



HEALTHY STARTS HERE

How to Start and Run a Wellness Committee/SHAC



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Table of Contents

01 [Overview](#)

01 [AZ Health Zone and Local Wellness Policy](#)

04 [Cultural Considerations](#)

04 [Wellness Policy in Action](#)

05 [Resources](#)



Overview

This guide assists AZ Health Zone Local Implementing Agencies in new or continued work with starting and maintaining Local Wellness Committees or School Health Advisory Councils (SHACs).

Background and Purpose

Local Wellness Policy: A Local School Wellness Policy (LWP) is a document to guide a Local Educational Agency's (LEA) or school district's efforts to establish a school environment that promotes students' health, well-being, and ability to learn. All LEAs participating in the National School Lunch Program or School Breakfast Program are required to have a LWP.

Final Rule: Mandated by USDA, the Final Rule places requirements on schools operating the National School Breakfast or Lunch Program to create and assess a LWP.

Triennial Assessment: The Final Rule requires LEAs to conduct an assessment of the wellness policy every three years, at a minimum. This assessment determines:

- District compliance and implementation of the wellness policy.
- Strength and comprehensiveness of the LWP.
- Progress made in attaining the goals of the LWP.

Learn more about USDA's final rule in the resources section.

AZ Health Zone and Local Wellness Policy

AZ Health Zone, Arizona's SNAP-Ed program, is funded by USDA. Its focus is to improve nutrition and physical activity in Arizona through Policy, System, and Environmental (PSE) changes. Creating and maintaining a SHAC is considered PSE work that has the ability to engage community. A community driven SHAC improves the school health environment with support from school health stakeholders. This includes administration, teachers, students, parents, and other community members for sustainable, long term changes to improve health outcomes for the school community.

As an AZ Health Zone employee, determine which partner sites or districts have an upcoming Arizona Department of Education (ADE) review for the coming school year. These partners may be more interested and motivated to do LWP work.

Benefits of a Wellness Committee

- Dedicated group that assesses the school health environment to strengthen the programs and policies to influence student health.
- Having an up-to-date LWP that reflects the current health programming and priorities of the school district.
- The committee creates a healthy vision and goals of the school district.
- Opportunity to engage students, parents, community, and other school health stakeholders
- Best practice recommends having four LWP committee meetings per year.

How to Start a Wellness Committee

- School district members to contact:
 - The Food Service Director is usually involved in LWP work.
 - The school principal monitors and ensures adherence to the LWP on a school level.
 - The district superintendent ensures compliance to the LWP on a district level.
 - Your school contact or the community can help connect you to the district level.
- Determine if the district has SHAC meetings:
 - If SHAC meetings are not active, assist in organizing and starting a SHAC.
 - If meetings are not possible, review the LWP, help revise and make sure it's reflecting model policy and the commitments your school makes to student and employee wellness.
- Build a committee of at least 6-12 people including:

Your school district may have a committee or advisory group (staff wellness) in the school community that can take on the functions of the wellness committee.

- Parents, students, school nutrition, physical education/health teachers, nurses, social workers, board members, school administration, before/after school staff and community stakeholders
 - The committee should represent the diversity of your community and include people that have a passion for children's health, have an influence in the school and community, and have time to commit to supporting the committee's goals.
- Additional support you can offer:
 - Offer assistance with marketing and recruiting for the LWP committee.
 - Sometimes offering food or a food demo helps recruit.
 - SNAP-Ed is able to offer wellness coordinator and/or school champions stipends if the budget allows for participation and work on LWP committee.

How to Revise and Evaluate a Local Wellness Policy

- Find the LWP policy and evaluate
 - Check the school district website and specifically child nutrition services.
 - Ask the food service director, superintendent, cafeteria manager or a school contact you are working for a copy of the LWP.

- After locating your Wellness Policy, seek permission to send it to [Theresa LeGros](#) for the WellSAT3.0.
 - The WellSAT3.0 is a comparison to a model policy and measures the strength and comprehensiveness of the policy. The final rule requires LEA's to assess the LWP to a model policy at least once every three years.
 - After the policy has been assessed, results will be sent back to whoever submitted the request for evaluation, with a list of recommendations to improve the strength and comprehensiveness of the policy.
 - AZ Health Zone LIAs can share results with the school districts as this is a great way to partner and work together on updating the policy.
 - Hold a meeting with school stakeholders, preferably the Wellness Committee or SHAC regarding the results of the assessment. Go over changes in language required by the USDA and areas for potential growth that the stakeholder group can decide on and work on as a team.
 - Post the LWP online to help inform the school community and parents about the contents of the policy and any revisions that are made.
 - Create a system or opportunity that allows for public comments on the revised LWP.

Future Opportunities

- Determine future projects, goals or action items with the LWP committee
 - May SNAP-Ed help with updating the policy to meet the ADE and USDA requirements?
 - May SNAP-Ed facilitate LWP meetings or participate as stakeholders depending on the needs of the school/district?
 - May SNAP-Ed offer direct education or implement PSE changes to support the LWP and the healthy atmosphere of the school or district?
 - May SNAP-ED help the school district complete the triennial assessment?



Cultural Considerations

Be respectful of the capacity of the schools that you are working with. Many of the teachers, administrators, and other support staff participating in the Wellness Committee have other responsibilities. Be flexible and willing to work at their pace and timelines. Suggest realistic goals or projects that reflect both staff and budgetary capacity. The stakeholder group members are the subject matter experts and decide the group direction.

Hold space for differences with each LEA you work with. Some schools or SHAC members may prioritize LWP work while others view it as a burden. Politics and relationships will vary in each LEA you work with. Keeping an open mind and using a trauma informed lens will help as you navigate cultures across districts and schools.

Lessons Learned

If your capacity is limited, it may be beneficial to work in a stipend to your budget to hire a Wellness Coordinator or Champion at the District or School level. The purpose of a Wellness Champion or Coordinator is to have someone who already knows and has relationships with the school to organize and facilitate wellness committee meetings and associated activities including communications and community engagement. The trust and relationships the Wellness Champion has will make gathering the committee and prioritizing wellness easier as they have a thorough understanding of the school's capacity and priorities. Having regular meetings to provide support and mentorship to your Wellness Champion will continue to build trust between you and your site while accomplishing AZ Health Zone/SNAP-Ed priorities. Your Wellness Champion/Coordinator can be school staff, a parent, or even a volunteer.

Local Wellness Policy Work in Action - Example provided by UA Cooperative Extension, Cochise County

- Draft or revise* a written school wellness. If the institution already has a wellness policy or does not need revisions, move to step 3 or 4 as needed.
 - Complete, review, or revise section I by September 30.
 - Complete, review, or revise section II by December 31.
 - Complete, review, or revise section III by February 28.
- Complete, review, or revise section IV by April 30.
 - Obtain approval of the draft policy from the school Board of Supervisors.
 - Maintain evidence of board approval for administrative review.
 - Publish a digital copy on the school website.
- Revise or review the policy by section at no less than four SHAC meetings per academic year.
 - Invite teachers, healthcare staff, community resource providers, and students to attend.
- Review the wellness policy each year for goal completion and general updates.
 - Plan for complete policy revision and administrative review every three years.

Success Story - Maricopa County Department of Health

Maricopa County SNAP-Ed established a partnership with the food service director and wellness coordinator at Madison School District. This relationship led to planning wellness committee meetings, updating the wellness policy, WellSAT 3.0 review and supporting the district with completion of the ADE activity and assessment tool. We coordinated and planned wellness meetings where SNAP-Ed presented on the importance of a wellness committee as well as the WellSAT 3.0 results. To get participation and community involvement at wellness meetings we served food, offered prizes and allowed for open discussion on what parents wanted to discuss. This partnership led to more nutrition education in the schools and the Smarter Lunchroom Movement becoming part of the LWP goals and activities. If you would like more information reach out to Andrea.Zechmann@maricopa.gov.

Summary

SHACs are a great way for schools to improve their school health environment through policy changes that improve or change current systems and environments. Through convening the voices of school health stakeholders, a SHAC can comprehensively address the concerns or goals related to the health and wellbeing of those who make up the school community. With changes to local wellness policy, we see improved scores on triennial and comprehensive assessments, and experience first-hand how gaps in processes or new initiatives can provide better access to food, physical activity, life skills, social emotional learning, and more.

Resources

[USDA's Final Rule](#)

[USDA Local School Wellness Policy Implementation Tools and Resources](#)

[Alliance for a Healthier Generation's School Wellness Committee Toolkit](#)

[CDC's Parents for Healthy Schools](#)

[WellSAT 3.0 Training](#)

[ADE's School Nutrition Program Manual](#)

[ADE's Model Local Wellness Policy](#)

[Health & Nutrition Services Online Training Library](#)

[Health and Nutrition Services National School Breakfast and Lunch Program](#)



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