



School Wellness: A New Opportunity for Parents

Parents, take note:
The new law requires schools to include parents (as well as students, food service staff, the school board and administrators) in developing a wellness policy—so this is a unique opportunity for you to get involved.

The News

During the 2005–2006 school year, your local education agency will be working on plans to make your school a healthier place for your child. A new federal law, the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization of 2004, requires local education agencies that have a federally funded school meals program to look at what steps they can take to improve physical activity and nutrition in schools. Under this new law, local education agencies must establish wellness policies before the 2006–2007 school year.

What Should Be Included in a Wellness Policy?

Your local education agency's wellness policy should include

- Nutrition education goals
- Physical activity goals
- Nutrition guidelines for all foods available on school campuses
- Ways for parents, students, school administrators, the school board, and the school food authority, as well as the general public, to get involved in developing the wellness policy
- Other school-based activities designed to promote student wellness
- Plans for evaluating the school wellness policy

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What Can Parents Do?

Do a Status Check. Make sure you know how healthy your school's environment is and what needs to be improved. Visit the school, talk to the principal, and work with your PTA, school administrators and food service directors to find out:

- What are kids eating when they're at school?
- Is junk food readily available?
- How much time is provided for physical activity?
- What can be done to make your school environment healthier?

Get in the Loop. Find out who will be working on the wellness policy for your local education agency. Is there an existing group that is working to address nutrition and/or physical activity issues? Your school or local education agency may already have a wellness council that is developing a wellness policy. Are they reaching out to parents, as required by law? Is there an opportunity for parents to get involved in the planning process?

Build Support. While policies are being developed at the district level, work with your PTA to develop a wellness committee for your own school. Get parents, teachers, the principal, students, administrators, food service personnel, a dietitian, and the school nurse to work together to find ways to improve school health. Make sure your opinions are heard by those who are in charge of developing your school's wellness policies.

Spread the Word. Many parents may not be aware of the new school wellness requirements. Make sure your friends and neighbors know about this exciting new opportunity to create healthier learning environments for our children.