

EVIDENCE BRIEF: TOBACCO INDUSTRY-SPONSORED YOUTH PREVENTION PROGRAMS IN SCHOOLS

CDC OFFICE ON SMOKING AND HEALTH

THE BOTTOM LINE

Tobacco industry-sponsored school-based tobacco prevention programs are ineffective and may promote tobacco use among youth. Despite this, the tobacco industry, including e-cigarette product makers, has continued to engage in school-based youth tobacco prevention initiatives. Because the presence of the tobacco industry in school settings may increase the likelihood of youth tobacco product initiation, public health and school-based efforts to prevent youth tobacco product use are encouraged to remain independent of tobacco industry influences.

The 2012 Surgeon General's Report documents the ineffectiveness of tobacco industry-sponsored youth prevention programs.

The 2012 Surgeon General's report, *Preventing Tobacco Use Among Youth and Young Adults*, reviewed tobacco industry-sponsored, youth prevention initiatives in depth, including school-based programs. The report found that "the tobacco industry's youth smoking prevention activities and programs have not provided evidence that they are effective at reducing youth smoking. Indeed, unpublished internal industry documents available to the public because of litigation, and published academic studies, indicate that they are ineffective or serve to promote smoking among youth."¹

According to the 2012 Surgeon General's Report, tobacco industry-sponsored youth prevention programs are intended to promote positive attitudes toward the industry: "The industry uses [youth prevention] efforts to convey to the public, policy makers, judges, and members of juries that it is doing something substantial about the issue of tobacco use among youth. In this way, the programs serve to promote positive attitudes about the tobacco industry. Such positive attitudes could help to limit the industry's legal liability and make it easier for its views to be heard on legislative issues."¹

- Products "provided to students by the tobacco industry, as well as other industry-sponsored efforts with the stated purpose of preventing youth tobacco use, could create favorable impressions of the sponsoring tobacco companies among young people, their parents, or others in the community."¹
- In contrast, "a substantial body of research has demonstrated that anti-tobacco industry attitudes reduce the likelihood of future initiation of smoking among youth and young adults."¹

School-based prevention programs are most effective when part of a comprehensive approach to reduce and prevent tobacco use.

- The 2012 Surgeon General's Report concluded: "The evidence is sufficient to conclude that school-based programs with evidence of effectiveness, containing specific components, can produce at least short-term effects and reduce the prevalence of tobacco use among school-aged youth."¹
- Because there is limited evidence of the long-term effectiveness of school-based programs to prevent smoking, school programs may not be fully effective as a stand-alone strategy to reduce and prevent tobacco use.²
- However, school-based prevention initiatives free of tobacco industry influence, including enforcement of tobacco-free school grounds policies, can be undertaken in combination with proven, community-based youth tobacco prevention strategies.¹⁻³ These can include:
 - High-impact media campaigns that warn young people about the dangers of tobacco use.
 - Strategies to raise the price of tobacco products, which reduce youth initiation and use.
 - Comprehensive smoke-free air laws that prohibit smoking and e-cigarette use in public indoor areas.
- Additional promising youth prevention strategies that could be part of a comprehensive strategy include, but are not limited to, raising the age of tobacco product sales to 21, placing restrictions on flavored tobacco product sales, and adding requirements that all tobacco products, including e-cigarettes, be kept behind the store counter or in a locked box.

Cigarette and e-cigarette companies continue to engage in school-based prevention initiatives.

Despite evidence of the ineffectiveness of industry-sponsored, school-based programs, tobacco companies continue to promote these programs. For example:

- R.J. Reynolds’ Right Decisions Right Now, according to the company, is a “free educational tobacco prevention program for students in grades 5-9” that “emphasizes prevention of tobacco in any form, including e-cigarettes and smokeless tobacco.” (<http://www.rightdecisionsrightnow.com/>)
- JUUL Labs, maker of JUUL e-cigarettes, has engaged schools in multiple states to share a pilot youth prevention and education program and offered \$10,000 to school districts for implementation.⁵ An independent review concluded that the curriculum is not evidence-based and fails to mention JUUL specifically or address the tobacco industry’s role in promoting youth tobacco use.⁵ Additionally, the curriculum does not implement best practices such as use of peer leaders as instructors, and instead utilizes “mindfulness” practices for which there is no scientific evidence of effectiveness.⁵

REFERENCES

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