

SPOTLIGHT: PARENTS IN ACTION

Parents can advocate for change at their children's school. Here are examples of parents who connected, created and contributed to make a positive impact.

CONNECT with key stakeholders to promote a sustainable drinking water program.

WHO is taking action: At a public elementary school in DeKalb County, Georgia, parents are working with the cafeteria manager, school nurse, and PTA.

WHAT are they doing: The group plans to install a new water bottle filling station in their cafeteria. The committee will partner with 5th grade students to evaluate the impact of the water bottle filling station on water consumption, providing students with math and science skills. To celebrate the launch of the new station, the committee is organizing "Water Week," a weeklong push to promote water through the parent newsletter, morning announcements, a pep-rally, contests with prizes and more.

HOW did they support the program: The committee secured funding for the water bottle filling station, unit installation, and water filters from the school PTA's underutilized building and grounds improvement fund. The PTA has also pledged to support the ongoing maintenance costs for the water bottle filling station.

LESSONS LEARNED: 1) A successful water team is comprised of members who represent different parts of the school community. 2) Schools may have untapped funds that that can be used for projects. 3) Students can play a key role in promotion and evaluation.

CREATE an environment that encourages children to drink water throughout the day.

WHO took action: PTA parents at a public elementary school in Oakland, California teamed up with their local school district officials and school food service employees.

WHAT did they do: They installed a new water bottle filling station in an accessible, high-traffic location close to the cafeteria, playground and a frequently used school entrance. At their launch event, the water team led an educational session for other parents focused on the importance of hydration and healthy eating.

HOW did they support the program: Parents sought funding from diverse sources, including community organizations and city council members.

LESSONS LEARNED: 1) Groups outside of your school – from local government, community organizations and school district officials – may be able to support your water program. 2) When selecting a location for a water source, it is important to map out existing water lines and areas with high foot traffic. Use the Water Audit Tool to gather this information.

CONTRIBUTE to building a culture where consuming water is the “new normal”

WHO took action: A group of parents in Arvin, California with training support from the California Project LEAN (CPL) and the Arvin Family Resource Center (FRC) teamed up with district leadership.

WHAT did they do: CPL engaged parents from the Dolores Huerta Foundation in an advocacy training to advance local school wellness policy efforts. CPL staff also trained staff from the FRC using a train-the-trainer model. FRC staff then had the skills to work with and engage additional parents in the efforts. Having learned about the health implications of sugary drinks, these parents used their newly acquired skills and joined the recently-convened school wellness council to actively support the wellness policy revision process the district was interested in undertaking. The policy language, which was updated with support from CPL and Board-approved, restricts sports drink offerings in elementary and middle schools (two years prior to the United States Department of Agriculture new federal school nutrition rules, Smart Snacks in Schools), limits flavored milk district-wide except for Fridays at lunch and encourages water consumption.

LESSONS LEARNED: 1) The school district’s wellness council can provide parents with the infrastructure for changing school nutrition. 2) Resources and trainings can equip parents with advocacy skills. 3) The train-the-trainer model is an effective way to garner more support for changes in school environments. For more information about CPL’s Parents in Action Tool Kit and Parent Lesson Plans, please contact: info@CaliforniaProjectLEAN.org.

School wellness policies may cover all of these areas for a comprehensive drinking water policy, or a policy may start with one area and then over time add more water-related language focused on:

- Access to Water
 - Types of water sources
 - Location of water sources
 - Time water sources are available for use
- Vessels for Serving Water
 - Provision of cups or reusable bottles
 - When and where students can drink water (including from reusable bottles)
- Maintenance of Water Sources/Vessels
 - Cleaning and maintenance of water sources
 - Filter changes, if they are used
 - Cleaning of reusable bottles
- Promotion and Marketing:
 - Activities to promote water intake
 - Role modeling of healthy beverage consumption by school staff
- Education
 - Inclusion of the benefits of drinking water in formal curriculum
- Safety and Quality
 - Types and frequency of water contaminants to be tested
 - Plan for communicating test results
- Monitoring and Evaluation
 - Outcomes to be measured
 - Frequency of monitoring
 - Plan for disseminating findings
 - Next steps for improvements based on evaluation

For an example, see Arvin’s new wellness policy: <http://www.arvinschools.com/files/vMCVm/44fae723b59498883745a49013852ec4/ArvinSchoolWellnessPolicyFinal.pdf>