

# DRINKING WATER IN SCHOOLS

## A POLICY AND RESOURCE GUIDE

### QUENCHING THIRST, FUELING MINDS: YOUR ROLE IN STUDENT HYDRATION

**Water is essential for students.** It helps them stay alert, regulates body temperature, and supports overall health. By ensuring access to drinking water, you are directly contributing to student success in the classroom and beyond.

This resource includes example model wellness policy language and resources for multiple audiences who can work together to ensure that all students and school staff have effective access to drinking water while in school buildings and on school grounds.



# RESOURCE TAGS

## Resource Type



**POLICY:** Information to **understand and develop policies** that support drinking water in schools.



**Learning:** Resources provide **background knowledge and information** on drinking water requirements, including information about drinking water safety, access, and promotion.



**Action:** Tools that support **actions** such as baseline assessments (e.g., of drinking water safety, access, or promotion) or steps to implement policy or programmatic efforts to support drinking water, safety, access, or promotion.

## Resource Topic



**Safety:** Resources related to ensuring that school drinking water is of high quality and meets health standards.



**Access:** Resources related to ensuring water is easily available and appealing—the water source is clean and well-maintained, with adequate water flow—and ideally, that cups or other vessels are available.



**Promotion:** Resources for education and promotion to raise awareness about water and encourage water consumption.

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# LOCAL SCHOOL WELLNESS POLICY COMMITTEES



Every school district participating in the National School Lunch Program or School Breakfast Program must have a Local School Wellness Policy (also referred to as a wellness policy). Wellness policies can be powerful tools for documenting the steps necessary to ensure proper hydration for students, including the school district's water access and water quality standards. When crafted thoughtfully, wellness policies can outline actions to integrate hydration into daily school routines, ensuring compliance with federal and state requirements while going beyond minimum standards. They provide a framework for educating students about the importance of proper hydration and can be used to empower schools to create a culture of healthy hydration habits.



## Actions wellness policy committees can take to keep students healthy and hydrated:

-  **Goals:** Incorporate specific hydration goals into your district wellness policy. Set clear objectives for water access. Include language promoting water as the primary beverage choice during school hours.
-  **Access:** Ensure wellness policy language supports equitable water access. Address potential barriers to water consumption, such as water quality concerns or cultural preferences, and outline strategies to overcome them.
-  **Promotion & Education:** Establish guidelines for water promotion and education. Require water-related education in health education curriculum rubrics. Identify ways to integrate water-related topics into other subjects. Require visible signage promoting water consumption throughout the school.
-  **Accountability:** Create accountability measures for hydration initiatives. Develop a system to track and report on water access improvements, consumption patterns, and educational efforts. Include drinking water-related questions in annual wellness policy assessments.

## Tools & Resources

**[Model Wellness Policy Language for Water Access in Schools](https://www.changelabsolutions.org/product/model-wellness-policy-language-water-access-schools)**. [ChangeLab Solutions]. Resource helping schools and other community advocates incorporate drinking water priorities into their wellness policies. Web page. [2012]. <https://www.changelabsolutions.org/product/model-wellness-policy-language-water-access-schools>



**[Water Access in Schools Microlearning Modules](https://www.cdc.gov/school-nutrition/water-access/microlearning.html)**. [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention]. Short videos instructing schools on the steps to encourage students to drink more water throughout the day. 9 videos. [2022]. <https://www.cdc.gov/school-nutrition/water-access/microlearning.html>



**[Healthier Generation Model Wellness Policy](https://www.healthiergeneration.org/take-action/get-help/how-to-use-the-wellness-policy-builder)**. [Alliance for a Healthier Generation]. Model wellness policy that can be used as a guide for schools. Web page. <https://www.healthiergeneration.org/take-action/get-help/how-to-use-the-wellness-policy-builder>



**[Action Center Model Policy Builder](https://www.healthiergeneration.org/app/resources?resources_tags=policy)**. [Alliance for a Healthier Generation]. Explore the Action Center to access tools and guidance to create healthier environments that support students' physical, social, and emotional well-being. Web page. [2021]. [https://www.healthiergeneration.org/app/resources?resources\\_tags=policy](https://www.healthiergeneration.org/app/resources?resources_tags=policy)



### RESOURCE TAGS

TYPE



POLICY



LEARNING



ACTION

TOPIC



SAFETY



ACCESS



PROMOTION

# SCHOOL LEADERSHIP



School leaders play many roles in ensuring students stay healthy and hydrated. They can work behind the scenes to ensure that drinking water is safe and readily available for students and school staff. School leaders are positioned to design and implement policies that ensure students have access to free, appealing drinking water throughout the day and create a school culture around drinking water through promotional activities and modeling drinking water behaviors.

## Actions school leaders can take to keep students healthy and hydrated:

- Access:** Incorporate provisions into school wellness policies that allow students to have water bottles in class and have easy access to appealing water access points throughout the day.
- Convenience:** Make water an easy beverage of choice during meals. Schools participating in the National School Lunch program are required to make potable water available to children at no charge in the place where lunch meals are served during meal service.
- Modeling:** Encourage school staff to model drinking water in front of their students.
- Professional development:** Host professional development opportunities focused on hydration at school for staff to learn more about drinking water initiatives that they could implement.
- Safety:** Collaborate with school district administrators and Facilities and Operations staff to establish a lead testing program aligned with the US EPA's 3Ts for Reducing Lead in Drinking Water, ensuring that school drinking water is safe for students and staff to consume.
- Promotion:** Foster a healthy hydration culture in your school by implementing strategies such as posting posters, making announcements, and hosting hydration challenges.

## Tools & Resources

**From Statute to Tap.** [National Drinking Water Alliance]. A fact sheet that provides the statute, regulations, and guidance for schools to follow the Water Requirements in the Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010. 1 page. [2016] <https://bit.ly/4dh8k8J>



**Effective Access to Water in Schools.** [National Drinking Water Alliance]. Colorful infographic of components of "effective access" to water in schools with links to additional toolkits. 2 pages. [2017]. <https://bit.ly/4jUnuDj>



**Healthy Hydration: Ensuring Access to Safe Water in Schools.** [National Drinking Water Alliance]. A checklist for school administrators to use to provide effective access to safe drinking water for students and staff. 7 pages. [2020]. <https://bit.ly/3GU1ZUE>



**Water Access in Schools Microlearning Modules.** [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention]. Short videos that instruct schools on steps to take for students to drink more water during the day. 9 videos. [2022]. <https://www.cdc.gov/school-nutrition/water-access/microlearning.html>



**3Ts for Reducing Lead in Drinking Water.** [US Environmental Protection Agency]. A website with interactive tools and fact sheets to assist schools with testing drinking water for lead, taking appropriate corrective actions, and communicating program activities to teachers and parents. Web page. [2018]. <https://www.epa.gov/ground-water-and-drinking-water/3ts-reducing-lead-drinking-water>



### RESOURCE TAGS

TYPE



POLICY



LEARNING



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TOPIC



SAFETY

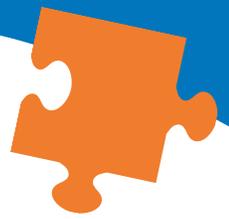


ACCESS



PROMOTION

# FOOD AND NUTRITION SERVICES



Food and nutrition services staff play a critical role in ensuring students are healthy and hydrated. They can encourage water consumption with meals and throughout the day. Food and nutrition leaders ensure safe water is available for food preparation and consumption, maintain water access points, and are often the first to notice and report water quality issues. In addition, food and nutrition services staff can be powerful advocates for improving drinking water access and promotion in schools. This is important because research shows that many students would like better access to drinking water.



## Actions food and nutrition services staff can take to keep students healthy and hydrated:

-  **Access:** Make water an easy beverage of choice during meals. Schools participating in the National School Lunch program are required to make potable water available to children at no charge in the place where meals are served during meal service.
-  **Convenience:** Provide a convenient means for students to fill reusable bottles, such as hydration stations in the cafeteria in places that are easily accessible. Provide cups for students who do not have a refillable water bottle.
-  **Education:** Educate students about hydration. Display signage that educates about healthy hydration and promotes water.
-  **Safety & Cleanliness:** Maintain clean, accessible water points. Regularly check fountains and dispensers for proper function, cleanliness, and appeal. Report any issues promptly to maintenance staff.
-  **Advocacy:** Share ideas for enhancing water availability and appeal with school administration, students, and parents.

## Tools & Resources

**Clarification on the Milk and Water Requirements in the School Meal Programs.** [United States Department of Agriculture] A memo clarifying how to provide water during meal times in schools participating in the National School Lunch Program. 2 pages. [2019] <https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/clarification-milk-and-water-requirements-school-meal-program>



**From Statute to Tap.** [National Drinking Water Alliance]. A fact sheet that provides the statute, regulations, and guidance for schools to follow the Water Requirements in the Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010. 1 page. [2016] <https://bit.ly/4dh8k8J>



**Effective Access to Water in Schools.** [National Drinking Water Alliance]. An infographic showing components of effective access to water in schools. 2 pages. <https://bit.ly/4jUnuDj>



**Keep it Flowing: A practical guide to school drinking water planning, maintenance, and repair.** [The Prevention Research Center on Nutrition and Physical Activity at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health]. Provides information for school leaders/facilities managers on ensuring that school water is safe and accessible. Provides guidance on constructing, maintaining, repairing, and cleaning water sources. 32 pages. [2024] <https://hsph.harvard.edu/research/nutrition-physical-activity/resources/keep-it-flowing/>



**Drinking Water Safety in Schools.** [National Drinking Water Alliance]. Short graphical depiction of steps to ensure drinking water safety in school. 2 pages. [2017] <https://bit.ly/42YdPpu>



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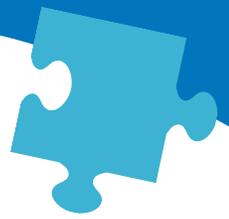


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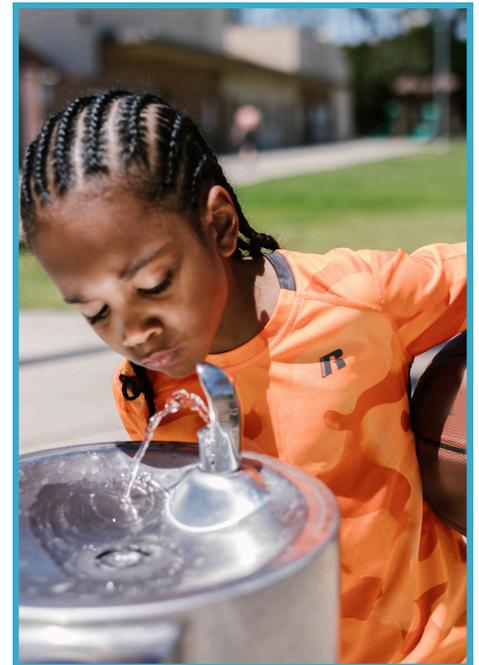
# FACILITIES AND OPERATIONS



Facilities and operations services play key roles in ensuring that the drinking water that kids, teachers, staff, and administrators consume at school is safe and free of pollutants, especially lead. Important actions include installing and maintaining water fountains and bottle fillers, responding promptly to repair requests, conducting regular water safety tests, and addressing any concerns. Facilities and Operations Staff also have expertise in planning and implementing infrastructure improvements that directly impact the abilities of the schools' students and staff to stay hydrated.

## Actions facilities and operations can take to keep students healthy and hydrated:

- Inspections & Maintenance:** Prioritize water infrastructure maintenance. Conduct regular inspections of water fountains, bottle fillers, and plumbing systems, and promptly address any identified issues.
- Routine testing:** Collaborate with local health departments and water suppliers to implement water quality testing protocols, establish communication channels, and establish a routine schedule for water testing at all sources used for drinking and food preparation. Ensure effective remediation if issues arise.
- Infrastructure upgrades:** Upgrade water access points strategically. Work with school leaders and administration to identify high-traffic areas for installing new water fountains or bottle fillers. Consider water temperature control and touchless operation to enhance appeal and hygiene. Contact your local municipality or public works department, as they may provide additional support for infrastructure upgrades.
- Planning:** When planning renovations or new construction, integrate easily accessible water stations into the building design, promoting a culture of hydration throughout the school.



## Tools & Resources

**Drinking Water Safety In Schools.** [National Drinking Water Alliance]. Short graphical depiction of steps to ensure drinking water safety in school. 2 pages. [2017] <https://bit.ly/42YdPpu>



**Let's Tackle School Drinking Water Safety! Webinar Series.** [National Drinking Water Alliance]. Webinar series that addresses drinking water and lead, steps schools should take to approach drinking water quality, and how to fix problems. Web page. [2017]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iwowzxhlwBA&themeRefresh=1>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=POaW7FD2sSs> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eOkHvt2LYlo>



**Keep it Flowing: A practical guide to school drinking water planning, maintenance, and repair.** [The Prevention Research Center on Nutrition and Physical Activity at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health]. Provides information for school leaders/facilities managers on ensuring that school water is safe and accessible. Provides guidance on constructing, maintaining, repairing, and cleaning water sources. 29 pages. [2024] <https://hsph.harvard.edu/research/nutrition-physical-activity/resources/keep-it-flowing/>



**3Ts for Reducing Lead in Drinking Water.** [US Environmental Protection Agency]. A website with interactive tools and fact sheets to assist schools with testing drinking water for lead, taking appropriate corrective actions, and communicating program activities to teachers and parents. Web page. [2018]. <https://www.epa.gov/ground-water-and-drinking-water/3ts-reducing-lead-drinking-water>



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PROMOTION

# STAFF, TEACHERS, AND WELLNESS AND WATER CHAMPIONS



Teachers and school staff can be important role models, and wellness and water champions play a key role in normalizing and promoting the adoption of healthy hydration behaviors. Teachers play a vital role in educating students about the importance of drinking water, what students can do to increase their water intake, and ensuring the provision of adequate breaks for hydration. There are many places in the school curriculum for education about the health benefits of drinking water. Teachers can also provide students with opportunities to educate their peers and put their learning into practice. Teachers and school staff can promote water consumption with posters or launch opportunities for students to create compelling campaigns.

## Actions staff, teachers, and wellness and water champions can take to keep students healthy and hydrated:

-  **Learn:** Educate yourself on the importance of healthy hydration for children, the problem of inadequate hydration, inadequate drinking water access, and current policy.
-  **Champion & Advocate:** Become a water champion in your school. Share ideas for enhancing water availability and appeal with school administration, students, and parents. Encourage students to drink water before and after recess.
-  **Educate:** Teach students about why drinking water is essential and what they can do to increase their water intake.
-  **Promote:** Launch “Healthy Hydration Campaigns” in your school to engage students, staff, and school leaders.

## Tools & Resources

**Effective Access to Water in Schools: What is it and why does it matter?** [University of California, Agriculture, and Natural Resources] Short research brief about the importance of drinking water, the problem of insufficient access in schools, effective strategies, and current legislation. 4 pages. [2021] <https://bit.ly/3ZhRnoW>



**National Drinking Water Alliance Fact Sheets.** [National Drinking Water Alliance]. Fact sheets for students and families about the importance of drinking water. 6 printable fact sheets; one in Spanish. [2017-2019]. <https://www.drinkingwateralliance.org/facts>



**Poster Pack – Drinking Water Promotion** [Prevention Research Center on Nutrition and Physical Activity] Fun posters promoting drinking water. 3 pages. <https://hsph.me/hprc-water-poster-pack>



**Water First** [Partnerships for Research in Child Health]. A website with materials for water-related educational activities for elementary students. [2023] <https://researchinchildhealth.org/resources/water-first>



### RESOURCE TAGS

TYPE



POLICY



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PROMOTION

# STUDENTS



Students of all ages can make healthy choices and influence their school community. Students are often eager to learn about drinking water from teachers, but can also educate themselves and their peers. Once students understand the importance of healthy hydration for health and the environment, they can promote water consumption among their peers more effectively than teachers or parents. For example, students can form organizations and launch campaigns to change school-wide hydration culture. They can also collaborate with community organizations and school leadership to implement plans to improve school water access and promotion. These efforts can enhance student health and teach students critical academic and professional skills.



## Actions students can take to keep students healthy and hydrated:

-  **Healthy choices:** Bring a water bottle to school and leave the sugary drinks behind.
-  **Advocacy:** Form a student nutrition advisory council to promote water consumption behaviors and ask school leaders to install/maintain drinking water access points and better water infrastructure. Create photo projects to document existing water infrastructure and provide data to their school on opportunities to improve access and promotion of drinking water.
-  **Promote:** Launch a student-led campaign to encourage students to drink water by creating videos/posters/ads that emphasize the benefits of hydration.
-  **Assess & Engage:** Survey the student community to see what would make students more interested in drinking water.

## Tools & Resources

**AQWA: Assessing Quality of Water Access.** [National Drinking Water Alliance]. A photo-evidence tool for citizen scientists (students, staff, etc.) to document and quantify school water access. Toolkit. [2020]. <https://www.drinkingwateralliance.org/aqwa>



**Teens Research the Impact of Signage and Positive Messaging on School Water Intake.** [National Drinking Water Alliance] Article with videos about a teen-led high school drinking water promotion campaign. Webpage. [2019]. <https://bit.ly/3YORwA9>



**4H2O Tip Sheets.** [University of California, Agriculture and Natural Resources] Tip sheet on how to successfully implement youth-led participatory action research based upon project 4H2O. 8 pages. [2018]. <https://bit.ly/4meg1Rn>



**Assembling and Managing a Student Nutrition Advisory Council.** [Institute of Child Nutrition] Guide on creating and managing a Student Nutrition Advisory Council - a group of students and staff who promote nutrition. 3 pages [2023] <https://bit.ly/43jPvOj>



### RESOURCE TAGS



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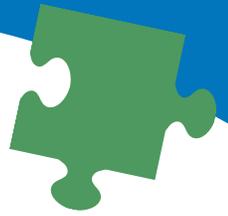


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# FAMILIES



Families are vital in ensuring that students are healthy and hydrated. Families are the first to see their child or teen each day – send them to school hydrated and with a refillable water bottle. Family members can also be good role models for healthy hydration by making water a “first choice” beverage. Families can be powerful advocates for actions to improve drinking water access and promotion in schools, at home, and everywhere that children spend their days.

## Actions families can take to keep students healthy and hydrated:

- Provide:** Send your student to school with a filled reusable water bottle that they can refill throughout the day instead of a sugary drink.
- Engage:** Discuss the importance of drinking water with your student and model drinking water yourself at home.
- Learn:** Read your student’s school wellness policy and, if needed, advocate for a written wellness policy that includes actions to ensure students have access to safe and appealing drinking water throughout the school day.
- Get involved:** Join your school or district wellness committee. Explore fundraising or other funding opportunities for your school to obtain water bottle filling stations and engage in water promotion activities.

## Tools & Resources

**Effective Access to Water in Schools: What is it and why does it matter?** [Nutrition Policy Institute at University of California, Agriculture and Natural Resources] Short research brief about the importance of drinking water, the problem of insufficient access in schools, effective strategies, and current legislation. 4 pages. [2021] <https://bit.ly/3ZhRnoW>



**Increase Healthy Beverage Consumption and Decrease SSBs: A Community Roadmap.** [Notah Begay III Foundation with University of California Nutrition Policy Institute]. Interactive guide with steps to increase water consumption among community members. 6 pages. [2021]. <https://nb3foundation.org/water-roadmap-interactive-infographic/>



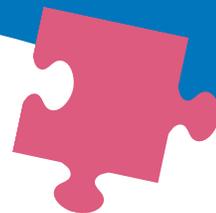
**Water First: A Toolkit for Promoting Water Intake in Community Settings.** [University of California, San Francisco]. Toolkit providing strategies for community organizations to promote drinking water effectively. 16 pages. [2016]. <https://bit.ly/3F5QnNY>



**Effective Access to Water in Schools: What is it and why does it matter?** [Nutrition Policy Institute at University of California, Agriculture and Natural Resources] Short research brief about the importance of drinking water, the problem of insufficient access in schools, effective strategies, and current legislation. 4 pages. [2021] <https://bit.ly/3ZhRnoW>



### RESOURCE TAGS



# COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Community partners play an essential role in ensuring students stay healthy and hydrated. Community organizations that partner with schools, such as afterschool programs, often provide students with drinks and snacks daily. These organizations can set students up for success by serving them water instead of sugary drinks and educating them about the importance of drinking water. Community organizations also know their communities and can identify ways to promote drinking water locally



## Actions community partners can take to keep students healthy and hydrated:

-  **Provide healthy choices:** Avoid serving sugary drinks to children at community events or afterschool programs and instead serve water.
-  **Assess:** Conduct a community assessment to identify barriers to making water the preferred drink choice.
-  **Educate:** Teach others in the community about the importance of drinking water through promotional materials, such as flyers and posters, or educational sessions.
-  **Refillable water bottles:** Provide reusable water bottles and water bottle filling stations for students to use during after-school programs, sporting events, or in other community spaces.

## Tools & Resources

**Effective Access to Water in Schools: What is it and why does it matter?** [University of California, Agriculture and Natural Resources] Short research brief about the importance of drinking water, the problem of insufficient access in schools, effective strategies, and current legislation. 4 pages. [2021] <https://bit.ly/3ZhRnoW>



**Increase Healthy Beverage Consumption and Decrease SSBs: A Community Roadmap.** [Noah Begay III Foundation with University of California Nutrition Policy Institute]. Interactive guide with steps to increase water consumption among community members. 6 pages. <https://nb3foundation.org/water-roadmap-interactive-infographic/>



**Water First: A Toolkit for Promoting Water Intake in Community Settings.** [University of California Nutrition Policy Institute]. Toolkit providing strategies for community organizations to promote drinking water effectively. 16 pages. [2016]. <https://bit.ly/3F5QnNY>



**OSNAP: Out of School Nutrition and Physical Activity Initiative.** [The Prevention Research Center on Nutrition and Physical Activity at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health]. Online toolkit with resources to help out-of-school time programs improve practices and policies to help kids move more and eat healthier snacks. [2023]. <https://osnap.org/>



### RESOURCE TAGS

TYPE



POLICY



LEARNING



ACTION

TOPIC



SAFETY



ACCESS



PROMOTION



# RESOURCES FOR MULTIPLE AUDIENCES

As written in the CDC’s Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child model, alignment between the actions of school leaders, facilities & operations staff, teachers, students, families, and communities strengthens the success of drinking water improvement efforts. Guaranteeing drinking water safety, access, and promotion in schools requires efforts from the whole school community. The following resources may be helpful for various school audiences.

## Tools & Resources

**Model Wellness Policy Language for Water Access in Schools.** [ChangeLab Solutions]. Resource helping schools and other community advocates incorporate drinking water priorities into their wellness policies. Web page. [2012] <https://www.changelabsolutions.org/product/model-wellness-policy-language-water-access-schools>



**From Statute to Tap.** [National Drinking Water Alliance]. Fact sheet that provides the statute, regulations, and guidance for schools to follow the Water Requirements in the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010. 1 page. [2016]. <https://bit.ly/4dh8k8J>



**Effective Access to Water in Schools: What is it and why does it matter?** [Nutrition Policy Institute at University of California, Agriculture and Natural Resources] Short research brief about the importance of drinking water, the problem of insufficient access in schools, effective strategies, and current legislation. 4 pages. [2021] <https://bit.ly/3ZhRnoW>



**AQWA: Assessing Quality of Water Access.** [National Drinking Water Alliance]. A photo-evidence tool for citizen scientists (students, staff, etc.) to use to document and quantify school water access. [2020]. <https://www.drinkingwateralliance.org/aqwa>



**Diving Into the School Year: How’s the Water?** [National Drinking Water Alliance] Webpage with action steps and resource links to promote water access at school. 1 page. [2019]. <https://www.drinkingwateralliance.org/school-wellness-policy>



**Virtual Healthy School.** [CDC]- An interactive web tool that demonstrates, through familiar scenes, how schools can support the health and academic achievement of students. Web-based application. [2022] <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/vhs/index.html>



**5 Steps to Revise Your Wellness Policy.** [Alliance for a Healthier Generation] Blog post that provides an update on the Local School Wellness Policy (LSP) requirements and outlines sequential steps to adopt best LSP practices. 1 page. <https://www.healthiergeneration.org/take-action/schools/wellness-topics/policy/local-school-wellness-policy/refresh-your-policy>



**Drinking Water Safety in Schools.** [National Drinking Water Alliance]. Short graphical depiction of steps to ensure drinking water safety in school. 2 pages. [2017]. <https://bit.ly/42YdPpu>



**Ensuring Access to Safe Water in Schools.** [National Drinking Water Alliance]. Suite of checklists providing “to-dos” for drinking water safety, access, and promotion in schools, including supporting resources. 7 pages. [2020]. <https://bit.ly/3GU1ZUE>



**Increase Healthy Beverage Consumption and Decrease SSBs: A Community Roadmap.** [Notah Begay III Foundation with University of California Nutrition Policy Institute]. Interactive guide with steps to increase water consumption among community members. 6 pages. [2021]. <https://nb3foundation.org/water-roadmap-interactive-infographic>



**WellsAT 3.0.** [Rudd Center for Food Policy and Health]. The Wellness School Assessment Tool (WellsAT 3.0) compares a school district’s wellness policies and practices with evidence-based recommendations. It is an online tool to evaluate school wellness policies. Web page. [2025]. <https://www.wellsat.org/>



**Poster Pack – Drinking Water Promotion.** [Prevention Research Center on Nutrition and Physical Activity] Fun posters promoting drinking water. 3 pages. <https://hsph.me/hprc-water-poster-pack>



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POLICY



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