

**A Comprehensive Approach to Tobacco  
Prevention & Cessation:  
Tools for Rhode Island Schools**



*Introduction*

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## **Introduction**

This toolkit is designed to help districts and schools address the issue of tobacco in a comprehensive and effective manner. It is intended for use by District Health and Wellness Subcommittees and other district or school leaders in developing and implementing policies, programs, and curricula to help prevent and reduce the use of tobacco throughout the school community. Resources and tools in the toolkit are based on best available research and models, with an emphasis on Rhode Island resources.

## **Who Developed the Toolkit?**

The Rhode Island School Tobacco Prevention Coalition is a network of organizations interested in preventing tobacco use in elementary and secondary schools in Rhode Island. Members include the Rhode Island Departments of Health (HEALTH) and Education (RIDE), Rhode Island Student Assistance Services, the American Cancer Society - Southern New England Region, the American Lung Association of Rhode Island and others. Beginning in 2004, Coalition members began collaborating in order to:

- Share resources, increase effectiveness and minimize duplication of efforts;
- Utilize existing entry points and channels to best promote tobacco prevention; and
- Reach out to other important groups in order to keep their focus on tobacco.

## **Why Was the Toolkit Developed?**

In 2004, the RI General Assembly passed, and the Governor signed, Public Law 05-074/05-076 ([www.rilin.state.ri.us/PublicLaws/law05/law05074.htm](http://www.rilin.state.ri.us/PublicLaws/law05/law05074.htm) or [www.rilin.state.ri.us/PublicLaws/laws05/law05076.htm](http://www.rilin.state.ri.us/PublicLaws/laws05/law05076.htm)), relating to health and wellness of students and staff. This law:

- Broadens the powers and duties of school committees to include the health and wellness of students and employees;
- Requires that district strategic plans include strategies to decrease obesity and improve the health and wellness of students and employees through nutrition, physical activity, health education and physical education.
- Requires that the school committee establish a health and wellness subcommittee responsible for the development of wellness policies, strategies and implementation plans and forwarding recommendations to the full school committee. The subcommittee must be chaired by a member of the school committee and must include members of the general public, a majority of whom are not employed by the school district, including at least one parent.

While the impetus of the legislation was to address obesity, nutrition and physical activity, the statute is written broadly, charging District Health and Wellness Subcommittees with trying to improve the health and wellness students and staff, including addressing other pressing health issues, such as tobacco.

HEALTH and RIDE, in partnership with the Healthy Schools Coalition, had developed a toolkit for District Health and Wellness Subcommittees to comply with this legislation. That toolkit

provided information, resources and tools to help districts set up District Health and Wellness Subcommittees, adopt nutrition and physical activity policies, and develop implementation plans. This tobacco toolkit is meant to supplement that original toolkit, helping districts to build on their success around nutrition and physical activity and address the issue of tobacco.

### **Why Focus on Tobacco?**

Tobacco remains the largest public health threat in the United States, with a particular impact on children and adolescents.

- Tobacco use is the leading cause of preventable death and disease in the United States;
- Environmental tobacco smoke (ETS) is classified as a Group A (known human) carcinogen by U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Exposure to ETS presents a serious and substantial public health risk;
- Nicotine is highly addictive;
- Tobacco use usually begins during adolescence;
- The younger a person is when they start using tobacco, the more likely s/he is to become a heavy user as an adult; and
- Tobacco may be a gateway to use of alcohol and other drugs.

### **Why Should School Districts Be Involved?**

Schools play a pivotal role in promoting health, given their central role in the lives of children and adolescents. Schools can help students adopt, practice and maintain healthful lifestyles through education, policy and environmental interventions.

Moreover, tobacco is not just a health concern; it is also an educational concern. Tobacco use can interfere with students' attendance and learning. Studies have shown a correlation between tobacco use and lower achievement levels. Students who use tobacco are somewhat more likely to be involved in alcohol, illicit drugs, and other risky behaviors. They are also more likely to be disengaged from school, to skip classes, and to be suspended from school for both tobacco and non-tobacco related offenses.

Tobacco is also an important staff wellness issue. Staff who smoke are likely to have health problems, which may cause them to miss a significant amount of time in school. In addition to improving their health and well-being, staff who quit smoking can serve as more effective role models for students.

### **What Can School Districts Do?**

Schools play an important role in preventing the use of tobacco by students. Although schools cannot be expected to do this alone, in collaboration with parents, communities, healthcare providers, and the media, they can significantly impact the likelihood that students will use tobacco.

A comprehensive approach to tobacco prevention in schools goes well beyond simply setting a policy banning tobacco use. It involves:

- Providing education in health education classes and school-wide programs,
- Establishing tobacco-free school policies,
- Communicating about policies, expectations, and consequences,
- Enforcing policies,
- Providing access to cessation services and/or counseling to both students and staff,

- Prohibiting tobacco advertising and funding,
- Involving families and communities,
- Preparing staff to fulfill their responsibilities around tobacco prevention, and
- Evaluating all of these efforts.

These strategies should be integrated into the district strategic plan and school improvement plans.

### **How Does One Use the Toolkit?**

This toolkit is organized into sections to help district and school leaders address these areas in a planned and coordinated manner. The sections are:

- **Introduction** – basic information to help get started and guide the process;
- **Tools for Schools** – resources and tools districts can use to develop a comprehensive tobacco program, including model policy language that districts can be adopted, self-assessment tools to help identify priorities and set up plans for action, information about effective tobacco curricula, and professional development opportunities around tobacco
- **Laws** – copies of relevant Rhode Island statutes and regulations;
- **Data** – Rhode Island student and school tobacco data;
- **Parent/Family Involvement Resources** – state and national resources for involving families in tobacco prevention;
- **Cessation Resources** – information and resources to help individuals quit using tobacco
- **Other Resources** – state and national resources on tobacco prevention

### **Where Can One Turn for Further Assistance?**

Rhode Island School Tobacco Prevention Coalition members are eager to provide technical assistance and support to districts around taking a comprehensive approach to tobacco prevention. Please contact any of the following:

Jan Mermin  
Health Education Specialist  
Rhode Island Department of Education  
401-222-8954  
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Melissa Campbell  
Community Executive for Cancer Control  
American Cancer Society, Southern New  
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Tri-Town Community Action  
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## Suggested Steps for a Comprehensive Approach to Tobacco Prevention in Schools

WHO	WHAT	WHEN
School Committee Member; District Health & Wellness Subcommittee (DHWS); or Superintendent	Appoint person to lead a team to address tobacco issues within the district. This team may be the full District Health and Wellness Subcommittee, a subgroup of that Subcommittee, or a separate <i>ad hoc</i> district-level team. (Regardless of how it is structured, this team will be referred to as the “School Tobacco Prevention Team” or “the Team” in this document.)	Start-up
School Tobacco Prevention Team chair	<p>Meet with the Superintendent, the DHWS, and/or others to plan the process.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Define the charge of the Team;</li> <li>• Determine the relationship of the Team to the DHWS, the school committee, and the superintendent’s office;</li> <li>• Clarify decision-making authority of the Team and communication and coordination processes;</li> <li>• Discuss the Team formation:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Identify members or groups to be represented, and</li> <li>○ Determine the recruitment process: who will recruit and through what means</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Identify the timelines for:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Conducting an assessment of district tobacco prevention efforts (policy, policy implementation, curriculum, instruction, prevention programs, cessation programs, family involvement, staff preparation and evaluation),</li> <li>○ Development of policy,</li> <li>○ Development of action steps to be incorporated into the district strategic plan,</li> <li>○ Evaluation of the tobacco curriculum, and</li> <li>○ Review of tobacco cessation and tobacco prevention programs.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Obtain formats for the current District Strategic Plan and district policies.</li> </ul>	Start-up
School Tobacco Prevention Team Chair, and other Team members	Recruit Tobacco Prevention Team members.	Month 1 (and ongoing)

WHO	WHAT	WHEN
School Tobacco Prevention Team	<p>Collect and review state, district and school tobacco data.</p> <p><i>Refer to the <u>Data</u> section of this Toolkit.</i></p>	Month 1-2
School Tobacco Prevention Team	<p>Collect and review state laws related to tobacco.</p> <p><i>Refer to the <u>Laws</u> section of this Toolkit.</i></p>	Month 1-2
School Tobacco Prevention Team	<p>Conduct a district self-assessment of tobacco prevention and cessation efforts.</p> <p><i>Refer to the “RI School District Tobacco Self-Assessment Tool” or the “CDC’s School Health Index” in the <u>Tools</u> section of this Toolkit.</i></p>	Month 2
<p>School Tobacco Prevention Team in partnership with DHWS, Superintendent and District School Improvement Coordinator</p>	<p>Develop an action plan with recommended strategies to prevent and reduce tobacco use by students and staff – to be included in the District Strategic Plan (DSP). Strategies should focus on one or more of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tobacco policy and its implementation,</li> <li>• Health education curriculum and instruction,</li> <li>• Staff preparation,</li> <li>• Tobacco cessation efforts,</li> <li>• Involvement of families in tobacco prevention,</li> <li>• Tobacco prevention programs, and</li> <li>• Evaluation.</li> </ul> <p><i>Refer to the <u>Tools</u> section of this toolkit for policy and implementation; refer to the <u>Resources</u> section for other topics.</i></p> <p>The action plan and strategies may be incorporated with those related to physical activity/nutrition and other health and wellness issues, created by the District Health &amp; Wellness Subcommittee.</p> <p><i>Refer to the District Health and Wellness Subcommittee Toolkit for guidance and templates related to health and wellness and the District Strategic Plan: <a href="http://www.thriveri.org/moreinfo/wellness_councils.html">www.thriveri.org/moreinfo/wellness_councils.html</a></i></p>	Months 2-5
School Tobacco Prevention Team, in partnership with DHWS	<p>Develop a revised District Tobacco-Free Schools Policy to be forwarded to the School Committee for approval.</p> <p><i>Refer to the “Rhode Island Model Tobacco-Free Schools Policy Language” in the <u>Tools</u> section.</i></p>	Months 2-3

<b>WHO</b>	<b>WHAT</b>	<b>WHEN</b>
District Health & Wellness Subcommittee Chair and/or School Tobacco Prevention Team Chair	Present the final draft of the District Tobacco-Free Schools Policy to the School Committee.	Month 3
School Committee	Approve and adopt the District Tobacco-Free Schools Policy, with any revisions, as appropriate and communicate the policy throughout the school and community.	Month 3
Superintendent and District School Improvement Coordinator	<p>Review the action plan and recommended strategies to prevent and reduce tobacco use (and other health &amp; wellness strategies). Determine how best to incorporate those strategies into the District Strategic Plan, as part of the annual review and update of the DSP.</p> <p>Submit the District Strategic Plan to RIDE by May 1 of each year; submit updates by November 1 of each year.</p> <p>Share the tobacco prevention (and other health &amp; wellness strategies) with School Improvement Teams, to be incorporated into School Improvement Plans.</p>	(Depends on the district's strategic planning cycle)
School Tobacco Prevention Team, in partnership with DHWS	Begin full implementation of the tobacco prevention action plan, including initial trainings, as needed.	Month 3 and beyond
School Tobacco Prevention Team, in partnership with DHWS	Monitor and begin to evaluate implementation and effectiveness of the tobacco prevention action plan.	Ongoing
School Tobacco Prevention Team, in partnership with DHWS, Superintendent and District School Improvement Coordinator	Review, revise and/or develop new recommendations for the tobacco prevention action plan for Year 2 – to be incorporated into the DSP.	Months 9-12
<i>Continue and Repeat...</i>		