

MODEL SCHOOL WELLNESS POLICY LANGUAGE FOR DRINKING WATER ACCESS AND CONSUMPTION

This model policy provides language for water access and promotion in schools. It includes recommended language for your school wellness policy and provides actions you can take to implement the policy. The intent of this model policy is to provide language for the provision of drinking water in schools that aligns with best practice recommendations. It is the “ideal” drinking water policy. This model policy addresses seven main areas of water-related language for school wellness policies:

- Water access
- Water delivery options
- Promotion and marketing
- Education
- Safety and quality
- Reusable water bottles
- Monitoring and evaluation

INCORPORATING MODEL WATER-RELATED LANGUAGE INTO YOUR SCHOOL WELLNESS POLICY

For each of these areas, recommended language is provided in the text box followed by specific actions your school or district can take to implement the guideline. Your school or district can use all of the best practices as written to implement a comprehensive drinking water policy. Or you phase-in over time the adoption of individual parts of the model policy. The model guidelines can be revised to meet the needs and priorities of your school or district.

1) Water Access

Recommended Language

The school district shall provide all students (including those with disabilities) and staff with easy access to clean, safe, and good-tasting drinking water free of charge at every school campus. Potable drinking water will be readily available at all times during the day and at before- and after-school activities in the food service and eating areas, common areas, gyms, outdoor physical activity spaces, classrooms, and faculty lounges.

Implementation Actions

- At minimum, the school district should comply with the fountain to student ratio as required by the State’s building code.¹ However, the size of the school campus, the drinking water needs of the students, and district resources can also determine the number of water delivery options available at individual school sites.
- The school district can provide students with drinking vessels (e.g., recyclable, compostable, or reusable cups) next to the tap water dispensers, water bottle fillers, point-of-use water machines, or other water delivery options for students to serve themselves water.
- School staff will ensure that the refillable water dispensers are filled when empty during each meal period, at a minimum, and, ideally, throughout the school day.
- If plain bottled water is sold, the school district should ensure that bottled water sold in vending machines, a la carte lines, and student stores costs no more than competitive beverages, such as sports drinks, fruit-flavored drinks, and flavored bottled water with added sweeteners.



(1) For example, the California State building code requires schools to have one water outlet for every 150 individuals (see: 2010 California Plumbing Code Table 4-1: <https://law.resource.org/pub/us/code/bsc.ca.gov/prince/gov.ca.bsc.2010.05.pdf>).

2) Water Delivery Options



Recommended Language

The school district shall consider the installation of appealing water delivery options in the event that there is construction of a new school campus, renovation of a school building, or substantial repairs or upgrades of existing drinking fountains.

Implementation Actions

- Consider non-traditional fountain water delivery options that include, but are not limited to, tap water dispensers, point of use water machine, bottle filling stations, and fountains with bottle fillers. Survey students to learn what kind of water delivery option they prefer.
- Ensure the water delivery option dispenses clear, chilled, good-tasting drinking water that is free of odors.



3) Promotion and Marketing

Recommended Language

The school district will actively promote water consumption throughout the school day and at before- and after-school activities. Promotional activities might include announcements, posters and signage, contests, and multimedia campaigns (e.g., videos, songs, social media, etc.).

Implementation Actions

- The school district will encourage all school administrators, teachers, and building staff to be role models by drinking tap water around students.
- The school district will encourage drinking water, preferably tap water, at all school or school-sponsored events, meetings, or parties (e.g., birthday or holiday celebrations in the classroom).



A poster used by Redwood City School District to promote water consumption

4) Education

Recommended Language

[Designated School Official] will review formal curriculum to ensure information relating to drinking water is consistent and up-to-date. As appropriate, teachers will include information about drinking water in their lesson plans. Lessons will incorporate information about the health and learning-related benefits of drinking adequate levels of water regularly throughout the school day.

Implementation Actions

- Water topics can be integrated within the comprehensive health education curriculum and taught at every grade level according to the standards of the [State] Department of Education.
- Schools can link water education activities with existing coordinated school health programs or other comparable comprehensive school health promotion frameworks.



5) Safety and Quality

Recommended Language

The school district shall conduct periodic water quality tests of all drinking water outlets in each district facility in accordance with Environmental Protection Agency guidelines. The school district shall maintain and sanitize all water delivery options on a regularly scheduled basis (e.g., as part of facility maintenance schedule).

Implementation Actions

- The school district should make the test results available in an easily accessible format (e.g., post on district website, include in school newsletter), and deliver letters with test results to students and parents.
- The school district should take the necessary remediation measures to keep the water safe to drink (e.g., water is flushed through at the start of week and after holiday closure, filters are installed when necessary) and communicate such action with affected students and parents.
- The school district should service all water delivery options and replace units in accordance with manufacturer guidance.
- For water delivery options with a filter, the filter will be changed in accordance with the manufacturer guidelines.
- Pitchers, refillable water dispensers, and drip trays should be cleaned weekly (or more frequently as needed).¹

6) Reusable Water Bottles

Recommended Language

Students will be permitted to carry reusable water bottles while at school for the specific use of drinking water only. Each student must have his or her own water bottle that is clearly labeled with his/her name. Students are allowed to take their reusable water bottles into the classroom except into the computer or science labs. Misuse of bottles will be subject to disciplinary action.

Implementation Actions

- Students can be responsible for providing their own reusable water bottles in accordance with the school district policy. At minimum, the reusable water bottle should be made of good quality, BPA-free plastic and fitted with a secure cap.
- The school district may also require that the reusable water bottles be clear plastic (transparent) to minimize the risk of students putting drinks other than water in their bottles.
- The school district can include reusable water bottles in the uniform list or school supplies list.
- The school district should encourage individual school sites to make reusable water bottles available to the school community through fundraisers or for purchase in the food service area and student stores.
- The school district should establish and communicate health and safety guidelines for reusable water bottles to the school community. Students and parents can be provided instructions for proper cleaning of bottles.



(1) See also: Harvard Prevention Research Center (Forthcoming). *Keep It Flowing: A Practical Guide to School Drinking Fountain Planning, Maintenance, and Repair*.

7) Monitoring and Evaluation

Recommended Language

Through implementation and enforcement of this policy, the school district will create an environment that supports opportunities for improving water access and water consumption. To ensure continuing progress, the school district or individual school sites will evaluate implementation efforts and their impact on students and staff.

Implementation Actions

- The school district should designate a school official to ensure that individual school sites comply with this drinking water policy.
- Policy language should be assessed each year and revised as needed.
- The school district should regularly assess whether schools are meeting students water intake needs.

