

Barriers to School Wellness Policy Implementation



Brief VI • 2009

Interviews were conducted with superintendents, food service directors, teachers, parents and others involved in the development of their school district wellness policy. Representatives from 28 school districts answered questions about the barriers and challenges they faced in implementing their wellness policies. Sixty-four middle school Physical Education (PE) teachers were also asked about the barriers to implementing the physical activity parts of the wellness policies.

Barriers to Wellness Policy Implementation Reported by District Level Stakeholders

Almost all districts reported the following barriers to implementing the district wellness policy:

- Threat of decreased revenue to the school from school stores and vending
- Confusion about nutrition standards and what foods are allowed under the new policies
- Threat of decreased revenue for parent and student groups that sell food to raise money
- Threat of decreased revenue from school food service
- Complaints from students

Most districts reported the following barriers to implementing the district wellness policy:

- Product availability
- Existing vending or pouring contracts
- Concern about the burden of an unfunded mandate from the state

About half of districts reported the following barriers to implementing the district wellness policy:

- Vending companies' compliance
- Complaints from parents
- Complaints from food service workers

Barriers to Wellness Policy Implementation Reported by PE Teachers

About half of the physical education teachers reported the following barriers to implementing the physical activity policies in their schools:

- Lack of priority due to state testing (WASL)
- Lack of facilities for PE
- Lack of priority from the administration
- Lack of priority from the other teachers

Opportunities for Improvement

- Barriers to implementing strong wellness policies could be reduced by eliminating dependence on the revenue from selling unhealthy food.
- Reframing the goal of simply preparing students to pass standardized tests to a goal of producing healthy, successful children could set the stage for improved support for wellness policies.