



100% Tobacco-Free Schools Program Overview

Background

Tobacco use is the #1 cause of preventable death in the United States, killing more than 440,000 Americans each year. It is also the leading cause of preventable death in North Carolina, and is the primary cause for numerous deadly cancers and debilitating illnesses. Yet more than 82% of North Carolina middle and high school students who have tried smoking had their first cigarette before their 15th birthday, according to the 2005 NC Youth Tobacco Survey (YTS).

In May of 2002, the NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund (HWTF) voted to allocate funds for a statewide Teen Tobacco Use Prevention and Cessation Initiative (TTUPC). One of the four main objectives of this initiative was promoting local adoption of and compliance with 100% Tobacco-Free Schools (TFS) policies.

According to the CDC, comprehensive school-based programs, when combined with community and mass-marketing efforts, can effectively prevent or postpone the onset of smoking by 20-40% among U.S. teens. Since the inception of HWTF's efforts, including annual investments of \$15 million in the TTUPC initiative, North Carolina has shown remarkable progress in reducing rates of youth tobacco use. In fact, the 2005 YTS recently revealed that the rate of decline in high-school aged smokers has more than tripled since HWTF began funding the TTUPC – as a result, there are 27,000 fewer teens smoking cigarettes in NC than there were in 2003. But while significant strides have been made, there are still enormous barriers to overcome.

Objective

No environment is more appropriate than school to help set the example for promoting healthy lifestyles among North Carolina's children. A 100% Tobacco-Free School prohibits all tobacco use anytime, anywhere by anyone on all school property and at all school-sponsored events. School property includes buildings, grounds and vehicles owned or leased by the school. School-sponsored events include sporting events, school dances and other functions held on and off school property.

The goal of HWTF's statewide 100% TFS campaign is to protect the health of our state's children by encouraging all 115 school districts in North Carolina to adopt a model 100% Tobacco-Free policy. Before HWTF took a leadership role in the TFS movement, only 14 school districts had adopted smoke-free policies.

[Click here to find the number of NC school districts that have gone 100% tobacco-free](#)

Rationale

A 100% TFS policy prevents exposure to second-hand smoke and ensures that students encounter only positive role models at their school. Preventing students from using and seeing



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others use tobacco at school, especially teachers and others in positions of authority, has been shown to help lower youth tobacco use prevalence. In fact, 2005 YTS data shows:

- North Carolina high schools without a 100% TFS policy have the highest prevalence rates for both cigarettes (22%) and any tobacco (31.2%)
- North Carolina high schools with established 100% TFS policy (four years or more) have the lowest prevalence rates for both current cigarette use (13.3%) and any tobacco (21.1%)

That means that when compared to non-TFS districts, students attending high schools that have established 100% TFS policies are 32% less likely to be tobacco users and 40% less likely to be smokers.

Program

Fifty-nine organizations are funded by HWTF to work on teen tobacco use prevention and cessation in their communities. Promoting 100% TFS policies has been central to each grantee's annual action plan since 2002, making grassroots support the single biggest factor in developing the 100% TFS initiative. HWTF staff directly assists local grantee efforts by holding community workshops, educating parents and school officials, and encouraging policy adoption, while assisting existing tobacco-free schools with their compliance efforts.

Adopting 100% TFS is just the beginning of a school's effort to promote a smoke-free environment, as changing norms and promoting compliance with the policy may be extremely difficult. To bring attention to school districts that have implemented the 'gold standard', HWTF funded a "Tobacco-Free Schools Friday Night Football Tour". During fall of 2005, this Tour traveled throughout NC, visiting five local high schools located in 100% TFS districts. The Tour's purpose was to highlight model districts that have successfully gone smoke-free; to build awareness and support for the TFS initiative; and to encourage other districts to adopt 100% TFS policy. At each stop, HWTF grantees provided information on 100% TFS policies, promoted adoption/compliance and HWTF's team captured video testimonials of tobacco-free schools advocates at many levels for use in current and future television commercials.

This fall HWTF will publicly introduce an innovative and interactive 100% TFS website, which can be found at www.TobaccoFreeSchoolsNC.com. This content-rich site is designed to provide parents, teachers, students, administrators, coaches and community advocates with detailed information about their own school district's policy and North Carolina's 100% TFS initiative; and to provide them with the tools necessary to either A) work towards adopting a 100% TFS policy in their district, or B) assist their schools and community comply with their tobacco-free policy.



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Various earned and paid media strategies are being planned to promote tobacco-free schools during 2006-2007.

Partners/Technical Assistance

HWTF works closely with subject-matter experts from the DHHS Tobacco Prevention and Control Branch (TPCB), as well as researchers and evaluators from the UNC School of Public Health. TPCB monitors progress and provides technical assistance for HWTF grantees across the state, while UNC staff provided much of the research for the 100% Tobacco-Free Schools website.

Other Important Notes

- Adults, particularly school teachers, are influential role models for students. By sending a clear and consistent message that tobacco use is unacceptable behavior at school, these role models are practicing what they preach, and teaching by example.
- There is no safe level of exposure to secondhand smoke - even a small amount can be dangerous. According to CDC and the Surgeon General's 2006 report, as little as 30 minutes of exposure to secondhand smoke can affect the coronary arteries of nonsmokers. It causes acute and chronic respiratory disease and causes or exacerbates asthma, ear infections and upper respiratory infections – primary reasons for school absence. TFS policies eliminate these risks.
- **Free** resources are now available to all NC school employees who want to quit smoking. HWTF and DHHS co-fund North Carolina's own Tobacco Use Quitline, where trained tobacco cessation specialists can be reached at **1-800-QUIT-NOW**. HWTF will pay for cessation services for any NC school employee.
- Districts that adopt 100% Tobacco-Free Schools policies can obtain "Smoke-Free School" signage for their school grounds by contacting the State Director of 100% Tobacco-Free Schools. All signs are provided free of cost by the Health and Wellness Trust Fund.