

Making the Case for School Wellness

Becoming an Effective Wellness Advocate

The first step to being an effective wellness advocate is being able to explain why it's important to address health and wellness in schools. The "why" will get your school community behind you and will build support for everything that comes next. You must sell the "why" before you can get into the "what" or the "how."



What is School Wellness?

School wellness is the belief that schools can and must promote and reinforce healthy eating, physical activity, nutrition education and physical education in order to increase student achievement. School wellness plays a role in every part of the school environment, from the lunchroom to the classroom to the playground to the front office. Parents, school staff and students can all influence school wellness activities, policies and practices.

Coordinated School Health

The coordinated school health (CSH) model is often recognized as the gold standard for school wellness. Recommended by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), this model focuses on the whole child by measuring eight different components of health, including:

- 1) Health Education
- 2) Physical Education
- 3) Health Services
- 4) Nutrition Services
- 5) Counseling, Psychological, and Social Services
- 6) Healthy and Safe School Environment
- 7) Health Promotion for Staff
- 8) Family/Community Involvement

Create a Sense of Urgency

Most people know that the U.S. is suffering from an obesity crisis, but they don't necessarily know how serious it is or how it relates to their personal lives – particularly their school environment. As school wellness advocates, it is our job to make these connections for them.

Why Schools?

Health should be a part of every school because:

- Schools reach most children and adolescents in a community.
- Schools provide opportunities to practice healthy behaviors – kids spend around 900 hours per year in school.
- Teachers, administrators, and school staff are key role models.
- Schools provide institutional approval for many behaviors related to food choices and physical activity.
- School policies, activities, programs, and practices reinforce the behaviors our children are learning.
- State curriculum standards for health usually include nutrition and physical education. Shouldn't our practices and climate reflect those standards rather than conflict with them?

Schools show kids what we value and what is important in our community. In fact, schools often have a much "higher bar" than some families for behavior, conduct, and respect, etc. Why is health any different?



"Because of the increasing rates of obesity, unhealthy eating habits, and physical inactivity, we may see the first generation that will be less healthy and have a shorter life expectancy than their parents."

~ Richard H. Carmona
Former U.S. Surgeon General, 2004



Sharing Data and Statistics

- Use local statistics whenever possible – national health and obesity statistics are fine, but local statistics from your state or school district may have a greater impact.
- Make the connection to academic achievement – let your audience know that increased physical activity and improved nutrition have been shown, in study after study, to increase student achievement.
- Share the facts in a compelling yet sensitive way.
- Stick to the most memorable and striking facts.

Physical Activity Improves School Performance

Study shows children scored a full grade level higher in reading comprehension after physical activity than after a period of rest.

~ UPI, 3/31/09; University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign release, 3/31/09; Hillman et al., Neuroscience, 3/31/09

Making it Personal

Make a link to people’s personal lives. Ask questions - for example: “Do you know anybody who has a chronic disease? Or someone who is always struggling with his or her weight?” Questions like these encourage people to put a face on the information you’re providing, which makes it more meaningful. Encourage them to share their stories if you’re in an appropriate setting and if they’re comfortable doing so.

When talking to school staff, put the issues into a school context.

For example: “How many students visit the nurse’s office or miss school because they are sick? How many kids can’t run around in PE or at recess? How many don’t eat breakfast before school starts?”

Connect your message with daily practices taking place at your school. Is your school sending conflicting messages about health through common school practices? Point out the contrasts to your audience:

- Are our students learning to eat when they are not hungry because they are given food as rewards?
- Are our students given frequent birthday sweets and an excess of holiday treats while being taught about the importance of good nutrition and moderation?
- Do our fundraisers support sports, the arts, and academics – yet promote choices that lead to unhealthy behaviors?
- Are our family events centered around unwholesome foods or active, healthy living?
- Are P.E. and recess shrinking while we stress the importance of physical activity to our student body?
- Do fresh, healthy salads sit side by side with French toast sticks in our lunchroom line?



RESOURCES

- 1 CDC slide series showing the increase in obesity in the U.S. since 1985:
<http://www.cdc.gov/obesity/data/trends.html>
- 2 CDC childhood obesity data:
<http://www.cdc.gov/obesity/childhood/index.html>
- 3 Data Resource Center childhood obesity data:
<http://www.childhealthdata.org/home>
- 4 Action for Healthy Kids report on the connection between health and learning: “The Learning Connection - What You Need to Know to Ensure Your Kids are Healthy and Ready to Learn:”
<http://www.actionforhealthykids.org/thelearningconnection>



“...being overweight or obese has become the leading medical reason recruits are rejected for military service....We consider this problem so serious from a national security perspective that we have joined more than 130 other retired generals, admirals and senior military leaders in calling on Congress to pass new child nutrition legislation.

What children eat and drink during school hours constitutes as much as 40 percent of their daily nutrient intake. Properly managed, the school environment can be instrumental in fostering healthful eating habits among our children.”

From “The Latest National Security Threat: Obesity” by retired U.S. Army Generals John M. Shalikashvili and Hugh Shelton, former Chairmen of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, *The Washington Post* Friday, April 30, 2010



Use Visual Examples

What happens when a student receives just one mint per day? Over the course of the school year, that adds up to over 2 ½ cups of additional sugar and 3,600 extra calories. Bring in a mint and a bag with 2 ½ cups of sugar inside – that will help to drive the point home.

Sharing Best Practices and Success Stories

Let your audience know what’s happening with school wellness policies and practices in your own district and share best practices from other districts so that they can place your proposed initiatives and concerns in the proper context. Use success stories to inspire your community – relevant local success stories may have the most impact. If they know that another school has been successful, it will be easier to get them on board.

Making a Difference

CanDo – the Coalition for Activity and Nutrition to Defeat Obesity – works with schools, worksites, health care settings, and community organizations in northern Colorado to improve community health by increasing physical activity and healthy eating. When establishing new relationships, CanDo’s first step is to “make the case.” CanDo’s “Why School Wellness” presentation (in slideshow and YouTube video format) is a powerful introduction to the topic. It presents local issues related to obesity and community statistics in a very engaging fashion. CanDo works with over 48 school wellness teams. The coalition’s attention to the “why” behind school wellness plays an important role in building community support. Visit CanDo’s website for a link to the video: www.candoonline.org

“After seeing our presentation, people often ask for the PowerPoint so that they can share it with their school communities.”

~ Jessica Hinterberg, CanDo Obesity Prevention Specialist



The Parent Leadership Series

Action for Healthy Kids (AFHK) is the nation’s leading nonprofit and largest volunteer network fighting childhood obesity and undernourishment by working with school communities to improve nutrition and increase physical activity. Parents play a crucial role in creating healthy school cultures. The Parent Leadership Series was developed to provide parents and other community members with tools, knowledge and resources to help kids eat right and move more at school.

Learn more at <http://www.actionforhealthykids.org>.

Note: The websites listed in this document are provided as a service only to identify potentially useful ideas and resources for creating healthier school cultures. Action for Healthy Kids is not responsible for maintaining these external websites, nor does the listing of these sites constitute or imply endorsement of their content.



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