

LOCAL WELLNESS POLICIES

In recent years, federal legislation put schools in the center of America's battle to combat the childhood overweight and obesity epidemic. The U.S. Child and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004 reinforces what many concerned parents, educators, health professionals and community leaders have been working towards – schools that foster sound nutrition and physical activity. The legislation requires nearly all of the 15,000¹ public school districts to implement a local wellness policy, effective July 2006; each policy must include:

- Goals for nutrition education, physical activity and school-based activities to promote student wellness;
- Nutrition guidelines for all foods available on the school campus and for school meals ;
- A plan for measuring implementation of the policy; and
- Involvement of parents, students, school administrators and members of the school board and the community.

Schools' progress complying with the mandate includes:

- Since 2006, a majority (68%) of local wellness policies meet the minimum federal requirements;
- Nearly one-third of policies were not in compliance with one or more of those requirements²;
- Foods and beverages low in nutritional value and high in calories, fat and sugar continue to be readily available to students during the school day³; and
- Only 4% of elementary, 8% of middle and 2% of high schools provide daily physical education (few more offer physical education three times per week⁴).

Schools have a vested interest in improved wellness practices for students. Research shows that good nutrition and physical activity contribute to improved academic performance, attendance rates, behavior and lifelong health and well-being. The challenge is that schools have full agendas, competing priorities and budget constraints. Schools cannot solve the childhood obesity epidemic alone yet the federal mandate does not provide funding to assist school districts with development, implementation or monitoring of wellness policies.

While progress is being made in advancing wellness practices, schools need resources to implement sustainable practices, achieve realistic benchmarks and accomplish meaningful change. Action for Healthy Kids, a trusted, recognized authority on school-based efforts to combat childhood overweight and obesity, has stepped in to provide support. Through Action for Healthy Teams in each state and the District of Columbia, our volunteers work collaboratively with schools to help improve nutrition and physical activity policies and practices. Specifically, Action for Healthy Kids developed a wellness policy tool to help schools – and our Teams working directly with schools – to create a local wellness policy that meets school districts' unique goals for nutrition and physical activity *and* take steps to put the policy into action to positively impact students' health and lifelong choices.

For information about Action for Healthy Kids' wellness policy tool, visit www.ActionForHealthyKids.org

¹ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. Overview of Public Elementary and Secondary Schools and Districts: School Year 2001-02, NCES 2003-411, by Lee McGraw Hoffman, Washington, DC: 2003.

² Moag-Stahlberg A, Howley N, Luscri L. A National Snapshot of Local School Wellness Policies.

³ Centers for Disease Control. School Health Policies and Programs Study 2006.

⁴ Centers for Disease Control. School Health Policies and Programs Study 2006.