

Parent Toolkit for School Wellness Policies: How to Talk to Your School About Your Local School Wellness Policy

Why do I need this Toolkit?

Jump IN for Healthy Kids developed this toolkit to help parents, families, and students navigate their schools' wellness policies. Local school wellness policies influence what kind of food is served at school, how much P.E., recess, and other physical activity are offered at school, and what kinds of food are available to students outside of meals (in vending machines, after school, in concessions outlets, food for celebrations, etc.). All of those policies strongly influence how healthy an environment your school provides, and all of those policies can be improved by engaged parents, families, and students, who have the right information and can generate support from the right school leadership.



What is a School Wellness Policy and why is it important?

A wellness policy is a written document that guides a local educational agency or school district's efforts to create supportive school nutrition and physical activity environments. Local Wellness Policies can address policies and practices for before-, during-, and after-school. (CDC)

Each local educational agency that participates in the National School Lunch Program or other federal Child Nutrition programs is required by federal law to establish a local school wellness policy for all schools under its jurisdiction.

Local wellness policies are an important tool for parents, local educational agencies (LEAs) and school districts in promoting student wellness, preventing and reducing childhood obesity, and providing assurance that school meal nutrition guidelines meet the minimum federal school meal standards.

Background on School Wellness Policies

Congress recognizes that schools play a critical role in promoting student health, preventing childhood obesity, and combating problems associated with poor nutrition and physical activity. In 2004, Congress passed the Child Nutrition and Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Reauthorization Act (Sec. 204 of Public Law 108-265). This act required by law that all LEAs participating in the National School Lunch Program or other child nutrition programs create local school

wellness policies by School Year 2006. The legislation places the responsibility of developing a wellness policy at the local level, so the individual needs of each LEA can be addressed.

In 2010, Congress passed the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 (Sec. 204 of Public Law 111-296) and added new provisions for local school wellness policies related to implementation, evaluation, and publicly reporting on progress of local school wellness policies.

What does the policy require from school districts?

School districts must:

- Set goals for nutrition education
- Set goals for physical activity
- Set nutrition guidelines for all foods and beverages available on school campuses during the school day
- Ensure that local guidelines for reimbursable school meals meet the program requirements and nutrition standards set forth by federal regulations
- Set goals for other school-based activities designed to promote student wellness
- Involve a broad group of members of the community to draft a plan to measure the implementation of policies
- Designate one or more person within the district or at each school charged with operational responsibility for ensuring that each school fulfills the district's local wellness policy

Things You Can Do

- Find out if your school has a wellness committee (wellness committees are not required by law, but it is a best practice to include multiple stakeholders in healthy and wellness decision making)
- Join your local wellness committee
- Request that your school make easily accessible their wellness policies and their implementation and assessment plans to parents, school staff, and state officials
- Model healthy behaviors and promote healthy choices at home
- Watch the Action for Healthy Kids Parent Leadership Webinar Series at www.actionforhealthykids.org/component/content/article/13-parents-for-healthy-kids/674-parent-leadership-webinar-series
- Volunteer for school wellness activities
- Help make parent participation in school health meetings easier by scheduling times outside of work hours, or offer to provide child care for parents with young children
- Include the goals of the wellness policy in Parent-Teacher Associations' (PTAs) actions and programs
- Advocate for a school garden

Questions to Ask Your School

- Does our school have a wellness policy and where can I find it?
- What are some obstacles the school faces when trying to execute a wellness policy?
- Does our school have a wellness committee?
- Does your school know that having a wellness committee is a best practice?
- Who is involved in the wellness committee?

- What can I do to get involved?
- Is wellness a priority in our school?
- What can we do to make wellness a priority?
- Is drinking water easily accessible to students in our school?
- Are students involved in school wellness decisions?
- What is the guidance for parents around school celebrations and fundraisers?
- How did the school score on its most recent wellness policy assessment? (Every three years the local wellness policy must be evaluated and its results made public. One assessment tool is the WELL SAT 2.0: www.wellsat.org which provides free, personalized guidance and resources for making improvements)



How to Engage Your Child

- Get your child interested in a healthy lifestyle at home:
 - o Talk to your child about why health is important
 - o Take your child grocery shopping and allow them to pick out fruits and vegetables that they'd like to try
 - o Let your child pick a physical activity that they enjoy and would like to pursue (sports, dancing, running, hiking, etc.)

- Have a policy of little to no food rewards at home, try to use physical activity as a reward (e.g., more play time)
- Cook with your child
 - Prepare meals/snacks together
- Keep kids moving
- For elementary aged students:
 - Bring your child to PTO/School Wellness Committee meetings
 - Model healthy lifestyles at home, by eating plenty of fruits and vegetables, making physical activity part of you day, and getting plenty of sleep
 - Suggest fun activities for birthday celebrations at school rather than food-related rewards
- For older high schoolers:
 - Encourage participation/volunteering with local health related organizations
 - Encourage participation in principal advisory councils/student wellness committees
 - Daily health tips on the morning announcements

Games and Activities for Child Engagement at School and Home

- Try-Day Friday: It's Fun to Find New Favorite Foods
https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/TNevents_tryday.pdf
- Try-Day Testing Ballot:
https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/tn/TNevents_appendixrepro1.pdf
- Blastoff Healthy Plate Game
<https://www.fns.usda.gov/blastoff>
- Fruit & Veggie Eater Meter
https://foodchamps.org/downloads/Eater_all.pdf

How to Create a School Wellness Committee

- Create a school health team
 - Start with people who are passionate about health and have the time and energy to commit to the team – could be the school nurse, a P.E. or dance teacher, or anyone on the school staff with an interest in good health.
- Assess problems and successes of your school community
 - Collect and analyze information about your school's success related to school wellness. Assess what's not going so well and where there are opportunities for improvements.
- Survey stakeholders
 - Survey the needs and concerns of internal and external stakeholders in your school community.
- Create a shared vision
 - Develop personal visions for what health looks like at your school and begin to create a shared vision of what you want your school to look like. You may enlist other parents and staff to help craft it.
- Communicate your vision

- Share with school staff, students, parents and the larger school neighborhood/community your vision for a healthy school.
- Talk with staff, students, parents, and other stakeholders
 - Have individual conversations with people to introduce the idea of building a healthier school.
- Develop a school health action plan that links activities to vision
 - This plan should show who will do what, when, and how you'll know if you're successful.
- Provide professional development opportunities
 - Give school staff the resources they need to implement physical activity breaks, nutrition education, healthy celebrations/rewards, etc.
- Model healthy behaviors
 - Are school staff practicing what they preach in front of students and families? Are leaders within your school modeling school wellness best practices themselves?
- Change support systems to support vision
 - Change support systems such as rewards and policies to support vision.
- Implement physical activity and nutrition initiatives
 - Implement the physical activity and nutrition initiatives included in your school health action plan.
- Document and share successes and failures
 - In school health team meetings, talk about the successes and failures of your wellness initiatives. What is working well, what needs to be improved, or needs more support?
- Reflect with the school community
 - What do they think about the wellness initiatives? What is and isn't working for them? Ask questions and gather feedback.
- Revise your school health action plan
 - Make changes to your plan based on changes in the administration, policy, updates, feedback from your school community, et.



FAQ

- **Who is responsible for developing the local school wellness policy?**

The local educational agency (LEA) is responsible for developing a local school wellness policy. This responsibility is placed at the local level so that LEAs have flexibility to address the unique needs of each school under their jurisdiction. LEAs are required to allow parents, students, teachers of physical education, school health professionals, the school board, school administrators, and members of the general public to participate in the development, implementation, and periodic review and update of the local school wellness policy.

<https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/cn/SP24-2017os.pdf>

- **What is the purpose of a school wellness policy?**

To promote student wellness, prevent and reduce childhood obesity, and provide assurance that school meal nutrition guidelines meet the minimum federal school meal standards. (USDA)

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/local-school-wellness-policy>

- **Why is a school wellness policy important?**

A school wellness policy is important because it:

- Reaches beyond USDA-funded meal programs to influence children's health
- Acknowledges local community responsibility to support or build government efforts
- Provides an opportunity for school districts to create an environment conducive to healthy lifestyle choices
- Recognizes the critical role of schools in curbing the epidemic of childhood overweight and obesity

https://www.fruitsandveggiesmorematters.org/wp-content/uploads/Tallies/Schools_with_Wellness_Policies_4.pdf

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- **Who should be involved in the school wellness plan?**

It's a best practice to include members of the community in the development of a school wellness policy. At the very least, parents, students, and representatives of the school food authority, the school board, school administrators, and the public should be a part of the development process. It is recommended that a school wellness or school health advisory committee be formed (if not already in place via a school health council) to develop, adopt and implement the policy.

- **Why do we need a school wellness committee?**

The school wellness committee provides a way to inform teachers, staff, students and families about the work the school is doing to improve the health and academic success of its students. The school wellness committee is also a way to ensure that district level wellness policies are implemented at the building level. In addition, these committees represent the unique perspective of the community in a school building. This enables the health priorities and activities put in place to truly reflect the needs and interests of that school.

https://www.healthiergeneration.org/_asset/ppvhfi/09-875_SWCToolkit.pdf

- **What do school wellness committees do?**

School wellness committees typically assess the school health environment, programs and policies in place and identify ways to strengthen these to improve the health of students and staff. Usually committees will develop and implement an action plan based on what they learn about the school. They also provide advice and expertise to administrators in the building and provide feedback to the district regarding implementation of health-related wellness policies and programs and report on the content and implementation to the public (including parents, students and the community members).

https://www.healthiergeneration.org/_asset/ppvhfi/09-875_SWCToolkit.pdf

<http://www.actionforhealthykids.org/tools-for-schools>

<https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/shi/index.htm>

- **Who decides what the school wellness committee will work on?**

The Alliance for a Healthier Generation offers a six-step process included in the Healthy Schools Program, to guide the committee in determining the needs and interests of students and school staff. The Framework Criteria that is the foundation of the Healthy Schools Program provides best practices guidance on what types of actions and programs can be implemented to make healthy eating and physical activity accessible and enjoyable.

https://www.healthiergeneration.org/_asset/ppvhfi/09-875_SWCToolkit.pdf

- **Where can I find model school wellness policies to utilize in developing a policy?**

USDA's Team Nutrition Program has an extensive website dedicated to the School Wellness policy which has sample policies and resources from a variety of states. The website address is:

www.teamnutrition.usda.gov/

Another good resource is the Indiana State Department of Health:

<https://www.in.gov/isdh/files/2018%20Healthy%20Schools%20Toolkit.pdf>

- Does the wellness policy requirement apply to private schools, including religious private schools, and charter schools?

Yes. Any school that participates in a program authorized under the National School Lunch Act or the Child Nutrition Act must develop a local wellness policy as specified in the Section 204 of the Public Law 108-265, the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004.

- Are small schools and Residential Child Care Institutions (RCCIs) expected to have a wellness policy?

All schools that participate in the school meal programs are expected to have a wellness policy, including small schools and RCCIs. While there are no exclusions in the law based on the size of a school or institution that participates in the meal programs, these institutions are encouraged to develop a wellness policy that meets the unique needs of their population. Because of the responsibility that RCCIs have in providing nutrition and physical activity to children in residence, it is important that RCCIs implement wellness policies that will support the health and development of their residents.

<https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/cn/SP24-2017os.pdf>

- Do private schools develop their own wellness policy or must they follow the local school district's wellness policy?

Private schools may develop their own wellness policy, or as in the case of parochial schools, the governing board could develop one for all their schools. A private school could also adopt the wellness policy of the local educational agency.

https://www.fruitsandveggiesmorematters.org/wp-content/uploads/Tallies/Schools_with_Wellness_Policies_4.pdf

