



MAKING THE CASE FOR SCHOOL WELLNESS

Becoming an Effective Wellness Advocate

The first step to being an effective wellness advocate is being able to explain why it's important to address health and wellness in schools. The "why" will get families and your school community behind you and will build support for everything that comes next. You must sell the "why" before you can get into the "what" or the "how."

What is School Wellness?

School wellness is the belief that schools can and must promote and reinforce the 10 key school health components highlighted in the Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child (WSCC) Model in order to ensure students are safe, engaged, supported, challenged and healthy. School wellness plays a role in every part of the school environment, from the lunchroom to the classroom to the playground to the front office. Parents/caregivers, school staff and students can all influence school wellness activities, policies and practices.

The [Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child \(WSCC\)](#) model is often recognized as the gold standard for school health as recommended by the CDC. The WSCC model highlights ten key school health components to ensure students are safe, engaged, supported, challenged and healthy.

10 Key School Health Components:

- Health Education
- Nutrition Environment and Services
- Employee Wellness
- Social and Emotional School Climate
- Physical Environment
- Health Services
- Counseling, Psychological, and Social Services
- Community Involvement
- Family Engagement
- Physical Education and Physical Activity

The model represents a collaborative approach to health and learning and emphasizes the role of the schools, families and communities in supporting student success.

Create a Sense of Urgency

Most people know that the U.S. is suffering from a complex child health crisis, spanning physical, social and emotional health, but they don't necessarily know how serious it is or what role they can actively play. As school wellness advocates, it is our job to help others in our communities to see connections between the child health crisis and environments at home and school and inspire them to take action.

Why Schools?

Health should be a part of every school because:

- Schools reach most children and adolescents in a community.
- Schools provide opportunities to practice healthy behaviors — kids spend around 1200 hours per year in school.
- Teachers, administrators, and school staff are key role models and have an opportunity to partner with families and caregivers.
- Schools provide institutional approval for many behaviors related to food choices and physical activity.
- School policies, activities, programs, and practices reinforce the behaviors our children are learning.
- State curriculum standards for health include nutrition and physical education. Shouldn't our practices and climate reflect those standards rather than conflict with them?

Schools show kids what we value and what is important in our community. Healthy habits that are taught and developed at school can carry over into the home and create healthier families and communities.

ACTION FOR HEALTHY KIDS 

Sharing Data and Statistics

- Use local statistics whenever possible — national health statistics are fine, but local statistics from your state or school district may have a greater impact.
- Make the connection to academic achievement — let your audience know that increased physical activity, improved nutrition and opportunities for social-emotional learning have been shown, in study after study, to increase student achievement.
- Share the facts in a compelling yet sensitive way.
- Stick to the most memorable and striking facts.

Make it Personal

- **Make a link to people's personal lives.** Ask questions — or example: “Do you know anybody who has a chronic disease? Or someone who has a hard time finding the resources and support to manage stress or difficult emotions?” Questions like these encourage people to put a face on the information you're providing, which makes it more meaningful. Encourage them to share their stories if you're in an appropriate setting and if they're comfortable doing so.
- **When talking to school staff, put the issues into a school context.** For example: “How many students visit the nurse's office or miss school because they are sick or show signs they're struggling to connect with peers or school staff? How many kids can't run around in physical education or at recess? How many don't eat breakfast before school starts?”
- **Connect your message with daily practices taking place at your school.** Is your school sending conflicting messages about health through common school practices? Point out the contrasts to your audience:
 - Are our students learning to eat when they are not hungry because they are given food as rewards?
 - Are our students given frequent birthday sweets and an excess of holiday treats while being taught about the importance of good nutrition and moderation?
 - Do our fundraisers support sports, the arts, and academics — yet promote choices that lead to unhealthy behaviors?
 - Are our family events centered around unwholesome foods or active, healthy living?
 - Are physical education and recess shrinking while we stress the importance of physical activity to our student body?
 - Does our school take steps to promote social-emotional learning and foster nurturing peer to peer and peer to adult relationships?
 - Are students encouraged to report harassment or bullying, including through anonymous reporting methods?

QUICK FACTS

for you to use while making the case:

- **Physical Activity:** Nearly 3 in 4 children ages 6–17 do not meet the daily recommendation of 60 minutes of physical activity ([National Physical Activity Plan Alliance](#))
- **Food Access:** 6 out of 7 children (85%) that qualify for meals do not participate in summer nutrition programs and thus do not get the meals they need. ([Action for Healthy Kids](#))
- **Social Emotional Learning:** More than six in 100 children between the ages of six and 11 have been diagnosed with anxiety. The frequency almost doubles to nearly 11 in 100 children when looking at youth aged 12 to 17 years. ([Centers for Disease Control](#))
- **Share best practices and success stories.** Let your audience know what's happening with school wellness policies and practices in your own district and share best practices from other districts so that they can place your proposed initiatives and concerns in the proper context. Use success stories to inspire your community — relevant local success stories may have the most impact. If they know that another school has been successful, it will be easier to get them on board.

Foster Family-School Partnerships

When parents/caregivers are engaged in their children's school activities, their children get better grades, choose healthier behaviors, and have better social skills. In addition, school health activities are more successful when parents/caregivers are involved (CDC).

Family-School partnerships bring together district leaders, school staff, and families to identify barriers to family engagement and specific child health needs, then work together to develop, implement, and evaluate effective and equitable solutions. Team up with parents/caregivers to make the case for wellness through discussion of how to create healthy, safe, and supportive learning and living environments for children. Working with parents/caregivers from the beginning will show them that their input and participation is valued, increase buy-in, and help to ensure sustainability of your work over the long-term.

Did you know that...86% of parents/caregivers are interested in providing input on kids' health issues? There is no denying the power of parents/caregivers when it comes to advocating for their children. Once you have parents/caregivers on your side to make the case for school wellness, create an official team that meets monthly to organize school health events to show the power of family-school partnerships and school health initiatives.

Responding to Questions and Concerns

As you take steps to make the case for school wellness, your audience may have questions or concerns. Here are a few common ones along with some suggested responses.

We're too busy.

Time is always a challenge, but it doesn't have to be a barrier. First and foremost, gather your team and identify leadership and supporting roles. Offer suggestions on how staff can be involved if they do have the time or the interest — looking at activities that utilize their skills and experience or aligns with their passion. Divvy up the tasks and create space to transfer responsibilities among the team over time.

Shouldn't we be focusing on academics?

With increasing academic pressures and competing priorities, teachers and administrators may be worried that wellness efforts will take time away from academics. Let them know that there are plenty of ways that physical activity and additional nutrition education can be integrated into classroom lessons (e.g., active learning opportunities, mindful movement, brain breaks, etc.). Gently remind them that study after study has shown that healthy kids focus better and learn better — even when wellness efforts do take away from more traditional academic time.

It's not the school's job to teach healthy habits; isn't that the parents'/caregivers' job?

No one can solve the child health crisis on their own and we know there is strength in numbers. There are many forces at work to help kids be healthy — physicians, parents/caregivers, the community — but schools play a vital role in bringing key players in child health together. It is your school's job to maximize student performance, and studies show that healthy



habits lead to increased academic success. Through strong family-school partnerships, we can make this happen!

We can't afford any new initiatives — how will we pay for wellness activities?

Creating a healthy school culture takes time, patience, creativity and perseverance. For some projects, funding is necessary, but those projects don't have to be done all at once, and much can be done without any funding at all (e.g., healthy celebrations and rewards, health promotion, movement and brain breaks, recess before lunch, etc.). Think outside the box and discover ways to make the most of what you have. Keep any eye out too — there are frequent grant opportunities out there — or find community partners to help out.

Resources

Action for Healthy Kids — [English](#) | [Spanish](#)

Learning Connection (Action for Healthy Kids) [English](#) | [Spanish](#)

Building Family-School Partnerships through Nutrition Education and Promotion (Action for Healthy Kids) [English](#) | [Spanish](#)

Building Family-School Partnerships through Physical Activity and Active Play (Action for Healthy Kids) [English](#) | [Spanish](#)

Building Family-School Partnerships through Social-Emotional Learning (Action for Healthy Kids) [English](#) | [Spanish](#)

Collaborating for Healthy Schools Guide (Action for Healthy Kids) [English](#) | [Spanish](#)

WSCC Model Poster (ASCD) [English](#) | [Spanish](#)

Parents for Healthy Schools (CDC) [English](#) | [Spanish](#)

Healthy Kids. Better World.

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