

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NOV. 3, 2004

UPCOMING FORUM DETERMINED TO MAKE 100% TOBACCO FREE SCHOOLS A REALITY

AS MOMENTUM GROWS, FORUM OFFERS TOOLS FOR IMPLEMENTATION & ENFORCEMENT

(Marion, NC) — School superintendents, health directors and children's health advocates will participate in the area's first-ever tobacco-free schools forum on Nov. 5 at the Corpening YMCA. The event is free and open to the public.

Since 2000, 44 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 35 other school districts. 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 has funded 70 community grants statewide to lead this important effort at the grassroots level.

Teen tobacco-use prevention advocates will join school officials and community leaders in the forum, which is designed to offer insight and assistance to those interested in implementing tobacco-free school policies in their communities.

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 27 percent of high school students in North Carolina smoke and 33 percent of them use a tobacco product.
- 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:

Mr. Jim Martin, State Advisor for Teen Tobacco Use, NC Dept. of Health and Human Service
Mrs. Suzanne DePalma, Tobacco Free School Director, NC Dept. of Health and Human Services
Dr. Tom McNeel, Superintendent, Caldwell County Schools
Dr. Steve Lane, Deputy Superintendent, Iredell-Stateville Schools
Mr. Judd Porter, Principal of Asheville High School
Dr. Ira Trollinger, Superintendent from McDowell County Schools

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PARTICIPANTS:

NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund (HWTF)
NC Department of Health and Human Services-- Tobacco Prevention and Control Branch
NC Department of Public Instructions—Healthy Schools Initiative
Question Why Youth Empowerment Centers
McDowell County Schools

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 \$55 million to support preventive health initiatives and \$78 million to fund a prescription drug assistance program for seniors. For more information, please visit www.hwtfc.org.

ABOUT TRU

Tobacco. Reality. Unfiltered, commonly known as TRU, is North Carolina's first-ever statewide youth tobacco prevention multi-media campaign that uses testimonials of real North Carolina teens as well as hard hitting facts to dissuade young people from using tobacco. This campaign is part of the NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund's teen tobacco use prevention initiative. Funded at \$28 million from HWTF, this grassroots initiative includes the TRU media campaign, as well as a grant program including 70 grants (50 community-based grants, 4 statewide grants and 16 tobacco free school mini-grants) to a total of 55 organizations. To find out more about TRU, please visit www.realityunfiltered.com.

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