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Tobacco Free School Policies Help Drive Youth Smoking to Historic Lows

Warren County and Russell Springs School Districts Tell Their Stories of Success

FRANKFORT, Ky. (Sept. 27, 2016) — Kentucky's youth smoking prevalence is at a historic low, dropping nearly 10 percentage points over the past decade.

Current smoking among Kentucky high school students is 16.9 percent, down from 26.2 percent just ten years ago, according to the 2015 Kentucky Youth Risk Behavior Survey. Officials from the Kentucky Department for Public Health (DPH) attribute the decrease, in part, to its tobacco free school policies, which encourage districts to create campus environments where tobacco and alternative nicotine products are strictly prohibited.

Currently, 35 percent of school districts across the state are tobacco free and many more school systems are considering adopting the policy.

"School districts want to hear from their peers and hear from colleagues who have gone through the process already," said Elizabeth Anderson-Hoagland, youth policy analyst with the Kentucky Tobacco Prevention and Cessation Program in DPH. "By demonstrating that others have successfully adopted the policy and experienced positive results, we are able to encourage more school administrators to consider going tobacco free."

Anderson-Hoagland, along with her colleagues in the tobacco prevention and cessation program, recently produced video success stories highlighting the impact of tobacco free policies in Russell County and Warren County public schools.

Russell County Public Schools passed a *100 percent Tobacco Free School* policy in July 2014 and Warren County Public Schools passed one in April 2015.

" When the idea of a Tobacco-Free policy was initially presented to me, it made sense to move forward because the purpose behind the change fit perfectly into our core values, one of those being to ensure student and staff safety," said Rob Clayton, superintendent for Warren County School District. "I am thankful

to work alongside so many passionate educators who not only want to teach our students about the importance of a healthy lifestyle, but who also model it daily through their actions.”

“It is my primary goal as superintendent to facilitate the best educational environment to for my students,” said Michael Ford, superintendent of the Russell County School District. “The evidence was clear that 100 percent Tobacco Free School policies protect student health and improve student achievement. We took a conscientious stance which favors better health for our youth and I believe readies them for the modern day workforce.”

100% Tobacco Free School policies prohibit tobacco, including alternative nicotine products and vapor products as defined by KRS 438.310, use by staff, students and visitors twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, inside Board-owned buildings or vehicles, on school owned property, and during school-related student trips. According to DPH, strongly enforced *100 percent Tobacco Free School* policies can reduce youth smoking by up to 30 percent.

“We strongly encourage every school district to adopt 100 percent Tobacco Free School policies,” said Dr. Connie White, senior deputy commissioner for DPH. “Smoking, which is the leading cause of lung cancer, heart disease and a host of other chronic diseases, is one of the biggest public health challenges facing our state. We owe it to our young people to create healthy environments where they won’t be exposed to tobacco and its detrimental health effects. Not only will it create a healthier, safer learning environment, it will further decrease the chances of them becoming smokers.”

New tools are available for school districts interested in passing *100 percent Tobacco Free School* policies. More information can be obtained from DPH by calling (502) 564-9358.

The success story for Russell County Public Schools can be found here: <https://youtu.be/imkcxDXiuqI>

The success story for Warren County Public Schools can be found here: <https://youtu.be/xQ6-kucZUVs>