

Children's Health Update

Does Your School's Wellness Policy Make The Grade?

(NAPSA)—If parents want to find out how well their child's school scores on health and wellness issues, they may want to learn more about the school's Local Wellness Policy and see how well it is being enforced. Created locally by each school district, these policies set minimum guidelines for nutritious foods and beverages offered, nutrition education and physical activity.

A recent study by Action for Healthy Kids found that only 54 percent of districts surveyed met the minimum requirements established by the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004. Nearly 20 percent of the schools did not address how the policies would be evaluated. "Parents and community members need to help schools implement and continually refine Local Wellness Policies," said Alicia Moag-Stahlberg, MS, RD, executive director of Action for Healthy Kids. A 2005 Action for Healthy Kids survey of 638 parents found that nearly two-thirds would like schools to restrict access to high calorie, low-nutrient snack foods.

However, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that 60 to 95 percent of schools allow students to purchase snacks and beverages from vending machines, school stores or snack bars, and less nutritious foods and beverages make up the majority of these sales. Seventy-seven percent of parents would like daily physical education for all children, but only 5.8 to 8 percent of schools nationally (depending on grade level) offer students daily physical education.



How healthy is the food offered in your child's school cafeteria? How much physical activity does your child's school offer?

"Many parents are eager to help improve their school's nutrition and physical activity but they don't know where to start," said Moag-Stahlberg. "Local Wellness Policies are a great opportunity for parents to get their feet in the door. Talk to your principal, food-service coordinator, school nurse, teachers and other interested parents. Parents must sometimes go out of their way to find out how they can help."

Here are a few suggestions:

1. Ask for a copy of your school's Local Wellness Policy and identify one component you can help make successful.
2. Join your child in the cafeteria to see what healthy options are available. Convey any support and/or concerns to the food-service staff and your school's administrator.
3. Ask a school administrator about policies regarding daily physical education and the nutrition of foods and beverages available for sale outside of the meal periods.
4. Encourage school officials, school administrators and foodservice staff to visit www.ActionForHealthyKids.org for resources.