

## Tennessee

### Blazing the Trail Toward Statewide Coordinated School Health

#### Public Health Problem

Inadequate physical activity, unhealthy eating behaviors, tobacco use, and other health risk behaviors can affect the physical and social well-being of young people, as well as their academic achievement. Risk behavior levels are high among Tennessee's high school students:

- 66% did not meet currently recommended levels of physical activity.
- Only 18% ate fruits and vegetables at least five times per day.
- 33% were overweight or at risk for becoming overweight.
- 26% smoked cigarettes during the previous month.

To improve students' health and strengthen their academic achievement, Tennessee has embraced a statewide coordinated approach to school health.

#### Program Example

Tennessee has steadily enhanced and strengthened efforts to support a coordinated system for improving the health of its students. Early efforts focused on increasing support and awareness of the Coordinated School Health Program model and its importance to adolescent health and educational achievement. As a result of this work, Tennessee's State Legislature authorized in 2000 a five-year pilot program that implemented CDC's coordinated school health approach in 10 counties. Evaluations determined that the pilot programs reduced absenteeism and increased

- The number of health education staff and school nurses.
- The availability of social services.
- Health screenings for students.
- Student opportunities to participate in physical education and physical activity programs.

Based on these successes, school health advocates were able to convince state legislators to appropriate \$15 million in 2006 to expand CSHP statewide. Currently, 133 of the 136 local school districts in Tennessee are implementing CSHP. Every school in Tennessee will be required to conduct the CDC-developed *SHI* to assess current school health efforts and direct planning activities for implementing a coordinated approach to school health.

The collaboration between the Tennessee Department of Education and Department of Health has made this expansion possible, along with the support provided by NGO partners, such as Tennessee's Action for Healthy Kids and the Tennessee School Health Coalition. In addition, CDC continues to provide technical assistance and CSHP-related materials to support the launch of Tennessee's statewide program.

#### Implications and Impact

Tennessee has become the first state in the nation to mandate and fund a coordinated approach to improving students' health in every school district in the state. This improvement from 10 pilot counties to a statewide endeavor is a huge undertaking that holds great promise for improving the health and academic achievement of the young people of Tennessee.