

# Maine Tobacco Prevention Success Story: Two Knox County School Systems Favor Caring for Students' Health over Punitive Enforcement

## Summary:

Working with the Knox County Community Health Coalition, two school districts in Knox County upgraded their tobacco- and vape-free school policies and incorporated restorative justice practices as the centerpiece of their enforcement. Both districts received mini grants from KCCHC for their policy efforts.

## Challenges

In Knox County, 8.5% of high school students have smoked within the past 30 days, 27.4% have vaped and 5.6% used smokeless tobacco. (2019 MIYHS) However, suspending students from school for infractions of the no smoking/vaping policy is ineffective. Negative impacts of school suspension include decreased graduation rate, increased involvement with the criminal justice system and lower academic achievement. (*Guiding Principles: A Resource Guide for Improving School Climate and Discipline*, US DOE, 2014) The best way to avoid enforcement problems is to help youth be tobacco free through prevention measures and through support of cessation efforts for tobacco-using students.

"A student who doesn't smoke or vape will not need discipline for breaking the tobacco- and vape-free policy. The best way we can help students adhere to the policy is to help them quit smoking or vaping—or better yet, to keep them from starting in the first place."

-----Ilmi Carter, MSN, RN, NCSN  
RSU 13 School Nurse and MASN School Nurse

## Results/Success

RSU 13 (Rockland) and the St. George Municipal School Unit decided to support students' efforts to quit tobacco products as a primary tool for enforcing their newly-upgraded tobacco- and vape-free school policies. Instead of suspending students, they will reinforce efforts to become tobacco free.

When RSU 13 (Rockland) decided to upgrade its smoking policy last fall, it wanted to ditch five-day school suspensions by instead using a restorative justice approach. The School Board was aligned with this philosophy. They worked with KCCHC to develop restorative justice enforcement language and flexible disciplinary measures.

St. George upgraded its policy last year but decided to strengthen it and include restorative justice language in its policy this spring. The Disciplinary Guidelines state, "Disciplinary strategies will emphasize assisting the violator with smoking/vaping addiction recovery (cessation) to improve the student's health and reduce future violations." The St. George Wellness Committee and Superintendent have signed off on the new policy, and the Board approved the policy on its first reading in June. The final approval is anticipated at the August meeting. St. George included vaping prevention presentation for eighth graders May 19 in preparation for the new policy.



## For more Information, Contact:

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