



How Local Wellness Policies Can Improve School Breakfast:
A Step-By-Step Guide for School & Community Partners
DRAFT

Background on the Local Wellness Policy Requirement

The 2004 federal reauthorization of the Child Nutrition Programs included a new requirement: by the start of the 2006 school year, the school boards of all school districts that serve school lunch (virtually all districts in California) must adopt a Local Wellness Policy. The federal law sets requirements for what the policy must contain and also who must be involved in its development. Specifically, the law requires that at a minimum each Local Wellness Policy must:

- include goals for nutrition education, physical activity, and other school-based activities designed to promote student wellness in a manner that the local educational agency determines appropriate;
- include nutrition guidelines for all foods available on the school campus during the school day;
- provide an assurance that guidelines for school meals are not less restrictive than those set by the Secretary;
- establish a plan for measuring implementation of the local wellness policy; and
- involve parents, students, and representatives of the school food authority, the school board, school administrators, and the public in development of the local wellness policy.

As noted in these requirements, members of the entire school community and the broader public have a critical role to play in this process.

Resources to Help Guide the Development of Wellness Policies

This guide is just one tool that can help you get involved with shaping your school district's Local Wellness Policy. In addition, given the quick timeline for the development and adoption of the policies, many organizations have already developed resources that can be helpful at the local level. Here are two of the most comprehensive sites:

- Food and Nutrition Services' Team Nutrition program has created a centralized resource with updates from USDA, sample policies and background information on nutrition, physical activity and nutrition education. See <http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/Healthy/wellnesspolicy.html>
- The National Alliance for Nutrition and Activity has created a national consensus model policy and also gathered useful background information. See www.schoolwellnesspolicies.org

The California Department of Education will soon create a website that includes California-specific resources¹.

Why Focus on School Breakfast?

There are many important issues to be discussed during the creation of a Local Wellness Policy. This resource guide focuses on the School Breakfast Program. Why? Because school breakfast is one of the most effective strategies for fighting hunger and preventing obesity.

Research shows the value of the School Breakfast Program:

- Kids who eat school breakfast do better on tests, have better classroom behavior and make fewer visits to the nurse's office than kids who don't participate.
- Kids who eat school breakfast consume more fruits, vegetables and calcium and less sugar than kids who don't participate.
- School breakfasts include more fruits and vegetables than other sources of breakfast—including breakfast prepared by parents.

Yet, in California, more than 1200 schools don't offer the School Breakfast Program, only 40% of kids who eat school lunch also eat school breakfast and only 16% of kids overall eat school breakfast. Not only does this missed opportunity mean that students are starting their day without the fuel they need to learn, but it also means that California schools are collectively turning away nearly \$400 million in federal nutrition funds. We can't afford to miss out on these resources!

As we work at the state level to make sure *all* California kids have access to the nutritional benefits of the School Breakfast Program, it's also important to strengthen the program at the local level. The Local Wellness Policy requirement is a prime opportunity to make real, positive changes to the breakfast program in your community.

¹ The website had not been created as of June 20, 2005. Contact jreich@cfpa.net for updated information.

Opportunities to Improve School Breakfast

Below is a step-by-step guide to developing the right school breakfast policy for your school district. First, you'll find some fact-finding questions you might want to research, principles you may want to discuss and resources that can help. Then, you'll find some recommended policies. There's a lot here; feel free to pick the items that you think are most important for your district to address.

Topic 1: Access to the School Breakfast Program

<i>Get the Facts</i>	Does every school in our district offer the School Breakfast Program? If not, why not?
<i>Ideas To Discuss</i>	What are the pro's and con's of offering school breakfast in every school?
<i>Resources</i>	See CFPA's forthcoming publication <i>Breakfast Works</i> for strategies that can help any school implement a successful breakfast program.

Policy Proposal. Except under extraordinary circumstances, all schools in our district will participate in all available federal school meal programs, including the School Breakfast Program, National School Lunch Program, After School Snack Program, Summer Food Service Program, and Child and Adult Care Food Program (including suppers). Schools that do not participate in one or more of these programs will provide information about why they are not at an annual School Board meeting (see the accountability section below).

Rationale. The fact that more than 8,000 California schools offer a breakfast program is evidence that school breakfast can work in every school. The advantages of school breakfast—including better academic performance, school behavior and dietary intake—are too important to let pass.

Topic 2: Maximizing Participation in the School Breakfast Program

<i>Get the Facts</i>	What is the school breakfast participation rate in our district? If possible, get the participation rates for each school site. Does the school district offer any "breakfast options" to maximize participation? Are competitive foods sold during meal time?
<i>Ideas to Discuss</i>	What are our goals for school breakfast participation and what policies are needed to get us on the path to reach them?
<i>Resources</i>	See www.breakfastfirst.org for information on the breakfast options.

Policy Proposal: When & Where Breakfast is Served/Sold. Recognizing that students of all ages and income groups (but especially low-income students) may arrive at school without having eaten a nutritious breakfast that maximizes their ability to learn:

- Schools will, to the extent possible, arrange bus schedules and utilize methods to serve school breakfasts that encourage participation, including serving breakfast in the classroom, "grab-and-go" breakfast, or breakfast during morning break or recess.
- During breakfast time, the only food or beverages that may be served or sold are full meals eligible for reimbursement under the School Breakfast Program. Schools may choose to exempt low-fat or nonfat milk and nondairy milk, water and fruit from this requirement.
- Schools that serve breakfast to students will notify parents and students of the availability of the School Breakfast Program.

Rationale. The breakfast options have proven success in maximizing participation. Eliminating most competitive foods during meal time encourages participation in the full meal program, which is much healthier than any collection of snacks, and also eliminates stigma for kids who must participate (due to income). It also maximizes reimbursement, helping to make meal programs financially sound.

Policy Proposal: Creating a Student-Friendly School Breakfast Environment. Meals served through the School Breakfast Program will be appealing and attractive to students and be served in clean and pleasant settings. Schools shall engage students and parents, through taste-tests of new items and surveys, in selecting foods sold through the school meal programs in order to identify new, healthful and appealing food choices. Schools will provide students with at least 10 minutes to eat after sitting down for breakfast and 20 minutes after sitting down for lunch.

Rationale. Engaging kids and families can help schools meet both nutrition and taste expectations. Having enough time to eat is essential, especially when there are long lines in the cafeteria.

Policy Proposal: Eliminating Stigma. As required by federal law, schools will prevent the overt identification of students who are eligible for free and reduced-price school meals. Toward this end, schools may use electronic identification and payment systems; provide meals at no charge to all children, regardless of income; promote the availability of school meals to all students; and/or use "grab-and-go" or classroom breakfast models.

Rationale. "Overt identification" is illegal and, as with all types of stigma, counter to the mission of the food programs.

Topic 3: Improving Nutrition

<i>Get the Facts</i>	What's on the menu for school breakfast?
<i>Ideas to Discuss</i>	What priorities does your district have for improving nutrition?
<i>Resources</i>	See www.breakfastfirst.org for <i>What's For Breakfast</i> , a guide to improving school breakfast quality (coming soon).

Policy Proposal. In addition to meeting existing local, state and federal statutes and regulations (including the federal nutrition standards for the School Breakfast Program), breakfasts served through the School Breakfast Program in our district will:

- offer at least one serving of fresh or dried fruit daily, with a variety of choices throughout each week;
- serve only low-fat (1%) and fat-free milk and nutritionally-equivalent non-dairy alternatives (to be defined by USDA);
- ensure that, if grain products are offered, at least one is a whole-grain product (a whole grain product is one in which the first ingredient is a whole grain) with at least 2 grams of fiber per serving²;
- limit added sugar to X grams per serving (with the exception of low-fat dairy products)³;
- include no products that have added trans fatty acids.

Schools shall share information about the nutritional content of meals with parents and students. Such information could be made available on menus, a website, on cafeteria menu boards, placards, or other point-of-purchase materials.

Rationale. Eating a nutritious school breakfast not only provides students with the nutrients they need to learn and grow, but it also helps them develop the healthy habit of eating a well-balanced breakfast. The definition of a healthy breakfast includes specific nutrients (Vitamin C, iron, etc.) as well as food groups (fruits and vegetables, whole grains).

Topic 4: Accountability

<i>Get the Facts</i>	Does the school food service director or superintendent currently provide the school board with an annual update on the status of the school meal programs?
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² The 2 g of fiber standard is derived from the SHAPE California standard of including 4 g of fiber in breakfast.

³ The standard is under development. Contact jreich@cfpa.net for updated information.

Ideas to Discuss What information should the school board and school community have each year on the meal programs, including breakfast?

Resources See <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/sh/sn/sminarrative.asp> for a California Department of Education report on school lunch quality. (There's no statewide data on school breakfast.)

Policy Proposal. On an annual basis, the school food service director, superintendent or designee shall present a report to the School Board that addresses the following:

- Whether or not each school in the district participates in the School Breakfast Program and, if not, why not.
- The participation rate for the School Breakfast Program in each school and, if the rate does not meet or exceed 70%, the steps that are being taken to increase participation.
- How well the breakfasts are meeting federal standards and the standards outlined in this policy.
- The results of a student satisfaction survey, to be administered on an annual basis by the school food service department, superintendent or designee, regarding the nutritional quality and appeal of the breakfasts, the breakfast eating environment and experience with cafeteria employees.

Rationale. The whole school community—including parents and neighbors—have an important role to play in helping schools nurture student health. Only with timely, useful information can they fulfill this responsibility.

Moving Forward

Here are some suggestions for how to get involved with your Local Wellness Policy process and advocate for better school breakfast:

- *Build on existing relationships.* As noted above, many food banks already have relationships with the local school district either through staff or board connections. By tapping into these existing relationships, you may be able to find out who's in charge of the Local Wellness Policy process and how you can get involved. If you don't have any contact with the schools, contact the School Food Service Director. S/he should also be an integral part of the process.
- *Get breakfast on the agenda.* The Local Wellness Policy requirement calls for school districts to include “nutrition guidelines for all foods available on the school campus during the school day” and “goals for nutrition education, physical activity, and other school-based activities designed to promote student wellness.” School breakfast—as food that's available on campus—must be part of the mix. While it's not required that LWPs focus on the full breadth of issues outlined in the model policy language

above, the federal law is presented as a minimum. School districts can always include more (but not less) in their local policies.

- *Visit a breakfast program.* The best way to engage your partners on the Local Wellness Policy Team in the importance of school breakfast is to visit a breakfast program in action. See what kids are eating. Ask them why they are *not* participating. If a certain school or classroom is piloting a breakfast option (such as classroom breakfast), ask that person to come and speak to the team about how to expand the program district-wide. To complement this information, be sure to ask your school food service director for the basic facts about the program—schools that offer/don't offer breakfast, participation rates, etc.
- *Share strategies.* Check in with other food bankers about their successes and challenges in promoting breakfast improvements through the Local Wellness Policy process.
- *Promote accountability.* Changing policies and programs is hard, but dealing with the consequences of hunger and obesity are harder. Set goals for school breakfast, make a plan for change and then keep track of your progress.

**Good luck with your work to improve school breakfast.
If you have questions or would like to share your experiences,
please contact Jessica at CFPA at jreich@cfpa.net or 415-777-4422 x129.**