

2026 Freshman Reality Maze

Key Student Takeaways and Follow Up

Following completing their scenario, students were asked to find two of their peers and complete a short debrief. The following report provides a snapshot of the most common responses and key findings. In addition, the students were asked if they had any additional questions. The end of the report includes an FAQ of those questions.

Question 1: Main Takeaways *“What are three things you learned from your scenario?”*

1. Financial Reality

The most frequent and specific theme was **money**. For freshmen, who often have limited income, the financial burden of a citation appeared to be the most "real" consequence.

- **Price Awareness:** Students didn't just say "it's expensive"; they cited specific numbers (\$98, \$124, \$140, \$600). They also were very interested in expense of medical bills
- **The Labor Connection:** Multiple students made the connection between money and time, specifically citing the **\$10 = 1 hour of community service** rule. One student specifically noted they would have to work **63 hours** to pay it off.
- **Personal Responsibility:** A recurring "aha" moment was the realization that **parents cannot pay the fine**. This shifted the consequence from a "family problem" to a "personal problem."

2. Awareness of Social, Athletics, Future Opportunity Consequences

Students reported awareness of their future opportunities and current social status.

- **Athletics and Activities:** "Banned from sports" and "losing my letter" were high-frequency mentions. This suggests the "Athletic Code of Conduct" is a strong deterrent.
- **The "Paper Trail":** The fear of a citation being on your **"Permanent Record."** Students mentioned "felony," "misdemeanor," "sex offender registry," and "background checks for jobs/college/living spaces."
- **Licensing:** The threat of losing a driver's license (or delaying the ability to get one) was mentioned as a major consequence, even for non-driving offenses.
- **School and Home:** School suspensions, losing trust of family members, and disqualification from scholarships
- **Comments from students included:** "Don't drugs it's not worth it" "Things get taken away" "Don't drink" "Don't vape" "Loss of privileges"

3. Health and Physical Impact

The "Hospital" table clearly left a mark. When students moved beyond "drugs are bad," they reported learning about the medical procedures required in serious situations.

- **The "Needle Drill":** Several students mentioned that if a vein can't be found, fluids are "**drilled into the bone.**" This specific, painful detail clearly stood out as a highlight of the event.
- **Physical Damage:** Lung/heart damage; insomnia; effects on daily functioning; death/overdose.
- **The Energy Drink Outlier:** There were many responses about "caffeine addiction" and "slamming energy drinks." This suggests that the inclusion of legal but high-stimulant substances was eye-opening for them.

4. Nuance in Law & Ethics

Some students picked up on the technicalities of the legal system and the weight of social interactions.

- **Consent and Assault:** There were several very sober mentions of "No means no," "Sexual assault is a felony," and the severity of the Dane County Jail and the sex offender registry.
- **The Legal Trap:** One student noted that even though THC is legal in some contexts (or neighboring states), it is "**illegal**" in Wisconsin.
- **Peer Pressure vs. Accountability:** Many mentioned learning to "surround yourself with better people", "don't get peer pressured" and that "stuff can spiral fast."

5. Positive Discoveries

Many students reported they learned about support systems along with the consequences.

- **Help is Available:** Mentions of "Counselors give support," "AODA can help you stop," and "There is always help" indicate that the simulation successfully mapped out a path for recovery, not just a path to jail

Question 2 Main Takeaways: *What are 2 interesting facts from what other people in your group shared?*

Looking at this second set of data, it's clear that the "peer-to-peer" learning was highly effective. While Question 1 was about their own experience, Question 2 reveals what actually has "social currency"—the facts that were shocking or interesting enough to repeat to a friend.

1. The "Shock Value" Winners (Medical & Social)

These are the facts that "traveled" the most through the groups because they were surprising.

- **The Bone Drill & DNA Tests:** Just like in the first question, the "needle in the bone" and "DNA swabs for rapists" were frequently mentioned. These graphic medical details are clearly the most "talkable" parts of the event.

- **The \$18,000 Hospital Bill:** One specific number—**\$18,000**—appeared in the peer feedback. This high-cost reality check for a broken leg or hospital visit seemed to stun students who were otherwise focused on \$100 tickets.
- **Caffeine & Energy Drinks:** A surprising number of students told their peers about "abnormal heart rhythms," "caffeine overdose," and "insomnia." This suggests the energy drink scenario was a major "aha" moment for students who previously saw caffeine as "safe."

2. Legal Realities & "Street Knowledge"

Students focused on the technical "loopholes" or harsh realities of the law that they didn't know before the simulation.

- **The "Curfew" Entry Point:** There is a clear theme of students realizing that **curfew violations** are how the police often catch them with other substances ("Don't go out past curfew especially with THC").
- **License Loss:** The fact that you can lose your driver's license for **non-driving** offenses (like a tobacco ticket or "being untrustworthy") was a major takeaway that students shared with each other.
- **The \$10 = 1 Hour Rule:** This labor-to-cost ratio was mentioned repeatedly. It has become the "standard unit of measurement" for consequences among this freshman class.

3. Sexual Assault & Cyberbullying

The inclusion of these "heavier" scenarios clearly impacted the wider group, not just those who went through them.

- **"No Means No":** This was echoed in almost every group. Consent is always required.
- **The Phone as Evidence:** Several students noted that "Police go through your phone" and "Don't have embarrassing things on your phone." This reflects a realization of how cyberbullying or taking photos without consent becomes a permanent legal problem called possession of Child Pornography.
- **The Sex Offender Registry:** The peer groups discussed the long-term impact of being on a registry and how it affects where you can live or work.

Observations that Stuck Out:

- **The "Parents Can't Pay" Myth-Busting:** This is perhaps your most successful piece of "hard" data. Students are consistently telling each other: *"Your parents aren't allowed to pay this for you."* That is a massive shift in their thought process.
- **The "Victims don't get fined" Note:** One student noted that victims of assault don't get fined. This is a crucial piece of victim-advocacy education that successfully reached the students.
- The long term effects of becoming addicted to nicotine, alcohol, and caffeine was something that was reported among many of the students.

Question 3: *What is one question you still have?*

The students were asked if they had any follow up questions after going through the scenarios. We wanted to provide answers to the most common questions as a follow up.

FAQ

Health and Wellbeing Questions

What is a "healthy" amount of caffeine?

- For most teenagers, the recommended limit is about **100mg per day**. Many energy drinks contain **200mg to 300mg**, which can lead to "caffeine toxicity," causing abnormal heart rhythms, severe anxiety, and insomnia. Remember that everyone reacts differently so for some 100mg might even be too much.

Should caffeine be used under the age of 16? (reflective)-There's no "rule" that says people under 16 can't have caffeine, but many health experts recommend teens limit it because caffeine can affect sleep, mood, anxiety, focus, and heart rate — especially while the brain and body are still developing.

A helpful question to ask is: *How does caffeine affect you personally?*

If it causes trouble sleeping, increased stress, shakiness, headaches, or feeling dependent on it to get through the day, it may be worth cutting back.

The goal isn't usually "never," but learning how substances impact your body, mental health, sleep, and daily life — and making informed choices from there.

What other kinds of things can come from long term caffeine addiction?

- **From: [Helpguide.org](https://www.helpguide.org)** Long-term effects may include the following: Irregular heartbeat or heart palpitations, calcium depletion, which can lead to bone loss, sleep disruptions, which may affect growth, stunted brain growth (due to sleep disruptions), stomach upset, decreased collagen production, which may lead to premature wrinkles, worsening of anxiety.

Why not lower MG in the drinks? (Reflective)

- Companies may not lower the milligrams in drinks because they want consumers to come back for more!

What is a great alternative if you are addicted to caffeine or have a problem?

- If caffeine feels like something you *need* to get through the day, it may help to look at what your body or mind is asking for — like sleep, hydration, food, stress relief, or rest. Gradually cutting back and finding other ways to boost energy and focus can make a big difference.

If it feels hard to stop even when it's negatively affecting your sleep, anxiety, mood, school, or daily life, talking with a trusted adult, doctor, or therapist can help. Like other habits or addictions, support and coping strategies can make change easier.

Why do they make energy drinks so bad?

- These drinks are engineered with high levels of caffeine and sugar to keep you coming back. They are designed to be addictive.
- Companies use 200mg–300mg of caffeine per can to provide a "rush," but this amount can lead to caffeine toxicity, severe anxiety, and abnormal heart rhythms.

How does vaping harm all parts of your body?

- Teens have a serious risk of addiction due to vapes containing highly addictive levels of nicotine.
- Vaping can harm the lungs with toxic chemicals including formaldehyde and toxic metals like nickel, chromium and lead.
- vaping can also harm your brain impacting on attention, learning, and memory

How much alcohol do I have to blackout?

There's no exact number of drinks that causes a blackout. A blackout is different from passing out. During a blackout, a person may still seem awake and functioning — talking, walking, texting, or interacting with others — but alcohol has temporarily disrupted the brain's ability to store new memories, so they may not remember what happened later. Passing out means losing consciousness. Both can be dangerous, and blackouts can happen faster than many people expect — especially with rapid drinking or mixing alcohol with energy drinks.

How many people die from poisoning?

-2,200 people die from alcohol poisoning annually. 30% of deaths due to alcohol poisoning can be attributed to alcohol dependence/alcoholism. THC/Cannabis poisoning is much more rare, it is harder to achieve such high toxicity levels.

School Questions

What happens during a second offense?

- If you are thinking about school related consequences check your Extracurricular code of conduct. For the second offense it would be a suspension from at minimum 1 event then the 3rd offense changes to suspension for one calendar year.

What would happen if someone died in the school for any scenario?

-We would make sure that all of the student services staff are available to listen and support. The district would communicate the death to our families and our students and share a plethora of available and incredible resources. We would bring in Agrace to help students and staff members with grief services as well. The district administration would continue to monitor the situation and provide ongoing support as needed after the initial incident.

What are the steps the school would take to help me stop using?

-It depends on the scenario. If you admit that you are using/addicted and need help, a counselor or student services member would be more than happy to help get you connected to resources to help you quit including the N.O.T. group, peer resources, AODA helplines, etc. If you are caught using at school, an administrator and Officer Oren will have a follow up conversation with you and a ticket will be issued to you, with a court appearance to juvenile court mandated. At that point, an AODA assessment will be mandated and treatment options will be provided to your family.

How much does it affect your chances of getting into college?

- For WI college entry, underage drinking or vaping won't stop admission, but they trigger disciplinary review (e.g., housing or probation) under the UW System Student Code and can affect financial aid. It could also effect admission into Graduate Programs [1, 4]

Can teachers confiscate a vape if they see it?

-Yes they can, but teachers might also choose to likely contact an Administrator or Officer Oren for support on this. They are also required to turn over any vape to an administrator or Officer Oren. Stoughton High school is a drug free and vape free campus.

Mental Health Questions

Does therapy really help?

- Yes. Therapy can be a path toward recovery and healing, helping you recognize that your past choices do not have to define your future.
- Support at School: Counselors provide a safe place to talk, and the school offers one-on-one counseling and support groups (like N.O.T. for tobacco) to help you in a way that works for you!

Why do people care so much about relationships and are eager to fight over it? (reflective)

- Relationships matter a lot because many people want to feel close to others, understood, and cared about. When something feels off, stressful, threatened, or someone gets hurt, emotions can escalate really fast and that can turn into arguments or drama. Learning how to talk it out, set boundaries, and respect each other can help things stay healthier and less stressful.

Why is cyberbullying/harassment so common?-Reflective / Who can you talk to if you are being cyberbullied?

- Cyberbullying unfortunately happens. There could be any number of reasons, but people often say things online they would never say in person because they feel anonymous or detached from the harm they are causing.
- If you are being harassed, tell a trusted adult immediately. You can specifically reach out to a school counselor, an administrator, or Officer Oren for help.

How would I progress through life after this? (reflective)

-No matter what choices you have made in your past, you do not have to let them define your future. If you take a THC gummy or drink underage, it is not the end of the world. If you are caught with a vape at school, there is still time to take the help that if offered, learn to quit, and move on. If you are struggling with the decisions you have made in the past and you want to make better choices in the future and you are not sure how, reach out to a trusted adult for support.

Legal Questions

What is the curfew in Stoughton?

- **Under 15:** 10 PM (Sun-Thu) / 11 PM (Fri-Sat)
- **15-17:** 11 PM (Sun-Thu) / Midnight (Fri-Sat)

Note: If you're coming from work or a school event, you're usually good.

What to do if I am taken advantage of?

- Tell Someone Fast: Reach out to a parent, teacher, or student services staff member immediately.
- You will **NOT** get fined or get in trouble by telling someone what happened.

What would it be if you're the passenger and you're injured in a car accident?

- If the driver were underage and under the influence, the driver faces those consequences, including mandatory court appearances, huge fines, and losing their driver's license.
- If you were under the influence, even being a passenger you can still be charged being a minor under the influence.

Is there a bigger fine for more offenses?

- When I order a forfeiture (which is like a fine, a money penalty) I also must order statutorily-mandated court costs. The total amount is typically \$100-\$200 per citation. A major exception is where there is a conviction for Habitual Truancy. The forfeiture and costs there total \$701.

How do they determine the amounts of the fine?

The judge determines that at the time of sentencing.

Is there any way to take a citation off my permanent record?

- For ordinance violations committed by a juvenile, which are the only juvenile cases I hear, there is generally no public record of a conviction. The Municipal Court maintains its own internal records, but those are not publicly available. So no "permanent record" to worry about.
- - HOWEVER, there are some exceptions. All traffic violations and underage alcohol violations (such as underage possession of alcohol or underage drinking) must be reported to the Division of Motor Vehicles and will always be on the Defendant's driving record. That record is generally available to the public and cannot be expunged.

Can you go to jail if you sexually assault someone while you are underage?

- The short answer is "yes", but it can get a bit complicated. If you are under age 17 and commit a sexual assault, the District Attorney's Office may file a petition with the Circuit Court in Madison asking that you be found a juvenile delinquent. If you are found to be a juvenile delinquent there are many dispositional options the Court can order, including incarceration. If you are 17 and commit a sexual assault you will face the same range of penalties as someone who is 18 would face.
- This is explained in further detail below.

Are there different types of Sexual Assault?

- Yes. Many. First we have to look at the statutory definitions involved, most of which are in Wisconsin Statutes Section 939.22 and—as pertains to people under the age of 18—Section 948.01. The

definitions are very detailed and specific (and in some cases long) so I will give some general but admittedly oversimplified definitions here. I would urge educators to reproduce the applicable statutes verbatim for discussion with students so as to avoid misunderstandings.

- “Sexual contact” means intentionally touching another person’s intimate parts (including butt, breast, penis and vulvar region) for the purpose of sexually degrading or humiliating the victim or to sexually arouse or gratify the defendant.
- “Sexual Intercourse” means penetration, however slight, of the vagina as well as oral sex or anal sex, where the defendant inserts one of their body parts into the victim, inserts an object into the victim or causes the victim to insert a body part or object into the victim.
- “Child Pornography” is defined in Sec. 948.12. In general terms it is images of a child engaged in sexually explicit conduct where the person who accesses or possesses the image(s) knows they possess them, knows or should know that the image(s) contain sexually explicit conduct and knows or should know that the person depicted engaging in the sexually explicit conduct is under 18 years old. This also includes virtual images. Manufacturing child pornography is defined in Sec. 948.05 (1)(m). Basically it means creating images of child pornography.
- Sexual Assault where the victim is age 16 or older is defined in Sec. 940.225 In general it is defined as follows:
 - **First Degree Sexual Assault:** Sexual contact or intercourse without consent causing pregnancy or great bodily harm or by use or threat of a dangerous weapon.
 - **Second Degree Sexual Assault:** Sexual contact or intercourse without consent by use or threat of force; where the contact or intercourse causes injury or significant mental harm; where the contact or intercourse is aided or abetted by another person; where the victim is unconscious or highly intoxicated; or where the victim is mentally incapable of granting consent to the intercourse or contact.
 - **Third Degree Sexual Assault:** Sexual intercourse without the victim’s consent.
 - **Fourth Degree Sexual Assault:** Sexual contact without the victim’s consent.
 - **Sexual assault of a child:** These statutes generally apply in cases where the victim is under the age of 16.
 - **First Degree Sexual Assault of a Child:** This applies where someone has sexual intercourse with a child under the age of 12; where the victim is under the age of 13 and has been caused great bodily harm by the assault; or where the victim is under the age of 16 and the assault was accomplished by use or threat of force or violence. Where the victim is under the age of 13 but where there has been no great bodily harm as a result the matter can also be charged as First Degree Sexual Assault of a child, but with a somewhat lesser penalty.
 - **Second Degree Sexual Assault of a Child:** Sexual contact or intercourse with a person under the age of 16.
 - **Sexual Intercourse With a Child Age 16 or 17 where the assailant is 19 or older.**

Maximum Penalties: First Degree Sexual Assault (adult victim)— 60 years.

Second Degree Sexual Assault (adult victim)—40 years

Third Degree Sexual Assault (adult victim)—10 years

Fourth Degree Sexual Assault (adult victim) 9 months

First Degree Sexual Assault of a Child (where great bodily harm results)—life imprisonment

Other First Degree Sexual Assault of a Child—60 years

Second Degree Sexual Assault of a Child—40 years

Possession of Child Pornography—25 years, unless the defendant is under 19 years of age in which case the maximum is 3.5 years

Manufacture Child Pornography—12.5 years

Is there a way to get off the Sex Offender Registry list and how long are you on?

- In almost all cases where a defendant has been convicted of a felony sexual assault they must register as a sex offender for a period of anywhere from 15 years to life, depending on the severity of the offense. In some cases a person on the SO Registry will also have to wear an electronic ankle monitor restricting their movement, sometimes for life. As far as I know there is no way to petition for “early release” from the Registry.

What would happen once they find the person who assaulted me?

- That is a very complicated question with a lot of possible answers. The simple way to answer it is that once the police have concluded their investigation they may arrest the assailant and refer them to the District Attorney’s Office for possible charges. This would be the situation where the police believe there a relatively strong case. They may also refer the case to the DA’s Office for them to make the decision as to whether or not to issue an arrest warrant. Either way, it is up to the District Attorney’s Office—and only the DA’s Office-- to decide whether or not to press charges.
- Once a matter has been referred to the DA’s Office to make a charging decision, that office will promptly contact the victim in the matter to advise them of their rights under Wisconsin law as the victim of a crime. Those rights include a meeting with the prosecutor assigned to the case to discuss it.
- The case may eventually proceed to trial, and the crime victim may be called on to testify. It is extremely important to know, however, that especially in cases of crimes against children the staff in the DA’s Office will do their best to keep the victim informed as to how the case is progressing through the criminal justice system and to make them as comfortable with that process as possible.
- They will also take into account the victim’s wishes in prosecuting the case, but ultimately they have to do what they think is in the best interests of the community, even if it might not be exactly what the victim hopes will happen.

How long can a minor be put in jail?

- First, in Wisconsin criminal law applies to any offender 17 years old or older. That means that if a 17-year-old commits a crime (battery, theft, burglary, etc.) they face the same potential penalties as someone who is 35—including jail or prison.
- Second, in most situations if someone under the age of 17 commits an offense that would normally be considered a crime (such as battery, theft, burglary, etc) that matter can be referred by the police to the District Attorney’s Office for the filing of a Juvenile Delinquency petition. If they do file such a petition and the juvenile is found by the Court to be delinquent, there are various possible dispositions the Court may order, including probation, removal from the home and secure custody for up to 30 days.
- If a juvenile commits certain very serious offenses, such as First Degree Intentional Homicide, the DA’s Office may file a criminal complaint, even if the juvenile is as young as 10. The Court then may determine whether the case should remain in Criminal Court or whether it should be sent to Juvenile Court. Similarly, if a juvenile is the subject of a Delinquency Petition, the DA’s Office can ask the Court to waive the case into Criminal Court. If that happens and the juvenile is convicted, they are subject to the same possible criminal penalties as if they were an adult.