

Conference Poster Abstract

Local youth groups in Georgia working towards policy, systems, and environmental changes

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Background: The Georgia Youth Tobacco Survey (YTS) is a survey of public middle school (MS) and high school (HS) students. The Georgia YTS was first conducted in 2001. According to YTS, students who attended a tobacco free schools' youth summit were significantly more likely to be aware of students who use tobacco products (MS: 21% for smoking and 20% for smokeless tobacco; HS: 42% for smoking and 39% for smokeless tobacco) on school property than students who did not attend a tobacco free schools' youth summit (MS: 10 % for smoking and 9 % for smokeless tobacco; HS: 32 % for smoking and 35 % for smokeless tobacco).

Methods: During the fall of 2014, the Chronic Disease Prevention Section of the Georgia Department of Public Health (DPH) hosted a youth summit for youth groups across the state. In total, 149 youth and 49 adult leaders attended the summit. The youth summit provided training for middle and high school youth to become tobacco use control advocates in their communities. The youth were involved in creating the messages they would deliver to their school boards.

Results: The local youth groups who attended the summit in 2014 were instrumental in four school districts adopting the model 100% Tobacco-Free Schools policy: Lowndes County Schools and Irwin County Schools (Valdosta, GA); Emanuel County Schools and Jenkins County Schools (Augusta, GA).

Conclusions: These findings support the growing literature on youth involvement in advocacy work towards policy change. Youth should be recruited to work with public health professionals in building coalitions to change community norms.

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