

SMART CHOICES

A Guide for Creating School-Business Partnerships for Healthy, Active and Successful Students

Educators and community leaders who are working together to create school Health and Wellness Policies are mounting an important effort to improve the lives and futures of young people and their families. Unfortunately, the efforts of schools alone cannot “solve” the childhood obesity problem. The number of overweight children has been increasing for decades, and spans all demographic groups. The problem is driven by the decline in physical activity among young people and by a lack of balance in their food and beverage choices.

Yet despite the content and size of meals consumed at restaurants or around the family dinner table, or the national fascination with video games, television and other forms of sedentary entertainment, the food and physical activity options offered by schools will continue to receive significant scrutiny from health advocates, community leaders and parents alike. As centers of learning, schools play an important role in providing healthy nutrition and physical activity options for children while setting a standard for habits and attitudes that extend beyond the school day. Recognizing the important connection between healthy and active lifestyles and student success and achievement, The Council for Corporate & School Partnerships promotes business and school partnerships that advance student well-being. Council members understand the great potential for lessons learned in school to be brought home to whole families and reinforced in the larger community as new practices and routines become part of students’ daily lives.

The unique intent of this “How-to” guide, authored by The Council, is to provide a larger understanding of the integral role that partnerships between businesses and schools can play in addressing – and surmounting – ongoing implementation challenges. Its purpose is to facilitate efforts to harness the power of these partnerships through broad strategic collaboration.

Council members believe although some schools may be able to lead by example independently, many more can realize greater gains by working in partnership with business and community leaders who also have a stake in addressing childhood health and obesity problems. Through well-managed and carefully structured alliances, schools and business and community partners can revise food and beverage offerings and nutrition education, enhance opportunities for physical activity, and adopt collaborative approaches for helping young people achieve healthy and active lifestyles during the school day and beyond.

Effective collaboration is critical to the success of this process. To succeed, representatives of schools and partner organizations must listen to and learn from the

Founded by The Coca-Cola Company and chaired by former U.S. Secretary of Education Richard Riley, **The Council for Corporate & School Partnerships** has created this guide to help those in the education and business community build and strengthen relationships that enhance the implementation of school Health and Wellness Policies.

various perspectives and levels of experience. Educators and business representatives must also recognize that their environments are very different places, and that practices that succeed in one setting may have to be adapted for others. To bring about long-term benefits, partnerships must be well-structured and managed, with clearly articulated business, health and academic objectives linked to appropriate and practical methods for evaluation.

This guide is part of a family of foundational resources¹ that The Council for Corporate & School Partnerships has created that helps identify how school-business partnerships can successfully improve the student experience for all children in the PreK-12 system of education in the United States. Through this new guide, the Council is striving to support the efforts of education and business leaders working to move beyond creating Health and Wellness Policies that meet the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act, but also to ensure their policies have joint objectives and desired outcomes that can be effectively implemented, measured and evaluated. With its unique focus on tapping into school-business partnerships as an implementation resource, this guide amplifies the available sources provided by the USDA and other groups listed in the appendix at the end of this document.

SIDEBAR: What's required by the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act

Signed into law on June 30, 2004, the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act requires every local educational agency participating in the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act to establish a local school wellness policy. At a minimum, each policy must include:

- Goals for nutrition education, physical activity and other school-based activities to promote student wellness;
- Nutrition guidelines for all foods available at each school to promote student health and reduce childhood obesity;
- An implementation and evaluation plan to ensure that the policy is effectively carried out, with benchmarks that will demonstrate its effectiveness; and,
- Community involvement in the development of the policy, with input from school administrators, parents, students, the school board and the school food authority, along with the general public.

While each school and school district has significant freedom in determining which tactics are most effective for developing these policies, the U.S. Department of Agriculture proposes a thoughtful approach that advises school officials to:

- Review existing state laws and guidelines about education and health, along with your current policies, and compare them to the requirements of the Act. The

¹ Other Council titles helpful in constructing partnerships based on best practice include *A How-to Guide for School-Business Partnerships*, and *Guiding Principles for School Business Partnerships*, both available online at the Council Web site, www.corpschoolpartners.org

USDA notes that in many cases, state and local requirements can be more stringent than federal requirements.

- Identify a policy development team that includes representatives of all the stakeholder groups that the Act requires to be involved in the plan's development – and look for those who have a heartfelt interest in improving nutrition and boosting physical activities as well as a basic understanding of the policy-making process.
- Assess your needs. Take a close look at the current nutrition and physical activity needs of your students and then think through the outcomes you'd like to achieve. This is vital for implementing and evaluating a sound policy.
- Learn from effective models. Schools and school districts around the U.S. are already doing a remarkably effective job in creating and implementing these policies. Look for examples that have been integrated into urban, suburban, rural or other types of environments that are similar to your own and determine which qualities are applicable to your needs and capacity.
- Build awareness and support. Keep all important audiences involved – and re-invest their feedback at every stage.
- Maintain, measure and evaluate the effort – this recommendation is critical for assessing your progress and making improvements as needed.

Following each of the following steps can help schools and businesses work together effectively to develop partnerships that encourage healthy and active lifestyles.

STEP ONE: Develop Your Wish List of Partner Possibilities

Inventory existing programs aimed at Healthy and Active Lifestyles.

As noted in the introduction to this Guide, some schools and school districts may succeed in developing and implementing Health and Wellness Policies that meet or exceed the requirements of the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act using existing resources and staff. Yet many may benefit significantly by building partnerships with business and community groups. Before approaching these partners, it's important to take a close look at the existing programs you currently have in place to support nutrition education and physical activity at your school, or within your school district. Look for and articulate clear indicators of how well these programs are working. Think about how they can be improved to meet the goals you've established. If possible, look for programs that are proving effective at one school and that might be replicated at other schools. This beginning inventory will inform your view of which additional resources may be needed.

Seek business and community partners that fulfill specific needs.

To determine the specific partners that should be approached and considered for your policy, begin by looking at the needs of your school or school district and those of businesses in your community. Are your community and school in need of information or resources to support nutrition education? Do schools need more food and beverage options for breakfast or lunch offerings? Do children and families in your community

need additional options for increasing physical activity in and out of school? There are several types of partnerships that may be created to fill these needs, for example:

- **Business partners that are major employers in your community** have a vested interest in the health and well-being of their employees and families. From health insurance costs, to lost work time due to illness and taking care of sick family members, to on-the-job productivity, leaders at these companies and organizations are well-aware of the direct impact of healthy employees and their own bottom line. For these reasons and more, they may be very open to partnerships with schools that enable them to share information about healthy eating and tips on how to become more physically active. They may provide resources for communications activities – such as schoolwide poster campaigns, student and family health and wellness newsletters. They may have employee wellness programs already in place that can be adapted for students both in and out of school.
- **Hospitals, healthcare organizations and insurance companies** have specific interests in creating healthy communities. They may offer staff and resources for evaluating student health, dieticians who can assist your food service staff in developing healthy and appealing menus, resources for communicating the importance of healthy and active lifestyles, or screenings for diabetes, high blood pressure, and other diseases exacerbated by obesity. In Morgantown, West Virginia, for example, a partnership between **Brookhaven Elementary School** and **Monongalia Health System** enables students to participate in Kidstride, a supervised recess-walking program that emphasizes cardiovascular conditioning. At the beginning and end of the school year, students participate in Monongalia health screenings. Data from the screenings showed that students decreased their blood pressure averages by 2%, with those over their ideal weight decreasing Body Mass Index (BMI)² by 3%.

Sometimes it's preferable for business groups to play a philanthropic role by providing financial resources to offer options that might not otherwise be possible. In Independence, Missouri, for example, funding from the Greater Kansas City Healthcare Foundation has enabled the School District of Independence, Missouri to integrate two well-regarded programs encouraging nutrition education and physical activity into the school day. Through "Nutrition Detectives™," students gain an understanding of the nutrition information on food labels to encourage healthy choices. The intent of Nutrition Detectives is to empower children to make smart food choices by learning 5 simple clues about how to see past the deceptions on food packages and in food advertisements.

² Body Mass Index (BMI) is a relationship between weight and height that is associated with body fat and health risk.

Through “ABCs for Fitness (Activity Bursts in the Classroom)TM,” physical activity is integrated into classroom activities to blend movement with learning. Created by Drs. David and Catherine Katz of the Yale-Griffin Prevention Research Center at the Yale University School of Medicine, both programs are replicable and available for modeling at schools nationwide at www.davidkatzmd.com.

- **Local health clubs and fitness facilities.** These organizations are in the business of fitness, so they may have a business interest in partnering with schools and school districts to share information about healthy and active lifestyles, share staff and resources that enable students to expand their physical activity options both during the school day and through after-school programs, or create wellness activities in which children and adults can participate.

Note: The National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) has an excellent resource for schools seeking additional advice on developing wellness plans in partnership with businesses. Building Business Support for School Health Programs: An Action Guide can be ordered from NASBE through its Web site at www.nasbe.org.

Seek partners that share your perspective.

The best partnerships are driven by respect, collaboration and appreciation for the mutual benefits accruing to each partner. In seeking partnerships with business and community groups, schools should consider factors such as:

- A demonstrated commitment to the school or school district and to the wellness of children, based on previous interactions.
- A willingness to make a long-term commitment to supporting student nutrition and fitness initiatives.
- A clear allocation of staff, training, or other resources to be utilized.
- Offerings that align with accepted school nutrition and physical activity guidelines.

Recognizing that the best partnerships are long-term commitments, business and community groups should engage in relationships with schools that recognize:

- Nutrition, nutrition education and physical activity all play a role in supporting healthy and active student lifestyles.
- Students at elementary, middle and secondary school levels have varying needs in terms of nutrition and physical activity.
- Nutrition and physical activity initiatives and education at school should be reinforced in the home and throughout the community.

Seek non-profit organization partners with specific insight and expertise.

There are numerous organizations that can serve as resources for the development of healthy and active guidelines at the school and district level. The National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE) has developed *Physical Activity for Children: A Statement of Guidelines for Children Ages 5-12*, which outlines specific amounts of time that should be allotted for student physical activity during the school day, as well as definitions and recommendations for optimal types of activities. NASPE has also developed National Standards for Physical Education, which provide information about how to offer high-quality physical education programs your students. These resources are available online at www.aahperd.org/naspe. The PTA offers also several that are especially useful for families at its Web site at www.pta.org/parent_resources.html.

There are also a number of organizations you can turn to for advice in developing initiatives for nutrition education and a policy for foods and beverages served during the school day, including:

The American Dietetic Association, which has developed guidelines at www.eatright.org with input from several leading education organizations, including those focused on physical fitness and nutrition.

The School Nutrition Association, which has Local Wellness Policy Guidelines that are available for review at www.schoolnutrition.org.

Alliance for a Healthier Generation, at www.healthiergeneration.com, a partnership between the American Heart Association and the William Clinton Foundation, which works in partnership with corporations on its Healthy Schools Program.

The President's Challenge Physical Activity and Fitness Awards Program, at www.presidentschallenge.org, offers insight and resources for schools, communities and families, and focuses on encouraging physical activity among people of all ages.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture, which has numerous studies evaluating the nutritional impact of various foods served at public schools, including breakfast and lunch, during both the regular school year and during the summer months, all of which are posted at www.ers.usda.gov/Briefing/Child/Nutrition.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), which have jointly created Dietary Guidelines for Americans, available at www.healthierus.gov/dietaryguidelines.

The National School Boards Association (NSBA), which has numerous resources for creating effective wellness plans at the “Healthy School Environments” link at its Web site at www.nsba.org/schoolhealth.

The American Association of School Administrators, which also offers resources at its Web site at www.aasa.org.

The Healthy States initiative, created by the Council of State Governments (CSG) and partner organizations, with funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), which has created numerous publications with recommended guidelines and best practices for nutrition and physical activity, including a Childhood Obesity Toolkit, available at www.healthystates.csg.org/Publications.

Align business and community partner resources with your policy and goals.

Some of the resources listed above may be useful but many not fit completely with the policy or the goals you have developed. Think about which options can be modified to meet your goals for nutrition education, promoting the availability of desired foods and beverages and facilitating progress toward your goals for physical activity. Consider eliminating existing programs that are no longer effective, or that don't support your policy.

Create or adapt new programs aligned to your school culture.

If you conclude that your current programs for nutrition education and physical activity aren't going to be sufficient for meeting your goals, work collaboratively with partners to investigate new programs that can be integrated into your school culture. When selecting programs, consider how well they align with your school culture. Initiatives that yielded strong results in a suburban school district may need significant modification in order to work well in an urban or rural environment. Programs that you adopt may also need to be revised to meet cultural and demographic needs based on the students and families served by your school.

SIDEBAR: FIVE MYTHS AND TRUTHS ABOUT SCHOOLS, COMMUNITIES AND HEALTHY AND ACTIVE LIFESTYLES

MYTH: Given the pressure to raise achievement in core academic standards and meet the rigorous demands of the No Child Left Behind Act, schools have no choice but to cut back on recess and physical education activities.

TRUTH: Numerous research studies have shown a direct link between physical activity and academic achievement, as measured by students' increased ability to concentrate and improvements in reading, writing and mathematics test scores. For this reason, opportunities for physical activity should not be viewed as an "add-on" to the school day, but rather as an integral component to ongoing teaching and learning.

MYTH: The requirements of the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act place an undue burden on schools already struggling to raise achievement and meet stringent accountability requirements.

TRUTH: Schools that comply with the law are taking a critical step in meeting the academic, social and physical needs of students. The law's requirements also provide a template for addressing each of the vital factors that contribute to healthy, active lifestyles.

MYTH: Students' dietary habits and food choices at school are a major cause of the youth obesity epidemic.

TRUTH: Nutrition and physical activity in the school environment are not the only factors in the health and wellness of young people. Messages about the importance of nutrition and physical activity must be reinforced at home and throughout the community, and young people must learn to make balanced food choices and engage in regular physical activity outside of school to achieve healthy, active lifestyles.

MYTH: Many schools do not have the resources, staff or space to provide physical activity opportunities for students.

TRUTH: Resources for physical activity and nutrition education should not be limited by what's available in the school budget alone. Partnerships with local businesses, health and medical facilities and community organizations can make a tremendous difference in resource-constrained settings and can significantly expand what schools have to offer.

MYTH: Expanding physical education requirements and changing what is offered on cafeteria menus are what is needed to effectively combat today's obesity epidemic among youth.

TRUTH: Bringing about lasting improvements usually means changing more than just a few elements of the school environment, and it's important to remember that the

problem won't be solved by schools alone. Real solutions for the childhood obesity epidemic are dependent on integration across the entire school environment. Teachers and students need to understand that better nutrition and a commitment to adequate physical activity can lead to better grades, improved behavior and better attendance. What students know about the benefits of a healthy active lifestyle has the potential to impact the choices they make as adults.

STEP TWO: Work together to define measurable objectives

Identify measures of success.

If you've tapped into the numerous resources and "how-to" information on the USDA Web site devoted to the development of Health and Wellness Policies, you should be aware of the emphasis on articulating tangible objectives for what each policy should achieve. Yet in practice, many policies remain vague, based on broad language without measurable goals. Working in partnership with the business and community organizations that agree to support your efforts, you can collaborate to develop specific metrics for what you would like your policy to achieve.

In doing so, consider employing the S.M.A.R.T. approach, which encourages a focus on articulating outcomes that are:

- **Specific,**
- **Measurable,**
- **Actionable,**
- **Realistic,** and
- **Timebound.**

Creating a plan that is **Specific** and **Measurable** means using factors such as numerical goals, such as "a 50% increase in students participating in after-school recreational activities," or tangible communications goals, such as "nutrition information will be posted in the cafeteria for each category of school lunch offerings." It may also mean articulating a precise policy change, such as "District health curriculum standards will be revised to include specific guidelines for physical activity and nutrition," with a quantifiable target to demonstrate impact and a **Timebound** date, such as "the new curriculum standards will be followed by 100% of district middle schools beginning with the 2008–2009 school year."

Creating a plan that is **Actionable** and **Realistic** means articulating objectives that are within the power of your school or school district and your business partners' power to achieve. For example, objectives for participation in physical activity programs may be influenced by the availability of space for these activities, the availability of funds to support facilities, equipment and staffing, and access to initiatives that can be integrated into the school day. Objectives for improving fitness should be informed by the likelihood of access to physical activity programs and education that can impact the population. In setting these objectives, you should strive to raise the bar on expectations while accounting for what is truly possible. And keep in mind that success may increase

with time. You may have one set of **Specific, Measurable, Actionable and Realistic** goals for the next six months, with more ambitious goals for one, two or three years from now.

Here are some guiding principles informed by research to consider in setting your goals:

Link healthy and active lifestyles to the cognitive, social and physical development and well-being of students.

Whenever possible, you should connect and align your health and wellness objectives to the overall cognitive, social and physical development of students – and clearly articulate the connection in your policy. This is vital, for while most people are familiar with data that establish the link between healthy lifestyles and academic achievement, it's important to continue reinforcing this message through communication and action. As noted by the National PTA on its *Fact Sheet: The Need for Physical Education and Physical Activity in Our Schools*, numerous respected studies have shown that increasing physical activity among students can lead to improved overall academic achievement as measured by students' increased ability to concentrate and gains in reading, writing and mathematics test scores. ⁽¹⁾⁽²⁾⁽³⁾ Studies also show that healthy and active students have better attendance records and a better overall attitude toward school. ⁽⁴⁾

Identify how your policy will be examined to ensure continuous comprehensive improvement.

You also need to think about how to evaluate the effectiveness of your policy components on an ongoing basis. How will you actively and continuously monitor policy implementation? Aspects of policy that work on paper may not translate effectively to practice – how will you identify these policy-to-practice gaps in a timely manner? What benchmarks might you establish to measure implementation progress? Examples might include regular status meetings or a management routine involving members of the Local Wellness Committee, timely reports that detail progress, and opportunities for ongoing public comment on the policy through the school or school district Web site.

⁽¹⁾ Shephard, R.J., Volle, M. Lavalee, M. LaBarre, R., Jequier, J.C., Rajic, M. *Required physical activity and academic grades: a controlled longitudinal study*. Children and Sport. Limarinen and Valimaki, editors.

⁽²⁾ Shephard, R.J. *Curricular physical activity and academic performance*. Pediatric Exercise Science 1997; 9: 113-126.

⁽³⁾ Symons, C.W., Cinelli, B., James, T.C. Groff, P. *Bridging student health risks and academic achievement through comprehensive school health programs*. Journal of School Health 1997; 67(6): 220-227.

⁽⁴⁾ National Association for Sport and Physical Education/Council of Physical Education for Children.

Create opportunities to keep families and communities involved in the implementation and evaluation of the policy.

While nutrition and physical activity during the school day can play a major role in both physical outcomes and in students' engagement in healthy and active lifestyle, they are only one element of the equation. The most effective school wellness policies will be those that effectively engage families and communities in building awareness of the importance of good nutrition and regular physical activity.

For this reason, families, caregivers and community leaders should have an ongoing role in ensuring that health and wellness policy is effectively implemented, actively monitored and consistently evaluated for effectiveness.

Create a strategic communications plan.

You should also focus on communicating news about your implementation plan to families, educators and community leaders. You can do this through communications vehicles such as Web sites, newsletters, listservs and collaboration with local media outlets, such as your community newspaper. This will help you build widespread support for your efforts – and it may attract additional partners as well.

Examples:

At Sedalia Park Elementary School in Los Angeles, CA for example, food service manager JoAnne Kilby developed an afterschool Fitness and Nutrition Club with direct involvement from volunteer parents and the PTA, which used schoolwide promotions to communicate messages about healthy eating, exercise, snacking and school meals. Sedalia was able to articulate a measurable benefit of the effort by encouraging more than 250 students to sign a pledge to eat healthier foods and become more physically active. Participation in the school's lunch program increased from 76 to 90%.

In Michigan, the Michigan State University Extension and the State of Michigan Department of Education created a Team Nutrition initiative that featured myriad creative approaches for educating students about nutrition and physical activity – including healthy food-related activities that involved parents. The program also featured nutrition-focused “food parties” attended by both students and their parents.

At Tarawa Terrace Elementary School in Tarawa, North Carolina, another Team Nutrition initiative was a Mini-Chef contest that required students to create a healthy recipe at home and bring it to school in order to enter the contest.

Articulate desired outcomes.

What evidence are you gathering to show progress toward achieving your goals? Where do you start? The best approach is to set clear benchmarks to demonstrate progress. Ideally, these benchmarks would be timed to points in the school year calendar and based on a short-, medium- and long-term timeline. Examples of clear, measurable benchmarks might include:

- A target for the percentage of students participating in after-school fitness initiatives.
- A target for classroom lessons or activities that involve physical activity and awareness that complement P.E. (eg: science lessons that focus on how calories are burned, or classroom or lab projects that incorporate physical activity into lessons about heart and pulse rates)
- A target for the percentage of students successfully completing homework or class projects that require them to demonstrate knowledge of healthy, active lifestyles.
- A target for the percentage of families actively participating in an initiative that links best practices for nutrition and physical activity at school to those at home.
- A targeted number of schools within a district that have implemented physical and health education programs consistent with national or local physical education standards, or those established by respected organizations, such as the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE).
- A target number for the sales of foods with important nutritional value, such as fresh fruits and salads.

Identify internal and external strengths and challenges

If your plan is ambitious and focused on tangible results, you'll need to carefully consider how to optimize or overcome the strengths and challenges to its success. You should begin by taking stock of your current situation. Strengths might include:

- A well-informed Local Wellness Committee with highly engaged administrators, business leaders, parents, school board members and others. If these individuals are readily accessible and if they have significant subject matter expertise, they should be viewed as ongoing resources who can update your policy to take advantage of emerging opportunities.
- An active PTA or other parent resource group, that can enhance your communications with parents and keep them engaged.

- Partnerships with businesses that aim to develop or strengthen nutrition education and/or physical activity programs that can be well-integrated into the student experience.
- An on-site staff dietician or other staff who have special nutrition expertise, who can continue to develop your school nutrition programs to respond to student needs while meeting your designated nutrition objectives. Your policy should already have an advanced and balanced plan for appropriate food vendors and choices.
- Well-established physical and health education programs, with qualified teachers, ample facilities, and time for implementation.

Examples of potential challenges you could face include:

- Significant turnover among those who were instrumental in the development of your policy. This would hinder your ability to take advantage of new opportunities for implementation. It would also hinder your ability to monitor the success of the policy.
- Low involvement among parents and community leaders in school affairs. While schools may be the focal point for education about healthy and active lifestyles, they are only one factor in achieving goals. Students must find the messages heard at school reinforced at home and in their communities.
- A business or community partner with a limited ability to support your efforts on a long-term basis.
- Insufficient resources for nutrition education and physical activity. Schools in lower-income communities may face significant challenges in finding the space and time and personnel to support physical education and physical activity. Business partners may be especially useful in addressing this challenge.

STEP THREE: Ensure appropriate infrastructure is in place

Once you've determined the activities that will be implemented in your policy and developed an array of partnerships and initiatives to strengthen your capacity to execute them, you need to take an equally close look at how your programs will be managed, monitored and evaluated on an ongoing basis. Here are some steps to consider:

Create a management and evaluation structure

While many schools may turn to well-qualified and highly engaged Local Wellness Committees for the development and implementation of their wellness policies, it's important to remember that the creation of the policy is only the beginning. These

individuals and others should be involved in the ongoing planning, implementation and evaluation, and should have numerous opportunities to refine and update the policies as part of a continuous comprehensive improvement strategy.

For this reason, it's a good idea to establish a formal management structure for policy implementation and evaluation. The evaluation process should include opportunities for input from both the core management team and other audiences, such as parents and business and community partners. The process should also involve ongoing review and review timed to major points in the school calendar, such as the beginning, middle and end of the school year. If these reviews demonstrate that activities of the policy aren't succeeding you can – and should – make adjustments as soon as possible, and plan for additional review to ensure they're leading to improvements.

Secure support and concurrence

You should also create a mechanism for ongoing commentary on your programs by students, faculty, staff and parents. These audiences should be able to easily access the plan and offer suggestions for improvement on an ongoing basis.

Create a communication plan

You should also have a detailed communication plan for your policy implementation to ensure awareness and evaluation opportunities among both internal and external audiences. Regular interaction with local news media outlets is important, as is communication directly to parents, students and partner organizations. Technology may be the best venue for making this happen, with tools such as Web links from your school or school district site, listservs, blogs and electronic newsletters.

One excellent resource for developing the communications objectives for your health and wellness programs can be found at the Team Nutrition section of the USDA Web site, located at www.Teamnutrition.usda.gov. Just click on "Resources for Educators," then go to "Getting the Message Out: A Media Guide for Team Nutrition." This guide will provide expert advice on interacting with print, broadcast and online media to build and maintain support for your policy.

Establish a process for incorporating feedback

Suggested changes to your policy should be carefully vetted by a designated group of individuals with the expertise to evaluate and reassess them effectively. You should also have a process for reviewing and evaluating feedback, and resolving differences in views. Setting times for regular, collective review of feedback may be especially useful. And all recommended changes should be evaluated for their long-term impact on the policy, programs and designated goals.

SIDEBAR – HOW CAN PARENTS AND COMMUNITY LEADERS BENEFIT FROM THIS GUIDE?

Parents and guardians are a driving force in school improvement, and educators agree that parental involvement is critical to the success of students and schools. This is a key reason that most committees created by schools and school districts to develop and implement wellness policies include parents. In most cases, these individuals are actively involved in creating policies, harnessing community resources and supporting overall efforts to improve physical activity options and encourage healthy eating. Parents and community leaders can both view this guide as a resource for developing relationships with business partners that have a vested interest in the health and well-being of students. They can bring the guide to the attention of school leaders and representatives of businesses in their communities and can consider its recommendations for developing plans that are mutually supportive to both schools and the local business community.

APPENDIX:

SELF-ASSESSMENT: MEASUREMENT AND EVALUATION TACTICS

There are many resources available for helping you assess your current capability to meet the objectives of your wellness policy, and some of the best are located on the USDA's Web site devoted to Local Wellness Policies, at www.fns.usda.gov. At this site you can access:

Changing the Scene Improvement Checklist, a simple guide, created by the USDA's Team Nutrition initiative, for helping you assess your school and/or district's current capabilities and determine how to expand your capacity to fulfill the objectives of your policy.

School Health Index: A Self-Assessment and Planning Guide, which was created by the CDC as a tool for helping schools identify strengths and weaknesses of nutrition and physical activity policies and develop action plans for improvement.

Keys to Excellence: Standard of Practice for Nutrition Integrity, a guide published by the School Nutrition Association (SNA) that identifies the elements of a high quality school nutrition program, and offers forms for evaluation and tracking of your progress.

It's Time for Your School's Physical Education Check-Up, a checklist of benchmarks for measuring and evaluating your physical activity offerings, created by the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE).

The CDC has a Self-Assessment and Planning Guide that offers a school health index, <http://apps.nccd.cdc.gov/shi/default.aspx>

Key Resources

- The USDA site: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/Healthy/wellnesspolicy.html> offers numerous resources on how to create, design and evaluate Health and Wellness policies.
- The National PTA has a partnership with GlaxoSmithKline, which offers numerous resources to help families and school work together to encourage healthy eating and active lifestyles.
- The School Nutrition Association at www.schoolnutrition.org offers an "Analysis of Local Wellness Policies from the 100 largest school districts" (link) and companion report, along with FAQs and resources at its "Hot Topics" link.
- The Food Research and Action Institute has helpful material on address the needs of student subgroups such as low-income students at www.frac.org.

MODEL CASE STUDY:

Based on a review of publicly available data, little formal documentation exists that records the preliminary steps involved in forming a school-business partnership focused on advancing school Health and Wellness policy goals. Working from available best practice and from informal interviews with health and wellness experts, the following model case study is an example of the steps involved in creating a school wellness plan in partnership with the business community. The examples referenced, while informed by research and interviews, are fictional – their purpose is to illustrate how the principles of this guide could be applied to developing a potential partnership.

School Partner:

Franklin County Public Schools, a school system with six secondary, five middle and five elementary schools.

Business Partners:

HarborHealth is a healthcare organization and community-based network of seven hospitals serving the residents of several counties, including Franklin. It employs 23,000 local residents and serves half a million patients each year. The organization has a strong interest in preventive medicine and in supporting healthy lifestyles.

TechExpress is a technology company that designs and manufactures a variety of computer products and systems, with significant Research and Development laboratory and production facility located in Franklin County. TechExpress employs 5,000 local residents and aims to expand its facilities through robust workforce development initiatives. TechExpress also has a strong interest in healthy employees and healthy families of employees, and a desire to raise visibility for its efforts to support the local community.

Phase One: Background/Founding of Partnership:

In response to both the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act and ongoing concerns about the rising childhood obesity levels in this largely suburban community, the Franklin County Schools Superintendent formed a Healthy and Active Lifestyles Task Force and asked the group to develop a 10-year plan for integrating health education and physical activity into in-school and after-school activities.

The task force included school nurses, physical education teachers and coaches, teachers of core subjects, such as mathematics and English, school district communications staff, school food service directors and the Superintendent's chief of staff, as well as a group of parent PTA representatives.

After a careful review of the requirements of the law, the task force completed a **comprehensive needs assessment** for its students and families and conducted a **peer**

review of other plans in place in school districts with similar demographics and needs. The needs assessment included factors such as:

- student health data (note: wellness-related criteria vary by state. Some examples include annual height and weight screening, BMI information, cardiovascular assessment and monitoring and a review of absentee rates by physicians and epidemiologists.)
- current curricular requirements and offerings for physical education by grade
- extracurricular physical activity options
- current school breakfast and lunch offerings

With these data in hand, the task force viewed **recommendations from respected organizations at the forefront of the effort to support healthy and active lifestyles** among students to determine optimal physical activity and nutritional offerings. These organizations included:

- The National Association for Sport and Physical Education: www.aahperd.org/naspe.
- The CDC's Self-Assessment and Planning Guide, which offers a school health index, at <http://apps.nccd.cdc.gov/shi/default.aspx>
- The CDC's Physical Education Curriculum Analysis Tool (PE-CAT), available at www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/index.
- The School Nutrition Association: www.schoolnutrition.org
- The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA): www.healthierus.gov/dietaryguidelines.
- The Council of State Governments Healthy States Initiative: www.healthystates.csg.org/publications
- Alliance for a Healthier Generation: www.healthiergeneration.com.

In its **peer review** activity, the task force also viewed an analysis of programs and activities put in place by other school districts with similar demographics, available at the School Nutrition Association's Web site at www.schoolnutrition.org.

The task force then developed a series of goals for its 10-year plan. With these goals in mind, the group considered the findings of the needs assessment, the recommendations of respected organizations and its peer review to determine the gaps in physical activity and nutrition options that needed to be filled in order to achieve the goals.

Phase Two: Interaction with Potential Business Partners

While there are many components of Wellness Plans – such as nutrition guidelines for available foods – that are largely up to the school or school system to manage, the task force determined that its plan could benefit from support of business partners. The task force therefore conducted a review of local businesses that could offer:

- significant resources in terms of education initiatives, volunteers and additional insight to enhance the wellness policy
- a demonstrated interest in the health and well-being of local residents and a demonstrated commitment to education

Based on these criteria, the group identified HarborHealth as a partner with the potential to enhance nutrition education and physical activity offerings, and TechExpress as a large local employer with a demonstrated interest in community health and in the educational achievement of local students.

Following outreach by communications staff, the task force and designated representatives of HarborHealth and TechExpress held a series of discussions to determine areas of mutual interest and alignment. Once the business partners agreed to play a role in the development and implementation policy, the task force arranged for a half-day planning meeting that reviewed:

- the needs assessment, peer review, and recommendations from organizations
- a listing of current programs and initiatives underway by the school district
- initial goals for the wellness policy, with 1-year, 2-year, 5-year and 10-year benchmarks

The business partners then presented a list of resources that could be offered in support of the wellness plan. The task force and business partners then worked together to develop a draft of the wellness plan that included activities such as:

- A statement of principles for physical activity and nutrition offerings for students at each level of the PreK-12 continuum, tied to the wellness plan.
- A series of weekend health and wellness clinics developed and staffed by school officials, students and employees of HarborHealth and TechExpress, which focus on healthy eating and engaged attendees in physical activities that could be replicated at school and after-school.
- Parent/Guardian resource kits, a DVD, Web site and a series of community forums held in partnership with the PTA to spotlight the importance of healthy lifestyles and physical activity, as well as the physical activity options offered by the schools.
- A multi-media in-school public education campaign that features posters, school-wide announcements, contests and other activities to change student behaviors and attitudes.
- A corps of local employees of HarborHealth and TechExpress who make in-school presentations to promote and exhibit the desired behaviors and who serve as volunteers for extracurricular fitness activities.
- A Nutrition Guide for current and potential vendors to the school system's food service offerings, for both breakfast and lunch and for on-campus vending machines.

- A year-long series of speakers from HarborHealth and TechExpress who visit schools, participate in classroom lessons and activities and make presentations to students at every level focusing on the importance of healthy lifestyles.
- A partnership with the local Boys & Girls Club, the YMCA and local civic associations for a summer day camp emphasizing physical activity and balanced food choices, staffed with support from HarborHealth and TechExpress volunteers.
- An annual Health and Wellness Report Card created by HarborHealth and TechExpress with support from the school system, which reports on the year's activities and indicators of progress. This report card was a key component of the strategic communications strategy, and was distributed to families, educators, HarborHealth and TechExpress employees and local business and community leaders.

Phase Three: Self-Assessment and Measurement of Plan

Prior to implementing its plan, the task force conducted a careful review based on insight from resources listed in this guide, including:

Changing the Scene Improvement Checklist, from the USDA's Team Nutrition.

School Health Index: A Self-Assessment and Planning Guide, from the CDC which was created by the CDC as a tool for helping schools identify strengths and weaknesses of nutrition and physical activity policies and develop action plans for improvement.

Keys to Excellence: Standard of Practice for Nutrition Integrity, a guide published by the School Nutrition Association (SNA) that identifies the elements of a high quality school nutrition program, and offers forms for evaluation and tracking of your progress.

It's Time for Your School's Physical Education Check-Up, a checklist of benchmarks for measuring and evaluating your physical activity offerings, created by the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE).

Phase Four: Implementation

The plan was implemented, monitored and evaluated with criteria mutually agreed upon by the business and school partners. At the end of the first semester the plan was revised, with some activities added and some dropped based on their effectiveness in engaging students and achieving results. The plan was revisited at the end of the school year, and revised over the summer based on the ongoing criteria.

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