

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Major Milestone:

TOBACCO FREE SCHOOL MOVEMENT ROARS TO THE BIG 5-0

Surge of school board votes means better health for children

(Raleigh, NC) – Health advocates today celebrated what they described as a major victory for North Carolina’s young people – the adoption of a 100% Tobacco Free School policy in 50 of the state’s 115 school districts. Following a growing trend, Dare County became North Carolina’s 50th school district to adopt a 100% Tobacco-Free School (TFS) policy last night when the Dare County School Board voted to prohibit tobacco use on campus beginning July 1, 2005.

Over the past month, McDowell, Currituck and Elkin school districts have also gone 100% TFS. Meanwhile, the growing momentum of TFS drives in 15 other school districts across the state have advocates optimistic that there’s more good news to come.

“Turning ‘50’ is a major milestone in the campaign to make our children’s’ public schools as healthy and safe as they can be,” said Lt. Gov. Beverly Perdue, chair of the NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund (HWTF), which supports local drives for 100% TFS policies. Lt. Gov. Perdue also applauded the young people who have rallied for the policy as part of HWTF’s TRU (Tobacco. Reality. Unfiltered) campaign. “As we’ve all seen, these young people have done a brilliant job and North Carolina should be proud,” said Perdue. “We’re almost to the half way point in this movement, and we’ll be ready to celebrate.”

A 100% TFS policy bans all tobacco use everywhere on school property at all times. This means no smoking on school buses, no smoking on school owned or leased property, and no smoking during sports events.

“School systems see this policy as an opportunity to provide the most optimal learning environment for their students and staff. In addition, research shows that school districts that have adopted this policy have a 20-40% decrease in youth tobacco use,” said Suzanne DePalma, Tobacco Free Schools Coordinator for the NC Tobacco Prevention and Control Branch (NC TPCB).

According to the 2003 NC Youth Tobacco Survey (NC YTS), which is conducted every other year by the NC TPCB, preliminary results show that current cigarette use among middle school students (grades 6-8) across North Carolina has dropped 38% since 1999, from 15.0% (1999) to 11.3% (2001), and finally to 9.3% (2003) in the most recent survey. “Unfortunately, high school current cigarette use was 27.3% in the 2003 survey, which is not significantly lower than 2001 or 1999,” said Sally Herndon Malek, MPH, head of the NC TPCB.

To learn more about the statewide movement towards 100% TFS, please visit www.nctobaccofreeschools.com To learn about the hazards of tobacco use and to download the tobacco-free pledge, please visit www.realityunfiltered.com, the Web site for the TRU campaign. Both websites are funded by the Health and Wellness Trust Fund.

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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 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.