



Addressing Weight Status Measurement in Schools

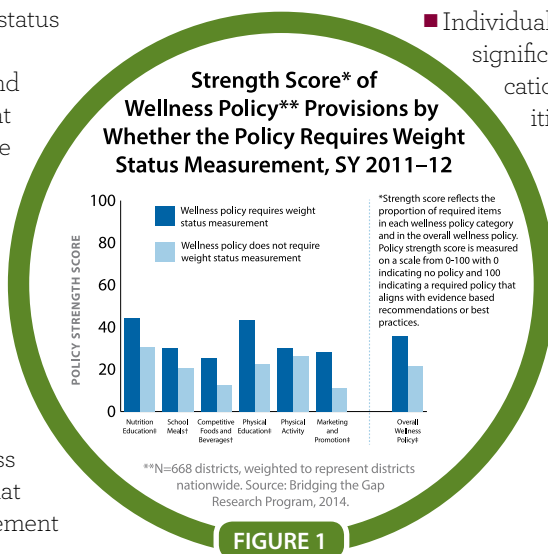
Local school wellness policies (i.e., wellness policies) include suggestions and requirements to promote health. Some school districts include weight status measurement in their wellness policies for surveillance and/or screening.^{1,2} Surveillance monitors the percentage of students who are overweight or obese. Screening provides parents with personalized information about their child’s weight status. A strong wellness policy can create a school environment that promotes activity and nutrition. Districts offering weight status measurement should have strong wellness policies to support students in maintaining a healthy weight.¹

The following discussion highlights the extent to which public school districts have included weight status measurement as part of a comprehensive wellness policy, based on a nationally representative sample of district wellness policies from the 2011–2012 school year from the Bridging the Gap (BTG) study. This brief also summarizes the strength scores of wellness policy components by whether the policy requires a weight status provision. All policies were collected and coded by BTG researchers using a standardized method based on evidence-based guidelines and recommendations from expert organizations and agencies.^{3,4} School districts were identified as having a weight status measurement provision if their wellness policy required schools to measure student body mass index (BMI), body composition, or fitness through FITNESSGRAM®^a. The wellness policy strength score for the overall policy and of individual policy components was defined by the policy coding process described in the methods document.⁵ Complete details about how these data were collected and compiled are available in the companion methods documentation.⁵

WHAT ACTIONS HAVE SCHOOL DISTRICTS TAKEN?

A strong wellness policy with a weight status measurement provision may increase awareness of overweight and obesity and allow students to practice behaviors that promote a healthy weight.^{1,6-8} During the 2011–2012 school year, the BTG study found that

- 10% of school districts had a required weight status measurement provision in their wellness policy.
- Wellness policies that required weight status measurement scored significantly higher on overall wellness policy strength ($P < .001$) than those that did not require weight status measurement (Figure 1).



- Individual wellness policy components scored significantly higher on strength of nutrition education ($P < .001$), school meals ($P < .01$), competitive foods and beverages ($P < .01$), physical education ($P < .001$), and marketing and promotion ($P < .01$) when the policies included a requirement for weight status measurement (Figure 1).
- There were no differences in the strength score of physical activity policy components between districts that did or did not require weight status measurement (Figure 1).

^a As part of a comprehensive fitness test, FITNESSGRAM® includes measurement options for student body composition through BMI, skin-fold assessment, or a bioelectric impedance device.

FIGURE 1



What Can You Do?

WEIGHT STATUS MEASUREMENT IN SCHOOLS

Weight status measurement in schools is not identified by the CDC as an evidence-based practice to address obesity. If districts offer this program, it should be complemented by a strong wellness policy.¹ These evidence-based strategies and expert recommendations provide guidance on this practice.^{1,9-14} See the Resources section for additional information.

STATES

- Offer guidance on whether school districts should pursue weight status measurement, and describe appropriate and inappropriate practices.

- Provide assistance on implementing a comprehensive set of strategies to address obesity.

SCHOOL DISTRICTS AND SCHOOLS

- Identify the purpose for weight status measurement and consider the pros and cons.
- Introduce the program to school staff and the community.
- Obtain parental consent.
- Staff should be trained and led by a school nurse.

- Protect student privacy.
- Obtain and use accurate equipment.
- Calculate BMI, and interpret the data by using CDC BMI-for-age growth charts.
- Develop efficient data collection procedures (e.g., appropriate number of trained staff, software for data entry, scheduling of measurements).
- Avoid using results to evaluate student or teacher performance.
- Regularly evaluate the program.
- Communicate clearly and respectfully with parents and include actions for safe and effective follow-up.

RESOURCES

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. About BMI for Children and Teens. http://www.cdc.gov/healthyweight/assessing/bmi/childrens_BMI/about_childrens_BMI.html.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Body Mass Index Measurement in Schools. Executive Summary. http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/obesity/BMI/pdf/BMI_execsumm.pdf.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Children's BMI Tool for Schools. http://www.cdc.gov/healthyweight/assessing/bmi/childrens_bmi/tool_for_schools.html.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. BMI Percentile Calculator for Child and Teen. <http://apps.nccd.cdc.gov/dn-pabmi/>.
- American Heart Association. Policy position statement on body mass index (BMI) surveillance and assessment in schools. http://www.heart.org/idc/groups/heart-public/@wcm/@adv/documents/downloadable/ucm_301789.pdf.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. School Health Guidelines to Promote Healthy Eating and Physical Activity. <http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/npao/strategies.htm>.
- USDA. Team Nutrition. Local School Wellness Policy. <http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/local-school-wellness-policy>.
- Bridging the Gap Research. School district wellness policy-related reports and materials. http://www.bridgingthegapresearch.org/research/district_wellness_policies.

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