

*Massachusetts*

## Massachusetts' Mini-grants: Empowering Students to Inspire Peers to Stop Smoking

### Problem Overview

Since the passage of the Massachusetts Educational Reform Act in 1993, use of tobacco anywhere on school grounds is illegal. Many schools, however, report that students, faculty, staff, and visitors still smoke on school property. According to the 2005 Massachusetts Youth Risk Behavior Survey:

- 43% of current student smokers reported smoking on school property in the past month.
- 20.7% of Massachusetts high school students are current cigarette smokers.

### Program/Activity Description

The Youth Action Initiative—known as Mass Youth Against Tobacco—is a program designed to engage Massachusetts youth ages 12–18 in the statewide movement against tobacco. As a part of this initiative, the Massachusetts Department of Public Health Tobacco Control Program and the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MDESE) Coordinated School Health Program, supported by CDC's Division of Adolescent and School Health, sponsored 17 “Smoke-Free Schools” mini-grant projects during the 2006–2007 school year. These grants funded youth-led groups formed to address smoking on school property and tobacco use reduction among young people.

### Program/Activity Outcome

The Mass Youth Against Tobacco mini-grant projects enhanced collective efforts across the state to eliminate smoking and the effects of secondhand smoke on school campuses. More than 80 student leaders in 17 schools were involved in planning and implementing their mini-grant projects.

- The projects documented the influence of tobacco in schools and raised awareness and visibility of tobacco as an issue to students and teachers. Student efforts resulted in increased postage of signs about smoke-free areas and provided data to support a proposal for a smoke-free buffer zone to one city council.
- At English High School in Boston, students initiated a “Shout Out Against Smoking” project. This group researched the school's smoking policies, designed an antismoking protest wall highlighting smoking facts and smoking ads, and created a wall mural of 1,200 handprints to raise awareness that 1,200 people die every day from smoking-related causes.

Strong youth involvement can send a powerful message to peers that “not everyone is smoking.” Changing the perception of the social norm is a huge step towards making schools truly smoke-free.

