

enforce

Policy enforcement

Tobacco Use Policy Violations: Consequences for Students, School Staff and Visitors

Across the state, school tobacco policy enforcement varies with respect to consequences or penalties for tobacco violations and provisions for positive options for punishment. Experience shows that the most effective enforcement policies are based on the following key principles.

We encourage you to talk with administrators, staff, students and parents to identify the best strategies for enforcing the policy within the school district. What follows are some suggestions based on the experiences of other school district in NC and across the country.

For students

- ◆ **Parent/guardian notification:** The policy should address parents/guardian notification procedures. The parent/guardian should be notified of all violations and actions taken by the school.
- ◆ **Support:** Refer students to the guidance counselor, school nurse, or other health or counseling services for all offenses for screening, information, and counseling and referral. Tobacco use is an addictive disease, not merely a discipline problem. It usually indicates psychosocial concerns of the adolescent and the student may engage in other unhealthy behaviors such as drug or alcohol use. Students who use tobacco may also have developed or exacerbated health problems as a result of their use. A screening will help to identify these at an early stage. Your tobacco policy will be more effective if you have clear procedures for identification, intervention and referral of students with tobacco-related problems
- ◆ **Mandatory education programs:** It is strongly recommended that all student violators attend an alternative to suspension (ATS) program that provides education on the addiction process and offers options for cessation. There are several ATS models that are available. These programs help students understand their tobacco behaviors, the risks to their health, and the skills that can help them if

they decide to quit smoking or chewing tobacco. An ATS program should not be confused with a cessation program. Some schools have incorporated mandatory respect and responsibly training or school/community service to play a role in enforcement.

- ◆ **School/community service:** Some schools have used school or community service projects as part of the consequences. This alternative can include activities related to the tobacco violation such as cleaning up school grounds of litter or providing tobacco education to younger students. In some cases, parent/guardians have been involved in the service requirement. Be sure to allow flexible scheduling to ensure that students don't lose instructional time and that parents don't miss work. Parents often prefer the opportunity for their children to choose among a few different types of service projects as opposed to a single, mandated requirement.
- ◆ **Cessation:** Research tells us that half of all young people who use tobacco want to quit. Offering cessation classes or helping to link students who violate the policy to community based cessation programs will motivate students to quit and introduce skills and techniques they can use to accomplish this. It will also help student develop coping methods to prevent relapse. The Not On Tobacco Program (NOT) is an example of a teen cessation program offered by school districts across the state. Scheduling of teen cessation programs vary. They can be offered afterschool, weekly during consecutive periods (so students won't miss too much class), on Saturdays, or during lunch. Some school districts offer teen cessation programs multiple times per year to the entire school body, as well as to ATS students.
- ◆ **Suspension:** Suspension rarely helps student tobacco addiction. Ideally suspension would only be used after a student has had several prior violations or refused to participate in other outlined measures. Your policy should include a suspension alternative. To provide uniformity and fairness in the decision-making process, school districts should clearly outline conditions that will lead to suspension. Students and parents should be shown the steps of enforcement so that they understand the seriousness of this action. Suspension should always be accompanied by counseling. A re-entry conference should be held prior to the student's return to school with the student, parent or guardian, and administrator. If suspension is deemed absolutely necessary, such as in the case of a repeat offender who refuses to participate in other options offered, alternative forms of suspension such as in-school suspension are preferable to out of school suspension.

For staff

- ◆ **Education and support:** Encourage staff to talk with their health professional regarding their tobacco use. As noted above, tobacco use is an addictive disease and staff who use tobacco may have developed health problems as a result. It is strongly recommended that all staff violators be provided with information on the dangers of tobacco use and on cessation options available to them in the community.
- ◆ **Disciplinary action:** After the first offense, staff violations should be considered as insubordination, and subject to disciplinary action as they would be for any other school policy violation. Staff must be expected to adhere to the policy stipulations as outlined.

For parents, family members and the public

- ◆ **Communication:** Communication with the public should always focus on positive messages to enforce the policy. Enlist the support of the public in enforcing the policy through ongoing communication of the policy and involvement in positive tobacco prevention activities.
- ◆ **Progressive enforcement:** A progressive enforcement policy is recommended. Public sanctions should involve the following: a) request the individual to stop and refer to the school policy; b) if person refuses to stop, request that the individual leave the site of the school function and refer to the school policy; c) if the person refuses to leave or is a repeat violator, refer to local authorities and the person is subject to a fine or other usual measure.