



# ***Improving student health and well-being in San Mateo County***

## **An assessment of the implementation of San Mateo County School Wellness Policy**

### *Summary*

This document provides a summary of the findings from the school wellness policy implementation assessment conducted by ASR for Get Healthy, a collaborative initiative of the San Mateo County Health System. The goal of the assessment was to understand the realities of policy implementation in order to improve the effectiveness of wellness policies across San Mateo County. The assessment identifies the successes and drivers, challenges and barriers, resources, and best practices for implementing district wellness policies. The full assessment can be found at [www.gethealthysmc.org](http://www.gethealthysmc.org)

### **Background**

#### *School Wellness Policies*

The 2004 Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act requires local educational agencies participating in child nutrition programs such as the National School Lunch Program and the School Breakfast Program to establish a Local School Wellness Policy. The 2010 Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 included new provisions to improve local policies; however there are great discrepancies in how these policies are implemented at the local level.

Since 2006, all of San Mateo County's 22 school districts that have received federal funds to implement the USDA's School Food Program have been required to implement School Wellness Policies at the district level. Schools and districts have varying levels of effective implementation, leaving some students facing much larger barriers to good health. The varying levels of implementation prompted a desire to conduct an assessment to better understand the challenges and best practices in order to improve the strength of school wellness policies across the county.

***Get Healthy San Mateo County. Health begins where people live, learn, work and play. Get Healthy San Mateo County (Get Healthy) works collaboratively with individuals, communities and organizations in the County to develop strategies that will reduce and prevent obesity and other health risks related to unhealthy eating and a lack of physical activity among all children in San Mateo County.***

***San Mateo County students are a primary focus of the Get Healthy Initiative. Schools provide great opportunities to influence the health of our students both in and out of the classroom, and successful Local School Wellness Policies are crucial to successfully guide districts to improve student wellbeing.***

## Methods

The following methods were used to gather data for improvements:

- **Literature review** of similar district wellness policy assessments
- **Key informant interviews** from 10 focus school districts including: superintendents, principals, food service directors, wellness coordinators, classroom teachers, physical education teachers, school nurses, parents, and school board members
- **Focus groups** with high school students in San Mateo County
- **Expert interviews** with local and national school wellness experts

## Findings

Three overarching factors were identified as facilitating success or creating barriers to effective implementation of school wellness policies: 1) administrative support, 2) funding, and 3) coordination of wellness efforts. The chart below provides more details on these factors, which directly linked to the wellness needs districts identified and strategies to improve implementation.

The second chart provides an overview of the successes and challenges described by districts and schools under each wellness topic area. Successes and challenges were attributed to the level of support provided by the drivers in chart 1.

Drivers	Issues/Needs	Strategies
<b>Administrative Support</b> <i>(school and district level)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Leaders understand importance of wellness efforts</li> <li>▪ Leaders provide support (material and political) to implement wellness efforts</li> <li>▪ Address issue of competing demands on staff time</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Peer-to-Peer advocacy</li> <li>▪ Positive recognition for wellness efforts</li> <li>▪ Demonstrate wellness efforts are doable</li> </ul>
<b>Funding</b>	Additional funds are needed for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Health education:</b> curricula, materials, staff, and training</li> <li>▪ <b>Food service:</b> equipment and fresh foods</li> <li>▪ <b>Physical education:</b> equipment and staff</li> <li>▪ <b>Staff time:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher time for trainings</li> <li>• Stipends for “wellness champions” at school sites</li> <li>• Staff to coordinate youth and parent involvement</li> <li>• PE specialists to coordinate recess activities</li> <li>• Health/nutrition educators</li> <li>• Wellness coordinators</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Implementation grants</li> <li>▪ Federal funding sources (e.g. USDA funding)</li> <li>▪ Opportunities to pool resources at district, city, and/or county level</li> <li>▪ Funding from local businesses</li> </ul>
<b>Coordination of Wellness Efforts</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Lack of staff time to coordinate wellness efforts</li> <li>▪ Can be difficult to maintain wellness efforts when it is not anyone’s job</li> <li>▪ Wellness coordinators play key role in districts that have them</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Compensate staff to be wellness champions</li> <li>▪ Structured technical assistance (initial training, ongoing support)</li> <li>▪ Cultivate relationship between health dept. and school districts</li> </ul>

Wellness Topic	Successes	Challenges
<b>Food</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Healthier food is served</li> <li>• Food service following guidelines</li> <li>• Water campaigns</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Large food waste because students not use to healthier options</li> <li>• High costs associated with healthy food</li> <li>• Student perception that healthy foods are not “cool” or appealing</li> </ul>
<b>Food Policies</b> <i>(celebrations, fundraisers, etc.)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overall support of policies by staff, parents, and students</li> <li>• Consistent implementation across schools</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fundraisers often serve unhealthy food</li> <li>• Inconsistent implementation and enforcement of policies</li> <li>• Staff concerns about being seen as “food police”</li> </ul>
<b>Physical Education</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most districts achieving required PE minutes</li> <li>• Collaboration with external organizations help bring in funds and/or provide PE instruction</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PE not as formalized as other subjects such as curriculum, standards, and training,</li> <li>• Funding needed for curriculum, equipment, staff</li> </ul>
<b>Teacher Engagement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wellness champions go above and beyond to promote and implement wellness efforts</li> <li>• Staff wellness activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff have many competing demands over implementing health policies</li> <li>• Lack time to participate in wellness efforts</li> </ul>
<b>Student Involvement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engaging events such as taste tests, cooking contests, jog-a-thons</li> <li>• High school student groups formed on student health</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff needed to facilitate student involvement</li> <li>• Student groups need structure that enables them to enact change</li> </ul>
<b>Parent Involvement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased parent involvement on wellness committees</li> <li>• Better awareness about wellness</li> <li>• Some parent health education</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff needed to facilitate parent involvement and provide parent education</li> <li>• Some concerns about consistency in communication about wellness policy</li> </ul>
<b>Wellness Committees</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most districts have wellness committees</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consistent participation by district/school leaders and teachers</li> </ul>
<b>Health/ Nutrition Education</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some integration into PE classes, middle school science</li> <li>• Dairy Council curriculum available</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of district-wide coordinated approach in many districts</li> <li>• Teachers lack time to teach</li> <li>• Lack of awareness about state health education standards</li> </ul>

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