

# Healthy Kids, Healthy Communities

## School and Local Government Collaborations



### What Local Governments Can Do

Reversing the childhood obesity epidemic requires a comprehensive, multi-component approach. Everyone has a role to play, from government at all levels to communities and schools, health care providers, the food and beverage industries, and families.

During the past three years, the Local Government Commission has been working with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation on the Active Living Leadership project to identify specific ways in which state and local governments can take action to create healthier communities.

Identifying and implementing policies that support school and community efforts to make healthy foods available and affordable is essential. It is equally important for local government officials to collaborate with schools and communities to provide children and families with facilities, programs and services that promote lifelong physical activity and healthy eating.

This brochure provides examples of cities, counties and school districts working together to address childhood obesity. It offers ideas and guidance that will help local government officials leverage community resources and identify opportunities for collaboration. It also provides resources and references to assist policy-makers in developing and implementing new initiatives.

For more details: [www.lgc.org/activeliving](http://www.lgc.org/activeliving)

### Childhood Obesity: A Preventable Epidemic

**O**besity is one of the most pressing health threats to families and children nationwide. Today, one-third of American children and adolescents are either obese or at risk of becoming obese.<sup>1</sup> Children who are overweight or obese increase their likelihood of developing heart disease, type 2 diabetes, stroke, asthma and a host of other serious health problems.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to the extraordinary toll on our nation's health, obesity also poses a tremendous financial burden. The direct and indirect health costs associated with obesity in the United States are estimated at \$117 billion annually.<sup>3</sup>

In California, the statistics are alarming. Public health data show that nearly 30% of children and teens are overweight or obese,<sup>4</sup> a figure that has more than doubled over the last 10 years. The California Department of Health Services estimated that obesity, inactivity and being overweight cost the state approximately \$21.7 billion in 2000.<sup>5</sup>

In addition to parents and caregivers, policy and environmental factors also have a significant impact on children's health. Limited access to affordable, healthy foods, land-use decisions that discourage physical activity, greater reliance upon fast food and cutbacks in physical education by schools all contribute to the escalation of childhood obesity rates.

Together, schools and communities have the potential to improve the health of young people by addressing these issues – and local government support is crucial. Immediate actions must be taken to change the environments in which our children live, learn and play in ways that will increase physical activity and foster healthier eating.

## RESOURCES for wellness policies

The **Action for Healthy Kids** web site includes a template to help schools prepare a wellness policy and contains a link to some fundamental elements to consider when developing a wellness policy. [www.actionforhealthykids.org](http://www.actionforhealthykids.org)

The **Model School Wellness Policies** web site includes a sample policy model on physical education and nutrition developed by a representative working group convened by the National Alliance for Nutrition and Activity (NANA).

[www.schoolwellnesspolicies.org](http://www.schoolwellnesspolicies.org)

The **U.S. Department of Agriculture** web pages on school wellness policies offer informative sections covering local wellness policy requirements, creating, implementing and evaluating a wellness policy, examples of wellness policies, implementation tools and funding for local policies.

[www.fns.usda.gov/tn/Healthy/wellnesspolicy.html](http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/Healthy/wellnesspolicy.html)

The **Alliance for a Healthier Generation's Healthy Schools Builder** is an assessment tool designed to evaluate a school's efforts to provide healthy foods and physical activity. It also offers guidance to help schools customize a plan for creating a healthier environment.

[www.healthiergeneration.org/HSB](http://www.healthiergeneration.org/HSB)

The **American Association of School Administrators** provides resources to school leaders, including information on wellness policies.

[www.aasa.org/policy/content.cfm?ItemNumber=5665](http://www.aasa.org/policy/content.cfm?ItemNumber=5665)

The **National Conference of State Legislatures** monitors and reports on state legislative action related to fighting childhood obesity, including school wellness policies.

[www.ncsl.org/programs/health/ChildhoodObesity-2005.htm](http://www.ncsl.org/programs/health/ChildhoodObesity-2005.htm)

## School Wellness Policies: An Opportunity for Collaboration

Schools have a significant influence on children's food choices and activity levels almost every day. Children consume an estimated 35% to 50% of their daily calories in school during an average school day.<sup>6</sup> This makes it essential for schools to provide a wide variety of nutritious and affordable meals, snacks and beverages. Schools are also an obvious venue for regular physical activity, yet less than 10% of younger children have daily physical education in school.<sup>7</sup>

In June 2004, the **Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act** mandated that all local education agencies

participating in programs authorized under the National School Lunch Act create a local wellness policy. School districts are also required to involve many stakeholders in the policy development process and have a plan for measuring implementation.

### ■ Recognizing Policy Limitations

The federal government does not currently assess the quality of local wellness policies, nor does it provide funding to support policy implementation. In a 2006 survey, Action for Healthy Kids found that only half of the policies evaluated met the mandate's minimum requirements.<sup>8</sup> This gap presents an opportunity for local and county government officials to provide technical assistance, resources and structure to improve the quality of policies and implementation.

### ■ Minimum Requirements for School Wellness Policies

A closer look at school wellness policy requirements will help illustrate how local officials can assist schools to develop wellness policies.

The requirements include the following components:

- Goals for nutrition education, physical activity and other school-based activities that are designed to promote student wellness.
- Nutrition guidelines for all foods available on each school campus during the school day.
- Nutrition guidelines for reimbursable school meals.
- A plan for measuring implementation of the local wellness policy.
- Community involvement – including parents, students and representatives of the school board, administration and food authority, and the public – in the development of the school wellness policy.



# Leveraging Community Resources

**W**hile children spend a large portion of their days in school, their lives are also greatly influenced by their neighborhoods and the neighborhood resources surrounding their schools. As a result, a cohesive relationship between schools and communities is vital. It makes sense for local jurisdictions to work with school districts on policies that can have a broader impact on the community.

Initiatives such as the Safe Routes to Schools (SRTS) program, joint use of facilities agreements, before and after-school programs, in-school programs; schools as community centers, farm-to-school programs, school and community gardens, and zoning of fast food outlets can be successful when local government officials are engaged and work collaboratively with schools.

## 1 Safe Routes to Schools: The Five E's

A generation ago, approximately half of all school-age children walked or biked to school. Yet today, estimates show that nine out of 10 kids are driven to school.<sup>9</sup> The Safe Routes to School initiative emphasizes the need to improve conditions for walking and bicycling in neighborhoods surrounding schools.

**The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans)** has provided SRTS funding for local jurisdictions in the state since 1999. In 2005, the federal transportation bill expanded this initiative into a national program with funding flowing to local governments through state transportation agencies.

To improve walkability for residents, SRTS programs focus on addressing the five E's – Encouragement, Education, Enforcement, Engineering and Evaluation – the primary factors affecting community walkability. City and county involvement is essential because applications developed with community participation have the best chance of receiving funding.



## Marin Kids Get Safe and Healthy

A comprehensive Safe Routes to Schools program in Marin County, California, that uses the five E's achieved a 64% increase in walking and a 114% increase in bicycling by its second year.

A key component to the success of the Marin SRTS program is the creative and flexible approach used to find funding and interact with local agencies.

Marin's approach provides an opportunity for parents to work closely with their children's school, the community and the local government.

Cities supporting the program report reduced traffic congestion and collisions in and around schools, and decreased speed in residential neighborhoods.<sup>10</sup>

### RESOURCES for safe routes to schools

The **Bikes Belong** web site houses the **Safe Routes to School National Partnership** and provides regularly updated information and resources. <http://bikesbelong.org/page.cfm?PageID=249>

**The National Center for Safe Routes to School** strives to equip SRTS programs with the knowledge and technical information to implement safe and successful strategies. [www.saferoutesinfo.org](http://www.saferoutesinfo.org)

More details about SRTS funding opportunities in California are available through the **Caltrans** web site: [www.dot.ca.gov/hq/LocalPrograms/saferoute2.htm](http://www.dot.ca.gov/hq/LocalPrograms/saferoute2.htm)

**The Local Government Commission** teams with the **Marin County Bicycle Coalition** to offer one-day SRTS workshops. [www.saferoutestoschools.org](http://www.saferoutestoschools.org)  
For more information, email Paul Zykofsky at [pyzkofsky@lgc.org](mailto:pyzkofsky@lgc.org).

### The Five E's:

- 1 Encouragement
- 2 Education
- 3 Enforcement
- 4 Engineering
- 5 Evaluation

# Leveraging Community Resources



## RESOURCES for joint use of facilities

**The National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities** provides comprehensive information on planning, designing, funding, building, improving and maintaining safe, healthy, high-performance schools. Its web site includes a section devoted to sharing school facilities.

[www.edfacilities.org/rl/community\\_use.cfm](http://www.edfacilities.org/rl/community_use.cfm)

**The California Park and Recreation Society** has many examples of joint use agreements and issues to consider for creating successful agreements.

[www.cprs.org/training-information.htm](http://www.cprs.org/training-information.htm)

**The Cities, Counties and Schools Partnership of California** offers several joint use case studies. CCS is a joint effort of the League of California Cities, California State Association of Counties and California School Boards Association to promote the development of public policies that build and preserve communities by encouraging collaborative efforts among California's cities, counties and school boards.

[www.ccspartnership.org](http://www.ccspartnership.org)

## 2 Joint Use of Facilities

Pools and sports/activity facilities are important community resources that provide children and residents opportunities to be physically active and stay fit. They are also expensive to build, maintain and staff.

Some cities, school districts and institutions of higher education have found ways to share these costs which also allows them to broaden access for students, competitive sports teams and the general public. For example, by working with the local jurisdiction, a school district can make use of adjacent parks and open space as play areas for students. Other examples of successful joint use of facilities agreements include:

**The City of Claremont, California, and the Claremont Unified School District** have a joint bidding, purchasing/contracting agreement and a facility agreement. City and district staff meet regularly to determine which projects can be jointly bid and what products can be jointly purchased to increase bargaining power and decrease costs. The facility agreement entitles each party to use the other's buildings and facilities free of charge. Each party is responsible for maintenance and repair of its own facilities, and is also responsible for damages that may be caused when using the other's buildings or facilities.

**The City of Temecula, California, and the Temecula Valley Unified School District** entered into a joint use agreement to share in the planning, design, construction, maintenance and scheduling of the Temecula Valley Aquatic Facility. The city was able to invest capital reserves, developer fees and state park bond monies to pay \$3.1 million for design and construction costs. The school district will reimburse the city for 50% of construction costs over a 10-year period. The new pool opened in 2002 and offers competitive swimming and water polo, an expanded physical education program, public swimming and swimming lessons.

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## Practicing Collaboration, Avoiding Conflicts

Often schools and park departments have agreements to share gyms, fields and pools. While these may begin as informal agreements, practice has shown that conflicts are averted with formalized agreements.

**The Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation** recommends that such agreements specify:<sup>11</sup>

- Authority for entering the agreement.
- The intent and purpose of the agreement.
- A description of the facilities, areas and equipment to be shared.
- A description of the activities and services to be offered.
- Use priority.
- Staffing and supervision requirements.
- Financial arrangements and responsibilities.
- Operation policy and procedures.

### 3 Before and After-School Programs

Before and after-school programs offer cities and schools another opportunity to work together to provide safe activities for school-aged children. Programs can include both academic and recreational activities.

In Northern California, the City of Fairfield, the Fairfield Suisun Unified School District, Solano Community College and the University of California, Davis joined forces to provide a **“Place to Be After Three.”** The mayor’s task force on youth and the city youth commission identified an unmet need for supervised after-school opportunities. The partners entered into a joint use agreement and sought funding from public, foundation and corporate sources.

The program is now offered at five sites and includes sports, fitness, arts and music classes for middle-school students. Some of the positive outcomes have included increased academic success, a decrease in vandalism, reduction in after-school fighting, increased satisfaction with teen services, a reduction of police calls in program service areas, and an increase in college enrollment for participating students.

In Southern California, the City of Irvine and the Irvine Joint Unified School District formed **the Irvine Child Care Project**, a joint powers authority to oversee a citywide network of before and after-school programs. They secured developer donations for land and a \$1.5 million lease revenue bond. In 2000, the Irvine Child Care Project reported 22 sites serving 2,000 K-6 children. The project continues to seek state and private grants. Programs are provided by nonprofit organizations on school grounds, and include developmentally appropriate indoor and outdoor activities.

#### ■ RESOURCES

**The California Department of Education** administers public funding of before and after-school programs in California. Their web site provides information on program evaluation, funding and fiscal management and regional networking. [www.cde.ca.gov/ls/ba/as](http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/ba/as)



**Less than 10% of younger children have daily physical education in school.**



### 4 In-School Physical Activity

Although in-school activities are primarily the responsibility of school districts, local government can still find creative ways to serve as a resource. For example, local governments can offer schools technical expertise, help shape curriculum and place health staff at schools to help with issues related to nutrition and activity.

**The Shasta County Department of Public Health** places health educators in schools to train teachers in developmentally appropriate physical education activities. The health educators also convene school site wellness councils to promote safe recreation and healthy food choices.

#### ■ RESOURCES

**The Cities, Counties and Schools Partnership** offers many joint use case studies of successful collaborative efforts, including the Shasta Public Health Partnership and the Claremont joint use agreements.

[www.ccspartnership.org/wrkSwrkB/SC\\$W\\_Ch.2\\_CaseStudies.pdf](http://www.ccspartnership.org/wrkSwrkB/SC$W_Ch.2_CaseStudies.pdf)

# Leveraging Community Resources

## 5 Schools as Community Centers

According to a 2004 study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, parents said “distance from home to school” was the largest barrier to letting their children walk or bike to school.

Increasingly, new schools are being constructed on land donated by developers to school districts without any coordination with local government. This results in schools being built on the edge of towns or neighborhoods instead of in the centers of communities where they can be accessed more readily by walking or bicycling.

Coordination between school boards and local governments is essential to locating schools in areas that will encourage walking to school and physical activity among children.

**John A. Johnson Achievement Plus Elementary School** in Saint Paul, Minnesota, was renovated to serve as a community center with a state-of-the-art school for more than 400 children from preschool to grade six.

The 75,000 square-foot school is located next to a 63,000 square-foot YMCA facility that serves community members and students. The result of a partnership between the city, the school district, the YMCA and other community organizations, it now hosts hundreds of events annually and serves as a healthy environment for learning, fitness and social activity.

### ■ RESOURCES

The nonprofit **New Schools Better Neighborhoods** advocates for a vision of schools and other public facilities as community centers. Their web site provides case studies and resources. [www.nsbno.org](http://www.nsbno.org)

## 6 Farm-to-School Programs

To increase children’s access to healthy foods such as fresh fruits and vegetables, some schools are partnering with nearby farms. More schools are finding that local farms are an important community resource and can become sustainable sources of fresh ingredients for healthier school meals. By providing incentives for local farmers to participate in farm-to-school programs, local jurisdictions can promote locally grown food, increase children’s exposure to fresh produce and help educate children about how food is grown and distributed.

**The Tulare County Office of Education Nutrition Network** partners with local farmers, ranchers and the school district for the “Farmer in the Dell” program. Through exercises involving nutrition, social studies, mathematics, science and history, students learn about the agriculture of the Central Valley, how food gets from the farm to the table and how to make healthy food choices. Farmers and ranchers take an active role in the education process.

### ■ RESOURCES

**The National Farm to School Program** connects schools with local farms in order to help serve healthy meals in school cafeterias, improve student nutrition, provide health and nutrition education opportunities and support local farmers. The Farm to School web site offers information about related national policies, funding opportunities, surveys, evaluation tools and case studies. [www.farmtoschool.org/resources.htm](http://www.farmtoschool.org/resources.htm)



**One-third of American children and adolescents are either obese or at risk of becoming obese.**

## 7 School or Community Gardens

Community gardens offer residents the opportunity to grow fruits and vegetables. Community garden participants can also benefit from learning about healthy eating habits and engaging in moderate physical activity. The same concept can be implemented within or adjacent to a school as a way to engage children in growing and learning about food, while also increasing their exposure to fresh, nutritious fruits and vegetables.

Local jurisdictions can help school districts set up community gardens by identifying land adjacent to schools that can be used as a garden or by making staff from parks and recreation or public works departments available to assist the school in starting a garden.

**The Soil Born Farm Urban Agriculture Project**, an urban market garden in Sacramento, California, works with the neighboring Jonas Salk Middle School on an “edible schoolyard” program. They take children on field trips to nearby farms, and coordinate nutrition and cooking classes with the school. These types of activities provide students with the skills and knowledge to make nutritious choices and encourage them to participate in meal planning and preparation.

### RESOURCES

**The American Community Gardening Association** has several publications and programs on starting and developing a community garden. [www.communitygarden.org](http://www.communitygarden.org)



**Children consume 35% to 50% of their daily calories in school during an average school day.**

## 8 Zoning of Fast Food Outlets

Local jurisdiction can help create healthier environments for children by limiting or restricting the number of fast, unhealthy food outlets near schools.

**The City of Arcata, California**, limits the number of franchise restaurants to nine and banned fast food restaurants from locating near their high school. Students were involved in the public hearing process and the subcommittee that introduced the ordinance, which was adopted in 2000. About 75% of residents at the hearings supported the ordinance and liked how it supported locally owned business and maintained Arcata’s unique character. Local franchise owners were opposed until they understood that the ordinance would not shut down existing restaurants. [www.jashford.com/Pages/ArcataOrd1333.pdf](http://www.jashford.com/Pages/ArcataOrd1333.pdf)



**Detroit, Michigan**, has a zoning ordinance prohibiting fast food restaurants within 500 feet of a school. **Arden Hills, Minnesota**, prohibits fast food restaurant within 400 feet of schools, churches, public recreation areas and residential zoning. Both locations do so on the basis that fast food outlets are a nuisance in terms of litter, noise, traffic, loitering, air pollution and odors.

### RESOURCES

**The Center for Law and Public Health** provides details and case studies supporting the legality of using zoning to restrict fast food in “The Use of Zoning to Restrict Fast Food Outlets: A Potential Strategy to Combat Obesity.”

[www.publichealthlaw.net/Zoning%20Fast%20Food%20Outlets.pdf](http://www.publichealthlaw.net/Zoning%20Fast%20Food%20Outlets.pdf)

# A Call to Action

## for Local Government Officials

Local government officials have a unique opportunity to help schools craft policies and implement programs that can improve the health of children and families in the community. Local governments have a natural connection to their constituents – they know what works in their neighborhoods and are well-positioned to help connect schools with agencies and community partners within their jurisdiction.

The lessons local officials learn and the tools they develop in the process are invaluable for informing national policies on this front. Creating communities that support and encourage healthy eating and regular physical activity requires active collaboration among many key stakeholders. Local government involvement is crucial.

Through creative use of existing resources, relationship building and policy implementation, local government officials can help reverse the childhood obesity epidemic and improve the health of families and children in their communities.

## Active Living Leadership and the Local Government Commission



The Local Government Commission is a nonprofit, membership organization that provides inspiration, technical assistance and networking opportunity to local elected officials and other dedicated community leaders working to create healthy, walkable, and resource-efficient communities. To join or learn more about the LGC: [www.lgc.org](http://www.lgc.org)

Active Living Leadership is a national partnership initiative supported by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to help state and local leaders create and promote places, policies and programs that enable active living and healthy eating. [www.activelivingleadership.org](http://www.activelivingleadership.org)

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