



Checklist for Vermont School Substance Use Policies and Procedures

This comprehensive checklist is intended for use by schools and communities in partnership with their local prevention coalitions.

In addition to Vermont state statutes and the Vermont State Board of Education Manual of Rules and Practices, content in this checklist is adapted from:

- Vermont Agency of Education and Department of Health joint statement: [Comprehensive School-Based Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drug Prevention](#), Nov. 2015
- [Tobacco-free Schools Policy: Checklist Toolkit](#), developed by the Rocky Mountain Center for Health Promotion and Education, 2010
- [School Substance Use Policy Development Guide](#), Maine Department of Health and Human Services, Nov. 2019
- [Guidance on School Policies Regarding Substance Use Prevention](#), Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Sept. 2016
- [What Schools Can Do: Creative Ways Franklin County And North Quabbin Schools Are Implementing DESE Guidance On Substance Use Prevention](#), Franklin (MA) Regional Council of Governments, 2017
- [Comprehensive Tobacco-Free School Policy Checklist](#), Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, undated

This tool includes numerous best practices that can strengthen a school's policies and procedures for addressing and preventing substance use. Not all best practices may be applicable or appropriate for a particular school, but by including them, we hope schools will choose to incorporate those elements that will help them achieve their health and wellness goals related to substance use.

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Checklist Completed by: _____

Date: _____

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Section 1: Substance-Free Schools Written Policy and Procedure Content

Meets Standards of Vermont Statutes					
This section assesses whether written policies and procedures are consistent with Vermont statutes regulating substances, including tobacco, alcohol, and cannabis.					
The written policy:	Yes	No	Partial	Notes	Recommendations on Next Steps
1. Prohibits use of tobacco products or tobacco substitutes on public school grounds or at public school-sponsored functions. (16 VSA §140)					
2. Defines tobacco to mean all forms of tobacco and tobacco use. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Tobacco products” means cigarettes, little cigars, roll-your-own tobacco, snuff, cigars, new smokeless tobacco, and other tobacco products as defined in 32 VSA § 7702. (7 VSA §1001(3)) • “Tobacco substitute” means products, including electronic cigarettes or other electronic or battery-powered devices, that contain and are designed to deliver nicotine or other substances into the body through inhaling vapor and that have not been approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration for tobacco cessation or other medical purposes. Products that have been approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration for tobacco cessation or other medical purposes shall not be considered to be tobacco substitutes. (7 VSA §1001(8)) • “Tobacco paraphernalia” means any device used, intended for use, or designed for use in smoking, inhaling, ingesting, or otherwise introducing tobacco products into the human body, or for preparing tobacco for smoking, inhaling, ingesting, or otherwise introducing into the human body, including devices for holding tobacco, rolling paper, wraps, cigarette rolling machines, pipes, water 					

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Meets Standards of Vermont Statutes

This section assesses whether written policies and procedures are consistent with Vermont statutes regulating substances, including tobacco, alcohol, and cannabis.

The written policy:	Yes	No	Partial	Notes	Recommendations on Next Steps
pipes, carburetion devices, bongs, and hookahs. (7 VSA §1001(7))					
3. States that possession of tobacco products, tobacco substitutes, or tobacco paraphernalia by a person under 21 years of age is against the law. (7 VSA §1005(a)(1))					
4. States that possession of cannabis or hashish by persons under 21 years of age is against the law. (18 VSA §4230b)					
5. States that consumption of cannabis in a public place is against the law. (7 VSA §4230a(2)(A))					
6. States that possession and consumption of malt or vinous beverages, spirits, or fortified wines by persons under 21 years of age is against the law. (7 VSA §656(a)(1))					
7. States that dispensing cannabis to persons under 21 years of age is against the law. (18 VSA §4230f(a)(1))					
8. States that furnishing alcoholic beverages to persons under 21 years of age is against the law. (7 VSA §658(a)(1))					
9. States that a person under 21 who possesses or consumes alcoholic beverages shall be referred to the Court Diversion Program for enrollment in the Youth Substance Abuse Safety Program. (7 VSA §656(a)(2))					
10. States that a person 16 years of age and under 21 years of age who knowingly and unlawfully possesses one ounce or less of cannabis or five grams or less of hashish					

Meets Standards of Vermont Statutes

This section assesses whether written policies and procedures are consistent with Vermont statutes regulating substances, including tobacco, alcohol, and cannabis.

The written policy:	Yes	No	Partial	Notes	Recommendations on Next Steps
shall be referred to the Court Diversion Program for enrollment in the Youth Substance Abuse Safety Program. (18 VSA §4230b(a))					
11. States that a person under 16 years of age who violates §4230b (possession of cannabis or hashish) shall be subject to 33 VSA Chapter 52 and provided an opportunity to participate in the Court Diversion Program. (18 VSA §4230j)					

Complies with Vermont State Board of Education Rules

This section assesses whether the written policies contain provisions consistent with Vermont State Board of Education Rules, [Series 4200](#), Alcohol and Drugs (based on statutory authority in [16 VSA §1165](#)) and 4300, Disciplinary Action (based on [16 VSA §1162](#)). It also includes items from the Vermont School Boards Association Model Policy on Student Alcohol and Drugs, [Code C2 \(required\)](#).

The written policy:	Yes	No	Partial	Notes	Recommendations on Next Steps
12. Contains a statement of philosophy that outlines concern with the health and well-being of all students and takes into consideration the individual needs of students with problems as well as the right of the majority of students to an education. (Rule 4212.1)					
13. States that: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• it is the policy of the School District that no student shall knowingly possess, use, sell, give or otherwise transmit, or be under the influence of any illegal drug, regulated substance, or alcohol on any school property, or at any school sponsored activity away from or within the school• students who violate the policy are subject to discipline consistent with the District's policy on Student Conduct and Discipline and the school's overall discipline plan developed pursuant to 16 VSA §1161a. (VSBA Model Policy C2)					
14. Defines substance misuse as: "the ingestion of a substance in such a way that it interferes with a person's ability to perform physically, intellectually, emotionally or socially." (Rule 4211)					
15. Defines drug as "any narcotic drug, hallucinogenic drug, amphetamine, barbiturate, cannabis or any other controlled substance as defined by state or federal regulation or statute." (VSBA Model Policy C2, based on statutory definitions in 18 VSA §4201 , 41 USC §706(3) and 21 USC §812)					

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The written policy:	Yes	No	Partial	Notes	Recommendations on Next Steps
16. Provides for an educational program consistent with the Vermont Alcohol and Drug Education Curriculum Plan. (Rule 4212.2) ¹					
17. Provides for a support and referral system for students in distress due to their own or another's use of alcohol or other drugs. Such a system shall include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a clearly defined in-school process for initial assessment, support, and if necessary, referral to community resources • a written referral agreement with at least one community substance abuse treatment provider approved by the Office of Alcohol and Drug Abuse Programs [now known as the Division of Substance Use Programs]. Such an agreement should define the process for making an effective referral and the nature and extent of information to be provided during and after such a referral to all parties involved. (Rule 4212.3)					
18. Provides for the handling of any alcohol/drug-related incident until the student has been discharged to the parent, guardian, social service, medical or law enforcement agency. (Rule 4212.3A)					
19. Establishes procedures for administering emergency first-aid related to alcohol and drug misuse. The					

¹ Although the board rules and VSBA model policy reference this plan, it is not referenced in the joint statement issued by the VT Agency of Education and Department of Health, *Comprehensive School-Based Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drug Prevention* in its section on Classroom-based Health Education.

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The written policy:	Yes	No	Partial	Notes	Recommendations on Next Steps
procedures will define the roles of the personnel involved. (Rule 4212.3B)					
<p>20. Affords students subject to disciplinary action due process as follows, per Rule 4311.1-4311.3:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In all cases of short-term suspension (usually 10 days or less), the student and their parent/guardian shall be given an opportunity for an informal hearing before an appropriately designated school official. The hearing must precede the suspension, except in cases where the student is a threat to themselves or others (see Rule 4311.3). The school district shall provide: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Notice of charges – Explanation of evidence against the student – Opportunity for student to tell their side of the story – Decision in writing to the parent/guardian • In all cases of long-term suspension (generally 10+ days unless the school district establishes a shorter period) the student and their parent/guardian shall be given an opportunity for a formal hearing before the school board and the district shall provide: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – written notice of the following: (a) nature of charges against the student; (b) date, time and place of hearing; (c) right to legal representation; (d) possible penalties involved – opportunity to present evidence – opportunity to cross-examine witnesses – decision in writing to parent/guardian 					

Complies with Vermont State Board of Education Rules

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The written policy:	Yes	No	Partial	Notes	Recommendations on Next Steps
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When a student, because of their conduct or condition, is an immediate threat to themselves, others, property or educational environment, the school district may take whatever action is appropriate under the circumstances, including, but not limited to, immediate suspension pending a hearing as soon as possible thereafter. See also Rule 4312-4313 for provisions covering qualified individuals with disabilities as defined by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. 					

Includes Best Practices for Written Policy and Procedure Content

These practices are largely drawn from guides and checklists developed by other states

The written policy:	Yes	No	Partial	Notes	Recommendations on Next Steps
21. Includes a rationale for being substance-free. <i>Example: "The School Board and staff of the school unit support a safe and healthy learning environment for students which is free of the detrimental effects of drugs and alcohol. Accomplishing this goal requires a cooperative effort among school staff, students, parents, law enforcement and organizations concerned with the use of drugs and alcohol by school-aged youth."</i>					
22. Establishes a protocol for communicating the policy, procedures, and rationale to all students, staff, parents, and visitors. (See Section 2 of this document)					
23. Bans use by substance, not just delivery method, and anticipates the evolving nature of substitutes being created by using language such as "any other device or					

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Includes Best Practices for Written Policy and Procedure Content

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The written policy:	Yes	No	Partial	Notes	Recommendations on Next Steps
product that delivers nicotine to a user” or “any product or device that delivers THC or a synthetic chemical to a user.”					
24. Defines what determines use and/or possession (such as presence of a substance in a locker, backpack, or car on school property).					
25. Establishes a procedure for communicating student substance-free school violations to parents/guardians.					
26. Clearly lays out prohibitions, enforcement, and consequences so that students and their families, staff, and visitors can understand what is not allowed, how the policy will be enforced, and the consequences for breaking the rules.					
27. Lays out consequences that are age-appropriate, appropriate to the situation, clearly align to policy violations, and clearly define criteria that can increase or reduce consequences.					
28. Establishes consequences for policy violations in a stepped, restorative-practices-focused response, based on factors such as severity of violation and whether it is a first or repeat offense.					
29. Includes provisions for assessment and screening for substance use treatment needs by trained staff and a system to connect students in need of treatment to services (in school or by referral) and students not in need of treatment to preventative interventions.					

Includes Best Practices for Written Policy and Procedure Content

These practices are largely drawn from guides and checklists developed by other states

The written policy:	Yes	No	Partial	Notes	Recommendations on Next Steps
30. Clearly identifies staff members (such as guidance counselors and social workers) who can provide students with treatment and/or referrals.					
31. Includes language restricting items from school property -- and off-campus at school-sponsored events -- that might contribute to substance use and acceptability (such as lighters, clothing, hats, stickers, or buttons with logos).					
32. Includes a requirement for prevention education for all students.					
33. Includes an exemption for possession of tobacco products for limited educational purposes (for example in a health class lesson on vaping or a VKAT display on environmental impacts of tobacco litter, etc.)					
34. Supports tobacco and nicotine cessation by expressly allowing prescribed items such as nicotine patches, lozenges, and gum.					
35. Includes provisions against accepting funds or in-kind donations from tobacco, alcohol, cannabis, and other drug industries.					
36. Includes language prohibiting advertising of products that cannot be sold to minors in school buildings and at school-sponsored functions.					

Includes Best Practices for Written Policy and Procedure Content

These practices are largely drawn from guides and checklists developed by other states

The written policy:	Yes	No	Partial	Notes	Recommendations on Next Steps
37. Includes a requirement that the school 1) conduct an annual review of policy enforcement to screen for bias, particularly toward students with disabilities, low-income students, students of color, and English learners ² , and 2) implement a corrective action plan if bias is detected.					
38. Includes procedures for periodic review and revision, including timetable, procedures for convening a policy committee, and the process for evaluating, reviewing, and revising the policy.					
39. Sets out standards for involving both the school and the community in developing and revising policies and procedures, including stakeholders such as school administrators; school board or school policy committee; teachers and staff; students; parents, guardians, and families; community members; law enforcement; and prevention, intervention, and treatment professionals.					

² In Vermont, students who are disabled, Black, and Native American have historically been suspended at much higher rates. Diaz, J. *Kicked Out! Unfair and Unequal Student Discipline in Vermont's Public Schools*. Vermont Legal Aid, 2015. See also Holcombe, R. *Exclusionary Discipline Response: Response to Written Request of February 26, 2015 Related to S.67*, Jan. 2016, noting that "[t]he Agency of Education finds that students who are non-Caucasian, male, participate in the free and reduced lunch program, have IEPs or Section 504 plans or are English Learners are over-represented in terms of the number who experience exclusion and the number of incidents resulting in exclusion."

Section 2: Communicating Policy and Procedures

Incorporates Applicable Best Practices for Communicating Policies and Procedures					
These practices are largely drawn from guides and checklists developed by other states					
The school:	Yes	No	Partial	Notes	Recommendations on Next Steps
40. Posts substance-free signage at all main entrances or sections of the building, event locations (sports fields, auditoriums etc.) and on district buses/vehicles. (See <i>Signage Activity at the end of this section for a more comprehensive list of locations.</i>) The signage should include language covering, at a minimum, all legal age-restricted substances, e.g., "This School (or School Property) is Substance-Free. Thank you for not using alcohol, tobacco, nicotine, vapor or cannabis/THC products."					
41. Includes statements in the student handbook regarding no-substance use, and requires both a student signature and a parent/guardian signature acknowledging that they understand the policy and what will happen if the student violates the policy. Statements should be easily understandable and culturally appropriate. The handbook should be distributed to all students at the beginning of each year and to new students upon enrollment.					
42. Includes no-substance use requirements in athletic contracts and requires both a student and a parent/guardian signature.					
43. Includes substance use policy acknowledgment on permission slips for off-campus, school-sponsored events, including athletic events and field trips.					
44. Incorporates no-substance use language in the employee handbook, including legal substances that may not be used during work, such as alcohol; tobacco					

Incorporates Applicable Best Practices for Communicating Policies and Procedures

These practices are largely drawn from guides and checklists developed by other states

The school:	Yes	No	Partial	Notes	Recommendations on Next Steps
and tobacco substitutes; and cannabis/THC products, including cannabis/THC-infused edibles.					
45. Reviews the policy during new employee orientation, including for volunteers and contractor employees.					
46. Disseminates the policy to coaches and advisors for extra-curricular activities.					
47. Includes no-substance use agreements in contracts with outside vendors or groups using school facilities (e.g., landscaping companies, construction companies, youth groups, recreation departments and others), if applicable.					
48. Explains Vermont laws and district/school policy/procedures applicable to substance use and possession on school property, the rationale for being substance-free, consequences for violations, and available resources via a variety of channels, including: newsletter articles, town bulletin boards, listservs or other electronic messaging channels, and other communications to parents/guardians and the broader community.					
49. Provides a process to address community questions and concerns while promoting the value of the policy/procedures.					
50. Makes announcements at school events (e.g., sporting events, school plays, talent shows etc.) to remind students, staff, and visitors of the policy.					

Incorporates Best Practice Resources and Programs for Prevention and Cessation/Recovery

Except where noted, these practices are drawn from guides and checklists developed by other states

The school:	Yes	No	Partial	Notes	Recommendations on Next Steps
<p>51. Implements a comprehensive health education curriculum, including substance use prevention concepts and student skill development. Health education must be based on the National Health Education Standards adopted by the VT State Board of Education and curricula should be aligned with the CDC's Characteristics of Effective Health Education Curriculum. (VT AOE and VDH Statement: <i>Comprehensive School-Based Alcohol, Tobacco, and other Drug Prevention</i>)</p> <p>If yes, in the "Notes" indicate what education is being done and at what grade levels.</p>					
52. Includes an evidence-based education component in the prevention curriculum designed for parents/guardians to help keep students safe from substance use by modeling skills and attitudes at home.					
53. Has a plan in place to promote and maintain a healthy, positive school climate, including a process for routine evaluation of health, safety, and school climate.					
54. Applies a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) framework to promote healthy behaviors for all students. (recommendation from VT AOE and VDH Statement: <i>Comprehensive School-Based Alcohol, Tobacco, and other Drug Prevention</i>)					
55. Provides annual training for faculty and staff on early warning signs and behaviors that indicate a student may be experiencing substance use problems and protocols to be followed. Training should include orientation to new and trending substances and paraphernalia to					

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Incorporates Best Practice Resources and Programs for Prevention and Cessation/Recovery

Except where noted, these practices are drawn from guides and checklists developed by other states

The school:	Yes	No	Partial	Notes	Recommendations on Next Steps
assist with identifying students who are using substances.					
56. Has resources visibly available to encourage tobacco/nicotine cessation for students, staff, visitors, and parents/guardians (e.g., posters, tip cards, brochures for telephone-based counseling, web-based programs, local resources or state resources).					
57. Provides assistance to students who want to quit using tobacco, tobacco substitutes, or nicotine products, for example partnering with a medical provider to prescribe nicotine replacements at in-school clinics with parental permission. <i>If yes, in the "Notes" indicate what cessation assistance is offered.</i>					
58. Has resources visibly available to support students, staff, visitors, and parents/guardians struggling with alcohol or drug use (e.g., posters, tip cards, brochures for telephone-based counseling, web-based programs, local resources or state resources).					
59. Has procedures for reintegrating students who have been absent while in recovery from drug or alcohol use.					
60. Partners with the local prevention coalition on parent outreach and community engagement around mutually supportive strategies to promote youth involvement in the community and discourage substance use (e.g., joins community coalitions; sponsors student advocacy groups (e.g., VKAT, OVX); or runs state-wide media campaigns on the school digital displays, website and/or social media channels)					

Incorporates Best Practice Resources and Programs for Prevention and Cessation/Recovery

Except where noted, these practices are drawn from guides and checklists developed by other states

The school:	Yes	No	Partial	Notes	Recommendations on Next Steps
61. Provides information to students, staff, visitors and parents/guardians regarding substance use prevention efforts and the health risks of substance use for youth.					
62. Provides information to students, staff, visitors and parents/guardians regarding the dangers of secondhand tobacco and cannabis smoke and vapor.					
63. Maintains a resource list of the currently available network of services available to students and their families.					

Signage Review Activity

Signage explaining substance-free policy is clearly posted:	Yes	No	Partial	Notes	Recommendations on Next Steps
64. At main entrances to the building					
65. At perimeters of the school/district property					
66. In parking lots					
67. At major walkways					
68. Near the main office					
69. In the nurse's office					
70. In all auditoriums					
71. In all gymnasiums					

Signage Review Activity					
Signage explaining substance-free policy is clearly posted:	Yes	No	Partial	Notes	Recommendations on Next Steps
72. At all athletic fields, especially in the spectator area					
73. At major student gathering places					
74. In all restrooms					
75. In loading areas					
76. In major stairwells					
77. In school or district vehicles/buses					

Section 3: Substance Use Behavior and Enforcement

Assessing Substance Use Behavior					
The information gathered in this section can help inform an assessment of the effectiveness of the policy and procedures. These practices are drawn from guides and checklists developed by other states					
School property and events:	Yes	No	Partial	Notes	Recommendations on Next Steps
78. Students are seen consuming tobacco, tobacco substitutes, drugs, or alcohol on school property. This includes vaping, chew, or other forms of tobacco/nicotine, as well as cannabis-infused edibles. <i>Note that in this section of the checklist, "seen" includes not only first-hand observation, but also viewing images posted on social media that purport to have been taken on school property.</i>					
79. Staff are seen consuming tobacco, tobacco substitutes, drugs, or alcohol on school property.					
80. Students, and/or staff are seen consuming tobacco, tobacco substitutes, drugs, or alcohol in school or district vehicles or in private vehicles on school and/or district property.					
81. Visitors (including parents) are seen consuming tobacco, tobacco substitutes, drugs, or alcohol on school property.					
82. Students, staff, parents, and/or visitors are seen consuming tobacco, tobacco substitutes, drugs, or alcohol at school-sponsored events (on or off campus).					
83. Students are seen during school hours near school property consuming tobacco, tobacco substitutes, drugs, or alcohol.					
84. There is evidence of tobacco/nicotine use on school property (e.g., cigarette butts; packaging for cigarettes,					

nicotine pods, or e-juice; chew tobacco tins, tobacco spit in sinks; vaping or smoking paraphernalia).					
85. There is evidence of alcohol or drug use on school property (e.g., empty alcohol containers, drug paraphernalia, vaping devices, used syringes).					
Assessing Policy and Procedure Enforcement					
These practices are drawn from guides and checklists developed by other states					
The school:	Yes	No	Partial	Notes	Recommendations on Next Steps
86. Enforces substance-free policy with students equally – including equal enforcement by coaches and extra-curricular advisors -- and utilizes clear procedures for handling violations.					
87. Utilizes a progressive discipline plan to enforce tobacco/nicotine policy with students (e.g., the consequences are less punitive for first offenses and become more punitive with repeated offenses. Less punitive options may include tobacco/vaping education and loss of privileges versus suspension).					
88. Where appropriate, utilizes a progressive discipline plan to enforce the substance use policy for substances other than tobacco/nicotine (e.g., the consequences are less punitive for first offenses and become more punitive with repeated offenses).					
89. Enforces the substance-free policy with staff and utilizes clear and consistent procedures for handling violations.					
90. Enforces the substance-free policy with visitors and utilizes clear procedures for handling violations (e.g., providing information about applicable Vermont law and school policy, providing cessation/recovery information).					

91. Identifies staff responsible for monitoring and enforcing the policy.					
92. Provides annual training for faculty and staff regarding substance use policy and enforcement strategies so that all staff know the district and school policies, procedures, and protocols for prevention, intervention, and follow-up in preventing and responding to substance use.					

Section 4: Action Plan for Policy/Procedure Revisions

Use this template to create your action plan for revising your policy					
Action Steps <i>Pull from Recommended Next Steps in each part of the Checklist</i>	Responsible Parties <i>Who will be accountable for seeing that this gets done? Who will support that work?</i>	Timeline	Resources	Potential Barriers	Status/Progress Notes
1.	Lead: Partners:	Start date: Projected completion:	Available: Needed:	Barriers: Plan to overcome:	
2.	Lead: Partners:	Start date: Projected completion:	Available: Needed:	Barriers: Plan to overcome:	
3.	Lead: Partners:	Start date: Projected completion:	Available: Needed:	Barriers: Plan to overcome:	
4.	Lead: Partners:	Start date: Projected completion:	Available: Needed:	Barriers: Plan to overcome:	
5.	Lead: Partners:	Start date: Projected completion:	Available: Needed:	Barriers: Plan to overcome:	