

Frequently Asked Questions About Tobacco-Free Schools

1. What is the definition of a 100% tobacco-free school district?

No student, staff or school visitor (including contracted workers) are permitted to smoke, inhale, dip, or chew tobacco at any time, including non-school hours:

- In any building, facility, or vehicle owned, leased, rented or contracted by the school district;
- On school grounds, athletic grounds, or parking lots;
- At any school-sponsored event off campus.

Some school districts have extended this ban by:

- Prohibiting students from possessing tobacco products;
- Banning all tobacco promotion and advertising in the school district. This includes prohibiting students from wearing or bringing personal items that promote tobacco – such as bags, lighters, t-shirts, and hats; and
- Closing the campus so students do not leave during breaks in the school day to use tobacco.

2. Is it legal in North Carolina to have a 100% tobacco-free policy in a school district?

Starting in August 2008 the North Carolina General Assembly (NCGA) requires all public schools in the state to be 100% tobacco-free, campus-wide, including all school-related events. Prior to the current law, it was already legal for a North Carolina school district to adopt a 100% tobacco free school policy. In July 2003, the NCGA passed a law (SL 2003-421) which stated that nothing G.S. 143-595 through G.S. 143-601, or any other section prohibits a local board of education from adopting and enforcing a more restrictive policy on the use of tobacco in school buildings, in school facilities, on school campuses, or at school-related or school-sponsored events, and in or on other school property.

3. We are mostly tobacco-free, so what will be gained by going 100% tobacco-free?

- Exposure to secondhand smoke – even a little secondhand smoke – is dangerous. It is a known carcinogen (causes cancer). As little as 30 minutes of exposure to secondhand smoke can affect the coronary arteries of healthy, young nonsmokers. It causes acute and chronic respiratory disease and causes or exacerbates asthma, ear infections and upper respiratory infections – primary causes of school absence.
- Asthma is a major cause of school absenteeism. Reducing secondhand smoke as an asthma trigger will result in reduced absenteeism.
- Positive adult role modeling for students is critical to send a message to our youth that is consistent with the tobacco use prevention curriculum taught in the classroom.
- A 100% tobacco-free school policy will help establish a tobacco-free norm.

A tobacco-free policy prepares students for the realities of an increasingly tobacco-free world – one where tobacco use is prohibited at worksites, in restaurants, on airplanes, in malls and other places.

4. With the current teacher shortage, will we risk losing staff that might be tobacco users?

In talking to personnel at the school districts that have adopted a 100% tobacco-free policy, teacher attrition is not an issue. Most human resources personnel tell us that teacher recruitment and retention issues are related to local supplements, geographical location and family situations – not to the implementation of a tobacco-free school policy. Furthermore, anecdotal information from administrators in tobacco-free school districts suggests that many job applicants want a tobacco-free work environment, and view this policy as an asset.

5. What are the benefits of offering cessation programs for staff?

Experience shows that employees from school districts adopting a 100% tobacco-free school policy often use this as an opportunity to cut down their tobacco use or quit. This can lead to decreased absences due to tobacco-related illnesses, decreases tobacco related health care costs, and increases productivity. We strongly encourage school districts to talk with these employees about the kinds of support they may need to be successful in quitting, and to consider offering these services and resources. For example, a number of school districts have provided financial support for employees to attend smoking cessation classes. Others have offered financial assistance for nicotine replacement therapy. Resources and support to

assist employees in quitting should be provided early in the policy development process so that staff are prepared when the campus becomes tobacco-free.

Helping tobacco users on staff who want to quit has many health benefits and potential medical cost savings for employees and the school as an employer. It will also make enforcement easier – as most violators of the 100% tobacco-free policy will be people who are addicted to tobacco. The benefits will be well worth the initial investment. Work with voluntary health agencies, hospitals, health departments, Employee Assistance Programs and other community organizations to identify local resources to support employees who use tobacco and wish to quit.

6. Will we risk losing our adult supporters at athletic events?

It is highly unlikely that you will lose adult supporters at athletic events. In fact, research shows that you will likely gain six new supporters for anyone who expresses displeasure. Administrators in school districts that have adopted a 100% tobacco-free policy have noted that the vast majority of adults have willingly complied with the tobacco-free school policy during athletic events. This makes sense, as these adults are school supporters and often have children attending the school. They understand and appreciate that school policies, such ones prohibiting tobacco use and alcohol use on campus, are designed to protect the safety of youth and offer a positive environment for students and families. Furthermore, the expectation that an event or a facility is tobacco-free has become more common in many social situations as we have become more aware of the health risks of secondhand smoke. As malls, movie theaters, restaurants and air travel have become smoke-free, we have not seen a drop off in patronage. The school policy does not require folks to quit using tobacco; it simply asks them to refrain from tobacco use on school property and at school sponsored events.

7. How do we handle the maintenance staff, construction crews and contractors that come on campus and use tobacco?

Much like you would handle enforcement of other policies related to use of certain substances on campus (e.g. alcohol) or certain behavior expectations (e.g. non-violence, no firearms). Clearly communicating the policy to firms and companies that contract with the schools is key. Inform potential contractors of the policy in all interviews, and include a no-tobacco-use clause in all contracts. Include a written statement in the contract that firms or organizations will be charged a cleaning fee if they do not ensure that staff and visitors comply with the policy. In addition, make sure that there is signage on campus communicating the policy.

8. If we develop a 100% policy, how will we enforce it?

Experience has shown that early and frequent communication, such as signage, letters home, information in event programs, and announcements during outdoor athletic events, is the key to successfully enforcing the policy. For ideas on how to effectively communicate the policy, see the handout "[Checklist for Communicating a 100% Tobacco-Free School Policy](#)" and "[Event Announcements for 100% Tobacco-Free School Districts](#)". Both are included in the Tobacco-Free Schools Policy Communication and Enforcement Toolkit. [Contact the Tobacco Prevention and Control Branch \(TPCB\)](#) for a free copy.

We encourage school districts to develop enforcement procedures for the tobacco use policy just as they would for any other policy. A detailed, comprehensive enforcement plan will allow for easier acceptance of the policy and fewer violations. A comprehensive enforcement plan for students, staff and visitors will include the following:

- Consequences for violating the policy;
- Details on how the policy will be enforced (for example: teachers will monitor areas where students gather; school resource officers will patrol stands at athletic events);
- The people who will have responsibility for enforcement;
- Training provided to enforcement personnel; and
- A process for handling complaints and other issues.

School districts that have implemented a tobacco-free school policy offer the following suggestions to enhance enforcement:

- Be positive. Emphasize that being tobacco-free is in the best educational, health and economic interests of all.
- Clearly communicate the policy using a variety of methods.
- Develop a comprehensive enforcement plan and commit to enforcing the new policy consistently. This will send a strong message about the importance of the policy by those who are enforcing it. Expect some people to "test" whether the policy will be consistently enforced.
- Select an implementation date with significance, such as the start of the new school year.
- Allow sufficient time for people to prepare for implementation. Make sure that tobacco users have time to reduce or quit using tobacco.
- Provide everyone with an opportunity to get involved in implementation and enforcement, including tobacco users, students, volunteers, maintenance workers and others.

- Ask all staff to assist in communicating and ensuring uniform enforcement of the policy. Organize special sessions to train and educate those who will be taking the lead on enforcement.

For more ideas and strategies for enforcement, [contact the TPCB](#) for a copy of the Tobacco-Free Schools Policy Communication and Enforcement Toolkit. The Toolkit contains a number of handouts – including "[Common Challenges for School Tobacco Policy Enforcement](#)", "[Strategies for Enforcement Problem Solving](#)", and "[Tobacco-Free School Enforcement Guidelines](#)" and an [in-service training](#) that is available to school districts that addresses enforcement.

9. Some organizations and employers, including hospitals and government offices, have areas for adult tobacco users. Why should our policy be stricter?

Schools are a primary place where our children develop healthy or unhealthy habits. Tobacco-free schools provide the optimal learning and social environment for students, and a healthy working environment for staff.

If tobacco use is allowed on campus, the school is supporting an environment that is inconsistent with the tobacco use prevention messages taught in the classroom by allowing students to view adult role models engaging in unhealthy habits. This also exposes students and other staff members to secondhand smoke.

10. What about the argument that it's legal for adults to use tobacco?

Schools have the authority to develop, adopt and implement policies that are in the best interest of the students and staff. For example, it's legal for adults to use other age-restricted products, such as alcohol. However, allowing adults to use these products on campus is not in the best interest of students; therefore, these products are banned on school campuses. This fact is especially true for tobacco.

Tobacco is a legal product for adults to purchase and use, and a tobacco-free school policy restricts tobacco use **on school campus (and at school events) only**. Adult tobacco users have the option of going off campus to use tobacco. However, students are required to be at school and don't have the right to leave in order to avoid exposure to secondhand smoke.

11. Don't teachers have a right to smoke?

More importantly, youth and non-smoking school staff have the right to breathe smoke-free air. Remember that most adults (approximately 75%) and the majority of young people do not use tobacco products.

12. We have a number of tobacco growers/processing plants in our area. Won't prohibiting tobacco use on campus hurt the local economy?

Clearly, a long-term fall in demand for tobacco will eventually lead to job losses. However, it should be stressed that any fall in demand will occur slowly, over many generations, not overnight. Preventing tobacco use on the campus will have absolutely no impact on the local economy. Furthermore, people may still choose to use tobacco products, just not on school property or at school sponsored events.

At the same time, we have to consider the **costs** of tobacco use on North Carolina communities as estimated by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

- Annual health care costs in North Carolina directly caused by smoking are \$1.92 billion.
- Residents' state and federal tax burden from smoking-caused government expenditures are \$498 per household.
- Smoking-related productivity losses in North Carolina are \$2.82 billion.

These amounts do not include health costs caused by exposure to secondhand smoke and residential and commercial property losses from smoking-caused fires (more than \$500 million per year nationwide); extra cleaning and maintenance costs made necessary by tobacco smoke and litter (about \$4+ billion nationwide for commercial establishments alone); and additional productivity losses from smoking-caused work absences, smoking breaks, and on-the-job performance declines and early termination of employment caused by smoking-caused disability or illness (dollar amount listed above is just from productive work lives shortened by smoking-caused death). (Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids)