

Promoting Water Consumption in Schools

Problem

Water is a **necessity** of life, yet too many children in California's schools do not have access to free, fresh drinking water. In a recent survey, at least **40 percent** of responding school districts reported **no access to free water** during meals.

If water is unavailable, the alternatives are either costly bottled water or more caloric options, such as juices, sodas, or sports drinks.

This poor access represents not only a **lack of equity**, but also a **public health concern** because increasing water consumption is a simple and effective **obesity prevention** strategy. As an essential nutrient with no calories, water should be the hydrating beverage of choice in schools. In addition, recent research suggests many students may not come to school properly hydrated. Inadequate hydration can have adverse impacts on academic and physical performance.

Solutions

Recently enacted state and federal laws **ensure that students will have access to free drinking water with school** meals. Schools are expected to be in compliance by the 2011-2 academic year.

Simple and inexpensive solutions exist to make this happen. Schools across the state and nation – from Berkeley and Los Angeles to New York City – have implemented unique and innovative ways to bring clean, safe water to kids. Some schools use filtered water dispensers and cups, while others depend on water jets or hydration stations. No one solution fits all. Although many of these interventions are **inexpensive**, they do require some initial start-up investment and smaller on-going costs.

Support

Encouraging water consumption is an issue that has **popular, widespread, and growing support**. Nutritionists, oral health experts, pediatricians, and public health advocates all understand the important health consequences and are great partners to work with in your district.

Request

- Work with your school and school district leaders to ensure compliance by the fall of 2011.
- Urge your school district to test its water supply to ensure that it is safe to drink.
- Work with your school district and community groups (such as the PTA, churches, service organizations, or others) to fundraise for water filters, reusable water bottles, and other needed infrastructure improvements to promote water access.
- Incorporate water access and consumption into your local school wellness policy and nutrition education plans.

For more information and resources, check out www.waterinschools.org!