



Action for Healthy Kids.

Progress or Promises?

What's Working For and Against Healthy Schools

The State of School Wellness: Action for Healthy Kids Stakeholder Research

School Wellness Defined

School wellness encompasses healthy eating, adequate physical activity, nutrition education, and physical education for all students. Improving school wellness practices is essential to decreasing childhood obesity and preparing children to live healthy, active, productive lives.

Free downloads of **The State of School Wellness: Action for Healthy Kids Stakeholder Research (research results) and Progress or Promises? What's Working For and Against Healthy Schools (2008 Action for Healthy Kids Report)**, are available at www.ActionForHealthyKids.org.

Overview

In October and November of 2007, Action for Healthy Kids conducted research with a wide range of school wellness stakeholders to gain insights into efforts to improve nutrition and increase physical activity for children in school.

Startling Gaps in Perception

The research revealed some startling gaps between perception and action that must be bridged for progress to continue.

Access to Healthful Foods and Beverages that Appeal to Kids

While most superintendents (80 percent) and school nutrition professionals (90 percent) say schools do provide access to healthy, youth-appealing foods and beverages, and that schools currently limit access to foods that are high in calories and low in nutrients, other stakeholders disagree – teachers, parents, and community health professionals most of all.

Need for Quality Physical Education Programs

About half of school board members, superintendents, and principals feel that most schools provide quality daily physical education programs for all students, while nearly 80 percent of physical education teachers feel improvement is needed, as do at least 70 percent of parents and students. (According to The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, just 4 percent of elementary schools, 8 percent of middle schools, and 2 percent of high schools provide daily P.E. to their students.)

Mixed Views on Effectiveness of Wellness Policies

Over 60 percent of superintendents and principals say that schools have effective wellness policies. Yet more than three out of four community health professionals disagree. School health professionals and

school nutrition professionals are split: about half feel that schools have effective policies, and half don't.

More Mixed Views on Wellness Policy Implementation

Seventy-seven percent of superintendents and 54% of principals feel that most schools are doing an adequate job implementing their wellness policies. But at least 70 percent of school health professionals, community health professionals, and physical education teachers say no.

Nutrition Education Needs Improving

Fewer than half of school nutrition professionals, school health professionals, physical education teachers, and parents feel schools are doing a good job of educating students about the importance of sound nutrition. Community health professionals and students are even more doubtful, with only a third or less indicating that schools provide adequate nutrition education.

Concerns about Physical Activity

Over half of school administrators (superintendents and principals) and board members believe schools have effective policies to encourage daily physical activity, while two-thirds or more of P.E. teachers, parents, students, and community and state education and health professionals disagree.



More Key Takeaways

Resources Are Inadequate

The majority of all stakeholder groups that responded to the survey strongly agree that schools are under-resourced to effectively strengthen school wellness.

Significant Barriers Hinder School Wellness

From a list of eight potential barriers to school wellness, respondents rate competition from other school priorities, lack of time in a school day, lack of resources available to implement school wellness policies, and the tracking and monitoring of policy implementation as most significant.

Those Best Positioned to Move School Wellness Forward...

From among a list of 11 stakeholder groups, respondents indicate that school administrators by far are the best positioned to move local school wellness forward. Parents and other caregivers come in second, with school board members close behind parents.

...Are Not Necessarily Viewed as the Most Supportive

Physical education teachers are judged most supportive overall, with 67 percent of respondents rating them as “very supportive” and 27 percent rating them as “somewhat supportive.” School health professionals are next, with 64 percent of respondents rating them as “very supportive” and 27 percent rating them as “somewhat supportive.” School administrators and school board members are also perceived as supportive but less so: only a quarter of survey respondents rate both groups as “very supportive” while over one-half of respondents rate them as “somewhat supportive.”

Ways to Achieve Positive Change

More resources (funding, staff, materials, time); changing school menus; improving and increasing physical education; boosting parental involvement; and better leadership at all levels were cited as the most important ways to achieve positive change.

Parent Encouragement Often Lacking

Over 70 percent of every group responding – including 73 percent of parents themselves – disagree that parents do a good job of encouraging their kids to be physically active every day. Similarly, over 60 percent of all groups responding – including 72 percent of parents themselves – disagree that that most parents encourage their children to consume healthful foods and beverages.

Opportunity for Schools to Provide More Guidance to Parents

Two-thirds or more of teachers, parents, school health professionals, and community and state health professionals feel that schools are not providing parents with adequate information on the importance of daily physical activity and guidance on sound nutrition.

Survey Methodology and Respondents

Eleven national education and health organizations* surveyed their members and constituents. Action for Healthy Kids also surveyed its own Team members.

In total, some 2,400 individuals from all 50 states responded. The survey group included school leaders (superintendents, principals, school board members); school personnel (school nutrition professionals, physical education and classroom teachers, and others); public health professionals; school wellness advocates; parents; students; and community members.

*Action for Healthy Kids Partners and other organizations participating in the research included: Afterschool Alliance; American Association of School Administrators; Center for Health and Health Care in Schools; Family, Career and Community Leaders of America; National Association for Sport and Physical Education; National Association of Elementary School Principals; National Association of Secondary School Principals; National Association of State Boards of Education; National Association of Student Councils; National PTA; National School Boards Association.

Further Resources

The Action for Healthy Kids web site offers a wide selection of resources for all stakeholders in school wellness. Visit www.ActionforHealthyKids.org for *Game On! The Ultimate Wellness Challenge*,™ *ReCharge! Energizing After-school*,™ a parent-engagement toolkit titled *Parents Advocating for School Wellness*, and a forthcoming resource for youth, “URWhatUEat.”

About Action for Healthy Kids

Action for Healthy Kids® is a national nonprofit organization that addresses the epidemic of overweight, undernourished and sedentary youth by focusing on improving nutrition and physical activity policies and practices in schools. This grassroots public-private partnership of 60 organizations and government agencies supports the efforts of Teams — comprised of more than 10,000 volunteers — in all states and the District of Columbia.

Action for Healthy Kids was founded in 2002 by former U.S. Surgeon General David Satcher, in response to the Surgeon General’s Call to Action to Prevent and Decrease Overweight and Obesity, which identified the school environment as one of five key sites of change.

To learn more, visit www.ActionForHealthyKids.org.