

INCLUSION IN SCHOOL WELLNESS POLICIES

A school wellness policy is a document that guides a school and/or a district's efforts to create a healthier school environment for every student and staff member through quality physical education, physical activity before, during and after school, community and family involvement, staff involvement and nutrition education. Local school wellness policies help set children up for a healthier future by cultivating healthy eating and physical activity habits.

Research shows that good nutrition and physical activity before, during and after the school day, are strongly correlated with positive student outcomes and academics.¹

National efforts have been implemented to reverse the trends of youth physical inactivity and childhood obesity by focusing on increasing physical activity and other health promotion efforts during the school day through the updating and implementation of school wellness policies. Children and youth with disabilities are often not fully included in these efforts, yet often experience even greater rates of physical inactivity and obesity.

What is Inclusion?

Inclusion assumes that all children, regardless of ability or disability, have the right to:

- Be respected and appreciated as valuable members of the school community
- Fully participate in all school activities
- Interact with peers of all ability levels with opportunities to develop friendships and learn and respect differences

It is important to acknowledge the barriers related to health promotion programming for children and youth with disabilities.

- Lack of accessibility in the community, existing facilities and programs.
- Lack of knowledge of existing inclusive programs
- Transportation
- Lack of knowledge of the importance of physical activity and health benefits
- Inadequate family support

Full inclusion begins with the recognition that children and youth with disabilities are integral members of the school community and must be more than just acknowledged as an afterthought.

How can wellness policies support inclusion?

1. Involve people with disabilities or representatives on committees.
2. Educate committee members about inclusion, accessibility and health disparities of people with disabilities.
3. Keep people with disabilities or those that represent the interests of people with disabilities involved in all aspects of the wellness policy from development through evaluation.
4. Assess inclusion of students with disabilities and other issues specific to physical activity, wellness and students with disabilities.
5. Provide specific language throughout that includes children and youth with disabilities.
6. Be creative. Fully including children and youth with disabilities might require “thinking outside of the box.”

When wellness policies support inclusion for all students, everyone wins!

For more information on inclusion in school wellness policies, go to:

- NCHPAD’s Discover Inclusive School Wellness Toolkit at www.nchpad.org/schoolwellness.
- NCHPAD’s Educators page at www.nchpad.org/educators.

References:

¹ Bryan, Charity L.; Sims, Sandra K.; Dunaway, Donna L.; and Hester, Donna J., “Become a Champion for Healthy, Active Schools” (2019). Faculty Publications. 4333. <https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/facpubs/4333>. [Link: <https://www.shapeamerica.org/uploads/pdfs/2019/publications/strategies/Become-a-Champion-for-Health-Active-Schools.pdf>.]

