

CARDS ON CAMPUS

Student gambling rises in schools, threatening education and well-being

Samantha Erwin, Co-Editor-in-Chief
Hali Ponce, Staff Writer

From casinos to classrooms

From casinos, online apps and public spaces, gambling takes place anywhere and everywhere, including in the classroom.

“I play poker with my friends for money, usually for fun. I think gambling can be an addiction for people, but I think most people who gamble at this school just do it for fun,” senior Dylan Harnden said.

Online gambling apps require social security numbers and age restrictions. Some allow users to play at 18, while others don’t permit users under 21—which high schoolers are not.

“Most people are using their parents’ security numbers and information and then their own credit cards. I think it’s a problem, but we also have to recognize the minor’s right to use their own money,” senior Gabriel Goolsby said.

Because gambling is imposing on academics, schools are beginning to recognize the need for intervention. Instead of doing school work in the classroom, students use time after lectures towards gambling, which results in incomplete school work or students scrambling to finish assignments.

“I just feel like I noticed in the past couple years of high school that gambling has been a little demonizing here. Specifically, exchanging money like it’s nothing,” senior Ava Dilisio said.

Fantasy football and other online sports games contribute to gambling’s popularity and betting among students. With the rise of underage gambling, a legal line is crossed.

In a school department chair meeting, teachers brought up issues with students gambling in their classes, according to Principal Brandon Manzella.

This led to an investigation in classrooms by the assistant principals. They found kids gambling in multiple classes, which is not permitted on school grounds per Utica Community School’s policy.

“I’m not even sure that we really know how much gambling happens on school grounds, yet, because it’s evolving right now,” said Dr. David Ledgerwood, Psychiatry and Behavioral Neurosciences professor at Wayne State University. “Access to internet gaming and sports betting and all of that is pretty new. But I know it’s increasing, because obviously you’re seeing it. It’s sort of a little bit like how seven or eight years ago, you started to see a huge proliferation in kids vaping outside of school. And now we’re seeing kids gambling inside of school.”

Underage addiction

First, a student gambles a couple cents at the end of class in a game of Black Jack, then a couple dollars, then hundreds. This is where a problem and addiction starts.

“The only time it’s really addictive is when you actually are winning. Even when you are losing, I think they just tend to do it just as something that’s fun, but I think it can get to the point where it’s too addictive and it’s really harmful for everyone. Now, you’re putting not just you, but your family into financial severities and maybe it could hurt your funds,” Harnden said.

Gambling is a behavioral disorder type of addiction. Comparable to being a shopaholic through continuous compulsive engagement with gambling in the critical developmental years of a student’s life. This makes them more susceptible to addictive behaviors, according to Ledgerwood.

“A lot of people gamble from time to time and

don’t have any problems. But at the same time, the younger a person gets involved with an addictive problem or addictive behavior, the more likely they are to become addicted to it,” Ledgerwood said.

With new technology, teenagers gained easier access to gambling options than in the past. And now with gambling infiltrating classrooms, this opens the door for a higher possibility of addiction.

“It’s especially troubling if, for example, teachers know kids are gambling on their phones, knowing it’s not only illegal but harmful,” Ledgerwood said. “There’s a lot of national campaigns like the National Council on Problem Gambling, for example, to educate parents that it’s a bad idea to put, for example, scratch off tickets in their kids’ Christmas stockings because that’s potential to develop problems down the road.”

Student risks

Students who gamble wager high risks of going into debt, damaging relationships and mental health issues.

“There’s different risk factors that can make people more likely to develop a gambling problem. One of them is simply being exposed to it, as we’ve been talking about another sort of related, behavioral factor: you win a big jackpot or something you perceive as a big jackpot early on and then you start thinking, ‘Oh, this might be a way to make money.’ So, you start spending more and more gambling and then you start losing and you fall into that pit of gambling problems,” Ledgerwood said.

Along with the obvious risk of addiction, additional repercussions could include: debt, consequences for illegal acts and mental aspects of losing out on money and big wins. Not only is the gambling taking place illegal, but this addiction can hurt students’ coursework and scores, according to Ledgerwood.

“It definitely takes a lot of time and attention

away from their learning. They’re focusing so much on trying to earn money that they’re not even listening or caring to listen to teachers who are trying to get them to learn things. Even in National Honor Society meetings, I noticed there’s people on their phone doing game like stuff. Also, it’s just not going to set them up for a good future with respecting people and being able to pay attention and be attentive to people,” Dilisio said.

As students put important meetings and classes on the back burner for gambling, they face peer pressures and fears of missing out as they see their friends partake in risky activities.

“If you’re in a peer group where gambling is much more normal and encouraged, then you’re probably more likely to do it,” Ledgerwood said. “If you’re in a peer group where it’s really not part of the norm, you’re probably less likely to do it. Because oftentimes gambling is social, although not always.”

Laws & consequences

Understanding underage gambling laws and their consequences protects students from financial debt and the effects of addiction.

“I use my mom’s information to get onto the apps, which I have gotten permission to do. But I feel like most people will use their parents’ information without them knowing, rather than actually asking them, which is where the problem lies,” anonymous said.

While off-site gambling at casinos and online apps are illegal for minors due to age restrictions, students are also using online gambling platforms designed for those 21 and up or playing card games to earn some extra change. Gambling in school violates the “buying and selling and disruption of school” sections in the district’s code of conduct, according to the student handbook.

“If a student gets caught gambling in school, more than likely this would be a violation of your school rules of conduct which could end in

suspension or expulsion depending on the severity of the case. If law enforcement got involved, the person could face criminal charges, up to a one year misdemeanor. Any of the gambling money would be confiscated as well,” said Brandon Dowty Detective Lieutenant with the Investigations/Tactical Response Unit.

If a student is over 18 they would be charged as an adult and the court processing would be handled in adult court. Minors are handled in juvenile court.

“The laws that cover gambling are pretty straightforward and if you meet the requirements you will most likely get charged,” Dowty said.

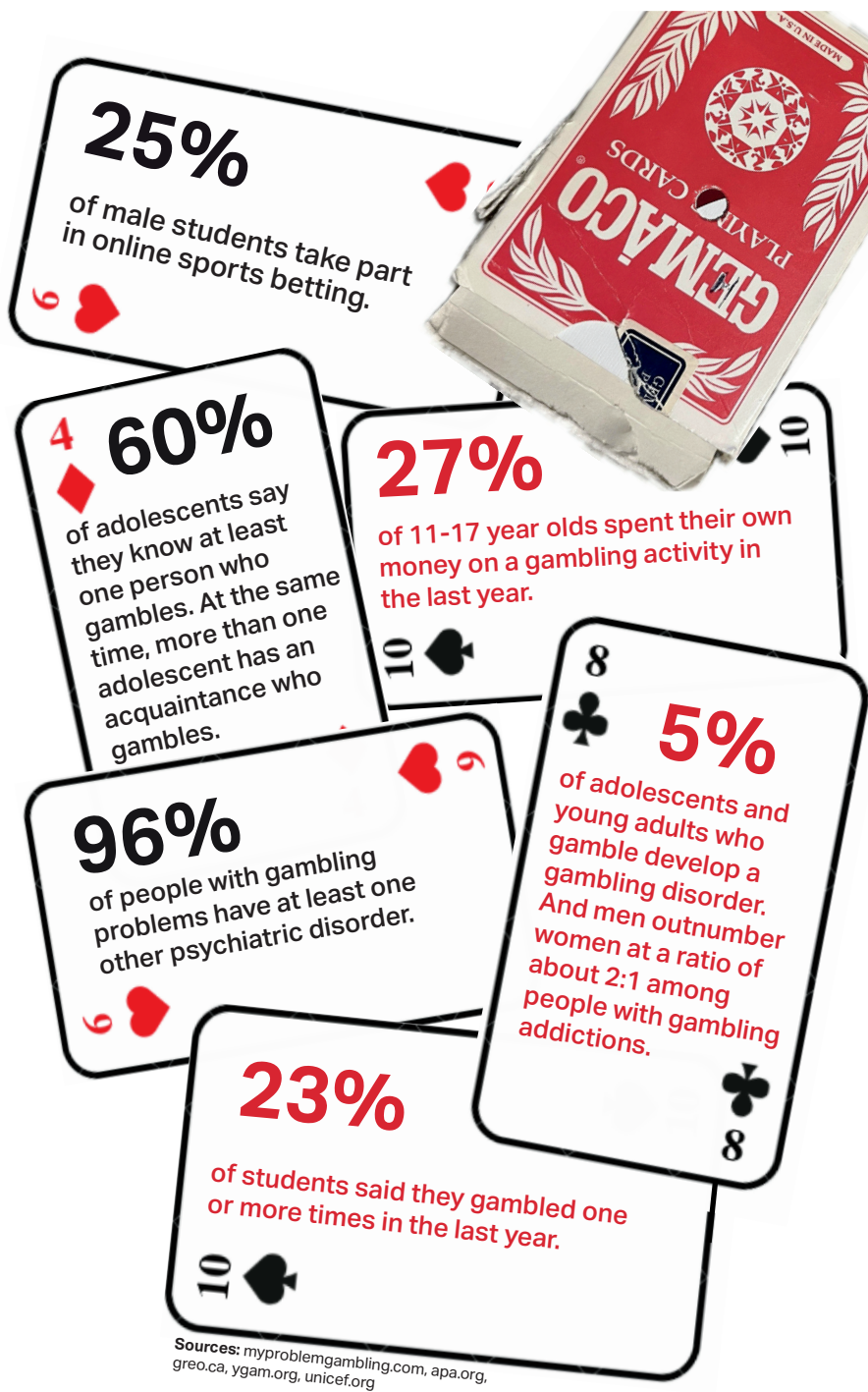
Some apps are 18 plus making it difficult to know what the consequence would be if a student is caught gambling in school using the app.

“Usually, gambling isn’t allowed in schools, but obviously with fantasy football and all that being legal, that becomes a little bit harder for us. But for this school, if you do get caught gambling in school it will or could lead to a suspension,” Student Resource Officer Lauren Weiss said.

Each form of gambling is being handled differently in the school as students get caught, according to Manzella. Playing card games for pocket change will result in more minor consequences than gambling online and the more a student gets caught the more serious the consequence can be.

If students struggle with gambling addiction they are able to contact the state hot-line at 1-800-270-7117.

“Getting in trouble at school or even worse, with the law, should always be avoided. Gambling can be addictive, but I think it is often downplayed because it’s not a physical drug that you consume,” Dowty said. “I’ve seen people get hurt and families ruined over unpaid gambling debts and irresponsible gambling.”



EAGLE'S VOICES

Do you think gambling is a problem?

Bridget Knoflach, Hali Ponce
Staff Writers, Samantha Erwin
Co-Editor-in-Chief



“I would say yes, because it is a distraction and it’s obviously gambling. I’m a person who cares about my image; so I would say, gambling is not a good image. I think it’s a distraction at the most.”

Demetris King ‘25



“I think it’s a problem because people come to school instead of working. They gamble and spend all their money and their parents are wondering where all their money is going. It’s creating a hassle around the school.”

Dereyon Williams ‘26



“I think it is a problem because everyone’s addicted and they’re losing money and they’re raging over it. I always see people gambling on their phones in the classrooms.”

Gabriella Riggio ‘26



“Yes, because it’s illegal and I don’t think it should be done by students, especially in school. It’s becoming a real problem.”

Una Grubac ‘27



“I would say it is a problem here. People are wasting all of their money on gambling and I always see guys playing gambling games in the classroom.”

Rosalia Biundo ‘26



“I don’t think gambling is a problem because we don’t even know if they’re gambling with real money. They could just be playing poker for fun. So, I think it should be allowed if it’s not real money.”

Joshua Pauline ‘26