

Eat Right

Food, Nutrition and Health Tips from Kids Eat Right

How Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics members can Promote School Wellness



As children spend nearly 50% of their waking hours in school and consume up to 50% of their daily calories at school, it is apparent that the wellness environment of schools has a tremendous impact on children's nutrition and physical activity behaviors. Schools have an obligation to provide a model wellness environment that families can adopt in their own homes, and many schools are doing just that. The Institute of Medicine recommends:

“Federal, state, and local government and education authorities, with support from parents, teachers, and the business community and the private sector, should make schools a focal point for obesity prevention.”¹

If schools are a focal point for healthy lifestyle promotion, nutrition professionals must be at the table. Registered Dietitian Nutritionists (RDN) are well positioned to lead and support schools in improving school wellness environments through school wellness committees.

Free School Wellness Environment Resources

USDA

www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/healthierschoolday/toolkit.htm
USDA's School Day Just Got Healthier Toolkit includes brochures, fact sheets, FAQs, fliers, school lessons, templates and much more targeted to specific audiences.

This is the new link to the USDA Wellness Policy resources:
<http://healthymeals.nal.usda.gov/local-wellness-policy-resources/school-nutrition-environment-and-wellness-resources-0>.

HealthierUS School Challenge

www.fns.usda.gov/hussc/healthierus-school-challenge
HealthierUS School Challenge (HUSC) is a USDA voluntary certification initiative recognizing those schools enrolled in Team Nutrition that have created healthier school environments through promotion of nutrition and physical activity. Monetary awards ranging from \$500–\$2,000 are provided to schools meeting HUSC criteria.

Review the **HUSC Criteria**:

www.fns.usda.gov/tn/HealthierUS/2012criteria_chart.html.

Alliance for a Healthier Generation

www.healthiergeneration.org

Alliance for a Healthier Generation is a program founded by the American Heart Association and the Clinton Foundation. The Alliance helps schools, companies, communities, healthcare professionals and families to transform the conditions and systems that lead to healthier kids. Register for the **Healthy Schools Program**, which brings parents, school staff, and students together to turn campuses into healthier places: www.healthiergeneration.org/programs.

Action for Healthy Kids

www.actionforhealthykids.org

Action for Healthy Schools provides school wellness resources.

School Nutrition Association

<http://www.schoolnutrition.org/Content.aspx?id=8504>

The School Nutrition Association Resource Center contains valuable resources, including school wellness policy information.

Kids Eat Right

www.kidseatright.org/volunteer

The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics Association's Kids Eat Right member site includes valuable tools and resources for Kids Eat Right campaign members.

Fuel Up To Play 60

www.fueluptoplay60.com

Fuel Up To Play 60 is a program supported by the National Dairy Council and National Football League, in collaboration with USDA, that empowers students to take charge in making small, everyday changes at school. Join Fuel Up To Play 60 at www.school.fueluptoplay60.com/join.

Coordinated School Health

www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/cshp/

Coordinated School Health (CSH) is recommended by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) as a strategy for improving students' health and learning in our nation's schools. Learn how to implement CSH in schools: www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/cshp/schools.htm.

1. Glickman D PL, Sim LJ, Cook HDV, Miller EA, Editors. *Accelerating progress in obesity prevention: Solving the weight of the nation*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press; 2012.

School Health Index

www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/SHI

The School Health Index (SHI) is an online self-assessment and planning tool that schools can use to improve their health and safety policies and programs. It is easy to use and completely confidential. Get started with the **SHI** here: http://nccd.cdc.gov/DASH_SHI/default/Login.aspx.

Team Nutrition

www.teamnutrition.usda.gov

Team Nutrition is an initiative of the USDA Food and Nutrition Service to support the Child Nutrition Programs through training and technical assistance for foodservice, nutrition education for children and their caregivers, and school and community support for healthy eating and physical activity.

Make it a Team Effort!

There are many important steps to engaging the school wellness committee.

First, it is important to come into the school with a collegial attitude, rather than a take charge attitude. The goal is to be supportive and avoid stepping on anyone's toes. Find out what your district's or school's Wellness Committee/Council is doing and acknowledge their efforts. Find out where the Wellness Policy is in regards to goal setting and evaluation, and offer your expertise. Many districts already have a functioning wellness committee with some amazing results.

If a school wellness committee is not in place, start one:

- **Select a school that is ready!** Select a school that is ready to welcome school wellness environment changes. The school should have strong administrative and school nutrition director support as well as a good line of communication with staff.
- **Start with the principal.** With the principal's support and assistance, solicit names of school staff interested in health (including school nutrition director/manager, teachers, administrators, school nurse, PE teacher, etc.).
- **Involve students.** Include older students in the wellness committee to be the student voice and to serve as role models in the school. You may wish to have an application process for students to serve on the wellness committee, resulting in a more engaged group of students than if the adults hand-selected students.
- **Engage the community.** Schools are part of our community and it makes sense to engage community members to be part of the school wellness committee. Potential members may include business leaders, community agency professionals, or others with a vested interest in children in their community.
- **Identify school champions.** Identify one or two school wellness committee "champions"—members who are highly motivated and passionate about children and health and willing to lead the committee meetings. Your role should be to empower the school and champions until the school wellness committee is moving along nicely. You may choose to continue to provide support to the school, but you may want to share your expertise with other schools and help them get started as well.

Lead school wellness committee:

- **Identify measurable goals.** By the second school wellness committee meeting, the group should discuss program options with a school wellness assessment, such as HUSSC, Alliance for a Healthier Generation, Action for Healthy Kids, and/or Fuel Up to Play 60.
- **Create an action plan with one or two small first steps.** Depending on the program selected, the committee may need to review the criteria and recognize changes that need to be made. An action plan should be created, with every team member responsible for something. This not only helps facilitate significant change in the school, but also keeps committee members engaged.
- **Follow up.** Although the committee may be off to a great start, maintaining engagement is important. Schedule a follow-up meeting to review progress on the action plan. Continue to move forward by adding new pieces to the action plan if needed.
- **Go public. You will need a marketing plan to** let the entire school and community know the great work the school wellness committee is doing! Take before/after pictures and tell the story of how the school went from ordinary to extraordinary when it comes to the wellness environment. The school wellness committee should present the story to the school board, PTA, school staff, and community members at various meetings. Share the story with the media and invite them to the school. Use social media throughout the year to promote a culture of wellness and build enthusiasm for wellness project(s). By doing these things, you are not only promoting the progress, you are getting buy-in from the school, parents, and community, which will be very important in implementing school wellness environment changes.
- **Communicate with the principal.** At every phase, keep the principal in the loop. The principal can provide the support and encouragement necessary to the school wellness committee to keep up the momentum.
- **Celebrate success!** Celebrate success, big or small, with the school staff, students, parents, and/or community. Remember, it may take several small steps as the school works to create a culture of wellness. Every step is important!

Authored by Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics staff registered dietitians.