



# DANNON INSTITUTE®

## Nutrition for Health



## EVALUATING SCHOOL WELLNESS PROGRAMS

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The Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004 identified evaluation as one of the key areas to address in a school policy document. Evaluating school wellness programs and the healthfulness of the school environment should be viewed as an essential part of effective program planning, not something that can be optional or added on after a program is established.

Program evaluation can serve several purposes, including helping to:

- Identify priorities for change
- Determine the impact of change
- Document progress toward change, including places where change is stalled or moving in the wrong direction
- Show key stakeholders where change is needed
- Document costs and justify the expenditure of resources
- Suggest ways to improve the design and operation of programs
- Promote positive public relations and community awareness

Consider the following option: rather than attempting to evaluate all components of school health, start with a targeted approach that focuses on a few priority areas at a time. School stakeholders would identify one or two areas where they believe that change would be meaningful and possible. The evaluation instrument is designed to answer specific questions related to each area with an eye toward documenting the extent of the problem (an exercise valuable in convincing stakeholders that change is needed) as well as areas that might be positively impacted through a new program or procedure. For example, rather than trying to design an evaluation that answers the question, "How healthy is our school environment?" a targeted evaluation may address specific areas of concern in a school such as:

- What proportion of the beverages offered in vending is water, skim milk and 100% fruit juice?
- What proportion of the snacks offered on the a la carte line meet the Alliance for a Healthy Generation's criteria for calories, fat, sugar and sodium?
- What proportion of teachers report building some movement into their curriculum plans?
- What proportion of our students bike or walk to school and what are school-level barriers that might be present?

While most school administrators are very comfortable with evaluating their students and staff, evaluating the healthfulness of the school environment can be challenging and intimidating. A targeted approach makes the evaluation process more feasible, manageable, and useful.

*Dr. Lytle is an expert in community-level approaches for preventing childhood obesity. She has been conducting and evaluating programs in schools for more than 20 years.*

*Dr. Finn is CEO of The American Council for Fitness and Nutrition, which is dedicated to teaching children the important concept of energy balance. In teaching lifelong wellness habits children must learn that what they eat and what they do must be in balance.*

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*for some important ideas about wellness?!*

