

# School Wellness Council Toolkit

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# School Wellness Council Toolkit

## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	
3	How to Use this Toolkit
4	What is a School Wellness Council (SWC)
4	Frequently Asked Questions on School Wellness Councils
5	Roles and Responsibilities
6	Talking Points for Schools – Why Health?
7	Framework Criteria
<b>Starting Up</b>	
7	Who Should Join Your SWC?
9	Considerations for SWC Members
10	Involving Students
11	Involving Families
12	Talking Points About the Healthy Schools Program
13	Sample Invitation Letter ( <i>customizable Word document invitation</i> )
<b>Plan for Success</b>	
14	Making Decisions
14	How to Keep Your Council Active and Effective
15	Support for Success
16	Matrix for Success
17	Role of Facilitator – Managing Difficult Behavior in Groups
17	Creating Group Norms
18	Communications Strategies
19	SWC Contact Information

## School Wellness Council Toolkit

Meeting Organizer	
20	Meeting Checklist
21	Timeline Example
22	Sample School Wellness Council Meeting Agenda
23	School Wellness Council Meeting Agenda Template

### How to Use this Toolkit

This guide was created as a resource for school wellness councils to convene, plan and implement their action plans. The tools and other tips contained in this Toolkit are meant to coordinate with other Healthy Schools Program resources and technical assistance provided by the Alliance for a Healthier Generation.

If you have questions about forming or maintaining your school wellness council or specific aspects of the Healthy Schools Program Framework related to wellness councils or policy and systems, contact your Program Manager or the National Policy Advisor, [Kathy.Wilbur@HealthierGeneration.org](mailto:Kathy.Wilbur@HealthierGeneration.org).

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## School Wellness Council Toolkit

### What is a School Wellness Council (SWC)?

A school wellness council is essentially an advisory group concerned with the health and wellbeing of students and staff. A council can be formed at the district level or school building level. This group typically has 6-12 members and includes school staff, students, family members, and community members.

#### District versus Building Level Councils

- District Level Wellness Council: Focus is on policy and the common mission of district policies and programs. Able to identify gaps and locate the district and community resources to address them.
- School Level Wellness Council: Focus is on the needs of students and staff in a specific school building. Able to implement programs and activities to meet these needs.

The school wellness council (SWC) acts collectively to lead, coordinate, and implement all aspects of the Healthy Schools Program.

### Frequently Asked Questions

#### Why do we need a school wellness council?

The school wellness council provides a way to inform teachers, staff, students and families about the work the school is doing to improve the health and academic success of its students. The school wellness council is also a way to ensure that district level wellness policies are implemented at the building level. In addition, these councils represent the unique perspective of the community in a school building. This enables the health priorities and activities put in place to truly reflect the needs and interests of that school.

#### What do school wellness councils do?

School wellness councils typically assess the school health environment, programs and policies in place and identify ways to strengthen these to improve the health of students and staff. Usually councils will develop and implement an action plan based on what they learn about the school. Some school wellness councils also provide advice and expertise to administrators in the building and provide feedback to the district regarding implementation of health-related wellness policies and programs.

#### Can we use our district level health council instead?

The district level council is key to many of the health policies and standards that the district develops and implements. It is important to have a school wellness council that can focus on implementation of district policies and translating policy into practice that is relevant to students and staff in the school building.

Utilizing a structure that includes school wellness council members serving as liaisons to the district level wellness council will provide information and feedback on how or if policies are being implemented in all of the schools.

#### Who should be on the school wellness council?

Most schools include a child nutrition/food service staff person, a physical education teacher, a health education and/or classroom teacher, a building administrator, a community parks and recreation representative or parent organization representative and others who are committed and interested in making the school environment healthier for students and staff. In addition, the council can include a parent or family member, students and other school staff or community members with an interest or expertise in healthy eating and physical activity.

#### What if we already have a school level group that meets to address student health?

The Healthy Schools Program has been designed to reduce duplication of efforts and assist with coordination. If the school already has a group that meets to address student and staff health including

## School Wellness Council Toolkit

healthy eating and physical activity, this group can also take on the role of guiding the implementation of the Healthy Schools Program Framework.

### **Who decides what the school wellness council will work on?**

Through the six step process included in the Healthy Schools Program, the council will determine needs and interests of students and school staff. The Framework Criteria that is the foundation of the Healthy Schools Program provides best practice guidance on what types of actions and programs can be implemented to make healthy eating and physical activity accessible and enjoyable.

### **What are the Roles and Responsibilities of a School Wellness Council?**

The school wellness council is an action-oriented group that makes the implementation of the district wellness policy and other health-related priorities possible.

#### **The SWC will:**

- Support the school in developing a healthier school environment
- Create the vision and goals for the local Healthy Schools Program
- Assist with policy development or revision to support a healthy school environment
- Promote parent, community, and professional involvement in developing a healthier school environment
- Advocate for school health programs and policies within the broader school community
- Tap into funding and leverage resources for student and staff wellness
- Plan and implement programs for students and staff
- Evaluate program and policy efforts
- Provide feedback to the district regarding progress on the implementation of the local wellness policy

## School Wellness Council Toolkit

### Talking Points for Schools

#### Why Focus on Health?

##### Did you know...?

- More than 1 in 3 youth are overweight or obese
- 17% (12.5 million) of the nation's children and adolescents are obese, according to the most recent data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- Childhood obesity has more than tripled in the past 30 years
- 79% of children ages 7 to 12 have a diet that needs improvement
- The percentage of children aged 6–11 years in the United States who were obese increased from 7% in 1980 to nearly 20% in 2008. Similarly, the percentage of adolescents aged 12–19 years who were obese increased from 5% to 18% over the same period.
- If trends continue, many experts believe that today's kids may be the first generation in American history to live shorter lives than their parents
- Collectively, over 20% of the United States population can be found in the school community
- Because of the size and accessibility of the school community, schools play a particularly critical role by establishing a safe and supportive environment with policies and practices that support healthy behaviors
- Schools provide opportunities for students to learn about and practice healthy eating and physical activity behaviors
- Poor nutrition and lack of physical activity are linked with health problems and increased school absences
- The American Medical Association recognizes obesity as a disease

##### Benefits of a Healthier School:

- Studies show that students with better nutrition have better attention spans and better class participation
- Proper nutrition improves academic, behavioral and emotional functioning and leads to increased math grades, lowered absenteeism and improved behavior
- Higher levels of physical activity can relate to higher self-esteem and lower levels of anxiety and stress as well as impact cognitive skills, enhanced concentration and attention and academic behavior—all of which are associated with improved academic performance
- Studies show positive associations between physical education and indicators of academic performance
- Studies show positive associations between recess and indicators of cognitive skills, attitudes and academic behavior
- Health education research shows promise of having a positive impact on academic achievement as it has on health outcomes of students
- Research demonstrates a positive association between healthy behaviors and academic grades

##### Challenges to a Healthier School:

Unhealthy foods and beverages are available throughout the day in many schools across the country.

- **Poor Nutrition:** Only 3 out of 10 high school seniors report eating green vegetables “nearly every day or more.”
- **Marketing to Kids:** Food and beverage marketing can enter schools via fast food retailers on campus, televisions in classrooms and advertising in vending machines.
- **Vending Machines:** Foods offered in school vending machines are often of little nutritional value and can be loaded with fats, sugars, salt, and calories.

## School Wellness Council Toolkit

While children are eating more, they are also exercising less. This can affect not only their weight but their attitude, academic performance and overall well-being.

- **Couch Potato Lifestyle:** Almost one in four children do not participate in any free time physical activity.
- **Less Physical Education:** 92% of elementary schools do not have daily physical education classes year-round. Barely a quarter of high school students take daily physical education classes.
- **Disappearing Recess:** Nearly one-third of elementary schools do not schedule recess on a regular basis.
- **Getting to School:** 85% of children travel to school by car or bus – only 13% of children walk or bike to school.
- **Lack of Playgrounds:** In more and more schools, playgrounds are becoming a luxury rather than a standard.

### Healthy Schools Program Framework Criteria

The role of the school wellness council is key to the success of the Healthy Schools Program. The responsibility for assessing the programs and policies impacting healthy eating and physical activity in your school, and developing and implementing an action plan based on this assessment rests with the school wellness council.

To support this important role, several of the criteria in the Healthy Schools Program Framework address school wellness councils. They are as follows:

- School is implementing the district wellness policy and providing feedback to the district regarding its progress annually
- School has an active wellness council/committee that meets at least every other month during the school year
- Family members and guardians have the opportunity to provide input to the implementation of wellness policy activities
- Students have the opportunity to provide input to the implementation of wellness policy activities
- The status of wellness policy implementation at the school level is communicated annually to school staff, students and families
- School wellness council/committee recommends new or revised health or wellness policies and activities to the district

The Healthy Schools Program has developed and compiled resources in addition to this Toolkit to assist school wellness councils in meeting each of the above criteria. Be sure to check out what is available at <http://www.schools.healthiergeneration.org>.

### Who Should Join Your SWC?

#### Who Should We Invite to Participate on Our School Wellness Council?

Groups with 6-12 active members are often the most effective. As you consider the following members, determine what size council you will need to be effective. If you have a large group of people who want to work on healthy eating and physical activity issues, think about a steering committee structure that includes subcommittees. You may also prioritize membership based on those areas where you will be focusing this year (i.e. updating a physical education curriculum would require including one or more physical education teachers).

## School Wellness Council Toolkit

<b>Administrators</b>	Administrative support is instrumental to your ongoing efforts with the Healthy Schools Program and school health. Your school principal or other building administrator should be included in and informed of your planning activities.
<b>Teachers</b>	All teachers at your school have a stake in healthy students and staff. Think about teachers, in addition to health education and physical education teachers, who show an interest and commitment to health issues.
<b>School Nurses</b>	The school nurse is a natural coordinator and expert on school health matters.
<b>Food Service Directors/Staff</b>	If you will be trying to impact the school foods environment, the food service/child nutrition manager will be key in helping the council understand federal and state requirements and making important changes to the food offerings in your school.
<b>Parents/Family Members</b>	Involvement of family members ensures that your efforts will reach beyond the school. In addition, parents can spread the word to other parents and help gain support for your efforts.
<b>Students</b>	Many of the changes you will implement through the Healthy Schools Program impact students directly. Involving them in decisions will limit resistance and can make your programs more successful.
<b>Local Health Departments</b>	Public health is committed to addressing childhood obesity and understands the role of changing environments to make “healthy choices, easy choices.” Local health departments often have access to community resources and other organizations as well. Most public health departments have data on student health behaviors that can help you make a case for health programs and policy changes in regards to healthy eating and physical activity.
<b>Business Community</b>	The business community has a stake in helping young people be healthy and successful in school. In addition, they may have concerns that the council may not have considered and resources that can be leveraged to support wellness priorities for students and staff.
<b>Local Coalitions</b>	Many communities have groups that have formed to address youth issues or childhood obesity specifically. Think about including members from these groups as they are often eager to work with schools.
<b>School Board Members</b>	Some of the changes included in the Healthy Schools Program will require district level policy support. School board member involvement in school wellness councils creates expertise on your school board related to student health issues. School board members are often engaged with the district and schools over a long period of time, so their involvement may increase the sustainability of your efforts.
<b>School Custodians</b>	Your school custodian often has insights and observations that will be valuable to your efforts. Custodians are aware of environmental issues, amount of food waste, transportation issues and also may have observed concerns of students because of their interaction in the hallways and school grounds.
<b>Healthcare Professionals</b>	A local doctor or nurse is often a knowledgeable professional who is respected in the community. As a school wellness council member, they may be able to make requests or deliver key messages on behalf of the school wellness council’s efforts.
<b>Physical Education and Health Education Teachers/Classroom Teachers</b>	Typically health education and physical education teachers are considered the champions in schools for student health issues. They can provide curricular support as well as engage staff in wellness activities. In many elementary schools, health education is taught by classroom teachers and their input is valuable when determining health education



## School Wellness Council Toolkit

	instructional time and class content.
<b>Parks and Recreation Department</b>	In addition to physical education and physical activity during school hours, physical activity opportunities before and after school are also important. Parks and Recreation Departments often run sports and recreation programs that your students and staff can access.
<b>Youth Serving Organizations</b>	Similar to Parks and Recreation, youth serving organizations often have afterschool or community programs that might be available to your students. They are also generally aware of other community programs and services for kids.

### Considerations for SWC Members

#### **Represent the diversity of your community**

It is important to include the whole school community in your efforts to improve healthy eating and physical activity. As you invite members to your school wellness council, consider the diversity of your student population.

#### **Involve people with a deep understanding of the culture, norms, and dynamics of your community**

As you reach out into your community to invite business leaders, youth serving organizations and others, be sure to extend invitations to those that seem to truly understand the community surrounding your school. Also consider those who have extensive networks and connections in the community.

#### **Involve people with a passion for kids and health**

At some point in your planning and implementation, you will need council members who can be strong advocates for the changes you are making in your school. This work is sometimes met with resistance and barriers. Council members with a commitment to healthy eating and physical activity will overcome these challenges as they come.

#### **Include people who can commit the time**

Many school staff members and community members are asked to sit on multiple committees. Be clear about how much time the wellness council meetings and activities will take. Time is often seen as the biggest barrier to getting things accomplished. Think about reaching out to those that other committees may not have thought to include.

#### **Include key players/influencers in the school and community**

Reach out to those in your school community that have the greatest ability to network and persuade others. Parents, staff members, and community members all have people whose opinions and actions they trust. This role will be essential as you begin to implement your action plan.

#### **Involve the least powerful as well as the most powerful**

Your wellness council should be truly representative of your school community in all aspects. Think about those whose voices are not usually heard and include them. Be sure to use facilitation techniques that will allow the least powerful to feel they have power and influence within your council.

#### **Involve skeptics as well as believers**

It is important to hear voices from a variety of perspectives. If you know that you want to make changes in competitive foods/vending options, it can be extremely helpful to have the marketing teacher or student body leader on your wellness council. However, use this technique sparingly as too many naysayers can slow your council down and result in those who are supportive to get discouraged and stop attending.

## School Wellness Council Toolkit

### Involving Students on the SWC

Students are often interested in making their schools and communities healthier. Because many of the changes the council may be implementing directly impact students, gaining their input and support will ultimately enable change to be better understood and accepted and happen more quickly. Students are often the best advocates for healthy schools and are able and articulate spokespeople with school decision makers and community members.

### Tips for Student Participation

If you decide to invite students to participate on your school wellness council, here are some helpful tips to ensure that student participation is productive and successful.

**Be clear about roles and expectations:** Do you want the student members to initiate healthy eating and physical activity projects with their peers? Do you want them to become more knowledgeable on these issues and advocate with school decision makers? Share your expectations and hopes for student representation with the student(s) you invite.

**Create more than one student position:** It may be easier to have consistent student representation with more than one student position on your council. In addition, it may help the students to not be the only youth member in the room, expected to represent all of their peers.

**Provide skill building opportunities with youth council members beyond the school wellness council meetings:** To ensure a successful school wellness council with student members, students should be given some information on meeting processes, norms, and expectations. Increasing the skills of student members on your council will lead to more successful participation.

**Prioritize students in your action plan:** It will help students continue to see their role in creating a healthier school environment if they see how they fit in the action plan and other activities your wellness council undertakes. Make some of these action items short term and celebrate when you achieve them. This will keep students and all wellness council members engaged.

**Invite your student member to cultivate leadership in their peers:** Because students move through the school, planning for replacing student members is an ongoing process. Ask student members to think about who would be good replacements and ask for their assistance in orienting the new student members.

### Other Opportunities for Student Participation

Students can create a council of their own with one or more liaisons that attend wellness council meetings. There are several ways to expand student input, from taste tests and selecting options for vending machines to designing marketing campaigns for healthy food options. Because it is students who these changes most affect, schools that report the most success in making changes to their food and beverage offerings identify student engagement as critical.

Communicate the status of wellness policy implementation annually through school newsletters, school website, etc. and invite student input on wellness activities throughout the year in a variety of ways.

## School Wellness Council Toolkit

### Involving Families

The school wellness council and the priorities its members set should represent the interests and needs of the entire school as well as the communities that the school encompasses. The Healthy Schools Program recognizes the importance of representation of family members on your wellness council.

In addition to having valuable insights and perceptions of the school within its community, family members reflect the diversity of your community in a number of ways. However, it can be a challenge to reach out to families and keep them coming to meetings.

Here are some of the common challenges schools face in involving parents and families along with some ways to address them.

#### **We always get the same few parents willing to be on a committee**

Every school has parent leaders that seem to volunteer for everything. This poses challenges for both the school and other parents. One of the reasons you ask families to participate is to hear from a broader representation of your community. If the same parents always volunteer, you might not get the benefit of diverse opinions and views. Allowing the same parents to represent all student families can also lead to other parents feeling as though they do not have a role or place to participate.

Be mindful of the various communities and interests within your school. Are there places where families are involved but not necessarily in committee work? These family members may be ready to join the school wellness council based on the fact they have become involved in other school efforts.

#### **Families are too busy to be on our school wellness council**

When possible, host your school wellness council meetings at a time that would be more convenient for working families. In addition, consider scheduling wellness council meetings in conjunction with other school events or meetings, it will limit the number of nights family members are away from home, making them more receptive to attending.

#### **We invite families to many things at the school and they don't come**

There is an art to extending an invitation to family members. For most school staff, school is a comfortable place. For some family members, this is not the case. Cultural norms or language barriers also can pose a challenge for family members who feel they are not the experts and have little to contribute. If your school has a family support or outreach coordinator, this person may have relationships with families in the community and can help identify potential council members. If your goal is to attract family members who do not usually attend school meetings or volunteer for committees, someone on the council may need to extend a personal invitation.

It is important to have strategies to get input from family members that represent the various age groups and backgrounds of your students. If you can provide meals or child care with your wellness council meetings, that may remove some of the barriers for families. Research other parent nights or programming for families that your school offers and ask if you can work with them. You may be able to conduct your school wellness council meetings in that setting or get input from families on your activities.

### Meeting and Time Commitment

Studies indicate that regular meetings and focused agendas enable groups to stay engaged, excited and effective. Once membership is determined, the school wellness council will meet at least every other month during the school year. As a group, the school wellness council will determine roles such as facilitator, record keeper, etc. These roles, once assigned, may involve a greater time commitment. The council can also consider rotating some committee responsibilities.

## School Wellness Council Toolkit

### Talking Points about the Healthy Schools Program

#### What is the Healthy Schools Program?

The Healthy Schools Program is an initiative of the Alliance for a Healthier Generation, founded by the American Heart Association and the Clinton Foundation to assist schools in creating healthy environments that encourage students and staff to eat healthy and be physically active. This program guides school wellness councils to identify priorities and provides resources and training.

#### The Healthy Schools Program focuses on helping schools:

- Improve the nutrition of food and beverages served in vending machines and cafeterias
- Increase physical activity opportunities for students to exercise and play
- Provide resources for teachers and staff to become healthy role models
- Set goals and utilize tools and resources to meet those goals
- Serve both the academic and the health needs of students without negatively impacting their budgets
- Provide quality health education and physical education programs
- Align their district wellness policies and school food contracts to the Alliance School Beverage and Competitive Foods Guidelines

## School Wellness Council Toolkit

### Sample Invitation Letter

Dear (Title, Name),

Childhood obesity is one of the most serious health epidemics facing America today. The American Medical Association now recognizes obesity as a disease. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, about one third of children and teens in the United States are overweight or obese. Childhood obesity is leading to a range of health problems that previously were not generally seen until adulthood, including high blood pressure, type II diabetes and elevated blood cholesterol levels. We believe we have a responsibility to improve the health and well-being of our children.

Experience shows that schools can be powerful places to make behavioral and environmental changes for students and staff. To make our school environment healthier, our school is forming a School Wellness Council. The purpose of the council is to bring together representatives from the school and community who can help us address issues facing the health and well-being of our children and youth.

As a (designate particular role or background), your input is particularly important and we would be honored to have you as a School Wellness Council member. We understand that your time is valuable and we want you to know we are committed to making changes in policies and programs that will positively affect the health of our students and school staff. We will be examining and planning for changes in the classroom, cafeteria, playing fields and more. We are fortunate to have the support of the Healthy Schools Program through the Alliance for a Healthier Generation. The Alliance was founded by the American Heart Association and the Clinton Foundation, aimed at reducing the prevalence of childhood obesity. The Healthy Schools Program provides technical assistance, resources, and tools to help our school create a healthier environment for students and staff.

Our first meeting will take place on (date) at (location) from (time to time). We anticipate holding meetings every 8-10 weeks during the school year. If you have any questions, or want to know more about what sort of responsibilities you would have as a member, please contact me (contact information here). We hope you will accept our invitation and join us in taking action against the growing youth obesity epidemic.

Sincerely,

(school superintendent or school principal)

## School Wellness Council Toolkit

### Making Decisions

Discussing how the group will make decisions is important for keeping the work moving forward. Knowing ahead of time how decisions will be made can potentially eliminate conflict and questions. Here are some examples:

**Democratic:** One person, one vote—majority wins.

- Pros: Decisions can be made relatively quickly. It is a clear process and one that most people are familiar with.
- Cons: Some of the group members will not be happy with the decision and it may be more challenging to ensure that minority voices are heard and their concerns addressed.

**Consensus:** Seeks the agreement of most participants, but also resolves or diminishes the objections of the minority to achieve the most agreeable decision.

Consensus statements:

- I understand why this decision is being made
- I can support this decision
- I can act upon this decision
- I can positively represent this decision to others
  - Pros: Consensus is an effective way for all group members to express their opinions and be heard.
  - Cons: Decisions may take a longer time to make because the group must work together to reach a solution that all members can live with even if they do not support the decision fully.

**Recommendation only:** All decisions deferred to another group or decision-making body.

- Pros: The group will not need to work through a decision making process so some confrontations or difficult situations may be avoided.
- Cons: Although the group may not need to reach a decision or action, they may still need to decide on a recommendation to forward. In addition, groups that do not have decision making authority or those that 'rubber stamp' the decisions of others have a more difficult time keeping members engaged over time.

### How to Keep Your Council Active and Effective?

#### A Shared Vision and Mission

- Spend the time at the beginning to define a collective vision and mission for your work. Each wellness council member brings a unique perspective and interest to shared efforts. Facilitate a process that allows members to share their views and find common ground and goals. This focus on commonalities will give the group its vision and mission.
- Keep the priorities developed in your action plan connected to those interests that individuals shared that may be more specific to their roles and experiences. This will keep members engaged in the work because they will see the relevance to their own priorities.

#### Consistent Decision Making

- Once a decision process has been discussed and agreed upon as a group, consistently apply the established process.
- Be clear about decisions as they are made by utilizing an agenda format that captures decisions and next steps. Clarity about this will help all members stay informed about what the council is doing and avoid continually going back over discussions when agreement has already been reached.

## School Wellness Council Toolkit

### Effective Meetings

- Utilize your action plan to create agendas and keep the group focused on the actions you have identified as part of your mission.
- Divide duties and action items so that all members feel utilized and part of the group.
- Refer to the meeting checklist in this guide to ensure that your meetings run smoothly and are productive.

### Celebrations of Success

- Celebrating success is a critical part of team building and group process. Wellness council members will appreciate being recognized for individual accomplishments or achievements. Take the time in meetings to thank and acknowledge members who have helped your council meet milestones or goals.

### Support for Success

Here are additional considerations that can help make your school wellness council more effective and successful.

#### Administrative Support (get one on the team!)

Administrators are busy people with many demands on their time. Find an administrator who is willing to support your efforts and keep up to date on your activities, even if they are unable to attend meetings regularly. Administrative input and support is essential for many of the action steps your school wellness council will identify. Having an administrator involved from the beginning and informed as you move forward will provide helpful information on the best ways to implement the action plan. Hopefully, the administrator will serve as a liaison with the district administrative team and district wellness council.

#### Dedicated Meeting Time

Sticking to a consistent meeting schedule will allow all members to put meetings on their calendar and plan for them well in advance. It will also help with challenges in communicating meeting details.

#### Committed Team Members Who “Step Up to the Plate”

Provide opportunities for council members to contribute to the group in ways that are small and large. Consider rotating facilitation or the taking of meeting notes. If there are community members on your council, you may want to hold a meeting in their offices. Members may also be willing to provide healthy snacks for your meetings.

#### Getting the Entire School Involved in Some Way

Involvement of staff, students, and families in your school will ensure the success of your efforts. Implementing the school employee wellness criteria in the Healthy Schools Program Framework is a way to involve more school staff.

#### Having the Team Divide into Task Teams

Breaking into smaller task teams will enable the council to get more done and can also engage additional people. Although the school wellness council should not be too large, task teams or subcommittees will allow members to invite others to become involved.

#### Smaller, Achievable Goals

As the action plan is developed, include steps that can be completed in a month or two. Giving the council early successes will help members feel positive about their contributions and encourage them to move forward with more challenging longer-term goals.

#### Sharing Your Progress and Success with Others

Take time to celebrate and share with others the work the council is doing. It is important to acknowledge the group's accomplishments with school staff, students, families and the community through planned

## School Wellness Council Toolkit

and regular communications. The Healthy Schools Program offers opportunities for your school wellness council to create success stories and share them with others. Consider putting these in school or district newsletters or websites or share your 'good news' at staff and/or parent meetings.

### Matrix for Success

#### A Framework for Success and Systems Change\*

Consider all critical components of success - vision, skills, incentives, resources, and action plan strategies - to keep the work moving forward and council members engaged. Leaving out one or more components can lead to negative results.

Vision	Skills	Incentives	Resources	Action Plan	=	Change
	Skills	Incentives	Resources	Action Plan	=	Confusion
Vision		Incentives	Resources	Action Plan	=	Anxiety
Vision	Skills		Resources	Action Plan	=	Slow Change
Vision	Skills	Incentives		Action Plan	=	Frustration
Vision	Skills	Incentives	Resources		=	False Starts
Vision	Skills	Incentives	Resources	Action Plan	=	Success

**Vision:** A joint goal about what the wellness council hopes to accomplish

**Skills:** The ability to participate in the group, complete tasks, has the information needed to communicate about the group's work

**Incentives:** Opportunities to be recognized, release time for participation, opportunities for professional development, time can contribute toward contact hours for recertification, etc.

**Resources:** Administrative support, a small budget, leverage in-kind or other non-monetary items, community resources, and Healthy Schools Program tools, resources, and technical assistance to assist in completing the action plan

**Action Plan:** An annual plan with a timeline and responsibilities that links to the group's vision to keep decisions and activities focused and intentional

\*Adapted from: Kastner, T & Enterprise Group, Ltd. (1991). Systems reform for children and their families. Lansing: State of Michigan



## School Wellness Council Toolkit

### Role of the Facilitator - Managing Difficult Behavior in Groups

#### Preventing Difficult Behavior

Prevention is often the most effective way to avoid conflicts or difficulties within a group. The facilitator can play a key role in allowing groups to work effectively.

- **Set a positive and enthusiastic tone:** If you expect people to be motivated, creative and committed, they will probably live up to your expectations.
- **Assist the group in enforcing the ground rules/norms:** Post the agreed upon ground rules and encourage all members to follow them. Referring to the norms agreed upon by the group will keep the whole group accountable.
- **Watch group vibes:** As the facilitator you are the group's barometer. If you sense people are bored, you may have to pick up the pace or take a quick physical activity break. If there seems to be "under-the-surface" issues, you may have to stop and address them.
- **Make sure everyone gets a chance to speak:** Keep informal track of who has spoken and include quieter group members in the discussion by going around the room and asking everyone who has not yet spoken to add their comments. Be sure to compliment people on their ideas and thank them for their input. This is really important if you have students or community members who are not used to speaking in groups.
- **Nonverbal cues are important:** Be sure your body language and attention encourages others to speak. Eye contact and leaning forward will also make members feel heard.
- **Be confident in your facilitator role:** Because the facilitator is responsible for overseeing that the meeting goes smoothly, group members need to feel that the facilitator is fair and including the opinions of all the group members.

#### Addressing Difficult Behavior in Groups

Being cognizant of group dynamics and addressing difficult behavior is part of facilitating a school wellness council. Below are some common difficult behaviors and suggestions for handling them:

- **Flare-ups:** When two members get into a heated discussion, summarize the points made by each and then turn the discussion back to the group.
- **Grandstanding:** Interrupt the person with a statement that gives him/her a sense of value for the contribution, but ask that others are given a chance to comment. You can also interrupt by saying, "You have brought up many points, and does anyone have a thought about what has been said?"
- **Interrupting:** If someone is continuously interrupting when others are talking, step in immediately and allow the person who was speaking time to finish his/her thought or point. If it is a chronic problem with an individual, ask that person to be the recorder at the next meeting.
- **Continual criticizing:** When addressing passionate issues, it is often easy to be negative and feel that change will never happen. Remind the person of the agreed-upon group norms. Redirecting the critical member to identify solutions or to be responsible for an achievable task may help.

#### Creating Group Norms

Group norms help a council create their culture and set the tone for meetings. These norms should be shaped, agreed upon, and consistently applied by the entire school wellness council. Once the council has created group norms, include them in meeting agendas or post them on the wall at the start of every meeting. Periodically check with the group and ask if the norms are still working or if they need to be revised.

To create group norms, begin with a standard list and ask the group to review and add to or delete from the list or ask the group to brainstorm the norms they would like to follow to ensure that the school wellness council is effective and enjoyable. If someone suggests a norm and it is not clear, ask a follow-up question for better understanding. The list can be as long or short as the group would like.

## School Wellness Council Toolkit

Here are some sample group norms. Feel free to use this list as a starting point for your group:

1. Meetings will start and end on time
2. Come prepared to meetings
3. Cell phones are off or turned on vibrate...no "texting" during the meeting
4. Listen to all points of view
5. Be respectful (may want to talk about what this looks like in your group)
6. One person speaks at a time-no side conversations or interrupting
7. Assume goodwill and good intent from others
8. Have fun

### Communication Strategies

#### Keeping SWC Members Informed

With a variety of communication tools available, it should be easy to keep school wellness council members informed and connected. However, people have a wide continuum of access to and comfort with technology so you will likely need to utilize various methods of communication. Think ahead about what types of information you will need to communicate between and prior to meetings. As you recruit and bring your SWC members together, be sure to collect contact information along with preferences on how members would like to stay informed. A sample contact information sheet is included in this Toolkit.

Because school council members may want to work together, think about creating a contact sheet/roster listing all members. The contact information sheet also provides an opportunity for members to grant permission to share their information with other SWC members. Ensure that if you break into subgroups that those groups also have a communication plan.

#### Possible Communication Strategies

- Agendas
- Meeting Minutes/Notes
- Surveys
- Subcommittee reports (if your group breaks into task groups)
- Calendar of meeting dates
- Notification of health-related community/school events

Some of these may have higher levels of urgency. Discuss as a group the best ways to keep everyone informed. If there are several members that prefer methods of contact other than e-mail, consider setting up a phone tree or other system that shares the responsibility of communication among SWC members.

## School Wellness Council Toolkit

### Contact Information

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address

Street: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_

State: \_\_\_\_\_

Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Please provide the following phone numbers for contact about SWC business and issues

Daytime phone #

Evening phone #

Cell phone #

Check which is your preferred number?

Day time phone #

Evening phone #

Cell phone #

Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

How often do you check your e-mail? Check one:

Several times a day  Once a day  Once a week  Rarely

We would like to make a contact list for our school wellness council members. Is it OK to share your contact information with other council members?

Yes  No

Yes, but only share the following (check all that apply)

Day time phone #

Evening phone #

Cell phone #

Address

Email

How would you prefer to get council information, meeting minutes, meetings reminders, activities, etc.?  
Check one:

Email

U.S. mail

## School Wellness Council Toolkit

### Meeting Checklist

#### General

- There is a written agenda that everyone receives in advance.
- Copies of the meeting agenda are available for everyone or the agenda is posted in the room.
- People are welcomed and valued when they arrive (focus on who is there and not on who is absent).
- The meeting begins and ends on time (so members with family and other responsibilities can plan their time).
- The majority of meeting time is given to planning further action on important issues/projects.
- Each member of the group is treated with respect, despite differences in viewpoint, age, experience, sex, race, income, and formal education.
- Once decisions are made, members are assigned responsibilities for follow-up.
- A tentative agenda and date is set for the next meeting.

#### Facilitator

- You greet members so they feel welcomed.
- The meeting focuses on the work to be accomplished.
- You encourage all members to participate in the conversation.
- You are open-minded to the possibilities when new ideas are expressed.
- You allow the group to set the pace during the decision-making process.
- The group has agreed on future tasks with deadlines and plans for follow-up.
- You ensure that tasks are divided equitably, meeting the needs and skill levels of the group members.

#### Participants

- You arrive at the meeting on time.
- You come prepared to discuss the agenda items.
- You have accomplished or followed through on any commitments you made at the last meeting.
- You are an active listener and speaker.
- You speak briefly and concisely when making your points.
- You clarify the assignments and deadlines for which you are responsible.
- You are open to making connections and building relationships with other school and community members.

## School Wellness Council Toolkit

### Timeline Example

The following timeline can help your school wellness council stay on track to accomplish their goals. This timeline illustrates a cycle of continuous improvement and provides opportunities to evaluate the implementation of your local wellness policy.

SWC Meetings	August / September	October / November	December / January	February / March	April / May	June
<b>Meeting Tasks</b>	Organize the SWC  Complete Healthy Schools Program Inventory as a council	Prioritize needs and create action plan  Assign tasks and timeline  Identify resources needed, including Healthy Schools Program National Advisors	Implement action plan	Check progress on action plan	Update Healthy Schools Program Inventory  Apply for Healthy Schools Program national recognition, if applicable	Celebrate successes  Report implementation of Local Wellness Policy to the district
<b>Between Meeting Tasks</b>	Gather data for Healthy Schools Program Inventory	Submit completed action plan	Document and collect information for portfolio	Communicate with students, school staff, families and community	Continue to implement action plan  Complete and submit Healthy Schools Program recognition application, if applicable	Schedule technical assistance sessions for next year
<b>Healthy Schools Program Resources</b>	Inventory worksheet; Toolkits; Healthy Schools Program website	Healthy Schools Program website; resource database; Webinars; Toolkits	Portfolio; Healthy Schools Program National Advisors	Healthy Schools Program resource database; Success story activity; Healthy Schools Program National Advisors	Healthy Schools Program National Advisors; Recognition manager	SWC Certificates of Appreciation

Your school may be on a different schedule. If this is the case, you may want to adjust this chart by changing the months across the top. It also may be helpful for completion of tasks or actions to ensure that all members of your school wellness council have access to the Healthy Schools Program resources through the Alliance for a Healthier Generation website ([www.schools.HealthierGeneration.org](http://www.schools.HealthierGeneration.org)).

## School Wellness Council Toolkit

### Sample School Wellness Council Meeting Agenda

**Instructions:** Identify and discuss the action steps that need to be accomplished to implement your Healthy Schools Program Action Plan. Use this meeting agenda template to guide your meetings and follow-up communications. A consistent format will enable all school wellness council members to easily find information on decisions, tasks they are responsible for and progress on the action plan.

**Meeting Date:** / /

**Attendees:** *(List those who attended here)*

**Meeting Tasks from Timeline:** *(Example: Update the Healthy Schools Program Inventory)*

<b>Action Step from Action Plan</b>		
<b>Steps to Achievement:</b>	<b>Decisions/Still to Do:</b>	<b>Who/When:</b>
<i>Example: Review the sample Employee Wellness Interest Survey</i>	<i>Example: Revise survey as needed; share with SWC for approval</i>	<i>Example: Assign tasks for administrating the survey with a date for each task to be accomplished</i>

**Notes:** *Check with principal about conducting the survey at the next staff meeting.*

**Next meeting Date:** / /

**Time:**

**Location:**

*(Be sure to include the next meeting date, time, and location on your agenda and in the minutes.)*

**Tentative Agenda Items:**

**School Wellness Council Toolkit**

**School Wellness Council Meeting Agenda Template**

**Meeting Date:** / /

**Attendees:**

**Meeting Tasks from Timeline:**

<b>Action Step from Action Plan:</b>		
<b>Steps to Achievement:</b>	<b>Decisions/Still to Do:</b>	<b>Who/When:</b>
<b>Action Step from Action Plan:</b>		
<b>Steps to Achievement:</b>	<b>Decisions/Still to Do:</b>	<b>Who/When:</b>
<b>Action Step from Action Plan:</b>		
<b>Steps to Achievement:</b>	<b>Decisions/Still to Do:</b>	<b>Who/When:</b>

**Notes:**

**Next meeting Date:** / /

**Time:**

**Location:**

**Tentative Agenda Items:**