

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.