

## **SPIRO, HOWE SCHOOLS STAMP OUT TOBACCO 24/7**

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Two public schools in eastern Oklahoma began their new school year tobacco-free, according to Tobacco-free LeFlore County Coordinator Benjamin "B.J." Barnes.

Both the Spiro and Howe school boards recently adopted an around-the-clock tobacco-free environment on school property, Barnes said by email.

Spiro School Superintendent Don Atkinson said, "With all the challenges that today's education brings to our children, we must do our part in providing a healthy environment along with promoting positive life skills."

Howe School Superintendent Scott Parks said he is pleased by the district's commitment to the tobacco-free cause, and believes it necessary that school officials set a proper example for the students they serve.

The district policies prohibit the use of all tobacco products on all district-owned property. The Howe and Spiro districts joined the Poteau, Shady Point and Talihina districts, which went tobacco-free earlier.

Barnes said current Oklahoma law only mandates that schools be tobacco-free between the hours of 7 a.m. and 4 p.m. "A goal of our coalition is to see all 17 LeFlore County school districts adopt a 24/7 Tobacco-free School Policy in an effort to give students the clear message that tobacco use is hazardous to their health," Barnes said.

According to information the coalition posted online, each year an estimated 5,400 Oklahoma children become new daily smokers.

The coalition states that tobacco kills more Oklahomans than does alcohol, auto accidents, AIDS, murders and illegal drugs combined.

The kindergarten through 12th-grade public schools aren't the only educational institutions eyeing smoke-free campuses in LeFlore County.

In January, citing health reasons, Carl Albert State College Student Government Association officers approached CASC regents with their desire to take the campus smoke-free as of January 2012. The students said smoking is Oklahoma's leading cause of preventable death, costing more than 6,000 lives and almost \$2.9 billion each year.

In March, the regents asked CASC's student association to also poll faculty and staff on the issue. The students said then they hope for a smoke-free campus as of January 2012, if the college officials approve the change.

Tobacco-free LeFlore County is a grantee of the Oklahoma Tobacco Settlement Endowment Trust, and is a program of the LeFlore County Coalition for Healthy Living and LeFlore County Youth Services. According to the announcement, the organization works with schools, municipalities and businesses to decrease tobacco use in LeFlore County.