

Highlights in Tobacco Control

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Keeping Kids Tobacco-Free School-Based Tobacco Prevention Activities

BY ANGELA MESHACK, DR. P.H.

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Youth are an especially important target group for tobacco prevention and control activities. For the past several years, research into these programs has been taking place in schools across the state.

At the University of Texas School of Public Health (UTSPH), researchers in the Center for Health Promotion and Prevention Research are involved with applying and evaluating tobacco control programs in and around Houston. Their colleagues at the University of Houston are also doing tobacco-related research in schools and communities to determine what exists and what is needed.

UTSPH research indicates that the largest reductions in tobacco use occurred when youth received both school/community programs and high levels of exposure to media campaigns. This research also found some important risk factors linked to youth tobacco use.

One risk factor was the belief that smoking makes a person look cool. Peer pressure was another risk factor. To

combat such beliefs, UTSPH researchers developed programs that address these and other erroneous views.

Specific program messages imparted to students include:

- ◆ Smoking is not cool or grown-up;
- ◆ Tobacco use does not promote relaxation;
- ◆ Cigarette smoke smells and tastes awful;
- ◆ Tobacco is addictive;
- ◆ It is not safe to smoke when you are young; and
- ◆ Youth will consider themselves stupid if they smoke.



At the University of Houston (UH), researchers found that community priorities ranked preventing youth tobacco use first, followed by motivating cessation, protecting the public from secondhand smoke, and eliminating disparities among different population groups. In a spring 2001 survey of school

principals, UH researchers learned that:

- ◆ 93% of schools enforced policies prohibiting tobacco use;
- ◆ 76% of schools offered Tobacco Use Prevention and Education; and
- ◆ 55% provided support for tobacco cessation by students.

In addition to the three components listed above, UH found evidence of five other elements of tobacco programs in schools. These components consisted of cessation support for teachers and staff, teacher training for Tobacco Use Prevention and Education, family participation in tobacco programs for students, evaluation of tobacco prevention, and changes to school policy on tobacco use.

These five components were not occurring in large portions of the schools surveyed, however. Part of the reason for this deficiency is the lack of a state mandate for a health course in middle school. While some school districts have added their own requirements for health education in middle school, tobacco education is often

(continued on back page)

Tobacco Education Policies and Practices in Texas Schools

BY MELYNDA BOERM, M.A.
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In Texas, the greatest increase in tobacco use occurs in middle school, from 27% of students reporting tobacco use in 6th grade to 36% in 8th grade. Tobacco use then increases more slowly in high school, from 43% in 9th grade to 47% in 12th grade. One way of preventing youth tobacco-use is through school-based programs.

Texas is one of 45 states that mandates health education in elementary schools and one of 43 states requiring health education in high schools. However, Texas is not one of the 42 states requiring health in middle schools. Texas is also not among the 36 states that have recommendations for school/district policies supporting tobacco-use prevention education for students.

According to *Tracking Healthy People 2010*, a school is considered to provide health education to prevent tobacco-use and addiction if it has a required course that provides tobacco-use prevention education. The recommended minimum amount of time spent on tobacco prevention programs is at least five classroom sessions every year for at least two years.

Research conducted in spring 2000 by the University of Houston found some important differences between what is recommended and what is actually oc-

curing in Texas schools

For example, only 15% of schools dedicated five or more lessons to tobacco education programs. In the majority of schools, tobacco education consisted either of a single lesson, was infused into multiple lessons, or was not provided.

In addition, less than 13% of schools reported using a research-derived, published curriculum with research-supported evidence of effectiveness. *Life Skills Training* curriculum was used in only 10% of schools and *Project Towards No Tobacco Use* curriculum was used in only 6% of schools.

Traditional instructional methods – such as lectures, group dis-

cussions, films or videos, and seatwork – were most commonly used by schools for tobacco education instruction. More effective interactive, skill-based, student-centered methods – such as role playing, peer educators, special projects, guest speakers, and the Internet – were used by only one-third or less of schools for tobacco-education instruction.

Finally, the materials used for tobacco education were predominantly from voluntary community organizations such as the American Cancer Society, American Lung Association, and American Heart Association.

Tobacco education in schools is one way to effectively prevent youth tobacco-use. Early interventions can prevent later illness and death from tobacco use.

The CDC's Guidelines for School Health Programs to Prevent Tobacco Use and Addiction¹

- ◆ Develop and enforce a school policy on tobacco use;
- ◆ Provide instruction about the short-term and long-term negative physiologic and social consequences of tobacco use, social influences on tobacco use, peer norms regarding tobacco use, and refusal skills;
- ◆ Provide tobacco-use prevention education in kindergarten through 12th grade; this instruction should be especially intensive in junior high or middle school and should be reinforced in high school;
- ◆ Provide program-specific training for teachers;
- ◆ Involve parents or families in support of school-based programs to prevent tobacco use;
- ◆ Support cessation efforts among students and all school staff who use tobacco; and
- ◆ Assess the tobacco-use prevention program at regular intervals.

Project TNT: Towards No Tobacco Use

BY ANGELA MESHACK, DR. P.H.
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By the time they turn 18, two-thirds of American youth have tried cigarettes.³ Over 400,000 people in this country die each year from tobacco-related illness.³ One way to stop the problems associated with tobacco use is to prevent youth from starting to smoke or use chewing tobacco.

The Project TNT: Towards No Tobacco Use curriculum is one such prevention strategy. It is currently underway in particu-



lar middle schools in Harris, Fort Bend, and Jefferson Counties. Students in these schools will participate in the 10-session program, which actively engages students in effective tobacco-prevention lessons.

As reported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 30% of high school seniors started smoking between 7th and 9th grade.² Because the middle school years are pivotal for the initiation of smoking, students in 7th and 8th grade represent the target audience for Project TNT.

The curriculum includes assertiveness and refusal skills,

training to resist peer pressure, increased knowledge of tobacco's consequences, accurate information about rates of tobacco use among peers and in society, assessments of the media's portrayal of tobacco use, and counter-advertising methods to debunk messages presented by tobacco companies.

Project TNT spotlights the principles and norms of being tobacco-free, promotes a commitment to remain tobacco-free, and assists youth in becoming advocates for a tobacco-free way of life. Evaluation of the program shows that its effects hold up over time.

Teachers are trained to use the curriculum in sessions facilitated by the University of Texas School of Public Health (UTSPH) research team. UTSPH staff work in collaboration with Region IV Education Service Center staff to ensure a solid understanding of the curriculum.

In schools where Project TNT is not being used, students will visit a website designed to provide the same program messages as Project TNT. The website is interactive and features an armadillo that guides students through a series of questions that assess their risks for tobacco use.

These students, as well as students attending comparison schools located outside of the study area, will be surveyed in late spring 2002. The survey will

evaluate the effects of the school/community and media



programs on youth tobacco use. In fall 2002, these students will be surveyed to evaluate the effects of program components.

In high schools, UTSPH researchers are conducting cessation activities for those students who currently smoke. High school students are receiving newsletters that feature their slightly older peers – college students – who have successfully quit smoking.

Like middle school students, high school students within the study area are also exposed to program messages via media and community activities. Surveys will be conducted with this group in fall 2002 to evaluate the effects of the program components on their quit rates.

For more information on Project TNT, contact ETR Associates at 1-800-321-4407. To learn more about Project TNT in Texas schools, contact Dr. Angela Meshack of UTSPH at 713-500-9669.

Alliance for a Tobacco-free Texas
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(continued from page 1)

limited and ineffective.

To combat these shortcomings, the Texas Department of Health (TDH) is actively engaging local contractors in efforts to increase tobacco prevention and education. Students in middle schools and high schools will participate in approved tobacco education programs and tobacco awareness events.

Also, students will be recruited to serve as peer mentors and trained as leaders in tobacco prevention. Finally, parents and school staff will receive information on local tobacco-related policies and Texas tobacco laws.

For more information about school-based tobacco prevention and education, contact Dr. Angela Meshack of UTSPH at 713-500-9669, Dr. Phyllis Gingiss of UH at 713-743-9843, or Kim Steege of TDH at 512-458-7402.

Conference Promotes Young Anti-Tobacco Advocates

4th Annual Statewide Tobacco Education and Prevention Conference
BY JENNIFER STEELE, SOUTHWEST TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY

It's almost that time of year again! July 21-24, 2002 marks the fourth year of the Annual Statewide Tobacco Education and Prevention (STEP) Conference. This year's event takes place at the Woodlands Resort and Conference Center, just outside of Houston.

The STEP Conference provides a unique opportunity for various sectors of the state to get together and learn about the latest research and prevention strategies, share successes and experiences, and network with others in tobacco education and prevention.

This conference brings together law enforcement personnel, school staff, health care and substance abuse professionals, community volunteers, parents, and youth for four action-packed days of intense learning and fun.

The conference is funded in part through the Texas Department of Health to provide learning opportunities for organizations receiving funds through the state's tobacco

settlement initiative. All contractors are encouraged to attend the conference and to bring representatives from their communities and local organizations.

Youth are a critical component of the conference, which hopes to accommodate up to 200 young people this year. Once again, STEP is offering scholarship opportunities for youth groups to attend the conference. Scholarship applications are currently being accepted.

The agenda is shaping up to be an exciting and impressive one. Presenters include Victor DeNoble, former research scientist for Philip Morris, and Alan Landers and Dave Gerlitz, former models for Winston cigarette ads.

For more information on the conference, call STEP toll-free at (888) STEP-123 or visit www.texas-step.net. If you need multiple brochures to distribute in your area, contact Joyce Cruz at STEP.

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Conference registration is currently underway. If payment is made by May 31st, the cost is \$195/person. The registration fees increase to \$250/person through June 28th, after which fees increase to \$275/person. Register early to get the lowest rate!

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