

Local Wellness Policies in the Child Nutrition Act

BACKGROUND AND HISTORY

PTA has been closely involved with federal health policy since its inception, including pivotal roles in the creation of both the U.S. Public Health Service and the Department of Health and Human Services. In 1923, PTA worked to ensure the provision of hot lunches in schools. In the 1940s and 1950s, PTA was involved in the establishment and expansion of the school milk programs. PTA also worked to ensure the original passage of both the National School Lunch Act and the Child Nutrition Act. More recently, PTA and its coalition partners fought successfully for the inclusion of language mandating the creation of local school wellness policies in the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004. In 2009, PTA will be advocating to improve child health and wellness through the reauthorization of the Child Nutrition Act.

In the First Session of the 111th Congress, the reauthorization of the Child Nutrition Act will be up for consideration. The 2009 reauthorization comes at a pivotal time in our nation's understanding of the role of nutrition in the lives of American children. In 2004, approximately 47 percent of children between the ages of 6 and 19 were either overweight or obese. In addition, in that same year nearly 18 percent of all households with children were food insecure.

The statistics on child obesity and nutrition demonstrate the need for Congress to address the needs of both long-term health and the immediate poverty-related inadequacy in the availability of affordable, nutritious food during the next reauthorization. PTA is resolved to make the 2009 reauthorization of the Child Nutrition Act an opportunity to comprehensively address the conditions contributing to childhood obesity and other child health issues, rather than taking a piecemeal approach. This legislation, which expires on September 30, 2009, covers many essential programs, including:

National School Lunch Program

Over 30 million students participate in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) each day, in over 100,000 schools, with nearly 60 percent of participating students receiving a free or reduced-price lunch. NSLP meal pattern requirements are becoming increasingly healthy as they are being updated to meet the recommendations under the 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans. This is evidenced by the fact that students in the NSLP eat twice as many servings of vegetables at lunch as non-participants, according to the USDA's Food and Nutrition Services.

School Breakfast Program

Established in 1966 as a pilot project, the School Breakfast Program currently provides breakfast to nearly 10 million students in approximately 82,000 schools nationwide, with over 75 percent of students receiving a free or reduced-price breakfast. Like the NSLP, school breakfast meal patterns are being updated to reflect the recommendations of the 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans.

Summer Food Service Program and the Child and Adult Care Food Program

Created in 1968, the Summer Food Service Program served over 120 million free, nutritious meals in the summer of 2007 to low-income children. The Child and Adult Care Food Program provided nutritious meals and snacks each day to nearly 3 million children and over 85,000 adults, making day care of children and elderly adults more affordable for millions of low-income families.

Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC)

The WIC program was created in 1972 amidst growing concerns about lower income children suffering from anemia and inadequate growth which adversely affect brain size and cognitive ability. This program provides supplemental nutritious foods, nutrition education and counseling, screenings and referrals to other health, welfare and social services. In 2007, WIC served over 8 million eligible low-income pregnant and postpartum women, infants and children up to age 5.

LOCAL WELLNESS POLICIES AND REQUIREMENTS UNDER CURRENT LAW

PTA and its coalition partners fought successfully for the inclusion of language mandating the creation of local school wellness policies in the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004. These wellness policies gave parents, students, school nutrition representatives, school board members, school administrators, and the general public the opportunity to formulate local policies that are tailored to the specific needs of their communities.

Not only is it the right of parents to be involved in the major decisions affecting their children's health and well-being, but parental involvement has the additional benefit of engaging, and in many cases educating, parents and the surrounding community about the importance of healthy nutrition in the daily lives of their families. However, the resulting policies vary greatly with regard to their quality, successful implementation, and enforcement measures.

As required by law, all local wellness policies, at a minimum, must include:

- Goals for *nutrition education, physical activity and other school-based activities* that are designed to promote student wellness in a manner that the local educational agency determines is appropriate;
- *Nutrition guidelines* selected by the local educational agency for all foods available on each school campus under the local educational agency during the school day with the objectives of promoting student health and reducing childhood obesity;

- *Guidelines for reimbursable school meals*, which are no less restrictive than regulations and guidance issued by the Secretary of Agriculture;
- A plan for measuring implementation of the local wellness policy, including designation of 1 or more persons within the local educational agency or at each school, as appropriate, charged with operational responsibility for ensuring that each school fulfills the district's local wellness policy; and,
- *Community involvement*, including parents, students, and representatives of the school food authority, the school board, school administrators, and the public in the development of the school wellness policy.

RESOURCES AND CONTACT INFORMATION

For further information on the National PTA's recommendations for the reauthorization of the Child Nutrition Act, please see PTA's annual Public Policy Agenda. Available online at:
http://www.pta.org/PTA_PublicPolicyPDF_final.pdf

If you should have any questions about the Child Nutrition Act, please contact:

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