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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**CAMPAIGN FOR 100% TOBACCO FREE SCHOOLS
GATHERS STEAM IN GOLDSBORO**

**AREA'S FIRST-EVER FORUM OFFERS TOOLS FOR
IMPLEMENTATION & ENFORCEMENT**

(Goldsboro, NC) — School superintendents, health directors and children's health advocates will participate in the area's first-ever tobacco-free schools forum on Dec. 3 from 9 to 11 a.m. at the Holiday Inn Express off Highway 70 East. The event is free and open to school, community and public health leaders.

Since 2000, 45 of the state's 115 school systems have adopted a 100% Tobacco Free School (TFS) policy, which bans all tobacco use everywhere on school property at all times. School and community leaders are working to pass the policy in at least 40 other school districts. This momentum has made TFS a rallying point for teen tobacco prevention advocates around the state. Starting in 2002, the NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund (HWTF) has funded 70 community grants statewide to lead this important effort at the grassroots level.

A school board chairperson, superintendent and high school principal from three of eastern NC's 100% tobacco free school districts will be featured speakers at the Leadership Forum. They will share the experiences of their school district and offer insight and advice on the implementation and enforcement of a 100% tobacco free school policy.

TFS Director Suzanne DePalma notes that a number of school districts in eastern NC – including Duplin, Greene, Jones, Lenoir, Nash, Sampson, Wayne and Wilson county school districts – have not implemented TFS policies. "We recognize that tobacco has deep roots in eastern North Carolina," said DePalma. "At the same time, we know that school leaders here - like everywhere else - strive for excellence in education. Adopting a 100% tobacco free school policy does not mean school leaders are saying 'no' to the tobacco farming community. It means they are saying 'yes' to providing the best possible learning environment for their students."

Enacting a tobacco-free schools policy represents a firm commitment by the school's administration, teachers and parents to provide a safe and healthy learning and working environment for students and school staff. A recent study by the UNC School of Family Medicine found that TFS policies have had a positive impact on participating school districts, providing opportunities for adults and peers to serve as role models for healthy behavior and protecting students from secondhand smoke.

"In my travels across North Carolina, I've met with lots of tobacco farmers and I've never encountered **one** who wanted his or her child to grow up to smoke or use other tobacco products," said Lt. Gov. Beverly Perdue, HWTF Chair. "I strongly support TFS policies. We need to get tobacco products away from our kids and out of our schools."

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Some important tobacco facts:

- Everyday, about 3,000 teens in America start smoking. Of those, approximately one in three will die of a smoking related disease.
- Approximately 27 percent of high school students in North Carolina smoke and 33 percent of them use a tobacco product.
- Smoking is North Carolina's leading preventable cause of death.
- Health care professionals estimate that North Carolina spends up to \$4 billion each year to treat people with smoking-related illnesses and cover the tab for lost productivity.

MEDIA OPPORTUNITIES:

Reporters will be able to interview several key people at this event:

- Mr. Jim Martin, State Advisor for Teen Tobacco Use, NC Dept. of Health and Human Services
- Mrs. Suzanne DePalma, Tobacco Free School Director, NC Dept. of Health and Human Services
- Mr. Carr Ipock, Chairman, Craven County School Board
- Dr. Julia Mobley, Superintendent, Pamlico County Schools
- Mr. Mark Ezzell, Community Outreach Coordinator, NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund

PARTICIPANTS:

- NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund
- NC Department of Health and Human Services — Tobacco Prevention and Control Branch
- NC Department of Public Instructions — Healthy Schools Initiative
- Question Why Youth Empowerment Centers

ABOUT THE NC HEALTH AND WELLNESS TRUST FUND

The NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund makes North Carolina stronger, both physically and economically, by funding programs that promote preventive health. Created by the General Assembly in 2000 to allocate a portion of North Carolina's share of the national tobacco settlement, HWTF has invested \$55 million to support preventive health initiatives and \$78 million to fund a prescription drug assistance program for seniors. For more information, please visit www.hwtfc.org.

ABOUT TRU

Tobacco. Reality. Unfiltered., commonly known as TRU, is North Carolina's first-ever statewide youth tobacco prevention multi-media campaign that uses testimonials of real North Carolina teens as well as hard-hitting facts to dissuade young people from using tobacco. This campaign is part of the NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund's teen tobacco use prevention initiative. Funded at \$28 million from HWTF, this grassroots initiative includes the TRU media campaign, as well as a grant program including 70 grants (50 community-based grants, 4 statewide grants and 16 tobacco free school mini-grants) to a total of 55 organizations. To find out more about TRU, please visit www.realityunfiltered.com.

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