

TIPS FOR SCHOOL TOBACCO POLICY ENFORCEMENT

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

Challenge # 1: Visitors Smoking 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.** Heavy smokers may find it difficult to refrain from smoking for an extended period of time – such as at athletic events or school plays and 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 most airline flights.
- **Hesitancy to confront violators.** School district personnel sometimes are 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 to Visitors Smoking on School Grounds

Solution: Communicating Policy Effectively

To the community-at-large. Some 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 and/or through parent organizations such as PTA, PTO and accountability committees.

Communication of policy on-site. Adequate signage is an essential part of communicating tobacco-free policies. Some districts liberally posts 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, in gyms and on bleachers.

Before and during every football game and other athletic events, staff from some schools make announcements over the loudspeaker stating that the school is tobacco-free and that smoking or chewing is not allowed on the premises. They 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.

Presenting the policy in a positive light. Regardless of the method of communication, the manner in which a policy is presented has an effect on its acceptance. Some districts emphasize

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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 (kids) 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. "They (adults) want to set an example for kids. Even a few of our board members who smoke are strongly in favor of the policy. During meetings, they deliberately go off campus to smoke." "For the safety and sake of our kids, this is a tobacco-free environment" is a repeated message in some districts.

Solution: Tactfully confronting violators

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 are embarrassed about the violation and are 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."

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

While school personnel initially may fear approaching violators, the situation rarely is confrontational. Confrontation of violators need not necessarily come from school district personnel. Students, parents, and other community members can do so.

Solution: Visibility of law enforcement personnel in the district

Adult visitor violations of district tobacco-free policies usually are unintentional. For those rare

instances when adults refuse to comply, the visibility of law enforcement may be a useful deterrent to violation. Some districts have "police school liaison officers" or other law enforcement personnel as part of their staff. They can monitor games, not only for tobacco use, but also for drug and alcohol use, fights, and vandalism.

Challenge #2: Students using tobacco on school property

There may be various reasons why students are smoking and/or using chew or "spit tobacco" despite the existence of school policies prohibiting tobacco use. They include the following:

- **Fitting in.** The desire to "fit in" often will 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. Unfortunately tobacco use often is 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.

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Solutions to use of tobacco on school property by students.

Solution: Commitment to Enforce

A true staff commitment to enforcing the policy is essential. School personnel reported the attitude that "this is the right thing to do, and we are doing it." 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. Many district administrators avoid problems because they are consistent in their messages and their actions with students.

Solution: Youth involvement in the development and enforcement of policies

One way to help prevent violations is to encourage students to get involved in the process. In some schools students not only help develop the policies, they are expected to enforce them. They are expected to show each other respect and to appropriately confront unacceptable behavior by fellow students. Some schools have shortened the break between classes as a direct response to students' requests. They felt the idle time encouraged them to break the tobacco policy.

Solution: Communicating the tobacco-free policy to students

Methods of Communication. Effective, proactive communication of the tobacco-free policy prevents, or at least reduces, the problem of student violation. Many schools use signs to help communicate their tobacco-free policy. The signage is very helpful for policy enforcement. In many districts at the beginning of the year, every student receives a handbook that contains a contract detailing the tobacco-free policy. In some, both the student and his/her parents are required to sign and return the contract stating they have read and understand the policy.

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 also can 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.

Presenting the Policy in a Positive Light. The benefits of a tobacco-free school to staff and students should be part of many communications.

Ensuring that the Policy Addresses Violations.

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. Each district or school establishes what the specific disciplinary actions would occur. This was the Legislature's attempt to recognize that consequences are likely to vary between and among local districts and schools. A review of policies indicates that, while most district policies clearly articulate the "no use" message, often they do not directly address the *consequences* of a violation.

Solution: Monitoring student behavior on school grounds

Staff often monitored 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 watch for compliance with the tobacco policy. When violations do occur, monitors issue citations. Violators then are reprimanded in accordance to the alternative-to-suspension protocol detailed below.

Solution: 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

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and do occur. Districts employ different approaches consistent with district philosophy.

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 may or may not include an educational component. The simplest progressive discipline programs specify increasingly stronger actions as the number of violations by a particular student mounts. There may be a first warning, followed by a parent conference, followed by possibility of suspension.

Educational Alternatives to Suspension.

Educational programs for violators, often called “alternative-to-suspension programs,” have evolved out of the disciplinarian’s wish to keep students who have violated policies in school. These programs often are 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 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. Alternative-to-suspension programs are not the same as tobacco cessation programs. A successful outcome for an educational alternative-to-suspension 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 “zero-tolerance approach” with student violators. In the case of tobacco-free policies, zero tolerance generally refers to immediate suspension for violation. CDC best practice guidelines suggest that whatever the

disciplinary actions, the student be offered assistance with cessation if s/he desires.

Solution: 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.

Challenge #3: Students leaving campus to smoke in surrounding neighborhoods - “hassle” factor for neighbors and safety concerns for school personnel

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. Often students 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 to Students Leaving School Grounds and Smoking in Neighborhoods

Solution: Involve community in decision-making/enforcement of policies

Including the wider community in discussions about the implementation of a tobacco-free policy

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can be critical in helping to confront the issue of students leaving school grounds to smoke in the neighborhood. 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.

Solution: Closing school campuses so that students do not leave school grounds

Some school districts and/or individual schools have closed campuses. 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 prior report that they never had to face the problem of students leaving campus to use tobacco. Some 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.

Solution: Expand the "reach" of the tobacco free policies

Some schools have defined their tobacco-free policies more strictly than others schools by extending its policy beyond school property boundaries. Such policies prohibit tobacco use on school grounds and off school grounds within "proximity to the school." Proximity is defined as being within view - "if we can see 'em, it's a

problem." This includes arriving at school and/or leaving school. Additionally, students may be banned from being *with* anybody who is smoking within proximity to the school.

One school developed a unique solution to the problem of students off school grounds. During breaks at the high school, a number of students routinely walked off school property into the adjacent street and surrounding property during school breaks. The off-campus crowd of students often smoked, exhibited disruptive behaviors, littered, attracted students from other schools, and increased the potential for gang incidents.

Community members became angry about the situation and went to the parent accountability committee for assistance. Ultimately, the matter was turned over to the City Manager and City Council to ask for their help. In an effort to increase the school's authority to control student behavior on adjacent property, the City Council *deeded shared jurisdiction of the street in front of the high school to the district as well as to the city*. This action solved some of the enforcement problems that the school experienced previously. Furthermore, the action encouraged staff to monitor property adjacent to the school, as they were now "co-owners" of the area.

Some districts use the "door-to-door" principle to extend their policies beyond the school ground.

This legal principle says that the school is responsible for the student from the time the student leaves home in the morning until s/he arrives home in the afternoon. For example, where school personnel are aware of a potential safety problem between home and school (e.g., a bully, a vicious dog), staff is expected to take responsibility and remediate the situation. This principle of law is used by administrators to account for policies that control particular behaviors beyond the school property, as in "in loco parentis."

Solution: Erecting physical barriers that disperse students

In districts with large student populations, the essence of the problem was not that students were leaving campus, but that they were leaving in

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large groups, all at once. It was the *large group* of kids that neighbors took notice of and that created a safety hazard as they crossed busy streets during breaks and lunch hours. The pack mentality led to fighting, loitering, and "trashing out" business parking lots with pop 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 of them avoid the fence and leave the campus in other directions. Although the fence did not prevent students from leaving campus, it dispersed them, which can greatly relieve area businesses.

Solution: Confront the fear of increased exposure to drugs/gangs

Individuals within some school districts may assert that prohibiting tobacco use on campus increases student exposure to and/or involvement in drug and gang-related activity taking place in the streets. The number of students leaving grounds has increased in some districts with implementation and enforcement of tobacco-free policies, but no districts actually have reported an increase in drug- or gang-related activity among these students as a result of their leaving campus. In fact, a few administrators that strictly enforce their tobacco-free policies believe they will eventually see a decrease in drug activity and possibly in gang activity as well. Tobacco, specifically cigarettes, has been called a "gateway drug." Often, cigarette smoking precedes illicit drug use. Condoning smoking on or near campuses can convey the message that smoking is acceptable, and they felt they'd be encouraging students to learn how to smoke from each other.

Solution: Youth possession ordinances

Some communities have adopted city ordinances that make minors' possession and/or use of tobacco illegal. In some cases, these ordinances

were passed to help alleviate problems with students leaving campuses in order to use tobacco. Some city councils have established a boundary that was designated as a tobacco-free zone. Within this boundary, essentially a 15-square-block area encompassing the elementary school and the high school, tobacco possession or use is prohibited by anyone under the age of 21 years.

Resources for information and assistance on school tobacco policy:

Wisconsin Association of School Boards,
608-257-2622

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction,
800-441-4563

American Lung Association of Wisconsin,
262-782-7833.

Tobacco Control Resource Center for Wisconsin,
www.tobwis.org

Fit, Healthy and Ready to Learn: A School Health Policy Guide. Available from the National Association of State Boards of Education, 703-684-4000.

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