

communicate

Policy Communication

It takes more than signage: Working with your local news media to support policy enforcement

Here is a list of ways you can work with your local news media to support enforcement efforts around your new Tobacco-Free Schools policy:

- ◆ **An Op-Ed piece:** Shortly before your new policy goes into effect would be the perfect time to have a school leader (such as a school board member, PTA President, or the superintendent) write an op-ed for the local newspaper. An op-ed is a fairly long opinion article that normally appears on the page “opposite” the newspaper’s own editorial opinion, thus the name “op-ed.” To develop an op-ed, speak to the editorial page editor of your local paper and let them know what you are planning. If he/she is interested, you will receive a due date and word limit for the piece. The writer may even be asked to provide a photo or have one made at the newspaper office, if they don’t have one on file.
- ◆ **An Editorial Board Visit:** A small team from the school system could ask the local newspaper to print an editorial in support of abiding by the new policy. Call the editorial page editor and ask for an appointment to meet with the editorial board. Bring no more than three people to the meeting, and prepare no more than a 15-minute presentation. Be clear that you are asking for an editorial supporting the policy. A good team to bring might include a school board member, school employee and either a parent or a student. It would be a real plus to have a supportive smoker on this team!
- ◆ **Letters-to-the-Editor:** Having supporters of the policy write letters-to-the-editor to your local newspaper could be a good idea at several points in the process. First, letters thanking the Board of Education for passing the policy will get things started on the right foot. Letters could also help remind the public of the new policy just as it is going into effect. Throughout the school year, just before times when more members of the public could be on-campus, more letters might help. Good times might be 1) when school starts 2) parent-teacher conference time 3) football season 4) just before big on-campus fundraising events 5) prom season 6) graduation.

- ◆ **Buy an ad:** There might be several opportunities to purchase ads in the local media around the policy. SWAT at Independence High School in Charlotte purchased an ad thanking the school board for adopting a 100% Tobacco-Free School Policy. The school could purchase an ad in the back-to-school issue of the newspaper or on a popular radio or TV show on a local station to remind the public about the policy. Depending on where you are, local radio and print can be very inexpensive to purchase.
- ◆ **Contests:** The schools could sponsor contests around the new policy. Catawba County held a contest to allow students to design the tobacco-free signs for campus. Other schools have held contests for T-shirt designs, billboard art, and smoke-free banners for schools. A radio ad contest could be used for radio and/or morning announcements.
- ◆ **News Releases:** It's a good idea to keep your community informed about the new policy by issuing news releases at important times during the school year (see #3 above). As a school system you might want to recommend that outside groups who use your school campuses for other events include information about the tobacco-free policy in their flyers, mailings and news releases as well. This will prevent confusion and enforcement problems later.