



School Wellness Policies

Background

The Child Reauthorization Act of 2004 requires that **every** U.S. school district participating in the National School Lunch and/or Breakfast Program develop and implement a local “wellness policy” by the beginning of school year 2006-2007. The intent of this mandate is to help protect and improve child health through adequate levels of physical activity and good nutrition during the school day. Congress recognized that each community is unique and has different needs, and so required that the policies be developed on a district-by-district basis. In addition, the law requires parents, students, and representatives of the school food authority, the school’s Board of Education, school administrators, and the public to be involved in the policy development process. This process is intended to help ensure that school policies will be realistic, practical, and representative of each district’s needs and values.

Unfortunately, no direct federal funding is available for policy implementation. Nevertheless, outside sources such as health insurance providers, private foundations, community organizations and government agencies may offer possible means of support if needed.

Requirements of the Local Wellness Policy

As outlined in the Act, wellness policies must address specific school-based nutrition and physical activity areas, as well as tie back to Federal and State school meal regulations. Specifically, the local wellness policy must:

- Include goals for nutrition education, physical activity, and other school-based activities designed to promote student wellness;
- Provide nutrition guidelines for all foods and beverages available on school campuses during the school day;
- Ensure that local guidelines for reimbursable school meals meet federal requirements and nutrition standards;
- Involve a broad group of members of the community;
- Include a plan for measuring implementation of the wellness plan; and,
- Designate a person(s) to insure fulfillment of the local wellness policy.

How does the local wellness policy differ from other state and federal regulations?

Federal regulations dictate various aspects of school policy (e.g. federally funded school meals must meet certain nutritional standards). As noted above, federal law now also identifies specific features to be required in local wellness policies as of mid-2006. In some states, additional laws, regulations or guidelines may provide varying degrees of specificity regarding nutrition and physical activity standards within that state. Regardless of other state and federal guidelines and/or regulation, however, each school district still must establish a wellness policy of its own that reflects the unique needs of that district.

What are the implications for a local school district?

Districts already should be in the process of designing a method of developing a local wellness policy that will enable the district to be in compliance with this Federal legislation. By developing and implementing a wellness policy, school districts are reinforcing healthy behavior, supporting academic achievement, and building a foundation for the lifelong well being of students. A wellness policy defines what needs to be done, why it should be done and who should do it. Areas of evaluation and consideration include:

- Nutrition education curricula;
- Nutrition education that occurs outside the classroom or that links classroom nutrition education to the school community and dining room;
- Wellness training and activities for teachers and staff;
- Physical education requirements for graduation;
- Physical education programs (time, frequency, intensity, teacher-to-student ratio);
- Physical activity outside of physical education (recess, before and after school);
- Mealtimes environments (time and scheduling of meals, surroundings for eating, and access to school nutrition programs);
- Foods and beverages sold in competition to the school lunch program, for example, a la carte, in vending machines, snack bars, school stores, concessions, parties, etc.;
- Coordinated school health approaches; and,
- Community and family involvement.

How can district representatives or the school community obtain more information about the local wellness policy mandate?

Numerous organizations have developed information about the new regulation and local wellness policies. For example, Action For Healthy Kids (a nonprofit organization that works to improve nutrition and physical activity in schools) has developed a Wellness Policy Tool that includes a state policy database. The Wellness Policy Tool can be found at www.actionforhealthykids.org. In addition, many states have developed model wellness policies that can be used as a template for a district policy.

The Numbers

20 Minutes—*75% of children get less than 20 minutes of vigorous activity every day.*

9 Million—*More than 9 million children between the ages of 6 and 19 are considered overweight.*

Tripled—*In the past 20 years the incidence of overweight has doubled among children and tripled among adolescents.*

The Consequences

Isolation—*Overweight children are prone to depression and isolation from their peers.*

Complications—*Overweight children tend to have at least one medical complication like asthma or elevated blood pressure.*

Obese Adults--*Nearly 80% of children who are overweight will become obese adults.*

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