
Policy and Systems Toolkit

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the benefit of schools
enrolled in the Healthy
Schools Program**

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Policy and Systems Criteria at a Glance

BRONZE LEVEL AWARD	
101	School is implementing the district wellness policy and providing feedback to the district regarding its progress annually
102	School has an active wellness council/committee that meets at least every other month during the school year
	1 Checklist Criterion
SILVER LEVEL AWARD	
	Meets Bronze
103	Family members and guardians have the opportunity to provide input to the implementation of wellness policy activities
104	Students have the opportunity to provide input to the implementation of wellness policy activities
105	The status of wellness policy implementation at the school level is communicated annually to school staff, students and families
	1 additional Checklist Criterion, total of 2
GOLD LEVEL AWARD	
	Meets Silver
106	School wellness council/committee recommends new or revised health or wellness policies and activities to the district
	2 additional Checklist Criteria, total of 4
CHECKLIST CRITERIA	
107	Drinking water is available to students free of charge at all times during the school day
108	School grounds and/or buildings are open to students, their families and the community for access to physical activities
109	School has secured funds or leveraged resources to support wellness priorities for students and staff
110	School's wellness goals are integrated into the overall School Improvement Plan
111	School tracks students' body mass index and reports the results to the district in aggregate on an annual basis

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Rationale

The policy and systems criteria provide a roadmap to the development of decision-making processes that are inclusive of the whole school community and address key aspects of a healthy school environment. The essential components of effective policy and systems are active, well-functioning and productive school wellness councils and successful implementation of school wellness policies.

Systems change theory focuses on how change is adopted or implemented in a system such as a school. This theory involves examining who the stakeholders are, what the community norms are and how necessary the change is perceived to be.

Policy creates environments that make “the healthy choice the easy choice.” Although healthy eating and physical activity can be individual behaviors, creating school policies and community norms that support active lifestyles and healthy eating will be more sustainable and are of critical importance to helping schools become part of the solution to the problem of childhood obesity. Policy development and implementation is a process that involves continuous feedback and improvement. Going beyond development, the Healthy Schools Program Policy and Systems criteria provide a roadmap or guidance for successful implementation.

Student, family and community involvement enable schools to ensure that policies and programs meet the diverse needs of students and families. In addition, schools cannot address childhood obesity without support and solutions from their communities.

Resources

[Alliance for a Healthier Generation: Policy and Systems Web Page](http://www.HealthierGeneration.org/Policy)
www.HealthierGeneration.org/Policy

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101	School is implementing the district wellness policy and providing feedback to the district regarding its progress annually
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Rationale

The 2004 reauthorization of the Child Nutrition Program required all schools participating in the National School Lunch Program to create a school district wellness policy by the 2006-07 school year. The policy elements required addressing:

- Goals for nutrition education, physical activity and wellness activities
- Nutrition guidelines for all foods available on school grounds
- Minimum nutrition requirements for reimbursable meals
- A plan for measuring implementation, including naming a person responsible for monitoring

The new child nutrition reauthorization bill, entitled Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010, sets basic standards for school wellness policies including goals for nutrition promotion and education and physical activity, while still permitting local flexibility to tailor the policies to their particular needs. In addition to this federal requirement, many states have also required schools to adopt policies on nutrition and physical activity.

The process of evaluating the impact of policy decisions at the school level is a critical step in the policy development and implementation process. Your school may be very different now than it was when your district's wellness policy was first approved. Utilizing a process to provide feedback on the annual progress and impact of the wellness policy will enable your school to provide valuable data to the district and help determine if any improvements are needed to the district policy. In addition, monitoring and reporting on the outcomes of your policy also creates accountability within the school, further ensuring that the policy will be implemented.

The definition of "implementing" the wellness policy depends on the language in the district wellness policy. The school should describe their efforts towards putting this policy language into practice. For example:

- If a district wellness policy is vague, such as encouraging schools to incorporate opportunities for daily physical activity, what is the school doing to meet this?
- If a district wellness policy is specific, such as conducting yearly BMI measurements on students, what is the school doing to meet this?

Action Steps

- The School Wellness Council reviews the district policy to determine what steps the school should take to implement the policy in their building.
- Measure and observe the implementation of the wellness policy. The Healthy Schools Builder[®], the online assessment tool of the Healthy Schools Program, is one way to do this.
- Use other school health assessments. For example, some school wellness council members monitor the vending machines and student stores to measure compliance with local policy.
- Present the information to school administrators and request input and support.
- Design the annual action plan to assist with the implementation of the wellness policy at the building level.
- Implement the action steps of the plan.
- Conduct an implementation evaluation.
- Submit a progress report to the district at the end of the school year. The committee may also be able to make a presentation on the highlights of their progress.

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Recognition Documentation

Describe how the school has provided annual feedback to the district regarding its progress on the implementation of the district wellness policy.

Resources

- [Child Nutrition Reauthorization Fact Sheet](#) (Let's Move!)
- [Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010](#) (U.S. Department of Agriculture)
- [Child Nutrition Bill Wellness Policy Requirements](#) (U.S. Department of Agriculture)

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102	School has an active wellness council/committee that meets at least every other month during the school year
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Rationale

The reauthorization of the Child Nutrition Program in 2004 required the creation of school wellness councils or committees to create the required wellness policy. Many states also required the formation of local school wellness councils or school 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 school, district and community
- Identify student/staff health needs
- Monitor, evaluate and report school building implementation of district health policies and programs

The roles and functions of an active and successful school wellness council rely on trusting relationships between members and regular interactions for conducting productive and meaningful meetings. The school wellness council assesses school health activities, identifies action steps and creates an annual plan together. Regular meetings give group members the opportunity to check progress on goals and action plan activities. In addition, regularly scheduled meetings allow members to plan ahead, leading to better attendance and engagement. In order to maintain a well-functioning and enthusiastic council, it is critical to be organized and productive.

Action Steps

- Talk to building administrators to determine support for the establishment or continuation of the school wellness council. Ask for an administrative representative on the council to serve as the liaison with other administrators.
- Identify school staff, community members, family members and students who have shown an interest in health issues related to healthy eating and physical activity and recruit members or identify key representatives that can fill critical roles on the council. The Healthy Schools Program School Wellness Council Toolkit includes invitations, sample agendas and talking points that are valuable for recruitment.
- Identify regular meeting times for the school wellness council.
- Decide on a decision-making process.
- Agree on roles and responsibilities of council members.

Recognition Documentation

Provide three dates when the school wellness council/committee (SWC) met during the past year:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

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Complete the roster below for the members of your wellness council/committee. Include each 1) name, 2) position in the school or community and 3) contributions to the committee and wellness efforts.

Examples:

Francis Fit, 1st Grade Teacher, Organized 5K Run for Fun event; Distributed and collected the Health Education Instruction Survey

Holly Healthy, Administrative Assistant, Keeps meeting minutes and sends meeting reminders; Checked school policies for restrictions on vending machine items that do not meet Alliance Guidelines

Wally Wellness, Hospital Rep., Organized blood pressure screening for staff; Worked with district office on insurance policy coverage of obesity treatment services for staff

Wellness Council/Committee Members

Names	Positions	Contributions

Resources

- [School Wellness Council Toolkit](#) (Alliance for a Healthier Generation)
- [Parent/Family School Wellness Council Tip Sheet](#) (Alliance for a Healthier Generation)

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103	Family members and guardians have the opportunity to provide input to the implementation of wellness policy activities
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Rationale

Family members have a stake in the health and well-being of their children. Hearing the voices of families is important to the success of wellness activities. Families have unique resources in terms of providing their children with healthy meals and opportunities to be physically active and talking to other families about these issues. Family members from diverse backgrounds and cultures can communicate with hard to reach family and community members to get input about the healthy changes the school is making, garnering more support for wellness policy efforts.

Action Step

Provide opportunities for family members and guardians to provide input on the implementation of wellness activities through a variety of means:

- Membership on the school wellness council
- Newsletters
- Parent night information table
- Presentation at parent group meeting
- School web page or blog
- Paper or online survey

Recognition Documentation

Describe two ways the school has given family members and guardians an opportunity for input to the implementation of wellness policy activities.

(Examples: membership on the SWC, parent education nights, family surveys, interviews, community meetings, collaboration with parent/family groups such as the PTA, etc.)

Resources

- [School Wellness Council Toolkit](#) (Alliance for a Healthier Generation)
- [Parent/Family School Wellness Council Tip Sheet](#) (Alliance for a Healthier Generation)
- [Parents In Action!](#) (California Project LEAN)
This resource is also available in [Spanish](#).

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104	Students have the opportunity to provide input to the implementation of wellness policy activities
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Rationale

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

Action Steps

- Include student representatives as members on the school wellness council or create a student wellness council with liaisons that attend wellness council meetings.
- Work with a marketing class, school store or student council to develop taste tests and design marketing campaigns for healthy food and beverage options and increase physical activity opportunities.

Recognition Documentation

Describe two ways the school has given students an opportunity for input to the implementation of wellness policy activities.

(Examples: membership on the SWC, student surveys, focus groups, student wellness club, collaboration with student council, etc.)

Resources

- [empowerME@school toolkit](#) (Alliance for a Healthier Generation)
- [Building Effective Youth Councils: A Guide to Engaging Youth in Policy Making](#) (The Forum for Youth Investment)
- [Care2Eat: Lessons for a Lifetime of Healthy Eating](#) (Alliance for a Healthier Generation)

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105	The status of wellness policy implementation at the school level is communicated annually to school staff, students and families
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Rationale

Many school districts have had wellness policies in place since the 2006-2007 school year. For many school communities, the content of the policy, implementation plans and related activities have become less visible. The district's wellness policy may have been updated or rules and regulations developed. Actively communicating the policy through various means is essential to implementation and garnering support for school wellness with school staff, students and families.

Utilize a variety of opportunities to tell school staff, students and families about the content of the wellness policy. Share with them what the school is doing to implement the policy and highlight positive changes in the school environment that are a result of the wellness policy.

Action Steps

- Include communication strategies in the action plan to inform school staff, students and families on the status of school wellness policy implementation.
- Use school newsletters or website, student handbooks, district websites, letters home, posters, school meal menus and other means of communication to inform school staff, students and families on the status of school wellness policy implementation.

Recognition Documentation

Describe two ways that the school has communicated the status of wellness policy implementation to school staff, students and families this year.

(Examples: school newsletters, school website or Facebook page, student handbook, local newspaper, TV or radio station, presentations at open house nights and to community groups, etc.)

Resource

- [Bulletin Board Tools](#) (Alliance for a Healthier Generation)

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106	School wellness council/committee recommends new or revised health or wellness policies and activities to the district
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Rationale

It is important for the district to hear from schools that are implementing the district wellness policy. This will show that the policy is being implemented consistently across the district. Information and recommendations from the schools will provide valuable data when evaluating and revising the district health and/or wellness policies.

Action Steps

- Compile and review all evaluation data gathered throughout the school year.
- As a council, reach consensus on recommendations that will go forward.
- Check on the method the district would like to receive the recommendations.
- Submit the recommendations to the school administrators for comments and finalize recommendations.
- Decide who from the council will present the recommendations to the district, if a presentation is appropriate.
- Share the response to the recommendations with the school wellness council.

Recognition Documentation

Share the recommendations the school wellness council/committee has made to the district and explain why the recommendations were made. What was the district's response to the recommendations?

Resource

- [School Wellness Council Toolkit](#) (Alliance for a Healthier Generation)
- [Parent/Family School Wellness Council Tip Sheet](#) (Alliance for a Healthier Generation)

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107	Drinking water is available to students free of charge at all times during the school day
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Rationale

Drinking water is important for learning and keeping a body functioning at optimum levels. Water also can replace beverages that may be high in sugar and calories, which also impacts weight. Water is a free and healthy beverage option in schools.

Action Steps

- Ensure that all drinking fountains are in working order.
- Check if water quality assessments are conducted and reviewed on a regular schedule.
- Check on school policy regarding students using refillable water bottles throughout the day and if water is available at lunchtime.

Recognition Documentation

Verify that drinking water is available to students free of charge at all times during the school day.

Resources

- [Drinking Water in Schools & Child Care Facilities](#) (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency)
- [Why Drinking Water is the Way to Go](#) (Nemours Foundation)

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108	School grounds and/or buildings are open to students, their families and the community for access to physical activities
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Rationale

According to the U. S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “One of the major barriers to youth participation in physical activity is a lack of access to sports and recreation facilities. Increased access to school facilities would, therefore, help facilitate increases in physical activity among young people.” Opening school grounds and school buildings allow students, families and community members to have access to a safe space for physical activities during times when the grounds and buildings are not in use. This increases the value of the school campus to the community while increasing opportunities for physical activity.

Action Steps

- Review the current district and/or school policy regarding joint use of school grounds, athletic facilities and school buildings by community groups.
- If a joint use policy does not exist or does not encourage use by community groups, determine the process to develop or revise the policy to open school grounds and building to students, families and community groups for physical activities.
- Work with local Parks and Recreation Departments and youth-serving organizations to identify facility needs in the community.
- Promote the use of school grounds and buildings for physical activities.

Recognition Documentation

Explain how the school shares information about ways community groups, students and families can access school grounds and buildings for physical activities and/or describe joint use policies that are in place.

(Examples: School principal gave a presentation to the PTA encouraging participation in Physical Activity Nights; the school and local YMCA signed a joint use agreement, the high school gym is open on Wednesday evenings for community members' use.)

Resources

- [Community Use of Schools Joint Use Agreements](#) (National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities)
- [Model Joint Use Agreement Resources](#) (National Policy & Legal Analysis Network)

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109	School has secured funds or leveraged resources to support wellness priorities for students and staff
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Rationale

There are many competing interests in schools. In general, schools that are able to secure resources for student and staff wellness priorities are the most successful at making changes to their food and physical activity environments. Financial resources often bring time and attention, accountability, increased staff, student and family/community engagement, and demonstrate a commitment from school leadership.

A strong, diverse and committed school wellness council is often the source of available community resources. Family and community members can bring connections to local businesses and organizations or leverage a network of volunteers. The councils may also provide the structure that can access grant funds by demonstrating broad community support and involvement in school health efforts.

Action Steps

- Review the action plan, determine resources needed and prepare a budget to execute wellness activities.
- Identify funds allocated in the school budget to support the wellness priorities.
- Identify community resources that can be leveraged either through donations, in-kind services or volunteers.

Recognition Documentation

Provide one example of how the school has secured funds or leveraged resources to support wellness priorities. Be specific about what funds were secured or resources leveraged.

(Examples: School applied for a grant from the district and received \$500 to buy a cooler for fresh fruits and vegetables; The cooperative extension provided 10 lessons on healthy cooking with whole foods for the afterschool program.)

Resources

- [Healthy Schools Program Funding Opportunity Announcements](#) (Alliance for a Healthier Generation)
- [Grant Alerts Database](#) (The Center for Health and Healthcare in Schools)

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110	School's wellness goals are integrated into the overall School Improvement Plan
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Rationale

School improvement plans are the overarching strategic plan or map schools use to set direction, develop policies, prioritize professional development and determine needs for additional resources. The School Improvement Plan development process usually involves steps similar to the Healthy Schools Program Six Step model. If the goals included in your school wellness council action plan are incorporated into the School Improvement Plan, it will elevate the importance and increase the likelihood that the school wellness goal of reducing youth obesity will be achieved. In addition, the wellness goals will become a strategy directly linked to ensuring that all students are successful learners.

Action Steps

- Have a representative from the School Improvement Plan Team on the school wellness council or invite an administrator to a school wellness council meeting to discuss the process for including the school's wellness goals into the overall School Improvement Plan.
- As a SWC, review the most recent School Improvement Plan and identify ways that the school's wellness goals can contribute to the School Improvement Plan.
- Submit recommendations to the School Improvement Plan Team and follow-up to determine if the recommendations were accepted as is, revised or excluded.

Recognition Documentation

Describe which of the school's wellness goals have been integrated into the overall School Improvement Plan.

Resources

- [Ensuring That No Child is Left Behind](#) (WestEd)
- [Healthy Students Learn Better](#) (Alliance for a Healthier Generation)
- [Student Health and Academic Achievement](#) (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)

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111	School tracks students' body mass index and reports the results to the district in aggregate on an annual basis
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Rationale

Body Mass Index (BMI) is the measurement of a student's height in relationship to his or her weight. BMI has received increasing attention over the last few years as awareness about childhood obesity has increased. Calculating student BMI has become more common because the measurements are easy to obtain and give an indication of body fat and the potential to become overweight or obese. BMI can be collected and observed for trends over a period of time. This should be an anonymous process and reported in aggregate.

The American Heart Association supports BMI assessment in schools for the purpose of surveillance to determine the effectiveness of obesity prevention programs. The American Heart Association does not recommend BMI assessment programs used for individual health screening purposes unless there are a number of safeguards in place to reduce the risk of harming students. The Healthy Schools Program criterion addresses BMI measurements that provide trend data in aggregate and not individual assessments.

BMI screening may be useful to evaluate the long-term impact of schools implementing key strategies to prevent the onset of pediatric obesity. Schools should use health professionals who are trained and qualified to organize and manage BMI screening in a sensitive and caring manner such as school nurses or other health providers. To avoid doing harm, efforts to improve the health of students should enhance physical, psychological and social well-being.

Schools that initiate BMI measurement programs should evaluate the effects of the program on BMI results and on weight-related knowledge, attitudes and behaviors of youth and their families; have in place a safe, respectful and supportive environment for students of all body sizes where size discrimination is not tolerated, and implement science-based strategies to promote physical activity and healthy eating.

If a school decides to collect BMI data, it is important to clarify what purpose the information will serve and how students will be selected – at the same grades each year (e.g. grades 5, 8, 10) or following a cohort of students as they progress through the grades. Safeguards must be put in place to protect individual student health data.

Some states require the collection of BMI as data that schools report to the state. Schools that are in a state that requires BMI screening will have access to state level guidance and resources.

Action Steps

- Talk with school administrators and other school staff to determine if your school district/school will collect BMI student data.
- Ensure there are policies and safeguards in place to protect student privacy and prevent harm.
- Review aggregate data and report it to the district.
- Regularly evaluate the program and its intended outcomes regarding youth obesity prevention efforts and possible unintended consequences.

Recognition Documentation

Describe your school's process for tracking and reporting students' body mass index on an annual basis.

(Examples: School conducts yearly body mass index testing with 5th, 8th and 11th graders in the spring; School established an electronic link to the district school health database.)

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Resources

- [Student Body Mass Index \(BMI\) Toolkit](#) (Alliance for a Healthier Generation)
- [Body Mass Index Measurement in Schools](#) (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)

Thank you for your interest in school wellness policies. For more information on wellness policies or school wellness councils contact the Alliance Policy and Systems Manager at Kathy.Wilbur@HealthierGeneration.org