



September 22, 2006

Dear Superintendent:

As you know, in June 2004 the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act was signed into law, making it mandatory for all local education agencies participating in federal school meal programs to create a local wellness policy by July 2006. On September 27, 2006, the Utah Action for Healthy Kids team is hosting an awards ceremony to honor the top five school district wellness policies. In preparation, the team compiled information that helps to answer the question **“How are Utah Schools Doing with Wellness Policies?”** We thought you may be interested in this information.

Background

The wellness policy requirement is a response to the epidemic of undernourished and overweight children in the United States and Utah, the weakening of nutrition and physical education requirements in the past two decades and the knowledge that kids who are physically active and eat well are successful in school. The urgency of the issue is leading to changes not just at school, but in workplaces, businesses and communities.

School districts are required to include school administrators, teachers, principals, health professionals and parents in the development of a policy and to include goals in the following areas: nutrition, physical activity, foods sold in schools and “other wellness activities” such as family involvement, staff wellness, after-school programs and access to school breakfast and lunch.

Not Just Words on Paper

Utah Action for Healthy Kids and its member organizations have assisted school districts by providing trainings, technical support and resources. The team’s goal is to provide education and encouragement so that Utah’s wellness policies are well-conceived, meaningful, and lead to action in each school.

How Hard can it be?

Think about changing your own health habits. It takes commitment and patience. Now, think about changing a whole school district made up of many people, each with habits and beliefs about kids, foods and physical activity. Schools across Utah are taking on this challenge and are having hard discussions about barriers to school wellness and how to overcome old habits. After all is said and done, most Utahns see that school wellness is what’s best for Utah kids.

How are Utah schools doing?

By the July 1, 2006 deadline, 75% of Utah school districts created a district wellness policy (30 out of 40 districts). Utah AFHK ranked each district's wellness policy according to the strength of the language, inclusion of each required area and adherence to the Utah AFHK "Recommendations for School Wellness Policies" distributed to each school district. Here are the results, alphabetically in categories indicating strongest to weakest policies.

Healthy School Pioneers

Davis
North Summit
Provo
Salt Lake
South Sanpete

On the Trail

Box Elder
Grand
Nebo
Ogden
Uintah
Wayne
Wasatch

Moving Ahead

Alpine
Granite
Juab
Murray
North Sanpete
Park City
Tooele
Washington
Weber

Getting Started

Duchesne
Emery
Garfield
Iron
Jordan
Kane
Logan
Sevier
South Summit

What Areas Pose the Biggest Challenges?

- Changing foods available at school to healthier options
- Acknowledging the importance of physical education and committing to providing 90 minutes or more of physical activity each week in elementary school
- Stretching beyond one recess per day in elementary school
- Commitment to wellness programs for school district employees
- Commitment to using non-food rewards
- Commitment to monitoring and evaluation of the policy

Making the Written Policy a Reality

Meaningful change will take place only when wellness policies become living documents that everyone in the school community embraces. We have a long way to go in Utah, but the good news is that the majority of our school districts are taking steps in the right direction. As you do your part in making school wellness a reality, please feel free to contact Utah Action for Healthy Kids and its team members for resources available in our state.

Utah Action for Healthy Kids
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