



## Strengthen Local School Wellness Policies 2009 Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization

Schools are a unique environment, where children spend many of their waking hours and eat 30-50% of their calories on school days. That environment needs to be safe and healthy. In addition, physical education and health education have long been fundamental components of the American educational experience, and research shows that well-designed, well-implemented school programs can effectively promote physical activity and healthy eating.

In the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004, Congress established the local school wellness policies. These ensure that school districts determine how they can best foster an environment that supports healthy eating and physical activity. By the start of the 2006 school year, each district was required to develop policies that include:<sup>1</sup>

- **goals** for nutrition education, physical activity and other school-based wellness activities;
- **nutrition guidelines** for all foods available on school campus;
- a plan for **measuring implementation** of the local wellness policy; and
- **community involvement**, including parents, students, school food-service, the school board, school administrators, and the public in the development of the school wellness policy.



### **Local Wellness Policies Fall Short on Community Engagement, Implementation, Evaluation, Nutrition, and Physical Activity**

As a result of local school wellness policies, many schools now have policies for foods sold on campus, physical activity, and nutrition education.<sup>2</sup> However, a recent study found that, while 68% of districts' policies met the minimum federal requirements, policies remain fragmented, underdeveloped, and lack sufficient plans for assessing implementation.<sup>3</sup>

**Community Engagement:** Evidence suggests that parents, including those in underserved communities, are interested in serving as wellness advocates, but they are not adequately informed about how to get involved. Well over 60% of school nutrition and health professionals, physical education teachers, other teachers, community health professionals, and parents feel that they are not sufficiently engaged by schools in the development of the wellness policies.<sup>2</sup>

**Implementation and Evaluation:** Only half of school food-service professionals believe school districts implement their wellness policies. Less than one-third believe schools are effectively monitoring implementation and evaluating results.<sup>2</sup> A national survey of school district policies found that only: 2% address funding for policy evaluation; 21% address the development of an implementation plan; and 32% address a process for updating and revising local wellness policies.<sup>3</sup>

**Nutrition:** Only about half of school food service professionals believe wellness policies effectively encourage proper nutrition. Almost 50% of school districts *recommend* standards for foods available outside of meals (vending machines, a la carte, and school stores) but only 40% *require* standards. Almost half of the standards are general in nature and are not detailed or specific.<sup>4</sup>

**Physical Education:** 95% of parents believe physical education (PE) should be included in the school curriculum<sup>5</sup>, and 92% of teenagers say that they should receive daily PE.<sup>6</sup> Yet, there is no requirement to address PE in local wellness policies. Only 35% of physical education teachers surveyed believe schools have effective wellness policies to encourage daily physical activity.<sup>3</sup>



### Recommendations for Strengthening Local Wellness Policies

The existing gaps in current local wellness policies need to be addressed through the Child Nutrition and WIC reauthorization. They need to be strengthened through:

- **Transparency:** Require schools to notify and make easily accessible their wellness policies and their implementation and assessment plans to parents, school staff, and state officials.
- **Oversight:** Create a standing district committee to lead development, notification, implementation, and assessment of school wellness policies.
- **Physical Education and Food Marketing:** Expand wellness policies to address these areas.
- **Clearinghouse:** Provide \$5 million over five years to USDA in mandatory funding to create a clearinghouse of wellness policy resources.
- **Grant Assistance:** Assist school districts in implementing, assessing, and enhancing their local wellness policies through Team Nutrition Network grants.

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<sup>1</sup>Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004, section 204, 42 U.S.C. 1751 (2004) Assessed at <[http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/healthy/wellness\\_policyrequirements.html](http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/healthy/wellness_policyrequirements.html)> on December 22, 2008.

<sup>2</sup>Action for Health Kids (AFHK). *Progress or Promises? What's Working for and against Healthy Schools*. Skokie, IL: AFHK, 2008. Accessed at <<http://www.actionforhealthykids.org/pdf/Progress%20or%20Promises.pdf>> on December 22, 2008.

<sup>3</sup>Moag-Stahlberg A, Howley N, & Luscri L. "A National Snapshot of Local School Wellness Policies." *Journal of School Health* 2008, vol. 78, pp. 562-8.

<sup>4</sup>School Nutrition Association (SNA), School Nutrition Foundation. *From Cupcakes to Carrots: Local Wellness Policies One Year Later*. Alexandria, VA: SNA, September 2007. Assessed at <<http://napnap.org/Docs/From%20Cupcakes%20to%20Carrots.pdf>> on January 22, 2009.

<sup>5</sup>National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE). *Parents' Views of Children's Health & Fitness: A Summary of Results*. Reston, VA: NASPE, 2003.

<sup>6</sup>Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF). National Poll Shows Parents and Teachers Agree on Solutions to Childhood Obesity [News release]. Princeton, NJ: RWJF, 2003. Accessed at <<http://www.rwjf.org/childhoodobesity/product.jsp?id=21648>> on December 23, 2008.