

FACT SHEET

WATER IN SCHOOLS: ACCESS AND PROMOTION

When schools provide ample drinking water as an alternative to sugary drinks, schools promote children's overall health and development. Programs that assure access and promote drinking water in schools have been found to reduce childhood obesity. Encouraging consumption of water, especially in place of sugary drinks, can help limit excess weight gain and prevent dental cavities. And of special importance to educators, drinking water helps students stay hydrated, focused, and ready to learn, especially in conjunction with physical activity. Plus, students are more likely to drink water if it is cold and served from fountains/dispensers that are perceived as clean.

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. 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. Under California law, there must be at least 1 drinking fountain per 150 students, but most states require 1 fountain or more for every 100 students.

Districts can institute drinking water requirements, such as 1 drinking water fountain per 100 students and include and maintain these in their own policies, such as in their Local School Wellness Policy.

What are the Challenges Around Water Access and Promotion?

- ❖ There may not be enough drinking fountains or they may not be well maintained.
- ❖ Water is not chilled.
- ❖ Fountain bowls can be dirty or used for dumping.
- ❖ Drinking water in some schools may not taste good or may have contaminants.
- ❖ Sugary drinks (e.g., sports drinks, fruit drinks, flavored milk, and sodas) are more easily accessible and/or promoted in the school environment than fresh, safe, drinking water.

Additional Resources

Water Works Guide: A Guide to Improving Access to and Consumption of Water in Schools to Improve Health and Support Learning (2014)

This tool provides information to develop a comprehensive program to increase access to safe, appealing, low-cost drinking water sources in schools. It also provides ideas, materials, and resources to help increase water consumption among the school community, as well as includes resources to help evaluate the impact of a water program.

<http://waterinschools.org/pdfs/WaterWorksGuide2014.pdf>



- ❖ Students may not be allowed to have capped water bottles in the classroom.

What is the Ideal Situation?

- ❖ There is at least 1 drinking fountain with cold water and a bottle refiller per 100 students.
- ❖ Standards for regular cleaning and maintenance are developed and implemented for all drinking fountains and other dispensers.
- ❖ When purchasing water fountains or stations consider designs that offer cold water, can refill bottles, have a high enough spout and can be easily kept clean.
- ❖ Periodic testing of all drinking water sources is conducted in each District facility and test results are made available in an easily accessible format (e.g., posted on District website, delivered via letters) to inform affected students and parents.
- ❖ Water consumption is actively promoted as the healthiest drink.
- ❖ PE/PA teachers and coaches encourage water consumption rather than sports drinks.
- ❖ Drinking water is promoted as a substitute for sugary beverages such as fruit/juice drinks with added sugar, sodas, sports drinks and flavored milk.
- ❖ Access to free, safe, cold, palatable drinking water is available wherever beverages are served and sold on campus (including beyond during meal times in food service areas).
- ❖ Safe tap water is provided and recommended rather than the use of individual plastic bottles of water which are not usually safer and are a significant environmental problem. If safe tap water is not available, then large water containers and/or jugs of water and coolers are utilized.
- ❖ Access to water free of charge is provided on the school campuses to all students, employees, and visitors and water bottles are allowed.

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What does your Local School Wellness Policy say about water access and promotion?
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Availability of Drinking Water in U.S. Public School Cafeterias Research Brief (2014)

This brief by Bridging the Gap describes how schools participating in the National School Lunch Programs are meeting the requirement of providing students with access to free drinking water during school meals, in the location where meals are served, as well as, provides insight about the cleanliness of drinking fountains.

<http://cfpa.net/ChildNutrition/Water/ExternalPublications/BTG-drinkingwater%20brief-April2014.pdf>

Water in Schools, a website by California Food Policy Advocates, provides tools and other resources.

<http://waterinschools.org/>



What can Parents do?

- ❖ Educate other parents and partners and promote the importance of water consumption to children's health.
- ❖ Ensure free, fresh drinking water is not only readily available during meals in school food service areas, but across the school campus.
- ❖ Work with partners to purchase and install water stations in key locations on the school campus with high traffic areas.
- ❖ Work with school administrators such as the principal and maintenance personnel to ensure water fountains are routinely cleaned and kept in working order and water bottles are allowed.
- ❖ Ask teachers to teach about the harmful health effects of sugary drinks, provide a healthy classroom beverage environment, and to use creative approaches to engaging students on the issue like water bottle art or other ideas.
- ❖ Work with your child's school and/or district to reduce access to or eliminate of all sugary drinks from the classroom, school celebrations, and fundraising.
- ❖ Create a flyer and/or an e-mail highlighting the importance of drinking water, what the district is doing to promote drinking water, and include how parents and caregivers can help support students drinking water at school by sending material home to parents.
- ❖ Request that information about the availability and healthfulness of consuming water is included in the morning school announcements.
- ❖ Work with partners to provide low-cost water bottles with clips to attach to student's backpack.
- ❖ Advocate that your child's school district adopts beverage standards that go above and beyond state and federal law, such as assuring that there is at least 1 water distribution point for every 100 students and using California Project LEAN's School Beverage Standards that remove flavored milk and sports drinks and include water access and promotion language into the district Local School Wellness Policy.

Information adapted and modified from Water Works Guide: A Guide to Improving Access to and Consumption of Water in Schools to Improve Health and Support Learning (2014) and California Food Policy Advocate's (CFPA) Water in Schools web page <http://waterinschools.org/whywater.shtml>.

