

Tobacco, Nicotine, and Vaping

Recommendations from the field for school-level impact

This resource aims to help districts strengthen their school tobacco policies and practices by providing a simple and non-exhaustive list of actionable examples and quality resources based on data and insights from the field. It was created in consideration of those with strategic goals to address tobacco, nicotine, and vaping among school-aged youth.

Supporting Policy

K-12 Toolkit for Administrators and Educators

The Tennessee Department of Health (TDOH) Tobacco Use Prevention and Control Program uses CDC evidence-based strategies to reduce tobacco use and tobacco-related disease. TDOH's [K-12 Toolkit for Administrators and Educators](#) provides digestible information and actionable tools to support tobacco prevention in schools. Major points of the toolkit include communicating and enforcing policies and ensuring a fully Comprehensive Model Policy. Additional relevant resources for youth and community engagement from TDOH are available [here](#).

Policy Review

Consider putting your district and/or school tobacco policy on an annual review cycle to ensure consideration of current product trends, student behavior, and infraction data. Be familiar with your local board meeting schedule to set appropriate deadlines for proposing revisions. When reviewing the policy, include various stakeholders. Consider the following representatives to be a part of your team:

- District/school administration
- Safety team
- School resource officers
- [TDOH regional tobacco coordinator](#)
- Public Health Educator with your county health department
- Youth health council members/TNSTRONG Ambassadors (if representatives are available)

An impactful policy includes specific language for various products. Consider if and how to use the following terms in policy and progressive discipline plans:

- Tobacco
- Emerging tobacco products
- Nicotine
- Smokeless tobacco
- Electronic/battery-operated devices
- CBD, THC, etc.

Reduction Takes Time

Seeing a reduction in nicotine/tobacco-related offenses takes time, even with changes in policy and practice. With an emphasis on a comprehensive approach, leaders can feel empowered that they are likely impacting

the student body as a whole by including measures for preventative education, access to cessation resources, and family support.

Determine how to count and track repeat offenses for a higher-quality impact measure. Districts may also consider using a [standardized assessment](#) to create an action plan.

Vape Disposal

Nicotine is categorized as a hazardous substance; therefore, vape devices (both disposable and refillable) are considered hazardous waste.¹ To address this in school practice, consider the following:

- Diversify talking points about vaping to include environmental concerns.
- Work with your local health department, SROs, and administration to ensure vaping devices are disposed of properly and not placed in the trash.
- Make it public knowledge (at the student level) that devices collected or turned in are being disposed of properly.
- **The Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation (TDEC) is currently developing a protocol for school districts and communities to properly dispose of devices outside of April and October Drug Take Back Days.²**

Tennessee Successes

District Highlight

Roane County Schools initiated a multi-year goal to revise their district policy and tiered discipline approach. They added alternatives to suspension by using the INDEPTH program from the American Lung Association throughout each tier. Part of their success came from a comprehensive representation of stakeholders on the policy committee (including the Director of Schools, Roane County Anti-Drug Coalition, and the Roane County Health Department), ample communication to parents and families, and increasing guardian involvement in the Saturday INDEPTH educational requirement at each tier. Infractions were reduced by over 60 percent after the first year among middle school students and by over 20 percent among high school students.

Communication Methods that Work

Districts across the state have reported success communicating tobacco/nicotine policy changes with the following innovative approaches:

- Social media
- Local newspaper
- Student and parent handbooks
- Parent information sessions
- Back-to-school night
- Registration night
- School website—opening banner
- Students and families in middle school and again at freshman orientation

Supporting Practice

Coordinated School Health data³ references the following resources as a part of district practices for tobacco/nicotine prevention and cessation support. Many of the resources are for informational purposes only and do not represent official policies, procedures, or guidance of the Tennessee Department of Education. Additionally, the Tennessee Department of Education bears no responsibility for the accuracy, legality, or content of the external sites.

Prevention Programs and Educational Approaches

- [AVOID: Anti-Vaping Online Information Dissemination](#)
- [CATCH My Breath](#)
- [DARE](#) and [LEAD](#)
- [EVERFI](#)
- [Health Smart](#) by ETR
- [Michigan Model for Health](#)
- [Mind Matters](#) by the National Institute on Drug Abuse
- [Not on Tobacco \(N-O-T\)](#) by the American Lung Association
- [On Point](#) (Resilience/Relationships/Risk Avoidance)
- [Stanford Tobacco Prevention Toolkit](#)
- [Tobacco Education Resource Library](#) by the FDA

Student, Educator, and Parent Experiences

- [ACT to Address Cessation by ALA](#) (training for educators)
- Programs through public health departments/prevention coalitions (check locally for availability)
 - Escape the Vape
 - Hidden in Plain Sight
- Stashed Away (Contact your local National Guard office)
- [Steered Straight](#)
- [TNSTRONG](#)
 - Youth Ambassadors and the Summit opportunity
 - Youth councils
 - Nicotine Free Teams

Cessation Support and Alternatives to Suspension

- [INDEPTH by ALA](#)
- Smokefree teen - teen.smokefree.gov
- [Tennessee Tobacco Quitline](#)
- [Truth initiative](#)

Additional Resources from Coordinated School Health

- [Respond, Reframe, Restore: A Multifaceted Approach for Student Vaping Offenses](#)
- [Coordinated School Health Website](#)

References

1. Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation. (n.d.) Hazardous Waste Program. <https://www.tn.gov/environment/program-areas/solid-waste/hazardous-waste-management/hazardous-waste.html>
2. Smith, C. (2025, Mar. 7). *Addressing Vaping Through an Environmental Lens: Environmentally friendly vape disposal as a strategy for vape cessation with Gen Z [Conference session]*. Coordinated School Health Institute, Nashville, TN, United States.
3. Tennessee Department of Education. (2024). Annual coordinated school health school district applications, 2022-23 through 2023-24. Unpublished raw data.