

# School Wellness Policies 101

## What is a Policy?

Policies are official statements that address the needs of a school system, school or classroom. Values, convictions and beliefs usually form the basis for a policy statement. Policies generally address what should be done, why it should be done and who should do it. Over time, policies can play a major role in culture changes within a school or district.

In 2004, President Bush signed the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act, part of which required all districts that participate in national school meals programs to have a wellness policy in place by July 2006. Policies had to include:

- Nutrition guidelines for all foods available on campus during the day, with the goal of promoting student health and reducing childhood obesity
- Goals for nutrition education, physical activity and other school-based activities designed to promote student wellness
- A plan for measuring implementation, including designation of at least one person in the district responsible for oversight

The law required that wellness policies be developed and implemented by “local parents, teachers, administrators, school food service, school boards and the public.” This provides flexibility for local schools/districts to develop policies that meet their unique circumstances, challenges and opportunities.



In 2010, the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act expanded upon the law passed in 2004. Policies must now include:

- Provisions for reporting to the public about the policy's content and implementation
- Provisions for periodic assessments of the policy
- Inclusion of goals for nutrition promotion

## TAKING ACTION:

### Advancing School Wellness Policies

In addition to district wellness policies, some individual schools have developed their own guidelines around wellness. Parents can get involved at the district level, the individual school level or both:

- 1 **Find and read your district's policy and any guidelines that exist for your individual school.** Look for this information online, in a family or parent handbook or in the school office.
- 2 **Pay attention to the policy language.** Does it “suggest,” “encourage,” “recommend” or say “Schools may...”? Or is it stronger: “Schools will...”, “Schools must...” etc.
- 3 **Ask questions.** Who wrote the policy? When was it developed, and has it ever been evaluated? Who is responsible for its implementation? Are teachers and parents aware of the policy or guidelines? Are the policy goals included in the School Improvement Plan?
- 4 **Use the policy or school guidelines as a platform for the projects you want to implement.** Talk about the wellness policy goals that your project will help to meet when you're looking for support.

- 5 **Promote the policy and your school's wellness practices.** Offer to develop materials to create community awareness and buy-in on the policy itself as well as your school's wellness initiatives. Use signage, brochures, newsletter articles and website promotions.



## Parent-led initiatives can help meet wellness policy goals

Goal Area	Project Ideas
Nutrition Education	Healthy food tastings Health fairs School gardens Educational signage Staff nutrition
Physical Activity	Walking school buses Active recess programs After-school sports or exercise clubs Physical activity breaks in the classroom Schoolyard and playground improvements
Health Promotion	Recess before lunch Family health nights Healthy rewards TV-turnoff week Healthy fundraisers AFHK <i>Get in the Action</i> events
Nutrition Guidelines	Salad bar in the lunchroom More fresh fruits and veggies at lunch Healthy snacks and celebrations guidelines Limits on unhealthy vending options and concessions



## RESOURCES

- 1 USDA information on Local School Wellness Policies:**  
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/healthy/wellnesspolicy.html>
- 2 Wellness Policy Assessment Tool (WellSAT) from the Rudd Center for Food Policy & Obesity:**  
<http://www.wellsat.org/>
- 3 Action for Healthy Kids Wellness Policy Tool:**  
<http://www.actionforhealthykids.org/for-schools/wellness-policy-tool/>
- 4 Action for Healthy Kids best practices for schools:**  
<http://www.ActionforHealthyKids.org/ParentToolkit>

## Strengthening Your District Policy

- Join your district wellness committee or school health advisory council (SHAC).
- Evaluate your policy's strength using the Wellness Policy Assessment Tool (WellSAT) from the Rudd Center for Food Policy & Obesity.
- Use AFHK's Wellness Policy Tool to provide structure and a framework for your wellness policy development efforts.
- Join or start a wellness team at your school and create your own guidelines to improve student health.
- Integrate your wellness policy into your school accountability system and school improvement plan.

## Making a Difference

Led by concerned parents, the wellness team at University Park Elementary in Denver, Colorado, created guidelines around all foods shared at school including snacks, celebrations and rewards. The momentum created by the guidelines inspired many other wellness initiatives at the school where students are now consuming hundreds of pounds of fresh fruits and vegetables every year, and parents report kids are eating better at home. University Park has won various awards for its wellness program, and was referred to as "the healthiest school in Denver" by the *Denver Post*, 2008.

## The Parent Leadership Series

Action for Healthy Kids (AFHK) is the nation's leading nonprofit and largest volunteer network fighting childhood obesity and undernourishment by working with school communities to improve nutrition and increase physical activity. Parents play a crucial role in creating healthy school cultures. The Parent Leadership Series was developed to provide parents and other community members with tools, knowledge and resources to help kids eat right and move more at school.

Learn more at <http://www.actionforhealthykids.org>.

**Note:** The websites listed in this document are provided as a service only to identify potentially useful ideas and resources for creating healthier school cultures. Action for Healthy Kids is not responsible for maintaining these external websites, nor does the listing of these sites constitute or imply endorsement of their content.



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