

adopt

Adopting a policy

Eight Steps to Policy Change

The following steps are a "road map" for policy change. However, like most destinations, there are several routes - with various stops along the way. We encourage you to use these 8 steps as-is, or to add or delete a few, and/or to change their order. Working together with school and community leaders to identify a policy change strategy that will be successful is what is most important.

Step 1: Use current policy assessment to get commitment.

- ◆ Identify problems related to current policy and support for a change in policy or enforcement. Identify educational, health, and economic reasons for changing policy or enforcement. Use the tool [needs assessment for a comprehensive tobacco-free school policy](#), which is available on this website.
- ◆ Plan for educational opportunities. Select a team of knowledgeable and respected supporters to meet with possible opposition or neutral parties. Education should always take place. Don't assume that people are knowledgeable of the issue.
- ◆ Interview key stakeholders about tobacco-free schools policy; share information; determine level of support and possible barriers.
- ◆ Identify potential barriers. Determine a system for working through these problems.
- ◆ Spend energy gathering supporters. Focus efforts on those who are neutral on the issue – encouraging them to take your side. Don't waste energy on individuals who will never move on the issue.
- ◆ Talk with students, staff, parents and community leaders about attitudes toward the current policy. Identify supporters; consider a petition (see a sample petition in the [Tools for Schools](#) resource guide).
- ◆ Secure school board and administrative support for a review of existing policy.
- ◆ Request support and cooperation from school board in developing new policy or strengthening enforcement of current policy.

Step 2: Form or utilize your school's health advisory committee to recommend a tobacco policy.

- ◆ Include representation of school and community members, including students, teachers, smokers and nonsmokers.
- ◆ Review current policy and gather data needed for new policy or enforcement changes.
- ◆ Include the review of effective policies or enforcement strategies from other districts.
- ◆ Discuss and address concerns of school administrators and others.

Step 3: Develop a draft of the new policy.

- ◆ Keep it simple and specific. We encourage your school district to adopt [our model 100% tobacco-free school policy](#), which is endorsed by the NC Department of Public Instruction. If your school district plans to develop its own policy, we suggest you review the components of our comprehensive tobacco free school policy as well as some of [actual policies of tobacco-free school districts in across the state](#).
- ◆ Identify to whom the policy applies – students, staff, visitors, contract workers.
- ◆ Identify where the policy applies – school buildings, grounds, athletic events, vehicles, etc.
- ◆ Identify a meaningful date, such as the start of the school year, to implement policy or begin policy changes.
- ◆ Develop rationale (include values and benefits) for the policy. Address enforcement issues. Invite local law enforcement officers to assist, if appropriate. Develop consequences for violation. Refer to the [model enforcement policy](#). Be creative.
- ◆ Meet individually with school board members to gain input and support as you prepare the new policy. Determine level of support prior to proceeding and be prepared to overcome any barriers.

Step 4: Present the new policy to school board.

- ◆ Identify students to champion the policy.
- ◆ Identify an influential member on the school board to champion the policy. Identify a smoker, if possible, on the school board to champion the policy.
- ◆ Acquire and submit forms to get on school board agenda.
- ◆ Select a group to present. These may include local health care provider, teacher, students, parent school club leaders, athletic director, other champions. See [preparing for a school board presentation](#) for some helpful tips.
- ◆ Provide information packets to board members prior to the meeting.
- ◆ Preferably, meet with board members individually before the meeting.
- ◆ Gather support from community members to attend the meeting.
- ◆ Convey the importance of such a policy and ask for approval to adopt.
- ◆ Recognize policy change takes time; if at first you don't succeed, strategize and try again.

Once the policy or policy change has been adopted by the school board...

Step 5: Plan the implementation and enforcement strategies.

- ◆ Use the model Enforcement Plan to start discussion on how to enforce the new policy.
- ◆ Identify enforcement strategies for students, staff and visitors.
- ◆ Select an implementation date four to six weeks out in order to prepare. If convenient and helpful, you may wish to choose a date with "significance," such as start of the school year, a new semester, or the Great American Smokeout (third Thursday in November).
- ◆ Allow sufficient time for people to prepare for implementation.
- ◆ Identify cessation resources available to tobacco users.
- ◆ Identify alternatives to suspension for policy violators.
- ◆ Prepare for complaints about the new policy and decide how conflicts will be resolved.

- ◆ Organize special sessions to train and educate those who will be enforcing the policy.
- ◆ Emphasize the need for firm, consistent enforcement.
- ◆ Emphasize that being tobacco-free is in the best educational/health/economic interests of all.
- ◆ Focus on the use of tobacco, not on the user.
- ◆ Make a commitment to enforce the policy consistently.

Step 6: Positively communicate the policy throughout school and community.

Include:

- ◆ A description of the new policy and reasons for the change.
- ◆ An emphasis on the educational, health and economic benefits of the new policy.
- ◆ People affected.
- ◆ Implementation date.
- ◆ Enforcement procedures.
- ◆ How and where to get help with quitting tobacco use.
- ◆ Communication strategies for reaching students, staff, parents and others.

Step 7: Implementing the policy.

- ◆ Post signs with a positive no-tobacco use message in all affected areas. Celebrate the implementation.
- ◆ Recognize commitment is necessary to insure effective policy implementation.
- ◆ Expect an initial testing period.
- ◆ Be extra vigilant during the first few months of policy implementation.
- ◆ Provide positive incentives on day one of implementation such as healthy snacks, cinnamon candies, etc
- ◆ Enlist support of community law enforcement agencies.
- ◆ Encourage students, staff, parents and others to take pride in new policy.
- ◆ Include tobacco users and non-users in all phases of implementation.
- ◆ Enlist cooperation of local retailers not to sell tobacco to minors.
- ◆ Use educational programs instead of punitive programs for student violators.
- ◆ Offer several options for cessation programs.

Step 8: Conduct on-going advocacy efforts and policy evaluation.

- ◆ Collect stories of positive effects of policies on students and staff.
- ◆ Solicit comments from parents and community members.
- ◆ Publicize these comments and stories in school newsletter – send home to parents.
- ◆ Develop recognition events for student and staff who quit tobacco use.
- ◆ Orient new administrators, employees and board members to the policy.
- ◆ Identify problems with policy implementation and make necessary corrections.
- ◆ Have a new tobacco-free schools poster contest each year and post the winners.
- ◆ Communicate, communicate, communicate.

Source: Change Starts Here: The Grass Roots Guide for Tobacco-Free Schools in North Carolina, NC Tobacco Prevention and Control Branch, 2001.