

School Wellness Council Fact Sheet

Did You Know?

- Students who get physical activity and eat healthier are more likely to have higher grades.¹
- One in every three children (31.7%) ages 2-19 is overweight or obese.²
- One third of all children born in the year 2000 are expected to develop diabetes during their lifetime.³
- 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 other families and partners in the community, they do play an important role.

Why School Wellness Councils?

- Wellness councils utilize a comprehensive, systems approach to school health in areas such as: access to healthier foods, opportunities for physical activity and staff wellness programs.
- Many states require the formation of local wellness councils or health advisory councils.
- School wellness councils bring school staff, families, students and community members together to address pressing 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 health and wellness policies and programs

What Schools Can Do

Many schools already have functioning advisory councils or committees that focus on one or more aspects of a healthy school environment. These may include health education curriculum, safety, student support and others.

Convening a Wellness Council to address nutrition and physical activity in your school or district may be as simple as expanding the mission of a current group. Schools will find it helpful to implement councils at both the district and school building levels.

- **District Level Wellness Council:** Focus on policy and the common mission of district health and wellness programs. Identifies gaps and locates district and community resources to address them. For example, a district level council may evaluate the implementation of district nutrition policies.
- **School Level Wellness Council:** Focus on the nutrition and physical activity needs of students and staff in a specific building and implements programs and activities to meet these needs. For example, a school wellness council might begin a walking program for students and staff to engage in regular physical activity.

¹ CDC. Physical Inactivity and Unhealthy Dietary Behaviors and Academic Achievement.
http://www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/health_and_academics/pdf/physical_inactivity_unhealthy_weight.pdf

² Ogden, C.L., Carroll, M., Curtin, L., Lamb, M., Flegal, K.(2010).Prevalence of High Body Mass Index in US Children and Adolescents 2007-2008.*Journal of American Medical Association, 303*(3), 242-249.

³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics.(2007).National Diabetes Surveillance System.Incidence of Diabetes: Crude and Age-Adjusted Incidence of Diagnosed Diabetes per 1000 Population Aged 18-79 Years, United States, 1997-2004.Retrieved April 17, 2007 from: <http://www.cdc.gov/diabetes/statistics/incidence/fig2.htm>.

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Starting and Maintaining a Wellness Council

As you get ready to convene a wellness council or add to the mission of a current group, think about the following membership criteria:

- Demonstrated interest in healthy youth
- Parent or students
- Knowledge, skills, resources (organization or individual)
- Willingness to devote time to regular meetings
- Representative of the student population
- Credibility/leadership within the school/community
- Authority to make decisions or commit resources to address food offerings, physical education, access to physical activity, health education and staff wellness.

How Can the Alliance for a Healthier Generation Help?

The Healthy Schools Program Framework provides criteria for developing a healthier school environment.

Online tools, resources and a national recognition program give schools what they need to successfully convene wellness councils and maintain interest, energy and achieve successes in:

- Improving the nutrition of food and beverages served in school vending machines, student stores and cafeterias
- Increasing opportunities for students to exercise and play
- Providing resources for teachers and staff to become healthy role models

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