

Accelerate.

Act.

Build.

Catalyze.

Change.

Collaborate.

Connect.

Convene.

Create.

Engage.

Facilitate.

Foster.

Inform.

Lead.

Mobilize.

Motivate.

Promote.

Support.

Accelerate.

Act.

Build.

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Change.

Collaborate.

Connect.

Convene.

Engaging School Leaders as Partners in Creating Healthy Schools

Tips and Insights for Action for Healthy Kids Teams



Action for Healthy Kids®

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Action for Healthy Kids is a national grassroots partnership created to address the epidemic of overweight, undernourished and sedentary youth by focusing on changes at school. *Action for Healthy Kids* is a public-private partnership of more than 50 national organizations and government agencies representing education, health, fitness and nutrition.

With the support of Teams in 50 states and the District of Columbia, and more than 9,000 volunteers, *Action for Healthy Kids* recently launched the "Campaign for School Wellness," a multifaceted outreach effort that brings to schools new tools and resources for strengthening local wellness efforts.

Action for Healthy Kids was created in 2002 in response to *The Surgeon General's Call to Action to Prevent and Decrease Overweight and Obesity*, which identified schools as a key environment for change. Former U.S. Surgeon General Dr. David Satcher is the founding chair of *Action for Healthy Kids*.



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Tips and Insights for Action for Healthy Kids Teams

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“We originally started our Lunch & Learn outreach program as a result of years of trying in vain, in more mundane ways, to reach administrators about the school wellness issue. In struggling to build strong teams of committed members, we learned time and again that, frustratingly, we could go only so far without the full involvement, sanctioning and influence of top leadership.”

DOROTHY BRAYLEY
*Chair, Rhode Island
Action for Healthy Kids,
on [“Engaging School Leaders”](#)*

INTRODUCTION

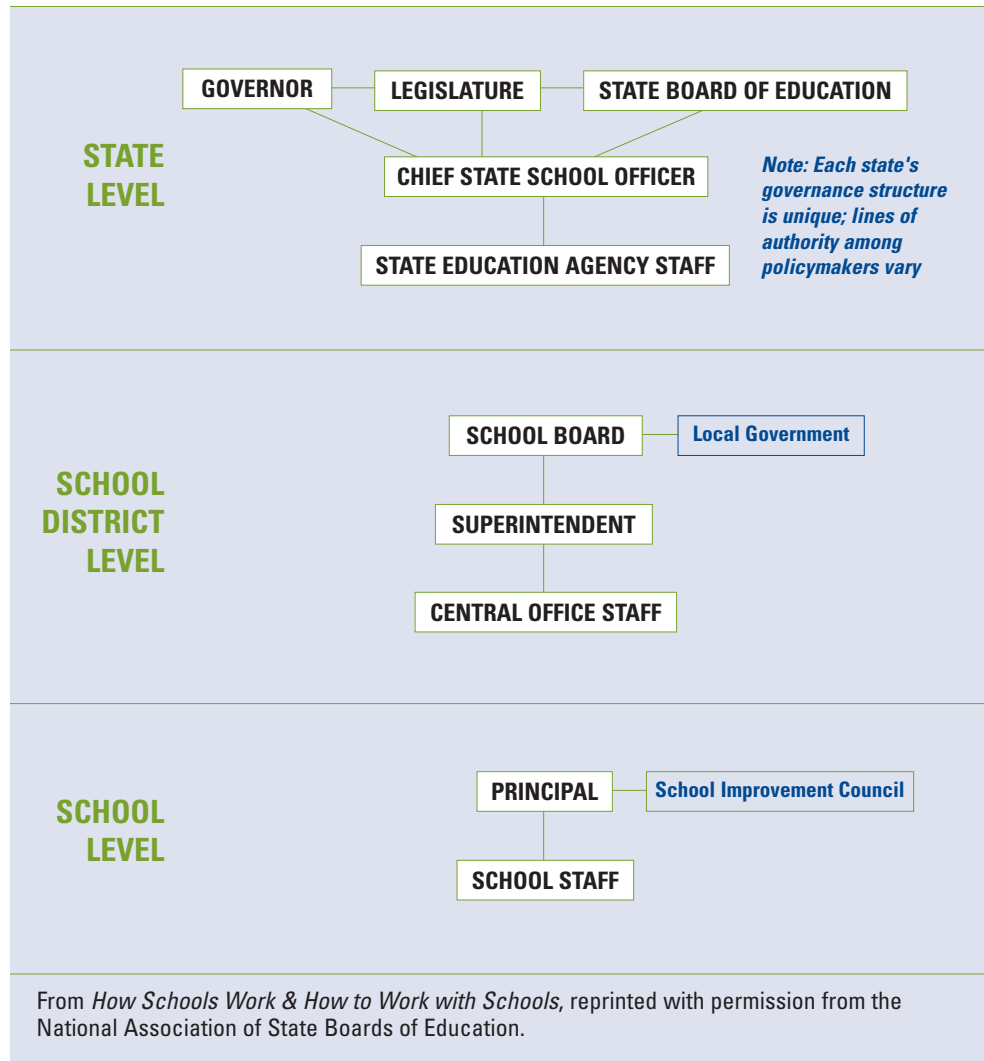
This publication provides tips and insights for those who want to work more purposefully with school leaders to improve the health and well-being of students. It describes how to build positive working relationships with educational leaders – those administrators with ultimate authority and accountability for school policy and practice at the state, district and building level.

This guide was developed especially for Action for Healthy Kids Teams as a resource to support their Action Plans. Directly or indirectly, school leaders play a role in virtually any school wellness initiative – and the more effectively Action for Healthy Kids Team members understand and collaborate with school leaders, the greater the opportunity to achieve their Action Plan goals and objectives.

Action for Healthy Kids Teams will be most successful in helping to create healthier learning environments when they tap into the talents, expertise and passion of school leaders. This can be particularly challenging given that today’s education leaders, at all levels, are focused on meeting requirements imposed by the No Child Left Behind Act. Therefore, developing a successful engagement strategy requires that every Action for Healthy Kids Team approach school leaders with sensitivity, careful preparation and reasonable expectations. Most if not all school leaders do care about the health and wellness of children. However, given other pressing priorities, many leaders often need assistance in determining how best to implement school wellness changes.

The information in this guide was developed with direct input from education leaders and is designed to help you cultivate relationships or to take your relationships with school leaders to the next level. The “Tips for Success” section offers specific recommendations on how to build an effective outreach and engagement strategy. The school leader backgrounders provide important insights and information on how best to engage specific groups of school leaders: principals, district superintendents, district board of education members, state board of education members and chief state school officers. Other education leaders and influencers – including state governors, city mayors and local education funds – also are profiled.

THE PUBLIC EDUCATION GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE, SIMPLIFIED



Key Messages for School Leaders

Schools that make wellness a priority are better positioned to become “high performing” schools.

School wellness contributes directly to student academic achievement. Healthy kids learn better, plain and simple.

Healthy schools don’t just happen. They are created by people who care deeply about the success of children, and come together to make it happen.

Significant improvements in school wellness will happen only when school leaders get actively involved. School leaders hold the keys to the long-term success of any school wellness initiative.

When schools are unhealthy, everyone loses, especially students. School leaders have the power to create healthy schools, and Action for Healthy Kids can provide critical help.

“We leave no resource, no dollar, no potential partner behind. We take advantage of all the resources in the community and bring them to bear. But this takes a lot of work, and it takes the type of work that necessitates that you be personally committed.”

PAUL VALLAS

CEO, School District of Philadelphia, on [*“The Role of School Wellness in Creating High-Performing Schools”*](#)

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

The following tips will assist Action for Healthy Kids Teams in further engaging school leaders in sound nutrition and good physical activity practices. Keep in mind that there is no single best method for building relationships with school leaders. Rather, a combination of thoughtful approaches and tactics, as described below, likely will be most productive.

View school leaders as clients and collaborators.

Instead of trying to “sell” school wellness, first listen to what school leaders have to say about their overall school needs. Determine their attitudes, beliefs and concerns about school wellness and attempt to address these up front. Ask them what they “want” and “need,” rather than trying to persuade them to buy the solutions you have to offer. Determine how they wish to communicate with you — via e-mail, phone calls, meetings, etc. Ask for specific ideas on how to make your proposal/program/idea more appealing and less burdensome to adopt. Ask how you should structure future communications with them to keep them informed and engaged but not overburdened.

Aim to learn as well as to share information.

Seek a dialogue with school leaders – and enter that dialogue with an open mind, aiming to learn as well as to share information. Try the following discussion starters:

- > *What are the top priorities facing your state/district/school?*
- > *How does wellness fit into your vision of student achievement?*
- > *How can school wellness help address some of your most pressing priorities?*
- > *What are your beliefs and concerns about school wellness?*
- > *How can we work together?*
- > *How can Action for Healthy Kids best work with you? How can we be of assistance?*
- > *How can we help you talk with your key audiences about school wellness?*
- > *How can we help you?*

Know your audience.

State and district school board members, state and district superintendents and local principals all have different roles and responsibilities. Each segment of leaders can impact school wellness in different and important ways. Achieving maximum impact on school wellness requires that you tailor your strategy, proposal, messages and “asks” to reflect the capacity of each audience. Review the background information on the different types of school leaders in this guide for more information.

Do your homework.

Before meeting with school leaders, take time to learn who they are, their responsibilities, their priorities and previous involvement and positions on school wellness issues. Visit their website; read past meeting minutes, professional publications and conference agendas. Come to the meeting with a couple of key handouts, perhaps a fact sheet and an article from the school leader’s professional association that addresses school wellness. Share a few examples of their peers who are effectively implementing wellness initiatives. The Action for Healthy Kids Web Forum, [*The Role of School Wellness in Creating High-Performing Schools*](#), features ideas and insights from seven leading school administrators, who discuss the benefits, challenges and solutions for promoting improved nutrition and physical activity within their schools.

Be respectful of other pressing priorities facing school leaders.

Avoid any approach that seeks an immediate response. As you push for improvements in school wellness, express to school leaders your understanding and respect for the many other demands placed upon them. Most school leaders accept the belief that healthy students learn better. However, many school leaders do not feel they can elevate school wellness to the top of their list given other pressing priorities, such as: raising academic outcomes, closing achievement gaps, hiring and retaining quality staff, insuring school safety and budget constraints. Acknowledge these competing priorities and work with school leaders to set reasonable goals for improving school wellness. Be patient and yet also persistent in working toward change objectives. Flexibility is key when planning a meeting with school leaders. They often must turn their attention to unexpected interruptions. Therefore, be prepared to wait for your appointment, and also have a shorter version of your presentation ready — just in case the available meeting time shrinks.

Offer school leaders something they value.

Position your proposal as a “joint venture,” a way to help school leaders achieve one or more of their priority goals. For example, if closing academic achievement gaps is their top priority, communicate that research reveals that healthy, well-nourished children are better prepared to learn and more likely to attend school and class. You could also cite the benefits of a school breakfast program and increased physical activity opportunities. This is a great time to revisit – and share – Action for Healthy Kids’ exclusive report on [*The Learning Connection: The Value of Improving Nutrition and Physical Activity in Our Schools*](#).

In addition, the [*Action for Healthy Kids Wellness Policy Tool*](#) – and wellness tools created by your Action for Healthy Kids Team – may help school leaders and school staff more effectively set and achieve wellness goals.

“If you can believe it, I’ve actually had angry parents phone me up after I removed a candy vending machine from the school cafeteria, demanding an explanation of what else on earth their child was supposed to eat! So when West Virginia Action for Healthy Kids’ invitation to a training session for their ‘Recipe for Success’ program came through, I knew I should make time for it.”

PHIL DOBBINS

Principal, Clay County High School, Charleston, West Virginia, on [“Engaging School Leaders”*](#)*

“You have to make sure that you don’t have a siloed situation, where one group in one part of the organization is going off in one direction and those in the other part of the organization are taking another direction. That requires clear setting of expectations and making sure that you’ve got people working collaboratively across different offices within the school district.”

THOMAS PAYZANT
Superintendent, Boston Public Schools, on [“The Role of School Wellness in Creating High-Performing Schools”](#)

Thank school leaders for what they are already doing.

Identify the positive steps that schools leaders are already taking to advance student wellness and applaud these efforts. Use this opportunity as a stepping stone to work collaboratively with them to take school wellness to an even higher level.

Build long-term “win-win” relationships.

Engaging school leaders requires that you work toward building an ongoing relationship, not simply conduct a one-time transaction. Success will likely require a commitment of months and years, not just days and weeks. Take time to get to know your targeted school leaders and their key issues. Research leaders’ background and their positions on wellness policies and related issues. Get their ideas and opinions up front and then continue to solicit and incorporate their feedback. Seek insights from other advocates who have worked successfully with targeted school leaders.

Communicate benefits that appeal to school leaders.

Use persuasive and memorable facts to describe how nutrition and physical activity practices can lead to high-performing schools. Consider the following benefit statements:

- > *Sound nutrition can positively impact a student’s academic achievement.*
- > *There is a direct link between nutrition and improved student attendance.*
- > *Investing in school wellness can contribute to high-performing schools.*

The [Action for Healthy Kids fact sheet](#) includes additional benefit statements.

Involve parents, caregivers, youth, other organizations and community leaders.

School leaders are more apt to respond positively to your request if they also hear the voices of parents, caregivers, students and other community organizations and other leaders who are willing to work collaboratively to enhance school wellness.

TIPS FOR ENGAGING POLICYMAKERS

- > Note serious problems and needs but emphasize proposed solutions and policy options.
- > Articulate measurable short-term benefits such as effects on student and staff attendance.
- > Use current data from credible sources as justification.
- > Stress how the proposal is consistent with existing policies and programs and helps advance state and district education goals.
- > Use current terminology used by policymakers, such as “education reform,” “ready to learn,” “student achievement” and “leave no child behind.”
- > Highlight the coordinated school health program model as an emerging trend supported by an increasing number of boards.
- > Enlist highly respected community members to express their support.
- > Enlist the endorsement of the business community.
- > Help students research issues, prepare presentations and be included on public-hearing agendas.
- > Make presentations at meetings and conferences attended by policymakers.
- > Suggest a pilot study or other alternatives if a broad-based policy or program does not gain support.
- > Help sympathetic policymakers by briefing them on answers to difficult questions and arguments that might arise in public meetings.

From *How Schools Work & How to Work with Schools*, reprinted with permission from the National Association of State Boards of Education.

BACKGROUNDEERS ON SCHOOL LEADERS

School Principals

School District Superintendents

Local Boards of Education

State Boards of Education

Chief State School Officers

SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

Effectively engaging principals is a critical first step toward creating positive change at the building level. Principals serve as the gatekeepers for local schools and are responsible for ensuring orderly day-to-day activities. They serve as the chief academic officer and seek to maintain a positive school culture. Principals usually are hired by the district superintendent and/or board of education and are charged with many responsibilities, health and wellness being just one area.

Engaging School Principals *Insights for Action for Healthy Kids Teams*

School safety and student achievement issues are the top concerns among many principals, and therefore school wellness — although important — is often considered a secondary priority. Principals generally respond best to a collaborative, “give and take” approach to problem solving. Seeking “common ground” is a recommended approach, realizing that principals are charged with balancing a wide range of needs and demands from a variety of key audiences. Asking principals “*how can we help you address your needs?*” can help to ensure a positive engagement. And remember to tap into the principal’s insights about student behavior when developing change strategies.

Stressing the connection between a *healthy mind and a healthy body* is a good way to get the attention of principals. Be sure to present accurate and compelling data when delivering your proposal. It might also help to bring along interested parents, caregivers, students and members of the community who could work collaboratively on a project or initiative.

Role of School Principals

The school principal serves as the chief administrator in a school. The primary duties of the principal include identifying the expectations that are placed on the school and ensuring that district guidelines are being met. The principal is responsible for:

- > Developing mission statements
- > Setting performance goals and objectives
- > Preparing budgets and reports on various subjects, such as finances and attendance, and overseeing the requisition and allocation of supplies
- > Hiring, evaluating and developing the overall teaching skills of teachers and staff
- > Advising, explaining and answering staff’s procedural questions
- > Ensuring that students meet national, state and local academic standards

“At the end of the day, a principal sets the tone in a school building. Yes, superintendents are obviously in charge. And while classroom teachers may be powerful and influential, they take their cues from the principal. We’ve learned time and again that a strong, involved school principal results in a strong school. He or she can dictate everything from what snacks get served at pep rallies to when and how food policies established by the state or district get implemented in the cafeteria. In our view, the school principal is the absolute linchpin, the most important piece of the puzzle.”

KATHY TALLEY

Coordinator, West Virginia’s Office of Child Nutrition, Team Member, West Virginia Action for Healthy Kids, on “Engaging School Leaders”

“[School wellness] can’t be delegated: The principal of the school has to lead the way... It has to be part of their speech, it has to be part of their lifestyle, it has to be part of every presentation they make.”

ROBERT HAGEMANN
Principal, McIntosh Middle School, Sarasota, Florida, on “The Role of School Wellness in Creating High-Performing Schools”

- > Serving as an advocate for the building of new schools and the repair of existing ones
- > Becoming involved – in some schools – in public relations and fundraising to secure financial support for their schools from local businesses and the community

How to Reach School Principals

Elementary and Middle Level Principals

The National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) leads in the advocacy and support for elementary and middle level principals and other education leaders in their commitment to all children. The NAESP website (www.naesp.org) includes [links to affiliate organizations](#) in all 50 states and the District of Columbia.

The National Middle School Association (NMSA) is dedicated exclusively to the educational and developmental needs of young adolescents in the middle level grades. NMSA has more than 30,000 members representing principals, teachers, central office personnel, professors, college students, parents, community leaders and educational consultants across the United States, Canada and 46 other countries. The NMSA website (www.nmsa.org) includes [links to NMSA state and regional affiliates](#).

Secondary School Principals

The National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) provides members with the professional research-based and peer-tested resources, and practical tools and materials they need to serve as visionary school leaders. The NASSP website is located at www.principals.org. Every state has its own principals association, which typically offers conferences, state-specific education information and professional development opportunities. [Links to state affiliates](#) are available on the NASSP site.

School Principals: Relevant Resources and Initiatives

National Association of Elementary School Principals

Leading Learning Communities: Standards for What Principals Should Know and Be Able to Do is a guidebook for those who care about creating and supporting quality in schools.

Leading After-School Learning Communities: What Principals Should Know and Be Able to Do helps principals rethink the connection between learning within the school day and learning that occurs beyond the school day.

National Middle School Association

Exploring Essential Components: Physical Activity, Nutrition, and the Young Adolescent is a 17-minute presentation tool designed to advocate wellness to school boards, parent/family groups, school, staff and community members. It presents data and compelling arguments to support schools as they take action to improve physical activity and nutrition for young adolescents.

National Association of Secondary School Principals

NASSP has a heavy focus on students through its ***Division of Student Activities***, which includes sponsorship of the National Association of Student Councils and the National Honor Society.

Breaking Ranks II: Strategies for Leading High School Reform and ***Breaking Ranks in the Middle: Strategies for Leading Middle Level Reform*** are two reports that engage principals, teachers and the entire school community in reforming high schools and middle schools into academically rigorous, personalized learning environments. Both guides outline specific, tested strategies for positive change.

“The best advice I could give would be: Be an example, be an advocate, and be patient.”

GAYDEN CARRUTH
Superintendent in Residence for Wellness, American Association of School Administrators, on [“The Role of School Wellness in Creating High-Performing Schools”](#)

SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS

School superintendents are districts’ chief executive officers. They have executive oversight and administration rights within a school district and, when a crisis strikes, the superintendent is the district’s go-to person. Superintendents are usually hired by the school board and are responsible for implementing policies created by the board.

Engaging School Superintendents *Insights for Action for Healthy Kids Teams*

The top priority of school superintendents is meeting strict academic requirements imposed by the No Child Left Behind Act. Similar to other school leaders, superintendents do not want their schools to appear on the “failing list” or become known as “low-performing.” Therefore, school wellness is generally viewed as important although it is not a top concern for most school superintendents.

Most if not all superintendents support the idea of healthy schools and healthy kids, and many also recognize the link to academic achievement. However, they often are hampered by lack of resources, have difficulty integrating wellness into the curricula, and also lack time in the school day given many other more pressing priorities.

To make progress in engaging this audience, identify superintendents who have embraced wellness at some level, and then help them advance to a higher level of involvement. Share the following messages: *Investments you make in health and wellness today will likely pay off down the road with increased student achievement. There are numerous wellness changes that you can make in your schools in the short term that are low-cost or no-cost, and easy to implement.*

When superintendents hear from a combination of parents, community leaders and school board members, they are more likely to respond with action. In large districts, consider seeking out an assistant superintendent who has specific responsibilities for health and wellness. Also in large districts you might offer to help develop a presentation that communicates the importance of school wellness to the entire central office staff.

Role of School Superintendents

Superintendents identify needs, develop regulations, provide leadership and manage the day-to-day operations of the district. They also make sure that all decisions of the school board are executed and enforced. A superintendent's responsibilities include:

- > Ensuring that the school board is informed about district operations and activities, and about the district's needs
- > Preparing an annual budget and submitting it to the school board for discussion
- > Relaying all communications by the school board regarding personnel to district employees
- > Providing leadership in all areas of a school's operations, including budget and finance, bargaining, curriculum and personnel relations
- > Preparing and submitting recommendations to the school board relative to all matters requiring board action, and providing the school board with information and reports needed to make informed decisions
- > Approving media interviews with district employees as well as other items of public interest that pertain to education matters, policies, procedures and school-related incidents or events
- > Maintaining effective relations with employee organizations and assuming ultimate responsibility for collective negotiations with district employees
- > Establishing and maintaining liaisons with community groups interested or involved in the educational programs of the district

How to Reach School Superintendents

The American Association of School Administrators (AASA) supports and develops effective school system leaders who are dedicated to the highest quality public education for all children. The AASA website, located at www.aasa.org, includes a [list of executives for state superintendent associations](#) as well as links to each [state's school administrator association](#).

The Urban Superintendent's Association of America (USAA) is a national organization with the primary goal of opening windows to visionary ideas and concepts in urban education through shared experiences and research. The USAA website is located at www.usaa.org.

"I'm so proud of our school board because they were behind me 100% to take a stand and say, we have kids who are overweight, we have kids who carry the genetic characteristics of diabetes type II, and we have to address it."

ROEL GONZALEZ

Superintendent, Rio Grande City Consolidated Independent School District, Texas, on ["The Role of School Wellness in Creating High-Performing Schools"](#)

School Superintendents: Relevant Resources

Multiple resources are available at aasa.org/focus:

- > *Childhood Obesity Initiative*, “Engaging Leaders for Healthy Eating and Active Living”
- > Seasonal publication of *Healthy Learning News: Superintendent Success Stories from the Field*
- > *Afterschool Programs and School System Leaders* includes an afterschool toolkit

“Healthy and Ready to Learn” by David Satcher, an article in the September 2005 edition of *Educational Leadership* (published by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development), examines the research on how nutrition and physical activity affect student achievement — and what schools can do to promote student health and readiness to learn.

LOCAL BOARDS OF EDUCATION

The majority of school board members are locally elected public officials, typically serving a four-year term, who are entrusted with governing a community's public schools. Founded on the belief that local citizens should determine the policies that govern how their children are educated, school boards ideally represent and are accountable to the community as a whole.

Engaging Local Boards of Education *Insights for Action for Healthy Kids Teams*

The top issue facing local boards of education is improving student achievement. Other priorities include lack of adequate funding for critical programs and unfunded mandates. Given these challenges, boards are more likely to consider initiatives that take into account competing board priorities, cramped instructional time and limited funding. It is especially important that Action for Healthy Kids Teams explain in detail how school wellness contributes to students' success now and in the future.

A successful engagement requires that you develop a meaningful relationship before requesting action or resources. Team members should take time to get to know the targeted school board and its key members, researching their past positions on relevant issues and identifying their most pressing priorities. Provide several realistic options as to how the board might strengthen its support for school wellness over time. For example, rather than pushing for board adoption of a whole new policy, a more prudent approach might be to seek incremental changes to an existing policy.

Look for an ally or champion who has clout. One of the best ways to engage local school boards might be to develop a relationship with a school board member who is active in your state's school boards association, which provides governance resources and policy support for local school boards. Also, consider networking with the executive director or another key member of the state association's staff. After developing a relationship, you might ask for help in recruiting a local school board member to serve on your Team. Further, the state association might identify local school boards that would be good candidates to partner with the Team in developing a showcase, replicable initiative.

When engaging school board members, **begin by identifying areas of mutual agreement** about wellness issues, and then work toward a specific plan. Given the financial pressures facing many boards, consider an initiative that would require little or no funding to implement. And remember that timing is very important when planning your engagement strategy. Pay attention to the news, attend (or watch on television if possible) school board meetings and read recent board minutes to evaluate the climate, and then determine the best time to move forward.

“Policy-making is not an individual ‘I’m doing it’ activity. You have to make allies and use ones that are important to you.”

JILL WYNNIS

*School Board Commissioner,
San Francisco Unified School
District, on [“The Role of
School Wellness in Creating
High-Performing Schools”](#)*

Role of Local Board of Education Members

The main objective of school board members is to establish a long-term guiding vision for the school system and adopt the policies that guide the journey to achieving the vision. The board does not implement policies or programs. Among the responsibilities of school board members are:

- > Setting goals and priorities and aligning resources appropriately
- > Being accountable to the public for the outcomes of district operations
- > Engaging the community in district planning and decision making
- > Employing and evaluating the superintendent
- > Being advocates for public education
- > Overseeing the continuous improvement of policies and programs, usually with an emphasis on improving student achievement, recruiting and retaining high quality teachers, and ensuring that schools are safe and supportive learning and teaching environments
- > Upholding board-approved policies
- > Serving as a judicial and appeals body

How to Reach Local Board of Education Members

The National School Boards Association (NSBA) is a not-for-profit federation of state associations of school boards across the United States. The association's mission is to foster excellence and equity in public education through school board leadership. NSBA represents the school board perspective before federal government agencies and with national organizations that affect education, and provides information and services to state associations of school boards and local school boards. The NSBA website, located at www.nsba.org, includes links to individual [state school boards associations](#). Note that state school boards associations usually employ individuals who serve as policy and governance consultants to school board members in their state.

Boards of Education: Relevant Resources and Initiatives

[The School Health Programs](#) department supports NSBA's commitment to help school policymakers and educators make informed decisions about health issues affecting the academic achievement and healthy development of students and the effective operation of schools. Project staff assist with the development and technical review of local district policies related to school health topics. NSBA staff also work with Federation Member state school boards associations, federal agencies and other national organizations to provide educational programming on school health topics.

[Council of Urban Boards of Education \(CUBE\)](#) is the urban component of NSBA's National Affiliate program and provides each of its members a unique voice in the national policy arena. CUBE currently has 108 member districts. Through legislative advocacy, conferences, workshops, seminars and publications, CUBE has been in the forefront of cultivating excellence in urban public schools for more than three decades. CUBE helps urban school leaders address challenges and problems at the local level.

NSBA's [National Education Policy Network \(NEPN\) Online Policy Database](#) provides hundreds of sample policies contributed by member districts from across North America, and is available to all NSBA National Affiliate districts and state association staff.

NSBA's [Extended Day Learning Online Resource Center](#) is a clearinghouse of information for school board leaders to build and sustain quality extended learning opportunities for all students. Included in the Resource Center is the 2005 NSBA report, [Building and Sustaining After-School Programs: Successful Practices in School Board Leadership](#), which features eight districts whose school boards are providing innovative leadership for after-school programs through policy and partnerships.

“Community collaboration, we have found, is the key to being able to implement any kind of wellness policy.”

MARY LOUISE COHEN

School Board Member, Bay Shore Union Free School District, New York, on [“The Role of School Wellness in Creating High-Performing Schools”](#)

“With the federal wellness mandate in place, school districts’ needs are very different now. They don’t need to be convinced of the value or worth of wellness councils anymore – many districts have to establish them by law, end of story. Now, however, what districts and individual schools need is assistance in drafting these policies – and then in refining them, enforcing them, modifying them to special circumstances.”

MELISSA CAMPBELL
Rhode Island Action for
Healthy Kids Team Member,
on [“Engaging School Leaders”](#)

STATE BOARDS OF EDUCATION

State board of education members are appointed by the state’s governor in about two-thirds of the states and are directly elected in most other states. Few members are public educators, yet all are public-spirited volunteers who serve during a specified term. Typically, state boards of education share policy responsibility for elementary and secondary education with the legislature.

Engaging State Board of Education Members *Insights for Action for Healthy Kids Teams*

State boards of education today are focused almost entirely on addressing numerous policy requirements under the No Child Left Behind Act. Although viewed as an important issue, childhood obesity is probably on the “B list” for most state boards, along with other challenging issues such as bullying.

Action for Healthy Kids Teams that want to connect with this audience should consider attending a state board of education meeting. Research the board members to see who has demonstrated an interest in school wellness and introduce yourself to them during a break. This could help position you to get on a future agenda.

The message that *school wellness contributes to a student’s academic performance* continues to resonate with many educators. However, another, perhaps equally powerful message is beginning to attract the attention of state board members: *staff wellness can enhance the school’s learning environment*. Consider exploring this angle as you plan your engagement strategy. Also, reinforce the idea that creating healthy schools is “doable” and not unreasonable. Use examples of how other states are making progress.

And finally, remember that if the public and media are talking about childhood obesity and school wellness, then your state board of education is likely to be more open to discussing these issues.

Role of State Board of Education Members

The overarching role of the state board of education is to review and adopt the regulations that govern educational policies and also to establish the standards that govern the state’s educational programs. State board of education members:

- > Set the rules needed to implement state education law, including the supervision and governance of the state’s schools
- > Set education policy in the areas of standards, instructional materials, assessment and accountability

- > Manage state and federal grant funds
- > Maintain educational standards through uniform testing and professional certification
- > Develop curricula and set graduation requirements
- > Coordinate statewide planning
- > Promote excellence in education

How to Reach State Board of Education Members

The National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) is the only national organization representing members of the nation's state boards of education. NASBE works to strengthen state leadership in educational policymaking, promote excellence in education, advocate equality of access to educational opportunity and assure continued citizen support for public education. The NASBE website, located at www.nasbe.org, includes [links to individual state boards](#).

State Boards of Education: Relevant Resources and Initiatives

The National Association of State Boards of Education offers an excellent report titled [How Schools Work & How to Work with Schools](#), which is available for purchase.

[Calories In, Calories Out: The NASBE Conference on the Role of Education in Promoting Healthy Living](#) was held in April 2006 to study background information, hear expert analysis and learn about successful state programs and policies in relation to nutrition and physical education. Attendance included more than 80 state board of education members, state education representatives, health agency officials and industry partners. Proceedings of the conference are available online.

[Fit, Healthy and Ready to Learn: A School Health Policy Guide](#) is organized around model policies – developed in partnership with CDC-DASH and other collaborators – on various school health topics that reflect best practice and can be adapted by states, school districts, public schools and private schools to fit local circumstances.

[Increasing Healthy Eating](#) is a project whose goal is to increase awareness, motivation and capacity among education leaders about the issues surrounding healthy eating in schools. Through the NASBE Center for Safe and Healthy Schools, the project is building partnerships between state boards of education and other stakeholders to create new or improved policies and programs.

"We have the leadership to compel change and the infrastructure to expedite it, and all are unequivocally necessary. But, like politics, change is local. It won't happen at the state level alone."

NANCY GRASMICK

Superintendent, Maryland Department of Education, speaking at the [2002 Healthy Schools Summit](#)

CHIEF STATE SCHOOL OFFICERS

Chief state school officers function as the chief executive officer of each state's department of education and serve as the primary public spokesperson for the state public education system. The chief state school officer – who may also go by the title state superintendent, commissioner, secretary or director of education – is usually appointed by the governor or by the state board of education, but in a few states the office is elective.

Engaging Chief State School Officers *Insights for Action for Healthy Kids Teams*

Chief state school officers generally deal at a high policy level with such front-burner issues as standards-based reform, teacher effectiveness, state capacity and accountability systems. One of their current major priorities is working to ensure flexibility in how states can enhance student achievement following the expected reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act.

Compared to other groups of school leaders, there probably are fewer opportunities for Action for Healthy Kids Teams to actively engage with chief state school officers. However, one approach to leveraging their involvement might be to target chiefs in [states that have structured wellness initiatives](#) such as those funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Another strategy might be to position school wellness as critical to preparing students for the workforce of the 21st century. Several chief state school officers are working closely with members of the [Partnership for 21st Century Skills](#). Over the coming years, this initiative could lead to new curricula that build student knowledge and skills in health and wellness, along with other "soft skills" needed in today's workforce. Ten states have joined a collaborative convened by the Council of Chief State School Officers (see p. 23) to develop assessment tools to measure 21st century learning and to facilitate learning of 21st century skills. Those states include Arkansas, Delaware, Kentucky, Nebraska, Nevada, North Carolina, Ohio, South Dakota, Virginia and West Virginia.

Role of a State Superintendent of Schools

The duties of the chief state school officer usually include:

- > Distributing state funds to local education authorities
- > Interpreting and administering state school laws
- > Supervising the certification of teachers
- > Helping to improve educational standards through in-service training programs
- > Providing advisory services to local superintendents and school boards

How to Reach Chief State School Officers

The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) is a nonpartisan, nationwide, nonprofit organization of public officials who head departments of elementary and secondary education in the states, the District of Columbia, the Department of Defense Education Activity, and five U.S. extra-state jurisdictions. CCSSO seeks member consensus on major educational issues and expresses their views to civic and professional organizations, federal agencies, Congress and the public. The Council also offers professional development to its members in a variety of interest areas. The CCSSO website is located at www.ccsso.org.

The CCSSO site also includes a [Meet the Chiefs](#) page with information on the chief state school officer in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, the Department of Defense Education Activity and five U.S. extra-state jurisdictions.

In addition, the CCSSO site has a [State Education Agency News](#) page with links to the newsroom area of state departments of education.

Chief State School Officers: Relevant Initiatives

[CCSSO State Collaborative on Assessment and Student Standards](#)

[Health Education Assessment Project \(HEAP\)](#) is a CCSSO initiative that develops effective health education assessment resources through a collaborative process, and increases members' capacity to align curriculum, instruction and assessment to improve student health literacy through improved health education instruction.

[Extended Learning Opportunities Project](#) at CCSSO conducts research and development and advocacy for high-quality extended learning and development opportunities. The Council also works to build state capacity in the implementation and maintenance of such programs.

OTHER EDUCATION LEADERS AND INFLUENCERS

State Govenors

City Mayors

Local Education Funds

STATE GOVERNORS

The governor proposes state budgets and new programs for approval by the state legislature. Governors can attract media attention to school reform issues and help shape public opinion while garnering support for needed change.

Role of State Governors

The structure and operation of governors' offices can vary considerably from state to state and usually change to support a governor's personal style. In some states, governors appoint the state board of education members and in some states the governor also is responsible for appointing the chief state school officer. Many states have obesity initiatives that involve, or were initiated by, the governor's office.

How to Reach State Governors

The National Governors Association (NGA) is the bipartisan organization of the nation's governors and in 2006 was identified as one of the nation's most influential education policy organizations by the Editorial Projects in Education Research Center. The NGA serves as the collective voice of the country's governors and also provides governors and their senior staff with services such as representing states on Capitol Hill, developing policy reports and hosting networking seminars.

The NGA website (www.nga.org) contains a list of [all current state governors](#) and general biographical and term information. There is also a [searchable database of governors](#) available on the site.

Education Issues

Following are some of the priority education issues for governors; however, it's important to understand the specific priorities in your state. Review the website of your state's governor for more specific information.

- > Early childhood education
- > School facilities and construction
- > Teacher compensation
- > Improving high schools
- > Child nutrition
- > Higher education
- > School choice/vouchers
- > School funding

State Governors: Relevant Resources and Initiatives

[Task Force on School Readiness](#) was established to identify ways in which governors can help support families, schools and communities to make sure that children are prepared with a strong foundation, allowing them to reach their full potential in school.

[Extra Learning Opportunities: A State Leader's Video Guide to Afterschool](#) highlights governors, their senior policy advisors and other leaders discussing strategies to expand access to and improve the quality of afterschool programs.

CITY MAYORS

City mayors not only have the power to make education reforms, but also to provide school committees, superintendents, principals, teachers and students with the tools they need to succeed.

Role of City Mayors

The role a mayor plays in public education varies from city to city. Some mayors have significant control over their school systems or school boards while others have no direct role in the public school system. Mayors may be asked to confront education challenges related to:

- > School system governance
- > District and school operation
- > Supporting teaching and learning
- > District and school budget matters
- > Consensus-building efforts

Mayors also may be asked to confront political, financial and bureaucratic challenges.

How to Reach City Mayors

The U.S. Conference of Mayors (USCM) is the nonpartisan organization of mayors in cities with populations of 30,000 or more. The USCM promotes the development of effective national urban/suburban policy, strengthens federal-city relationships, ensures that federal policy meets urban needs, provides mayors with leadership and management tools and creates a forum in which mayors can share ideas and information. The USCM website is located at www.usmayors.org and includes a searchable [Meet the Mayors Database](#) with contact information for individual mayors.

Education Issues

Following is a general list of education priority issues for city mayors; however, it's important to understand the specific priorities for city mayors in your state. Review the websites of city mayors in your state as well as local news sources for more information.

- > Preschool and early childhood education
- > Afterschool
- > Parent involvement in education
- > Teacher quality
- > School safety
- > School system governance
- > School funding

City Mayors: Relevant Resources and Initiatives

[Mayoral Leadership and Involvement in Education: An Action Guide for Success](#) provides information, strategies and ideas to help mayors become more involved in education in their city.

After-School Programming – This USCM initiative includes a publication, *After-School Programs in Cities across the United States*, and the Mayors After-School Leadership Project, which is supported by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation and designed to help mayors take a leadership role when it comes to expanding and strengthening after-school programs. As part of the project, a survey was conducted to provide a baseline of data on current after-school programming.

LOCAL EDUCATION FUNDS

Local Education Funds are influential organizations in many communities and school districts in the U.S. According to a recent report in *Education Week*,* these local nonprofit groups “are going far beyond fundraising and boosterism to play significant roles in constructing and driving their districts’ improvement agendas... Often described as ‘critical friends,’ the groups are independent enough to point out problems, but they also work closely with school systems to arrive at solutions... Increasingly, experts see such organizations as not just helpful, but essential to sustaining improvement efforts in urban systems, in particular.” Local Education Funds represent potential partners and advocates for school wellness initiatives that are integrated with an overall school reform agenda.

Role of Local Education Funds

Local Education Funds (LEFs) are community-based advocacy organizations that engage local citizens in public education reform. LEFs, which are also referred to as “reform-support organizations,” are independent of their local school districts yet typically work closely with public school administrators, teachers and school boards. They also partner with parents, local leaders, businesses and students to develop supportive community and private sector relationships with a public school system. In general, LEFs are:

- > 501(c)(3) organizations
- > Usually in high-poverty areas (urban or rural)
- > Work with, but independently from, their school districts
- > Professionally staffed, with boards reflective of their community
- > Committed to whole-system reform and to ensuring a high-quality education for all children

How to Reach Local Education Funds

Public Education Network (PEN) is a network of 88 LEFs and individuals working to advance public school reform in low-income communities across the country. PEN operates in 34 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico, and its members work in over 1,600 districts and more than 16,000 school buildings. The PEN website (www.publiceducation.org) includes a [database of LEF members](#) in each of the member states. **Note:** Some state and community local education funds may not be members of PEN.

Priority Issues

Following are some of the national priority issues for LEFs; however, it’s important to understand the specific priorities of the LEF in your community by reviewing its website and/or contacting its leaders and members.

- > Standards and accountability
- > Student support services
- > Teacher quality
- > No Child Left Behind
- > High school reform
- > Public engagement

*From “In Some Districts, Outside Groups Have Inside Track,” *Education Week*, Nov. 29, 2006

Local Education Funds: Relevant Resources

Community Counts: How Youth Organizations Matter for Youth Development, a publication on what motivates youth to participate in community-based organizations, is based on a dozen years of conversations with youth in challenging urban and rural settings. It includes recommended action steps for how community youth organizations, schools, funders and policymakers can support youth.

Comprehensive School Health Initiative created “Lessons from the Field,” a four-part series presenting lessons learned from the activities undertaken by local education funds (LEFs) in the 1990s as they established, enhanced and institutionalized coordinated school health programs in their communities. The initiative was produced in cooperation with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Division of Adolescent and School Health (CDC/DASH).