

The Importance of a Comprehensive Tobacco-Free School Policy

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The Center for Disease Control and Prevention states, **“Developing and enforcing a tobacco-free policy in schools is the number one strategy in reducing teen smoking...** There is a strong link between teen tobacco use and other risky behaviors, lower academic performance, and poor school attendance.”ⁱ

The Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids in 2006 reported **90% of adult smokers began in their teens** and nearly 2/3 became daily smokers before age 19.ⁱⁱ

The American Journal of Public Health reports, **“Students who attend schools with tobacco-free policies that are enforced are less likely to use tobacco.”**ⁱⁱⁱ

For several years, the Tobacco Dependence Program has been involved in reviewing school policies throughout New Jersey through their work with Youth Quit2Win and the REBEL programs. Often we have found tobacco policies to be vague and unenforced. Instead of providing very clear guidelines to students, staff and visitors regarding possession and use on school property, tobacco is either clumped in with all other drugs of abuse, or there is one or two sentences stating, “No smoking allowed on school property. A fine of \$200 will be given to violators”.

The fact is, tobacco is a drug, and policies on possession and use of it on school property should be developed and enforced just as those for other substances. Unfortunately, this is not always the case. If a student were to be caught using or possessing other substances, such as marijuana or alcohol, a trained counselor is immediately alerted to perform a formal assessment and provide the student with appropriate education and treatment options. However, with tobacco, students are often treated in a very punitive manner with fines, detention and suspension and are provided little or no education or cessation services. Policy awareness is also an issue – we have found that many students and staff do not even know what the policy is, because it is buried somewhere in a 100-page handbook or policy manual.

States across the US that have implemented Comprehensive Tobacco-Free School Policies (CTFSP or TFS) have shown positive results. North Carolina is one of these model states, where the percentage of school districts in North Carolina adopting 100% TFS policies increased from 5% in 2000 to 75% in 2007. Building on that momentum, in 2007 the state legislature further bolstered the campaign by passing a law mandating statewide TFS compliance. By July 2008, all 115 of North Carolina’s school districts were 100% tobacco-free. How did these policy changes affect students? When comparing schools with CTFSP for 4 years to those without:

1. Students at CTFSP schools had a 40% lower smoking rate
2. Students at CTFSP schools had a 32% lower use rate for all kinds of tobacco
3. Schools who only had a policy in place for 1-2 years still had 5-10% lower smoking/tobacco use rates than schools with no CTFSP
4. Schools without a CTFSP had the highest smoking and tobacco use rates among students in the state

It is clear that the adoption of a CTFSP helps improve the health and wellbeing of a school’s students.

The New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services, with recommendations from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, developed a tool kit to assess current NJ school tobacco policies. Part of the tool kit provides a sample Comprehensive Tobacco-Free School Policy (CTFSP) which could be implemented in all New Jersey school districts. REBEL (Reaching Everyone by Exposing Lies, a statewide, youth-led anti tobacco movement) students are utilizing this tool kit to assess policies in their schools and suggest changes to their school administration. REBEL teens continually educate their peers and community members on the dangers of tobacco use. The program runs throughout New Jersey middle and high schools and has over 10,000 participating teens. Each year students advocate for a cause. Previously, REBEL teens helped

Highlights of a Good Comprehensive Tobacco-Free School Policy:

PURPOSE OF POLICY

- It protects the health of students, faculty, staff, and visitors by creating a tobacco free, healthy learning environment.
- It recognizes tobacco is a gateway drug and highly addictive.
- It sends a clear, consistent message to all that tobacco use is not acceptable in educational settings and ensures that all youth have positive, tobacco-free role models at school.
- It presents all the federal and state laws which back the policy.

DEFINES FOR WHOM, WHEN AND WHERE THE POLICY APPLIES

- It clearly defines for all students, faculty, staff and visitors
- It clearly defines on all school property, at all school events and in school vehicles
- It clearly defines 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

CLEARLY DESCRIBES WHAT IS MEANT BY *TOBACCO PRODUCTS*

- It clearly defines ALL tobacco products are prohibited.
- This includes cigarettes, cigars, blunts, bidis, kreteks, hookah, pipes, chewing tobacco and all other forms of smokeless tobacco, rolling papers and any other items containing or reasonably resembling tobacco or tobacco products.

COMPLIANCE ISSUES

It clearly defines compliance issues for students, faculty, staff and visitors and states consequences for violating the policy.

RECOGNIZES TOBACCO USE AS NICOTINE ADDICTION

It recognizes that people who are addicted to nicotine need help and support rather than punishment and offers opportunities for education and support to quit.

implement NJ's smoke-free legislation. Today, their main goal is to urge schools to adopt 100% Comprehensive Tobacco-Free School Policies.

So why are REBEL students fighting for CTFSP when schools already have tobacco policies? Because current policies are not working! Students continue to use tobacco and its use is often overlooked by administration, teachers and parents. Tobacco is considered a "gateway drug," which means tobacco use can lead to other drugs of abuse. As tobacco companies bombard our nation's teens with new trendy products, tobacco use in schools must be taken seriously and properly controlled.

As smoking prevalence is dropping across the country, the tobacco industry is



designing clever colorful marketing campaigns to entice youth to start smoking or use other forms of tobacco. Smokeless products are popping up all over, including: SNUS (tobacco in a tiny tea-bag), tobacco sticks (similar to a toothpick which dissolves in your mouth), tobacco orbs (mint or candy-like) and tobacco strips (similar to a breath strip which dissolves in your mouth). All of these products contain nicotine and encourage dependency. What's more, many are marketed as a way to use tobacco when

smoking is prohibited – a way for smokers to maintain their nicotine addiction in the spite of clean air regulations.

A Comprehensive Tobacco-Free School Policy would help by clearly defining ALL tobacco products, as well as clearly stating that it applies to ALL, EVERYWHERE, 24/7 on school grounds, at school sponsored activities and in school vehicles. In addition to enforcing consequences for tobacco use, it would implement tobacco-related education and cessation opportunities for those abusing the policy in a manner similar to policies for other drugs of abuse.

REBEL students in Middlesex County are encouraging their peers, faculty, parents and community members to get involved in supporting policy change by participating in the "Count Me In" campaign. If you'd like to learn more about the "Count Me In" campaign and REBEL'S efforts for CTFSP please contact the Middlesex County REBEL Coordinator, Nancy Speelman Edwards, at 732-235-8218 or by email at nancy.speelman@umdnj.edu

i U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). Preventing Tobacco Use Among Young People: A Report of the Surgeon General. Atlanta, Georgia: HHS, PHS, CDC, NCCD-PHP, OSH, 1994. In: What is the Tobacco Free Schools Initiative? <http://www.tobaccofreecny.org/pages/schoolpolicy.htm>.

ii SAMHSA, HHS, Calculated based on data in 2006 National Household Survey on Drug Use and Health, <http://www.oas.samhsa.gov/nsduh.htm>. In: Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids. Smoking and Kids Fact Sheet. Updated 2008. Available at <http://tobaccofreekids.org/research/factsheets>. In: What is the Tobacco Free Schools Initiative? <http://www.tobaccofreecny.org/pages/schoolpolicy.htm>.

iii Pentz, M.A., Brannon, B.R., Charlin, V.L., Barrett, E.J., MacKinnon, D.P. & Flay, B.R. (1989). The power of policy: The relationship of smoking policy to adolescent smoking. *American Journal of Public Health*, 79,(7); 857-862. In: What is the Tobacco Free Schools Initiative? <http://www.tobaccofreecny.org/pages/schoolpolicy.htm>.

Latino Outreach At A Glance

by Claribel A. Beltrez

In 2008, the Tobacco Dependence Program was awarded a grant through The Rutgers Community Health Foundation with a main objective reducing the current rate of tobacco dependence and future tobacco caused disease in the people of color in New Brunswick. Specifically, we are targeting the local African American and Latino populations, and I have been given the opportunity to coordinate outreach to Hispanic people in the New Brunswick area. As a Hispanic person, I feel that I have a personal investment in this project and find it exciting to work with this population.



Coordinating with colleagues and trying to find new and effective ways to reach the local minority populations has been challenging but very rewarding. I have been developing culturally competent marketing materials as well as meeting with local Hispanic organizations to increase awareness of the smoking cessation services that are available to them. Additionally, I have attended various community events, such as health fairs, in order to reach the local Spanish-speaking populations. Although planning and executing these outreach efforts requires a lot of work, the outcome makes it all worth while. There is nothing more rewarding than seeing the people I spoke with at an outreach event arrive at the Clinic and succeed in quitting smoking.