

Flex your Parent Power Muscles!

Tips for getting involved

Approaching the principal, mayor or legislator about an issue you care about can feel intimidating. But parents and caregivers are important partners in achieving healthy schools. Here are a few tips for success!



Identify who has power.

Always explore who has stake in an issue you care about, and think about what will influence them. Do they need more information, or parent support? Will they respond to letters from students? Are they elected, and likely to respond to votes or an article in the paper? The answers will help you identify what actions to take.



Build your squad.

Change takes time and many hands. When you are really passionate about something, it can be tempting to forge ahead without taking the time to build relationships and get feedback from others. But recruiting a team of people excited about the issue and eager to help will make your work more effective and sustainable. Reach out to teachers, parents and allies who support your cause and are ready to help.



Share your story.

Your story is important, and it's one of your most powerful tools. Share how issues affect your family personally. Include this story in all of your work, from meeting with the principal to writing for the paper. It helps build connections, relationships, trust, and goodwill.



Take action.

Remember: People like us have made great things happen. Whether you have a little or a lot of time, there are many things you can do. Talk with your school principal. Attend school board meetings. Sign up for or start a wellness committee. Call your representatives. It ALL makes a difference!

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HEALTHY SCHOOLS POWER PACK

An Insider's Guide to a Healthy School Day



Every child deserves a healthy start.

A healthy school day enables our children to learn, succeed and thrive. Parents are thrilled about the progress schools have made around healthier meals, snacks and drinks. But there's more to do. We know that a healthy school day also means ensuring parents have access to paid sick days. It means ending the school-to-prison pipeline, and focusing on social-emotional learning. It means supporting immigrant students and our littlest learners. It means equipping our teachers with resources, not guns. And so much more.

The good news is that parents and caregivers have tremendous power to make change happen. From the school, to the city, to

the national level, we have been on the frontlines of demanding policies that truly support children and families.

We hope this Healthy Schools Power Pack helps you get started, or continue your good work. Inside you'll find information on the many issues affecting a healthy school day, a snapshot of who has the power to make change happen, and tips for getting involved. Most importantly: remember that all change has started with people like you believing we can do better.

Together we can build healthier schools and communities that support all of our children and families. Thank your all you do. Now let's get to it! ■

Parents play a key role in helping achieve a healthy school day!

Meet some parents making a difference:



Sara

Sara's daughter gets recurring ear infections, but Sara doesn't have paid sick days to care for her. Sara knows first-hand that paid sick days help everyone stay happy - and productive! She called her members of Congress and visited her city councilmember's office to share her story.



Anita

Anita is passionate about healthy food for her kids. She encourages her children to try healthy foods at school, and visits her child for lunch when she can. She also joined the Wellness Committee, and is helping organize a Fun Run instead of a bake sale to raise money for the school band!



Bea

Bea is working with other parents to help her school find alternatives to suspensions and expulsions. She worked with the principal to introduce a conflict mediation program that trains students and staff as peer mediators, and helped write a proposal to the school board to get funding to introduce the program.

Healthy Food in Schools

Healthy school food, snacks and drinks are an important part of the healthy school day. Not only do schools teach healthy habits that last a lifetime, but when children eat healthy food, they're ready to learn, focus and succeed in school, too. Children eat half of their daily calories in school, and these calories are even more important if a child experiences food insecurity at home. There are many ways we can support healthy food and habits during the school day - here are a few!

Healthy Meals and Snacks

Good news! The majority of schools are now meeting healthy school meal and smart snack standards, which have been updated to prioritize whole grains, low sodium, and low-fat foods.

- WHAT YOU CAN DO** Share your excitement about healthy school foods with the school and your children! Encourage students to try new foods. Have lunch with your child. Ask your school about breakfast and summer meal programs, too, which are important additional ways to ensure that all children are ready to learn and thrive!

Junk Food Marketing

Companies spend about \$2 billion every year marketing foods and beverages to children, including in schools. Parents know that marketing impacts what our kids ask for, and what they're willing to eat. In schools, marketing surfaces through sponsorships, fundraisers, label redemption programs, billboards, incentive programs, fundraisers and more. Local Wellness Policies require that only food and beverages that meet the Smart Snack standards can be marketed in schools - yay! But marketing still creeps in through sponsorships, fundraisers and more.

- WHAT YOU CAN DO** Propose healthy fundraisers and incentive programs. Join the Wellness Committee to be on the team addressing issues like marketing in schools.

Healthy Drinks

While schools are now required to have accessible water fountains, they can often be outdated and unappealing, and/or located far from the cafeteria. In addition, less than 10% of schools and daycare centers are required to test for lead.

- WHAT YOU CAN DO** Ask your school about accessibility to healthy drinking water throughout the day and during lunch time. Local Wellness Committee and ESSA state standards also address water. Speak out about the importance of testing for lead. The state environmental agency is active on this front, and needs to hear from parents like us.

Healthy Food for Little Learners

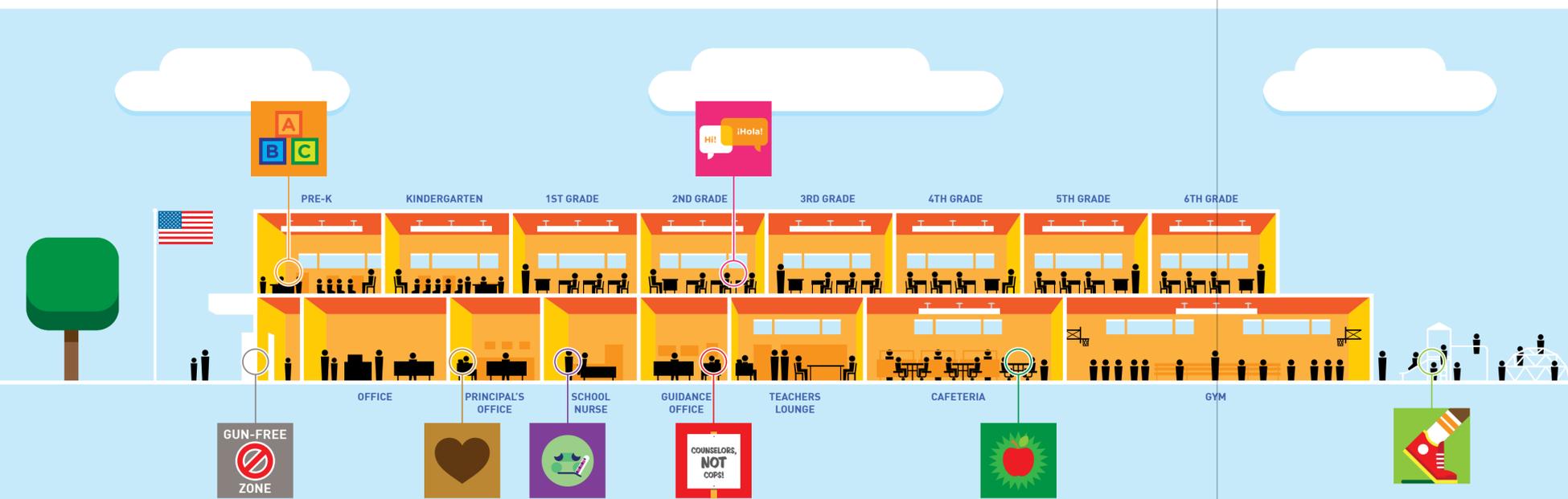
In 2016 the USDA rolled out updated nutrition standards for infants and children in childcare centers through the Child and Adult Care Food Program. These new science-based guidelines address added sugars, saturated fats, whole grains, breastfeeding, healthy drinks, and more.

- WHAT YOU CAN DO** Thank your center for meeting the new standards! Back them up at home by encouraging your kids to try healthy foods, too!

Hunger

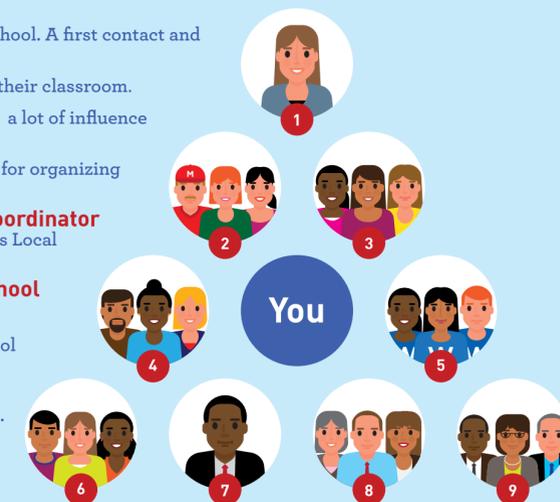
A healthy school day is even more important for children experiencing food insecurity, as the meals these children receive at school may be the only food they get that day.

- WHAT YOU CAN DO** Many children eligible for free or reduced-price meals aren't able to access school breakfast or summer feeding programs. Encourage your school and district to introduce both. And ask your school district about Community Eligibility - which helps ensure all hungry kids are able to access these important programs.



Know Your Allies for a Healthy School Day!

- 1. Principal:** The key decision-maker at a school. A first contact and powerful resource and ally.
- 2. Teachers** control a lot of what goes on in their classroom.
- 3. School Staff and Nurses** can also have a lot of influence within the school.
- 4. PTO/Parent Groups:** Often responsible for organizing events and fundraisers.
- 5. District Wellness Committee and Coordinator** create, implement and monitor the District's Local Wellness Policy.
- 6. School Wellness Committee and School Leadership Team**
- 7. Superintendent:** Top official in the School District.
- 8. School Board:** Oversees school policies, budget, curriculum and the Superintendent.
- 9. Elected Officials:** Create laws affecting of these issues at the municipal, state and even national level.



Many additional actors have an influence over the healthy school day. What's most important is that you explore who has a stake in a particular issue or policy you're concerned about, and think strategically about how to engage them. While parents are important voices, we can't make change happen alone!

End the School to Prison Pipeline

Students missed over 11 million days of school in 2015-16 because of suspensions. That translates to more than 60,000 school years, more than 60 million hours of lost education, and billions of dollars wasted in a single school year. The school-to-prison pipeline pushes students out of school with exclusionary disciplinary policies that include suspensions, expelling or even arresting kids for minor offenses that used to be mediated by principals and school staff. And students of color and students with disabilities are disproportionately affected. Indeed, more than one out of four boys of color with disabilities and nearly one in five girls of color with disabilities receives an out of school suspension.

- WHAT YOU CAN DO** Support positive behavior interventions and supports, restorative justice, trauma-informed care, and social-emotional learning tools in schools. How? Ask questions, talk to teachers and principals about their approach, join the PTA, learn about ESSA plans. Approaches like peer mediation, conflict resolution, guidance counseling, mentoring and more are able to reduce conflict in schools, exclude use of police and police interventions, and create positive and healthy school environments for the success of all students.

Support Immigrant Children and Families

Schools and teachers play a critical role in ensuring that immigrant children feel safe during the school day and parents feel safe in their school community. Schools can help support immigrant families by providing information in their language, offering resources like know-your-rights workshops, and working with community organizations to fill the specific needs of the community. Schools can also provide counseling and referral services for students who may be affected by current immigration policy, including support for children whose parents might be detained.

- WHAT YOU CAN DO** Let your school know that whether families are tenth generation or new Americans, families belong together and children come first.

Provide Paid Sick Days

All too often sick children are sent to school because a parent doesn't have access to paid sick days. Contagious illnesses like the flu spread more quickly in schools than in the workplace. In fact, nationwide parents without paid sick days are more than twice as likely as parents with paid sick days to send a sick child to school or daycare. Studies also show that sick children recover

better when cared for by their parents. Whether it's to care for a 4th grader with the flu, a toddler with an ear infection, or an 11th grader with a chronic illness, being there for family is what matters. Parents shouldn't have to give up a paycheck, or risk losing their job, to do it.

- WHAT YOU CAN DO** Check out state and national efforts to win paid sick days!

Keep Children Moving

Current guidelines recommend that kids get 60 minutes of movement a day, but 22% of schools don't require physical education. In fact, only 4% of elementary, 8% of middle and 2% of high schools provide daily physical education. When kids move and exercise their bodies they are better able to focus in class, and they perform better in school. Studies show that academic achievement increases when students are physically active. PE programs reduce stress, increase self-esteem and improve judgment.

- WHAT YOU CAN DO** Ask your school how many minutes of physical education and recess your children get each day. Let your school know that PE is a priority. Wellness Committees and state ESSA standards are also great inroads to promoting PE during the school day.

Encourage Multilingual Learning

Multilingual educational programming for language learners, like dual language immersion programs, are one of the most effective strategies for closing the opportunity gap for all students before it starts while also ensuring our kids have a competitive advantage when they enter the global workforce. Not to mention that knowing multiple languages is great for our brains! Students who know more than one language have exhibited increased emotional intelligence, stronger problem solving skills, and improved academic outcomes. Research also shows that dual-language programs are critical to fostering positive identity development for kids of all cultures.

- WHAT YOU CAN DO** Ask your school or school district about dual-language programs, and make your support for them clear. Municipal and state leaders can also move the needle!

Arm Schools With Resources, Not Guns

Gun safety is a top priority for parents and students, with another wave of heartbreaking tragedies over the last school year. Students are leading an inspiring charge

demanding sensible gun laws in our communities. As parents we must back them up. We must also ensure that schools invest in resources that are actually proven to improve learning and school safety, including counselors, and address the emotional and psychological needs of our students.

- WHAT YOU CAN DO** Join conversations around school safety in your community. Work with your school board to pass resolutions to keep your school gun-free. Join efforts to boost education funding, particularly funding for counseling and mental health services. Contact your elected state and local representatives and urge them to work to arm schools with resources like more counselors, and not with firearms!

Invest in Early Learners

Did you know that 90 percent of a child's brain is developed by age 5? Neurons are making connections, language is developing, and there are so many opportunities for learning! Early learning programs support social-emotional development, cognitive development, and go a long way in setting up our little ones for success. Studies show that children who have high-quality early learning experiences are more

likely to succeed in school, graduate from high school, and gain stable employment. Not to mention that early learning can also mean a BIG boost for our economy. For every \$1 invested in high-quality early learning there is a later return of 13%.

- WHAT YOU CAN DO** If your community doesn't have early learning programs, ask lawmakers to make it a priority.

And More!

Your school and community likely have additional priorities, which is fantastic! Issues are connected, and tactics and tools can be adapted to other work. Use this packet as a springboard to inform your ideas! Additional resources on the MomsRising website include:

- Managing social media, media and privacy online.
- Tips for starting a food pantry or school garden
- Resources on trauma-informed care at school
- Tips on walking and biking to school

Visit <https://moms.ly/HealthySchools> to learn more.