

Several common challenges exist in enforcing school policies against tobacco use. This document describes the challenges, contributing factors and effective solutions for three areas:

1. Visitors using tobacco on school grounds.
2. Students using tobacco on school property.
3. Students leaving campus to smoke in surrounding neighborhoods.

CHALLENGE 1

Visitors Using Tobacco on School Grounds

Smoking by visitors on school grounds or at school-sponsored events is a common challenge. Several factors can contribute to this situation:

- *Lack of awareness:* Adult visitors who violate the tobacco-free policies usually do not knowingly do so. Many of the tobacco-free schools policies are new and visitors may not be aware of the changes.
- *Difficulties in suppressing the urge to use tobacco at events:* Heavily addicted users may find it difficult to refrain from tobacco use for extended periods of time – such as at athletic events or at school plays or concerts. However, they can still adhere to school policy by walking off the grounds to use tobacco. That's more than what is possible on long airline flights.
- *Hesitancy to confront violators:* School district personnel are sometimes hesitant to confront violators. Some fear that violators who are confronted may cause trouble for the schools within the larger community. Others feel that "it is not their job" to police enforcement.

SOLUTIONS

Communicating Policy Effectively

To the community-at-large: Many districts communicate their policies by publicizing them in the local newspapers. Others send notification of the policy with "parent packets" at the beginning of the year. Consequences of violation are described along with other school discipline policies. Ongoing reminders are included in parent newsletters throughout the year



ENFORCEMENT

Challenges and Solutions for Tobacco Free Schools



and/or through parent organizations such as PTA, PTO and accountability committees.

On-site policy communication: Adequate signage is an essential part of communicating tobacco-free policies. It is advisable to liberally post signs around campus. If violations continue in a particular building or in an area on school grounds, the placement and visibility of signage in these areas should be checked to ensure signs are plentiful and visible. Since smoking by visitors at athletic events is the most commonly reported problem, it is important to place signs at the entrance to stadiums, and on bleachers.

Before and during every football game and other athletic events, staff should make announcements over the loudspeaker stating that the school is tobacco-free and that the use of tobacco products is



not allowed on the premises. Announcements should remind visitors that this policy exists to protect the health of students. These same announcements can be made at plays, concerts, dances and other school events. Written event programs also provide an opportunity to convey and reinforce tobacco-free policies.

Framing of policy presentation: Regardless of the method of communication, the manner in which a policy is presented has an effect on its acceptance. Some districts emphasize that adhering to the policy is important for the example it sets for students. One administrator, who is a smoker herself, said, “Adults who violate the policy are asked to respect it because we don’t want them [the students] to start smoking. Most adults don’t want their kids smoking, so they understand.” Framing the policy as a children’s health issue is also effective. “For the safety and sake of our children, this is a tobacco-free environment” is a frequently repeated message.

Tactfully confronting violators

Gentle reminders: It is almost inevitable that district personnel will need to remind visitors of the tobacco-free policy. Most often when violations occur, visitors are unaware of the policy or have forgotten about it. Usually, a gentle verbal reminder or pointing at tobacco-free signage at the time of the violation is all that is needed. Most people at the event are school supporters with children, siblings or friends at the school. Rather than being angry, they are more likely to be embarrassed about the violation and happy to comply with the policy. One administrator asks people to extinguish his cigarette by stating, “For the sake of our students, we ask that you not smoke on school property. This is a tobacco-free campus.” While school personnel initially may fear approaching violators, the situation rarely is confrontational.

Nonverbal reminders: Another strategy is to hand violator’s information cards that inform them of the district policy. In this situation, the person approaching the violator does not have to say anything.

Enlist the help of others: Reminding violators of the tobacco-free policy is not just the task of school district personnel. Encourage members of student organizations, PTA/PTO members, and other groups with members attending events to remind spectators of the policy. When using volunteers – especially students – provide some guidance on tactful, non-confrontational approaches. You may even want to give out small supplies of the reminder cards (shown here) to these volunteers to use when appropriate.

**Our school is a tobacco-free campus.
No tobacco, please.**



Visibility of law enforcement personnel in the district

Violations of district tobacco-free policies are usually unintentional. For those rare instances when visitors refuse to comply, the visibility of law enforcement may be a useful deterrent to violation. Some districts have school resource officers (SROs) or other law enforcement personnel as part of their staff. They can monitor events, not only for tobacco use, but also for drug and alcohol use, fights, and vandalism.



CHALLENGE 2

Students Using Tobacco on School Property

There are various reasons why students are smoking and/or using chew or “spit” tobacco on school property despite the existence of school policies prohibiting tobacco use. They include:

Fitting in: The desire to “fit in” will often prompt students to smoke on school grounds.

Rebellion: Students also may be violating the policy out of rebellion or a desire to challenge authority. Tobacco is represented as an “adult behavior” in our society, and teens may perceive tobacco use as a way to assert their independence. Not only does this increase their immediate health risk, but, unfortunately, tobacco is a gateway drug and is often a precursor to underage drinking and use of other drugs such as marijuana and cocaine.

Lax enforcement: The problem is exacerbated when districts do not strictly enforce their tobacco-free policies with students. Behavior change is best achieved when consequences are immediate and consistent. Sporadic enforcement sends the message that students can “get away with it” most of the time.

Addiction to nicotine: Nicotine is a highly addictive drug. Many teenagers who smoke say they would like to give up smoking. Many make serious attempts to quit, but fail. Some students will risk violating policies to satisfy their addiction.

SOLUTIONS

Commitment to enforce

A true staff commitment to enforcing the policy is essential. It’s important that all staff have the attitude that “this is the right thing to do.” The support must come not only from the superintendent, but also from other administrators, board members, teachers, and staff throughout the district so a united front exists and kids receive a consistent message. Avoid enforcement problems by being consistent in both messages and actions.

Youth involvement in the development/enforcement of policies

One way to help prevent violations is to encourage students to get involved in the enforcement process. In some schools, students not only help develop the policies, they are also encouraged to help enforce them by appropriately confronting unacceptable behavior by fellow students and school visitors. Students can also be expected to show each other respect – which includes not exposing others to secondhand smoke or modeling unhealthy behavior. Student input can lead to effective changes that school staff may not otherwise consider. For example, some schools have shortened the break between classes as a direct response to students’ requests. Students felt the idle time created opportunities for others to break the tobacco policy.

Communicating the tobacco-free policy to students

Methods of Communication: Effective, proactive communication of the tobacco-free policy can significantly help prevent the problem of student violations. Most schools use signs to help communicate their tobacco-free policy; the signage is very helpful for policy enforcement. In many districts, every student receives a handbook at the beginning of the year that contains a contract detailing the tobacco-free policy. By requiring both the student and his/her parents to sign and return the contract stating they have read and understand the policy it is guaranteed that all parties are informed.

New student orientations for middle school, high school and transfer students provide a particularly important mechanism for conveying tobacco-free policies. Proactive communication helps to establish school norms and reduce the likelihood of policy violation. Student newsletters can also be used to announce and reinforce student tobacco use policies. Communication strategies, such as announcements for visitors at athletic events, also serve to remind students of an existing tobacco-free policy.

Framing of policy presentation: The health, academic

and social benefits of a tobacco-free school to staff and students should be part of any communications.

Include policy violation consequences in writing: The tobacco-free policy should be clear and concise, and it should elaborate not only the expected behavior, but also the consequences of failure to comply.

===== SOLUTIONS =====

Monitoring student behavior on school grounds

Staff should monitor hallways as well as school grounds to deter tobacco use. Schools typically have some sort of monitoring already in place watching for aggressive behavior and truancy. These same monitors can watch for compliance with the tobacco policy. When violations do occur, monitors should be trained to act in accordance to the school/districts' enforcement protocol.

Selected approaches to discipline for student violators

Preventive efforts can help districts avoid or lessen the problem of student violation of tobacco-free policies; nevertheless, violations can and do occur. Districts should employ different approaches consistent with district philosophy. These can include:

Progressive Discipline: In lieu of immediate suspension for policy violation, many school districts implement progressive discipline programs in an effort to keep students in school. These programs should include an educational component. The simplest progressive discipline programs specify increasingly stronger actions as the number of violations by a particular student mounts. For instance, there may be a first warning and parent conference, followed by participation in an ATS program (see below), followed by possibility of suspension.

Educational Alternatives to Suspension: Educational programs for violators, often called "alternative-to-suspension programs," or ATS, have evolved out of the school administrators' wish to keep students in school who have violated tobacco policies. These programs are often offered in conjunction with a progressive discipline plan. And, like the progressive discipline plan, they are intended to delay the more drastic disciplinary action of suspension. Most schools focus on getting compliance with the school policy, which requires the student to manage his/her tobacco use.



Typically, they include information on the negative effects of tobacco use and help the student examine his/her own use, with the goal of increasing the student's interest in cessation. ATS programs are not the same as tobacco cessation programs. A successful outcome for an educational ATS program would be no further policy violation, as opposed to the successful outcome of a cessation program, which is discontinued use of tobacco. Resources such as Alternatives to Suspension from the American Lung Association are available for such programs.

Other Disciplinary Actions: Some districts have elected to adopt a community or school service component to their policy. A “zero-tolerance approach” is not recommended for student violators. In the case of tobacco-free policies, zero tolerance generally refers to immediate suspension for violation. Evidence indicates that tobacco users rarely benefit from suspension – it merely provides the suspended child a site away from school to continue their tobacco use. CDC best practice guidelines suggest that whatever the disciplinary actions, the student be offered assistance with cessation if s/he desires.

Expand district policies to include possession of tobacco

Some districts decided that they could implement their policies more effectively if they included possession and have modified their policies accordingly. In these instances, tobacco products are not allowed on school grounds.

CHALLENGE 3

Students Leaving Campus to Use Tobacco in Surrounding Neighborhoods

Some school districts do not experience problems with students using tobacco on school grounds. Rather, they face the challenge of students leaving campus to smoke or to use spit tobacco in the surrounding neighborhoods. Students often linger on or around private residential or business property. In turn local residents and business owners complain of students throwing trash, leaving cigarette butts, trampling shrubbery, and vandalizing their yards and parking areas. Businesses report that “hovering” groups of teenagers deter other customers from patronizing their stores. Businesses and local residents frequently blame schools for the students’

behaviors and hold schools responsible for solving the problem.

Safety is another concern for some districts, especially those in urban areas. Students cross busy streets in places other than at crosswalks, posing a hazard to themselves as well as to drivers.

SOLUTIONS

Involve others in decision-making/ enforcement of policies

Including students, parents and the wider community in discussions about the implementation of a tobacco-free policy can be critical in helping to confront the issue of students leaving school grounds to smoke in adjacent neighborhoods. Businesses and community residents need a forum in which to express their concerns to school administrators, board members and students. All parties can develop a joint and mutually agreeable plan to address problems.



Erecting physical barriers that disperse students

In districts with large student populations, the essence of the problem is not necessarily that students leave campus, but that they leave in large groups, all at once. These large groups quickly become concerns of neighbors and create safety hazards as they cross busy streets during breaks and lunch hours. The pack mentality can lead to fighting, loitering, and “trashing” business parking lots with soda cans, sandwich wrappers, and cigarette butts. Among various other efforts, some schools have erected high chain link fences along that edge of their property. Although students might still climb over the fence in order to leave campus, most will avoid that effort and leave the campus in other directions. Fencing will not prevent students from leaving campus, but it will disperse them in controlled directions, which can greatly relieve stress to area businesses and neighborhoods.



Closing school campuses so students do not leave school grounds

Some school districts and/or individual schools have closed campuses in which students are not allowed to leave school grounds during the day without being granted a leave of absence for different activities, such as to attend field trips or to take classes off-site. Some administrators with closed campuses report that they never had to face the problem of students leaving campus to use tobacco. They also report fewer neighbor complaints and safety problems. In addition, parents have expressed increased feelings of security knowing that their children are not permitted to wander freely in adjacent neighborhoods.

The acceptance of closed-campus policies goes beyond administration and parents, and includes local business people who report reduced theft and vandalism problems. One of the perceived barriers to closing campus, particularly in large districts, is lack of indoor facilities. Districts fear they will not be able to accommodate all of their students on campus during lunch hours or class breaks. Some districts have dealt with this issue creatively by staggering lunch hours, the school day, or even the school year.



Source: Adapted from Getting to Tobacco-Free Schools: A Trouble Shooting Guide, Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment and American Cancer Society, Colorado Division by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. August 2001.

Frequently Asked Questions about Tobacco-Free Schools

Q: What is the definition of a 100% tobacco-free school district?

A: 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.

Q: Will we risk losing our adult supporters at athletic events?

A: It is highly unlikely that you will lose adult supporters at athletic events. In fact, research shows that you will likely gain new supporters. They understand and appreciate that school policies, such as ones prohibiting tobacco use and alcohol use, are designed to protect the safety of youth and offer a positive environment for students and families.

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 theatres, restaurants, and air travel have become smokefree, we have not seen a drop off in patronage. The school policy does not require people to quit using tobacco, it simply asks them to refrain from using tobacco on school property and at school sponsored events.

Q: How do we handle the maintenance staff, construction crews, and contractors that come on campus?

A: Much like you would handle enforcement of other policies related to substance abuse on campus (such as alcohol) or certain behavior expectations (no firearms). 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 all staff and visitors comply with the policy. In addition, make sure there is signage on campus communicating the policy.

Q: If we develop a 100% smokefree policy, how will we enforce it?

A: Experience has shown that early and frequent communication, such as signage, letters home, information at events, and announcements during athletic events, is the key to successfully enforcing policy. We encourage schools 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;
- Who is responsible for enforcement;
- Training provided to enforcement personnel;
- A process for handling complaints and other issues.



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.
- Commit to enforcing the new plan consistently. This will send a strong message about the importance of the policy by those 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 or the beginning of a new semester.
- Allow sufficient time for people to prepare for implementation.
- Provide everyone an opportunity to get involved in the 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.
- Contact your local health department tobacco education specialist to assist with training and education

Q: What about the argument that it’s legal for adults to use tobacco?

A: 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.



**Keeping them healthy
and tobacco free!**