



**FOR EMBARGOED RELEASE**

2/28/19 – must wait for official “yes” vote at 5:30pm meeting

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## **Bernalillo Public School District Adopts a Truly Tobacco-Free School Policy**

***Bernalillo Public School Board partners with local youth to adopt a tobacco-free school policy recognized by the Department of Health as comprehensive***

BERNALILLO – The New Mexico Department of Health’s Tobacco Use Prevention and Control Program and tobacco cessation community partner 24/7 recognized the Bernalillo Public School Board for their vote on Thursday, February 28, 2019 for adopting a comprehensive tobacco-free school policy. The vote comes after two local teens spoke to the board about the need for local schools to provide the healthiest education environment possible.

The 24/7 campaign partners with school districts to help them update their tobacco policies to meet the Department of Health’s comprehensive standard, which is more stringent than the state of New Mexico’s law requires.<sup>1</sup> By this standard, the definition of tobacco products must include e-cigarettes and nicotine liquid containers, and the policy must apply to students, staff, and visitors at all school property owned, leased, or rented by the district as well as all school-sponsored activities whether on- or off-site. “In a truly tobacco-free school environment, tobacco should not be used by anyone, anywhere, at anytime,” says 24/7 campaign manager Ashley Wagner.

“Bernalillo Public Schools (BPS) is excited and looking forward to having a consistent policy district-wide to support our students and staff with a tobacco-free campus,” says Keith Cowan, BPS Superintendent.

Last fall two students from V. Sue Cleveland High School, in the neighboring Rio Rancho Public School District, Aileen Vasquez, 17, and Lea Aguino, 17, approached the Bernalillo school board to ask them to update the district’s tobacco policy. “Implementing 24/7 tobacco free schools is not only significant in the school community, but in the lives of so many young adults,” says Aguino. “With 24/7, we are establishing a healthy lifestyle for numerous individuals- all who can set the example for future generations.” The youth are members of the Department of Health’s statewide youth movement called Evolvment, which works on health campaigns including 24/7.

“Freshmen going into high school look up to the older kids, and seeing them smoke e-cigs and other products makes them want to try it too,” says Vasquez. “Our youth are being influenced to try these tobacco products because they see it around so often they start thinking it’s fine to do and that it will

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<sup>1</sup> 6.12.4 NMAC, TOBACCO, ALCOHOL AND DRUG FREE SCHOOLS RULE

make them look cool. 24/7 works on preventing this so our youth can see the harm in tobacco products.”

To help promote its new comprehensive policy, BPS will be receiving free resources for all schools in the district from the 24/7 campaign, including free, bilingual tobacco-free signs for all school buildings and grounds. Other free resources include bilingual announcements, faculty training, and pre-written staff memos and parent letters explaining the policy.

“Santo Domingo Trojans are proud to be tobacco free!” says Shauna Branch, Principal at Santa Domingo Elementary and Middle Schools. “Thank you 24/7 campaign for your help in our campus making this commitment a reality!”

### **About the 24/7 campaign**

The 24/7 campaign is an initiative to help all school districts in New Mexico understand, adopt, implement, and enforce comprehensive tobacco-free policies. For more information, visit [www.247NewMexico.com](http://www.247NewMexico.com).

### **About Evolvement**

Evolvement New Mexico is the New Mexico Department of Health Tobacco Use Prevention and Control Program’s youth-led volunteer program with a mission to decrease the harmful and addictive use of tobacco. To date, more than 3,000 teens have participated in the Evolvement Program across New Mexico. For more information, visit <https://www.evolvement.org/new-mexico>.

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