

Louisiana School Wellness Policy Action Plan Guide

2009

The “School Wellness Policy Implementation Project” was funded through a grant award from the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices Healthy Kids, Healthy America program to improve obesity rates among the state’s youth. The Louisiana Council on Obesity Prevention & Management led the collaborative project of the Department of Health and Hospitals’ Nutrition Services, Department of Education, Louisiana State University Agricultural Center and the Governor’s Office.

BOBBY JINDAL
Governor



State of Louisiana
Office of the Governor

Dear School Superintendent,

Louisiana was selected as one of 15 states to receive a national grant to be used for childhood obesity prevention efforts in schools. This grant award from the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices *Healthy Kids, Healthy America* award project is intended to assist Louisiana elementary and middle schools in successfully implementing their local school wellness policy. At this time we are writing to notify you of the next phase of this project and encourage your support.

This "School Wellness Policy Implementation Project" is spearheaded by the Louisiana Council on Obesity Prevention and Management and is a joint effort between the Department of Health and Hospitals, Department of Education, Louisiana State University Agricultural Center (LSU AgCenter), and the Governor's Office. The health of Louisiana's children is at serious risk due to poor nutrition and lack of physical activity. Obesity in children is increasing at an alarming rate and children are being diagnosed with costly adult diseases such as type 2 diabetes and hypertension. School wellness policies give schools the tools needed to address the three-fold increase in childhood obesity, through healthy food choices and physical activity.

The federal requirement for school wellness policies has been in effect for almost two years and we are anxious to hear how the implementation phase is developing at the district and school level. We are gathering information from schools in order to provide a voice to your successes and possible solutions to any challenges. An online survey of Louisiana elementary and middle school principals was completed in January 2008. Our next step is to conduct focus groups across the state with participants who have a working knowledge of the school wellness policy. The information obtained from the focus groups will then be used to develop an action plan guide and resources to enhance and support efforts to advance the implementation of school wellness policies.

LSU AgCenter Extension Agents currently work closely with schools and school board offices across the state and will be recruiting participants for the focus groups. We strongly encourage your support through your participation and your staff involvement of this project.

Our hope is that through a collaborative effort we can promote an environment that supports opportunities for Louisiana residents to make healthy food choices, be physically active, and maintain a healthy weight in order to achieve wellness.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Bobby Jindal.

Bobby Jindal
Governor

Handwritten signature of Paul Pastorek.

Paul Pastorek
State Superintendent
Department of
Education

Handwritten signature of Alan Levine.

Alan Levine
Secretary
Department of Health and
Hospitals

School Wellness Policy Implementation Project Overview:

National Governors Association Healthy Kids, Healthy America Program: Preventing Childhood Obesity in Schools and Communities

Obesity is a growing healthcare problem in Louisiana, and carries with it significant costs, both in terms of dollars and lives. According to the 2008 United Health Foundation Health Rankings, Louisiana currently ranks as the unhealthiest state in the nation in terms of overall health and ranks 47th in the nation for obesity, with 30.7% of the population being obese. Because Louisiana also has one of the highest poverty rates in the nation and an estimated 23% of children in the state live in poor families, combating the epidemic is crucial, but difficult. Obesity rates continue to climb and the resulting medical complications are having a devastating effect on the quality of life of Louisiana citizens and the state budget. Prevention is needed in order to decrease the need for more expensive tertiary care and to decrease the prevalence of children being diagnosed with adult diseases. In order to reduce the prevalence of overweight/obesity in Louisiana, it is essential that we teach younger children to adopt healthy behaviors now, before unhealthy habits are established. The Governor of Louisiana with support of the Legislature, and the Louisiana Departments of Education and Health and Hospitals, is committed to preventing childhood obesity through policy and environmental change.

In 2004, the Federal Government enacted the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act, which requires all school systems participating in the USDA National School Lunch and Breakfast Program to establish and implement school wellness policies by the start of the 2006 school year. Wellness policies for each school district must be developed with community involvement and address the following: nutrition education and physical activity goals, nutritional guidelines for foods offered during the school day, and plan for evaluation and implementation.

In March 2006, the Louisiana Department of Education distributed a memorandum to all Louisiana Parish and/or City School Superintendents informing them of the 2004 Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization requirement for a wellness policy, along with a policy template, and contact information for assistance. The actual implementation of the School Wellness Policy at the district and school level is the avenue to enhance the overall school environment by promoting awareness and increasing physical activity and healthy eating in schools.

Project Goal

The goal of this project was to develop an action plan based on findings from focus group discussions and surveys that will guide and support efforts at the local and district levels to advance the implementation of the existing wellness policies. More specifically, the School Wellness Policy Action Plan Guide will address increasing capacity, overcoming common barriers to implementation, and identifying methods to duplicate successes.

Increasing the local capacity to advance the level of implementation of the School Wellness Policy will result in sustainability of effort and continuity of the project. Physical activity and nutrition alone cannot solve the childhood obesity epidemic, but can foster long-term habits and contribute to prevention. Advancing the level of implementation of school wellness policies will influence the school environment that supports opportunities for students to make healthy food choices and to be physically active in order to achieve or maintain a healthy weight.

Focus Group Discussion Results

Focus group discussions were conducted to assess the current level of implementation of local school wellness policies and identify successes and common challenges associated with the implementation of these policies. The focus group discussions were administered by trained facilitators from the LSU AgCenter. The Human Subjects Institutional Review Board of the LSU AgCenter approved the study. All subjects provided informed consent before participating in the focus group discussion. Two focus group discussions were conducted in each of the five School Foodservice Regions in Louisiana (10 focus groups total) among individuals with a working knowledge of the School Wellness Policy requirements.

Information obtained from the focus group discussions indicated that time, money, and limits of capacity and monitoring affect implementation of the School Wellness Policy. All participants were knowledgeable about the School Wellness Policy Mandate in general; however, the extent of this knowledge varied greatly. Policy implementation was also hindered by the increased emphasis on academics and standardized testing. Collaboration with community partners and frequent communication about policy requirements to all stakeholders were identified as factors that enhanced development and/or implementation of the School Wellness Policy at the local level.

Principal Survey Results

The School Wellness Policy Survey was designed to better understand the challenges elementary and middle schools confront in implementing wellness policy. The survey was developed by the National Food Service Management Institute, Applied Research Division, located at the University of Southern Mississippi. The survey was administered by the Public Policy Research Lab at Louisiana State University. Louisiana has 934 elementary and middle school principals in public schools. Results presented are based on 412 completed interviews, reflecting a 44% response rate.

- Sixty-four percent of the principals who responded were from elementary schools (N=235), 18% from middle schools, and 18% from combined middle and elementary schools.
- A majority of the principals responding to the survey (54.9%) represented schools with 100-499 students, while 40% of principals represented schools with enrollments between 500 -999. The remainder represented schools with less than a 100 students (1.5%) or more than 1000 students (3.6%).
- Among the schools represented in the survey, the average number of children on free or reduced lunch was 68%. This compares well to statewide estimates that 67% of Louisiana children are eligible for free or reduced lunch.
- In terms of foodservice regions, 32% of respondents were from the Southeast, 21% from Southwest, 23% from South Central, 11% from Northeast, and 13% from Northwest.

Summary of Key Findings

- Elementary and middle school principals see wellness policy primarily in terms of physical education and meeting state and federal requirements. They place considerably less emphasis on providing students with nutritional information. For example, 86% of principals say that having physical education included in the curriculum is a very important component of the policy compared to 47% who say nutritional education is very important. They also see a healthy school environment primarily in terms of daily physical activity, security, and cleanliness.
- Elementary and middle school principals report being most involved and having taken steps to attain wellness policy goals in those areas that they see as most important. They report being most likely to have attained or made progress on physical education and report the least progress in providing nutritional education. Eighty-seven percent of principals say they have attained the goal of including physical education in the curriculum, while only 29% say they have attained the goal of including nutritional information in the curriculum.

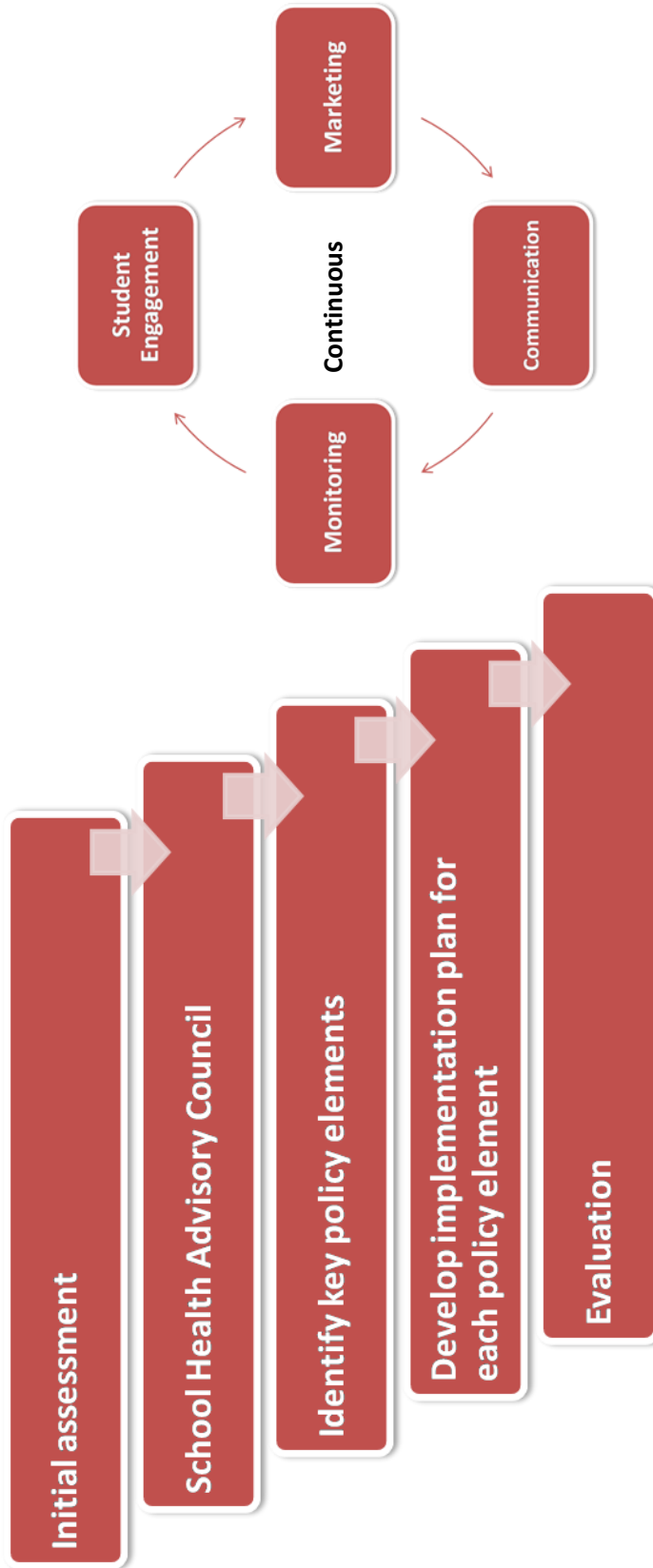
- Elementary and middle school principals generally see their roles and responsibilities in implementing wellness policy in terms of physical education and internal school activities. They are less likely to see an external role in advocating for change or educating the community. Fifty-three percent of principals say they are very involved in efforts to increase physical activity, while only 20% report being very involved in educating the local community on school wellness policy. This is further illustrated by results indicating only a quarter of principals have sought funding to implement wellness policies from the school district and that many principals do not know whether community, business, or government leaders would be supportive of efforts to implement wellness policy.
- Elementary and middle school principals see the effects of wellness policy primarily in terms of improving physical fitness among students. Fifty-four percent strongly agree that implementing local wellness policy will improve physical fitness among students. They are less likely to strongly agree that it will improve behavior in the classroom (31%) or academic performance (38%).
- To successfully implement wellness policy, principals believe they need support from parents, the school administration, and teachers. They report being most concerned that it will take time and funding to implement, but are less concerned about impacts on teacher time or reduced revenues from vending. Principals generally see parents, school administrators, teachers, and students as supportive of wellness policy implementation.
- Elementary and middle school principals report having made only limited progress in implementing local wellness policies. Only 8% of principals report having met all five minimum requirements and only 3% of principals report having exceeded those requirements. Principals also report being uncertain as to how to assess the effectiveness of wellness policies. Nine percent reported having no plans to assess the effectiveness of wellness policies, while nearly half (49%) report that they do not know or unsure how they will assess effectiveness.

The full report of survey results can be found at:

<http://www.dhh.louisiana.gov/offices/reports.asp?ID=270&Detail=571>

School Wellness Policy Implementation Steps

The diagram below illustrates the steps needed to put the School Wellness Policy into action



Putting School Wellness Policy into Action*

1. **Do your homework (initial assessment).** Collect information regarding the child nutrition, nutrition education, and physical activity mandates, policies, and programs in your district and/or state. Determine if your district has an approved wellness policy and an active School Health Advisory Council in place. If your district has an approved wellness policy, determine if it meets the current needs of the district, schools, administration, faculty, and students, among others. Also, identify community organizations with any existing efforts underway that may be able to provide support in the development and implementation of the school wellness policy.
2. **Develop an active School Health Advisory Council.** Parents, students, the school board, school officials, teachers, and the community should be actively involved in the wellness policy development and implementation process. Make sure members of the School Health Advisory Council represent everyone that will be affected by the policy. When considering team members, identify those individuals who have good communication skills, an interest in school nutrition, physical activity and child wellness, and experience with policy development, implementation, and/or evaluation.
3. **Together, the School Health Advisory Council should assess what the school district is currently implementing or addressing about nutrition standards, nutrition education, and physical activity and what it should be doing differently.** Use assessment and evaluation tools such as the Louisiana School Health Index to identify strengths and weaknesses.
4. **Identify key elements that should be included and/or revised in the wellness policy and prioritize.** Key policy elements can include, but are not limited to: physical activity, nutrition education, and nutrition guidelines for foods served in school.
5. **Develop strategies to implement key elements identified above.** Strategies should be developed for EACH key policy element identified. In this step, you should describe how you will address key elements of the policy.

*Pages of this action plan guide are modeled after several resources, including the School Health Index, USDA Team Nutrition, California Project LEAN, and Action for Healthy Kids state team guidelines

6. **Develop separate implementation plans for *each* element of the policy because the tasks will be different for each key element and the individuals that will need to be involved may also be different.** In this step you will identify who, what, when, where, and how the strategies will be implemented. This step is similar to an action plan in that it identifies who will be responsible for implementing the actual strategies, how policy elements and action strategies will be communicated to all parties involved (ranging from the administrative level to the school level), and the timeline to which each action item or strategy should be implemented. Before the plan for each element of the overall policy is implemented, how and by whom changes to the plan will be documented and communicated should also be considered.
7. **Engage students, parents, faculty, administration, and community members.** As the policy is implemented, it is critical to continuously communicate with and receive feedback from students, parents, faculty, administration, and community members.
8. **Communicate and market.** Success of the wellness policy will ultimately depend on how well policy elements and strategies are communicated and/or marketed to all parties involved. In other words, if they don't know about the overall policy and associated strategies, implementation of strategies within the policy will be very difficult, if not impossible. Because of the diverse needs of the parties involved, multiple vehicles for communication must be utilized. For example, posting fliers/banners in the school cafeteria may create awareness among students, but it will do little to inform parents or community members.
9. **Monitor and evaluate policy elements and strategies.** Based on our finding from the focus groups, this is the most critical, but difficult part of the wellness policy. Monitoring and evaluation is critical because it will help you determine if and how effectively the policy strategies are being implemented and whether modifications are needed. Who will be responsible for monitoring and/or evaluation, how strategies will be monitored/evaluated and when should be decided when the policy implementation plan is developed. Some tools can be used for both a needs assessment as well as for evaluation.

Additional Resources

Wellness Policy Tools and Information

USDA Local Wellness Policy

<http://teammnutrition.usda.gov/Healthy/wellnesspolicy>

Wellness Policy Template, Louisiana Department of Education

<http://www.louisianaschools.net/lde/uploads/9528.pdf>

Wellness Tool, Action for Healthy Kids

<http://www.actionforhealthykids.org/wellnesstool/index.php>

Wellness Policy Tracker, Action for Healthy Kids

<http://www.actionforhealthykids.org/policymonitor/trackerregister.php>

Progress or Promises: What's Working for and Against Healthy Schools, Action for Healthy Kids

<http://www.actionforhealthykids.org/pdf/Progress%20or%20Promises.pdf>

Louisiana Department of Education
Safe and Healthy Schools Section
Division of Student Learning and Support
(225) 342-3338

Louisiana Department of Education Wellness Policy Page

<http://www.louisianaschools.net/lde/scs/1937.html>

Louisiana Team Nutrition Page

<http://www.louisianaschools.net/lde/nutrition/465.html>

Louisiana School Health Index

<http://www.louisianaschools.net/lde/nutrition/lasshi/main/homepage.asp>

Wellness Policy Tools from Other States

Arkansas School Wellness Policy Guide Kit

http://www.healthyarkansas.com/advisory_committee/pdf/tool_kit_part1-2006.pdf

Wisconsin School Wellness Policy Resources

<http://dpi.wi.gov/fns/wellnessplcy.html>

School Wellness Policy Support Materials and Resources, Iowa Action for Healthy Kids

http://actionforhealthykids.org/filelib/toolsforteam/recom/IA_IA-Wellness_Policy_Resources.pdf

Building the Wellness Policy Committee

Team Building, School Health Index, Louisiana Department of Education

<http://www.louisianaschools.net/lde/nutrition/lasshi/main/teambuilding.asp>

Getting Parents Involved (Parents in Action)

http://www.californiaprojectlean.org/media/ParentsInAction_web.pdf

School Board Involvement Resources

<http://www.californiaprojectlean.org/Assets/1019/files/RSBM%20English.pdf>

Family Nutrition Nights, Louisiana Department of Education

<http://www.louisianaschools.net/lde/nutrition/2398.html>

School Food Service, TEAM Nutrition, USDA

http://healthymeals.nal.usda.gov/nal_display/index.php?info_center=14&tax_level=1

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/>

Incorporating Nutrition, Physical Activity and Health into the Curriculum

Tip Brochure for Teachers, CDC and MetLife Foundations

<http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/physicalactivity/brochures/pdf/teacher.pdf>

Bridges to Wellness, Classroom Lessons for Middle and High School Youth

<http://www.nutritionexplorations.org/educators/lessons/bridges/bridges-main.asp?tab=1>

Integrating Physical Activity into the Classroom Setting: Brainbreaks and Energizers

<http://www.emc.cmich.edu/brainbreaks/> or <http://www.ncpe4me.com/energizers.html>

The Learning Connection: The Value of Improving Nutrition and Physical Activity in Our Schools

<http://www.actionforhealthykids.org/pdf/Learning%20Connection%20-%20Full%20Report%20011006.pdf>

Grade-level Expectations for Physical Education, Louisiana Department of Education

<http://www.louisianaschools.net/lde/saa/1915.html>

Healthy Fundraising and Vending Resources

Creative Fundraising Ideas, Project LEAN

http://www.californiaprojectlean.org/Assets/1019/files/Creative%20School%20Fund-raising%20Ideas_Healthy%20Food%20Policy%20Resource%20Guide.pdf

Guide to Healthy School Fundraising, Action for Healthy Kids of Alabama

www.actionforhealthykids.org/AFHK/team_center/team_resources/AL/N&PA%2031%20-%20Fundraising.pdf

Approved Vending List for Schools, Pennington Biomedical Research Center

http://www.pbrc.edu/Division_of_Education/pdf/Approved_listing.pdf

Alternative to Using Food as a Reward

<http://www.tn.fcs.msue.msu.edu/foodrewards.pdf>

Educational Resources (downloadable or free)

USDA Team Nutrition Resources A to Z

<http://teammnutrition.usda.gov/library.html>

MyPyramid, USDA

<http://www.mypyramid.gov>

Fact Sheets for Healthier School Meals, USDA Food and Nutrition Service

http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/Resources/dgfactsheet_hsm.html

Food and Health Educational Resources, LSU AgCenter

http://www.lsuagcenter.com/en/food_health/

Fruit and Veggie More Matters

<http://www.fruitsandveggiesmorematters.org/>

Smart Bodies

www.smartbodies.org

Go with the Whole Grain for Kids

<http://fs.bellinstitute.com/GeneralFS/Whole+Grain/GWTWG+for+kids+Leader+Guide.htm>

Game On! The Ultimate Wellness Challenge

http://www.actionforhealthykids.org/gotuwc/index.php?page=full_toolkit

WE CAN Get Involved Campaign for Schools

<http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/obesity/wecan/get-involved/school.htm>

Body and Mind (BAM!) Teacher's Corner, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

<http://www.bam.gov/teachers/downloads.html> or <http://www.bam.gov/index.html>

Fuel Up to Play Wellness Activation Kit, Southeast Dairy Council and the National Football League

<http://www.schoolwellnesskit.org/futp/enroll.asp#>

Nutrition Across the Curriculum, Louisiana Department of Education

<http://www.doe.state.la.us/lde/nutrition/1667.html>

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