

TOBACCO-FREE SCHOOLS

February 2025







COMMERCIAL TOBACCO-FREE K-12 SCHOOL MODEL POLICY



The use or promotion of commercial tobacco products¹ on school grounds and at off-campus school-sponsored events is detrimental to the health and safety of students, staff, and visitors.

Under federal law, smoking is prohibited in any kindergarten, elementary, or secondary school or library serving children under the age of 18 years if federal funds are used in the school.² Many states also have laws that restrict commercial tobacco use, including electronic cigarettes, in public K–12 schools.³ However, federal law and many state laws do not cover outdoor school grounds.

To promote an environment free of commercial tobacco in primary and secondary schools, the Public Health Law Center has prepared a comprehensive model policy that school districts and schools may adopt.





The policy:

- Provides a definition of commercial tobacco products to include current and future tobacco products;
- Prohibits the following items on campus (inside and outside buildings) and at off-campus, school-sponsored events:
 - Tobacco products and tobacco-related devices, including electronic cigarettes,
 - Imitation tobacco products (such as candy cigarettes), and
 - Lighters
- Prohibits accepting any donations or curriculum from any tobacco-related industry;
- Prohibits any promotion of tobacco products, including electronic cigarette products; and
- Includes effective and holistic enforcement options for student violations instead of suspension and expulsion.

Free Legal Technical Assistance

As with all policy drafting, this K–12 Model Policy is only to be used as a guide. Each school district or school may consider modifications that reflect local needs, resources, and situations. You should review your policy with a legal technical assistance provider to ensure internal consistency, especially if you change terms or delete provisions.

The Public Health Law Center may be able to review the draft of your school or school district's commercial tobacco-free policy. The Center also offers trainings on drafting effective policies. Please check our website at www.publichealthlawcenter.org for more information about policy drafting and other model policies and resources. To request assistance, e-mail publichealthlawcenter@mitchellhamline.edu.

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I. K-12 School Tobacco-Free Model Policy Findings

- (A) Commercial⁴ tobacco use is the single most preventable cause of death in the United States.⁵
- (B) In the United States, smoking causes more than 490,000 deaths annually and is responsible for nearly \$240 billion in healthcare spending.⁶
- (C) Nicotine is found in all commercial tobacco products, including electronic smoking devices.⁷ Exposure to nicotine during adolescence and young adulthood can cause addiction and harm the developing brain.⁸
- (D) The use of commercial tobacco products by children in the United States is a pediatric disease of considerable proportions that results in new generations of nicotine-dependent children and adults.⁹
- (E) In 2024, 8.1 percent of U.S students reported current use of any commercial tobacco product, totaling 2.25 million, with 1.63 million youth currently using e-cigarettes.¹⁰ In 2024, 87.6 percent of youth using e-cigarettes reported using flavored products, with fruit flavors being the most popular, followed by candy, dessert, and other sweets, mint, and menthol flavors.¹¹
- (F) Children are exposed to tailored, targeted, substantial, and unavoidable tobacco industry marketing and advertising that leads young people to (1) hold favorable beliefs about, (2)



- overestimate the prevalence and undermine the health harms of, and (3) become more likely to begin to use commercial tobacco. ¹²
- (G) Electronic delivery smoking devices create and increase nicotine addiction among young people. In 2018, the U.S. Surgeon General declared use of electronic delivery smoking devices as an epidemic among young people. Using these products may also encourage youth to try other combustible tobacco products that are known to cause disease and lead to premature death.
- (H) Imitation tobacco products, such as candy cigarettes and smokeless chew, may lead youth to use commercial tobacco by desensitizing them to the dangers of tobacco and by advancing the idea that commercial tobacco use is socially acceptable.¹⁴
- (I) Evidence has shown anti-tobacco use campaigns sponsored by the tobacco industry (including electronic smoking device manufacturers and retailers) do not prevent youth from using commercial tobacco products and may encourage youth to smoke and create positive associations with the tobacco industry.¹⁵

II. Purpose

This is a comprehensive policy designed to ensure a safe learning and work environment free of commercial tobacco.

- (A) [The [district name] Board of Education] / [school name] recognizes that the use of commercial tobacco products, including electronic smoking devices, is a health, safety, and environmental hazard for students, staff, visitors, and school facilities. The board is acutely aware of the serious health risks associated with the use of commercial tobacco products, including electronic smoking devices, to users and non-users. The [board/school] believes that the use or promotion of commercial tobacco products, including electronic smoking devices, on school grounds and at off-campus school-sponsored events is detrimental to the health and safety of students, staff, and visitors.
- (B) The [board/school] also believes accepting gifts or materials from the tobacco industry will send an inconsistent message to students, staff, and visitors.
- (C) The [board/school] acknowledges that adult staff and visitors serve as role models for students. The board embraces its obligation to promote positive role models in schools and to provide an environment for learning and working that is safe, healthy, and free from unwanted smoke or aerosol and other commercial tobacco use for the students, staff, and visitors.



THEREFORE, the [board/school] adopts the following commercial tobacco-free policy:

III. Definitions

- (A) "Administrator" means any person who has disciplinary and managerial authority to enforce school policies in [district/school name], including but not limited to principals, vice-principals, and office personnel.
- (B) "Any time" means 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year.
- (C) "Electronic smoking device" means any product containing or delivering nicotine, or any other substance, whether natural or synthetic, intended for human consumption through the inhalation of aerosol or vapor from the product. "Electronic smoking device" includes, but is not limited to, devices manufactured, marketed, or sold as e-cigarettes, e-cigars, e-pipes, e-hookah, vape pens, mods, tank systems, whether or not under any other product name or descriptor. "Electronic smoking device" includes any component part of a product, whether or not marketed or sold separately, including but not limited to e-liquids, e-juice, cartridges, or pods.
- (D) "Imitation tobacco product" means any edible non-tobacco product designed to resemble a commercial tobacco product, or any non-edible non-tobacco product designed to resemble a commercial tobacco product and intended to be used by children as a toy. "Imitation tobacco product" includes, but is not limited to, candy or chocolate cigarettes, bubble gum cigars, shredded bubble gum resembling chewing tobacco, pouches containing flavored substances packaged similar to snus, and shredded beef jerky in containers resembling snuff tins.
- (E) "Lighter" means a mechanical or electrical device typically used for lighting tobacco products.
- (F) "Off-campus, school-sponsored event" means any event sponsored by the school or school district that is not on school property, including but not limited to, sporting events, day camps, field trips, dances, or theatrical productions.
- (G) "Parent/Guardian" means any person that has legal guardian status over a student enrolled in [district/school name].
- (H) "School" means [name of school/any public nursery, day care center, child care facility, Head Start program, kindergarten, elementary, secondary school, alternative learning center or adult education center] operated under the control of [district name].



- (I) "School property" means all facilities and property, including land, whether owned, rented, or leased by [district/school name], and all vehicles owned, leased, rented, contracted for, or controlled by [district/school name] used for transporting students, staff, or visitors.
- (J) "Signage" means signs declaring that all [district/school name] school property is tobaccofree.
- (K) "Smoking" means inhaling, exhaling, burning, or carrying any lighted or heated cigar, cigarette, or pipe, or any other lighted or heated product containing, made, or derived from nicotine, tobacco, cannabis, or other plant, whether natural or synthetic, that is intended for inhalation. "Smoking" also includes carrying or using an activated electronic smoking device. "Smoking" does not include the use of traditional, or sacred, tobacco used by many American Indian and Alaska Native communities for spiritual and medicinal purposes.
- (L) "Staff" means any person employed by [district/school name] as full or part-time, or any position contracted for or otherwise employed, with direct or indirect monetary wages or compensation paid by [district/school name], or anyone working on a volunteer basis. This term includes, but is not limited to, faculty, service personnel, volunteers, chaperones, student teachers, adult classroom or student aides, and other adults working for [district/school name].
- (M) "Student" means any person enrolled in [district/school name]'s educational system.
- (N) "Tobacco industry" means manufacturers, distributors, or wholesalers of tobacco products or tobacco-related devices (e.g., Juul, Altria). This includes parent companies and subsidiaries.
- (O) "Tobacco industry brand" means any corporate name, trademark, logo, symbol, motto, selling message, recognizable pattern of colors, or any other indication of product identification identical or similar to those used for any brand of tobacco product, company, or manufacturer of tobacco products.
- (P) "Tobacco product or commercial tobacco product" means any product containing, made, or derived from tobacco or that contains nicotine, whether synthetic or natural, that is intended for human consumption, whether chewed, smoked, absorbed, dissolved, inhaled, snorted, sniffed, or ingested by any other means, or any component, part, or accessory of a tobacco product, including but not limited to: cigarettes; electronic smoking devices; cigars; little cigars; cheroots; stogies; periques; granulated, plug cut, crimp cut, ready rubbed, and other smoking tobacco; snuff; snuff flour; cavendish; plug and twist



- tobacco; fine-cut and other chewing tobacco; shorts; refuse scraps, clippings, cuttings and sweepings of tobacco; and other kinds and forms of tobacco.
- (Q) "Tobacco products shop" means a retail establishment that derives more than 90 percent of its gross revenue from the sale of tobacco products, as defined in this policy.
- (R) "Tobacco-related devices" means ashtrays, rolling papers, wraps, or pipes for smoking and any components, parts, or accessories of electronic smoking devices.
- (S) "Visitor" means any person subject to this policy that is not a student, staff, or administrator as defined above.

IV. General Statement of Policy

- (A) [District/school name] students are prohibited from possessing, using, consuming, displaying, promoting, or selling any commercial tobacco products, tobacco-related devices, imitation tobacco products, or lighters at any time on school property or at any off-campus, school-sponsored event.
- (B) Administrators, staff, or visitors of [district/school name] are prohibited from using, consuming, displaying, activating, promoting, or selling any commercial tobacco products, tobacco-related devices, imitation tobacco products, or lighters at any time on school property or at any off-campus, school-sponsored events. This includes products or paraphernalia displaying tobacco industry brands.
- (C) It shall be a violation of this policy for [district/school name] to solicit or accept any contributions, gifts, money, curricula, or materials from the tobacco industry or from any tobacco products shop. This includes, but is not limited to, donations, monies for sponsorship, advertising, alleged educational materials, promotions, loans, scholarships, or support for equipment, uniforms, and sports and/or training facilities. It shall also be a violation of this policy to participate in any type of service funded by the tobacco industry while in the scope of employment for [district/school name].
- (D) It shall be a violation of this policy for any person to promote, or for [district/school name] to promote or allow promotion of commercial tobacco products, tobacco-related devices, or imitation tobacco products on the school property or at off-campus, school-sponsored events. This includes promotion of these products via gear, technology accessories, bags, clothing, any personal articles, signs, structures, vehicles, flyers or any other materials.



- (E) [District/school name] shall act to enforce this policy and to take appropriate action against any student, staff, administrator, or visitor who is found to have violated this policy. At no time shall enforcement of this policy require [district/school name] to involve law enforcement in response to any violation of this policy.
- (F) Instruction to discourage the use of commercial tobacco products shall be included in the education provided for all students. Staff responsible for teaching tobacco use prevention shall have adequate training and participate in ongoing professional development activities to effectively deliver the education program as planned. The curriculum for this instruction will not be paid for or developed by the tobacco industry or its subsidiaries.

V. Exceptions

- (A) It shall not be a violation of this policy for a person to possess or provide tobacco, tobacco-related devices, imitation tobacco products, or lighters to any other person as part of an indigenous practice used by American Indian or Alaska Native communities for spiritual and medicinal purposes. It shall not be a violation of this policy to use tobacco, tobacco-related devices, initiation tobacco products, or lighters as part of an educational experience related to traditional, or sacred tobacco practices that has been approved by administrators.
- (B) It shall not be a violation of this policy for commercial tobacco products, tobacco-related devices, imitation tobacco products, or lighters to be included in an instructional or workrelated activity in [district/school name] school buildings if the activity is conducted by a staff member or an approved visitor and the activity does not include smoking, chewing, or otherwise ingesting the product.
- (C) It shall not be a violation of this policy for non-students 18 years and older to use or possess a product that has been approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration for sale as a tobacco cessation product, as a nicotine dependence product, or for other medical purposes, and is being marketed and sold solely for such an approved purpose.

VI. Opportunities for Cessation Programs

(A) Administrators shall consult with the local public health department or other appropriate health and allied community-based organizations to provide students, staff, and administrators with information and access to support systems, programs, and services to encourage them to abstain from the use of commercial tobacco products.



(B) Administrators shall identify and offer evidence-based programs and services for staff that use commercial tobacco products to support them in complying with this policy.

Comment

In supplying information and resources on commercial tobacco cessation during the enforcement process, administrators or other designated staff should only rely on evidence-based cessation programs, such as the <u>North American Quitline Consortium</u>, <u>quitSTART</u> (a free smartphone app for teens), and the American Lung Association's N-O-T: Not On Tobacco.

VII. Enforcement

The success of this policy depends upon the thoughtfulness, consideration, and cooperation of the whole [district/school name] community. All individuals on school premises, including students, staff, administrators, and visitors are responsible for adhering to and enforcing this policy. Members of the [district/school name] community are encouraged to communicate this policy with courtesy and diplomacy. Any person acting in violation of this policy will be informed or reminded of the policy and asked to comply.

(A) Students

- (1) Promotion of Tobacco Industry Brand, Tobacco Products, Tobacco Product Shops or Tobacco-Related Devices Only.
 - (a) The first violation that involves only the promotion of tobacco industry brands, tobacco products, tobacco product shops, or tobacco-related devices (e.g., clothing, electronic device covers) will result in the following:
 - (i) The student will be asked to cover the logo that is on apparel or devices or turn over the item containing any promotional material to be returned at the end of the school day; and
 - (ii) The student will be reminded of this policy and requested to sign an agreement acknowledging receipt of this policy as well as indicating they understand the policy and agree to abide by it.



- (b) Any subsequent violations involving only the promotion of tobacco industry brands, tobacco products, tobacco product shops, or tobacco-related devices will result in the following:
 - (i) A student meeting to review the policy and the student's previous agreement to adhere to the policy;
 - (ii) Education on the roles that promoting the industry brand and commercial tobacco products generally play in youth use; and
 - (iii) Notification to parents and/or guardians, including a reminder of the policy and the fact of subsequent violations.
- (2) Possession or Use of Commercial Tobacco Products.
 - (a) The first violation shall result in confiscation of commercial tobacco products, tobacco-related devices, imitation tobacco products, or lighters; notification of parents and/or guardians; and at least one of the following:
 - (i) A student meeting and individual student assessment with a chemical health educator or designated staff to discuss commercial tobacco use and the school policy.
 - (ii) Student participation in a tobacco education program.
 - (iii) Provision of information to student about available cessation programs and resources.
 - (b) The second violation shall result in confiscation of commercial tobacco products, tobacco-related devices, imitation tobacco products, or lighters; notification of parents and/ or guardians; the provision of information to the student about available cessation programs; and at least one of the following:
 - (i) A student meeting and individual student assessment with a chemical health educator or designated staff with parents and/or guardians to discuss commercial tobacco use and school policy.
 - (ii) Student participation in a tobacco education program.
 - (c) The third and any subsequent violation shall result in confiscation of commercial tobacco products, tobacco-related devices, imitation tobacco products, or lighters; notification of parents and/or guardians; the provision of information



to the student about available cessation programs; student participation in a tobacco education program; and at least one of the following:

- (i) A student meeting and individual student assessment with a chemical health educator or designated staff with parents and/or guardians to discuss commercial tobacco use and school policy.
- (ii) Educational community service.

(B) Staff

- (1) The first violation of this policy shall result in a verbal warning to the staff member and an offer of a referral to cessation services.
- (2) The second violation shall result in a written warning to the staff member with a copy placed in the staff member's district personnel file, and an offer of referral to cessation services.
- (2) The third violation shall be considered insubordination and shall be dealt with accordingly based on established policies and procedures for suspension and/or dismissal of staff.

(C) Visitors

- (1) Visitors observed violating this policy shall be asked to comply with [district/school name]'s tobacco-free policy.
- (2) If a visitor fails to comply with the request, this policy violation may be referred to the building principal or other available school district supervisory personnel. The supervisor shall decide on further action that may include a directive that the visitor leave school property and forfeit any fee charged for admission to a school-sponsored event.
- (2) Repeated violations may result in a recommendation that the superintendent prohibit the individual from entering [district/school name]'s property for a specified period of time.



Note

Similar to the model language provided here, Alliance for a Healthier Generation has adapted PHLC's model K–12 policy to provide a "supportive discipline" model for student infractions of the policy. This is the enforcement language from their tookit:

Any violation involving possession or usage of tobacco products shall result in:

- Confiscation of tobacco products.
- Notification of caregivers.
- The offer of information to the students about available tobacco education and/or cessation programs that are free or low-cost (e.g., through Medicaid or community partners), including nationally recognized tobacco cessation programs.
- Facilitation of the enrollment of the student in an evidence-based cessation program if the student expresses an interest in quitting.
- Additional intervention as follows:
 - At the first violation, a collaborative conversation shall take place between the student and a designated staff member to discuss:
 - What factors led to the violation, including information on student's tobacco product usage.
 - Possible triggers for use, and knowledge of physical, social, and emotional harm caused by tobacco.
 - The policy's purpose, which is to protect students from the impacts of long-term commercial tobacco product use.
 - A verbal agreement on next steps between student and designated staff member.
 - At the second violation:
 - A collaborative conversation shall take place between the student and a designated staff member as outlined above.
 - The student will be enrolled in an evidence-based tobacco education program as an alternative to suspension.
 - The district shall designate a staff member to monitor the progress of the student found in violation of the policy.

(continues)



Note (continued)

- At the third and subsequent violation(s):
 - A supportive discipline meeting shall take place between the student, their caregiver(s) and
 at least three staff members in the following roles: administrator or member of student
 discipline staff, chemical dependency professional or designated staff member (ideally a
 school nurse, school counselor or school-based health center staff member), and other
 student support staff member (as identified by student), to include a discussion of the
 following topics:
 - Past violations of policy.
 - Progress of student in treatment or other interventions.
 - Specific challenges and barriers impeding policy adherence.
 - Commitment by student to avoid infractions and address tobacco usage through on- and off-campus resources.
 - Support from staff members and caregiver(s) to ensure success.
 - The development of a 60-day plan monitored by a designated staff member to include collective agreement of consequences that will follow if this plan is not completed.
 - The student will be enrolled in an evidence-based tobacco education program as an alternative to suspension.

Citation: Alliance for a Healthier Generation, *Tobacco-Free District Model Policy Model Policy*, Administrative Rules and Student Code of Conduct Language Policy Guidance (2021).

Alliance for a Healthier Generation also has resources on supportive disciplinary approaches on its <u>webpage</u>. Other resources on alternatives to suspension, provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, can be found here: <u>Schools Supporting Students to Quit Tobacco Use as an Alternative to Suspension: Lessons from the Field.</u>

VIII. Dissemination of Policy

- (A) Appropriate signage shall be posted throughout the district at building entrances and other highly visible locations on all school buildings, building entrances, vehicles, vehicular entrances to school grounds, and all indoor and outdoor athletic facilities indicating that [district/school name] requires an environment free of commercial tobacco.
- (B) The [school/district] shall notify students and parents/guardians of this policy through student handbooks and orientations.



- (C) The [school/district] shall provide notice of this policy in staff handbooks, through orientations and employee or staff trainings, and when offering employment.
- (D) The [school/district] shall make reminder announcements of its commercial tobacco-free policy at [school/district] events at appropriate intervals throughout the events, when possible.

IX. Program Evaluation

The tobacco-free policy shall be assessed by the school district or its designee evaluator at regular intervals, but at least once a year, to determine whether policies, policy enforcement, communication, education, staff training, and cessation programs are effective. Policies and programs shall be updated and revised accordingly.

X. Effective Date

This policy shall take effect in full on [insert date].

Endnotes

- 1 The Public Health Law Center recognizes that traditional and commercial tobacco are different in the ways they are planted, grown, harvested, and used. Traditional tobacco is and has been used in sacred ways by Indigenous communities and tribes for centuries. In comparison, commercial tobacco is manufactured with chemical additives for recreational use and profit, resulting in disease and death. For more information, visit: http://www.keepitsacred.itcmi.org. When the word "tobacco" is used throughout this document, a commercial context is implied and intended.
- 2 20 U.S.C. § 6083(a).
- 3 National Association of State Boards of Education, Tobacco-Free Environments, http://statepolicies.nasbe.org.
- 4 Traditional and commercial tobacco are different in the ways they are planted, grown, harvested, and used. Traditional tobacco is and has been used in sacred ways by Indigenous communities and tribes for centuries. Comparatively, commercial tobacco is manufactured with chemical additives for recreational use and profit, resulting in disease and death. For more information, visit http://www.keepitsacred.itcmi.org. When the word "tobacco" is used throughout this document, except for the indigenous practice provision, a commercial context is implied and intended.
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- 10 U.S. Food & Drug Administration, *National Youth Tobacco Survey* (2024), https://www.fda.gov/tobacco-products/youth-and-tobacco/results-annual-national-youth-tobacco-survey#2024%20Findings%20on%20Youth%20Tobacco%20Use.
- 11 *Id*.
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