



PARENTS IN ACTION!



*A guide to engaging
parents in local
school wellness policy*





CALIFORNIA PROJECT LEAN

California Project LEAN (Leaders Encouraging Activity and Nutrition) (CPL), a joint program of the California Department of Public Health and the Public Health Institute, focuses on youth and parent empowerment, policy and environmental change strategies, and community-based solutions. CPL's mission is to increase healthy eating and physical activity to reduce the prevalence of obesity and chronic diseases such as heart disease, cancer, stroke, osteoporosis, and diabetes.

CPL works with state and local physical activity and nutrition leaders, and key school and community organizations, to conduct programs in communities throughout California. Through an infrastructure of regional coordinators, CPL implements local interventions that increase opportunities for Californians to eat healthfully and be physically active.

This toolkit is funded by a grant from the California Endowment. The grant is administered by the Public Health Institute.

©2008. California Project LEAN.

Modification of this toolkit is prohibited without the express written permission of California Project LEAN. This toolkit may be reproduced for educational or personal uses only.

To purchase or download the toolkit, contact:

California Project LEAN

916.552.9907

www.CaliforniaProjectLEAN.org

California Project LEAN wishes to thank the following reviewers for their insightful feedback on this toolkit:

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Terry O’Toole, PhD

Division of Adolescent and School Health
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Judy Sheldon, M.S., R.D.

Nutrition Education, Marketing, and Outreach Section
California Department of Public Health
Women, Infant and Children Program (WIC)

Jan Lewis, M.A., R.D.

Nutrition Education Consultant
California Department of Education
Nutrition Services Division

April Jurisich, M.P.H., R.D.

Public Health Nutritionist
Shasta County Health and Human Services Agency,
Public Health

Sallie C. Yoshida, Dr.PH., R.D.

Nutrition Research Consultant

Lucrecia Farfan-Ramirez

County Director
University of California
Cooperative Extension, Alameda County

Monique Derricote, M.B.A., R.D.

Chief, Nutrition Education, Marketing, and
Outreach Section
California Department of Public Health
WIC Program

Heather Reed, M.A., R.D.

Nutrition Education Consultant
California Department of Education
Nutrition Services Division

Bea Fernández

Coordinator/Trainer
San Diego Parent University
San Diego Unified School District

Susan LeBlanc

Contract Manager
Nutrition Education, Marketing, and
Outreach Section
California Department of Public Health
WIC Program

Naomi Butler

Public Health Nutrition Manager
County of San Diego
Chronic Disease and Health Disparities
Maternal, Child, and Family Health Services

Holly Weber, M.S., R.D.

Project LEAN Regional Coordinator
Santa Clara County Public Health Department

Theresa Rickard-Borba, M.A.

Community Education Specialist
Shasta County Health and Human Services Agency,
Public Health

Joyce Nakashima, M.S., R.D.

Health Educator
California Project LEAN

Deirdre Kleske

Regional Lead
California Project LEAN, Southern Coast Region

Engaging Parents in School Wellness Policy

Introduction 5

Engaging Parents

Benefits of Engaging Parents 6

Strategies for Reaching Parents 8

Facilitating Successful Parent Meetings 14

Assessing Your School District

How Are Parents Currently Involved in Your School District? 15

Assessing Your School’s Nutrition and Physical
Activity Environment 16

Preparing Parents for Action

Taking Action on Local School Wellness Policies 17

Step 1: Pick a Problem and Find a Solution 19

Step 2: Identify the Policy Players 21

Step 3: Build an Action Plan 23

Step 4: Evaluate How You Are Doing 25

Case Studies

Los Angeles Unified School District 26

Monterey Elementary School, San Bernardino
Unified School District 29

Lewis Middle School, San Diego Unified School District 31

Alamosa Park Elementary, Vista Unified School District 33



Fact Sheets

Health and Academics..... 35

What is Policy?..... 37

Working with Schools..... 38

The School Environment..... 39

Classroom Messages..... 41

Marketing in Schools..... 43

California’s Nutrition Standards..... 45

Physical Activity..... 47

Physical Education..... 49

School Lunch Program..... 51

School Breakfast Program..... 53

Fundraising in Schools..... 55

Parent Handouts

Sample Resources for Communicating
Local School Wellness Policies to Parents 57

Additional Resources 64

Appendix

Glossary 73

Appendix A: Campus Survey 75

Appendix B: Action Plan Resources 85

Sample Student Survey..... 86

Letter Guide..... 87

Sample Letter..... 88

Sample Phone Guide..... 89

Presentations..... 90

Working with the Media..... 91





ENGAGING PARENTS IN SCHOOL WELLNESS POLICY

Introduction	5
Engaging Parents	
Benefits of Engaging Parents.....	6
Strategies for Reaching Parents	8
Facilitating Successful Parent Meetings	14
Assessing Your School District	
How Are Parents Currently Involved in Your School?.....	15
Assessing Your School's Nutrition and Physical Activity Environment	16
Preparing Parents for Action	
Taking Action on Local School Wellness Policies.....	17
Step 1: Pick a Problem and Find a Solution.....	19
Step 2: Identify the Policy Players	21
Step 3: Build an Action Plan	23
Step 4: Evaluate How You Are Doing.....	25
Case Studies	26





INTRODUCTION

The landscape of the school food, beverage, and physical activity environment has improved over the past few years and is set for even more positive change. In response to rising rates of overweight and inactivity in America's youth, federal legislation was passed that required school districts to develop a local school wellness policy (LSWP) by the beginning of the 2006-2007 school year. The LSWP required school districts to set goals for nutrition education, physical activity, all foods and beverages available on campus, and school-based activities designed to promote student wellness. The federal mandate also required school districts to establish a plan for measuring implementation. Additionally, it required schools to involve the community and, specifically, parents in the development of the policy.

The success of the LSWP can be shaped by parents, through their involvement in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the policy. Parents have the potential to play a critical role in the quality of the policy and extent to which it is implemented. Parent involvement in LSWP implementation provides an important opportunity for parents to promote both the academic achievement and health and wellness of their own children as well as the entire student body.

California Project LEAN (CPL) conducted a literature review and key informant interviews with parents and stakeholders working with parents to determine why parents participate in school activities; what would get parents involved; obstacles to partici-

pation; gaps in parent knowledge about LSWP; ways parents are interested in becoming involved; and the best vehicles for communicating with parents. This formative research guided the development of this toolkit.*

This toolkit aims to support parent efforts to improve the school environment and increase healthy food and physical activity opportunities through the LSWP.

Who should use this toolkit?

- School stakeholders who want to work with parents to implement/improve LSWPs.
- Parents who want to advocate for strong LSWPs.

Purpose of the toolkit:

- 1) To provide tools and resources that help school stakeholders engage parents in LSWP implementation.
- 2) To educate and engage English- and Spanish-speaking parents about LSWP requirements and expected changes to the nutrition and physical activity environment in their child's school.
- 3) To give parents the tools to be proactive and advocate when LSWP changes are not occurring.
- 4) To expand parent awareness of advocacy opportunities in their communities.

**For a copy of the formative research report, please go to www.CaliforniaProjectLEAN.org*



ENGAGING PARENTS

Benefits of Engaging Parents

Across the nation, schools are challenged to improve the academic success of their students. We know that healthy, fit students are more successful students. It has been well-established that well-nourished children:

- Perform better in school and have increased concentration, improved mathematics, reading and writing test scores and less disruptive behavior.¹
- Have better attendance.²

There are also numerous benefits to parent involvement in schools. Schools with involved parents become better schools. Students with involved parents, no matter what their income or background, are more likely to:

- Earn higher grades and test scores, and enroll in more advanced programs.³
- Be promoted to the next grade level, pass their classes, and earn credits.³
- Attend school regularly.³

- Have better social skills, show improved behavior, and adapt well to school.³
- Graduate and go on to advanced education.³

What is Parent Involvement/Engagement?

Parent involvement/engagement in schools can range from that of volunteer, fundraiser, and/or participant in parent groups to advocate for the improvement of school services.

For the purposes of this toolkit, CPL has defined parent engagement in schools as parents being involved in school activities which results in parents having an increased knowledge of what impacts students; seeing and being involved in positive school changes; feeling that their opinions and perspectives are valued; and parents becoming empowered.

¹Symons, C.W., Cinelli, B., James, T.C., and Groff, P., (1997). Bridging student health risks and academic achievement through comprehensive school health programs. *Journal of School Health*, 67(6), 220-227.

²National Association for Sport and Physical Education; Council of physical education for children. (2001). Physical education is critical to a complete education.

³Epstein, J. L. (2001). School and family partnerships. Johns Hopkins University. Report No. 6 March 1992. Center on school, family, and community partnerships.