



NEWS RELEASE

Media Contact: Jennifer Maurer
External Communications Manager
Jennifer.maurer@mahec.net
828-257-4445

Original Children’s Musical Educates North Carolina Youth About Dangers of Opioids *It’s Just a Pill debuts at Ferguson Auditorium on March 8 before touring North Carolina*

(Asheville, N.C. – March 4, 2019) — **On Friday, March 8, at 7:00 pm**, the Mountain Area Health Education Center will debut [*It’s Just a Pill*](#) to a full house at A-B Tech’s Ferguson Auditorium in Asheville.

This professionally produced musical takes a creative approach to educating children, their families, and teachers about the risks associated with opioids and substance misuse. Accidental drug overdoses, usually involving an opioid, are now the [leading cause of accidental death in North Carolina](#) and the U.S.

The story follows a young middle-school girl and her efforts to learn about the dangers of opioids at the same time the epidemic hits surprisingly close to home. The play is being produced by MAHEC, a state leader in opioid misuse prevention and substance use treatment in primary care.

The script and lyrics were written by MAHEC’s Melody Hays, a former children’s theater manager at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, with input from Blake Fagan, MD, MAHEC’s Chief Education Officer and North Carolina’s Clinical Consultant for the Opioid Crisis, and a team of behavioral health, school health, and parenting program specialists.

“I was thrilled when Melody brought this project to us,” shares MAHEC’s CEO Jeff Heck, MD. “We know more than 90 percent of adults with substance use disorders started using before age 18. And half of them started using drugs before age 15,” he explains. “We have to educate kids before they misuse opioids because even the first time can be fatal, especially when fentanyl is involved.”

It’s Just a Pill is scored by [David Ruttenberg](#), a GRAMMY® producer who has worked with Peter Gabriel, Stevie Wonder, and Janet Jackson, and is directed by Bruce Hostetler of the [Portland Revels](#).

Following the red-carpet premiere, the play will tour the eastern part of the state before returning to WNC for performances in Buncombe, Henderson, and Madison counties. The first run is slated to wrap up by the end of March after reaching an estimated audience of 4,000 youth, teachers, and parents.

“BCS is appreciative of the opportunity for our students to see this professional production that is not only entertaining but will also help our students understand the appropriate use of medications, the dangers of substance abuse, and ways to seek help,” shares Susanne sSwanger, Associate Superintendent of Buncombe County Schools.

“MAHEC continues to be a fantastic school partner,” adds Swanger. “We are fortunate to have their expertise to help us address this important area of concern for students, staff, and families.”

Mountain Area Health Education Center

121 Hendersonville Road • Asheville, NC 28803 • Phone (828) 257-4400 • www.mahec.net

After the initial run, the script and supplemental curricula will be available through MAHEC for use by substance misuse prevention groups, churches, schools, libraries, drama teams, and anyone who wishes to independently produce and use the play as a prevention and awareness resource.

Doors open at 6:00 pm. Media are welcome.

More information is available online at mahec.net/justapill.

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Mountain Area Health Education Center was established in 1974 and is a leader in healthcare, education, and innovation. Located in Asheville, MAHEC serves a 16-county region in Western North Carolina. It is the largest [Area Health Education Center](#) in North Carolina, which evolved to address national and state concerns with the supply, retention, and quality of health professionals. MAHEC's mission is to train the next generation of healthcare professionals for Western North Carolina through quality healthcare, innovative education, and best practice models that can be replicated nationally. MAHEC's Biltmore campus is also home to [UNC Health Sciences at MAHEC](#), an academic health center in partnership with UNC-Chapel Hill that includes programs from the UNC School of Medicine, UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health, and UNC Eshelman School of Pharmacy. For more information, visit www.mahec.net or call 828-257-4400.