

**Somerset Public Health
Celebrates Athens
Community School**

Athens Community School shows off their new signs after passing a new smoke-free & tobacco-free policy!

Athens Community School (ACS) is a small K-8 school with 110 students and 25 staff members.

In early 2019 a teacher from ACS, Kassie Dwyer, was told about an informational Electronic Nicotine Delivery System (ENDS) presentation that was delivered to the staff at a local business by Somerset Public Health (SPH). Kassie reached out to SPH, and asked if a similar presentation could be delivered to the youth at the school. District Tobacco Prevention Partner Eric Taylor coordinated with Mrs. Dwyer and delivered an ENDS presentation to the entire student body two weeks later. After the presentation Mrs. Dwyer expressed interest in new anti-tobacco/vaping signage for ACS property. SPH provided technical assistance to ACS at this time by providing them with a draft policy for their school that met all of the requirements to be deemed a model tobacco-free policy, and to be eligible for free, tobacco-free, signage. After working together to revise the language to meet ACS wants/needs, and review by the school board, the revised policy was approved and ACS was able to order new tobacco-free signs through SPH to convey the smoke/tobacco-free message.

Somerset County has a traditional cigarette use rate of 2.1% among middle school aged youth, and a Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems (ENDS) use rate of 6.2% among middle school aged youth.



With the number of middle school aged youth currently using ENDS being almost 3x the number that currently use cigarettes, the ENDS presentations, and improved policy will help ACS lower the ENDS use rates.

District Tobacco Prevention Partner Somerset Public Health has reached out to the administration of all Somerset County School Districts, offering to assist with tobacco prevention in a variety of different ways.

The tobacco prevention resources provided to schools by SPH include:

- Policy creation/revision/technical assistance
- Durable smoke/tobacco free signage
- Educational tobacco prevention presentations
- Suggestions for alternatives to suspension regarding tobacco use/possession.

SPH believes that the more tobacco prevention resources that are utilized by school districts in our county, the less susceptible youth will be to becoming addicted to using cigarettes or ENDS. Every school that adopts a smoke free policy is creating a space where youth can avoid the harsh effects of second-hand smoke. According to Maine Prevention Services, youth are more sensitive to nicotine and can feel dependent earlier than adults. As a result, 3 out of 4 teen smokers will smoke as adults, making early intervention even more impactful.

SPH is proud of the work that has been done with Athens Community School and is ready to assist with tobacco prevention efforts in the future. After submitting the policy to the Tobacco Prevention Services team, SPH received the new signs and delivered them to ACS.

Staff and students were excited to have their new signs and happily posed for a photograph to promote the success via social media.

**“These are great!
We wouldn’t have
been able to get
these on our own.”**

- Athens Community School
Staff Member after receiving
smoke-free signs

SPH’s social media efforts encourage other schools to engage with various prevention efforts, including policy development, tobacco prevention, and the Sidekicks program which is a 4 hour training that gives youth the knowledge, skills, and confidence to talk to peers about tobacco use and other risky behaviors.

**For more information, Contact SPH
Community Health Educator Eric Taylor at
(207) 858-8456.**

Find Somerset Public Health Online:

Website: somersepublichealth.org

Facebook: facebook.com/SomersetPublicHealth

Instagram: @SomersetPublicHealth

About Somerset Public Health:

Somerset Public Health is a coalition of staff members, community members, organizations, and businesses working together to improve health in Somerset County.

Our goal is to make Somerset County a healthier place to live and work for the families we serve. We strive to make this happen by: improving nutrition; increasing physical activity; stopping tobacco use; preventing drug abuse; promoting the responsible use of alcohol. To do all of this, we need your help. We work with community members, schools, workplaces, child-care centers, service groups, and other community groups to make the places we visit every day healthier.



Maine Center for Disease Control & Prevention
Department of Health and Human Services