

## The Superintendent

JAMES H. VANSCIVER

### Ask the Mice

Companies, politicians, and school districts across the country have begun grappling with a thorny issue: how to deal with the rights of both smokers and nonsmokers in the workplace. Officials at Lake Forest School District in Harrington, Delaware, elected not to wait for the issue to come to them. We gathered facts, solicited input from both sides, and set a plan in motion.

*First the Process.* To address the issue, we formed a committee composed of both smokers and nonsmokers and representing all employee groups. At the first two meetings members had the opportunity to vent their frustrations, assert their rights, and assess the situation from both sides. Then we decided to gather data from our entire 400-member district work force by using a Likert-style survey. Of the 190 persons who replied, 41 were smokers.

Respondents indicated strongly that they felt smoking, including second-hand smoke, is hazardous to health; that smoking has a negative impact on a staff member's effectiveness as a role model; and that the current policy that permitted smoking in faculty rooms and in some work areas should be changed.

Then came the tough question: what should be done? Getting mixed results, mostly about 50-50, were survey statements indicating that smoking should be banned, that smoking should be banned in all district buildings only during hours when school is in session, that smoking should be permitted only in areas within the building other than the faculty lounge; and that smoking should be permitted only in areas outside the building. The last survey statement—*if an adequate designated interior area for smoking cannot be found, smoking should be*

*banned within the building*—drew strong support.

*Then the Plan.* After considering the survey data, the 17 committee members recommended that the board of education enact a policy to prohibit smoking in all district buildings at all times on a six-month trial basis. It was not an easy decision. It was not unanimous.

The committee recommended that the policy apply to all people, not just staff. That is, community members who attend school functions and groups who use district buildings would also fall under the direction of the no-smoking policy. The committee also recommended that the staff development plan provide for assistance programs for smokers who wished to reduce or halt their smoking.

As the issue was sensitive, the school board engaged in lengthy discussion and asked for legal assistance in developing a policy that would withstand any tests. The matter came up for vote at the next board meeting.

At this point, the media became interested in our deliberations. All local and statewide papers carried the story, as did radio and television stations. Both statewide papers ran major editorials two days later in support of the program. A radio talk show drew calls in support of the proposal. Calls and letters from community members and from employees in neighboring school districts also were supportive. An American Cancer Society representative praised our effort.

Soon a policy was drafted, procedures formulated, and board passage enacted at the following board meeting.

*Will It Work?* We believe that, after some kinks get worked out, communication is established, and a review is conducted, the policy will remain intact. The end result will be that all staff, smokers and nonsmokers, will work in a healthy environment. Anyone who doesn't think that is important may want to ask those laboratory mice used in the smoking experiments. □

**James H. VanSciver** is Superintendent, Lake Forest School District, Harrington, DE 19952.

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