

The Local Process: How to Create and Implement a Local Wellness Policy

(Adapted from *Fit, Healthy, and Ready to Learn*)

Step 1 – Initial Homework

Before you start to develop your school wellness policy, identify and review existing State laws and guidelines about education, health, and/or agriculture; other school districts' policies; and your own local district policies that address wellness topics. For samples, see [Examples: Local Wellness Policies](#). Compare them to the requirements of [Section 204 of the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004](#); in many cases, state laws and state or local policies are more stringent than the Federal law. At a minimum, your school district's new wellness policies must be in compliance with the Federal statute requirements, plus all relevant state and district requirements.

There are no standard procedures for developing a school wellness policy; the process will vary from one district to another. Find out who needs to be involved or kept informed in your district, who needs to review and approve drafts, and what a typical timeline for review and approval might be. If you are not familiar with your district's procedures, find out from the school district superintendent's office. The process by which you develop your district's policy can have a significant impact on your school, community and the effectiveness of implementation. So, take your time and plan carefully.

Step 2 – Identify a Policy Development Team

Anyone can initiate a process to create a new policy or adopt an existing policy. The law requires (1) parents, (2) students, (3) representatives of the school food authority, (4) the school board, (5) school administrators, and (6) the public to be involved in the process. Make sure you involve everyone that will be affected by the policy.

Frequently, members of *effective* policy teams offer a combination of qualities. Often they:

- Demonstrate interest in improving school nutrition and physical activity in schools;
- Are effective communicators and team players;
- Possess some understanding of the district's procedural requirements for policy, and
- Have policy-related experience in the district.

It is important to collaborate with any existing efforts underway in the school or community. If your school district is already working on student wellness issues and has an existing infrastructure, such as a school health council, a coordinated school health program, a local Team Nutrition team, or staff involved in the Carol M White Physical Education Program (PEP), these people are well-positioned to assist in the development of the policy.

The following are some resources to assist schools and school districts in establishing a new team, if needed, or in building on existing teams and partnerships.

- North Carolina's [**Effective School Health Advisory Councils – Moving from Policy to Action**](#) [PDF]
- [**Promoting Healthy Youth, Schools, and Communities: A Guide to Community-School Health Councils**](#) from the American School Health Association (at cost).
- [**Improving School Health: A Guide to School Health Councils**](#) [PDF] from the American Cancer Society.
- [**How You Can Take Action**](#) from Action for Healthy Kids
- [**Team Nutrition Resources**](#) from USDA

Step 3 – Assess the District's Needs

Before making plans to develop policies, you should assess the current situation and the nutrition and physical activity needs of your students. Look for data on the education and health status of young people in your state. Web resources include:

- The CDC's data on [**Obesity Trends**](#)
- The CDC's [**Youth Risk Surveillance System**](#)
- Action for Healthy Kids' [**State Profiles for Action**](#)

The following tools may help you assess your schools' existing policies, programs, and areas that need improvement:

- [**Changing the Scene Improvement Checklist**](#) [PDF] is a simple checklist to help you assess where things stand in your school and to help you focus on exactly what needs to be done. The [**State of Michigan modified**](#) [PDF] this improvement checklist to help you measure progress as you take action.
- [**School Health Index: a Self-assessment and Planning Guide**](#) is CDC's self-assessment and planning guide that includes physical activity and healthy eating. This tool enables schools to identify the strengths and weaknesses of nutrition and physical activity policies and programs and develop an action plan for improvement.
- [**Keys to Excellence: Standard of Practice for Nutrition Integrity**](#) is a guide, published by the School Nutrition Association (SNA), that identifies the elements of a quality school nutrition program. This publication provides an easy-to-use evaluation form for assessing school meal programs quality and tracking progress.
- [**It's Time for Your School's Physical Education Check-Up**](#) [PDF] is a check list of physical activity measurements, created by the National Association for Sport and Physical Education.

Step 4 – Draft a Policy

Based on your needs assessment, draft your initial policy statements. They must address nutrition education, physical activity, other school-based activities that promote student wellness, nutrition guidelines for all foods available on each campus, and a plan for measuring implementation, as required by Public Law 108-265, Section 204. For more information about the components that must appear in your wellness policy, see [**Policy Requirements**](#).

Writing a policy is not easy, but help is available. To save time, you may consider adapting or adopting another district's or organization's existing policy to meet the needs of your school district. Check out [**Examples: Local Wellness Policies**](#) for some ideas. Additionally, some State agencies that administer the school meal programs offer guidance to assist local districts to create and implement local wellness policies. You may also check with professional associations and organizations that you are familiar with for model school wellness policies and useful resources. The non-governmental organizations that are acting as [**Collaborators on the Local Wellness Policy**](#) are a great place to start.

The goals you set for nutrition education and physical activity, the nutrition guidelines, and other school-based activities must be developed in recognition of both where you would like your school district to be, and where it is now; they should be realistic and attainable. It is often a good idea to propose several policy options from which decision makers can choose. The local school board or superintendent will probably want to know the financial implications of each policy option, particularly in regards to nutrition guidelines for foods sold in vending machines or school stores. For examples of success stories where schools improved the nutritional quality of foods offered and maintained revenue see USDA and CDC's joint publication [**Making it Happen**](#).

Your team will also find it helpful to draft a plan for implementing and measuring the new policy while you're drafting the policy itself. For example, you may consider:

- What indicators will be used to evaluate the progress of implementation?
- Who will be responsible for monitoring the implementation of the policy?
- How often will the implementation be evaluated?

Answering these questions while you draft the initial policy will help your team anticipate challenges and prepare to meet them.

Decision makers do not like surprises. You need to keep your school district's decision makers informed about the proposed wellness policy and obtain their support throughout the development process.

If you need further information on the policy development process, the following resources are available to assist you:

- The topic specific sections of the USDA's Local Wellness Policy web pages can help you draft policies specifically targeting [nutrition education](#), [physical activity](#), [nutrition guidelines](#) for all foods available on school campuses during the school day, and other [school-based activities](#) designed to promote student wellness.
- [Fit, Healthy, and Ready to Learn](#) is a school health policy guide developed by the National Association of State Boards of Education that provides sample policies on healthy eating, physical activity, and other topics.
- [Changing the Scene: Improving the School Nutrition Environment—a guide to local action](#) was developed by USDA's Team Nutrition in collaboration with 16 education, health and nutrition organizations to help schools take action in improving their nutrition environment.
- [CDC Guidelines for School Health Programs to Promote Lifelong Healthy Eating](#) these guidelines identify the school-based strategies most likely to be effective in promoting lifelong healthy eating among young people.
- [CDC Guidelines for School and Community Programs to Promote Lifelong Physical Activity among Young People](#) these guidelines identify the strategies most likely to be effective in helping young people adopt and maintain a physically active lifestyle.

Step 5 – Build Awareness and Support

It is important to obtain support from schools and your community in order for the policy to be smoothly adopted and widely implemented. Student involvement is also an important component of building awareness and support. Use the resources in [Changing the Scene](#) to help educate various audiences about your policy initiative. Enlist local media to spread awareness of the district's needs and community leaders to speak out in favor of the proposed solutions. Be prepared for challenges that may arise and ensure all spokespeople for the policy are providing a consistent message. When dealing with the education community, it is helpful to identify the potential benefits the policy can have on student learning and academic achievement.

[Making it Happen](#) contains numerous success stories of districts that built broad local support for school health policy goals.

Step 6 – Adopt the Policy

In most, if not all school districts, the district Board of Education (the 'school board' or 'school committee') must approve the wellness policy before it can be implemented. A public hearing or presentation might be necessary. The district superintendent's office can describe the usual process and advise you on how matters are brought before the board. Team members will have a better understanding of board procedures if they have attended board meetings prior to presenting the policy proposal.

Prepare a persuasive and concise case in support of the policy and provide supportive background information. It is wise to invite and involve policy supporters (such as

parents, school nurses, and other community members) to attend the board meeting to voice their support and/or make a presentation on behalf of the proposed policy. For help with this process, see USDA's PowerPoint [**Welcome to Wellness: Putting School Nutrition Legislation Into Practice**](#). Also, check out the School Nutrition Association's PowerPoint [**Talking to Your School Administrators: An Overview of the Local Wellness Policy**](#).

Step 7 – Implement the Policy

Developing and adopting a sound policy is only the beginning. The adoption of a policy does not automatically mean that it will be implemented. Implementation requires good planning and management skills, the necessary resources, consistent oversight, and widespread buy-in by school staff and the local community. Leadership, commitment, communication and support are the keys to your success.

Implementation can occur all at once or may be phased-in over time. Your team is in the best position to determine which approach is likely to be most effective in your district.

The attitude of all school personnel, from individuals serving the food, to the personnel who stock vending machines, students, coaches, teachers and administrators, can have a significant effect on the response to the policy. A positive attitude toward new foods, new physical activity options, or other changes, from everyone in the school community can make a huge difference.

Marketing can be an important tool for policy implementation. Consider how marketing principles of product, price, placement, and promotion can work to help with policy implementation.

[**Implementation Tools and Resources**](#) provides links to specific examples of programs and activities that are helping schools fulfill their wellness policy goals. These links can help you start thinking about creative ways to implement your own policies and provide resources to ease the burden of creating new curricula and learning devices.

Step 8 – Maintain, Measure and Evaluate the Effort

As required by law, each school district must establish a plan for measuring implementation of the local wellness policy, including designation of one or more persons with operational responsibility for ensuring that the school is meeting the policy.

A sustained effort by each district is necessary to assure that new policies are faithfully implemented. Periodically assess how well the policy is being managed and enforced. Reinforce the policy goals with school staff if necessary. Be prepared to update or amend the policy as the process moves on. The school district or individual schools should celebrate policy success milestones (and the district team can do the same!).

Evaluation and feedback are very important in maintaining a local wellness policy. You need to document any financial impact to the school foodservice program, school stores, or vending machine revenues.

It is also important to assess student, parent, teacher, and administration satisfaction with the new policies. A good evaluation plan does not need to be extensive, formal or put additional undue burdens on staff that is involved in the process. Through the evaluation process, you will be able to answer some basic questions that are very important to policymakers, students, school staff, parents, and the general public:

- What changes to nutrition education, physical activity, the nutritional quality of foods available to students, and other aspects covered by the policy occurred in each school as a result of the district wellness policy?
 - For example:
 - Did the number of students participating in nutrition education change?
 - Did the students have a different number of minutes of physical activity?
 - Did any of the campuses change available food options?
 - Did participation in the National School Breakfast or Lunch Program change?
- Did the policy and implementation address the issues identified in the needs assessment?
 - For example:
 - Is it making a difference?
 - What's working?
 - What's not working?
- How can the impact of the policy be increased to enhance its effect on student health and academic learning?

If you need further information on the evaluation process, the following resources are among those available to assist you:

[Evaluation Primer: An overview of education evaluation](#). This material is excerpted from **[Understanding Evaluation: The Way to Better Prevention Programs](#)** [PDF].

Evaluating Community Programs and Initiatives (chapter 36-39 of the Community Toolbox) developed by the University of Kansas Work Group on Health Promotion and Community Development. This document contains information on developing a plan for evaluation, methods for evaluation and using evaluation to understand and improve the initiative.

- **[Chapter 36. Introduction to Evaluation](#)**
- **[Chapter 37. Some Operations in Evaluating Community Intervention](#)**
- **[Chapter 38. Some Methods for Evaluating Comprehensive Community Initiatives](#)**
- **[Chapter 39. Using Evaluation to Understand and Improve the Initiative](#)**

Framework for Program Evaluation is a CDC publication, MMWR 1999;48(No. RR-11), that outlines steps and standards for effective program evaluation.

Criteria for Evaluating School-Based Approaches to Increasing Good Nutrition and Physical Activity [PDF], by Action For Healthy Kids, outlines an array of issues to consider when evaluating school-based programs.

Stay in Touch!

If you have questions, concerns, or success stories about the Wellness Policy—including stories about forming coalitions, drafting policies, implementing policies, or evaluating your efforts— email us at [**teamnutrition@fns.usda.gov**](mailto:teamnutrition@fns.usda.gov).