

Panel OKs tobacco ban at schools

Students already forbidden from using on campus

By Brandee Hayhurst Times-News

Some leaders in the health community are calling once more for county schools to push smoking and chewing tobacco entirely off school grounds.

The Alamance County Board of Health passed a resolution Tuesday night encouraging the school board "to adopt a tobacco-free school policy for students, staff and visitors on all school property at all times." The resolution passed with an 8-2 vote.

School board policy forbids students in the Alamance-Burlington School System from using tobacco on school grounds at any time, but teachers and other employees can light up at some schools if they are outside and out of sight.

And although no one can smoke in the stands, parents have designated smoking areas at outdoor sporting events.

The Board of Health wants to stamp out teen smoking, and its chairman, Dr. Steven Slott, said that forbidding teachers and parents from indulging on school property would help, and eliminate second-hand smoke.

"Although it's out of sight, per se, the kids tend to know the teachers smoke," Slott said. "We just think as role models it just sets a bad example."

But Keith Whited said he voted against the resolution as "meddlesome." The attorney and businessman said the school board got it right by preventing teachers and administrators from smoking in front of children.

Whited said he voted no partly because he did not want to impose on the right of parents and teachers to smoke.

"It's (smoking) a poor choice, and not one that I make," he said. "But it's still a choice."

County Commissioner Bill Lashley, who represents the commissioners on the Board of Health, also voted against the measure.

The Alamance-Burlington School Board last revisited its tobacco policy in 2003, when Healthy Alamance, a partnership including the health department, advocated a complete ban. The school board voted it down.

Healthy Alamance coordinator Cindy Brady said the organization has not revisited the issue at that level since, but it does support Tuesday's resolution.

Tom Manning, chairman of the Alamance-Burlington Board of Education, said he has the same concerns he did two years ago. Who is going to stop teachers and parents from smoking, and how much money would it cost?

"The issue of tobacco use on school property has been studied before, and the issue really came down to enforceability," Manning said. "We would like to cut down teen smoking also. There's

no argument with that."

School boards in Guilford and some other counties have entirely banned tobacco use, but Manning said he is not convinced that works. He saw "kids smoking all over the parking lot" at one school in Guilford County.

Slott said that he sympathizes with concerns about trying to enforce a ban.

"We understand there's a lot of considerations that go into it," he said. "But we do want them to know that we advocate 100 percent smoke-free campuses."

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