

Raise Your Hand. Support School Wellness.

Tips for Effective Local School Wellness Policies Messaging

- ✓ Stress that all children deserve to go to a healthy school no matter where they live, what school they attend, or what grade they are in.
- ✓ Highlight the importance of local school wellness policies in helping set children up for a healthy future by cultivating healthy eating and physical activity habits.
- ✓ Emphasize the value of parents' and community members' involvement in developing or updating their school's local wellness policy.
- ✓ Provide examples of what local school wellness policies should focus on, including potential solutions, and encourage schools to enact standards that mirror or go beyond the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) rules for local wellness policies.
- ✓ Remember that there may be different audiences you're trying to reach, from parents and teachers to other community members. Each message point should be written to match the perspective of that audience member so that everyone feels empowered and encouraged to get involved!

Local School Wellness Policies Messages (*Use key messages consistently and repeatedly)

- ★ ***Children spend many of their waking hours and eat up to half of their daily calories at school, so schools must play a crucial role in cultivating healthy eating and physical activity habits and overall wellness.***
 - Local wellness policies in schools are important for improving children's health and academic performance.
 - Healthy, active children learn better, perform better academically, and behave better.
 - The most successful local school wellness policies are the result of parents and community members providing input and being able to easily access and understand the policies as they are implemented.
 - Local school wellness policies should focus on: updated nutrition standards for school meals and snacks; classroom celebrations and rewards; nutrition education; marketing of food and beverages; physical activity; and physical education.
 - It is important that states and school districts enact standards that mirror or go beyond the USDA's rules for local school wellness policies to ensure that all children benefit, no matter what school they attend.

Language to Emphasize/Language to Avoid

Messages that resonate best are clear and simple. They use everyday language free of jargon and communicate shared values and emotion. Below you'll find a list of words/phrases Voices for Healthy Kids encourages you to use (left-hand column) when talking about local wellness policies in schools. Language in the right-hand column includes terms and phrases not as easily understood or impactful when looking to engage your audience.

<i>Use This Language</i>	<i>Instead of This Language</i>
✓ Help kids grow up at a healthy weight	✗ Prevent childhood obesity
✓ Eating healthy and being physically active helps prevent diabetes and heart disease	✗ Eating healthy and being physically active helps prevent childhood obesity
✓ Standards	✗ Regulations

Tips for Effective Messaging to Support Public Policy Change

1 Connect with supporters.

When communicating to gain support for policy, systems, and environmental changes that help kids grow up at a healthy weight, it is important to use language that will move people to take action. By framing your message in a way that paints a picture of how the current environment makes it difficult, if not impossible, to make healthy choices, you can create a sense of urgency and the need to take action. Make sure to clarify that the change and action you're calling for is about transforming environments to make it easy for people to eat healthy and be physically active and less about creating personal behavior change.

2 Use the right words.

While obesity is a chronic disease, most people still think of it as a personal problem with a personal solution. They believe if someone is obese or overweight, that person just needs to eat less and be more physically active. They don't immediately see the need for public policy solutions. However, when talking about people facing obesity-related diseases like diabetes and heart disease, most people agree that we need to work together to find a solution to the problem. Avoid using "obesity" and instead emphasize the health threats posed by heart disease and/or diabetes.

3 Emphasize choice.

People are most supportive of healthy changes if they don't fear their choices will be limited. When talking about adding healthy options, stress the array of overall choices offered to people, especially parents who we are here to support, so the focus is not on the removal of unhealthy options.

4 Use the right messenger.

Messages are only as strong as the person delivering them. Is the person delivering the message credible? Are they representative of the community most affected? Do they have personal experience related to the issue? Are they respected by the audience? The best messenger needs to be determined for each situation and location. For example, when messaging on health issues, the best messenger could be a doctor, a nurse, or a patient. Make informed decisions about the most culturally appropriate messenger on an issue.

5 Stress consumer education as ONE piece of the puzzle.

People believe education is the best way to encourage behavior change. But helping all children grow up at a healthy weight is a complex challenge and education is only one part of the solution. Reinforce consumer education as key to awareness building about the problem and solutions, but emphasize other initiatives that drive system-wide policy change. For example, with tobacco use, warning labels did a great deal to educate consumers but the change in norms and dramatic drops in smoking rates happened when environmental changes happened like prohibiting the sale to minors and making workplaces smoke-free.

6 Alleviate skepticism and build trust.

People are very skeptical of government and framing our solutions only from that lens can prevent us from getting our message through to key audiences. Introduce policy, systems, and environmental change efforts to the public with words like "services," "resources," "partnerships," as people are more inclined to embrace this terminology instead of "regulations," "mandates," "bans," "funding," and "government."