

# TOBACCO INDUSTRY-SPONSORED YOUTH PREVENTION PROGRAMS IN SCHOOLS

CDC OFFICE ON SMOKING AND HEALTH

## THE BOTTOM LINE

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Tobacco industry-sponsored school-based tobacco prevention programs are ineffective and may promote tobacco use among youth. Despite this evidence, the tobacco industry, including e-cigarette product makers, continue 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, it is critical that public health and school-based efforts to prevent youth tobacco product use 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* (2012 SGR), reviewed tobacco-industry sponsored youth prevention initiatives in depth, including school-based programs. It 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 Indeed, unpublished internal industry documents available to the public because of litigation, and published academic studies, indicate that they are ineffective or serve to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.”<sup>1</sup>

### **Industry-sponsored youth prevention programs are intended to promote positive attitudes toward the industry. According to the 2012 Surgeon General’s Report:**

- “The industry uses [youth prevention] efforts to convey to the public, policymakers, judges, and members of juries that it is doing something substantial about the issue of youth’s tobacco use. 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.”<sup>1</sup>
- 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.”<sup>1</sup>
- 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.”<sup>1</sup>

### **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.”<sup>1</sup>
- 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.<sup>2</sup>
- 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.<sup>1-3</sup> 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 reduces 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 sales to 21, restrictions on flavored tobacco product sales, and requirements that e-cigarette products kept behind the store counter or in a locked box.

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

Despite evidence of 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, is engaging school principals and youth prevention coordinators in multiple states to share a pilot youth prevention/education program and offering money to schools to test that program. The focus of the pilot program (the "JUUL Program") is to educate, prevent, and/or discourage students from using e-cigarettes and marijuana. The company also says it is developing technological solutions that prevent students from using JUUL products on school grounds.<sup>5,6</sup>

## CDC does not partner with or accept donations from the tobacco industry or industry-sponsored foundations.

- The activities of the tobacco industry are incompatible with CDC's public health objectives to prevent and reduce tobacco use across the lifespan and protect the public from secondhand smoke exposure.
- The 2014 Surgeon General's Report concluded that "the tobacco epidemic was initiated and has been sustained by the aggressive strategies of the tobacco industry, which deliberately misled the public on the risks of smoking cigarettes."<sup>3</sup> Additionally, a Federal court found, among other violations, that tobacco companies "intentionally marketed to young people under the age of twenty-one in order to recruit 'replacement smokers' to ensure the economic future of the industry."<sup>7</sup>
- CDC observes article 5.3 of the World Health Organization (WHO) Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (2005), of which the U.S. is a signatory but has not ratified, which contains specific recommendations on the protection of public health policies from the vested interests of the tobacco industry.<sup>8</sup>
- Additionally, CDC's gift policy explicitly prohibits the agency from accepting donations from tobacco corporations or foundations related to tobacco corporations.<sup>9</sup>

## REFERENCES

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