

## Facts on Local Wellness Policies

### Did You Know?

Childhood obesity is one of our nation's leading health threats. Today, nearly 1 in 3 youth are already obese or overweight. The obesity epidemic is clearly taking its toll, as more and more kids are developing conditions and diseases typically associated with adults. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 1 in 3 individuals born in the year 2000 will develop type 2 diabetes. In vulnerable populations that number increases to 1 in 2 individuals. If we don't reverse this epidemic, the current generation of young people could live sicker and die younger than their parents.

### Why is wellness important?

To reverse the trend of childhood obesity and increased health risks will require preventative measures in schools, communities and at home. Collectively, over 20 percent of the United States population can be found in the school community. Because of the size and accessibility of this population, school health programs are one of the most efficient ways to encourage lifelong healthy eating and physical activity habits.

### Consider the current challenges:

- Unhealthy foods and beverages are available throughout the day in many schools across the country.
- Poor Nutrition: Only 3 out of 10 of high school seniors report eating green vegetables "nearly every day or more." [1]
- Unregulated Nutrition: Foods offered in school vending machines are often of little nutritional value and can be loaded with fats, sugars, salt and calories. [2]
- While children are eating more, they are also exercising less. This can affect not only their weight but their attitude, academic performance and overall well-being.
- Couch Potato Lifestyle: Almost one in four children do not participate in any free-time physical activity. [3]
- Less Physical Education: 92% of elementary schools don't have daily physical education classes year-round. [4] Barely a quarter of high school students take daily physical education classes. [5]
- Disappearing Recess: Nearly one-third of elementary schools do not schedule recess on a regular basis. Some schools lack the space to play while others feel that recess takes away from instructional time. [6]
- Getting to School: 85% of children travel to school by car or bus – only 13% of children walk or bicycle to school. [7]

### What is in a local wellness policy?

On June 30, 2004, the President signed the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004. Section 204 of this law required school districts participating in the national school meals program to establish a local school wellness policy by school year 2006. This was reinforced and expanded in the Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010.

### The local wellness policies are required to include:

- Goals for nutrition education, physical activity and other schools based activities that are designed to promote student wellness.
- Nutrition guidelines for all foods available on each school campus during the school day;
- Guidelines for reimbursable school meals, which are no less restrictive than regulations and guidance issued by the Secretary of Agriculture;

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- A plan for measuring implementation of the local wellness policy, including designation of at least one person charged with ensuring that each school fulfills the district's local wellness policy;
- Community involvement, including parents, students, and representatives of the school food authority, the school board, school administrators, and the public in the development of the school wellness policy.

### What can schools do to implement their wellness policies?

- Convene or maintain an active, broadly representative school wellness council to help develop and monitor implementation of the policy
- Highlight relevant federal and state laws and mandates that support your local wellness policy
- Communicate regularly with staff, students, families and community members about the healthy changes you are making in your school as a result of your wellness policy
- Seek out supportive school board members, parents, staff, students, and community members to assist in locating resources for healthy eating and physical activity opportunities
- Integrate your wellness policy implementation into other school accountability and improvement efforts

### What is the Healthy Schools Program?

- The Healthy Schools Program is an initiative of the Alliance for a Healthier Generation, founded by the American Heart Association and the Clinton Foundation.
- The Healthy Schools Program focuses on helping schools:
  - improve the food and beverages during the regular and extended school day
  - increase physical activity
  - improve the quality of health education and physical education programs
  - establish wellness programs for school employees
- Participation in the Healthy Schools Program is an excellent way to jump start the implementation of the district wellness policy at your school and to be recognized for your efforts. By joining the program, your school will gain access to best practice tools and resources through telephonic and online support. Examples of support include: online trainings with a cadre of experts, implementers' Toolkits on a variety of topics and tangible resources to help with implementation.

The Healthy Schools Program team can help your school every step of the way!

**For more information on School Wellness Councils please contact Dana Roberts at**  
**[Dana.Roberts@HealthierGeneration.org](mailto:Dana.Roberts@HealthierGeneration.org)**

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  4. School Health Policies and Programs Study. Journal of School Health 2001;71 (7)
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