

Date: September 15, 2015

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For Immediate Release

The Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph CHA Congratulates Sturgis, St. Joseph County ISD, Colon and Mendon Community Schools on their New Tobacco-Free Policy

St. Joseph County, MI – The Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph CHA congratulates Sturgis, St. Joseph County ISD, Colon and Mendon Community Schools on the adoption of a 24/7 Comprehensive Tobacco-Free School Policy.

In all of the mentioned school districts in St. Joseph County their Board of Education passed a 24/7 Tobacco-Free School Policy. The policy prohibits the use of tobacco products 24 hours a day, 7 days a week within any building, and within any vehicle that is owned, leased, or operated by the school district. Use of tobacco products is also prohibited at all school sponsored events and on any real property owned, leased, or operated by the school district. This policy applies to all employees, students, contractors and visitors on the premises of the school district and at all school sponsored events.

The policy was adopted in response to a recommendation by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for schools to implement effective, comprehensive school health programs to prevent tobacco use and addiction.

According to Kelley Mapes, Community Health Educator, “a tobacco-free school policy puts into practice what students are learning about tobacco prevention in their classes. In order for education to be effective, the school environment must support what is being taught. Making a tobacco-free environment the norm supports a child’s decision to remain tobacco-free.

In a 2012 Report titled *Preventing Tobacco Use Among Youth and Young Adults*, the U.S. Surgeon General noted that progress has been made in reducing tobacco use among youth, but far too many young people are still using tobacco products. Currently more than 600,000 middle school students and 3 million high school students smoke cigarettes. Every day, more than 1,200 people in the U.S. die due to smoking. For each of those deaths, at least two youth or young adults become regular smokers each day. Almost 90% of those new smokers smoke their first cigarette by age 18.

“Policies that provide a healthy, tobacco-free environment for youth demonstrate a tobacco-free community norm and protect young people from the health dangers associated with second and third hand smoke exposure. We congratulate these schools on taking this important step to protect area youth and help prevent more young people from stating to use tobacco,” stated Kelley Mapes, Community Health Educator.

To date, 4 of the 9 school districts in St. Joseph County have adopted 24/7 comprehensive tobacco-free school policies. For more information and/or assistance with policy change please feel free to contact Kelley Mapes, Community Health Educator, Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph CHA @517-279-9561 x0103# or mapesk@bhsj.org.

For FREE help in quitting tobacco contact the Michigan Tobacco Quitline at 1-800-784-8669.