

Tobacco Prevention and Evaluation Program
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School of Medicine

Promotion, Adoption, and Compliance with
100% Tobacco Free School Policies in North Carolina:
A Policy Analysis

BRIEF SUMMARY

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Summary

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), as part of a comprehensive tobacco control program, calls for 100% tobacco-free policies in schools (TFS) to prevent youth tobacco use. A model 100% TFS policy prohibits the use of tobacco products by anyone, including students, staff, and visitors, on school grounds or at school events at all times. Comprehensive TFS policies that are enforced lead to significant reductions of youth tobacco use. According to the 2005 North Carolina Youth Tobacco Survey, high schools with established 100% TFS policies report 40% fewer smokers than schools without such policies.

The North Carolina Health and Wellness Trust Fund (NC HWTF) supports the adoption of 100% TFS policies as one of the primary objectives of its Teen Tobacco Use Prevention and Cessation Initiative. Beginning in 2003, approximately 30 HWTF grantees across the state began to focus on promoting the adoption of and compliance with 100% TFS policies. By early August of 2005, 61 NC school districts had passed such policies. From 2003 to 2005 (essentially the first two years of the HWTF Teen Initiative) there was rapid expansion of TFS policy across the state, jumping from 15 districts at the beginning of 2003 to 61 two and a half years later (see figure). As of mid-June 2006, 73 districts had passed 100% TFS policies.

To better understand factors that were important in policy passage and to provide recommendations to support the continued promotion of 100% TFS policy adoption in NC, the University of North Carolina Tobacco Prevention and Evaluation Program conducted a study of the 46 districts that passed 100% TFS policies between 2003 and early August of 2005. This study included 118 interviews with key informants in those districts and found the following themes:

- ❑ Support from the HWTF created champions for 100% TFS policy adoption.
- ❑ HWTF support of technical assistance through multiple channels translated into increased policy adoption.
- ❑ Political leadership (e.g., former Governor Hunt and Lt. Governor Perdue) proved a motivating factor for school districts in pursuing the adoption of 100% TFS policies.
- ❑ School and community leaders report that 100% TFS policies in NC are very effective, with excellent compliance, enforcement, and outcomes.
- ❑ School districts' fears about policy implementation have remained mostly unfounded.
- ❑ Decisions to strategically involve youth involve in advocating for TFS policies have resulted in more rapid policy adoption.
- ❑ School districts report that knowledge of the positive experience with policy adoption from other school districts encouraged them in their own policy adoption efforts. The positive experience of other districts, along with an emerging statewide trend toward policy adoption, has helped school districts even with historic or current strong economic ties to tobacco to pass 100% TFS policies.

The adoption of 100% TFS policies in NC over the last few years is a tremendous success story. Interviewee data support the conclusion that statewide funding and leadership associated with HWTF positions, programs, training, technical assistance, and resources have had a rapid and dramatic effect on the adoption of 100% TFS policies in the state. The extent of policy adoption that has occurred in such a short time should also prove useful to stakeholders in as many as three dozen states in the U.S. that have school tobacco laws similar to NC's.

**Figure. Cumulative Number of 100% TFS Policies Passed in NC
1990- August 2005**

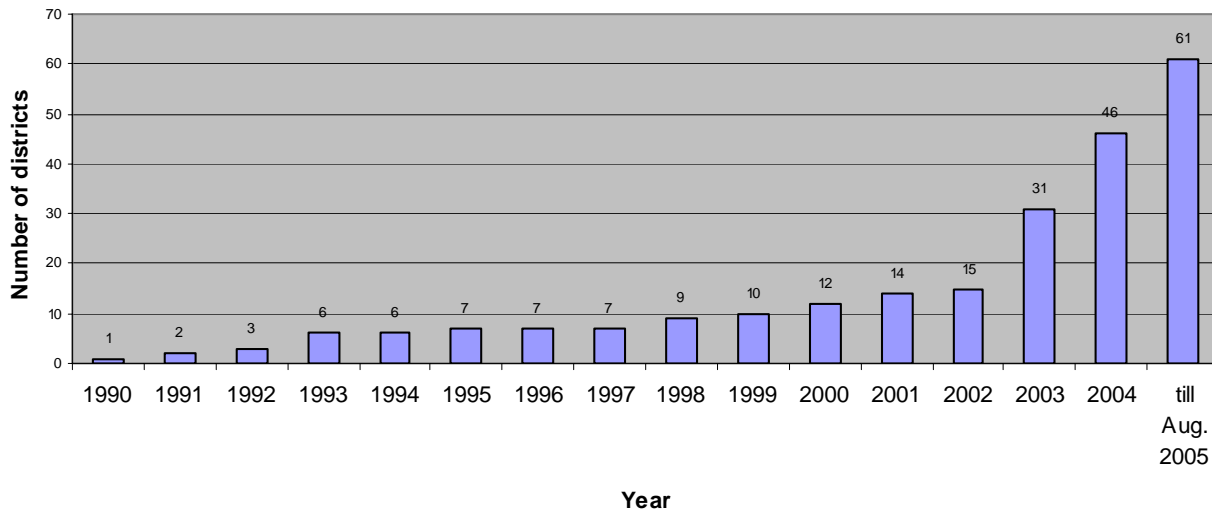


Table. Quotes from Interviewees Demonstrating Themes in 100% TFS Policy Adoption

“Absolutely [HWTF had an impact]. None of this could have been done without that support.”
(Coalition Coordinator)

“The [HWTF funding] has been crucial and is still crucial. The district has shown a lot of improvement in having someone focused on and dedicated to this.”
(Safe and Drug Free School Coordinator)

“We are in a rural area with a lot of tobacco, and there are kids with asthma, cancer, and respiratory problems. We don’t want to be left behind even though we’re small and rural. If [our] county can do it, then everyone ought to be able to.”
(School Health Educator)

“Other school districts are going in that direction; it’s the right thing to do.”
(Safe and Drug Free School Coordinator)

“[People are complying] very well. That is one of the significant things that I’ve noticed, that smoking of students on campus has almost completely disappeared. The smoking violation average is one per month. At first there were some violations at football games and public events, but now there is almost 100% voluntary compliance....”
(Assistant Superintendent)

“We were hesitant because we thought it would be difficult to enforce, but that was not the case.”
(Superintendent)

“It’s a lot easier than you think it’s going to be. After you make the decision, people respect it.”
(Principal)

“Don’t expect the worst. A lot of times we would anticipate adversity and resistance, but we didn’t get them.”
(Coalition Coordinator)

“The biggest cash crop in the county is tobacco, so it was overcoming the traditional thing. . . but the students came and the Board backed it up. . . it didn’t look like we were causing a big uproar.”
(Superintendent)