



New York State Association of School Nurses

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"Caring for New York's Future"

WELLNESS POLICY POSITION STATEMENT

SUMMARY

It is the position of the New York State Association of School Nurses (NYSASN) that all school district nurses be part of the continued implementation, management, and evaluation of their district Wellness Policy. Overweight children and obesity among children are major public health threats. Being overweight is now the most common medical condition of childhood. School nurses are in the unique position of having daily contact with school age children and can assist in providing strategies needed for their participation in lifelong physical activity and healthy eating habits.

HISTORY

Medical experts agree that there is an epidemic of overweight and obesity among American children. Since 1980 the percentage of children who are overweight has more than doubled, and among adolescents the rate has more than tripled. Overweight is a risk factor for health conditions such as diabetes and is associated with problems such as poor self-esteem. (1) (Frac, 2006).

The local Wellness Policy requirement emerged out of a push from Congress to respond to these increased rates of obesity and to improve the health of America's youth. As a result of a new provision in the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004, Public Law 108-265, every school district participating in the National School Lunch and/or School Breakfast Programs must establish a local Wellness Policy by the start of the 2006-07 school year. In passing this legislation, Congress recognized the vital role schools play in ensuring the health and wellness of their students. (Ibid).

DESCRIPTION OF ISSUE

School Nurses are concerned about the increasing rates of overweight and obese children they care for. Also at issue is the decrease in physical activity in which students engage. School nurses not only have medical expertise, but also day-to-day knowledge that comes from seeing students who are suffering from a range of health problems.

Specifically, School Nurses :

- Can offer valuable insights at Wellness Committee meetings on the current wellness status of the school.
- Can provide anecdotal and statistical data about the health and habits of students in the district.

- Identify diet-related chronic disease and indications for prevention and treatment.
- Provide advice on the necessity of good nutrition in order to learn.
- Advocate for healthy, nutritious food and beverage choices to be available in all school vending machines, school stores, snack bars, and any area in school where food is sold.
- Are health/nutrition resource persons for students, staff, parents, and community.
- Are advocates for school and community facilities for physical activities for all students, staff members, parents, and community members.
- Provide health referrals as necessary.
- Are role models for making healthy eating choices. (NASN).

RATIONALE

School nurses are in a unique position to help promote healthy lifestyles and health practices to all students. We can help to enforce their districts' Wellness Policies by serving as a resource for students, administrators, and parents to insure students have the best chance of a healthy lifestyle through good nutrition and adequate physical activity.

RESOURCES/REFERENCES

1. Food Research and Action Center. "School Wellness Policy and Practice: Meeting the Needs of Low Income Students, 2006". Accessed from http://www.frac.org/pdf/wellness_guide2006. November 6, 2007.
2. NASN, "School Wellness Policies". Accessed from <http://www.nasn.org/default.aspx?tabid+318>. September 24, 2007.
3. School Wellness Policy: Guidance For Montana Schools. Accessed from <http://www.opi.mt.gov/schoolfood/wellness.html>. October 9, 2007.
4. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Healthy People 2010: Understanding and Improving Health. Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office.
5. West Virginia Takes Strong Stance on Student Wellness. Accessed from <http://wvde.state.wv.us/news/1177>. November 9, 2007.

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