



Brenda Fitzgerald, MD, Commissioner | Nathan Deal, Governor

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May 16, 2016

Dear Superintendents,

The Georgia Department of Education (DOE), in partnership with the Georgia Parent Teacher Association (PTA) and the Georgia Department of Public Health (DPH), is reaching out to you to offer support for the adoption of a 100% Tobacco Free Schools Policy within all public schools in the state of Georgia. The Department of Education is dedicated to promoting children's health, well-being, and educational success by creating a healthy and safe school climate for all students, staff and visitors. Research has demonstrated that a positive school climate is associated with academic achievement, student engagement, and positive development of social skills. We believe adopting the 100% Tobacco Free Schools Policy is critical to creating and maintaining a positive and healthy school climate.

As a multi-disciplinary group of professionals, we support policies for the care and protection of Georgia's youth. We see the effects of tobacco use in the public every day and want to encourage all school districts to adopt the 100% Tobacco Free Schools Policy. Currently, 109 of the 181 school districts in Georgia have this policy in place; this means 1,353,037 students are protected from the dangers of second hand smoke. With only 72 school districts not yet tobacco-free, it is important that we continue to make every effort toward providing a tobacco free environment for our students and school staff members. A tobacco free environment would impact all four dimensions of the school climate: 1) safety; 2) relationships; 3) teaching and learning; and, 4) the physical environment of the school.

We recognize that local school districts may have a rule that addresses tobacco use; however, the adoption of the 100% Tobacco Free Schools Policy will more clearly define that no student, staff member or visitor is permitted to use any tobacco products *including Electronic Cigarettes* at any time: 24 hours/7 days a week—

- In any building, facility, or vehicle owned, leased, rented or chartered in a specified school district.
- On all school grounds and property - including athletic fields and parking lots - owned leased, rented or chartered by a specified school district.
- At any school-sponsored or school-related event on-campus or off-campus by a specified school district.

Electronic cigarettes contain high levels of nicotine, which is a major health threat to the developing brains of children and teens. A recent CDC study found that electronic cigarette use had tripled among high school students in just one year from 4.5 percent in 2013 to 13.4 percent in 2014. Tobacco use is a danger to everyone. Secondhand smoke is also a danger to everyone, especially children, and particularly to those who have asthma and other respiratory illnesses. Each year thousands of students miss school due to asthma. Adopting the 100% Tobacco Free Schools Policy would eliminate exposure to secondhand smoke in schools and help to increase attendance rates. Tobacco free school policies can prevent youth from starting to smoke, and encourage youth to be tobacco free, positively impacting the school climate and the community-at-large. We want to partner with each school district in Georgia to ensure that all schools and school facilities are tobacco free. Please join us in this effort.



We Protect Lives.

For more information on how to adopt, implement, enforce or to determine if your tobacco free schools policy is model, please contact Anne-Marie Coleman, Youth Tobacco Policy Analyst at Anne-Marie.Coleman@dph.ga.gov. Sample policies, the current participation map and spreadsheet, and other supporting documents are attached for your review. They can also be found at dph.georgia.gov/schools. We welcome the opportunity to partner with you to adopt the 100% Tobacco Free Schools Policy. Thank you for your consideration, and we look forward to speaking with you soon.

Sincerely,



Commissioner Brenda Fitzgerald, MD
Georgia Department of Public Health



Superintendent Richard Woods
Georgia Department of Education



Lisa-Marie Haygood
Georgia PTA President