

Children's Health

Is Your Child's School Committed To Wellness?

(NAPSA)—Many parents would be surprised to learn what their child's school is—and is not—doing to promote health and wellness. A new national survey of parents of school-aged children revealed a significant gap between what parents believe is happening and what is actually going on in terms of nutrition and physical activity.

The survey, conducted by Action for Healthy Kids, found that half of the parents polled feel their child's school is doing an "excellent" to "good" job restricting access to high calorie, low nutrient snack foods.

Actually, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports over 60 percent of schools allow students to purchase snacks or beverages from vending machines, school stores, or snack bars, and less nutritious foods and beverages make up the majority of these sales.

There is also a discrepancy relating to parents' knowledge of physical activity at school. Sixty-two percent of parents rated their child's school as "excellent" or "good" on "making daily physical education available for all students."

In reality, less than 10 percent of schools nationally offer students daily physical education, even though 77 percent of parents support requiring daily physical education for all children.

There is a way, however, for parents to become involved. The Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004 requires that all school districts participating in the National School Lunch Program implement "local wellness policies" before the 2006-2007 school year.



Studies show that most schools fall short of providing good nutritional foods and adequate physical activity for students.

The Act specifies that parents must be involved in designing these policies. "Parents would like a strong nutrition and physical activity focus in our schools," said Alicia Moag-Stahlberg, MS, RD, Executive Director of Action for Healthy Kids.

According to Moag-Stahlberg, there are several ways for parents and caregivers to take part in the process:

- Help spread the word to parents and other interested parties who can help districts implement and monitor the progress of local wellness policies.
- Find out who is coordinating the wellness policy at your school district, and find a way to help.
- Join your state's Action for Healthy Kids team to help schools improve nutrition and physical activity. Action for Healthy Kids works through 51 State Teams to improve nutrition and increase physical activity in schools.
- Encourage your district to use tools that can simplify the wellness policy process, such as the Wellness Policy Tool. To access this tool and for more information, visit www.actionforhealthykids.org.