



Section

04

Grassroots Advocacy:

Organizing Your Local Unit to Make Change

The National Congress of Parents and Teachers was founded in 1897 by a concerned group of mothers who wanted to make changes that would result in better futures for all children. Our mission is still the same.

Use the materials in this section to prepare your PTA to take action. The Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004 presents a unique opportunity for PTAs to improve the environment of their schools and promote healthy behaviors. Under this law, local education agencies that receive federal funds for their school meals must establish wellness policies before the 2006–2007 school year. Even local education agencies that already have wellness policies will probably be making improvements and revisions to them. In this section, you will find more information about the new legislation and how your unit can get involved in the creation of your local wellness policy. You will also find tips about how to organize your members so that they're ready to take action should similar opportunities arise in the future.

School Wellness: A New Opportunity for PTAs to Promote Health in Schools



For more information on how PTAs and other groups across the country are getting soda machines and junk food out of their schools and increasing opportunities for physical activity, see the Local PTA Action Stories included in this notebook.

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 children. 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 their schools.

Under this new law local education agencies that receive federal funds for their school meals must establish wellness policies before the 2006–2007 school year. Local education agencies that already have wellness policies will probably be making improvements and revisions to them.

What's Key

The new law states that local education agencies must involve parents (as well as students, representatives of the school food authority, school boards, school administrators, teachers, health professionals, and the general public) in developing a wellness policy. This means that your PTA has a unique opportunity to make sure that children have access to healthy foods and sufficient physical activity at school.

What Can PTAs Do?

Do a Status Check.

Make sure you know how healthy your school's environment is and

what needs to be improved. (You can use the PTA Fact-Finding Project included in this notebook to get started.) Visit the school, eat a school lunch, and talk to teachers, the principal, administrators and food service directors in your district 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, including physical education and recess?
- 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?

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Is there an opportunity for the PTA to get involved in the planning process?

Build Support.

While policies are being developed at the local education agency level, your PTA can also take the lead in forming (or expanding and strengthening) a wellness committee for your own school. Get 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 policy. Reach out to local groups or chapters of national organizations such as the American Heart Association, the American Dietetic Association, the American Cancer Society and the American Diabetes Association—they may be able to partner with you or even provide additional resources.

Spread the Word.

Many people may not be aware of the new school wellness requirements. Use school or PTA calendars, newsletters, bulletin boards, school websites, e-mail and word-of-mouth to make sure PTA members, friends and neighbors know why it's important to improve student nutrition and wellness. Let them know about this exciting new opportunity to create healthier learning environments for our children.

For more information on how PTAs and other groups across the country are getting soda machines and junk food out of their schools and increasing opportunities for physical activity, see the Local PTA Action Stories included in this notebook.

What Should a School Wellness Policy Include?

National PTA worked with more than 50 organizations under the National Alliance for Nutrition and Activity

(NANA) Coalition to develop a model school wellness policy. You can use this model policy as a guide, or offer it as a resource for your principal or your school board. Keep in mind that this is a model policy that may need to be adjusted to fit your school district's needs and realities. The full text of the model policy is available at www.schoolwellnesspolicies.org. You can also find additional information about policies governing student nutrition and wellness at www.pta.org and www.parentsaction.org.

Here are some important highlights from the National Alliance for Nutrition and Activity's model policy:

School Health Councils Should Include Parents

A school health council consists of a group of individuals representing the school and community, and should include parents, students, representatives of the school food authority, members of the school board, school administrators, teachers, health professionals, and members of the public.

School Meals

Meals served through the National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs will

- Meet, at a minimum, nutrition requirements established by local, state, and federal statutes and regulations;
- Offer a variety of fruits and vegetables;
- Serve only low-fat (1%) and fat-free milk and nutritionally-equivalent non-dairy alternatives; and
- Ensure that half of the served grains are whole grain.

Breakfast

- Schools will, to the extent possible, operate the School Breakfast Program.
- Schools will, to the extent possible, arrange bus schedules and utilize methods to serve school break-

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fasts that encourage participation, including serving breakfast in the classroom, “grab-and-go” breakfast, or breakfast during morning break or recess.

Foods and Beverages Sold Individually (i.e., items sold in vending machines, snack lines, fundraisers, etc.)

- In elementary schools, any food or beverage sold individually should be limited to low-fat and non-fat milk, fruits, and non-fried vegetables.
- In middle/junior high and high schools, all foods and beverages sold individually outside the reimbursable school meal programs (including those sold through a la carte [snack] lines, vending machines, student stores, or fundraising activities) during the school day, or through programs for students after the school day, will meet the nutrition and portion size standards set forth in the School Food and Beverage Table on page 68.

Nutrition Education and Promotion

- ***Communications with Parents***
The district/school will offer healthy eating seminars for parents, send home nutrition information, post nutrition tips on school websites, and provide nutrient analyses of school menus.
- ***Food Marketing***
Schools will limit food and beverage marketing to the promotion of foods and beverages that meet the nutrition standards for meals or for foods and beverages sold individually (see above). School-based marketing of brands promoting predominantly low-nutrition foods and beverages is prohibited. The promotion of healthy foods, including fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and low-fat dairy products, is encouraged.

Physical Activity Opportunities and Physical Education (P.E.)

- ***Daily P.E.***
All students in grades K–12, including students with disabilities, special health-care needs, and in alternative educational settings, will receive daily physical education (or its equivalent of 150 minutes/week for elementary school students and 225 minutes/week for middle and high school students) for the entire school year. Students will spend at least 50 percent of physical education class time participating in moderate to vigorous physical activity.
- ***Recess***
All elementary school students will have at least 20 minutes a day of supervised recess, preferably outdoors, during which schools should encourage moderate to vigorous physical activity verbally and through the provision of space and equipment.

Physical Activity Opportunities Before and After School

All elementary, middle, and high schools will offer extracurricular physical activity programs, such as physical activity clubs or intramural programs. All high schools, and middle schools as appropriate, will offer interscholastic sports programs. After-school child care and enrichment programs will provide and encourage—verbally and through the provision of space, equipment, and activities—daily periods of moderate to vigorous physical activity for all participants.

Safe Routes to School

The school district will assess and, if necessary and to the extent possible, make needed improvements to make it safer and easier for students to walk and bike to school.

School Food and Beverage Table

BEVERAGES	
Allowed:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ water or seltzer water without added caloric sweeteners; ○ fruit and vegetable juices and fruit-based drinks that contain at least 50% fruit juice and that do not contain additional caloric sweeteners; ○ unflavored or flavored low-fat or fat-free milk and nutritionally-equivalent non-dairy beverages (<i>to be defined by U.S. Department of Agriculture</i>).
Not allowed:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ soft drinks containing caloric sweeteners; ○ sports drinks; ○ iced teas; ○ fruit-based drinks that contain less than 50% real fruit juice or that contain additional caloric sweeteners; ○ beverages containing caffeine, excluding low-fat or fat-free chocolate milk (which contain trivial amounts of caffeine).
FOODS	
A food item sold individually:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ will have no more than 35% of its calories from fat (excluding nuts, seeds, peanut butter, and other nut butters) and no more than 10% of its calories from saturated and trans fat combined; ○ will have no more than 35% of its weight from added sugars; ○ will contain no more than 230 mg of sodium per serving for chips, cereals, crackers, French fries, baked goods, and other snack items; ○ will contain no more than 480 mg of sodium per serving for pastas, meats, and soups; and ○ will contain no more than 600 mg of sodium for pizza, sandwiches, and main dishes.
PORTION SIZES	
Limit portion sizes of foods and beverages sold individually to:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ One and one-quarter ounces for chips, crackers, popcorn, cereal, trail mix, nuts, seeds, dried fruit, or jerky; ○ One ounce for cookies; ○ Two ounces for cereal bars, granola bars, pastries, muffins, doughnuts, bagels, and other bakery items; ○ Four fluid ounces for frozen desserts, including, but not limited to, low-fat or fat-free ice cream; ○ Eight ounces for non-frozen yogurt; ○ Twelve fluid ounces for beverages, excluding water; and ○ The portion size of a la carte entrees and side dishes, including potatoes, will not be greater than the size of comparable portions offered as part of school meals. Fruits and non-fried vegetables are exempt from portion-size limits.

Grassroots Advocacy: Organizing Your Local Unit to Make Change



Remember:

Successful advocacy campaigns are not a one-shot, short-term effort. They must be sustained over time.

In some situations, your goals could take months if not years to reach.

You need to be prepared to work for the long haul if you want to reach your goals.

Focused persuasion with the goal of effecting change is what advocacy is all about. When you work with the people you know on the local level, it becomes a grassroots campaign. Here are a few steps to help you get started as an advocate for school wellness.

Getting Started

Identify your issue. What health and wellness issues concern you? Is it junk food in your school? Not enough opportunities for physical activity? Setting a clear, measurable goal for your effort is the most important part of an advocacy campaign. Once you have set your goals, revisit and re-evaluate your strategy based on its effectiveness in achieving the goals.

Identify your target audience. On whom are you going to focus your efforts? The school board? Your principal? Other parents in your school? Why should your issue be important to them? What will move them to take the actions you request? The more you know about your target audience, the more focused you can be in developing your strategies in order to meet your overall goal(s). To understand your audience, you need to think outside of your organization. Talk to the people you want to persuade and ask them for their input. Getting your information solely from people who are already on your side

will not help you to reach effectively your target audience.

Researching Your Issue

Know the impact. Make sure that you know the number of people (i.e., students) who are currently affected by the problem you wish to correct as well as the number of people who will benefit from your plan. This is particularly important when you are trying to influence elected officials, because they are most interested in how a problem or policy is going to affect the voters to whom they are responsible.

Gather stories. Having real life examples to share that support your efforts is a highly effective tool. Talking hypothetically is not nearly as effective as sharing real-life anecdotal evidence. You don't have to be an expert on the subject! Just speak from the heart and tell decision makers how the identified problem affects his/her constituents. See the Local PTA Action Stories in this notebook for examples of other local PTA advocacy efforts.

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Coming Up with a Compelling Message that Connects with Your Target Audience

Planning is Everything! Don't just rely on great tactics. Good planning could make or break your success. When planning, you need to keep your goals and your target audience in mind. When possible and feasible, pre-test your message to ensure that it works for your target audience. You can do this by trying it out on a few people who are in the target audience. Note their opinions and suggestions. If your message doesn't look like it will have the desired effect, you can make adjustments with your goal in mind. Remember, you need to think like the people you wish to affect, not the ones who are already on your side.

Don't forget to "ask." Make sure that your message includes an "ask"—a doable action you want your target audience to perform or support. For example, ask your audience to "call school officials and demand that they replace non-nutritional foods in school vending machines with healthier alternatives."

Use multiple tactics. There are a number of ways you can influence your target audience. Don't be afraid to try multiple methods. Writing letters to decision makers, writing an op-ed for the local newspaper, holding a rally, and activating a phone tree are all examples of ways to get your message out to your target audience.

Find a spokesperson. Having a spokesperson for your campaign is also an effective means of reaching your target audience. This person doesn't have to be someone famous (in fact, everyday people often work best). He or she just has to be credible and have the ability to have an impact on your target audience.

Budgeting is key. Come up with a realistic budget for your effort. Don't make the mistake of spending lots of money on a big event and leaving little money for long-term follow-through. Consider your budget (time and money) when establishing your goals.

Call in the experts. Consider talking to people outside of your organization for advice. This will help you target your audience rather than the people within your organization.

Identify like-minded advocates. Are there others in your community who support your goals? Seek them out and solicit their help. The more diverse your voice, the more powerful the message. Just make sure that you stay focused on the goals you've established and that you don't stray into other areas.

Get PTA's position out in the community. Use your PTA newsletter or other available communication tools to get PTA's position out in the community. Harness the power that the PTA name brings to an effort. Also, speak about the issue publicly and provide updates whenever possible.

Local PTA Action Stories: Grassroots Advocacy



**Montgomery County
Council of PTAs;
Montgomery County, Maryland**

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Close to a dozen bills addressing nutrition and physical activity were introduced in the Maryland state legislature in the 2003, 2004 and 2005 sessions. Though only a few of these bills survived to be enacted as law, the overall result was an increase in awareness of these issues, especially among key policy makers. The process also brought together stakeholders who were able to continue their efforts, redirected at bringing about change at the local level.

One result of these local efforts occurred in October 2003 when the board of education (BOE) for Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) passed a resolution calling for a Vending Study Group to be formed in order to review the types

of beverages offered in vending machines. Another resolution was passed by the BOE in December 2003 restricting the sale of soda until the end of the school day, as well as expanding the charge of the Vending Study Group to address the snacks available in vending machines.

The chair of Montgomery County Council of PTA's (MCCPTA) health committee served on the Vending Study Group along with two other parents. She became originally involved in MCCPTA's efforts to address nutrition and physical activity after reading a notice in her local unit's newsletter about state legislation having to do with vending profits. The Vending Study Group met from November 2003 to January 2004 to review federal and state policies regarding beverages and snacks, county health education practices, and nationwide actions to combat obesity, and met with students to include their input.

The entire set of recommendations the Vending Study Group had developed were approved by the county superintendent, who officially announced that the changes would take place in the 2004–2005 school year. In order to expand the offering of healthier foods available during school hours, vending machines do

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not contain sodas, are not turned on during the school day, and have strict nutrition standards that require snacks to have less fat and sugar. Going beyond the group's recommendations, the county mandated that the newly adopted standards must apply to a la carte items as well.

In addition to the success that resulted from the PTA's involvement in the county-wide vending machine changes, the MCCPTA health committee chair has also recently led the committee in adopting two resolutions aimed at increasing the quality of physical education in MCPS schools. The first resolution requests that the BOE approve a new physical education curriculum that has been developed by the MCPS office for physical education (PE) curriculum in conjunction with the State of Maryland, with input from experts in the field of physical education. This new curriculum is standards-based and covers important areas not previously covered in traditional programs. The hope is to establish a strong foundation of physical activity during students' formative years that will instill a life-long practice of physical fitness. At the time the resolution was passed, the new curriculum was in draft form waiting approval by the BOE. Because the MCCPTA also realizes that schools may not have enough time allotted to physical education in order to implement effectively the program, the second resolution asks the BOE and MCPS to examine ways to increase the amount of time elementary schools designate for physical education classes.

MCCPTA intends for these resolutions to empower them with a collective voice that will allow them to convey a strong message in negotiations with the school system on how best to reconfigure the overall instructional time to accommodate an increase in PE minutes. They will continue to organize their members to contact their school's food service representative, in addition to writing letters and testifying at BOE meetings. They have also created a website (<http://us.net/mccpta/health.html>) for parents, providing them with supplemental information about the resolutions and links to other resources. They have already begun to collect information from across their region and the country that identifies alternative approaches that they intend to share with MCPS, and they plan to develop a strategy that will test the implementation of the new PE curriculum.

Physical Education and Nutrition Resolutions; Alaska PTA

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The Alaska PTA passed a resolution in 2001 advocating for regular physical education (PE) programs in its schools. Two years later, they also passed a resolution on school nutrition and they then decided to submit these two resolutions to National PTA. *The Importance of Physical Education in Our Schools* resolution was adopted at the National PTA Convention in June 2003. A year later, the *Nutritional Eating Require-*

ments in Our Schools to Combat Childhood Obesity resolution was also adopted by National PTA.

In addition, the Alaska PTA is promoting healthier snacks in after-school settings and encouraging local units to introduce walking programs before and after school and at lunchtime. They have also created a family fitness and nutrition toolkit on CD-ROM to help families adopt a healthy lifestyle. The kit includes Alaskan-native and other physical activity games, a plan for staging a bike rodeo, and a 12-month calendar featuring health activities for each day of the year.

Currently, the PTA is working with the Alaska Department of Education & Early Development in promoting the department's School Breakfast Start-Up program, a federally funded program to help schools not eligible for participation in the federal breakfast program offer breakfast to their students.

**Blue Springs Council of PTAs;
Blue Springs, Missouri**

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In the fall of 2003, as a result of the efforts of a small group of committed PTA volunteers, Blue Springs School District in Blue Springs, Mis-

souri, agreed to turn off all soda machines at the elementary and middle school levels during the school day. Building on the momentum of this success, the Franklin Smith Elementary PTA in the Blue Springs School District continues to make strides toward improving the nutritional health of children within its school district.

Parents at Franklin Smith were concerned about the unhealthy snack and beverage choices available to their children every day at school. After researching the subject, and learning of the serious negative health effects of poor nutritional choices in children, they worked closely with the Missouri PTA legislative vice president to create a Missouri state resolution titled *Healthy School Choices for Healthy School Kids*. This resolution was adopted at the Missouri PTA Convention in October 2004.

One of the Franklin Smith PTA members requested that a nutrition committee be formed by the Blue Springs Council of PTAs and volunteered to chair that committee. At a council meeting, the nutrition committee chair presented both the Missouri PTA resolution and the National PTA resolution, *Nutritional Eating Requirements in Our Schools to Combat Childhood Obesity* (also passed in 2004), and expressed a desire to work with administration, faculty, parents, and the district food service director to discuss ways to improve nutrition in their school district. As a result, a committee meeting including parents and administrators was held, where it was decided that a parent survey would be beneficial.

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The nutrition committee chair first created a survey for parents and then worked with PTA presidents in the district to get the word out in their newsletters to parents that their input was needed for the survey. It was mostly done electronically, but the option for manually filling out the survey was available.

Once the committee compiled the results of the parent survey, binders containing the Missouri and National PTA resolutions and the parent survey results were created for all school board members within the district. The binders also contained information about the local school wellness policies that must now be developed and imple-

mented at schools that receive federal funding for their school meals programs as a result of the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization of 2004. The nutrition committee requested that the school board review the material in the binders and urged the school board to create and implement the district wellness policy before the fall 2006–2007 deadline, since so much of the work for the school wellness policy had already been done.

While there are still improvements to be made, Blue Springs Council of PTAs provides a great example of how PTAs and school districts can work together to improve the lives of children at the local level.



Handouts

Grassroots Advocacy

Please make copies of these handouts and share them with parents.



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.