

Dear Kentucky Public School Superintendent,

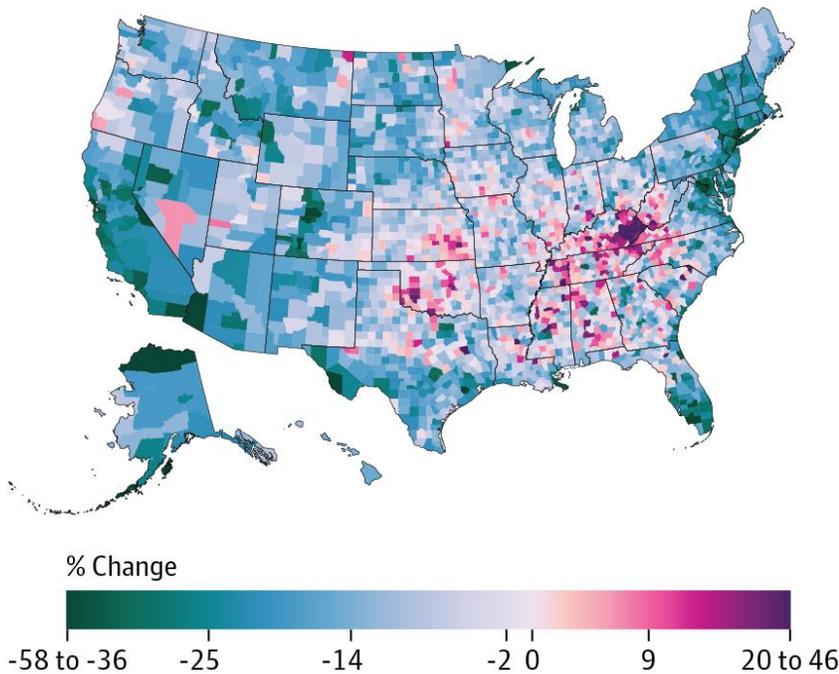
A cancer-free Kentucky. Youngsters who can breathe without struggling. Children who can look forward to a future without heart disease and other chronic health conditions. Kentucky children deserve this.

The single-most effective thing Kentucky can do to achieve these goals is to reduce our high rate of smoking.

On February 9, members of the Kentucky Senate Committee on Education unanimously approved a bill to do just that. Senate Bill 78 would make all public-school campuses in the Commonwealth tobacco-free, starting in the 2018-2019 school year. As a nonpartisan, nonprofit foundation working to improve the health of Kentuckians, we know that eliminating exposure to second-hand smoke in the buildings and on the grounds where our children spend a third of their young lives will protect them from the dangers of tobacco today, while also reducing the chances that they will start smoking tomorrow.

It's absolutely critical to Kentucky's health that we make our schools tobacco-free. Kentucky has the highest adult and youth smoking rates in the nation and, not incidentally, the highest rate of death from cancer. Nearly 29 percent of all cancer deaths can be tied to smoking.ⁱ That number rises to 40 percent for Kentucky men.ⁱⁱ And while cancer mortality declined 20 percent nationwide from 1980 to 2014, it rose significantly in many Kentucky counties over that 35-year span.ⁱⁱⁱ The map below^{iv} is a stark reminder that Kentucky cannot afford to put off taking every reasonable measure to reduce smoking and exposure to tobacco among our youth.

Change in Cancer Mortality – 1980-2014



Asthma, exacerbated by cigarette smoke, is also an issue for 11 percent of Kentucky children,^v and nearly 12 percent of adults.^{vi} These are among the highest rates in the nation, where asthma accounts for millions of days of missed school and work every year.

And smoking has long been associated with poorer academic performance.^{vii}

We recognize that, as a public-school superintendent in Kentucky, your influence in the lives of our youth is tremendous and multi-faceted; certainly, that role has become more complicated in recent years as children and their families deal

with a myriad of social, environmental, and physical and mental health issues. Supporting smoke-free school campuses is one thing you can do to help improve your students' performance almost immediately, while also reducing their long-term health risks.

Congratulations to the 36 percent of Kentucky public school districts that have already gone smoke-free, ahead of Senate Bill 78. Please continue your efforts to educate students, families, faculty and staff on the benefits your efforts are having. Meanwhile, I encourage the remaining districts, which cover nearly half of Kentucky's public school students, to move quickly to do the same.

In health,

Ben Chandler
President and CEO

ⁱ "State-Level Cancer Mortality Attributable to Cigarette Smoking in the United States," *JAMA Intern Med.* 2016;176(12):1792-1798. doi:10.1001/jamainternmed.2016.6530.

ⁱⁱ Ibid.

ⁱⁱⁱ "Trends and Patterns of Disparities in Cancer Mortality Among US Counties, 1980-2014," *JAMA.* 2017;317(4):388-406. doi:10.1001/jama.2016.20324.

^{iv} Ibid.

^v Kids Count Data Center, <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/map/30-percent-of-children-with-asthma-problems?loc=1&loct=1#2/any/false/1021/any/300/Orange/>, accessed Feb. 10, 2017.

^{vi} Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, <https://www.cdc.gov/asthma/brfss/2014/tableL1.htm>, accessed Feb. 10, 2017.

^{vii} "Exposure to secondhand smoke and academic performance in non-smoking adolescents," *J Pediatr.* 2010 Dec;157(6):1012-1017.e1. doi: 10.1016/j.jpeds.2010.06.013. Epub 2010 Jul 16.