

MARCH 31, 2005

ATTENTION: NEWS DIRECTORS/ASSIGNMENT EDITORS/Writers/REPORTERS

CAMPAIGN FOR 100% TOBACCO FREE SCHOOLS GATHERS STEAM IN DUPLIN COUNTY

FIRST-EVER AREA FORUM OFFERS TOOLS FOR SCHOOLS

(Kenansville, NC) – School superintendents, public health leaders and children’s health advocates will participate in the area’s first-ever tobacco-free schools forum on April 4 at the James Sprunt Community College in room 113 of the Boyette Building from 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. The event is free and open to the public.

Currently, 51 of the state’s 115 school systems have adopted a 100% Tobacco Free School (TFS) policy, which bans all tobacco use everywhere on school property at all times. School and community leaders are working to pass the policy in at least 12 other school districts this spring. This momentum has made TFS a rallying point for teen tobacco prevention advocates around the state. Starting in 2002, the NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund (HWTF) has funded 70 community grants statewide to lead this important effort at the grassroots level.

The forum hopes to change the fact that Duplin, Sampson, Wayne, Lenoir, Greene, Wilson, Johnston, Harnett and Pitt county school districts have not implemented TFS policies.

At the forum, TFS Director Suzanne DePalma will offer advice on how to implement a TFS policy in area schools systems. Teen tobacco-use prevention advocates will join school officials and community leaders in forum discussions, which are designed to provide insight and assistance to those interested in implementing tobacco-free school policies in their communities.

“In my travels across North Carolina, I’ve met with lots of tobacco farmers and I’ve never encountered **one** who wanted his or her child to grow up to smoke or use other tobacco products,” said Lt. Gov. Beverly Perdue, HWTF chair. “I strongly support TFS policies. We need to get tobacco products away from our kids and out of our schools.”

Enacting a tobacco-free schools policy represents a firm commitment by the school’s administration, teachers and parents to provide a safe and healthy learning and working environment for students and school staff. Once enacted, TFS requires vigilant enforcement. Enforcement of a tobacco-free policy confirms a district’s commitment, providing opportunities for adults and peers to serve as role models for healthy behavior. A recent study by the UNC School of Family Medicine found that TFS policies have a positive impact on participating school districts.

Some important tobacco facts:

- Everyday, about 3,000 teens in America start smoking. Of those, approximately one in three will die of a smoking related disease.
- Approximately 36 percent of high school students in North Carolina smoke.
- Smoking is North Carolina’s leading preventable cause of death.
- Health care professionals estimate that North Carolina spends up to \$4 billion each year to treat people with smoking-related illnesses and cover the tab for lost productivity.

MEDIA OPPORTUNITIES:

Reporters will be able to interview several key people at this event:

- Charles Willson, MD, HWTF Commissioner, Clinical Professor and Assistant Dean Physician Affairs, Brody School of Medicine, East Carolina University
- Suzanne DePalma, Tobacco-Free Schools Director
- Mark Ezzell, HWTF Community Outreach Coordinator
- Julia Mobley, Superintendent, Pamlico County Schools
- Carr Ipock III, School Board Chair, Craven County Schools
- Richard Lawson, Principal, Pender High, Pender County Schools

PARTNERS:

- NC Health And Wellness Trust Fund
- N.C. Department of Health and Human Services—Tobacco Prevention & Control Branch
- N.C. Department of Public Instructions—Healthy Schools Initiative
- American Lung Association of North Carolina
- Question Why Youth Empowerment Centers
- Duplin Partners for Health

ABOUT THE NC HEALTH AND WELLNESS TRUST FUND:

The NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund makes North Carolina stronger, both physically and economically, by funding programs that promote preventive health. Created by the General Assembly in 2000 to allocate a portion of North Carolina's share of the national tobacco settlement, HWTF has invested \$127 million to support preventive health initiatives and \$78 million to fund a prescription drug assistance program. For more information, please visit www.hwtfc.org.

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