

Parent/Family Tip Sheet: School Wellness Councils

Why get involved?

- Students face many risks to their health which impact their ability to be successful learners in school.
- More than one in six children and adolescents are overweight and 79% of children ages 7-12 have a diet that needs improvement.
- Many experts believe that today's kids may be the first generation in American history to live shorter lives than their parents.
- Schools alone cannot be responsible for the health and well-being of children, but along with families and other partners in the community, they do play an important role.

What is the School Wellness Council?

When the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) reauthorized the Child Nutrition/School Meals Program in 2004, they required all districts to create a school wellness policy. This wellness policy must address:

- Goals for nutrition education, physical activity and wellness activities
- Nutrition guidelines for all foods available on school grounds
- Meeting requirements for reimbursable meals
- Plans for measuring implementation, including naming a person responsible for overseeing the policy
- Parent/student involvement (wellness councils)

The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 expanded on the 2004 bill. The local wellness policy is to include goals for nutrition promotion. Local education agencies (LEAs) or districts are now required to permit teachers of physical education and school health professionals to participate in the implementation and periodic review and update of the district policy. LEAs are required to inform and update the public (including parents, students and others in the community) about the content, implementation and assessment of the local wellness policy. LEAs are required to designate one or more administrators to ensure that each school complies with the wellness policy.

In addition to the USDA requirement, many states also require the formation of local school wellness councils or health advisory councils. These health councils bring school staff, families, students and community members together to address important student health issues. They also may:

- Advise the school board/district on school/community health issues
- Coordinate efforts and programs that exist in the district and the community
- Identify student/staff health needs
- Monitor and evaluate implementation of district and school health policies and programs

What You Can Do:

To find out if your child's school or district has a school wellness council or health council, contact the principal or the district food service director. They should be able to tell you if there is a council, who is in charge and how you can get involved.

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Questions to Ask:

1. What is the district wellness policy? What are the goals and rules around physical education, health education, foods and beverages sold or offered at school, before and afterschool programs and staff wellness?
2. How is this policy being put into effect? How are administrators ensuring that this policy is implemented in all schools?
3. Were parents/families/students involved in the creation of the policy? How are they being involved to make sure it is implemented?

How Parents Have Made A Difference on School Wellness Councils:

- Assisted with family surveys on school nutrition, physical education, health education and physical activity opportunities
- Advocated for recess, intramural sports, breakfast programs and afterschool programs that promote healthy eating and physical activity
- Talked with other parents to hear their concerns
- Linked wellness council issues and activities with parent-teacher organizations
- Found resources or funding for additional physical activity opportunities

Additional Resources on Wellness Policies and Wellness Councils:

For a general guide on school wellness councils and how they function:

Effective School Health Councils: Moving from Policy to Action

www.nchealthyschools.org/docs/school/tools/shacmanual.pdf

For information on the 2004 and 2010 Child Nutrition Bill wellness policy requirements:

Team Nutrition: USDA Food and Nutrition Service

www.fns.usda.gov/tn/Healthy/wellnesspolicy.html
[Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010](http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/Healthy/Hunger-FreeKidsActof2010)

For more information on wellness policies or school wellness councils contact:

Alliance for a Healthier Generation

SchoolPolicy@HealthierGeneration.org
www.HealthierGeneration.org/Policy

Thank you for your interest in wellness policies in your child(ren)'s schools.