

Fighting tobacco with policy, prevention, and more

Community Health Improvement Plan | Year One Spotlight

With funding from the Ohio Department of Health's Tobacco Use Prevention & Cessation grant, the health promotion and education division of Hamilton County Public Health is working to curb tobacco use and exposure to secondhand smoke in Hamilton County. Jessica Skelton, a health educator and certified tobacco treatment specialist, works with school districts, youth, and communities on tobacco policy, prevention, and cessation.



Health educators Dominique Walker and Jessica Skelton present Winton Woods' Steve Denny and Corina Denny with Tobacco-Free Campus signage and certificate from the Ohio Department of Health.

TOBACCO-FREE CAMPUS POLICIES

All school districts must comply with state law, which prohibits smoking inside school buildings and bans students from using or possessing tobacco products on school grounds and at school activities. But many school districts still allow smoking and other tobacco products on school property.

In Hamilton County, Princeton City Schools and Northwest Local Schools are the latest districts to adopt 100 percent tobacco-free campus policies. They join Winton Woods, Three Rivers, Cincinnati, and Norwood in adopting a comprehensive policy that includes things like eliminating designated smoking areas and prohibiting e-cigarettes in addition to all forms of tobacco.

PREVENTION STARTS WITH YOUTH

Prevention in Hamilton County focuses on educating, empowering, and engaging youth in the fight against tobacco and e-cigarettes. In the 2018-19 school year, Jessica worked with Princeton and Winton Woods high school health teachers. She taught a class on tobacco and e-cigarettes to about 400 students.

Jessica sees her role as the expert providing students with accurate information. "I'm not pro-tobacco and I'm not anti-tobacco," she said. "I am very much for

informed consent. I give the kids all the information they need to make a very well-educated choice."

Pre-testing shows that students don't know the facts, particularly when it comes to e-cigarettes (also called vaping or JUUL).

"A lot of high schoolers, and even adults who I've talked to, didn't know that e-cigarettes contain nicotine. They didn't know that there is no difference between a vape and an e-cigarette, or that the JUUL is an e-cigarette."

- Jessica Skelton

This lack of knowledge about e-cigarettes is disturbing. E-cigarettes are now the most commonly used tobacco product among youth. "I would say 50 percent of every class I taught had tried JUULs," Jessica said. And e-cigarettes are not usually covered in high school health classes because it's not required by the state.

UP NEXT

A new grant year began on July 1st. "A major change this year will be focusing on getting former smokers involved," Jessica said. "They will be trained to help people who want to quit smoking."

Jessica is also launching a new peer mentorship pilot program with health promotion and education students at the University of Cincinnati. College students will be trained to teach tobacco use prevention to high school students, who in turn could be trained to teach middle schoolers.

To ensure that schools continue to educate students about e-cigarettes, Jessica did the leg work to set them up with CATCH My Breath (CatchMyBreath.org), a best-practices youth e-cigarette and JUUL prevention program. She will incorporate the program into the classes she teaches, and health teachers will continue to have access to CATCH My Breath in the future.



Jessica Skelton provides tobacco education in communities and schools.