

# All Students Deserve a Completely Tobacco-Free School Environment

## Passing a Gold Standard Tobacco-Free Schools Policy in Your Community

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that schools develop and enforce policies to prohibit tobacco use by students, staff, parents and visitors on school grounds, in school vehicles, and at all school-sponsored events, on or off school property.

In 2011, the State of Alaska Tobacco Prevention & Control Program (TPC) assessed current school board policies, developed a Gold Standard model policy in coordination with the Association of Alaskan School Boards, and shared information with Superintendents and School Board Presidents of each Alaska school district.

Many Alaska School Districts are now working to modify their policies in order to provide the best possible tobacco free environment for students, staff and the community. Community members and TPC Grantees can play an important role in promoting and supporting schools in policy change.

## So, how do you change policies in schools?

### PHASE ONE

#### ✓ UNDERSTAND THE SYSTEMS

##### Who are the policy makers?

School policy change happens at the school board level. There are 54 school districts in Alaska and each one has a governing body: the local school board. While school boards may vary in size, they are typically made up of 5 to 7 people who volunteer their time to govern the school district. This is the group of people who will ultimately decide whether or not the school district passes a gold standard tobacco-free campus policy.

School district administrators, especially the school Superintendent, support the school board in implementing the policies they establish. School boards rely on school district administrators to provide them with accurate and timely information that will assist them in making decisions. Therefore, it is important that school district administrators are supportive of a tobacco free campus policy change that is going to be reviewed and voted upon by the school board.

#### ✓ ORGANIZE SUPPORT AND BEGIN TO STRATEGIZE

Engaging partners is key to any policy success. Consider groups and individuals who may also want to see a Gold Standard Tobacco-free Schools Policy implemented in your district. Your local tobacco coalition is a great first step in finding supporters.

It is good to find allies at all levels, if possible, within the school system. Teachers, students, coaches, administrators, the Superintendent, School Wellness Committee members – anyone who is supportive of what you are doing should be involved to the fullest extent possible. More allies provide a better chance for success.

Once you assemble a core group, from as many sectors of the community as possible, you need to consider how you are going to approach the situation.

##### There are many possibilities:

- Speaking with the Superintendent
- Speaking with a school administrator such as a Principal
- Making a friendly public comment at a school board meeting
- Finding an administrator to champion the policy



## All Students Deserve a Completely Tobacco-Free School Environment - continued

### PHASE TWO

#### ✓ DO YOUR HOMEWORK

The more you know about the current policy, school system, issues your proposed changes relate to, and individuals involved, the better your chance of success will be.

**Learn about current policy.** Find out exactly what the current tobacco policy for your school district is. If you do not already have a copy of their tobacco policy, contact your Grant Program Manager or email [tobacco@alaska.gov](mailto:tobacco@alaska.gov). Make sure you understand exactly what is and what is not covered in the policy.

**Know the issue.** Make sure you understand the importance of tobacco free schools well enough that you can answer any questions put to you and help resolve concerns from staff, students, administrators, and school board members.

#### A few common questions/concerns:

##### **Q. Won't enforcement be difficult and expensive?**

**A.** Enforcement of tobacco-free schools policies is relatively easy if schools commit to posting good signage and adequately communicating the policy. Common costs may include maintenance staff posting the signs, the cost of removal of any existing smoke shacks or ashtrays on school grounds, and potentially staff time for consequences of tobacco violations such as in school suspension. TPC will provide up to 6 signs per school building for those schools that have a Gold Standard Policy.

##### **Q. What about staff? Will there be an issue with the labor unions?**

**A.** There have been no issues with labor unions and tobacco policies in Alaska. The Gold Standard policy is approved by the Alaska Association of School Boards and therefore has been vetted for legal sufficiency. Making sure staff that currently use tobacco have resources to quit is important. Research shows that most smokers want to quit and some will be motivated to quit by the passage of a policy in their workplace. Alaska's Tobacco Quit Line is an excellent resource for helping adult tobacco users reduce or quit tobacco. Call, 1-800-Quit-Now

##### **Q. We don't need a strong written policy because we are already doing everything that's in the Gold Standard Policy.**

**A.** It is important for parents, students and the community that policies be adopted by the School Board. This makes enforcement easier through alleviating confusion and creates consistency throughout the district.

#### **Prepare a solid rationale for the proposed change.**

- Explain exactly why a tobacco free school campus is necessary. Use the information above and any local information you can add, including stories of local tobacco issues that involve real people in your community.
- Speak to the costs of implementing a Gold Standard Tobacco-Free School Campus Policy.
- Obtain testimonials from nearby school districts that have passed a Gold Standard Tobacco Free School Campus Policy. School administrators and boards like to hear from peers and colleagues who can provide credible insight into implementing tobacco-free schools policies.

#### **Obtain the State of Alaska Model Tobacco Free Schools policy from: [info@mission100alaska.org](mailto:info@mission100alaska.org) or by contacting your Grant Program Manager**

Make sure your core group understands the policies. Two model policies were distributed to all districts in August 2012, one regarding facilities and the second for students. The two policies together, comprise a Gold Standard. Ask the superintendent or an administrator if the district has plans to adopt the model policies as part of their annual updates.

**Note:** Sometimes people may offer additions to the policy that may or may not be beneficial. The Gold Standard Tobacco Free Schools policy was designed to be comprehensive and effective. If questions do arise that your group needs assistance with, contact to [tobacco@alaska.gov](mailto:tobacco@alaska.gov) or your Grant Program Manager.

### PHASE THREE

#### ✓ ENGAGE LEADERS TO SUPPORT PASSAGE OF THE GOLD STANDARD TOBACCO FREE SCHOOL CAMPUS POLICY

Work with administrators, the superintendent or school board members to determine the best way to propose the policy (formally) to the school board. Next steps might include:

##### 1- Getting on the agenda for a School Board Meeting:

If the Superintendent and School Board members are involved, they can make sure that you get enough time for a proper presentation.

##### 2- Presenting the proposed policy change at a School Board meeting:

- Make sure you can demonstrate a base of support through having parents, students, health professionals and other community members participate in the presentation in some way.
- Make sure your message is clear and consistent, no matter who is delivering it. What your group has to say should be straightforward, informative, and non-confrontational. It should be backed up with facts, statistics, study results, experience of other school systems, and/or educational (or psychological or scientific) theory. Most importantly, it should emphasize how a Gold Standard Tobacco-Free School Campus will benefit students, education, and/or the community.
- Be prepared for opposing arguments. Make sure you can counter them with hard facts and other substantiation. If your group is asked a question you cannot answer, offer to find out the answer and bring it to the next meeting.

#### ✓ ENSURE HIGH COMPLIANCE

Once the Gold Standard Tobacco Free Schools Policy has passed, making sure that everyone complies is important.

The State of Alaska Tobacco Prevention Program has developed a toolkit, "Putting Policy into Action: Communication and Enforcement of Tobacco Free School Policies," that has helpful advice on implementing a tobacco-free campus policy. The toolkit includes things such as sample announcements and progressive discipline suggestions.

Please be in contact with the TPC Program or your Grant Program Manager if you have any questions or would like to discuss your thoughts for working with your local school board. Working to pass comprehensive tobacco free school policies is a great opportunity to get practice advocating for tobacco free policy in a welcoming environment, and an excellent way to improve the health of young people, staff and families in your community.



### Top 6 Reasons for a Tobacco Free School Policy:

- 1 Reinforce norms regarding tobacco use. Tobacco-free schools policies reinforce that tobacco use is unhealthy and not supported by the community.
- 2 Protect children from developing an addiction to tobacco. Ninety percent of all adult smokers began smoking in their teens, and nearly two-thirds became daily smokers before age nineteen.(i)
- 3 Protect the community from secondhand smoke and provide more nonsmoking environments. In Alaska, schools are far more than places to educate children; they are places where the entire community gathers for events, celebrations, and social time. Schools are a powerful reflection of community values.
- 4 Counteract the tobacco industry's targeting of children. Internal industry documents indicate that tobacco companies have purposefully marketed to children as young as fourteen.
- 5 Role model healthy behavior. Implementing tobacco-free school policies with parents, staff, and visitors provides positive role models for students. Policies that only apply to students unwittingly reinforce the tobacco industry's message that tobacco use is a way to show that you are an adult.
- 6 Prepare students for a tobacco-free world. Tobacco-free worksites and communities are becoming the norm throughout the world. In addition, employers are becoming more reluctant to hire smokers due to increased absenteeism, health care costs, and possible disability.



#### CITATIONS:

i-(CDC, 1994, <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/00026213.htm>).

ii-For more information about the State of Alaska Tobacco Prevention and Control Programs see <http://dhss.alaska.gov/dph/Chronic/Pages/Tobacco/default.aspx>

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT: [www.tobaccofree.alaska.gov](http://www.tobaccofree.alaska.gov)

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