



TAKE ACTION



“Never doubt that a thoughtful, committed group of citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has” – Margaret Mead

Take Action: Implementing the Action Plan

With your plan of action and timeline complete you are now ready to take action. As you begin to take action there are a few important tips, which will make your work easier and help you achieve the changes you are trying to make.

- **Make sure everyone is on the same page:** It is important that everyone understands the plan of action and can communicate your plan in the same way (If asked about your plan, you should all be able to give the same answer). This can be done by holding a group meeting to review the action plan. To make sure that everyone has the same message and the correct facts, you can design and distribute a pamphlet or postcard size handout about what you are doing and why. You might even want to come up with a slogan or catchy name for your initiative.
- **Communicate your ideas clearly:**
 - Brief oral presentations should cover only the most important points, accompanied by a written summary (bullets are great and easy to read).
 - Information should be clearly written in language that decision-makers, parents and other school community members can understand.
 - Documents should be as simple as possible without sacrificing accuracy or context.
 - Charts and graphs are useful for illustrating key findings.
 - Offer definite conclusions and program ideas.
 - Anticipate, respond to, and involve critics.
- **Form workgroups:** You can form workgroups so no one feels overwhelmed. You can also try to collaborate with other student groups that are willing to help you accomplish your goals.
- **Ask for help when needed:** Implementing your action plan is a big project. Don't be afraid to ask for help. Use the helpful hints in the following pages to get adults in your school and community involved in your plans.
- **Monitor and report progress:** This is important to building motivation and momentum. Report back to your student body on your accomplishments and/or ask them for help. Be sure to check your progress frequently to see if you are accomplishing your goals or if you need to adjust your plan of action.
- **Budget your money wisely:** If you need money that is not available at your school, do not hesitate to visit local businesses especially for amounts under \$1,000. Businesses may also donate goods, materials and other products. You should write a one page proposal that uses data and clearly outlines your future plans.
- **Give recognition:** Recognize your volunteers and supporters by writing them letters of appreciation and publicizing their work so that the whole community will know about their contributions to furthering your initiative.

Take Action: Engaging the Decision Makers

A key part of your work as an advocate, will be to speak with key decision-makers such as food service directors, school principals, school boards, superintendents, state education administrators and legislators. This can be very intimidating at first, but it is one of the most important steps in taking action. The following are some tips on how to engage these decision-makers.

Tips for Engaging Important Decision-Makers

- Highlight school health as an emerging trend that more and more schools, districts, boards and states are supporting (the “bandwagon effect”). You can use the example of the 2002 Healthy School Summit and the more than 30 national organizations that supported this landmark event and the development of Action for Healthy Kids.
- Make presentations at meetings and conferences that decision-makers are likely to attend. For example, school committee meetings, school board meetings, PTA meetings, etc.
- State measurable short-term benefits, such as effects on student and staff attendance.
- Call your local newspaper and let them know about the work that your student group is doing (see resource section for media kit).
- Use current data from credible sources to support your statements (i.e. data from the Youth Behavior Risk Surveillance Survey <http://www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/yrbs/index.htm>). See additional materials found in the appendix of this toolkit.
- Stress how the guidelines you are offering are consistent with and supportive of existing school, district, board and state programs.
- Enlist the endorsement of the community, parent organizations and local businesses.
- Increase public awareness about the need for the proposed program. Decision-makers are likely to be attentive if a groundswell of public support is generated.

Unfortunately, not all decision makers will be fully supportive of your ideas, and as a result you must be ready to answer tough questions.

As a result, you will most likely need to build support for your work and continually engage the decision makers to gain their full support. To do this, you can use numerous tools including, letter writing, making phone calls, giving presentations, and working with the media.

Take Action: Answering Tough Questions

When you talk to adults and try to get them to help you or to convince them to act, they may ask some tough questions about the feasibility of your ideas. Here are some possible questions and sample answers that might be helpful to you.

Q: Students might not buy the healthy foods. How can food service take a chance on losing money?

A: First, let's ask the students which healthy foods they will buy. Then we can do a taste test to see which healthy choices the students like the most. Next, we can have a trial period. During this time, food service will sell healthy foods and promote these foods so students know they are available. We can encourage students to buy the healthy foods and track sales of the new, healthier options. There is also good information emerging that food service departments will not lose money.

Q: How can we keep the gym open after school? The school insurance won't cover this.

A: We can research to find out if we have any options regarding our coverage and the associated costs. We can ask parent and community groups to help us with this project. Finally, we can ask the school board to spend the extra money so students have a safe place to be physically active.

Q: How can we put different foods in the vending machines? That is the vending machine company's decision.

A: We can work with the vending machine company. We can tell the vending machine company that students want some healthy snacks. We'll give them our survey results, which show how many students will buy healthy snacks. We'll tell the vending machine company the types of healthy snacks we like and ask them to stock at least two of these in the vending machines. (Note: Go to the John Stalker Institute A list - <http://www.johnstalkerinstitute.org> and click on Healthy Snacks - as seen in the list, the food industry is responding with more healthy vending items).

These are only a few of the many tough questions that you may face, but you have the ability to answer any question that comes your way. As you begin to show people that you have thought out your plan and are serious about making change you will begin to gain support. You can also use a variety of tools to build support for your work including letter writing, phone calls, presentations, and working with the media.

Take Action: Tools for Action (adapted from CA Project Lean's Playing the Policy Game)

Letter Writing

Letter writing is a great way to tell people about your ideas. A well-written, short letter can have a big impact. For example, it can let someone know about your activities, or get someone to support your cause. When you write your letter, follow these tips:

- 1) Keep letters short (one page only).
- 2) Spell the person's name correctly and make sure you have the right address.
- 3) It is okay to hand write or e-mail letters

Here is a guide to help you write a professional, concise letter:

Your name
School name
Organization or club
School address
School city, State, Zip code

Date

Name of person you are writing to
Title of person you are writing to
Street address
City, State, Zip code

Dear (Name of person you are writing to)

My name is (your name). I am a (your age)-year-old student at (your school name). I live in (name of your city or town).

(Explain why you are writing in one or two sentences.)

(Explain why you care about the problem. Use your most interesting facts and shocking statistics. This paragraph can be about three to five sentences.)

(Explain what you are asking for, such as a vote to adopt your policy.)

Sincerely,
(Your signature)
(Your name)

Phone Calls

A simple phone call can help you get information or it can give you the chance to tell your ideas and share your facts with someone. When you make a phone call, follow these tips:

1. Before calling, fill out the phone guide below with the information that you want to talk about in the phone conversation.
2. Have paper and a pencil handy for note-taking.
3. When someone on the other end of the line picks up, always introduce yourself by giving your name, grade, and school.
4. If the person you are calling is not there, ask what time he or she will be back. Write down the time and call back then.
5. If you need to leave a message, make sure to leave your name, grade, school, phone number, the best time to call you back, and a short message about why you are calling. Most times, your call will be returned. If not, don't be afraid to call back as many times as it takes. Just be polite.
6. If you are able to speak with your contact person, before engaging in a long conversation ask if it is a good time to talk to show that you are respectful of their time.
7. While you have your contact person on the phone get the correct spelling of his/her name, title, mailing address, and phone number.
8. Say thank you before saying goodbye.

Here is a phone guide for you to fill out before you make your calls:

Phone Guide	
Contact Name:	Contact Address:
Contact Title:	Contact Phone Number:
Contact Organization:	
Hello, may I please speak to (contact name)_____?	
My name is _____ and I am in ____ at _____ school.	
I am calling to speak to you about....	
Why you are calling. What you want to say or ask:	

Notes. Write down what your contact tells you:	

Thank you very much. Good bye.	
YOUR INFORMATION	
Name of your school:	Your Organization:
School Address:	School Fax Number:
School Phone Number:	

Presentations

As an advocate, you will most likely need to give presentations to influence the decision makers and to build support for your solution. A good presentation can show the importance of having a healthy school environment and ultimately convince the decision maker to do what you are asking of them. In your presentation you can tell people what you are trying to do and urge them to join you. When you make a presentation, follow these presentation tips:

1. You will probably be nervous. Most people are nervous when they make presentations. Just be yourself.
2. Keep it short and simple. State your problem, a few facts and figures, and your solution.
3. Emphasize two to three points you want your listeners to remember.
4. Write your presentation and practice it until you feel comfortable. Practice in front of friends or family members.
5. Make your presentation interesting. Tell a personal story about why you want to eat healthier and be more physically active. Give shocking facts, or show an interesting chart or picture. For example, tell a short story about a family member who has had a heart attack.
6. Talk about how your solution will benefit the listener, not just how it will benefit you and your friends.
7. To really make a good impression, give your listener a fact sheet that bullets the major points of your presentation.
8. Leave time for questions and answers after your presentation. Be prepared to answer tough questions.

Working with the Media

***For more in depth information, please see the media guide in the resource CD.**

The media can expand the reach of your efforts, reinforce your messages throughout the community, and increase public support for a healthy school environment. Many times it can be the deciding factor in pushing the decision maker to act. The media will most likely jump at the opportunity to cover a story about students organizing to bring about positive change in their school health environment, so do not be afraid to ask for coverage!

To engage the media:

A. Build a Media Contact List:

1. Begin by finding the phone numbers and addresses in the phonebook.
2. Call the newspapers, radio and TV stations to ask which reporters cover health and education.
3. Develop a **Media Contact List** with all of the names, phone and fax numbers, and addresses that you are able to gather.

B. Plan What You Want to Say- it's all about 6 simple questions.

1. Who? – who is doing the project or holding the event?
2. What? – what is it about?
3. When? – when is the project or event taking place?
4. Where? – where is the work taking place (i.e. your high school) or if it's an event, where is it taking place?
5. Why? – why are you trying to make change (i.e. site your survey results and rationale) or why are you holding an event?
6. How? – how did you do this project or how are thinking of doing the project if you are announcing something?

C. Send them information on your work:

1. Write a Letter to the Editor.

- Newspapers print letters to the editor. These letters express opinions about issues that affect the community. Your letter should describe how the problem has affected your life. You can find the editor's name and address on the editorial page of the newspaper.

2. Write a Press Release.

- A press release is a written description of a news story or event. A press release should be short and to the point — no more than two pages. It's best to type a press release.
- Make sure reporters know your press release is written by teenagers. They will be much more interested in your story. In addition, many times newspapers will use the press release as the basis for their story so make sure to do a good job.

- You should fax, email, or mail a copy of your press release to all of the reporters on your media contact list, then telephone them to make sure they received it. After you get media coverage, remember to get a copy of the newspaper article, or a recording of the TV or radio story. You can use the copies the next time you contact a decision maker.
- 3. Hold an event to attract media attention:**
- Reporters like events. Create an event at your school to attract reporters. You could hold a debate, or give a presentation to the school board. Make sure to invite the media. You could also invite a reporter to have lunch with you in the school cafeteria.