



SCHOOL WELLNESS POLICY 101

What is a Wellness Policy?

Policies are official statements that address the needs of a school system, school or classroom. Values, convictions, beliefs and best practices 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 local school wellness policy (LSWP) 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 local school wellness policies be developed and implemented by “local parents/caregivers, teachers, administrators, school food service, school boards and the public.” This provides flexibility for schools and 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, and in 2016, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) released updated requirements of school districts and LSWPs, including:

- Review and consider evidence-based strategies to promote student wellness
- Permit all stakeholders to participate in policy development, implementation, review and updates
- Prohibit marketing of all foods and beverages that do not meet Smart Snacks standards
- Report annually to the community about policy content, implementation and updates
- Designate one or more officials as responsible for school-level compliance with the policy



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Taking Action: Advancing School Wellness Policies

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

1 Find and read your district's local school wellness policy and any guidelines that exist for your individual school.

Look for this information online, in a family or parent/caregiver 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? When was it most recently assessed? Who is responsible for its implementation? Are teachers, caregivers and students aware of the policy? How is the policy shared out to community members? Are the policy goals included in the school improvement plan?

4 Use the local school wellness policy 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, social media and website promotions.



Family or Caregiver-Led Initiatives Can Help Meet Wellness Policy Goals

Goal Area	Project Ideas
Nutrition Education	Healthy food tastings
	Health fairs
	School gardens
	Educational signage
	Reading nutrition facts labels
Nutrition Guidelines	Staff nutrition
	Salad bar in the lunchroom
	More fresh fruits and veggies at lunch
	Healthy snacks and celebrations guidelines
	Limits on soda and other caffeinated beverage options
Wellness Promotion	Limits on food-related fundraisers
	Free and accessible water throughout the school day
	Recess before lunch
	Family health nights
	Non-food rewards
Physical Activity	Tv-turnoff week
	Healthy fundraisers
	AFHK Every Kid Healthy Week
	Walking school buses
	Active recess programs
Social-Emotional Health	After-school sports or exercise clubs
	Physical activity breaks in the classroom
	Schoolyard and playground improvements
	Mindfulness breaks
	Bullying prevention guidelines
	Sensory hallways
	Outdoor classrooms
	Restorative practices in the classroom

Strengthening Your Local School Wellness Policy

- Join your district wellness committee or school health advisory council (SHAC).
- Evaluate your policy's strength using the Wellness School Assessment Tool (WellsAT) from the Rudd Center for Food Policy & Obesity.
- Join or start a wellness team at your school and create your own guidelines to improve student health
- Use AFHK's six step framework to a healthier school for a free and simple way to assess strengths and opportunities, implement projects and track your progress.
- Integrate your local school wellness policy into your school accountability system and school improvement plan.
- Consider the whole child. Check out the CDC's Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child (WSCC) model to see how addressing student wellness goes beyond just nutrition and physical activity in order to ensure all kids are healthy in body and in mind.

Making a Difference

If your school hasn't been meeting all of its wellness policy goals, approach school leaders and position your school health team's suggested initiatives as a positive way to start moving the bar in this area. Be empathetic about how many tasks schools have on their plates and offer to help. Don't make it "just another thing" for teachers and administrators to take on. Align your team's plan with top priorities for the district. Help administrators understand that when students are healthy in body and in mind, they thrive.



Resources

[AFHK's 6 Steps to Healthier Schools](#)

[AFHK School Health Index](#) (Action for Healthy Kids)

[CDC Healthy School's Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child Model](#) (CDC)

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

School Wellness Policy 101 (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](#)

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