



Chapter 9: Schoolwide Health Promotion



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Section 1: School-wide Health Promotion

There are many opportunities within schools to teach, model and support the overall health and development of students and staff. We can set students and staff up for success by creating healthy environments that support whole-child wellness (physical and emotional) and encourage them to practice healthy habits. Studies show a strong connection between healthy behaviors and academic achievement. When students practice healthy habits, they:

- Are **more focused and attentive** and come to school ready to learn.
- **Sleep better**, which can help improve their mood, increase physical energy and strengthen their immune system.
- Are **more confident** and have **fewer behavioral issues** in the classroom.

School nurses play a vital role in creating a culture that influences healthy behaviors through schoolwide health promotions:

- Advocating for access to healthy foods and beverages.
- Creating opportunities for physical activity and emotional wellness support.
- Serving as a healthy role model.

The information included in this chapter will provide ideas and resources to help support the school nurse's role in schoolwide health promotion.

Reference

Busch V., Loyen A., Lodder M., Schrijvers A.J.P., van Yperen T.A., de Leeuw J.R.J. The effects of adolescent health-related behavior on academic performance: A systematic review of the longitudinal evidence. *Rev Educ Res.* 2014;84(2):245-274. doi:10.3102/0034654313518441





Section 2: Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child

The [Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child](#) (WSCC) model, the CDC’s framework for addressing health in schools, is student-centered and emphasizes the role of the community in supporting the school, the connections between health and academic achievement, and the importance of evidence-based school policies and practices. The overarching goal of the WSCC model is to keep students healthy, safe, engaged, supported and challenged.

The model is composed of 10 components, with opportunities for school nurses to provide schoolwide health promotion in each area.



Health Services

School health services provide first aid, emergency care, and assessment and planning for the management of chronic conditions. In addition, they provide wellness promotion, referral to prevention services, and student and parent education. School nurses connect school staff, students, families, community and healthcare providers to promote the health of students and a healthy and safe school environment.

Health Promotion Strategies

- Promote health services and introduce your role so students, staff and parents/guardians are aware of the services you provide on your school’s announcements, newsletters and webpage.
- Create a section in your school’s newsletter with updates from the school nurse about illness and injury prevention, healthy lifestyle tips or upcoming health events (e.g., health fairs, screenings).
- Create signage for the school nurse office so students and staff can easily locate you.
- Provide education to students and parents/guardians about chronic conditions and coordinate care with external healthcare providers.
- Train appropriate school staff on how to provide resources that support students with chronic health conditions.

Nutrition Environment and Services

The school nutrition environment provides students with opportunities to learn and practice healthy eating through available foods and beverages, nutrition education, and messages about food in the cafeteria and throughout the school campus. Students may have access to foods and beverages in a variety of venues at school, including the cafeteria, vending machines, grab-and-go kiosks, school stores, concession stands, classroom rewards, classroom parties, school celebrations and fundraisers.

All individuals in the school community, including school nurses, play an important role in supporting healthy school nutrition environments by encouraging participation in school meal programs, role modeling healthy eating habits and ensuring students have access to free drinking water throughout the day.

Health Promotion Strategies

- Collaborate with the school nutrition team to highlight school meals on morning announcements. Feature smart menu choices or cafeteria promotions on TV monitors, the school website, the school newspaper and cafeteria signage.
- Encourage school staff to be positive role models by participating in school meals, drinking water, and promoting smart food and beverage choices.



- Support nutritional needs of students with chronic health conditions, including food allergies and diabetes, and advocate for students with special dietary needs to ensure options are provided, per federal regulations.
- Encourage caregivers to complete a free and reduced meal application to ensure students have access to nutritious meals.
- Screen for food insecurity and refer students to community-based healthcare providers and healthy eating services.
- Encourage nonfood rewards and healthy classroom celebrations. Create school guidelines around healthy nonfood rewards (stickers, extra activity time, water bottles, etc.), display a bulletin board promoting healthy rewards or give a presentation about the importance of healthy rewards at a staff meeting.
- Ensure water fountains, dispensers and hydration stations are available throughout the school.

Physical Education and Physical Activity

Schools are in a unique position to help students get the recommended 60 minutes or more of moderate to vigorous physical activity daily by offering opportunities for students to be active throughout the school day. Not only can physical activity help you feel energized, focused and alert, but it is also a great coping skill to help manage feelings and emotions. The benefits of physical activity are well documented, and school nurses have an opportunity to teach students about the importance of movement through activities and education.

Health Promotion Strategies

- Collaborate with PE staff to design appropriate programs for students with special health concerns.
- Incorporate brain breaks and other movement-based activities on morning announcements, in the classrooms and in all special classes.
- Encourage all students to participate in physical activity, regardless of ability, unless health conditions prevent it.

- Ensure access to free drinking water in the gym and other physical activity areas.

Health Education

Health education consists of any combination of planned learning experiences to teach skills students need to make positive health decisions. When provided by qualified, trained teachers, health education helps students acquire the knowledge, attitudes and skills they need for making health-promoting decisions, achieving health literacy, adopting health-enhancing behaviors and promoting the health of others.

Being involved in health education formally and informally, the school nurse can make the largest impact to promote health and wellness. The school nurse can always take advantage of teachable moments in the health clinic, taking time to talk to students about such topics as the importance of hand hygiene and cleaning wounds, ways to keep yourself healthy and ways to ask for help when you need it.

Health Promotion Strategies

- Collaborate with various departments to provide education on health-related topics. For example, team up with the counseling and psychological staff to coordinate schoolwide prevention activities, such as suicide prevention programs and ghost-outs (drunk driving prevention program). Alternatively, connect with health education, PE and school nutrition services staff to implement programs that will enhance healthy behaviors in eating and physical activity. These efforts can have a far-reaching effect on health issues.
- Teach students and staff about importance of eating nutritious meals, physical activity, sleep, injury and illness prevention, coping strategies and other healthy behaviors during daily interactions or in-classroom lessons.
- Teach classes for staff on infection control, CPR and AED, first aid, specific illnesses and health issues.
- Conference with teachers and staff about an individual student’s health needs and effects on the educational process.
- Advocate for healthy practices that will have a direct effect on education and attendance, such as hand hygiene, including availability of all necessary supplies.



- Display bulletin boards in the health clinic, teachers’ lounge and hallways promoting health and well-being.
- Host health fairs for students and/or staff.
- Ensure students get comprehensive health education that includes information on common chronic health conditions and uses CDC’s Health Education Curriculum Analysis Tool ([cdc.gov/healthyouth/hecat/index.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/healthyouth/hecat/index.htm)) to help improve the delivery of health education.

Community Involvement

Community groups and local businesses can create partnerships with schools, share resources, and volunteer to support youth learning and health-related activities.

Health Promotion Strategies

- Involve local hospitals, healthcare plans, health departments, school-based and community health centers, and other health organizations in school health initiatives.
- Connect with out-of-school programs about access to health services and students with chronic health conditions.

Family Engagement

Family engagement is an important collaboration where schools are committed to involving families in meaningful ways, and parents/guardians are committed to actively supporting their children’s health and well-being. Families and school staff can work together to support and improve the health of their youth. When we create a positive relationship between families and schools, it reinforces the importance of health and well-being in multiple settings.

Health Promotion Strategies

- Provide opportunities for parents/guardians to learn about chronic health conditions and school health services.
- Encourage families to participate in school-based programs and activities that promote healthy behaviors.

Employee Wellness

School staff serve as powerful role models for students. When the work environment is set up to support healthy eating, physical activity and emotional wellness, staff members are more likely to participate in healthy behaviors and serve as positive role models. Staff training and role modeling is a key component to the successful well-being of youth at out-of-school-time settings.

Health Promotion Strategies

- Create a healthy and supportive work environment for staff that prohibits tobacco use and encourages healthy eating and physical activity practices.
- Encourage school staff to model healthy behaviors around nutrition, physical activity and emotional wellness, and recognize staff members who serve as positive role models.
- Encourage school staff to participate in professional development opportunities to learn about physical activity, nutrition, behavior management and healthy lifestyle behaviors.
- Train all staff each year on adopted policies that support well-being, and provide opportunities for them to serve as healthy role models to students.

Physical Environment

A healthy and safe physical environment promotes learning by ensuring the health and safety of students and staff.

Health Promotion Strategies

- Provide a safe physical environment, both outside and inside school buildings, by ensuring proper cleaning, maintenance and ventilation, and by limiting exposure to chemicals and pollutants.
- Ensure access to clean, safe drinking water.
- Display posters, pictures, books, bulletin boards, etc. that promote positive messages about nutrition, physical activity and emotional wellness.



Social and Emotional Climate

A positive social and emotional school climate is conducive to effective teaching and learning. The school climate can affect student engagement in school activities, their relationships with others, their health and growth, and their academic performance. (Source: [cdc.gov/healthyschools/wsc/index.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/wsc/index.htm))

Health Promotion Strategies

- Promote a positive school climate where respect is encouraged and students can seek help from trusted adults.
- Create policies that ensure food and physical activity are not used as rewards or physical punishment.

Counseling, Psychological and Social Services

These prevention and intervention services support the mental, behavioral, social and emotional health of students.

Health Promotion Strategies

- Identify, track and provide direct care to students with emotional, behavioral, mental health or social needs.
- Help students with chronic health conditions during transitions, such as changes in schools or family structure.
- Provide or refer students and families to school- and community-based counseling services.



Section 3: Advocating for Health and Wellness

School nurses ensure that all youth have access to appropriate educational opportunities regardless of their state of health. They have a foundational role, providing not only direct services for students with health conditions, but also [promoting the health of the communities in which they live and serve](#). To promote a healthy and supportive environment where students can thrive, school nurses should be familiar with their district’s school wellness policy and ensure all areas are being met and serve on their school’s wellness council.

Local School Wellness Policy

A [local school wellness policy](#) is a written document that guides a local educational agency’s (LEA) or school district’s efforts to establish a school environment that promotes students’ health, well-being and ability to learn. A wellness policy is required for each LEA participating in the National School Lunch Program and/or School Breakfast Program and is required to have:

- Specific goals for nutrition and education, physical activity, and other school-based activities to promote student wellness.
- Standards and nutrition guidelines for all food and beverages sold to students on the school campus during school day.
- Standards for all food and beverages provided, but not sold, to students during the school day, like school parties, celebrations, snacks, etc.

All school wellness policies are public documents and should be reviewed and followed in the school. School nurses should familiarize themselves with the policy and adhere to the standards and guidelines. School nurses can advocate for updates and changes to the policy to ensure the wellness of students and staff is promoted throughout the school.

School wellness policies are created directly to support a healthy and safe environment. Here are policy examples from Alliance for a Healthier Generation to consider adding to your wellness policy:

School Meals

The district/school will:

- Offer a variety of foods and beverages that are appealing and attractive to youth.
- Post menus on the district website and/or individual school website and include nutrient content and ingredients.
- Prohibit the use of food as a reward or withholding food as a punishment.
- Encourage staff to model healthy eating behaviors.
- Promote participation in child nutrition programs among students and parents/guardians to ensure that caregivers know the programs available in their district and have access to those programs.
- Establish practices related to feeding students with unpaid meal balances that do not embarrass youth or increase social stigma related to being of low income.

Water

- Free, safe and unflavored drinking water is available to students during the school day and during the extended school day (including during out-of-school time and before and after school).
- Water cups/jugs are available in the cafeteria if a drinking fountain is not present.
- Students can bring and carry approved water bottles filled with only water before, during and after the school day across the school campus.

Physical Activity

- The district requires that all students receive education on the benefits of physical activity in conjunction with health (including nutrition) education.
- The district prohibits the use or withholding of physical activity (including recess) as a punishment during the school day and during the extended school day (including during out-of-school time and before and after school). The district will provide resources and training to school and out-of-school-time staff on appropriate ways to discipline students.
- The district requires that classroom physical activity be incorporated into planning throughout the school day and the extended school day.



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- The district requires that physical activity be provided in the classroom outside of planned instruction (physical activity breaks).
- The district requires that physical activity in the classroom is offered in addition to PE and recess at all school levels.

Bringing the local school wellness policy to your school's wellness council is a great way to ensure all staff members in the school are aware of the standards and guidelines put in place to support whole-child wellness in the school.



Section 4: School Wellness Councils

As a health expert, the school nurse should work in partnership with teachers, PE teachers/coaches, PTA, school nutrition staff and administrators to promote a healthy school environment. An effective way to accomplish this is through a school wellness council.

A school wellness council is an advisory group concerned with the health and well-being of students and staff. A council can be formed at the district level or school building level. This group typically has six to 12 members.

Why Do We Need School Wellness Councils?

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.
- Ensures district-level wellness policies are implemented at the school level.
- Represents the unique perspective of the community in a school building, enabling the health priorities and activities put in place to reflect the needs and interests of the school.
- Keeps teachers, staff, students and families informed of pertinent information related to wellness, school policy changes, etc.
- Ensures health priorities and activities are reflective of the true needs of the school.

The Role of School Wellness Councils

School wellness councils assess the school health environment, programs and policies in place and identify ways to strengthen these to improve the health of students and staff. Councils 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.

How to Start a School Wellness Council

The Alliance for a Healthier Generation has a comprehensive toolkit (healthiergeneration.org/take-action/schools/wellness-topics/policy/local-school-wellness-policy) to assist schools in starting a wellness council. This process is relatively easy, but it requires assistance from those in the school that have a passion for change.

As you consider the council members, first 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 setting up a steering committee structure that includes subcommittees. You may also want to prioritize membership based on those areas where you will be focusing during the school year. For instance, updating a PE curriculum would require including one or more PE teachers.

If a School Already Has a School Wellness Council

Get involved! Be a leader in advocating for improvements in all areas of health and wellness. If your school already has a group that meets to address student and staff health, including healthy eating and physical activity, this group can also take on the role of guiding the implementation of health and wellness initiatives. You can also work with school administrators to support existing wellness policy and encourage adoption of stronger language.

Do I Become an Advocate?

Your experiences, information, perspective and voice can influence leaders to improve school health and wellness policies. Contacting your federal and state legislators, along with your local school leaders, about pressing school health issues can make a difference. When you share your beliefs and experiences, you plant a seed that can grow into action. That is how positive change begins.



Section 5: Wellness Advocacy Resources

- Strong4Life Schools Hub: strong4life.com/schools
- Georgia Shape: georgiashape.org
- Georgia Association of School Nurses: gasn.org
- The Alliance for a Healthier Generation: healthiergeneration.org
- CDC Healthy Schools: cdc.gov/healthyschools
- Let's Move: letsmove.obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/active-schools
- Role of the 21st Century Nurse from NASN: nasn.org/nasn-resources/framework
- The School Wellness Policy Evaluation Tool: wellsat.org/about_the_WellSAT.aspx