl crisis.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Austin American Statesman • KEYE (CBS Austin) • Community Impact Newspaper • KTBC (FOX Austin) • Good Day Austin (Special Program on KTBC) • Hays Free Press Newspaper • KUT Radio (NPR Austin) • KVUE (ABC Austin) • KXAN (NBC Austin) • San Marcos Daily Record Newspaper • Spectrum News • Univision Austin • UT Journalism Student News • Texas State University Student News 	<p><i>Many of these organizations covered multiple stories on the Hays CISD fentanyl crisis.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ATPE News Magazine • Dallas Morning News Newspaper • KABB (Fox San Antonio) • KENS (CBS San Antonio) • KSAT (ABC San Antonio) • MySanAntonio.com • San Antonio Express News Newspaper • Telemundo San Antonio • Texas Standard Radio • Texas Tribune • Univision San Antonio 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ABC News • Axios News • CNN • Daily Caller News Foundation • Epoch Times • Fox News National - live • Kaiser Health News • The New Yorker Magazine • Newsmax • Salon Magazine
		International
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Al Jazeera • Sky News Great Britain • TV4 Sweden



Reporters cover the February 23, 2023, Hays CISD roundtable on fentanyl with United States Senator John Cornyn.

News Releases, Statements, and Updates

Because of the natural media attention the district received regarding the fentanyl crisis, it wasn't necessary throughout the first year to issue many news releases to generate news coverage. The predominant driver of coverage was the email updates to parents from the superintendent that were shared with the media. The statements, updates, and news releases used during the first year of the campaign are listed below and housed on the district's main fentanyl homepage:

[May 3, 2023: Fentanyl Update from Superintendent \(6th Student Death\)](#)

[May 1, 2023: Fentanyl Steals Your Friends - Sky News Film](#)

[May 1, 2023: District Safety Newsletter - Fentanyl Emphasis](#)

[April 21, 2023: Email to Secondary Parents RE Pre-Summer Assemblies](#)

[March 3, 2023: Hays County Opening New Mental Health/Substance Abuse Facility](#)

[March 2, 2023: Superintendent Message on Fentanyl \(Update\)](#)

[February 23, 2023: Superintendent Remarks at Fentanyl Roundtable with Senator John Cornyn](#)

[January 9, 2023: Fentanyl Update from Superintendent](#)

[December 6, 2022: Fentanyl Update from Superintendent \(Release of Video #4 and Student Graphics\)](#)

[October 21, 2022: Fentanyl Update from Superintendent \(Announcing Elementary School Posters\)](#)

[September 7, 2022: Superintendent Message on Fentanyl Update](#)

[September 2, 2022: Email to All Parents Regarding Social Media Discussions About Hays HS](#)

[August 24, 2022: Hays CISD & Kyle Police Department Joint Media Availability Regarding Fentanyl](#)

[August 24, 2022: City of Kyle & Kyle Police Department Media Advisory: Kyle Police Department Warns of Fentanyl Drugs in Kyle](#)

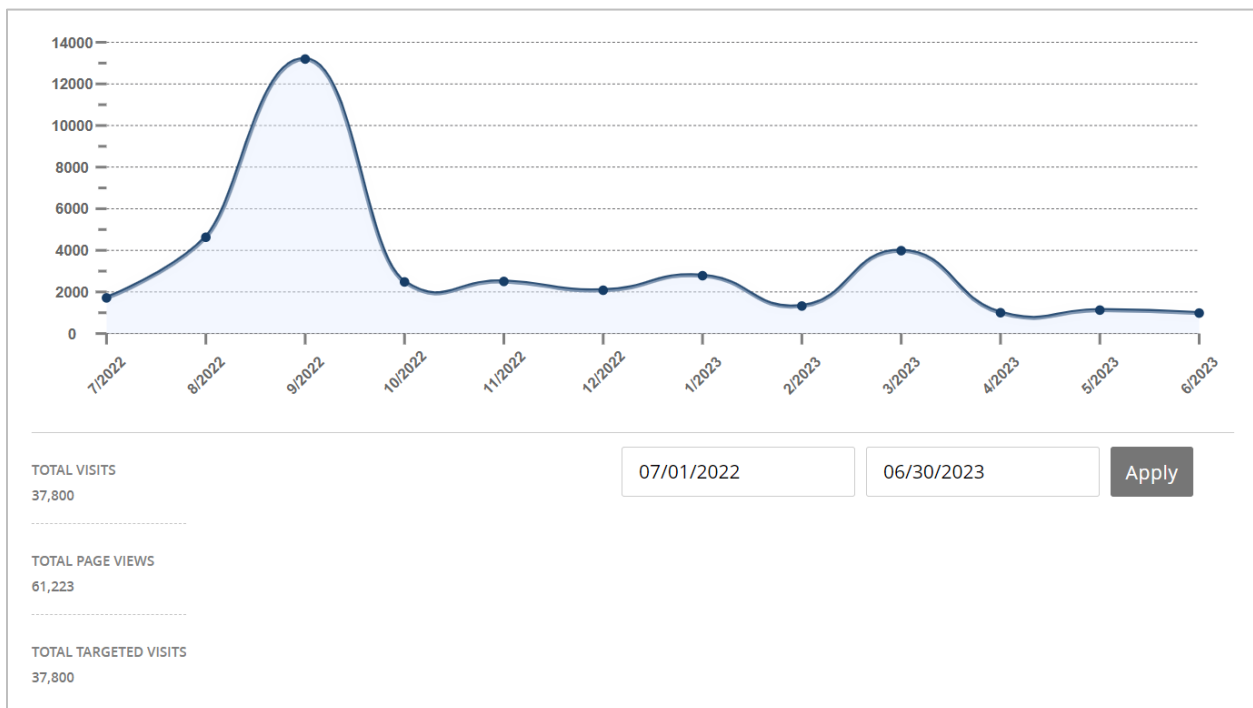
[August 23, 2022: Superintendent Message on Fentanyl](#)



Hays CISD Communication Director Harvest Goodrich (at right) works with a production crew in April 2023, setting up for ABC national news to do a fentanyl story at Hays CISD.

WEBSITE TRAFFIC & TOTAL CAMPAIGN REACH

The primary home for the Hays CISD Fighting Fentanyl Campaign is the webpage at www.hayscisd.net/fentanyl. The website section, comprised of several subpages, saw 37,800 visits in the first year of the campaign, including 61,223 total page visits. Amplified by direct email correspondence to parents and staff at approximately 55,000 district email contacts per email, plus the social and traditional media coverage and webcast audiences, as well as in-person assemblies and seminar presentations, the total reach of the campaign is easily in excess of 1 million people.



In March 2023, a new treatment facility specifically for teens opened in Hays County, offering much needed help. Hays CISD Safety and Security Chief Jeri Skrocki (pictured) was included in the news story about the opening of the facility. Advocating for, and realizing, expanded addiction treatment options for teens has been a goal of the district's Fighting Fentanyl campaign.

LESSONS LEARNED

We didn't know what we didn't know when the campaign started following the accidental deaths of four students in July and August of 2022. To fight fentanyl, the district learned more than it thought there was to know about fentanyl. And, through trial and error during the campaign, the district adapted and continued to learn. There were many misunderstandings and myths that had to be addressed with teens, parents, and the community to combat fentanyl. Here are some of the takeaways:

More NARCAN: The district had been stocking NARCAN, an emergency opioid reversal medicine, on campuses two years before the 2022 crisis through School Resource Officers and then in the nurses' offices. However, NARCAN is designed for natural opioids. Fentanyl, a synthetic opioid, is often found in extremely high concentrations. Saving a life from fentanyl poisoning often required more NARCAN than was expected. Previous to the 2022-2023 crisis, Hays CISD schools stocked two to four doses each of NARCAN. The district found that it was taking as many as six or more doses of NARCAN to revive some students. The district added to its NARCAN stocks at campuses.



Jennifer McCormick of Plum Creek Pharmacy in Kyle said the pharmacy was one of the sources Hays CISD turned to for its Narcan supply. Each box of Narcan comes with two doses, and the pharmacy provides it free to the public. (Nell Carroll/Community Impact Newspaper June 16, 2023)

No Debate: Early in the crisis, one of the stories news organizations covered involved the “debate” about whether schools should have NARCAN on hand. Hays CISD maintains there should be no debate. When you need it, you need it immediately! NARCAN at campuses saved the lives of 11 Hays CISD students who experienced on-campus fentanyl poisonings during the 2022 – 2023 school year. NARCAN bought enough time during an overdose emergency for an ambulance to arrive and transport a child to the emergency room.

NARCAN has limits: While critically needed for saving lives, NARCAN typically wears off before a fentanyl overdose. NARCAN buys time to get someone to a hospital, but it doesn't “fix” the overdose. This was one of the myths the district addressed with students who otherwise thought that if they had NARCAN at a party it might be safe to use pills.

A designated NARCAN friend won't work: For the reasons discussed with the limits of NARCAN, appointing a designated NARCAN friend at a party will not work because without proper aftercare, NARCAN will wear off before the fentanyl overdose.

You can't NARCAN yourself: Another myth among teens that needed to be debunked was the notion that if someone had NARCAN on hand, they could administer it to themselves if they started to think they were experiencing fentanyl poisoning. Fentanyl works too fast.

Pills from the same batch are not alike: This myth was also debunked in the Hays CISD Fighting Fentanyl campaign. Some students thought if they or their friends had taken a pill from the same batch that all of the pills in that batch would be fine. There is no pharmaceutical control in the manufacturing of illicit fentanyl and different people react differently. Just because a few pills in the same batch didn't lead to an overdose or fatality for one person, it did not mean that the batch was free from a deadly pill. The student portion of the Fighting Fentanyl campaign referred to this as playing Russian Roulette with a bag of pills.

Pills from a trusted friend can't be trusted: Students have no way of knowing where their friend obtained the pills they are selling. These pills may have changed hands several times before being consumed.



As this DEA image shows, drug cartels aggressively market their fentanyl-laced products to teens by making the pills look "cool" or like candy. If some people die, their business model calls it an acceptable loss.

Small network dealing: Unlike previous types of drugs that traditionally have one or two dealers in an area; with fentanyl pills, some students would buy small amounts - enough for their habit – and then sell the rest – in small amounts or single pills - to support it. This micro-dealing has been a challenge for law enforcement in taking down the fentanyl sales network.

Fentanyl is not necessarily what teens are seeking: All of the student deaths in Hays CISD during the 2022 – 2023 school year have been attributed to counterfeit pills. It's likely that casual, or first-time users didn't seek fentanyl directly. Instead, they thought they were buying Percocet or a different and less potent type of opioid pill. A key component of the Fighting Fentanyl campaign messaging, included in the initial poster, was to alert students that they needed to fear all pills not prescribed by a doctor and purchased at a pharmacy by their parents. Students were warned not to ignore the campaign messages about fentanyl, thinking they didn't apply to them (since they might not be specifically looking for fentanyl). As the crisis progressed, we have since learned that students who are in full addiction may actually be seeking fentanyl to recapture their first high experiences.

The addiction is powerful: The district is aware of several students who survived fentanyl poisonings and resuscitation only to overdose again (sometimes more than once) or die later. The addiction to opioids is formidable. According to the DEA, fentanyl is 50 times stronger than heroin and 100 times stronger than morphine. This is why the district has included as part of its Fighting Fentanyl campaign the advocacy for funding expanded, specialized community-based drug treatment options for teens.

It's everywhere: While there is still some debate about whether fentanyl is the leading cause of death or a leading cause of death among young people; it is pervasive. According to the DEA, in recent years fentanyl has caused nearly 70% of the more than 100,000 annual drug overdose deaths in the country – and that percentage and total death number is growing.

Numbers are underreported: According to lawmakers, Hays CISD's own experiences, and other experts, the number of fentanyl overdoses and deaths are likely grossly underreported because there is, as of yet, no central or uniform system to report fentanyl casualties.

CONCLUSION

The fentanyl epidemic is chapter two of the greater opioid crisis. As the initial fight against abusing prescribed, pharmaceutical-grade opioids has been successful, it has created a market for the synthetic and often illicitly manufactured fentanyl for use in counterfeit pills. Sadly, Hays CISD believes as a nation, we are likely early in this second chapter.

There are still far too few school districts talking about the crisis in earnest. This is likely, in part, because the fentanyl deaths of their students are probably not happening at school, raising the issue or concern in many communities about whether it is the school district's story to tell. None of the six Hays CISD students who died in the first year died at school. Additionally, unless or until students have died, the fentanyl crisis is mostly relatively abstract for those who are not directly affected. Hays CISD was there prior to July 2022. You know it's a danger and you know it's lurking; but, if it hasn't hit home, it's probably not tangible.

For Hays CISD, facing so many deaths in such a short period of weeks, the only reasonable reaction was action. The students who died were part of the Hays CISD family. Their peers, teachers, friends, family members, and loved-ones are also part of the school district family. If not the district, in partnership with law enforcement and first responders, who would sound the alarm? Who would intervene?

Is it working? It's a question we're asked by reporters every week.

Though we will never know the total number of lives saved; we know we have reached a significant number of students who might have otherwise, and unknowingly, casually tried a fentanyl-laced pill. In certain ways, it has been every generation's rite of passage to experiment with drugs. That's what some teenagers do. But this drug – this evil – this fentanyl – leaves no margin of error. As the DEA campaign says, "One pill can kill."

The district's challenge remains with those who are truly addicted or who may be taking the first steps toward addiction. The district's initial deaths involved students who fought addiction, but also those who had just tried their first pills. The later deaths, those occurring after the Fighting Fentanyl campaign began, seem to be among students with known addictions. In fact, the student who overdosed in the surveillance video used in the campaign has since overdosed again – twice.

We know the Fighting Fentanyl campaign has been powerful with an extended reach, but we also know its limitations. If a near-death experience is not enough to deter a student from using, no poster ever will. We need more treatment centers for adolescents. We need more people talking about the dangers. We need to keep the focus on this problem and make it a priority for leaders to fund efforts to combat it on all fronts.

Sadly, while writing this report recapping the first year of the campaign, we learned that on October 2, 2023, the parents of another Hays CISD student went to wake her up for school, but instead found her dead in her room. Authorities suspect her death is from a fentanyl overdose poisoning and are awaiting the autopsy to confirm it. Her death would be the district's seventh attributed to fentanyl poisoning.

There is still work for Hays CISD to do, and so we will continue. There is still work for all of us to do.



The McConvilles – Shannon and Darren, carrying what would have been their son Kevin’s graduation cap – are posthumously awarded his diploma by Hays CISD Superintendent Dr. Eric Wright. Kevin would have graduated on May 30, 2023, with his Lehman High School classmates had fentanyl not taken his life two weeks before the start of his senior year in high school.

This report and this campaign are dedicated to the memory of the Hays CISD students who have died much too young and to all of those affected by the ravages of the fentanyl crisis.

