

American Lung Association Tip Sheet: Long-Term Policy Change

Creating or updating policies that impact asthma-friendly school elements are goals that can affect students with asthma permanently. Policies may be local or statewide and can involve any or all of the AFSI elements: environment, education, physical education and activity, and health services.

Policy work is particularly effective for coalitions who have a broad representation from the community and strong base of support. Changing policy is typically time-intensive but low in other costs, and the work will result in permanent changes, regardless of the coalition's future funding, for example.

How local and state regulations and policies are created and adopted vary greatly. To undertake policy work you must understand how the process takes place in your school district, city, or state. Each state is different, and opportunities to change policy vary.

The Sample AFSI Grid for Integrating Evaluation into Five-Year Planning included in this section incorporates a sample policy-related goal, for your reference.

Changing School Policies

The National Association of State Boards of Education offers a range of tips for working with schools, including these ideas when working toward policy change:

Responsibilities

- Responsibility for policy change is generally that of the state legislature and the state board of education.
- Local control is strong in every state, and local school boards and principals may object to interference by the state.
- Even when policy changes are made at the state level, implementing those policies may be a long, incremental process.
- Some changes may require interagency collaboration such as the departments of education and health.

Laying the Groundwork for Change

Enlist widespread support for your policy, which may be viewed as valuable depending on who proposes and supports it. Consider including the following constituencies who can create a groundswell of support:

- Health and social service providers
- Community groups
- Youth-serving community agencies
- Business leaders
- Private-sector employees (who can help determine internal corporate priorities for community action)

Engaging Policymakers

- Emphasize proposed solutions to serious problem
- Identify measurable, short-term benefits
- Stress consistencies with existing policies and programs
- Highlight the coordinated school health program model as an emerging trend
- Include students in the process (researching issues, presenting at hearings)
- Propose a pilot study if policy does not gain support

Several excellent resources on creating school asthma policies are available, including:

- *Action on Asthma* (American Lung Association)
- *How Schools Work & How to Work with Schools* (National Association of State Boards of Education)--
- *Fit, Healthy, and Ready to Learn—Part III: Policies on Asthma, School Health Services, and Healthy Environments* (National Association of State Boards of Education)

Ordering information is included in the Resources section of this Toolkit.