

Proposed Best Practice Standard: Tobacco-Free Schools

Tobacco use is a proven health and safety hazard, with serious risks and long term consequences for all affected. Smoking is the leading cause of preventable death in the United States while smokeless tobacco use has been linked to increased risk of oral and other cancers and cardiovascular disease.

The health risks posed by tobacco in all its forms have led to national efforts to reduce tobacco-related diseases and deaths. CDC's Office on Smoking and Health (OSH) created the National Tobacco Control Program in 1999 to provide funding and technical support to state and territorial health departments to establish effective tobacco control programs to prevent and reduce tobacco use. Similar action has been undertaken on a more local basis; nearly all states and thousands of localities have enacted laws restricting smoking in public places and workplaces.

In 1994, Congress outlawed smoking in most of the nation's public schools and in federally funded programs that serve children including Head Start centers, day-care centers, and community health centers. Existing Ohio law provides that smoking is prohibited in public places and places of employment, including the indoor areas of schools. Smoking is also prohibited immediately adjacent to entrances to and exits from public places and places of employment.

Establishing a tobacco-free environment in public schools sets a clear example of good health practices; provides a healthy atmosphere; results in lower clean-up costs; encourages both employees and students to quit tobacco use; and significantly lowers long term health care costs. Seventeen states already have adopted policies prohibiting the use of all tobacco products on school grounds, and many school districts across Ohio have already implemented or are considering adopting policies to make their campuses completely tobacco-free. According to the Ohio Department of Health, 176 of the state's public school districts were 100% tobacco-free as of August 7, 2008.

The Board accordingly believes that requiring Ohio public school districts to adopt a 100% tobacco-free school campus policy will reduce health care costs and improve the health status of public school employees and thus represents a "best practice" as envisioned by Section 9.901.

Proposed Rules

1. Each public school district shall establish a tobacco-free school campus policy which provides, at a minimum, that no student, staff member, volunteer, or school visitor is permitted to smoke, inhale, dip, chew or use tobacco at any time, including non-school hours, in any building, facility, or vehicle owned, leased, rented, or chartered by the district or on school grounds, athletic grounds, or parking lots and at school-sponsored events.