

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
**July 22, 2004**

## **TOBACCO FREE SCHOOL MOVEMENT CELEBRATES 'THE BIG 4-0'**

**HEALTH ADVOCATES ENCOURAGE KIDS AND PARENTS TO MARK  
OCCASION BY TALKING ABOUT TOBACCO DANGERS**

### **ACTION HEATS UP AROUND STATE**

**(Raleigh, NC)** – Today, health advocates called for a statewide celebration to mark the fact that Pamlico County has become North Carolina's 40<sup>th</sup> school district to adopt a 100% Tobacco-Free School (TFS) policy. The Pamlico County School Board voted unanimously this month to prohibit tobacco use on campus when school opens next month.

“Just as turning 40 is a milestone for individuals, we consider our 40<sup>th</sup> Tobacco Free School district to be well worth celebrating,” said Suzanne DePalma, Tobacco-Free Schools Coordinator for the NC Tobacco Prevention and Control Branch (NC TPCB) within the NC Department of Health and Human Services. “To mark the occasion, we encourage North Carolina's young people to take a pledge to go tobacco-free and North Carolina's parents to take the time to talk to their children about the dangers of smoking.”

In the past decade, 40 of the state's 115 school systems have adopted a TFS policy, which bans all tobacco use everywhere on school property at all times. This means no smoking on school buses, no smoking on school owned or leased property, and no smoking during sports events, even in the evenings.

Nearly half of North Carolina's public school students now have the advantage of learning and growing in a TFS school district. The TFS movement is gaining noteworthy traction in the following school districts: **Graham, Macon** and **Haywood** in western NC; **Hoke, Montgomery, Moore** and **Richmond** in central NC; and **Bertie, Chowan, Tyrrell** and **Washington** in eastern NC. Contact information for these areas is provided below.

To learn more about TFS, the hazards of tobacco use and the tobacco-free pledge, please visit [www.realityunfiltered.com](http://www.realityunfiltered.com), the Web site for the Tobacco. Reality. Unfiltered. (TRU) campaign sponsored by the NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund (HWTF).

Enacting a Tobacco Free School policy represents a firm commitment by the school's administration, teachers and parents to provide a safe and healthy learning and working environment for students and school staff. A recent study by the UNC School of Family

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Medicine found that TFS policies have a positive impact overall on participating school districts.

“School systems see this policy as an opportunity to provide the most optimal learning environment for their students and staff. In addition, research shows that school districts that have adopted this policy have a 20-40% decrease in youth tobacco use,” said DePalma.

According to the 2003 NC Youth Tobacco Survey (NC YTS), which is conducted every other year by the NC TPCB, preliminary results show that current cigarette use among middle school students (grades 6-8) across North Carolina has dropped 38% since 1999, from 15.0% (1999) to 11.3% (2001), and finally to 9.3% (2003) in the most recent survey. “Unfortunately, high school current cigarette use was 27.3% in the 2003 survey, which is not significantly lower than 2001 or 1999,” said Sally Herndon Malek, MPH, head of the NC TPCB.

Lt. Gov. Beverly Perdue, HWTF chairperson, applauded the “Big 4-0” milestone, saying, “The dangers of tobacco use are impossible to ignore. We need to get tobacco products away from our children and out of our schools.”

### **CONTACTS FOR REGIONAL TFS INFORMATION:**

#### **Western region:**

Haywood County Health Dept. HI TOP ASSIST  
Waynesville, NC  
Contact: Traci L. Clark  
Phone: 828-452-6675

#### **Central region:**

FirstHealth of the Carolinas Community Health Services  
Pinehurst, NC  
Contact: Lisa Hartsock, Sally Beth Johnson  
Phone: 910-215-1925

#### **Eastern region:**

Chowan Regional Health Care Foundation  
Edenton, NC  
Contact: Jean Bunch  
Phone: 252-482-6440

Halifax County Schools  
Halifax, NC  
Contact: Barbara J Wilkins  
Phone: 252-586-4125

### **ABOUT THE NC HEALTH AND WELLNESS TRUST FUND:**

The NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund makes North Carolina stronger, both physically and economically, by funding programs that promote preventive health. Created by the General Assembly in 2000 to allocate a portion of North Carolina's share of the national tobacco settlement, HWTF has invested \$55 million to support preventive health initiatives and \$78 million to fund a prescription drug assistance program. For more information, please visit [www.hwtfc.org](http://www.hwtfc.org).