



# Improving Access to Drinking Water in Schools

Water consumption is important for students' cognition, dental health, and physical health.<sup>1-3</sup> The availability and promotion of free water during the school day has been shown to increase water consumption<sup>4,5</sup> and may prevent school children from being overweight.<sup>3</sup>

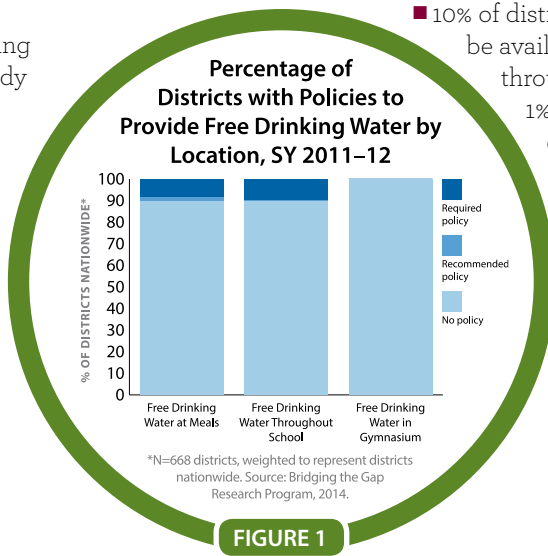
The Institute of Medicine recommends making free, potable water available as a means to decrease sugar-sweetened beverage consumption by children and adolescents.<sup>6</sup> National organizations, including the American Academy of Pediatrics, recommend that districts provide students with access to free drinking water throughout the school day.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) requires that schools participating in the National School Lunch Program make free, potable water available during meals in places where meals are served. Schools must also make drinking water available during the School Breakfast Program when breakfast is served in the cafeteria.<sup>8</sup>

This brief highlights areas where local school wellness policies (i.e., wellness policies) address water accessibility and where policy opportunities exist. It summarizes policy actions taken by public school districts from 2011–2012 school year from the Bridging the Gap (BTG) study. 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.<sup>9,10</sup> Complete details about how these data were collected and compiled are available in the companion methods documentation.<sup>11</sup>

## WHAT ACTIONS HAVE SCHOOL DISTRICTS TAKEN?

Few wellness policies addressed water accessibility in schools (Figure 1). During the 2011–2012 school year, the BTG study found that

- Only 9% of districts *required* that free drinking water be available in places where meals are served, and approximately 2% of districts *recommended* free drinking water be available where meals are served.
- Approximately 90% of school districts do not have a policy for access to free water on the school campus.



- 10% of districts *required* that free drinking water be available throughout the school day and throughout the school campus. Less than 1% of districts *recommended* that free drinking water be available throughout the day on school campuses.
- No districts *required* or *recommended* that free drinking water be available in the gymnasium.

FIGURE 1



## What Can You Do?

## IMPROVE ACCESS TO WATER

There are a number of evidence-based strategies and expert recommendations that can help improve access to drinking water in schools.<sup>6,12,13</sup> The actions below can help you implement these strategies and recommendations. See the Resources section at the end for links to documents and Web sites that provide additional information.

### STATES

- Work with districts to ensure that free, clean, and safe drinking water is available throughout school campuses.
- Help districts secure funding to improve the condition of water fountains.
- Strengthen building codes that affect the availability of drinking water.

- Encourage school districts and schools to promote water consumption by using marketing campaigns and practices that make water easily accessible (e.g., allowing students to bring water bottles into classrooms).

### SCHOOL DISTRICTS AND SCHOOLS

- Include language about drinking water access in the district wellness policy.
- Offer free drinking water during lunch periods.
- Ensure that water fountains are clean and functioning properly.
- Consider installing drinking fountains in locations where students can easily access

them including school cafeterias, gymnasiums, and throughout hallways.

- Offer nonfountain sources of water (e.g., dispensers, pitchers, coolers) in areas where drinking fountains are not feasible.
- Consider providing cups at drinking fountains and other nonfountain sources of water to encourage students to drink more water.
- Allow students to bring water bottles into classrooms.
- Promote water consumption by using marketing campaigns.
- Limit the availability of sugar-sweetened beverages that compete with and displace water consumption.
- Encourage school staff to model healthy behaviors, including water consumption.

## RESOURCES

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Adolescent and School Health. Water Access in Schools. <http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/npao/wateraccess.htm>.
- USDA Team Nutrition. Local School Wellness Policy. <http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/local-school-wellness-policy>.
- ChangeLab Solutions, National Policy & Legal Analysis Network to Prevent Childhood Obesity. Drinking Water Access in Schools. [http://changelabsolutions.org/sites/default/files/documents/WaterAccess\\_FactSht\\_FINAL\\_20111026.pdf](http://changelabsolutions.org/sites/default/files/documents/WaterAccess_FactSht_FINAL_20111026.pdf).
- ChangeLab Solutions, National Policy & Legal Analysis Network to Prevent Childhood Obesity. Water Access in Schools: Model Wellness Policy Language. <http://changelabsolutions.org/publications/wellness-policy-water>.
- Water in Schools. <http://www.waterinschools.org/index.shtml>.
- Bridging the Gap Research. School district wellness policy-related reports and materials. [http://www.bridgingthegapresearch.org/research/district\\_wellness\\_policies](http://www.bridgingthegapresearch.org/research/district_wellness_policies)

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- <sup>8</sup>National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program: Nutrition Standards for All Foods Sold in School as Required by the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010, Interim Rule, 78 Fed. Reg. 39068-39120 (June 28, 2013) (to be codified at 7 C.F.R. Pt. 210 and 220).
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Suggested citation: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Bridging the Gap Research Program. *Strategies for Improving Access to Drinking Water in Schools*. Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; 2014.