

Tobacco-Free School Enforcement Guidelines

Some of the most frequently asked questions about a tobacco-free school policy concern enforcement. Experience shows that policies that are clearly communicated and consistently enforced for all individuals are the most successful. Without effective enforcement, schools and students cannot receive the benefits of a tobacco-free school policy.

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A Plan for Enforcement

School districts adopting this policy should develop an enforcement plan. The enforcement plan can be included in the new policy, included in school administrative procedures, or can be a stand-alone document. The enforcement plan should include:

- Specific strategies that will be used to communicate the policy to students, staff and visitors;
- Consequences of violation of the new tobacco use policy for students, staff and visitors;
- Areas in the schools and on school grounds which will be monitored;
- The people who will have responsibility for monitoring and enforcement;
- Training for enforcement personnel; and
- A process for handling complaints and other issues.

A detailed, clear and comprehensive enforcement plan will allow for easier acceptance of the policy and will result in fewer challenges.

Who Should Enforce the Tobacco-Free Policy?

Overall compliance monitoring and enforcement of the tobacco use policy should be designated as the responsibility of one person at the district level, usually a school administrator, such as the superintendent, the Safe and Drug Free School Coordinator, or the Healthful Living Coordinator. At the same time, each school should have one person designated to oversee compliance with the policy, such as the principal, assistant principal, health teacher or school nurse. These enforcement officers will need to maintain a working knowledge of applicable state and federal laws regarding tobacco use, have a clear understanding of the policy, and understand the implementation strategies used within the school and the district to ensure compliance. They should meet periodically with the district superintendent, the school board, or designated district administrator to provide updates as to the progress of their schools' tobacco policy enforcement. At each individual school, policy enforcement responsibilities should be shared among other staff, parents and school volunteers, and students.

Clear Expectations

It is important to outline the rules and expectations of a tobacco-free school policy as they apply to students, staff and visitors. The superintendent, district school board, or human resources department should establish disciplinary actions and appropriate avenues for reporting infractions. Enforcement policies should emphasize support rather than punishment and should be clearly communicated and consistently applied

At a minimum, tobacco use rules and disciplinary actions resulting from infractions should be included in employee and student handbooks, all contracts, in sports or other program brochures handed out to school visitors, and in letters home to parents periodically throughout the year.

Uniform Enforcement

Make a strong commitment to enforce the policy consistently. Ask all school staff to assist in uniform implementation. Ensure consistent enforcement by letting staff know that the same restrictions that apply to students will apply to them, as well. Students in tobacco-free school districts have pointed out that while they are punished for tobacco related violations, adults – including staff – are often allowed to violate the policy without consequence. Eliminating this double standard will do a lot to support the tobacco-free policy. Do not make exceptions for important visitors. Every institution with a tobacco policy will have an important visitor who uses tobacco. Visitors will recognize the importance of compliance if they are made aware of it. Also seek the assistance of students, parents and community volunteers for enforcement. Explain procedures for dealing with fellow staff, students or visitors who violate the policy. Assign specific duties to staff in the enforcement process (e.g. teachers report students they see using or possessing tobacco).

Ongoing Communication

Communication of the policy should be positive and emphasize that tobacco-free is in the best educational, health, and social interests of all. Communication should occur in many ways – including employee and student handbooks, signage, announcements at athletic events and on all applications and contracts. Both the policy and the penalties of violation should be clear to all students, staff and visitors. For more information on communicating a tobacco-free policy see the [Checklist for Communicating A 100% Tobacco-Free School Policy](#).

Tobacco-Free Lifestyle Promotion

Providing ongoing tobacco-free lifestyle promotion will help establish a tobacco-free school norm. This will, in turn, support policy enforcement. Engage all students in events and activities that promote a tobacco-free lifestyle. Link up with national events such as the Great American Smoke Out, Kick Butts Day, or World No Tobacco Day. Also, establish connections between the school and community agencies and the media to support prevention and cessation.

Enforcement Options for Students, Staff and Visitors

Across the state, policy enforcement varies with respect to consequences or penalties for tobacco violations and provisions for positive options for punishment. We encourage you to talk with administrators, staff, students and parents to identify the best strategies for enforcing this policy within the school district. Here are some suggestions based on the experiences of other school districts in North Carolina and across the country:

For students

- **Parent/guardian notification:** The policy should address parents/guardian notification procedures. The parent/guardian should be notified of all violations and actions taken by the school.
- **Support:** Refer students to the guidance counselor, school nurse, or other health or counseling services for all offenses for screening, information, and counseling and referral. Tobacco use is an addictive disease, not merely a discipline problem. It usually indicates psychosocial concerns of the adolescent and the student may engage in other unhealthy behaviors such as drug or alcohol use. Students who use tobacco may also have developed or exacerbated health problems as a result of their use. A screening will help to identify these at an early stage. Your tobacco policy will be more effective if you have clear procedures for identification, intervention and referral of students with tobacco-related problems.
- **Mandatory education programs.**
It is strongly recommended that all student violators attend an alternative to

suspension (ATS) program that provides education on the addiction process and offers options for cessation. There are several ATS models that are available. These programs help students understand their tobacco behaviors, the risks to their health, and the skills that can help them if they decide to quit smoking or chewing tobacco. An ATS program should not be confused with a cessation program. Some schools have incorporated mandatory respect and responsibly training or school/community service to play a role in enforcement.

- **School/community service.**

Some schools have used school or community service projects as part of the consequences. This alternative can include activities related to the tobacco violation such as cleaning up school grounds of litter or providing tobacco education to younger students. In some cases, parent/guardians have been involved in the service requirement. Be sure to allow flexible scheduling to ensure that students don't lose instructional time and that parents don't miss work. Parents often prefer the opportunity for their children to choose among a few different types of service projects as opposed to a single, mandated requirement.

- **Cessation:** Research tells us that half of all young people who use tobacco want to quit. Offering cessation classes or helping to link students who violate the policy to community based cessation programs will motivate students to quit and introduce skills and techniques they can use to accomplish this. It will also help student develop coping methods to prevent relapse. The Not-On-Tobacco Program (NOT) is an example of a teen cessation program offered by school districts across the state. Scheduling of teen cessation programs vary. They can be offered afterschool, weekly during consecutive periods (so students won't miss too much class), on Saturdays, or during lunch. Some school districts offer teen cessation programs multiple times per year to the entire school body, as well as to ATS students.

- **Suspension:** Suspension rarely helps student tobacco addiction. Ideally suspension would only be used after a student has had several prior violations or refused to participate in other outlined measures. Your policy should include a suspension alternative. To provide uniformity and fairness in the decision-making process, school districts should clearly outline conditions that will lead to suspension. Students and parents should be shown the steps of enforcement so that they understand the seriousness of this action. Suspension should always be accompanied by counseling. A re-entry conference should be held prior to the student's return to school with the student, parent or guardian, and administrator. If suspension is deemed absolutely necessary, such as in the case of a repeat offender who refuses to participate in other options offered, alternative forms of suspension such as in-school suspension are preferable to out of school suspension.

For staff

- **Education and support:** Encourage staff to talk with their health professional regarding their tobacco use. As noted above, tobacco use is an addictive disease and staff who use tobacco may have developed health problems as a result. It is strongly recommended that all staff violators be provided with information on the dangers of tobacco use and on cessation options available to them in the community.
- **Disciplinary action.** After the first offense, staff violations should be considered as insubordination, and subject to disciplinary action as they would be for any other school policy violation. Staff must be expected to adhere to the policy stipulations as outlined.

For parents, family members and the public

- **Communication:** Communication with the public should always focus on positive messages to enforce the policy. Enlist the support of the public in enforcing the policy through ongoing communication of the policy and involvement in positive tobacco prevention activities.
- **Progressive enforcement:** A progressive enforcement policy is recommended. Public sanctions should involve the following: a) request the individual to stop and refer to the school policy; b) if person refuses to stop, request that the individual leave the site of the school function and refer to the school policy; c) if the person refuses to leave or is a repeat violator, refer to local authorities and the person is subject to a fine or other usual measure.