**Step 1: Gather Your Team**

**Overview**

School health teams come in a variety of shapes, sizes, and names (such as school health councils or wellness committees). But they all have a common goal: to [rally forces to make schools healthier places](https://www.actionforhealthykids.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/TS_GameOn_School_Health_Team_v2.pdf) for students. **Research shows that schools with a wellness team that meets at least once per year have more students at a healthy weight.** And having an active wellness team is associated with more healthy nutrition habits, such as students eating fewer sugary foods.

**Ready to start one?**

We recommend your school health team have between three and ten members, representative of all areas of your school. Together, you’ll identify primary health concerns, lead projects that promote healthy habits, raise funds, celebrate successful health initiatives, and develop resources to help others replicate your efforts.

Building representative school health teams helps to ensure your team is supporting the Whole Child. Think outside the box – when looking at your school health team or committee consider using the Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child (WSCC) model as your template. [Check out this tip sheet for building representative school health teams](https://www.actionforhealthykids.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/TS_Building-Representative-School-Health-Team_FINAL.pdf) for ideas on how to expand upon yours.

Before getting started, see where you might want to focus your attention this year by [taking the 3-minute School Health Survey](https://www.actionforhealthykids.org/school-health-survey/).

**Building and Leading Successful School Health Teams**

* **Determine if you can expand on an existing wellness-oriented group or develop a plan to start your own.** See if health and wellness can be added to an existing group, such as the PTA/PTO or school improvement team. If there isn’t an existing health team, start your own. Identify more champions to join you, and build on their energy, passion and expertise.
* **Develop an “elevator pitch.”** In two minutes (or two sentences) or less, be able to describe why you want to create a health team, what types of activities the team will undertake, and what kind of time commitment will be necessary.
* **Get the principal’s approval.** A supportive principal or assistant principal is essential to your efforts. A principal who participates on the team is ideal.
* **Invite school staff, parents, students and community members to join the team.** Your team should be creative, committed, passionate, and determined to face challenges head on. The optimal team consists of at least five individuals, including a parent and a school administrator. Inspire them to participate by making the case for school wellness and creating a sense of urgency about the state of children’s health and its link to student achievement. Use local statistics, personal stories and examples from your own school to make your case.
  + Recruit stakeholders who represent the diversity of your community and have a deep understanding of the culture, norms and dynamics of your community.
  + Remember that not everyone needs to be a leader — supporters are just as important to your team’s success.
  + Invite student input and participation. Consider creating more than one [student health team](https://www.actionforhealthykids.org/activity/student-wellness-team/) member position to have consistent student representation.
* **Develop a vision.** At first your meeting, have your team write a vision statement that defines what your school will look like if you achieve all of your goals. From there, create a team charter – a document that outlines your goals, project ideas and details for how to begin implementing. Cast the net wide and brainstorm a running list of ideas. As you begin to assess your school (step 2 of Game On), you can then use those results to refine your list and identify priorities.
  + **Sample:** *“ABC Elementary students will learn how to make healthy choices, be physically active and nurture their social emotional health throughout the school day so they are better prepared to learn and begin developing skills and behaviors for a happy, healthy life.”*
* **Understand your school wellness policy.** Take time to review the existing school wellness policy to familiarize your team with requirements and goals. [Read this case study](https://www.actionforhealthykids.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/AFHK_Impact_Report-Putting-Policy-Into-Practice.pdf) to learn how Game On can be used to implement district wellness policies.
* **Conduct successful meetings.** Use our [Guide to Successful School Health Team Meetings](https://www.actionforhealthykids.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Guide-to-School-Team-Meetings.pdf) to set up meetings in a way that best supports your team. Meet at least four times per school year but aim for a frequency that fully supports your project or plans.

**Step 2: Assess & Track Progress**

Your team is assembled! Now it’s time to examine your school environment. A wellness assessment is well worth your time and effort and may cover several aspects of the school environment: health education, nutrition, physical activity, competitive foods and beverages, family and community involvement, staff wellness, healthy and safe school environments, and health services.

See where your school succeeds or has room for improvement by using the School Health Index. [Visit the AFHK School Portal to access our online School Health Index](https://afhkschoolportal.force.com/AFHK_Communities_Login).

When you conduct a wellness assessment, you enable your team to:

* Develop key relationships with staff.
* Determine your school’s strengths and weaknesses.
* Define goals that suit your school’s need.
* Justify your desire to make changes.
* Document starting points in order to show progress over time.

We offer schools an abbreviated online version of the CDC’s School Health Index (SHI). The SHI is an assessment tool that helps you understand which school health best practices your school has/does not have in place that support healthy students and prepare them to learn. The SHI aligns with the [Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child model](https://www.actionforhealthykids.org/whole-school-whole-community-whole-child/) to help your school get a comprehensive look at school and student health.

Our SHI includes key questions on various school health topics from the CDC’s version of the School Health Index to provide your school with a shorter, easy-to-complete assessment. Once completed, we’ll provide you with an auto-generated report that summarizes your responses and identifies areas for growth. Focus your school health efforts on these improvement opportunities to ensure you’re providing a learning environment that supports students who are healthy, active and ready to learn.

Your entire school health team can complete the assessment collaboratively online via [AFHK’s School Portal](https://afhkschoolportal.force.com/AFHK_Communities_Login).

**School Health Index Resources**

* [School Health Index FAQs](https://www.actionforhealthykids.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/School-Health-Index-FAQ.pdf)
* School Health Index Questions (Elementary School) ([questions only](https://www.actionforhealthykids.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Elementary_AFHK_School-Health-Index_Questions.pdf) | [questions and detailed instructions](https://www.actionforhealthykids.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Elementary_AFHK_School-Health-Index_Questions__Answers.pdf))
* School Health Index Questions (Middle/High School) ([questions only](https://www.actionforhealthykids.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Middle-High_School_AFHK_SHI_Questions.pdf) | [questions and detailed instructions](https://www.actionforhealthykids.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Middle-High_AFHK_SHI_Questions__Answers.pdf))
* [Instructions for using the Action for Healthy Kids School Health Index](https://www.actionforhealthykids.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Instructions-for-Completing-the-SHI.pdf)

[Learn about ways to engage students in completing the School Health Index.](https://www.actionforhealthykids.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/School-Health-Index-Engage-Students-2018_3252019_3297.pdf)

**Step 3: Create & Implement an Action Plan**

Developing a clear action plan is critical to the success of a school health initiative. In addition to serving as a road map, creating a plan provides many benefits, such as:

* **Team camaraderie** – The process of developing an action plan together will make the team feel more invested.
* **Group brainstorming** – Each team member brings different skills to the table; action plans will be clearer and more inclusive when everyone plays a role in their development.
* **Clear communication** – Everyone will understand project goals, what he/she is expected to do, and what the timeline is for accomplishing those tasks. This reduces confusion and potential conflicts.
* **A timeline** – Written timelines help keep everyone on the same page and keep tasks moving forward.

After you’ve assessed your school health environment using the [School Health Index in Step 2](https://www.actionforhealthykids.org/step-2/), you will receive a report that summarizes your school’s results. This report showcases an overall score that highlights what percentage of health-promoting practices your school has in place as well as “Opportunities for Growth.”

To develop your action plan, review the “Opportunities for Growth” on your School Health Index report. Identify what is feasible for your school to accomplish during the school year, and pick three to five priorities. These activities will serve as the foundation for your school action plan.

[Log in to our School Portal](https://afhkschoolportal.force.com/AFHK_Communities_Login) to review your School Health Index report.

**Steps to Develop Your Action Plan**

1. **Review your School Health Index Results**. After you complete the SHI, your school receives a report that summarizes opportunities for growth. Identify the opportunities for growth that are feasible for your school to accomplish this year, and select three to five priorities on which to focus your school health efforts.
2. **Translate your SHI Results into an action plan**. Your action plan can be as simple or as elaborate as you’d like. For a simple version, print your School Health Index report, highlight your priorities and use that as your action plan. Next, outline activities, dates, resources, etc. for each priority. Regardless of the type of action plan you use, bring a copy of it to each [School Health Team](https://www.actionforhealthykids.org/step-1/) meeting to review progress.
3. **Select and search for activity ideas**. Game On has resources to support each topic area on the School Health Index. Once you have identified your top priorities for the year, visit [Step 4 to find Game On Activities](https://www.actionforhealthykids.org/game-on-activity-library/) that align with your priorities. Each Game On activity provides ideas, tips and resources to support you in successfully implementing the activity. Contact us at ContactUs@actionforhealthykids.org if you need additional support.
4. **Apply for grants!** [Find funding](https://www.actionforhealthykids.org/school-grants-support/) to help you implement your action plan.
5. **Put the plan into action**. Use the action plan to track your progress against your health priorities. Revisit the action plan throughout the year to update objectives and check off completed actions.

Consider including students in creating and implementing your action plan. Assign tasks to each student and have them weigh in on what actions should be included. This will help students understand their role in creating a healthier school environment if they see how they fit in the action plan and other activities your team undertakes. Be sure to celebrate your action items when you achieve them to help keep members engaged!

**Step 4: Find Activities**

It’s time for some fun! Once you’ve built your school health team and used the SHI to assess the school health environment, choose some activities to help achieve your health and wellness goals. We’ve got over 100 activities on a wide variety of topics, so [search the library](https://www.actionforhealthykids.org/game-on-activity-library/) to see what best suits your school’s needs.

Before you get started, here are some helpful tips:

* Test drive an activity at any time. Or, if your school health team is just starting out, we recommend starting Game On from the beginning and then using the activities to tackle your school’s specific areas for improvement.
* Schools that receive grants from AFHK are encouraged to use Game On activities to help implement their grants.
* Physical activity activities include tips and guidelines for making activities inclusive of students with special needs.

[Visit Activity Library](http://www.actionforhealthykids.org/game-on-activity-library/)

*Did You Know?* Children with special needs are about twice as likely as other children to be overweight or obese, often due to the related greater likelihood of being sedentary. Some conditions, such as cerebral palsy, increase difficulty in eating, which leads to being underweight. However, the general trend of obesity in children with special needs is much greater. [Learn how to ensure your health initiatives are inclusive of all children](https://www.actionforhealthykids.org/including-all-children-health-for-kids-with-disabilities/).

**Step 5: Engage Families & Communities**

Get others on your side! In order for any program to be successful, it is vital to engage key groups of adults, such as school staff, parents, schools board members, community organizations and local business owners, who want to support your vision to create a healthier school. These partnerships can not only improve student learning by promoting consistent messages about healthy behaviors, but they can also provide access to additional resources and volunteers.

* **Empower and engage families** with [parent tools and resources](https://www.actionforhealthykids.org/parents-for-healthy-kids/). Find information about how school systems work and the most effective ways to advocate for change, along with ideas for creating a healthier school food and physical activity culture.
  + The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has also developed a set of resources called [Parents for Healthy Schools](https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/parentengagement/parentsforhealthyschools.htm) to help schools and school groups (e.g., parent teacher associations (PTA), parent teacher organizations (PTO), school wellness committees) engage parents to create healthy school environments.
* **Involve community organizations** to donate healthy food, offer trainings, host a trip to a local garden, and more. Consider reaching out to businesses, health departments, parks and recreation departments, universities, local foundations, restaurants, and faith-based organizations.
* **Recruit community volunteers** to support your programming and events. Volunteers can offer new perspectives and make a lasting impact and contribution through their knowledge base and support. They also can provide an extra helping hand or a needed, valuable skill set. Brainstorm ways to engage individuals, organizations or businesses who are passionate about healthy kids to help with your program needs or to offer their expertise.
* **Host an Every Kid Healthy™ Week event** for students, families and the larger community. [Every Kid Healthy Week](https://www.actionforhealthykids.org/what-we-do/every-kid-healthy-week/) is an annual observance created to celebrate school health and wellness achievements. However, any time is a good time to plan a healthy event at your school. [Find great resources and ideas.](https://www.actionforhealthykids.org/what-we-do/every-kid-healthy-week/)

To develop successful and meaningful partnerships, communicate expectations up front. People in supporting roles are just as important to your success as leaders, so remember to provide a welcoming climate to families and outside organizations, and always check in with your principal to ensure you’re on the same page.

**Step 6: Celebrate Success**

The last step in the Game On process is to celebrate the success you’ve had in making health-promoting changes to your school environment to ensure students are healthy and ready to learn. Recognizing your accomplishments can help your school maintain momentum and support for school and student health. Celebrations also give you the opportunity to reinforce the importance of your work, recognize the achievements of students and adults, thank staff and volunteers who contributed to your efforts, and take pride as a school and a community in what you accomplished.

**Identify Wins**

Revisit your [School Health Index](https://www.actionforhealthykids.org/step-2/) results and take a moment to update your assessment. Where have you improved? Work with your [School Health Team](https://www.actionforhealthykids.org/step-1/) to create a plan for celebrating and sharing these improvements. Celebrate wins, no matter how big or small! Incremental improvements support long-term, sustainable programming. To share your success, consider:

* Meeting with school and district administrators to highlight your work (and advocate for continued support);
* Sharing on your school’s social media and website, in newsletters and at school events;
* Contacting local media to do a story;
* Speaking at an open school board or other community meeting on the importance of physical activity and nutrition and the actions your school has successfully taken;
* Recognizing students, staff, families and community members that contributed to your success;
* Hosting an event such as a community breakfast, student assembly or Every Kid Healthy Week event to have fun, recognize contributors and reinforce healthy messages;
* [Sharing your school’s success](mailto:marketing@actionforhealthykids.org) with Action for Healthy Kids to inspire other schools to improve their environment to ensure kids are healthy and ready to learn.

**Plan for Next Year**

As you celebrate wins, spend some time with your team reflecting on challenges and additional opportunities for improve school and student health. Review the *Opportunities for Growth* section of your [School Health Index](https://www.actionforhealthykids.org/step-2/) report to identify 3-5 priorities for next year. Game On is a cyclical process and each year, we encourage you to work through each step to ensure you have the people, tools, resources and programming to make your school the healthiest place it can be.