
School Wellness Council Toolkit

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School Wellness Council Toolkit

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How to Use this Toolkit?

This guide was created as a resource for school wellness councils to convene, plan and implement their action plans. The tools and other tips contained in this Toolkit are meant to coordinate with other Healthy Schools Program resources and the technical assistance provided by the Alliance for a Healthier Generation.

As always, if you have questions about forming your school wellness council or specific aspects of the Healthy Schools Program Criteria Framework related to wellness councils or policy and systems, contact your relationship manager or Kathy.Wilbur@HealthierGeneration.org.

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What is a School Wellness Council?

A school wellness council is essentially an advisory group concerned with the health and wellbeing of staff and students. These councils can be formed at the district or school building level. These groups typically have 10-20 members and include school staff, community members, family members and students.

District versus Building Level Councils

- District Level Wellness Council: Focus is on policy and the common mission of several district programs. Able to identify gaps and locate the district and community resources to address them.
- School Level Wellness Council: Focus is on the needs of students, families and staff in a specific building. Able to implement programs and activities to meet these needs.

The school wellness council (SWC) acts collectively to lead and implement all aspects of the Healthy Schools Program.

Frequently Asked Questions

Why do we need a school wellness council?

The school wellness council provides a way to inform families, teachers, staff and students about the work the school is doing to improve the health and academic success of its students. The wellness council is also a way to ensure that district level health policies are implemented. In addition, these councils represent the unique perspective of the community in a school building. This enables the health priorities and activities put in place to truly reflect the needs and interests of that school.

What do school wellness councils do?

School wellness councils typically assess the school health environment, programs and policies in place and identify ways to strengthen these to improve the health of students and staff. Usually councils will develop and implement an action plan based on what they learn about the school. Some wellness councils also provide advice and expertise to administrators in the building and provide feedback to the district regarding implementation of health related policies and programs.

Can we use our district level health council instead?

The district level council is key to many of the health policies and standards that the district develops and implements. School level wellness councils are more focused on implementation of district policies and translating policy into practice that is relevant to students, families and staff in the school building.

Utilizing a structure that includes school wellness council members to serve as liaisons to the district level health council will provide information and feedback on how or if policies are being implemented in all of the schools.

What if we already have a school level group that meets to address student health?

The Healthy Schools Program has been designed to reduce duplication of effort and assist with coordination where possible. If you already have a group that meets to address student and staff health including nutrition and physical activity, this group can be used to meet the school wellness council criterion in the Healthy Schools Program.

Who has to be on the school wellness council?

The council should include a building level administrator and potentially another staff member willing to take on the leadership of the group. In addition, the council should include a parent or family member, students, and other school staff or community members with expertise in healthy eating and physical activity. Most schools choose to include a child nutrition/food service staff person, a physical education teacher, a health education and/or classroom teacher, a community parks and recreation representative, and any others who are committed and interested in making the school healthier for students and staff.

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Who decides what the school wellness council will work on?

Through the six step process included in the Healthy Schools Program, the council will determine needs and interests of the school, students and staff. The Framework Criteria that is the foundation of the Healthy Schools Program provides best practice guidance on what types of actions and programs can be implemented to make healthy eating and physical activity accessible and enjoyable.

What are the Roles and Responsibilities of a School Wellness Council?

The school wellness council is an action-oriented group that makes the implementation of the district wellness policy and other health related priorities possible.

The SWC will:

- Support the school in developing a healthier school environment
- Create the vision and goals for the local Healthy Schools Program
- Assist with policy development to support a healthy school environment
- Promote parent, community and professional involvement in developing a healthier school environment
- Advocate for school health programs and policies within the broader school community
- Tap into funding and leverage resources for student and staff wellness
- Plan and implement programs for students and staff
- Evaluate program and policy efforts

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Talking Points for Schools

Why Focus on Health?

Did you know...?

- More than 1 in 3 youth are obese or overweight
- 17 percent (12.5 million) of the nation's children and adolescents are obese, according to the most recent data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Since 1980, obesity prevalence among this age group has almost tripled
- 79 percent of children ages 7 to 12 have a diet that needs improvement
- If trends continue, many experts believe that today's kids may be the first generation in American history to live shorter lives than their parents
- Collectively, over 20 percent of the United States population can be found in the school community
- Because of the size and accessibility of the school community, school health programs are one of the most efficient ways to encourage healthy habits

Benefits of a Healthier School:

- Studies show that students with better nutrition have better attention spans, better class participation and higher test scores
- In some cases, improved nutrition seems to reduce behavioral problems
- Higher levels of physical activity seem to be related to higher self-esteem and lower levels of anxiety and stress—all of which are associated with better academic performance
- Poor nutrition and lack of physical activity are linked with health problems and increased school absences

Challenges to a Healthier School:

Unhealthy foods and beverages are available throughout the day in many schools across the country.

- **Poor Nutrition:** Only 3 out of 10 high school seniors report eating green vegetables “nearly every day or more.”
- **Marketing to Kids:** Food and beverage marketing can enter schools via fast food retailers on campus, televisions in classrooms and advertising in vending machines.
- **Vending Machines:** Foods offered in school vending machines are often of little nutritional value and can be loaded with fats, sugars, salt and calories.

While children are eating more, they are also exercising less. This can affect not only their weight but their attitude, academic performance and overall well-being.

- **Couch Potato Lifestyle:** Almost one in four children do not participate in any free time physical activity.
- **Less Physical Education:** 92 percent of elementary schools do not have daily physical education classes year-round. Barely a quarter of high school students take daily physical education classes.
- **Disappearing Recess:** Nearly one-third of elementary schools do not schedule recess on a regular basis. Some schools lack the space to play while others feel that it takes away from academic time.
- **Getting to School:** 85 percent of children travel to school by car or bus – only 13 percent of children walk or bike to school.
- **Lack of Playgrounds:** In more and more schools, playgrounds and physical education classes are becoming a luxury rather than a standard.

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Framework Criteria

The role of the school wellness council is key to the success of the Healthy Schools Program. The responsibility for assessing the programs and policies impacting nutrition and physical activity in your school, and then developing and implementing an action plan based on this assessment rests with the school wellness council.

To support this important role, several of the criteria in the Healthy Schools Program Framework address school wellness councils. They are as follows:

- School has convened an active wellness council/committee that meets at least every other month
- Family members and guardians have the opportunity to provide input to the implementation of wellness policy activities
- Students have the opportunity to provide input to the implementation of wellness policy activities
- The status of wellness policy implementation at the school level is communicated annually to school staff, students and families
- School wellness council/committee recommends new or revised health or wellness policies and activities to the district

The Healthy Schools Program has developed and compiled resources in addition to this Toolkit to assist you in meeting each of the above criteria. Be sure to check out what is available at www.healthiergeneration.org/schools.

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Who Should Join Your SWC?

Who Should We Invite to Participate on Our School Wellness Council?

Groups with 6-12 active members are often the most effective. As you consider the following members, determine what size council you will need to be effective. If you have a large group of people who want to work on nutrition and physical activity issues, think about a steering committee structure that includes subcommittees. You may also prioritize membership based on those areas where you know you will be working (i.e. creating a physical education curriculum would require including the physical education teacher).

Administrators	Administrative support will be instrumental to your ongoing efforts with the Healthy Schools Program and school health. Your school principal or other building administrator should be included in and informed of your planning activities.
Teachers	All teachers at your school have a stake in healthy students and staff. Think about teachers in addition to health education and physical education who have shown a great commitment to health.
School Nurses	The school nurse is a natural coordinator and expert on school health issues.
Food Service Directors/Staff	If you will be trying to impact the nutrition environment in your school, the food service/child nutrition manager will be key in helping you understand federal requirements and making important changes to the food offerings in your school.
Parents/Family Members	Involvement of family members ensures that your efforts will reach beyond the school. In addition, parents can spread the word to other parents and help gain support for your efforts.
Students	Many of the changes you will implement through the Healthy Schools Program impact students directly. Involving them in decisions will limit resistance and can make your programs more successful.
Local Health Departments	Public health is committed to addressing childhood obesity and understands the role of changing environments to make “healthy choices, easy choices.” Local health departments often have access to community resources and other organizations as well. Most public health departments have data on student health behaviors that can help you make a case for health programs and policy changes in regards to healthy eating and physical activity.
Business Community	The business community has a stake in helping young people be healthy and successful in school. In addition, they may have concerns that the council may not have considered and resources that can be levered to support wellness priorities for students and staff.
Local Coalitions	Many communities have groups that have formed to address youth issues or childhood obesity specifically. Think about including members from these groups as they are often eager to work with schools.
School Board Members	Some of the changes included in the Healthy Schools Program will require district level policy support. School board member involvement in school wellness councils creates expertise on your school board related to student health issues. School board members are often engaged with the district and schools longer than many administrators, so their involvement also may increase the sustainability of your efforts.
School Custodians	Your school custodian often has insights and observations that will be valuable to your efforts. Custodians are aware of environmental issues, amount of food waste and also may have observed issues with students because of their time in the hallways and grounds.

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Healthcare Professionals	A doctor or nurse from the community is often a respected and heeded professional. As a school wellness council member, they may be able to make requests or deliver key messages on behalf of your efforts.
Physical Education and Health Education Teachers/Classroom Teachers	Typically health education and physical education teachers are considered the champions in schools for student health issues. They can provide curricular support for your efforts as well as engage staff in wellness activities. In many elementary schools, health education is taught by classroom teachers and their input is valuable when determining health education instructional time and class content.
Parks and Recreation Department	In addition to physical education and activity during school hours, physical activity opportunities before and after school are also important. Parks and Recreation Departments often run sports and recreation programs that your students and staff can access.
Youth Serving Organizations	Similar to Parks and Recreation, youth serving organizations often have afterschool or community programs that might be made available to your students. They are also generally aware of other community programs and services for kids.

Considerations for SWC Members

Represent the diversity of your community

It is important to include the whole school community in your efforts to improve healthy eating and physical activity. As you invite members to your school wellness council, consider the diversity of your student population.

Involve people with a deep understanding of the culture, norms and dynamics of your community

As you reach out into your community to invite business leaders, youth serving organizations and others, be sure to extend invitations to those that seem to truly understand the community surrounding your school. Also consider those who have extensive networks and connections in the community.

Involve people with a passion for kids and health

At some point in your planning and implementation, you will need council members who can be strong advocates for the changes you are making in your school. This work is sometimes met with resistance and barriers. Council members with a commitment to nutrition and physical activity will overcome these challenges as they come.

Include people who can commit the time

Many school staff members and community members are asked to sit on multiple committees. Be clear about how much time the wellness council meetings and activities will take. Time is often seen as the biggest barrier to getting things accomplished. Think about reaching out to those that other committees may not have thought to include.

Include key players/influencers in the school and community

Reach out to those in your school community that have the greatest ability to network and persuade others. Parents, staff members and community members all have people whose opinions and actions they trust. This role will be essential as you begin to implement your action plan.

Involve the least powerful as well as the most powerful

Your wellness council should be truly representative of your school community in all aspects. Think about those whose voices are not usually heard and include them. Be sure to use facilitation techniques that will allow the least powerful to feel they have power and influence within your council.

Ask people you do not know well

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It is often easy to turn to friends when embarking on a project that will likely be challenging and time-consuming. As you think about your council membership, consider school staff and community members you do not usually have contact with. This will expand your reach and access to resources. You may also make some new friends.

Involve skeptics as well as believers

There is a saying that advises, “Keep your friends close and your enemies closer.” In some cases this can apply to wellness council membership. If you know that you want to make changes in competitive foods/vending options, it can be extremely helpful to have the marketing teacher or student body leader on your wellness council. However, use this technique sparingly as too many naysayers can slow your council down and result in those who are supportive to stop attending.

Involving Students

Students are often interested in making their schools and communities healthier. Because many of the changes you are implementing through your wellness policy directly impact students, gaining their input and support ultimately will enable change to happen more quickly. Students are often the best advocates for healthy schools and are able and articulate spokespeople with school decision makers and community members.

Students can be members of your wellness council or they can create a council of their own with one or more liaisons that attend wellness council meetings. There are several ways to invite student input as decisions are made from taste tests and selecting options for vending machines to designing marketing campaigns for healthy food options.

If you decide to invite students to participate on your wellness council, here are some helpful tips to ensure that student participation is productive and successful.

Be clear about roles and expectations: Do you want the student member to initiate nutrition and physical activity projects with their peers? Do you want them to become more knowledgeable on these issues and advocate with school decision makers? Share your expectations and hopes for student representation with the student(s) you invite.

Create more than one student position: It may be easier to have consistent student representation with more than one student position on your council. In addition, it may help the students to not be the only youth member in the room, expected to represent all of their peers. With more than one position, you may also want to invite other student governance bodies to send a student representative to your wellness council.

Provide skill building opportunities with youth council members beyond the school wellness council meetings: To ensure a successful school wellness council with student members, students should be given some information on meeting processes, norms and expectations. Increasing the meeting skills of student members on your council will lead to more successful participation.

Prioritize students in your action plan: It will help students continue to see their role in creating a healthier school environment if they see how they fit in the action plan and other activities your wellness council undertakes. Make some of these action items short term and celebrate when you achieve them. This will keep students and all wellness council members engaged.

Invite your student member to cultivate leadership in their peers: Because students move through the school, planning for replacing student members is an ongoing process. Ask student members to think about who would be good replacements and ask for their assistance in orienting the new student members.

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Beyond wellness council membership, there are many ways to engage students in creating a healthier school. Having students active in decision making through your wellness council is an excellent step, however, be sure to build in other opportunities for student input and participation. Communicate the status of wellness policy implementation annually through school newsletters, school website, etc. and invite student input on wellness activities throughout the year in a variety of ways. Because it is students who these changes most affect, schools that report the most success in making changes to their food and beverage offerings identify student engagement as critical. Thus, the Alliance developed empowerME@school to give students the tools to lead these changes.

Involving Families

The school wellness council and the priorities its members set should represent the interests and needs of the entire school as well as the communities that the school encompasses. The Healthy Schools Program recognizes the importance of representation of family members on your wellness council.

In addition to having valuable insights and perceptions of the school within its community, family members reflect the diversity of your community in a number of ways. However, it can be a challenge to reach out to families and keep them coming to your meetings.

Here are some of the common challenges schools face in involving parents and families along with some ways to address them.

We always get the same few parents willing to be on a committee.

Every school has parent leaders that seem to volunteer for everything. This poses challenges for both the school and other parents. One of the reasons you ask families to participate is to hear from a broader representation of your community. If the same parents always volunteer, you do not get the benefit of diverse opinions and views. Allowing the same parents to represent all student families can also lead to other parents feeling as though they do not have a role or place to volunteer.

Be mindful of the various communities and interests within your school. Are there places where families are involved but not necessarily in committee work or decision making? These family members may be ready to step into the school wellness council based on the fact they have become involved in other school efforts.

Families are too busy to be on our school wellness council.

Whether we work at school or work elsewhere, there never seems to be enough time for our many responsibilities and interests. When possible, host your school wellness council meetings at a time that would be more convenient for working families. In addition, if you can schedule your wellness council meetings with other school events or meetings, it may limit the number of nights family members are away from home, making them more receptive to attending.

We invite families to many things at the school and they don't come.

There is an art to extending an invitation to family members. For most school staff, school is a comfortable place of mostly pleasant memories or we would not have chosen to work in the education field. For some family members, this is not the case. Cultural norms or language barriers also can pose a challenge for family members who feel they are not the experts and have little to contribute.

If your school has a family support or outreach coordinator, this person may have relationships with families or in the community. He/she can help you extend an invitation to be on the school wellness council. If your goal is to attract parents who do not usually attend school meetings or volunteer for committees, you will need to make a more personal invitation. A flyer in "backpack mail" or an announcement on the website will not likely result in a parent volunteer.

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In addition, although budgets are always strained, if you can provide meals or child care with your wellness council meetings, that may remove many of the barriers for families. Research other parent nights or programming for families that your school offers and find out if you can work with them. You may be able to conduct your school wellness council meeting in that setting or get input from families on your activities. It is important to have strategies to get input from family members that represent the various age groups and backgrounds of your students. Have a formal plan to communicate the progress of your achievements to provide a healthy school environment and continuing challenges.

Talking Points for SWC Members

What can School Wellness Councils do?

- Support the school in developing a healthier school environment
- Create the vision and goals for the local Healthy Schools Program
- Assist with policy implementation to support a healthy school environment and recommend new or revised health or wellness policies and activities to the district
- Promote parent, community and professional involvement in developing a healthier school environment
- Advocate for school health programs and policies within the broader school community
- Tap into funding and leverage resources for student and staff wellness
- Plan and implement programs for students and staff
- Evaluate program and policy efforts

What is the Healthy Schools Program?

The Healthy Schools Program is an initiative of the Alliance for a Healthier Generation, founded by the American Heart Association and the William J. Clinton Foundation. This program guides wellness councils to identify priorities and provides resources and training.

The Healthy Schools Program focuses on helping schools:

- Improve the nutrition of food and beverages served in vending machines and cafeterias
- Increase physical activity opportunities for students to exercise and play
- Provide resources for teachers and staff to become healthy role models
- Set goals and utilize tools and resources to meet those goals
- Serve both the academic and the health needs of students without negatively impacting their budgets
- Align their district policies and contracts to the Alliance School Beverage and Competitive Foods Guidelines

Meeting and Time Commitment

Studies indicate that regular meetings and focused agendas enable groups to stay engaged, excited and effective. Once membership is determined, our council will meet at least every other month during the school year. As a group our school wellness council will determine roles such as facilitator, record keeper, etc. These roles, once assigned, may involve a greater time commitment. We can also consider rotating some committee responsibilities.

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Sample Invitation Letter

Dear (Title, Name),

Childhood obesity is one of the most serious health epidemics facing America today. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, about one third of children and teens in the United States are overweight or obese. Childhood obesity is leading to a range of health problems that previously were not generally seen until adulthood, including high blood pressure, type II diabetes and elevated blood cholesterol levels. We believe we have a responsibility to improve the health and well-being of our children.

Experience shows that schools can be powerful places to initiate behavioral and environmental changes for students and staff. To make our school environment healthier, our school is forming a School Wellness Council. The purpose of the council is to bring together representatives from the school and community who can help us address issues facing the health and well-being of our children and youth.

As a (designate particular background), your input is particularly important and we would be honored to have you as a School Wellness Council member. We understand that your time is valuable and we want you to know we are committed to making changes in policies and programs that affect the health of our students and staff. We will be examining and planning for changes in the classroom, cafeteria, playing fields and more. We are fortunate to have the support of the Healthy Schools Program through the Alliance for a Healthier Generation. The Alliance was founded by the American Heart Association and the William J. Clinton Foundation, aimed at halting and reducing the prevalence of childhood obesity. The Healthy Schools Program provides technical assistance, resources and tools to help our school create a healthier environment for students and staff.

Our first meeting will take place on (date) at (location) from (time to time). We anticipate holding meetings every 6-8 weeks during the school year. If you have any questions, or want to know more about what sort of responsibilities you would have as a member, please contact me (contact information here). We hope you will accept our invitation and join us in taking action against the growing obesity epidemic.

Sincerely,

(school superintendent)
(other community organizer)

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How to Keep Your Council Effective?

A Shared Vision and Mission

- Spend the time at the beginning to define a collective vision and mission for your work. Each wellness council member brings a unique perspective and interest to your shared work. Facilitate a process that allows members to share these and use this as an opportunity to find common ground and goals. This focus on commonalities will give the group its vision and mission.
- Attend to keeping the priorities you develop in your action plan connected to those items that individuals shared that may be more specific to their roles and interests. This will also keep members engaged in your work because they will see the relevance to their own priorities.

Consistent Decision Making

- Once you have decided how you will make decisions as a group, consistently apply the agreed upon process.
- Be clear about decisions as they are made by utilizing an agenda format that captures decisions and next steps. Sometimes a group makes a decision without realizing they have. Clarity about this will help all members stay informed about what the council is doing.

Effective Meetings

- Utilize your action plan to create agendas and keep the group focused on the actions you have identified as part of your mission.
- Delegate duties and action items so that all members feel utilized and part of the group.
- Refer to the checklist for effective meetings in this guide to ensure that your agendas and meetings are a good use of time for all wellness council members.

Celebrations of Success

- The Healthy Schools Program offers opportunities for your wellness council to create success stories and share them with others. It is important to acknowledge the group's accomplishments.
- In addition, some of your wellness council members may also appreciate being recognized for individual accomplishments or achievements. Take the time in meetings to thank and acknowledge members who have helped your council meet milestones or goals.

Making Decisions

As you work with your wellness council you will need to make decisions or recommendations. Discussing how the group will make these decisions is important for keeping the work you do together moving forward. Knowing ahead of time how decisions will be made can potentially eliminate conflict and questions.

Democratic: One person, one vote—majority wins.

- Pros: Decisions can be made relatively quickly. It is a clear process and one that most people are familiar with.
- Cons: Some of the group members will not be happy with the decision and it may be more challenging to ensure that minority voices are heard and their concerns addressed.

Consensus: Seeks the agreement of most participants, but also resolves or mitigates the objections of the minority to achieve the most agreeable decision.

Consensus statements:

- I understand why this decision is being made
- I can support this decision
- I can act upon this decision
- I can positively represent this decision to others

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- Pros: Consensus is an effective way for all group members to express their opinions and be heard.
- Cons: Decisions may take a longer time to make because the group must work together to reach a solution that all members can live with if not support fully. Consensus takes specific skills to facilitate well.

Recommendation only: All decisions deferred to another group or decision-making body.

- Pros: The group will not need to work through a decision making process so some confrontations or difficult situations may be avoided.
- Cons: Although the group may not need to reach a decision on action, they may still need to decide on a recommendation to forward. In addition, groups that do not have decision making authority or those that 'rubber stamp' the decisions of others have a more difficult time keeping members engaged over time.

Support for Success

Here are some other things to consider in making your school wellness council more effective and successful.

Administrative support (get one on the team!)

Administrators are also busy people with many demands on their time. Find an administrator who is willing to support your efforts and keep up to date on your activities, even if they are unable to attend meetings regularly. Administrative support will be key for many of the action steps your wellness council will identify. Having an administrator involved from the beginning and informed as you move forward will prevent "surprises" and concerns. Hopefully, the administrator will serve as a liaison with the administrative team and the wellness council.

Dedicated meeting time

Sticking to a consistent meeting schedule (time and place) will allow all of your members to get meetings on their calendar and plan for them well in advance. It will also help with challenges in communicating meeting details.

Committed team members who "step up to the plate"

Provide opportunities for council members to contribute to the group in ways that are small and large. Consider rotating facilitation or if you have community members on your council, you may want to hold a meeting in their offices. Members may also be willing to provide healthy snacks for your meetings.

Getting the entire school involved in some way

Involvement of staff, students and families in your school will ensure the success of your efforts. Diversity of roles on your wellness council will result in broader involvement. In addition, implementing the school employee wellness criteria in the Healthy Schools Program Framework is another way to involve more school staff. Consider including some of these criteria in your action plan.

Having the team divide into task teams

Breaking into smaller task teams will enable the council to get more done and also will engage additional people. Although the school wellness council should not be too large, task teams will allow members to invite others to become involved.

Smaller, achievable goals

As you develop your action plan, include steps that you can complete in a month or two. Nothing that you do to make your school healthier is small. Giving your council an early success will help members feel positive about their contributions.

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Sharing your progress and success with others

Celebrating success is a critical part of team building and group process. Take the time to celebrate and share with others the work you are doing. The Healthy Schools Program provides opportunities to write success stories. Consider putting these in family and staff newsletters or share your 'good news' at staff and/or parent meetings.

Matrix for Success

A Framework for Success and Systems Change*

As you provide leadership for your wellness council, consider all critical components of success - vision, skills, incentives, resources and action plan strategies to keep your work moving forward and your members engaged. Leaving out one or more components can lead to negative results.

Vision	Skills	Incentives	Resources	Action Plan	=	Change
	Skills	Incentives	Resources	Action Plan	=	Confusion
Vision		Incentives	Resources	Action Plan	=	Anxiety
Vision	Skills		Resources	Action Plan	=	Slow Change
Vision	Skills	Incentives		Action Plan	=	Frustration
Vision	Skills	Incentives	Resources		=	False Starts

Vision: A joint decision about what the wellness council hopes to accomplish

Skills: The ability to participate in the group, complete tasks, have the information needed to communicate about the group's work

Incentives: Opportunities to be recognized and see success can also include release time for participation, opportunities for professional development, etc.

Resources: Access to administrative support, a small budget, leverage in-kind or other non-monetary items or community resources to assist in completing the action plan

Action Plan: A plan with a timeline and responsibilities that links to the group's vision and mission to keep decisions and activities focused and intentional

*Source: Kastner, T & Enterprise Group, Ltd. (1991). Systems reform for children and their families. Lansing: State of Michigan

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Addressing Difficult Behavior in Groups

Being cognizant of group dynamics and addressing difficult behavior is part of facilitating a school wellness council. Below are some common difficult behaviors and how to handle them:

- **Flare-ups:** When two members get into a heated discussion, summarize the points made by each and then turn the discussion back to the group.
- **Grandstanding:** Interrupt the person with a statement that gives him/her a sense of value for the contribution, but ask that he/she give others a chance to comment. You can also interrupt by saying, "You have brought up many points, does anyone have a thought about what has been said?"
- **Interrupting:** Step in immediately and allow the person who was speaking time to finish his/her thought or point. If it is a chronic problem with an individual, ask them to be the recorder at the next meeting.
- **Continual criticizing:** When addressing passionate issues, it is often easy to be negative and feel that change will never happen. Redirecting the critical member to identify solutions or to be responsible for an achievable task may help.

Preventing Difficult Behavior/Role of the Facilitator

Prevention is often the most effective way to manage conflicts or difficulties within a group. The facilitator can play a key role in making groups effective.

- **Set a positive and enthusiastic tone:** If you expect people to be motivated, creative and committed, they will probably live up to your expectations.
- **Assist the group in enforcing the ground rules/norms:** Post the agreed upon ground rules and encourage all members to follow them. Referring to the norms agreed upon by the group will keep the whole group accountable.
- **Watch group vibes:** As the facilitator you are the group's barometer. If you sense people are bored, you may have to pick up the pace or take a quick physical activity break. If there seem to be "under-the-surface" issues, you may have to bring them up.
- **Make sure everyone gets a chance to speak:** Keep informal track of who has spoken and include quieter group members by asking them directly if they have something to add. Be sure to compliment people on their ideas and thank them for their input. This is really important if you have students or community members who are not used to "the culture of meetings."
- **Nonverbal cues are important:** Be sure your body language and attention encourages others to speak. Eye contact and leaning forward will also make members feel heard.
- **Be confident in your facilitator role:** Because you have most of the control in the meeting, group members need to feel that you are fair and watching out for all of the group members.

Creating Group Norms and Ground Rules

Norms and ground rules help a group create their culture and set the tone for meetings. These norms should be shaped, agreed upon and enforced by the whole wellness council, not just the facilitator. Once the council has created norms, include them in wellness council notebooks and post them on the wall at the start of every meeting. Periodically check in with the group (every other meeting or so) to see if the norms are still working or if they need to change or add norms.

To create group norms, you can begin with a standard list and ask the group to add or you can start with a blank sheet of paper and ask the group to brainstorm norms or rules they would like to have to ensure that the wellness council is effective and enjoyable. If someone suggests a norm and it is not clear, ask a follow-up question to ensure there is understanding. The list can be as long or short as the group would like.

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Here are some sample group norms. *Feel free to use this list as a starting point for your group:*

1. Meetings will start and end on time
2. Come prepared to meetings
3. Cell phones are off or turned on vibrate...no “texting” during the meeting
4. Listen to all points of view
5. Be respectful (may want to talk about what this looks like in your group)
6. One person speaks at a time-no side conversations or interrupting
7. Assume goodwill and good intent from others
8. Have fun

Communication Strategies

Keeping SWC Members Informed

With a variety of communication tools available, it should be easy to keep school wellness council members informed and connected. However, people have a wide continuum of access to and comfort with technology. As you recruit and bring your SWC members together, be sure to collect contact information along with preferences on how members would like to stay informed. This chapter contains a contact sheet for your use (*see page 18*).

Because you want council members to work together, think about creating a contact sheet/roster listing all members. The contact sheet included in this Toolkit also provides an opportunity for members to grant permission to share their information with other SWC members.

As you are successful in creating diversity in your wellness council, you will likely need to utilize various methods of communication. Think ahead about what types of things you will need to communicate between and prior to meetings.

Communication strategies might include:

- Minutes/decisions from the previous meeting
- Surveys
- Agendas
- Subcommittee reports (if your group breaks into task groups)
- Calendar of meetings
- Notification of health related community-school events

Some of these may have higher levels of urgency. Discuss as a group the best way to keep everyone informed. If there are several members that prefer methods of contact other than e-mail, consider setting up a phone tree or other system that shares the responsibility of communication among SWC members.

Ensure that if you break into subgroups that those groups also have a communication plan.

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SWC Contact Information

Name _____

Address to send council mail/information

Street _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

Day time phone # _____

Evening phone # _____

Cell phone # _____

Fax # _____

Preferred phone for contact about SWC business and issues check one:

Day time phone # Evening phone # Cell phone # Other _____

Email _____

How often do you check your e-mail? check one:

Several times a day Once a day Once a week Rarely

We would like to make a contact list for our wellness council. Is it OK to share your contact information with other council members?

Yes No

Yes, but only share the following (check all that apply:

Day time phone #

Evening phone #

Cell phone #

Address

Email

How would you prefer to get information, minutes, notification of council meetings, activities, etc.? Check one:

Day time phone #

Evening phone #

Cell phone #

Email

US mail

Fax #

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Meeting Checklist

General

- There is a written agenda that everyone received in advance.
- Copies of the agenda are available for everyone or it is posted in the room.
- People are welcomed and valued when they arrive (focus on who is there and not on who is absent).
- The majority of meeting time is given to planning further action on important issues/projects.
- The meeting begins and ends on time (so members with family and other responsibilities can plan their time).
- Each member of the group is treated with respect, despite differences in viewpoint, age, experience, sex, race, income and formal education.
- You have assigned responsibilities for each decision made.
- You have set plans and a tentative agenda for the next meeting.
- People stay around and talk after the meeting indicating that relationships are being built and strengthened.

Facilitator

- The meeting results in decisions being made.
- The group has agreed to the assignment of tasks with deadlines and plans for follow-up.
- You are open-minded to the possibilities when new ideas are expressed.
- You have made sure that everyone feels comfortable participating.
- You encourage others to speak out and participate.
- You ensure that tasks are divided equitably, meeting the needs and skill levels of the group members.
- You have allowed the group to set the pace and make decisions.

Participant

- You arrive at the meeting on time.
- You come prepared to discuss the agenda items.
- You have accomplished or followed through on any commitments you made during the last meeting.
- You are an active listener and speaker.
- You speak briefly when making your points.
- You clarify the assignments and deadlines for which you are responsible.
- You are open to making connections and building relationships with other group and community members.

***Source:** PALS—Physical Activity for Local Students

School Wellness Council Toolkit

Timeline Example

The following timeline can help your wellness council stay on track to accomplish your goals. Share this timeline with your school wellness council members. This timeline illustrates a cycle of continuous improvement and provides opportunities to evaluate the implementation of your wellness policy.

SWC Meetings	August / September	October / November	December / January	February / March	April / May	June
Meeting Tasks	Complete HSP Inventory	Prioritize needs and create action plan	Implement action plan; assign tasks and timeline	Check progress on action plan. Determine whether or not to apply for recognition.	Update HSP Inventory. Apply for recognition.	Celebrate successes
Between Meeting Tasks		Submit completed action plan to relationship manager	Document and collect information for portfolio	Share successes with your relationship manager	Continue to implement action plan. Complete and submit recognition application.	Schedule technical assistance sessions for next year
HSP Resources	Inventory worksheet; toolkits; HSP website	Resource database; webinars; toolkits; HSP website	Portfolio; SWC	Resource database; success story activity; content managers	Content managers; recognition managers	SWC certificates of appreciation

Your school may be on a slightly different schedule. If this is the case, you may want to adjust this chart by changing the months across the top. It also may be helpful for completion of tasks or actions to ensure that all members of your school wellness council have access to the Healthy Schools Program resources through the Alliance for a Healthier Generation website.

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Agenda Sample

School Wellness Council Meeting Agenda

Instructions: Identify and discuss the action steps that need to be accomplished to implement your Healthy Schools Program Action Plan. Use this meeting agenda template to guide your meetings and follow-up communications. A consistent format like this will enable all of your school wellness council members to easily find information on decisions, tasks they are responsible for and progress on your action plan.

Meeting Date: / / **Attendees:** *(List those who attended here)*

Meeting Tasks from Timeline: *(Example: Update the Healthy Schools Program Inventory)*

Action Step from Action Plan:		
Steps to Achievement:	Decisions/Still to Do:	Who/When:
Example: Download the sample Employee Wellness Interest Survey	Example: Revise survey as needed; share with SWC for approval	Example: SWC / SWC meeting date

Next meeting Date: / / **Time:** **Location:**

(Be sure to include the next meeting date, time and location on your agenda and in the minutes.)

Notes:

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Meeting Date: / /

Attendees:

Meeting Tasks from Timeline:

Action Step from Action Plan:		
Steps to Achievement:	Decisions/Still to Do:	Who/When:
Action Step from Action Plan:		
Steps to Achievement:	Decisions/Still to Do:	Who/When:
Action Step from Action Plan:		
Steps to Achievement:	Decisions/Still to Do:	Who/When:

Next meeting Date: / /

Time: Location:

Notes: