

## School Wellness Council Toolkit

It is often easy to turn to friends when embarking on a project that will likely be challenging and time-consuming. As you think about your council membership, consider school staff and community members you do not usually have contact with. This will expand your reach and access to resources. You may also make some new friends.

### **Involve skeptics as well as believers**

There is a saying that advises, “Keep your friends close and your enemies closer.” In some cases this can apply to wellness council membership. If you know that you want to make changes in competitive foods/vending options, it can be extremely helpful to have the marketing teacher or student body leader on your wellness council. However, use this technique sparingly as too many naysayers can slow your council down and result in those who are supportive to stop attending.

## Involving Students

Students are often interested in making their schools and communities healthier. Because many of the changes you are implementing through your wellness policy directly impact students, gaining their input and support ultimately will enable change to happen more quickly. Students are often the best advocates for healthy schools and are able and articulate spokespeople with school decision makers and community members.

Students can be members of your wellness council or they can create a council of their own with one or more liaisons that attend wellness council meetings. There are several ways to invite student input as decisions are made from taste tests and selecting options for vending machines to designing marketing campaigns for healthy food options.

If you decide to invite students to participate on your wellness council, here are some helpful tips to ensure that student participation is productive and successful.

**Be clear about roles and expectations:** Do you want the student member to initiate nutrition and physical activity projects with their peers? Do you want them to become more knowledgeable on these issues and advocate with school decision makers? Share your expectations and hopes for student representation with the student(s) you invite.

**Create more than one student position:** It may be easier to have consistent student representation with more than one student position on your council. In addition, it may help the students to not be the only youth member in the room, expected to represent all of their peers. With more than one position, you may also want to invite other student governance bodies to send a student representative to your wellness council.

**Provide skill building opportunities with youth council members beyond the school wellness council meetings:** To ensure a successful school wellness council with student members, students should be given some information on meeting processes, norms and expectations. Increasing the meeting skills of student members on your council will lead to more successful participation.

**Prioritize students in your action plan:** It will help students continue to see their role in creating a healthier school environment if they see how they fit in the action plan and other activities your wellness council undertakes. Make some of these action items short term and celebrate when you achieve them. This will keep students and all wellness council members engaged.

**Invite your student member to cultivate leadership in their peers:** Because students move through the school, planning for replacing student members is an ongoing process. Ask student members to think about who would be good replacements and ask for their assistance in orienting the new student members.