



National Alliance for Nutrition & Activity

Create a State Plan to Support Healthy School Nutrition Environments

States and communities aspire to provide nutritious meals and snacks to the children they serve at school, but face some barriers to doing so. With childhood obesity a significant public health concern and federal, state, and local policy changes emerging to address it, improving school foods has become a key focal point of change.

One promising strategy is for states to develop and implement school nutrition plans. State plans can lay out a framework to create and support healthy school nutrition environments. A plan provides a mechanism to synthesize and comply with federal requirements, state standards, or local wellness and other school policies. For example, the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 (HHFKA), a recent overhaul of the federal school food programs, includes a number of new resources and requirements for improving school foods. A state school nutrition plan can help identify gaps and take advantage of opportunities to make school food more nutritious for children and youth. Tribes may also be interested in developing plans for schools in Indian country.

Why Advocate for a State School Nutrition Plan?

A state plan can help to:

- Ensure children have healthy food options at school, where children get a third to a half of their daily calories.
- Teach children healthy habits that can last a lifetime.
- Support implementation of school meal and snack standards and local wellness policies.
- Identify and fill gaps in federal, state, and local policies and standards.
- Engage parents, health professionals, and others in the community in supporting school efforts to improve nutrition.
- Identify schools and districts that need additional technical assistance and support.
- Identify success stories and best practices so that schools/districts can replicate them.
- Improve accountability and oversight for implementation of standards.



Who Implements the Plan?

Each state has a child nutrition agency responsible for school food that provides technical assistance to schools to implement standards, monitors compliance, and certifies that schools meet the standards in order to qualify for additional federal reimbursement. The agency is generally within the department of education, except in New Jersey and Texas, where it is in the department of agriculture.

How to Get a State School Nutrition Plan:

- Meet with your state child nutrition agency to learn about their efforts to support healthy nutrition environments in schools.
- Urge your state board of education to request a plan or report.
- Ask your governor to issue an executive order for a state plan or to direct the state child nutrition program to convene an implementation committee.
- Work with the state legislature to:
 - ✓ Enact legislation requiring a state plan;
 - ✓ Hold an oversight hearing on school foods and how the state intends to ensure healthy foods in all schools; or
 - ✓ Pass a resolution encouraging the state child nutrition program to develop a plan.

Issues

Key issues to address in state implementation plans include:

- School meal standards
- Standards for foods outside of meals (e.g., vending, a la carte, school stores)
- School food financing provisions, such as how the state agency is supporting schools to qualify for additional lunch reimbursements and how to charge fair prices for paid meals and a la carte items
- Local wellness policies
- Training and technical assistance
- USDA Foods (commodities)
- Participation in the National Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program
- Access to drinking water
- Accountability and compliance reviews
- Professional standards for food service
- Reporting on school food quality, local wellness policies, and other aspects of the school nutrition environment to parents and other interested community members
- Nutrition education
- Purchasing and procurement practices
- Incorporating food service into school improvement plans
- Giving children enough time to eat and holding recess before lunch (for younger children)
- Monitoring and evaluation of the state plan.



For more information, please contact Meghan Maroney at the Center for Science in the Public Interest at mmaroney@cspinet.org