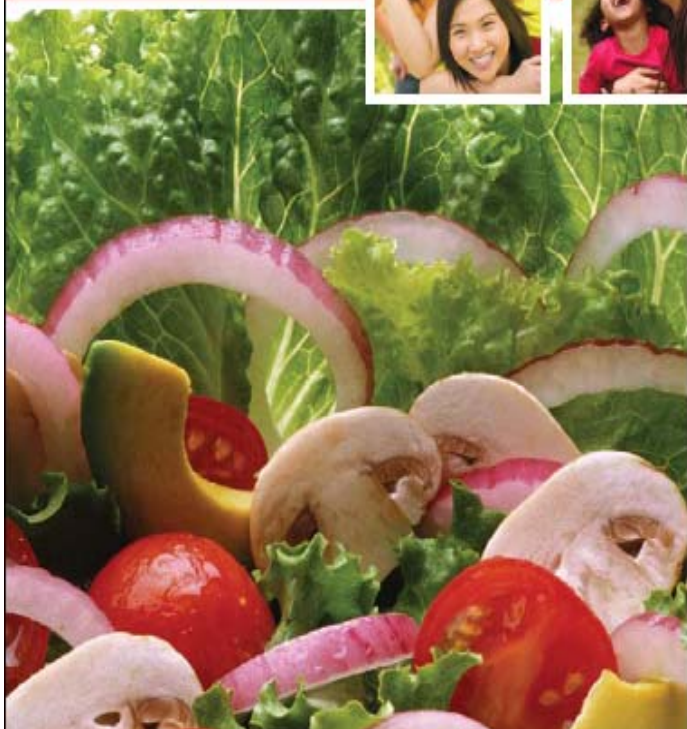




**PARENTS IN ACTION!**



*A guide to engaging  
parents in local  
school wellness policy*



# Parents in Action!

## Engaging Parents in Creating Healthy School Environments

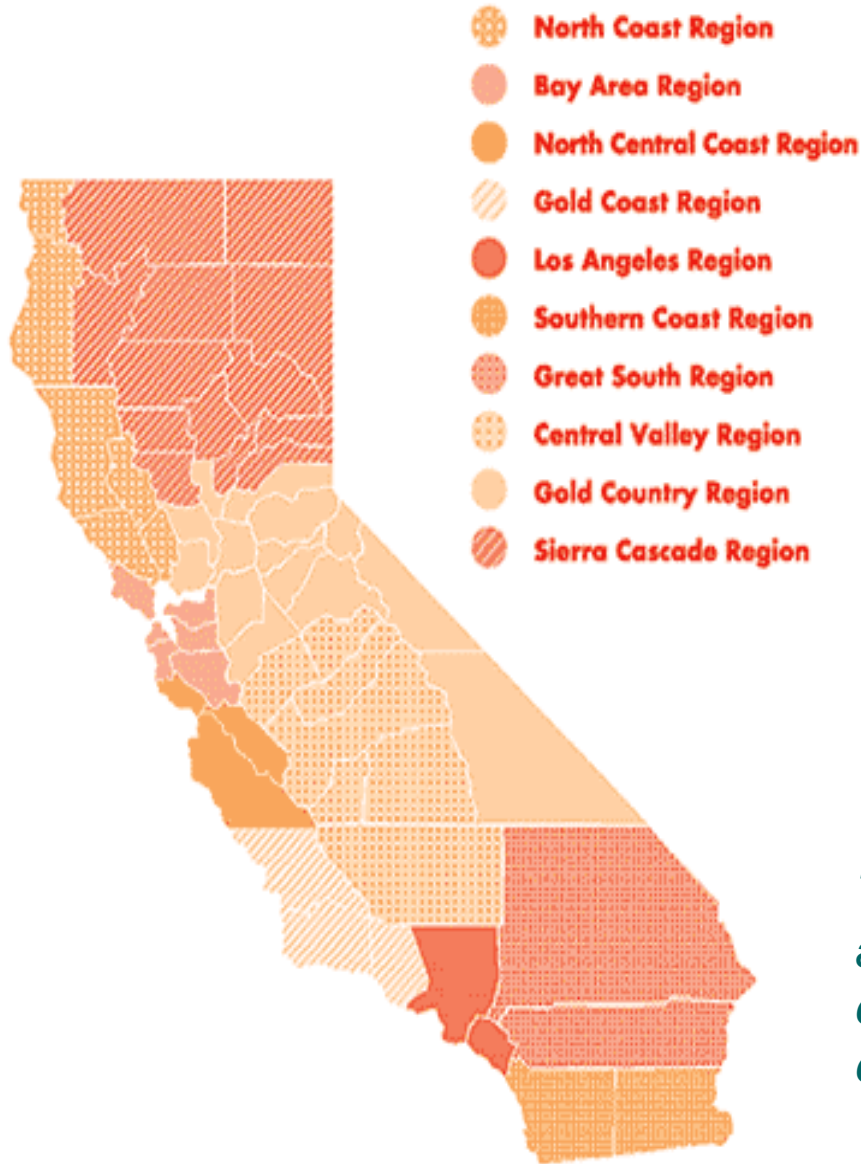
**Presented by:**

**Vilma Hernandez**

**Health Educator**

**Collaborative Meeting  
September 17, 2009**

I



# California Project LEAN works in partnership with 10 Regional Coordinators



## Mission

*To increase healthy eating and physical activity to reduce the prevalence of chronic diseases, such as heart disease, cancer, stroke, osteoporosis and diabetes.*



# Project LEAN Goals

- To create healthier communities through policy and environmental changes.
- To serve as leaders coordinating state and local efforts promoting nutrition and physical activity.



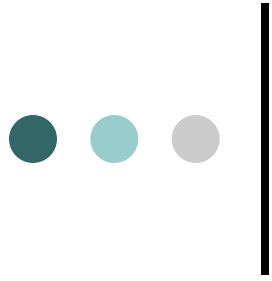
# Childhood Obesity

- Overweight among children aged 6-19 increased four-fold from 1963-2000
- In California, about 33% of children (ages 6-11) and 25% of teens are overweight
- More than 1 out of 3 Latino adolescents are overweight or at risk for overweight



# Tackling Childhood Obesity from Many Sides

- Obesity prevention does not lie solely with schools, but schools are a critical piece of the puzzle.
- Preventing obesity will require a variety of efforts from various sectors.



# School Landscape

## Federal

- Local Wellness Policy Requirement
- IOM Committees

## States

- Many passing legislation
- Linking to the wellness policy requirements

## Local

- Passionate staff and community members
- Passing district level policies



# What is Policy?

- A rule or set of rules that people must follow (written)
- Policies have the power to influence how you and others act
- In schools, school board members are responsible for adopting policy – after which schools in the district are obligated to follow it



# Local School Wellness Policy

**Federal mandate requiring school districts to set goals for:**

- Nutrition education
- Physical activity
- All foods and beverages available on campus
- School-based activities designed to promote student wellness



## Local School Wellness Policy

- Must establish a plan for implementing and monitoring policy
- Designate an individual with operational responsibility
- Should have been developed with a group, including parents



# Parent Involvement

- Roles at home
- Volunteering
- Fundraising
- Community collaboration
- Formal roles at district/school level
- Governance/Advocacy\*



# Benefits to Engaging Parents

## Parent Involvement in Schools Results in Students Who Are More Likely to:

- Earn higher grades and test scores
- Enroll in more advanced academic programs
- Be promoted to the next grade level and pass their classes
- Attend school regularly



# Parents as Advocates

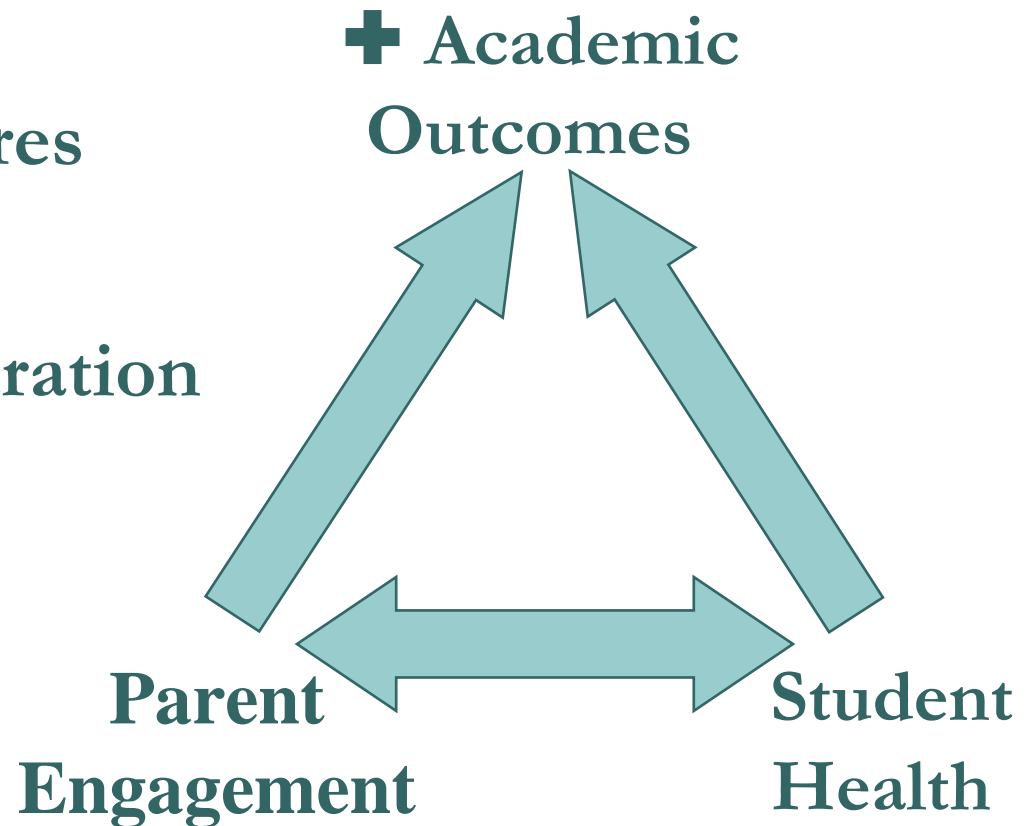
## Our Goal:

- To encourage and facilitate parents playing the role of advocate in their child's school for the improvement of nutrition and physical activity environments.



# Healthy, Fit Students

- Improved test scores
- Better attendance
- Increased concentration





# Project Objectives

- Educate and engage parents to become more aware of school wellness requirements and expected changes to the school environment
- To give skills to advocate and be proactive when changes are not occurring
- To expand awareness and advocacy opportunities in their communities



# ● ● Parents in Action! Toolkit

## Background:

### Formative Research

- Literature review
- Key informant interviews with 25 parents and 10 stakeholders working with parents



# Important Findings

## Key Informant Interviews:

- What would get parents involved
- Barriers to parent participation
- Gaps in parent's knowledge about LSWP
- Ways parents are interested in becoming involved
- Optimal vehicles for communicating with parents



# Addressing Barriers to Parent Engagement

- Barriers include:
- Work and home schedules.
- Lack of childcare.
- Language/cultural barriers.
- Lack of interest/don't care.
- Lack of transportation.
- Feeling disrespected or unwelcome.
- Feelings of inadequacy.



# Important Findings

## Parents participate in schools:

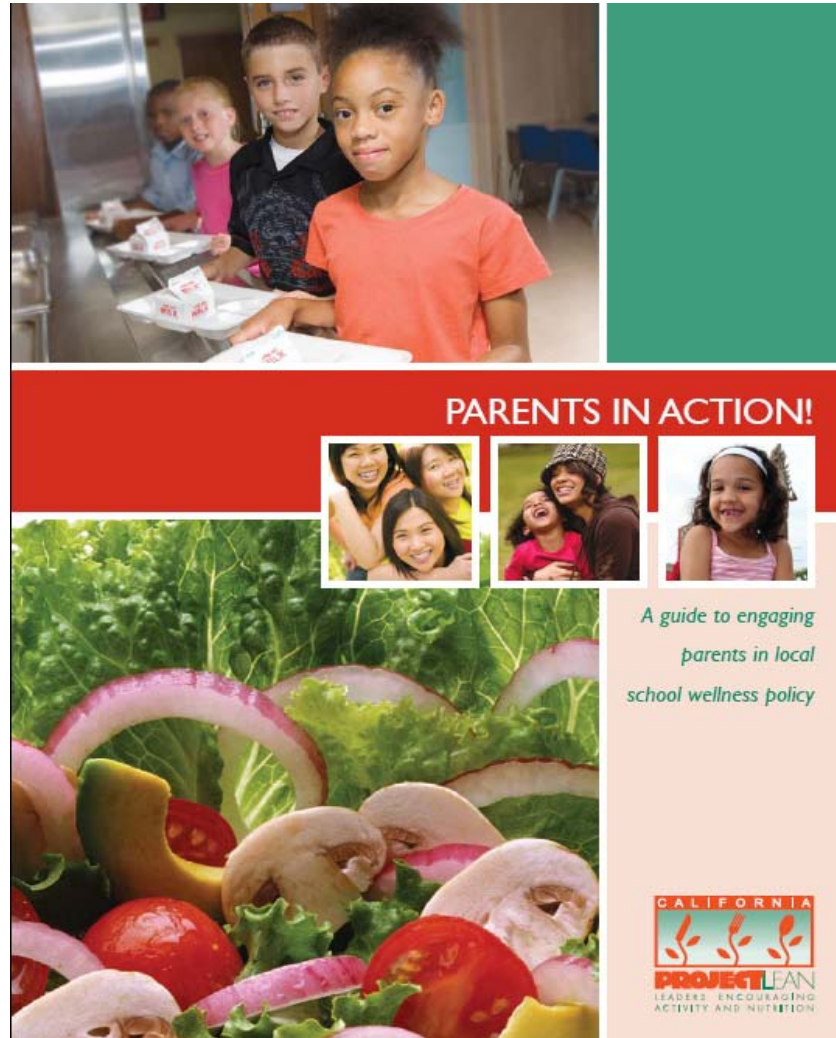
- Because it makes them feel good.
- To show they care (about their child's health and education).
- Because they feel it is their duty.



## Parents would get involved if...

- Incentives (food, childcare, gift cards, raffle prizes, etc.)
- Their input was valued and validated.
- There was a caring, compassionate, warm, and welcoming environment.

# Parents in Action! Toolkit



# Parents in Action! Toolkit



## ENGAGING PARENTS

### Benefits of Engaging Parents

Across the nation, schools are challenged to improve the academic success of their students. We know that healthy, fit students are more successful students. It has been well-established that well-nourished children:

- Perform better in school and have increased concentration, improved mathematics, reading and writing test scores and less disruptive behavior.<sup>1</sup>
- Have better attendance.<sup>2</sup>

There are also numerous benefits to parent involvement in schools. Schools with involved parents become better schools. Students with involved parents, no matter what their income or background, are more likely to:

- Earn higher grades and test scores, and enroll in more advanced programs.<sup>3</sup>
- Be promoted to the next grade level, pass their classes, and earn credits.<sup>3</sup>
- Attend school regularly.<sup>3</sup>

- Have better social skills, show improved behavior, and adapt well to school.<sup>3</sup>
- Graduate and go on to advanced education.<sup>3</sup>

### What is Parent Involvement/Engagement?

Parent involvement/engagement in schools can range from that of volunteer, fundraiser, and/or participant in parent groups to advocate for the improvement of school services.

For the purposes of this toolkit, CPL has defined parent engagement in schools as parents being involved in school activities which results in parents having an increased knowledge of what impacts students; seeing and being involved in positive school changes; feeling that their opinions and perspectives are valued; and parents becoming empowered.

## Engaging Parents (p.6)

- Background Information
- Strategies for Reaching Parents
- Addressing Barriers
- Identifying Parent Participation Opportunities



## ASSESSING YOUR SCHOOL DISTRICT

### How Are Parents Currently Involved in Your School District?

The Local School Wellness Policy (LSWP) is a district policy that should be implemented at each school within the district. It may be in different stages of implementation at different schools. Before you begin working with parents, it may be a good idea to assess what is happening at your district regarding parent involvement in LSWP.

The following checklist will provide you with a baseline for assessing current parent involvement in your school district.

1. Does your school district have a School Wellness Committee\*?

Yes  No

2. If yes, how often does it meet?

\_\_\_\_\_

3. If there is a School Wellness Committee, are there parents on it (parents should be a part of this committee)?

Yes  No

4. Has the LSWP been communicated to parents throughout the district?

Yes  No  Unsure

a) If yes, how has it been communicated?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

b) If the policy has been communicated, was it done so in multiple languages and with consideration for low-literacy parents?

Yes  No  Unsure

If yes, list languages:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

5. Where are parents currently involved in your school/school district (this information may be school-specific)?

PTO/PTA

Parent center

After school groups

In-class volunteers

Parent booster club

Advisory boards

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

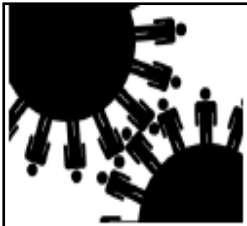
The information gathered from this brief survey will assist you in planning your parent outreach and activities. Having this information will allow you to find out where and how to reach parents currently involved at the school district, let you know if you need to assist the district in communicating the LSWP to parents, and whether any efforts have been made to reach low-literacy or non-English speaking parents.

### Assessing Your Schools' Nutrition and Physical Activity Environment

Each school within your district may be implementing the LSWP in different stages. You may be working with parents at the district level and/or at the school level. Regardless, parents are more likely to be compelled to become involved if they know what is happening at their child's school.

You may want to complete a brief survey of the school before you meet with your parents or have your parents complete a brief school survey with you to assess the nutrition and physical activity environment in some of your district's schools. The survey will provide you with information that may help identify areas within your school(s) that need work.

Please see [Appendix A](#) for a sample Campus Survey.



## STEP 1: PICK A PROBLEM AND FIND A SOLUTION

### BRAINSTORMING WORKSHEET

Use this Brainstorming Worksheet to keep track of your ideas. Utilize your Campus Survey (*Appendix A*) information and resources in the *Fact Sheets* and *Parent Handouts* sections of the toolkit to assist with this step.

Problem:	Possible Solutions:
Problem:	Possible Solutions:
Problem:	Possible Solutions:

When picking your final problem and solution, consider:

- What will be different if we succeed?
- Which idea will help the most people?
- Which idea will make a lot of people healthier?
- Which idea has the best chance of working?
- Which idea will be the cheapest?
- Which idea can be done the quickest?
- Which idea do we like the best?

## Parents Taking Action! (p.18)

1. Pick a Problem and Find a Solution
2. Identify the Policy Players
3. Build Your Action Plan
4. Evaluate



Photo by Tim Wagner for HEAC

## CASE STUDIES

### Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD)

#### Objective

Elizabeth Medrano is part of the Healthy School Food Coalition, a group of parents, teachers, students, and community organizers, who want to improve the cafeteria foods and environment in LAUSD. Since 2001, LAUSD has been on the cutting edge of improving the foods and beverages sold separately from the school breakfast and lunch programs. LAUSD was one of the first school districts in the nation to eliminate the sale of sodas and unhealthy snacks on school campus. The district instituted this change before California passed a law requiring its school districts to do this. While this effort was a positive step for the district, Elizabeth said that changes were needed in the school lunch program as well. Students had very little say about the types of foods that were offered to them in the school cafeteria and the cafeteria lines were long, which meant that students had little time to eat after getting their lunch. Because of this, Elizabeth said that action was needed to address the issues and improve access to healthy school meals for all students.

#### Motivation

As a parent, Elizabeth wanted to make sure her son, who attends an LAUSD school, ate his meals in the

cafeteria. She felt the cafeteria meals were a healthier option than some of the "competitive foods"—foods sold outside the school meal program. She got involved in improving the cafeteria foods and environment in the district because she believes that all students should have access to healthy food, regardless of their income level.

#### Steps

In 2006 the LAUSD school board passed the Cafeteria Improvement Motion that called for improvements to the meal program and cafeteria environment. Elizabeth worked with the Healthy School Food Coalition to develop and implement a plan to improve the cafeteria. The committee identified some specific areas for improvement, such as creating a more varied menu, making the eating environment more attractive, improving the cafeteria equipment, addressing the long lines and limited time to eat lunch, and making sure nutrition education in the classroom was linked to the foods served in the cafeteria.

The Healthy School Food Coalition members felt it was important to make the meal service accessible to all students. The coalition learned that many students who qualified for free or reduced price meals did not eat in the cafeteria because there was a stigma associated with eating these meals. Students who get free or reduced price meals must use a

## Case Studies (p.26)

- Objective
- Motivation
- Steps
- Results
- Who Helped?
- Challenges/Solutions
- Future Plans
- Advice for Other Parents

# Fact Sheets (p.35)

## FACT SHEET

### MARKETING IN SCHOOLS

#### Why is it Important to Limit Marketing in Schools?

Marketing and advertising of unhealthy foods and beverages influence children's attitudes, preferences, food purchase requests, diets, and health. Labeling and signage on school campuses affect students' food selections both at and away from school. Marketing and advertising of unhealthy products conflict with the educational mission of schools to teach children about good health and proper nutrition. Advertising unhealthy foods also creates mixed messages as it creates the appearance that the school supports students eating these foods/beverages.

#### What are the Challenges Around Marketing in Schools?

- ❖ Schools may be unaware of the influence of marketing on student health behaviors and health.
- ❖ Schools may have exclusive contracts with food/beverage companies that they are hesitant to break; some contracts allow these companies to market on campus.
- ❖ Schools may fear potential loss in revenues/products (such as free books, scoreboards, school supplies) if they do not allow companies to market on campus.

#### What is the Ideal Situation?

- ❖ No commercial influences on campus, at school events, in district curriculum, or in classroom materials that promote unhealthy foods and beverages.
- ❖ A school marketing policy that supports the above.

#### What does your LSWP say about marketing?



#### What is Marketing in Schools?

*Marketing in schools takes many forms. Marketing in schools includes product sales (such as foods/beverages sold on campus or items sold through fundraising), direct advertising (such as signs, billboards, scoreboards, book covers, and buses), and indirect marketing (which includes corporate-sponsored curriculum and contests in return for funds/products). The majority of the foods and beverages marketed in schools are of poor nutritional quality.*



## MARKETING IN SCHOOLS *continued*

#### What Can Parents Do?

- ❖ Work with the School Wellness Committee and other concerned stakeholders to educate parents, community partners, school administration, students, and staff about the impact of food marketing on youth.
- ❖ Conduct a marketing assessment on your child's school campus.
- ❖ Determine if the foods/beverages that are marketed/advertised on the school campus meet your state's policy on foods/beverages that are allowable for sale on school campuses and that they are aligned with the LSWP.
- ❖ Draft a sample marketing policy to share with the school board, school wellness committee, or principal and consider adding it to the LSWP.
- ❖ Set guidelines for business partnerships that restrict marketing and advertising of unhealthy foods and beverages.
- ❖ If a school has exclusive food/beverage contracts, find out when the contracts expire and advocate for the school not to renew the contract to allow companies to market unhealthy foods and beverages at school.
- ❖ Conduct periodic evaluations of the marketing/advertising on campus.
- ❖ Ensure that fundraising practices are not selling/marketing unhealthy food/beverage choices.

#### Additional Resources

*Captive Kids: Selling Obesity at Schools: An Action Guide to Stop the Marketing of Unhealthy Foods and Beverages in Schools.*  
California Project LEAN  
This toolkit addresses the issue of marketing of unhealthy foods and beverages on California school campuses and includes an easy-to-use marketing assessment tool.  
[www.CaliforniaProjectLEAN.org](http://www.CaliforniaProjectLEAN.org)

*Food Marketing to Children and Youth: Threat or Opportunity.* The National Academies of Science  
This report offers the most comprehensive review to date of the scientific evidence on the influence of food marketing on diets of children and youth.  
[www.nationalacademies.org](http://www.nationalacademies.org)

*Raw Deal: School Beverage Contracts Less Lucrative than They Seem.* Center for Science in the Public Interest  
A report looking at school beverage contracts.  
[www.csipinet.org/beveragecontracts.pdf](http://www.csipinet.org/beveragecontracts.pdf)



# Parents in Action! Toolkit

- Parent Handouts
- Appendix
- Lesson Plans



# California's Nutrition Standards

- Summary Sheet (Foods and Beverages)
- \*Slide Guide
  - Number of servings per container
  - Calories per serving
  - Grams of fat per serving
  - Grams of saturated fat per serving
  - Weight in grams per serving
  - Grams of sugar per serving

*\*Currently under Revision*

# Lesson Plans

Photo by Tim Wagner for HEAC

**PARENT LESSON PLANS: ADVOCATING FOR HEALTHIER SCHOOL ENVIRONMENTS**

Photo by Tim Wagner for HEAC

*A Companion Piece to  
Parents in Action!  
A Guide to Engaging  
Parents in Local  
School Wellness Policy*

**CALIFORNIA**  
**LEAN**  
LEADERS ENCOURAGING  
ACTIVITY AND NUTRITION

- Lesson 1 – Parents and Schools Working Together to Improve Student Health
- Lesson 2 – Foods and Beverages on Campus
- Lesson 3 – Physical Activity on Campus
- Lesson 4 – Parents Taking Action in Schools



# Pilot Phase

- **Trained Four Organizations**
  - Manual Arts High School PTSA members
  - Accelerated High School – parents
  - GEM – Promotores de Salud
  - IDEPSCA – Promotores de Salud



# Parents in Action!

GEM  
Promotoras →



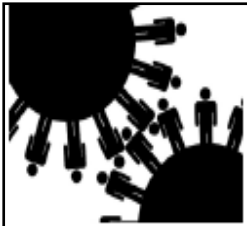
← Manual Arts H.S.  
Parents



## Parents Taking Action

Summarize what the  
LSWP says about  
[Your Topic]

What is currently  
happening on campus  
regarding  
[Your Topic]?



## STEP 1: PICK A PROBLEM AND FIND A SOLUTION

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- Which idea do we like the best?

## Parents Taking Action! (p.18)

1. Pick a Problem and Find a Solution
2. Identify the Policy Players
3. Build Your Action Plan
4. Evaluate



# Evaluation

- Self-administered pre- and post survey
- Training evaluation at end of session
- Facilitator debriefing
- Key stakeholder interviews



# Evaluation Findings

## Training Curriculum

- **Built participant capacity contributing to gains in:**
  - Participants' knowledge of LSWP and LSWP contributions to student health and wellness.
  - Gains in valuing the use of an advocacy approach to engage parents addressing school-related nutrition and physical activity concerns
  - Increase in self-efficacy to support parent engagement in LSWP development



# Evaluation Findings

## **Post-intervention Evaluation (1-3 months after)**

- Key informant interview, organizational leaders shared experiences of using the strategies and materials acquired through the training
- Both organizational leaders and participants provided practical suggestions for strengthening the dissemination and diffusion of the curriculum.



# Evaluation Findings

## Self-efficacy Changes

### ○ “Very Promising”

- Findings suggest that participants felt capable of being active participants, advocates and informants in the movement to improve school-based food and physical activity programs and policies
- Did not feel qualified to prepare other groups of parents to take on these roles
- It is unclear if more training would have significantly improved their self-efficacy around this task, or if the role of trainer is one that they are uncomfortable with



# Dissemination Phase

## ○ Phase II:

- **Trained 4 Additional Groups:**
- **John Liechty Middle School**
- **Maternal Child Health Access**
- **MotherNet L.A.**
- **Gratts E.S. and Esperanza E.S.**
- **Used Toolkit and Lesson Plans**



## Next Steps

- Continue Promoting **Parents in Action!** Toolkit and Lesson Plans, Statewide
- Partner with CA Action for Healthy Kids to deliver parent trainings within the LAUSD
- Will continue focusing on engaging parents in the implementation and assessment of the LSWP
- Will continue strengthening parents' advocacy skills by providing technical assistance



# Visit us on the Web



**[www.CaliforniaProjectLEAN.org](http://www.CaliforniaProjectLEAN.org)**

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