

TTAC Help Your Peers—Tobacco-free Schools

The January 2000 Governor's Youth Summit, organized by the Tobacco Prevention and Control Branch (TPCB) and the Governor's Office, in collaboration with the multiple other stakeholders, provided the spark that was necessary for 100% Tobacco-Free Schools (a 100% Tobacco-Free School prohibits all tobacco use anytime, anywhere by anyone on all school property and at all school-sponsored events) to move forward in North Carolina. Part of what made the Governor's Summit so effective was that it brought together school administrators, teachers, concerned citizens, and youths to focus on the problem and solutions to teen tobacco use. The Summit demonstrated the ability of students to speak articulately on an issue relevant to them on which they had not previously been consulted. The goal of having 100% Tobacco-free school policies in all 115 school districts became the focal point that teens at the Summit. The work at the Summit initiated then-Governor Hunt, and later then-Governor Easley and then-State Superintendent Mike Ward to send letters to local schools supporting local school districts in their efforts to become 100% tobacco-free.

Two years later, the number of tobacco-free schools in North Carolina had tripled. During that timeframe TPCB had worked with the Department of Public Instruction, local school representatives, youth and other stakeholders to create tools, model policies, resources, website, signage, training and technical assistance focused on 100% tobacco-free schools. Grants from both the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and American Legacy Foundation supported youth empowerment and tobacco-free school efforts.

In May of 2002, the MSA-funded NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund (HWTF), chaired by then-Lt. Governor Bev Perdue (NC's current Governor), voted to allocate funds for a statewide Teen Tobacco Prevention Use and Cessation Initiative (TTUPC). One of the primary objectives for this initiative was promoting local adoption of and compliance with 100% Tobacco-Free Schools (TFS) policies. HWTF funded over 50 local Community/School grantees.

The goal of HWTF's statewide 100% TFS campaign, working in coordination with the TPCB and other stakeholders, was to protect the health of our state's children by encouraging all 115 school districts in North Carolina to adopt and successfully implement a 100% tobacco-free policy.

With continued statewide and local education, training, tools, resources, media and technical assistance, the number of local school board policies increased significantly from 14 to 87 by July 2007.

Several key factors that lead to successful passage and implementation of the tobacco-free policies were:

- State level leadership (e.g. Governor, Lt. Governor) remained a motivating factor for school districts in pursuing the adoption of 100% TFS policies.
- Formation of strong coalitions with multiple stakeholders promoting policy adoption.
- Youth involvement and empowerment that facilitated policy adoption

- Demonstration of local community and school support for 100% TFS policy change proved valuable in persuading policy makers to support the policy.
- Technical assistance and training provided crucial support.
- Messages about role modeling of adults and the health of students and staff helped convince decision makers to support the policy.
- Peer pressure from other school districts, and the idea of a statewide trend of policy adoption, helped some districts pass 100% TFS policies.
- Policy implementation fears remained mostly unfounded.
- Policy adoption had now occurred in school districts with historic or current strong economic ties to tobacco.
- Comprehensive efforts to communicate new 100% TFS policies resulted in high policy effectiveness, enforcement, and compliance.
- Providing TFS signage to all districts with a 100% TFS policy—(verified the language)

Tobacco-Free School policies work. In fact, 2005 NC Youth Tobacco Survey data show that North Carolina high schools without a 100% TFS policy had the highest prevalence rates for both cigarettes (22%) and any tobacco (31.2%). The study also shows that, when compared to non-TFS districts, students attending high schools that have established 100% TFS policies were 32% less likely to be tobacco users and 40% less likely to be smokers.

With a critical mass of 87 of 115 school districts adopting and implementing a 100% tobacco-free school district policy, the NC General Assembly passed a new law (SB1086) in July 2007 that required the remaining local school districts without a 100% tobacco-free school policy to adopt and enforce the policy by August 1, 2008.

Since August 1, 2008, all 115 school districts in NC have adopted and are promoting compliance with a 100% tobacco-free school policy.

Websites:

<http://www.nctobaccofreeschools.com/> tailored more for school administrators and school leaders (includes model policies, communications, fact sheets etc.).

<http://www.tobaccofreeschoolsnc.com/> tailored more for parents, school and community leaders.