

# **Tobacco-Free School Policy**

A Discussion Paper

*This paper provides a background and discussion regarding tobacco-free schools. The paper is intended to enhance discussion about the health benefits to children who attend schools that have a comprehensive tobacco-free school policy. The benefits to the personal health of students are both direct and environmental. Direct health benefits from a tobacco-free school policy are achieved via effective and appropriate health instruction that informs students of the health consequences of tobacco use, thus helping to reduce or eliminate tobacco use behaviors among youth. Environmental health benefits from a tobacco-free school policy are achieved via the elimination of second-hand smoke, a known risk factor for tobacco-related health problems.*

Prepared for the

**Montana Board of Public Education**

Prepared by the

Montana Healthy Schools Network

and the

Office of Public Instruction  
Division of Health Enhancement and Safety

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### Background

It is estimated that more than 3,000 American teenagers start smoking each day. The 2003 Montana Youth Risk Behavior Survey<sup>1</sup> reported tobacco use rates among Montana teens to be as follows:

- About 61 percent of high school-aged students have tried smoking, which is slightly above the national average of 58 percent.
- Almost 20 percent of students were 12 years old or younger when they smoked for the first time.
- Nearly 23 percent of the students reported they were “current” smokers (smoked on one or more of the past 30 days). Although this is a 40 percent decline since 1997 when just over 38 percent of students reported they were current smokers, it still represents nearly one in every four Montana high school students.
- Over 13 percent of the students reported that they used smokeless tobacco in the previous 30 days. While this is a 45 percent decline since 1993 when 24 percent of high school youth reported using smokeless tobacco, it is still twice the national average of 6.7 percent.
- Thirty percent of the students indicated that, in the previous six months, they had tried to quit smoking cigarettes.

While virtually every Montana school district has a tobacco policy that prohibits tobacco use by students while on school property or at school events, the 2002 School Health Profiles Survey<sup>2</sup> concluded that only three of every ten schools (28.7 percent) have a comprehensive tobacco-free school policy.<sup>3</sup> A comprehensive policy prohibits tobacco use by all persons – students, staff or other adults – while on school property or at school-sponsored events.

Schools play an important role in shaping student tobacco-use behaviors. Tobacco prevention education, adult role modeling of non-smoking behavior, and strong tobacco-free school policies combine to create a positive and protective environment in which youth can remain tobacco free and practice behaviors that will help them become healthy adults.

### Issues/Discussion

#### *Attitudes and Acceptance*

Perceived social acceptance of tobacco use influences adolescent tobacco use behavior. The idea that tobacco use is socially acceptable can be developed when youth see others using tobacco or when they use it themselves without negative consequences. Studies have shown that children consistently overestimate the number of tobacco users. Research has found that students who made relatively high estimates of the amount of smoking around them were more likely to experiment with tobacco and were more likely to become regular smokers or to increase the amount they smoked.

Adult attitudes toward tobacco use can perpetuate the perception of acceptance. Studies on risk factors for drug and alcohol abuse found parental permissiveness – parents not taking a firm stand against their children using these substances – to be a key factor in teen initiation and use. The idea that tobacco use is normative and that it is socially accepted by others, including respected adults, encourages initiation and ongoing use of tobacco products by youth. Thus, enactment of a tobacco-free school policy represents a firm stand on the part of school administrators, teachers, and parents about youth tobacco use.

### *Legal Considerations*

Montana law (20-1-220 MCA) prohibits the use of tobacco products in public school buildings or on public school property during school hours, except that non-student adults may use tobacco products in an area designated by the school administrator or board of trustees. *(Editorial Note: This exception was removed by the 2005 Montana Legislature under HB643. This change occurred after this issue paper was written.)* Federal law (the Pro Children Act as reauthorized in sections 4301 through 4304 of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001) provides that no person shall permit smoking within any indoor facility used for the provision of kindergarten, elementary, or secondary education or for library services. Compliance with current state and federal law would not make a school "tobacco free" since current law allows for a designated smoking area for non-student adults.

### *Comprehensive Tobacco-Free School Policy*

A comprehensive tobacco-free school policy is designed to ensure a tobacco-free school environment and to be supportive of effective classroom-based tobacco use prevention education. The elements of a comprehensive tobacco-free school policy are:

- a ban of all tobacco products on the entire school campus;
- a clear no-use and no-possession statement at all times for all students;
- a clear no-use statement at all times for all staff and other individuals visiting or using the school or any of its property;
- a ban on tobacco advertising on school property, at school functions, or in school publications;
- enforcement provisions for violations of the policy, and
- support for classroom-based instruction on tobacco use prevention, including training for teachers whose instructional duties would include tobacco use prevention content.

The attached model policy (Attachment 1) provides a rationale for the policy, defines tobacco terminology used in the policy, is clear in what is prohibited under the policy, explains how the policy will be communicated to all persons, and includes support for classroom-based prevention education.

### Conclusions

- Despite the decline in the use of smoke and smokeless tobacco, too many Montana youth still use tobacco products.
- Montana law prohibits the use of tobacco products in public school buildings or on public school property during school hours, except that non-student adults may use tobacco products in an area designated by the school administrator or board of trustees.
- Federal law states that no person shall permit smoking within any indoor facility used for the provision of kindergarten, elementary, or secondary education or for library services.
- Compliance with current state and federal law would not make a school "tobacco free" since current law allows for a designated smoking area for non-student adults.
- Schools that intend to provide effective, school-based education programs to prevent tobacco use and addiction should also provide a tobacco-free environment. Adopting and enforcing a comprehensive tobacco-free school policy should be a priority for schools.

## Recommendations

1. That the Joint Committee for Healthy Kids<sup>4</sup> and the Montana Healthy Schools Network<sup>5</sup> seek action from the Board of Public Education that would encourage all districts to adopt and implement a comprehensive tobacco-free school policy by September 2006.
2. That the Board of Public Education encourage all districts to adopt and implement a comprehensive tobacco-free school policy by September 2006, and that such policy be consistent with the attached model tobacco-free school policy.

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## **Footnotes**

- <sup>1</sup> The Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) is an every-other-year survey conducted by the Office of Public Instruction. In Montana, the YRBS is given to students in Grades 7-12. The survey monitors the prevalence of health risk behaviors of youth.
- <sup>2</sup> The School Health Profiles is an every-other-year survey conducted by the Office of Public Instruction. The survey is given to principals and health teachers. The survey measures health policy and program implementation in Montana schools.
- <sup>3</sup> Preliminary review of 2004 School Health Profile Survey data reveals consistency with the 2002 findings. Final statistical analysis of 2004 data will not be available from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention until January 2006.
- <sup>4</sup> The Joint Committee for Healthy Kids (JCHK) is comprised of school health-related staff from the Office of Public Instruction (OPI) and the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS). The JCHK serves as an informal collaborative forum to improve coordinated school health services for Montana's K-12 students.
- <sup>5</sup> The Montana Healthy Schools Network is a three-member network whose function is to promote quality, well-coordinated school health programs. The member agencies are: the Montana Board of Public Education, the Montana School Boards Association, and the Montana Office of Public Instruction.

## **Resources**

- Tobacco-Free School Policy Guide, Montana Office of Public Instruction, July 2000
- National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) model policy, *Fit, Healthy and Ready to Learn: A School Health Policy Guide*, March 2000

## Attachment 1 Model Policy

*The following policy is a model. Local school boards may make modifications to the model policy to accommodate circumstances specific to their community.*

### Tobacco-Free Schools

#### 1. PURPOSE AND GOALS

INTENT. All students shall possess the knowledge and skills necessary to avoid all tobacco use, and school leaders shall actively discourage all use of tobacco products by students, staff, and school visitors. To achieve these ends, district leaders shall prepare, adopt, and implement a comprehensive plan to prevent tobacco use that includes:

- a sequential educational program to prevent tobacco use that is integrated within the school health education curriculum; that is aimed at influencing students' attitudes, skills, and behaviors; and that is taught by well-prepared and well-supported staff;
- establishment and strict enforcement of completely tobacco-free school environments at all times;
- prohibition of tobacco advertising;
- appropriate counseling services and/or referrals for students and staff to help them overcome tobacco addiction;
- cooperation with community-wide efforts to prevent tobacco use; and
- strategies to involve family members in program development and implementation.

NOTE: The district is not responsible for any costs for counseling or cessation services and/or referrals to counseling or cessation services to help students or staff overcome tobacco addiction.

RATIONALE. Cigarette smoking is considered the chief preventable cause of premature disease and death in the United States. Schools have a responsibility to help prevent tobacco use for the sake of students' and staff members' health and the well-being of their families. Research conclusively proves that regular use of tobacco is ultimately harmful to every user's health, directly causing cancer, respiratory and cardiovascular diseases, adverse pregnancy outcomes, and premature death; and second-hand smoke is a threat to the personal health of everyone, especially persons with asthma and other respiratory problems.

DEFINITION. For the purposes of this policy "tobacco" is defined to include any lighted or unlighted cigarette, cigar, pipe, bidi, clove cigarette, and any other smoking product, and spit tobacco, also known as smokeless, dip, chew, and snuff, in any form.

#### 2. TOBACCO-FREE ENVIRONMENTS

TOBACCO USE PROHIBITED. No student, staff member, school visitor or person/group using or renting school property is permitted to smoke, dip, or chew tobacco at any time, including non-school hours, on school property. This includes any building, facility, or vehicle owned, leased, rented, or chartered by the district; school grounds, athletic grounds, or parking lots; or any school-sponsored event off campus. In addition, no student is permitted to possess a tobacco product. *(Districts may wish to add an exception for tobacco use when the use is part of an approved classroom instruction. Such an exception would include ceremonial use of tobacco on school property.)*

TOBACCO PROMOTION PROHIBITED. Tobacco promotional items, including clothing, bags, lighters, and other personal articles, are not permitted on school grounds, in school vehicles, or at school-sponsored events. Tobacco advertising is prohibited in all school-sponsored publications and at all school-sponsored events. The use of curricular materials from tobacco companies is prohibited. *(Districts may wish to add a prohibition on accepting funding from tobacco companies.)*

**TOBACCO LAW ENFORCEMENT.** School authorities shall consult with local law enforcement agencies to explore community-based strategies to enforce laws that prohibit the possession of tobacco by minors within the immediate proximity of school grounds.

**NOTICE.** The district shall notify students, families, education personnel, and school visitors of the tobacco-free policy through such means as handbooks and newsletters, on posted notices or signs at every school entrance and other appropriate locations, and by other efficient means. To the extent possible, schools and districts will make use of local media to publicize the policies and help influence community norms about tobacco use.

**POLICY ENFORCEMENT.** Violation of this policy by students will be subject to actions outlined in the student discipline policy. Violation of this policy by staff will be subject to actions outlined in the employee discipline policy. Violation of this policy by visitors will be subject to local board determination. Any tobacco product found in the possession of a minor student shall be confiscated by staff and discarded.

### **3. TOBACCO-USE PREVENTION EDUCATION**

**INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAM DESIGN.** Tobacco-use prevention education shall be integrated within the Health Enhancement program and be taught at every grade level, pre-kindergarten through twelfth. The educational program shall be based on theories and methods that have been proven effective by published research and consistent with the state's/district's/school's Health Enhancement standards/guidelines/framework.

**STAFF PREPARATION.** Staff responsible for teaching tobacco-use prevention shall have adequate preservice training and participate in ongoing professional development activities to effectively deliver the education program as planned. Preparation and professional development activities shall provide basic knowledge about the effects of tobacco use and skill practice in effective instructional techniques and strategies for presenting program-specific activities.

**EDUCATIONAL REINFORCEMENT.** Tobacco-use prevention education shall be closely coordinated with the other components of the school health program. Tobacco-use prevention concepts shall also be integrated into the instruction of other subject areas to the greatest extent possible.

To send consistent messages to students and their families, school instructional staff shall collaborate with agencies and groups that conduct tobacco-use prevention education in the community. Guest speakers invited to address students shall receive appropriate orientation to the relevant policies of the school/district.

### **4. ASSISTANCE TO OVERCOME TOBACCO ADDICTION**

**PROGRAM AVAILABILITY.** The school health program may make referrals to community resources and programs to help students and staff overcome tobacco addiction. School counselors or community agencies are encouraged to establish voluntary tobacco-use cessation programs at school.

**NOTE:** The district is not responsible for any costs for counseling or cessation services and/or referrals to counseling or cessation services to help students or staff overcome tobacco addiction.

**PROGRAM ATTENDANCE.** Attendance or completion of a tobacco-use cessation program shall not be mandatory for anyone or used as a penalty. Attendance or completion of a tobacco-use cessation program is allowed as a voluntary substitute to suspension for possession or use of tobacco on school property.

**Adapted from NASBE Sample Policy on Tobacco Use Prevention**  
*Fit, Healthy and Ready to Learn: A School Health Policy Guide, March 2000*