

Improving children's health:

How school policymakers can make a difference

“Education that does not address health misses the heart of the matter”

– C Everett Koop, Former U.S. Surgeon General



- 1 **Establish a health action council** that includes administrators, school staff, parents, health professionals, and representatives from community organizations to support nutrition and physical activity program goals. Using *Changing the Scene—Improving the School Nutrition Environment* (see *Resources for school policymakers*), health action councils can coordinate:
 - an assessment of the school environment;
 - education of school staff, parents and students;
 - development of a plan for improvement;
 - and policy development for board consideration.
- 2 **Ensure that plans for renovations or new schools provide adequate serving and seating space** for the school meals program.
- 3 **Consider the impact of board decisions on student health**—for example, approval of beverage or vending contracts and physical education waivers.
- 4 **Establish and enforce policies that demonstrate commitment** to children's health. Following are policy options that support a healthy school nutrition environment. Use the assessment to decide which are most important to your district.
 - *Nutrition education is integrated into core subject area* from pre-kindergarten through 12th grade. The focus is on building knowledge and skills needed to positively impact children's food choices.
 - *Physical activity is part of every school day.* Adequate opportunities for activity are provided through a quality daily physical education program, daily recess periods and extracurricular physical activity programs suitable for all ability levels.
 - *A quality school meals program provides menus that meet nutrition standards* and follows age-group recommendations for portion sizes. Providing a variety of healthy choices that appeal to students is a high priority.

School nutrition policy is needed to:

- demonstrate that nutrition is important and that the district is committed to improvement;
- support and validate nutrition education programs and activities;
- provide direction for change, laying out what is important to the district;
- help integrate new programs and processes into ongoing school activities;
- increase public knowledge about the facts and issues; and
- assign accountability.

- *Students have adequate time to eat meals and meals are scheduled at appropriate times—for example, lunch is not served before 11:00 a.m. or after 1:00 p.m.*
- *Food and beverages available on school grounds or at school-sponsored events contribute to a healthy diet, including food and beverage available through a la carte offerings, vending machines and school stores.*
- *Fund-raising by school-sponsored groups supports healthy eating.*
- *Food or physical activity is not used as either a reward or punishment by school staff.*
- *Healthy eating and an active lifestyle are actively promoted to students, school staff and parents.*



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