State Successes in Student Health and Obesity Prevention
in Partnership with NASBE’s Obesity Prevention Project

Through the Obesity Prevention Project at NASBE’s Center for Safe and Healthy Schools, NASBE works with state boards of education, state departments of education and health, and local education agencies to advance the development and implementation of policies to improve nutrition and the health of students in states, localities and the nation, especially for children and youth at highest risk for chronic disease.

The project’s efforts are focused primarily on working directly with state boards of education to create and implement policies that improve the school health environment, specifically related to nutrition and physical activity. Below are examples of policy and program successes (covering 2009-2012) that have been achieved by providing state boards of education with technical assistance and two-year grants through NASBE’s funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s Division of Adolescent and School Health (DASH) and Leadership for Healthy Communities, a program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

Arkansas

Key policy goals in the Arkansas State Board of Education workplan were to increase opportunities for fruit and vegetable access, connect school improvement plans with wellness policies and goals, and address other school health topics such as STD/teen pregnancy, access to health services, tobacco use, and mental health. Accomplishments included implementing pilot projects to increase fruit and vegetable access and making school health a standing item on the agenda of each state board of education meeting.

Michigan

Accomplishments of the Michigan State Board of Education included adopting the draft state nutrition standards in October 2010 and working with the Michigan Department of Community Health to pilot the standards in four school districts using funds from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). They will be using the lessons learned from these schools to create a toolkit and offer trainings. The State Board also incorporated health-related assessment questions into the Comprehensive Needs Assessment (a school improvement tool), and it adopted the Integrating Mental Health in Schools policy and disseminated the policy toolkit. Board members are in the process of reviewing and updating the state board of education Policy on Quality Physical Education and will continue to hold quarterly meetings of their State Board School Health Committee.

Mississippi

Key policy goals in the Mississippi State Board of Education workplan included encouraging healthy fundraisers, not allowing physical activity to be used as punishment, and not allowing food to be used as a reward. Year One of the project involved a pilot with six schools to implement one of the three policy goals, with technical assistance from the state. Other key accomplishments included passage of a number of state policies, including strengthened Board of Education nutrition standards, beverage and snack regulations, food services training and standards, and others. The board continues to publicize its successes, investigate other policy opportunities, and hold meetings of the State Board of Education health subcommittee.
Pennsylvania

The policy goals in the Pennsylvania State Board of Education workplan were to develop stronger nutrition standards for competitive foods; address use of food, beverages, or physical activity as either reward or punishment; and require 30 minutes of physical activity daily. Key accomplishments in Year One included formation of a State Board standing committee on Student Health & Wellness, as well as developing and advancing draft nutrition and physical activity standards through a Board vote. The new health standards are currently progressing through the state’s legislative process.

Alabama

The Alabama State Board of Education is working to create a statewide wellness policy, as well as an assessment tool that local districts can use to review the strength of their own wellness policies. Additionally, the State Board plans to find ways to integrate existing student data collection systems in ways that will provide a clearer picture of student health and its links to student academic performance. The Board also maintains a strong collaborative relationship with the state health department.

Georgia

Not only does the newly created Georgia State Board of Education’s Health and Wellness Committee meet on a regular basis to review progress toward its policy goals, the Board has leveraged the partnerships created through this committee to create several smaller projects, such as a partnership between the Georgia Department of Education and the Georgia Department of Natural Resources to encourage families to take advantage of the physical activity opportunities available in state parks. The State Board also a part of the statewide SHAPE (Student Health and Physical Education) partnership, which will be hosting a summit in the Fall of 2012. Additionally, the Health and Wellness Committee is in the process of updating the Board’s nutrition and physical activity standards and plan to present them to the full State Board for review in 2012.

Kentucky

The Kentucky Board of Education’s School Health Committee includes a wide range of stakeholders from state-level agencies and advocacy groups. The committee is working to enhance the state’s process of evaluating schools’ compliance with extracurricular programs, including health and physical activity. Committee members hope to create an accountability system that makes effective use of student data to support student health while emphasizing the importance of physical and health education. They are also active in statewide coalitions and projects, and are in the process of reviewing the state’s existing nutrition and physical activity standards.

North Carolina

North Carolina’s Healthy Responsible Students Committee is led by the North Carolina State Board of Education and includes stakeholders from other state health agencies and the nonprofit and business community. The committee sponsored a SPLASH (Strengthening Proactive Leadership Alliances for School Health) Summit in July 2011, which gave members time to evaluate progress toward their policy goals as well as develop a plan for accomplishing the remaining goals. Other activities of the Healthy Responsible Students Committee include passage of a State Board resolution in support of school breakfast, and participation in the Governor’s “No Kid Hungry” campaign.

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