

# Strategies for Enforcement: Practical Tips for Enforcing Your Tobacco-free Schools Policy

## CITATIONS

<sup>1</sup> Adams, Monica L et al. "The relationship between school tobacco policies and school tobacco use," *Journal of School Health*, Vol 79, No. 1, January 2009 pp. 17-23.

<sup>2</sup> Klein, Jonathan, "Adolescents and smoking: The first puff may be the worst" *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, Vol . 175 (3) August 1, 2006 p.262-2623.

<sup>3</sup> Sabistan, CM et al. "School smoking policy characteristics and individual perceptions of the school context: Are they linked to students' smoking status?" *Journal of Youth Adolescence* (2009) Nov (10); 38:1374-2387.

A written policy is only effective if it is communicated and enforced. The following document provides a range of options for schools and districts to consider as they decide the best way to enforce tobacco policy in the context of their own schools and communities.

## Communication

The first step in successful tobacco policy enforcement is communication. Communication through a variety of channels sends clear, consistent messages that tobacco use is not acceptable in the school environment. Communication should be continual and highly visible. The more positive messages, signs, reminders, announcements and newsletter articles, the fewer problems there will be with enforcement. Once the no-use expectation is strongly set forth there should only be a small number of people who may violate the policy (For more information on communication strategies see "Communication Tips: Get the Word out About Your Tobacco-Free Schools Policy").

Ultimately, each school or district must decide its discipline policies (i.e., consequences) for students, staff and parents. Colorado laws are clear that there should be no tobacco use or student tobacco possession on school grounds but enforcement procedures are not defined.

## Enforcement with Students

Progressive discipline is the key recommendation when it comes to enforcement of tobacco use violations. Progressive discipline means that disciplinary procedures start with less

One recent study found that "enforcement of school tobacco policies, but not the comprehensiveness of those policies, was associated with fewer observations of tobacco use by minors on school grounds as well as lower rates of current smoking among students."<sup>1</sup>

Simply Stated: Enforcement of school tobacco policies—even if they're not perfect, makes a difference!

punitive consequences and become more punitive with each violation. Ideally, tobacco prevention education and cessation opportunities are part of the discipline plan especially for first violations. Progressive discipline is important because tobacco use is more than a discipline issue; it is an addiction issue. Research shows adolescents can quickly become dependent on nicotine.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, studies indicate that policies that prohibit tobacco use and assist smokers in overcoming addiction are associated with lower smoking rates.<sup>3</sup>

There are many discipline strategies that can be utilized in a progressive discipline policy. The right combination should be decided upon at the school or district level to match the schools' philosophy, climate and unique needs.

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# Strategies for Enforcement: Practical Tips for Enforcing Your Tobacco-free Schools Policy

## Enforcement with Students, continued

The following strategies can be combined to create a progressive discipline policy\*:

- ✓ Verbal warning
- ✓ Confiscation of tobacco
- ✓ Parent/guardian notification
- ✓ Referral to guidance counselor or school nurse
- ✓ Conference with school administrator
- ✓ Mandatory alternative to suspension tobacco education program (e.g., “Second Chance” by RMC Health or “Alternative to Suspension” by American Lung Association)
- ✓ Academic assignments focusing on tobacco use
- ✓ Referral to student court (if available)
- ✓ Restorative justice practices
- ✓ School/community service
- ✓ In-school suspension
- ✓ Out of school suspension

See page 31 for an example of a progressive discipline policy using these strategies.

## Cessation

Because nicotine dependence can start early in an adolescent’s tobacco use experience, cessation resources should be offered to the student beginning at the first offense. No one can be forced to quit so the choice must be the student’s. Research has shown that most teen smokers do want

to quit but have been unsuccessful in their previous attempts.<sup>4</sup> The American Lung Association’s Not on Tobacco (N-O-T) teen smoking cessation program is an effective and low-cost program to offer in high schools. For more information, contact the American Lung Association of Colorado at 303-388-4327 or check out their website at [www.notcolorado.org](http://www.notcolorado.org).

Other options for cessation are free quit resources that can be accessed on-line such as: My Last Dip ([mylastdip.com](http://mylastdip.com)), and for youth over 15 years of age, the Colorado QuitLine (1-800-QUIT-NOW).

School staff are often tempted to use participation in a cessation program as one of the consequences in a discipline plan. The idea of helping students quit smoking is a good one but cessation programs should not be used as alternative to suspension programs. Tobacco alternative to suspension programs are available and they focus on education and helping students move towards the decision to quit. These programs can be used as a consequence whereas participating in a cessation program should be voluntary.

## Alternative to Suspension Programs

“Second Chance” is a new on-line tobacco education program designed for schools and communities to use as an alternative to suspension program. The program takes about two hours to complete and administrators are able to track student progress. Topics covered in Second Chance

## CITATIONS

<sup>4</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “High school students who tried to quit smoking cigarettes—United States, 2007,” *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, 58 (16); 428-431, May 1, 2009.

\*Cessation information should be made available at all levels of the discipline progression.

## Strategies for Enforcement: Practical Tips for Enforcing Your Tobacco-free Schools Policy

### CITATIONS

<sup>5</sup> Camenga, Deepa et al., “The changing risk profile of the American adolescent smoker: Implications for prevention programs and tobacco intervention,” *Journal of Adolescent Health*, Vol., 39, No. 1 July 2006.

<sup>6</sup> Durant, RH, et al. “The relationship between early age of onset of initial substance use and engaging in multiple health risk behaviors among young adolescents,” *Archives of Pediatric Adolescent Medicine*, 1999 March: 153(3): 286-91 (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services CDC, 2008).

include: health risks of tobacco, refusal skills, tobacco industry tactics and others. Go to [secondchancetobacco.org](http://secondchancetobacco.org) or [rnc.org](http://rnc.org) to learn more.

The American Lung Association’s “Alternative



to Suspension” program is a four-session tobacco education program based on the social cognitive theory. The focus is tobacco use education and helping students move towards their own decision to quit.

If possible, it is helpful to implement both the Alternative to Suspension program and the N-O-T program at the same school/location, so that once students make the decision to quit using tobacco there is a ready and supportive resource.

### Support/Education/ Community Service

Tobacco use is often an indicator of other issues in a student’s life. One study found that adolescents who use tobacco are more likely to engage in other behaviors such as risky sexual behaviors, risky alcohol-related behaviors and to not wear seatbelts or bicycle helmets.<sup>5</sup> Students who use tobacco are also more likely to struggle academically.<sup>6</sup>

A meeting with the school counselor can result in referrals to help students deal with

stress, and academic or addiction issues that might otherwise have been overlooked. If tobacco use is part of how a student copes with stress, the school counselor can help the student figure out alternative coping strategies. Be sure to prepare the school counselor or nurse for such referrals.

Alternative to suspension programs and community service are recommended steps to take before suspension. It is important that the tobacco user doesn’t feel isolated and benefits from positive messages and support to change behavior. Tobacco-related community service opportunities can be set up such as cleaning up cigarette butts, getting involved in activities that support national tobacco prevention events like Red Ribbon Week or Kick Butts Day, or volunteering to lead tobacco education sessions for younger students. Service can be done at school or with local community organizations. Use student groups and local health agencies to help think of possibilities. The more options offered, the more likely the student will find an activity he/she finds meaningful.

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## Possession

In July 2008, the Colorado Legislature passed the Teen Tobacco Use Prevention Act (TTUPA) (C.R. 25-14-301). The law bans possession of tobacco products by any person under 18 years of age. Enforcement of TTUPA is not defined in the statute but is left to local municipalities.

Enforcement of the youth possession law on school grounds is determined at the district or school level and is not required. A checklist of possession points to consider:

- ❑ School tobacco policy should indicate that it is against the law for youth under the age of 18 to possess tobacco.
- ❑ If schools or districts determine they will enforce a tobacco possession policy, it is recommended that they implement a progressive disciplinary strategy, utilizing education options for first or second time offenders.
- ❑ The policy may indicate that schools will only enforce policies regarding “visible” possession of tobacco to prevent students from being searched.
- ❑ If lockers are being searched for other purposes and tobacco is found, the consequences should be outlined in the policy.
- ❑ The school/district should be aware of any possession ordinances in place in the community and work with local law enforcement or School Resource Officers (SROs) to coordinate messaging and enforcement practices.

## Non-traditional School Settings

Non-traditional school settings present unique challenges to tobacco policy enforcement where use tends to be much higher than in other school settings.<sup>7</sup>

As in all schools, a priority of alternative schools is to keep students in school and help them succeed. The following are suggestions to help design a tobacco policy that will work in a non-traditional school setting:

- ✓ Set and communicate clear, consistent expectations about no-use on school property.
- ✓ Provide a break area that is an inviting place to be with non-tobacco related alternatives (e.g., games, music, computers, mints).
- ✓ Involve students in the development and enforcement of the TFS policy (e.g., some schools already have student-run courts in place and tobacco violations can be a case to put before the court, implement student-generated restorative justice practices).
- ✓ Implement a progressive discipline policy with heavy emphasis on education, help with addiction, alternative coping mechanisms, and support for quitting.
- ✓ Offer many avenues for quitting (e.g., multiple cessation classes, links to community or hospital cessation groups, on-line resources).

## CITATION

<sup>7</sup> Grunbaum, JA et al. “Prevalence of health-related behaviors among alternative high school students as compared with students attending regular high schools,” *Journal of Adolescent Health*. 2001 Nov; 29 (5):337-43.

## “DOOR TO DOOR” PRINCIPLE

The legal principle states 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. This principle is used by administrators to account for policies that control behaviors beyond the school property as in “in loco parentis.” This type of principle has been applied to safety problems between home and school such as bullying or a vicious dog.

“Tips for Tobacco Policy Enforcement,” Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2001.

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## Students Leave School Grounds to Use Tobacco

Once tobacco use has been eliminated or enforcement is more consistent on school grounds, it is common for students to leave school property to use tobacco. This is a very challenging issue for schools. Often the use occurs where it is visible from the school or in close proximity to school grounds. The school does not have any legal responsibility to address use off school grounds but tobacco use off school grounds affects student attendance, health, and the no-use message being sent by the school.

The following are some suggestions to consider to minimize the problem:

- ✓ Involve the community in decision-making/enforcement of policy. Work with local partners to coordinate community policy with school needs. Use community groups and neighborhoods for support.
- ✓ Close the campus so students don't leave school grounds.
- ✓ Get involved with the local tobacco coalition on youth access issues.
- ✓ Work with local law enforcement including the school resource officer (SRO) on options for actions off school grounds that are effective and not just punitive.
- ✓ Coordinate consistent messaging between school and the community.
- ✓ Clearly determine who will monitor school grounds and who will deal

with violations. Sometimes use is overlooked due to a lack of defined procedures for monitoring and enforcement.

- ✓ Expand the reach of the policy by including words like “proximity to the school” (e.g., within view of the school) or “door-to-door” when writing the policy.

## Cultural Considerations

Tobacco is part of sacred rituals conducted by Tribal elders in some Native American tribes. Every effort should be made to respect tobacco use in its sacred context.

A school can enforce a tobacco-free schools policy without being in conflict with a tribe's beliefs and practices surrounding tobacco. Commercial tobacco products (cigarettes, chew, snuff) are not typically part of sacred rituals.

Similarly, commercial tobacco use on school property is not part of sacred use. Within the school environment all people must refrain from tobacco use.

## Athletics

Tobacco use by athletes, often in the form of chewing tobacco, is a major issue in some schools. No-tobacco use policies should be adopted and communicated to students and coaches participating in school athletics. Many of the same general principals about policy apply to athletics.

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# Strategies for Enforcement: Practical Tips for Enforcing Your Tobacco-free Schools Policy

## Athletics, cont.

Consider the following suggestions:

- ✓ Spell out district/school tobacco policy in athletic contracts. Also include what happens to athletes caught using tobacco both on and off school grounds as well as in-season and off-season. Parents and athletes should both sign the contract.
- ✓ Athletic contracts are often very strict in their no-tobacco policies. Consider adding a clause that allows an athlete to get help quitting without being penalized. If this is added, discussion must take place on how to handle situations fairly and what will happen if there is a repeat offense.
- ✓ A progressive discipline policy should be implemented for athletes and resources provided if an athlete is ready to quit.
- ✓ Coaches are role models to student athletes and should not use tobacco in the presence of students. Make sure coaches understand this responsibility before they are allowed to coach students.

## Enforcement with Staff

Staff contracts often contain provisions that prohibit them from using tobacco on school property or at school sponsored events. Staff should be informed of the policy and the specific provisions that apply to them.



The following elements can be combined to create a progressive discipline policy for staff:

- ✓ Verbal warning
- ✓ Education/support
- ✓ Enrollment in a tobacco education program (if available)
- ✓ Disciplinary action (e.g., written warning, formal reprimand or letter in staff file). Consequences of violating the TFS policy should be written in the staff handbook so they know in advance what to expect.

In addition to policy/contract reasons, it is important for consistency of the no-tobacco use message that staff members not use tobacco on school grounds or at any school function. If the school or district has a worksite wellness program, tobacco education and cessation would be a helpful component to include.

Tobacco use is addictive. It is important to encourage staff to talk to their health care professional about quitting and to provide them with access to cessation resources. The Colorado QuitLine is a free resource (1- 800-QUIT NOW/www.coquitline.org) to help people over the age of 15 interested in quitting. Employees should check their health care benefits to see if cessation is one of their benefits. Districts should look into adding cessation benefits if they are not already provided.

## FOCUS ON THE BEHAVIOR NOT THE USER

Focus on tobacco use as an unhealthy behavior versus the user. For example, a teacher or coach who uses tobacco may still be great role model for youth but his/her tobacco use promotes an unhealthy behavior. Make sure adults are not alienated because of their tobacco use but that they know their behavior is sending the wrong message to students. Support them if they have a desire to quit.

~North Dakota  
Tobacco-free  
Schools Guide





## Strategies for Enforcement: Progressive Discipline Example for Students

### \*QUITLINE

Provide QuitLine (1-800-QUIT-Now or [www.coquitline.org](http://www.coquitline.org)) information (for those 15 and over) or other information on cessation.

This is one example of a progressive discipline policy. Schools/districts must decide how quickly to ratchet up the consequences for students caught using tobacco at school.

### First Offense

- ✓ Confiscate tobacco
- ✓ Notify parent/guardian of infraction
- ✓ Hold conference with school administrator
- ✓ Refer to school counselor or nurse
- ✓ Recommend alternative to suspension program (such as Second Chance or ALA Alternative to Suspension)

### Second Offense

- ✓ Confiscate tobacco
- ✓ Notify parent/guardian of infraction
- ✓ Hold conference with school administrator
- ✓ Community service or in-school suspension

### Third Offense

- ✓ Confiscate tobacco
- ✓ Notify parent/guardian of infraction
- ✓ Hold conference with school administrator
- ✓ In-school or out-of-school suspension