# WATER WORKS



## A Guide to Improving Water Access and Consumption in Schools to Improve Health and Support Learning

## Authors
Anna Grummon, BA, Karla Hampton, JD, Ariana Oliva, BA, Claire Brindis, DrPH, and Anisha Patel, MD, MSPH, MSHS.

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## Note
While we have attempted to provide the most up-to-date information and website URLs at the time of publication, some information may have changed.

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# INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The *Water Works* Implementation Guide can help you develop a comprehensive program to increase access to safe, appealing, low-cost drinking water sources in your school. It also provides ideas, materials, and resources to help you increase water consumption among the school community. Finally, the guide provides resources to help you evaluate the impact of your water program.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF IMPROVING ACCESS TO AND CONSUMPTION OF WATER IN SCHOOLS

### Water Access is Important for Students' Health and Cognition

When schools provide drinking water as an alternative to sugar-sweetened beverages (SSBs) such as soda, fruit drinks, and sports drinks, schools promote children's overall health and development. Encouraging consumption of water, especially in place of SSBs, can help limit excess weight gain[1-8] and prevent dental cavities.[9-10] And of special importance to educators, drinking water helps students stay hydrated, focused, and ready to learn.[11-13]

**Health benefits of drinking water include:**

- ↑ hydration
- ↓ risk for dental cavities
- ↓ risk for obesity
- ↓ risk for diabetes

### Water Access is Required by Law

The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 requires schools to make free drinking water available to students during mealtimes in areas where meals are served.[14] Recently, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) also released a proposed rule that school wellness policies include language about provision of free drinking water as well as maintenance of drinking water sources.[15] Some states also have legislation requiring schools to offer water at mealtimes. For example, California Senate Bill 1413 requires school districts to provide free, fresh drinking water wherever meals are served or eaten.[16]


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(15) Local School Wellness Policy Implementation under the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010. RIN 0584-AE25. https://s3.amazonaws.com/public-inspection.federalregister.gov/2014-04100.pdf. Accessed March 3, 2014.
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# ABOUT THIS IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE

## How to Use This Implementation Guide

This implementation guide presents actions you can take to improve water access and consumption in schools (see the ***Checklist for Taking Action to Improve Water Access and Intake in Schools*** at the end of this guide). Some of these steps may not apply to your school, and you may prefer to complete the steps in a different order than presented here.

## Target Audience

This toolkit is a great resource for anyone interested in increasing water intake among students and staff in school settings, including school administrators, parents, teachers, nutrition services staff, health and wellness coordinators, school nurses, and school community partners.

## What You Will Find in This Implementation Guide:

We provice a comprehensive description of how to start a water program at your school, including information on how you can:

- **Build Your Team and Gather Support:** this section discusses how to identify and build relationships with key stakeholders, and provides suggestions for how to assemble a team.
- **Serve Safe and Appealing Water**: this section provides details on different types of water sources, and explains how to choose a location for new water sources, test water outlets for contaminants, and remediate any water quality problems.
- **Enhance and Sustain Your Water Program:** this section describes ways to conduct promotional and educational activities to encourage students to drink water, and provides an overview of key components of model wellness policy language to promote increased water intake.
- **Monitor Progress and Make Improvements:** this section describes how to evaluate your school water program.
- **Fund Your Water Program:** this section provides guidance on how to identify and approach funders to secure both short- and long-term funding.
- **Supplemental Materials:** the ***Water Works*** guide also comes with supplemental materials including:
  - Flowchart of water quality testing procedures for testing and remediating lead in drinking water
  - Descriptions of different types of water delivery options, reusable bottles, and cups
  - Links to sample promotional and educational activities
  - Model school wellness policy language for improving drinking water access and consumption
  - Overview and examples of methods to evaluate your water program


## Learning Objectives:

After using the *Water Works* guide, you will be able to:

1) compare different water sources and vessels for serving water
2) test your school's water outlets for contaminants and remediate any water quality problems
3) develop methods for encouraging water consumption at your school
4) develop and implement a wellness policy that ensures water access and intake at your school
5) conduct a formal evaluation of your water program

# ACTION 1 - GATHER SUPPORT AND BUILD YOUR TEAM

Implementing and sustaining a successful water program requires the help of many stakeholders. For example, facilities staff may help install and maintain a water source, teachers can role model healthy beverage consumption, and cafeteria staff can help serve water during mealtimes. As you develop your water program, you will need to identify and meet with these key stakeholders. Engaging with stakeholders will help you build a team that is committed to making sure your school water program is successful. This section describes:

- how you can identify and gather support from key stakeholders
- how you can form and meet with your water team

## GATHER SUPPORT FROM KEY STAKEHOLDERS

### Identify Key Stakeholders

Your first step in building your team is to identify individuals who will be directly involved in implementing the water program, such as cafeteria staff, custodial and facilities staff, and district or school administrators. You will also want to seek out individuals or groups from your school, district, and community who are interested in promoting water consumption a way to support students' health and well-being.

**Potential Stakeholders for School Water Programs**

| Stakeholders at the District Level | Stakeholders at the School Site | Stakeholders from the Community |
|---|---|---|
| • Superintendent<br>• Food services or nutrition director<br>• Facilities or maintenance administrators<br>• School board<br>• District wellness coordinator | • Students<br>• Cafeteria manager and staff<br>• Custodial and facilities staff<br>• Principal<br>• Teachers<br>• School nurse<br>• School wellness coordinator<br>• Parent Teacher Association<br>• Parents | • Public health professionals (e.g., community health workers at your local health department)<br>• Researchers<br>• Community-based organizations focused on health promotion<br>• Municipal water supplier |

## Meet with Key Stakeholders

After you identify key stakeholders for your water program, meet with them to discuss your plans and solicit their feedback. Below are suggested items for your discussion.

### Discussion Items for Meeting with Key Stakeholders

In the table below are some of the key individuals and groups you might enlist for support of your water program (left column), along with issues you might want to discuss with each of the stakeholders (right column). In addition to these specific questions, it might be helpful to get a general idea of any concerns stakeholders have about starting a new water program.

| Stakeholder Group | Key Questions to Discuss |
|---|---|
| School Administrators (e.g., superintendent, principals) | • Are there any preferences or restrictions about where water can be served or consumed at school?<br>• Does the district or school have any resources available to facilitate the program (e.g., general funds that could be used for the water program)?<br>• Does the school or district have plans to remodel or build new facilities? Can these plans include efforts to improve water access? |
| Food Service Staff (e.g., director of food/nutrition services department, cafeteria staff) | • What water sources are currently available during school meals (e.g., fountains available in cafeteria, bottled water served with meals)?<br>• How do the food service staff determine whether the school is in compliance with federal and state laws requiring free water access during meals in areas where meals are served and eaten?<br>• What resources does the food service staff have, if any, to facilitate the program? For example, are there monies to purchase cups or reusable bottles, or to put toward purchasing new water sources?<br>• Are the food service staff aware that "reasonable costs" associated with providing free water access are an allowable expense to the school's non-profit food service account?[1]<br>• Are cafeteria staff willing and able to assist in implementing the water program? What constraints do cafeteria staff face in assisting with the water program? |
| Maintenance Personnel (e.g., custodians, facilities staff) | • Are maintenance personnel willing and able to assist with any cleaning or maintenance of school water sources (including new units added as part of the water program)? For example, ask maintenance staff if they can help with the following:<br>  • Picking up cups students use to access the water sources<br>  • Cleaning the water source regularly<br>• What resources do maintenance staff have available to assist with the installation of new units (e.g., does the district have plumbers who can help install units)? |
| Students | • Do students have preferences about where water is served?<br>• Do students have preferences about what types of water delivery options should be installed?<br>• What would motivate students to drink more water? |

(1) Long, C. U.S. Department of Agriculture. *Child Nutrition Reauthorization 2010: Water Availability During National School Lunch Program Meal Service*. http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/governance/Policy-Memos/2011/SP28-2011_osr.pdf. Published July 12, 2011. Accessed February 24, 2014.

## FORM YOUR TEAM

In addition to engaging key stakeholders at the onset of a new water program, you may also want to form a "water team," that is, a formal team that meets regularly to work on the water program. In addition to cafeteria managers, the principal or vice principal, students, and facilities staff, you might also invite parents, teachers, and other relevant parties to join your team.

### Tips for Managing Your Team

- Select a team leader who can schedule and facilitate meetings and manage group dynamics
- Choose a regular meeting time and place that works for most members. Try meeting once every 4 to 6 weeks; more or less frequent meetings may be needed depending on your team's activities, goals, etc.
- Consider dividing up work so individual members can work on the actions that are most interesting to them
- Make sure members feel included in decision-making and recognized for their accomplishments

### Resource Spotlight

**The State of Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction** has created a toolkit called ***School Wellness Policy Best Practices for Development, Implementation and Evaluation***. The toolkit and its associated website feature sample letters to parents, community members, and staff inviting them to join the school's wellness committee. These letters can be adapted to work for water programs**.** Refer to the ***Resources*** supplementary material for a detailed list of resources, including weblinks.