The Leadership Role of the Superintendent in Promoting Student & Staff Health & Wellness

Based on the Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child Model

An Action Guide for Superintendents from the American Heart Association
A superintendent’s perspective:

Being a school superintendent takes dedication, passion and a service mindset. When a superintendent supports the American Heart Association it is a true act of leadership to the collective effort to make our world a better place for our children.

Why volunteer? Here are some reasons and perspectives:

Have you lost a family member, friend, colleague, student or staff member to heart disease, a heart attack or stroke? The AHA leads efforts to reduce these leading causes of death, improve student education on CPR and healthy living and they save and change lives for millions. Put simply, the American Heart Association is a relentless force for a world of longer, healthier lives.

Superintendents have the opportunity to contribute to the health and wellbeing of students and staff. Our school systems must be designed to serve as models for safe and healthy living which begins at the top. An AHA partnership serves to tie together our schools with our community.

Let’s create schools where students are socially-emotionally involved and exhibit good behavior, attend school regularly and strive toward academic success. These are all outcomes that improve when a student is healthy. Working along side the AHA your school access to a wealth of resources to improve health outcomes for your students and staff.

From one superintendent to another:

Please volunteer for the American Heart Association!

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INTRODUCTION

School superintendents have tremendous leadership responsibilities for delivering a vision that leads to the success of their students and staff. They are influential within their communities and have a public platform to be heard across a broad spectrum of stakeholders.

The central goal of this guide is to help superintendents position health and well-being as a key component for school operations. This is intended to be a starting point to level set. The goal is to get all superintendents thinking about the transformational impact that occurs when leaders apply their skills to improving health outcomes in schools. This guide hopes to capture the passion and moral imperatives that come with this monumental task.

We have an opportunity to create conditions where our students move and exercise more, understand the value of eating healthy foods, are socially and emotionally confident, and feel safe and valued. We know the outcomes of creating such an environment within our schools; better student behavior, higher student and staff attendance and higher academic achievement. These very measures are what superintendents strive to achieve every day. But of even greater significance, one that lasts a lifetime, is to empower students with the knowledge to live healthy lives and create schools that embrace healthy living.

THE WHOLE CHILD

As schools became more regimented, more driven by seat instruction and over-reliant on standardized tests, there began a movement that embraced the truth that developing the potential of a child requires addressing the needs of the whole child. Children’s cognitive, physical, social and emotional development are connected, and the Whole Child model calls for greater alignment of the education, public health and school health sectors.

The American Heart Association has adopted the Whole Child model as they work with schools across the country. The AHA partners with schools and communities and works tirelessly to educate, motivate, and support students, families and staff to understand heart health, learn CPR, improve physical activity and to embrace healthy eating habits. The graphic below illustrates the focus areas of the Whole Child model and highlights the work of the AHA within those areas. This guide identifies the role of the superintendent in key areas of the Whole Child model.
In collaboration with the school board, ensure the district mission, vision and goals align with the Whole Child model.

- Design and use accountability metrics to chart Whole Child progress.
- Evaluate Whole Child opportunities and partnerships using evidence-based policies, processes and practices.
- Address facility and budgetary needs strategically.
- Lead by embracing collaborative opportunities utilizing the interest and energy of a wide variety of stakeholders, internal and external.
The superintendent understands how health is taught at each grade level within the district, ensures that the curriculum meets or exceeds national standards and empowers and supports district staff and standing committees such as the School Health Advisory Committee (SHAC) to regularly bring forth recommendations for improving the delivery model.

The superintendent understands and works at implementing programs across all five components of the Comprehensive School Physical Activity Program (CSPAP).

The superintendent understands the nutritional delivery model within the school district and seeks innovative collaborations that expand and improve access and nutritional quality.

The superintendent prioritizes school nurses as an essential staffing allocation at each campus and provides leadership in aligning health needs of students with partner organizations, the medical community and local government.

The superintendent prioritizes school counseling services by counselors over the myriad of other duties counselors are assigned within schools. Collaborative community supports are utilized where needed.

The superintendent supports the evaluation of the social-emotional climate of the schools within the district and the adoption of a social-emotional learning program or model that includes community support services as needed.

The superintendent regularly reviews the physical conditions of facilities and addresses health and safety issues immediately and transparently. District and school-based committee efforts to improve facilities are supported.

The superintendent reviews and bolsters the facets of a comprehensive school employee wellness approach by coordinating programs, policies, benefits and the physical environment of the workplace to support employee wellness.

The superintendent sets the expectation to have robust Parent-Teacher organizations at every school and regularly meets with parent groups to provide information and listen to concerns. District parent education programs on a wide range of health and wellness issues are created utilizing partner organizations and internal resources.

The superintendent utilizes the position of the office to consistently engage the community in seeking collaborative partnerships to address health and wellness initiatives, events, and opportunities. School facilities are utilized as common meeting places for community engagement.

The modules which follow expand on each of these areas of focus and provide useful resources to help ensure success in your district.
The Role of the Superintendent in Physical Education and Physical Activity

OUR POSITION

The superintendent recognizes and supports the value of students and staff being physically active and is committed to ensuring that the physical education program is of high quality and for all students. The superintendent embraces the five components of the national framework for physical education and physical activity, and the framework is a component of district strategic planning.

Components of a Comprehensive School Physical Activity Program (CSPAP):

- Physical Education
- Physical Activity During School
- Physical Activity Before & After School
- Staff Involvement
- Family & Community Engagement

SUPERINTENDENT ACTION ITEMS

COMMUNICATE

Communicate your expectations to curriculum and instruction staff and campus administrators that physical education must be of high quality and given the attention and resources core classroom instruction receives. Work with campus administrators to address facility and scheduling challenges.

SEEK

Seek community partners to facilitate creative and innovative programs and events enhancing student and staff participation in physical activity before, during and after school hours. Encourage campus principals to seek such partners.

EVALUATE

Evaluate the district facilities and learn about community assets related to physical education and activity. Identify improvement needs and collaborative opportunities to coordinate community resources with district resources. Convey the expectation that facilities are to be used by all students, not only students involved in extracurricular activities.

RESOURCES & LINKS

Kids Heart Challenge is the premier elementary program that gets students active and prepares them for success in the classroom and in life.

American Heart Challenge is a student service-learning program for middle school and high school students.

Our Workplace Health Solutions program is dedicated to continuous quality improvement for employee health.

The American Heart Association has access to a wealth of resources related to student and staff health and wellness and is eager to share these resources.
The Role of the Superintendent in Leading Improvements in School Nutrition Programs

OUR POSITION

The superintendent must express the expectation that the school district food services program strive to create an environment that empowers students to develop healthy eating habits. It is incumbent upon the superintendent to prioritize creating food delivery models that match the needs of students and staff using all resources available. The superintendent should always be looking to collaborate with leaders and community groups to form partnerships that improve food access and quality for students and families.

SUPERINTENDENT ACTION ITEMS

SET BASELINE
Meet with the child nutrition director to determine the department’s existing goals and guiding practices. Learn how and when food is served and discuss current barriers, challenges, opportunities and successes within the department.

CREATE PROCESSES
Direct or lead a process that reviews existing food service policy, drafts recommendations for environmental and systems improvements and stimulates innovative practices with partner organizations and community leaders. The School Health Advisory Committee (SHAC) or partner organizations like Alliance for a Healthier Generation have the capacity to do this work.

FIELD EXPERIENCE
Regularly visit school cafeterias during student breakfast and lunch hours. Talk to the campus principal, staff members and students about their perceptions and attitudes about the food quality and delivery model at the school.

FUNDING
Lead a review of current federal and state funding and meal reimbursement programs (for both school and community) to determine if funding is available but not currently utilized.

RESOURCES & LINKS
Partnership with the Alliance for a Healthier Generation
Supports for Policy Improvements
Direct support to schools through Simple Cooking with Heart kids program.
Instruction and parent-support resources
The Role of the Superintendent in Leading the Implementation of Health Services

OUR POSITION
Ensuring a healthy and safe school environment is the top priority for superintendents. In addition to overseeing the nursing and health services delivery model, superintendents now play a key role in interpreting public health policy, evaluating facilities and building tactical plans for campus and district operations. This requires a high degree of collaboration with educators and health professionals and assumes a common commitment to achieving Whole Child outcomes. The roles of school nurses and health professionals in schools have expanded out of necessity. Superintendents should expect them to be leaders in implementing Whole Child concepts. Effective superintendent leadership is marked by acts that ensure safety and well-being of students and staff while pushing district outcomes toward healthy school environments.

SUPERINTENDENT ACTION ITEMS

1. STAFFING
Review school nurse and district health staffing allocations and seek recommendations for improving staffing resources. Explore partnerships to increase health services with health care providers, including establishing a school-based health center (if one does not exist within the district).

2. WHOLE-CHILD STRATEGY
Address Whole Child concepts in developing district strategic plans while requiring campus administrators to create annual measurable campus goals for all ten components of the Whole Child model.

3. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
Seek to establish a regular meeting with community health care leaders to learn about health issues, opportunities for partnerships and current strategies that positively impact community and school district health outcomes.

RESOURCES & LINKS
Resources include Hands-Only™ CPR training materials and other tools that encourage school nurses to be health leaders for their campus.
The Role of the Superintendent in Addressing Social-Emotional Learning Needs

**OUR POSITION**
The superintendent leads the adoption and support of a comprehensive social and emotional learning (SEL) program within the school district. This includes implementation of an SEL curriculum and instruction, adopting school-wide SEL practices and policies and identifying opportunities for involvement of family and community partnerships.

**SUPERINTENDENT ACTION ITEMS**

1. **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**
   Engage in professional development opportunities to expand your knowledge and skills in SEL implementation. It is essential to be versed in the science and implementation of SEL, especially what SEL looks like in schools and classrooms.

2. **SUPPORT**
   Develop foundational support for SEL by creating a shared vision that establishes SEL as essential for student success and equitable learning environments.

3. **PRIORITIZE**
   Build SEL priorities into annual budgets and consistently communicate that SEL is a district priority by organizing the district to promote collaboration among leaders around SEL, academics, and equity.

4. **DISTRICT POLICY**
   Adopt district policies that support SEL.

5. **COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS**
   Develop relationships with families and community partners to align missions and promote SEL.

**RESOURCES & LINKS**

Kids Heart Challenge & American Heart Challenge strongly support student social-emotional learning

Physical Education and activity initiatives (including NFL Play60)

Collaborations with community partners
The Role of the Superintendent in Leading Improvements in the Physical Environment

OUR POSITION
Superintendent leadership in addressing campus and district facility issues is vital. In addition to making important and impactful decisions to ensure facilities are safe, clean and meet health quality standards, superintendents also play a critical role in facility design and function. The opportunity for superintendents to use their influence to improve the physical environment in a manner that promotes equity for students and Whole Child outcomes is significant.

SUPERINTENDENT ACTION ITEMS

1. ADDRESS CRITICAL ISSUES
   Address critical physical environment issues transparently and seek collaborative solutions that involve stakeholder input. Build support for addressing critical needs.

2. DECISION MAKING
   Focus on how decisions are being made regarding setting the priorities for defining the physical environment within the district. Do the staff members making facility and grounds decisions embrace continuous Whole Child improvements?

3. COLLABORATIVE PROCESS
   Create a collaborative analysis and decision-making structure with staff when improving and designing facilities (including addressing stakeholder interest regarding spending bond funds).

4. AVOID SILOS
   Ensure that campus administrators are committed to reducing practices that silo Whole Child tenets (for example, restricting all food consumption to the cafeteria and only allowing physical activity in the gym and on playgrounds). Look at ALL facilities holistically as opportunities for all students to learn and engage in Whole Child activities.

5. COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS
   Seek partnerships to improve the physical environment of the district for students and staff, including partnerships with parent groups to expand opportunities for school facilities to be used to promote student and staff health and wellness.

RESOURCES & LINKS
Whole Child resources that connect school activities to AHA programs and areas of advocacy.
The Role of the Superintendent in Improving Employee Wellness

**OUR POSITION**

Superintendents directly shape the working conditions of district employees through the organizational priorities and practices they implement. Making a commitment to improve the physical, mental, and social-emotional health of employees as part of the priorities and practices of the district can have very positive outcomes, including better staff morale, lower absenteeism, higher productivity, and ultimately, the creation of a stronger learning environment for students. Superintendents are role models for staff and should convey to staff support for wellness efforts while embracing opportunities with external partners to provide services and programs for staff members designed to encourage healthier lifestyles.

**SUPERINTENDENT ACTION ITEMS**

### 1. ENCOURAGE STAFF ACTIVITIES

*Encourage and support campus efforts by staff to organize healthy activities* such as group activities and competitions related to exercise and nutrition. Set expectations for campus administrators to facilitate staff activities to the extent possible.

### 2. TALK ABOUT IT

Use speaking opportunities to *demonstrate a commitment* to adopting district practices that contribute to a healthy work environment.

### 3. COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

 Seek external partnerships from organizations with health resources for employees.

### 4. LIVE IT

*Model a focus and commitment to a healthy lifestyle* to the best of your abilities.

### 5. INDIVIDUAL SUPPORT PROGRAMS

Support *employee assistance programs* and human resource initiatives that support individual employees with health issues.

**RESOURCES & LINKS**

- AHA's Workplace Health Solutions Suite
- District Heart Challenge / Go Red For Women
The Role of the Superintendent in Leading Family & Community Engagement

**OUR POSITION**

Successful school districts strive to be transparent and embrace processes that facilitate family and community engagement and participation in campus and district activities. Superintendents set the tone of the district regarding providing a welcoming and engaging culture. The superintendent is also the primary representative of the district and has the opportunity to ensure families and community members feel heard and can give feedback. The key role of the superintendent in family and community engagement is to identify and forge common ground when issues arise with families and community members and in solving those issues balance the needs of the district with the desires of families and community members.

**SUPERINTENDENT ACTION ITEMS**

1. **WELCOME ENGAGEMENT**
   Share a commitment and expectation that the school district staff always **welcome families and value community input and engagement**.

2. **MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT**
   Set an expectation with campus principals that **each campus must have a full array of ways to engage families** in meaningful and sustainable ways, including having a robust and operating parent-teacher organization.

3. **COMMUNITY SERVICE**
   Look for **opportunities to provide services** in neighborhoods and at community facilities (such as feeding programs, bond presentations, etc.)

4. **DIRECT INTERACTION**
   Provide a **district level program that allows direct interaction** between the superintendent and community members.

5. **VOLUNTEER PROGRAM**
   Create a **district-level volunteer program**.

6. **COMMITTEE INVOLVEMENT**
   Facilitate **parent and community member service on district committees** and the education foundation.

7. **COMMITTEE INVOLVEMENT**
   Regularly **participate in activities with community leaders** advancing the mission of the district within the community.

**RESOURCES & LINKS**

Online resources for families

Assistance with aligning community resources with district need