



PROMOTING SCHOOL WELLNESS IN MINNESOTA SCHOOLS: CREATING AND SUSTAINING A SCHOOL HEALTH COUNCIL

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Introduction

Developing a School Health Council, also known as a School Wellness Committee, is a critical step to promote health and wellness in the school setting. Although not required by law, incorporating a School Health Council can ensure that a school's wellness policy is well written, enforced and adequately updated. School Health Councils play a critical role in monitoring the school's environment to ensure that health and wellness concepts are consistently reinforced and to ensure community partnership in these efforts.

What is a School Health Council?

A School Health Council is a group representing educators and administrators, parents, students and community members who work in partnership to improve the health in the school setting. These advisory groups make recommendations on school health policies, programs and practices to ensure they reflect community concerns and values. Most often School Health Councils advise an entire school district, but may also be useful for an individual school building, often called a "School Health Team".

Why are School Health Councils important?

As society becomes more aware and concerned about the health of children, communities are turning to schools for solutions. Schools are one of the most powerful influences in the lives of students, and can significantly help to create and promote healthy habits and behaviors in children. School Health Councils bring together school personnel and community partnerships to work together to ensure a healthy environment for students. Studies suggest that having a School Health Council results in a more comprehensive approach to school wellness.¹

Are there any federal or state laws requiring a School Health Council?

No. Federal law requires that schools have a school wellness policy. In addition, the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010²:

- » Requires the school district to designate at least one or more persons within the district or at each school to ensure that each school complies with the local wellness policy.
- » Requires the school district to permit parents, students, representatives of the school food authority, the school board, school administrators, and the general public to participate in the development and periodic review and update of the local school wellness policy.

Does the Minnesota School Boards Association (MSBA) Model Wellness Policy address School Health Council?

No. The MSBA model school wellness policy does not have language to create a School Health Council. But, the MSBA model policy has several portions of the policy that are supportive of developing a School Health Council. For example, the MSBA has a model policy has the following provision: “The school district encourages the involvement of students, parents, teachers, food service staff, and other interested persons in implementing, monitoring, and reviewing school district nutrition and physical activity policies.”

What other school policies may address the creation and management of a School Health Council?

The MSBA has model policies that may affect the creation and management of a School Health Council. Please refer to the following model policies for reference: 213 (School Board Committees), 302 (Superintendent), 305 (Policy Implementation), 601 (School District Curriculum and Instruction Goals), and 603 (Curriculum Development). Each school district has its own iteration of the MSBA model policies. Before developing policy language, please refer to the specific school district policies, including the school wellness policy.

What is strong sample language that I can use to incorporate into my school wellness policy relating to School Health Council?

Below is language that can be incorporated into a school board policy modeled after the MSBA’s model policy. This language can also be individually tailored to fit into a school board policy that does not follow the MSBA’s model policy.

Addition to the MSBA School Wellness Policy*IV. IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING**E. School Health Council*

- 1. The school district will permit parents, students, representatives of the school food authority, the school board, school administrators, and the general public to participate in the development and periodic review and update of the local school wellness policy.*
- 2. The superintendent will ensure the formation and implementation of a district-wide School Health Council by developing guidelines/procedures for the School Health Council.*
- 3. The School Health Council will include representatives from appropriate stakeholder groups as determined by the superintendent. The School Health Council may include students, parents, teachers, food service staff, and other interested persons.*
- 4. The superintendent will identify incentives, where available, for School Health Council members.*
- 5. The superintendent will ensure the School Health Council provides an annual report to the school board, individual schools, and the public on the implementation of and compliance with the School Wellness Policy and any other wellness objectives identified by the superintendent.*
- 6. The superintendent, with the assistance of any existing School Health Council, will develop guidelines/procedures to govern the School Health Council. These superintendent guidelines will include:*
 - a. School Health Council membership;*
 - b. School Health Council decision-making process;*
 - c. Frequency of meetings;*
 - d. School Health Council responsibilities; and*
 - e. Resources to support the School Health Council.*

Are there any other policy options that can be used relating to School Health Councils?

Yes. In the majority of the school districts around Minnesota, the superintendent has the power to implement and enforce existing school board policy. Therefore, a superintendent can issue protocols/procedures/guidelines to implement the school wellness policy. Below is sample language that a superintendent could use to implement a School Health Council. Principals can also use this language to develop a School Health Council (also known as a “School Health Team”) at individual school sites, as appropriate.

Guidelines to Implement and Manage a School Health Council

I. The School District has requested that the superintendent implement the school wellness policy. Pursuant to that request, the superintendent has developed the following guidelines to implement the goals and objectives outlined in the school wellness policy. As required by law, the school district will permit parents, students, representatives of the school food authority, the school board, school administrators, and the general public to participate in the development and periodic review and update of the local school wellness policy.

II. Purpose

The School Health Council is critical in developing, implementing, monitoring, reviewing and revising policies impacting school nutrition and physical activity policies, including the Wellness Policy.

The School Health Council, as directed by the superintendent, will be responsible for:

- » *Advising the superintendent and school board on school and community health issues.*
- » *Identifying student and staff health needs.*
- » *Monitoring and evaluating implementation of school wellness policies.*
- » *Supporting the school in developing a healthier school environment.*
- » *Assisting with policy development to support a healthy school environment.*
- » *Planning and implementing programs for students and staff.*
- » *Identifying funding and resources for student and staff wellness.*

*III. Provisions**A. School Health Council Members:*

- 1. The School Health Council shall include members from the school and community setting, including representatives from each school, and at least one person from each of the following groups:*
 - » *School Administrator*
 - » *Parent*
 - » *Student*
 - » *Early Childhood Educator*
 - » *Health Professionals*
 - » *School health services*
 - » *Food Service Representative*
 - » *PE Teacher*
 - » *Community Parks and Recreation Representative*
 - » *Local agricultural community, where available*
- 2. The School Health Council could also include community health professionals, members of the school board, school administrators, coaches and other members of the public.*

3. *The School Health Council will include and foster participation of representatives with varying linguistic, cultural, racial, gender, sexual orientation, and socio-economic backgrounds of the student population.*
4. *Recommendations to fill future vacancies will be made to the superintendent by the School Health Council.*
5. *The superintendent, with the assistance of the School Health Council, will determine any limitation on tenure or membership requirements.*

B. Decision-making process

The superintendent, with the assistance of the School Health Council, will determine the decision-making process. The superintendent will designate a staff member to take leadership of the group.

C. Frequency of Meetings:

School Health Council will establish a meeting schedule and meet every other month.

D. School Health Council Responsibilities:

1. Assess the school health environment

- » *The School Health Council will collect evaluation data (e.g. survey students before and after the wellness policy is implemented, create a focus group to discuss the wellness policy and the progress of implementation, observe the students behaviors, attitudes and choices with regard to nutrition, physical activity, and other health factors).*
- » *The School Health Council will develop a feedback mechanism allowing students, teachers, other school employees or the public to report on policy compliance and suggestions in promoting nutrition and physical activity in the school setting.*
- » *The School Health Council will develop indicators of success and ways to measure them.*
- » *The School Health Council will develop an annual action plan and monitor its implementation, progress and outcomes. The superintendent will present this plan to the School Board for approval.*

2. Recommendations on Policies, Programs, and other factors

- » *Once every two years, the School Health Council will review and make recommendations to the superintendent and/or the school board regarding the School Wellness Policy and any other policies, programs or other factors related to the school health environment.*
- » *On an annual basis, the School Health Council will assess and report to the School Board on policy compliance and other factors affecting the general state of nutrition and physical activity in the school setting. The report will consider nutrition, physical education, physical activity, family and community involvement, health education, and any other relevant topics.*
- » *Reports provided to the School Board will also be distributed to all school health councils, parent/teacher organizations, school principals, school health services personnel in the district, and the public as appropriate.*

E. Allocation of Resources

The superintendent, with the assistance of the School Health Council, will identify and develop an action plan to obtain needed resources.

Are there any other resources that may be helpful in developing a School Health Council?

Yes. There are several resources available that assist with making the case for a School Health Council and developing policies to support its sustainability. These include:

- » <http://www.schoolwellnesspolicies.org/WellnessPolicies.html>
- » Promoting Healthy Youth, Schools, and Communities: A Guide to Community-School Health Councils, American Cancer Society, <http://www.cancer.org/healthy/morewaysacshelpsyoustaywell/schoolhealth/schoolhealthcouncils/school-health-councils>
- » School Health Council Resource Guide, http://www.nche.org/ypc_school_communityschoolhealthcouncil.htm



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¹ “Transparency and Oversight in Local Wellness Policies,” Jamie F. Chrique and Frank Chaloupka, *Journal of School Health*, Volume 81, Issue 2, pages 114-121, February 2011.

² For more information on the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010, please visit www.publichealthlawcenter.org