

An Informational Guidebook for Improving School Health

December 13, 2024

“Schools by themselves cannot and should not be expected to solve the nation’s most serious health and social problems. Families, health care workers, the media, religious organizations, community organizations that serve youth, and young people themselves also must be systematically involved. However, schools could provide a critical facility in which many agencies might work together to maintain the well-being of young people.”

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Division of Adolescent and School Health

On behalf of the Louisiana Department of Education, Safe and Healthy Schools Division, thank you for your interest in improving the health of your school or school district. We hope this guidebook provides you with the essential information, steps and resources to articulate the value and importance of ensuring school health is used as an avenue to improve academic achievement.

No matter the role you play in your school or district, it is critical to the healthy success of our students. If we want to change the trajectory of school health we need School Wellness Champions like you! We applaud your efforts and we are here to support you.

Please email HealthySchools@la.gov with any questions.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

THE “WHY”: LINKING HEALTH TO ACADEMICS & OVERALL WELL-BEING.....5

LOUISIANA’S EFFORTS & LAWS IMPACTING SCHOOL HEALTH 6

LOUISIANA COORDINATED SCHOOL HEALTH.....7

LOCAL SCHOOL WELLNESS POLICY8

THE “HOW”: SIX STEPS TO IMPACTFUL CHANGE.....9

STEP 1: Build Support with a District SHAC & School Health Teams 9

STEPS 2 and 3: Assess Policies & Practices and Develop an Action Plan 13

STEPS 4-6: Explore Resources, Take Action & Celebrate Success14

RESOURCES..... 14

APPENDIX 15

PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDE

Assist Local Education Agencies (referred to as “districts”) and schools with creating effective and efficient school health councils and teams –representing all eight components of the [Louisiana Coordinated School Health \(LCSH\) Model](#) that focuses on the improvement and sustainment of a healthy school culture.

This guide is aimed at ensuring districts and schools are aligning their team’s efforts to the **LCSH model** as well as federal and state school health guidelines and laws.

Recognizing that integrating school health into academics can be overwhelming and schools in general are overloaded, this guide is intended to provide you with the simple yet necessary steps and resources to reduce the challenge of creating a healthier school culture.

THE “WHY”: LINKING HEALTH TO ACADEMICS & OVERALL WELL-BEING

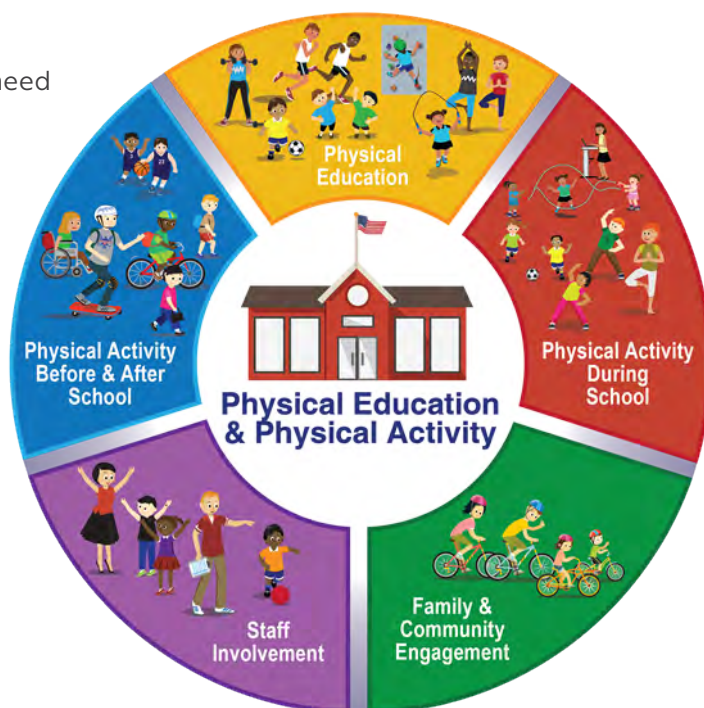
Research shows a strong connection between healthy behaviors and academic achievement (e.g., grades, standardized tests, graduation rates, attendance). Healthy students are better learners, and academic achievement bears a lifetime of benefits for health. However, **youth risk behaviors**, such as physical inactivity, unhealthy dietary behaviors, tobacco use, alcohol use, and other drug use are consistently linked to poor grades and test scores and lower educational attainment. (From https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/health_and_academics/index.htm)

While children are eating more, they are also exercising less. This can affect not only their weight but their attitude, academic performance and overall well-being. Research shows that when school districts and schools have effective policies and practices that support the health of their students and staff:

- ✓ Student and staff absenteeism decreases.
- ✓ Student concentration improves.
- ✓ Student behavior problems are reduced.
- ✓ Children and adolescents establish life-long health-promoting behaviors.

The positive outcomes listed below are why many of the nation’s leading educational organizations recognize the need to address health and well-being within the educational environment.

- When students’ nutritional and physical activity needs are met, they are able to attain higher academic achievement levels;
- Providing students access to physical, mental, and oral health care improves attendance, behavior, and achievement; and,
- The development of connected and supportive school environments benefits teaching and learning, helps engage students, and enhances positive learning outcomes.



Active Students = Better Learners

www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/PEandPA

LOUISIANA'S EFFORTS & LAWS IMPACTING SCHOOL HEALTH

LOUISIANA'S REVISED ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM

Louisiana's revised accountability system will raise the bar for academic success, enhance the value of career education, and make it easier for the public to understand how schools are performing. It's named **Grow. Achieve. Thrive.** after its three core student expectations. Louisiana expects all students to grow academically year-over-year, achieve proficiency on key content, and thrive beyond high school.

Grow. Achieve. Thrive. goes into effect for the 2025-2026 school year. You can stay up-to-date at louisianabelieves.com/accountability.

CURRENT LOUISIANA SCHOOL HEALTH LAWS

The Louisiana State Legislature has laws around school health, including physical activity, physical education, nutrition, school health advisory councils and more. You can do a complete search at <http://www.legis.la.gov/legis/LawSearch.aspx>.

The law most relevant to this guidebook is RS 17:17.1: Required physical activity in schools. Section D of this law states: "Each city, parish, and other local public school board shall *establish a school health advisory council to advise the board* on physical activity for students, physical and health education, nutrition, and overall student health. The council may advise the board on issues relative to compliance with school vending machine restrictions, use of physical fitness assessment results, and school recess policies. The council members shall be appointed by the school board and shall include parents of students and individuals representing the community. All council members shall serve without compensation."

[Bulletin 741 - Louisiana Handbook for School Administrators](#)

§1155. School Health Advisory Council

- A. Each city, parish, and other local school board shall establish a school health advisory council to advise the board on physical activity for students, physical and health education, nutrition, and overall student health.
- B. The council may advise the board on issues relative to compliance with school vending machine restrictions, use of physical fitness assessment results, and school recess policies.
- C. The council members shall be appointed by the school board and shall include parents of students and individuals representing the community. All council members shall serve without compensation.

AUTHORITY NOTE: Promulgated in accordance with R.S. 17:17.1.

HISTORICAL NOTE: Promulgated by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, LR 50:

LOUISIANA COORDINATED SCHOOL HEALTH

The [Louisiana Coordinated School Health \(LCSH\)](#) approach connects physical and mental health with education through eight interrelated components. This coordinated approach improves students' health and their capacity to learn through the support of families, communities, and schools working together. Coordinated School Health works with many partners to address school health priorities.

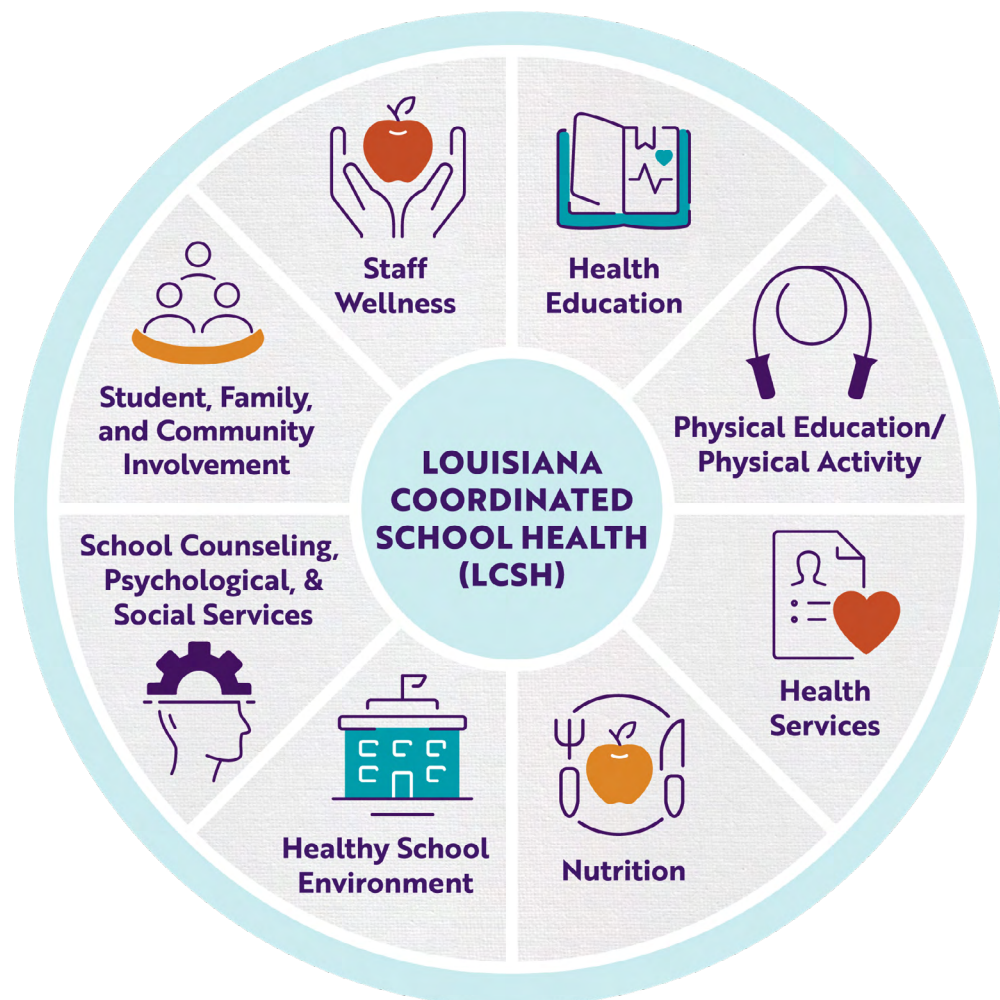
The involvement of parents, families, and the community is the glue that binds the LCSH. Full involvement of these entities as partners in the educational process provides valuable input, increases the commitment of all partners, and ensures positive educational and health outcomes.

Coordinated School Health is not a program but a systematic approach to promoting student health that emphasizes needs assessment, planning based on data and sound science, analysis of gaps and redundancies in school health programming, and evaluation.

The LCSH approach consists of eight major components. By definition, all Coordinated School Health Components work together to improve the lives of students and their families. Although these components are listed separately, their composite allows CSH to have a significant impact.

LCSH Components

- Health Education
- Physical Education
- Health Services
- Nutrition Services
- Counseling, Psychological, and Social Services
- A Healthy and Safe School Environment
- Staff Wellness
- Family and Community Involvement



LOCAL SCHOOL WELLNESS POLICY

A local school wellness policy is a written document that guides a school district's efforts to create supportive and healthy environments (i.e. child nutrition, physical activity, tobacco, etc.) and can address policies and practices for before-, during-, and after-school. (From <https://www.cdc.gov/assessing-improving-school-health/wellness/>)

Every local educational agency (LEA) participating in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP) must conduct an assessment of their wellness policy every three years (known as the Triennial Assessment), at a minimum, as established by the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004, and recently enhanced by the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 (HHFKA). Furthermore, School Food Authorities in Louisiana are required to assess Local School Wellness Policy compliance during their Administrative Review with Nutrition Services.

Two resources recommended to ensure your Local School Wellness Policy aligns with the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act are the [CDC's WellSAT 3.0](#) and the [Alliance for a Healthier Generation Model Wellness Policy](#). The WellSAT is a quantitative assessment tool to help you score and improve your Local School Wellness Policy. Healthier Generation's Model Wellness Policy is in Microsoft Word format and can be used to help create and/or update your Local School Wellness Policy and meet the minimum federal standards for local school wellness policy implementation.

The Wellness Policy in Action Tool (WPAT) and the WellSAT-I are both designed to help districts meet Triennial Assessment requirements through scores and actionable recommendations for continually improving school wellness policies and practices. Please refer to page 13 of this Guidebook for additional information on Assessing Policies and Practices.

Local School Wellness Policy Implementation Tools and Resources can be found at <https://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/wellness-policy/implementation-tools>.



THE “HOW”: SIX STEPS TO IMPACTFUL CHANGE

OVERVIEW

Creating a “culture of school health and wellness” can be a daunting task. The **6 Step Process**, modeled after Healthier Generation’s continuous improvement process, is a circular journey where schools continuously take a status check, work on making improvements, learn from successes and challenges and keep pushing the needle forward. When schools repeat the cycle each year, their healthy changes become embedded in the culture of the school and efforts to become a healthy school are sustained. **Let’s dive into each step as we continue through this guidebook.**



STEP 1: Build Support with a District SHAC & School Health Teams

District-Level School Health Advisory Council (SHAC)

As stated above, **Section D of RS 17:17.1** requires each school **district** to establish a **School Health Advisory Council (SHAC)**. It is of Best Practice that the SHAC meet four times per year to create, update and educate their schools and community on the Local School Wellness Policy, and establish district goals on development and implementation of their Local School Wellness Policy.

Furthermore, some of the roles and responsibilities of a district-level school health advisory council are:

- Ensure district’s local school wellness policy is updated to meet current guidelines, and stays up-to-date on any changes made by the federal and state governments
- Identify gaps in the district’s health policies, programs and processes and locate resources to address gaps
- Ensure schools, parents and the community are aware of district-level health policies, specifically the district’s local school wellness policy
- Assist schools with challenges and resources to creating a culture of school health, and helping them celebrate the successes they achieve
- Ensure schools are meeting the district’s wellness policy and make this information available to the public
- Communicate with the school board on the progress of district and school health improvements



Using the LCSH Model, the SHAC best functions when each of the 8 components are represented by someone within the school district.



1. Health Education

When provided by qualified, trained teachers, health education helps students acquire the knowledge, attitudes, and skills they need for making health-promoting decisions, achieving health literacy, adopting health-enhancing behaviors, and promoting the health of others.

2. Physical Education & Physical Activity

A comprehensive school physical activity program (CSPAP) is the national framework for physical education and youth physical activity. A CSPAP reflects strong coordination across five components: physical education, physical activity during school, physical activity before and after school, staff involvement, and family and community engagement. Physical education serves as the foundation of a CSPAP and is an academic subject characterized by a planned, sequential K-12 curriculum (course of study) that is based on the national standards for physical education.

3. Nutrition/Food Services

The school nutrition environment provides students with opportunities to learn about and practice healthy eating through available foods and beverages, nutrition education, and messages about food in the cafeteria and throughout the school campus. Students may have access to foods and beverages in a variety of venues at school including the cafeteria, vending machines, grab 'n' go kiosks, school stores, concession stands, classroom rewards, classroom parties, school celebrations, and fundraisers.

4. Health Services

Health services connect school staff, students, families, community and healthcare providers to promote the health care of students and a healthy and safe school environment. School health services actively collaborate with school and community support services to increase the ability of students and families to adapt to health and social stressors, such as chronic health conditions or social and economic barriers to health, and to be able to manage these stressors and advocate for their own health and learning needs. Chronic health conditions such as Diabetes and Asthma is managed through these services and offers a safe environment for the student to participate in physical activities while at school. Qualified professionals such as school nurses, nurse practitioners, dentists, health educators, physicians, physician assistants and allied health personnel provide these services.

5. Counseling, Psychological & Social Services

These prevention and intervention services support the mental, behavioral, and social-emotional health of students and promote success in the learning process. Services include psychological, psychoeducational, and psychosocial assessments; direct and indirect interventions to address psychological, academic, and social barriers to learning, such as individual or group counseling and consultation; and referrals to school and community support services as needed.

6. Healthy & Safe School Environment

A healthy and safe physical school environment promotes learning by ensuring the health and safety of students and staff. The physical school environment encompasses the school building and its contents, the land on which the school is located, and the area surrounding it. A healthy school environment will address a school's physical condition during normal operation as well as during renovation (e.g., ventilation, moisture, temperature, noise, and natural and artificial lighting), and protect occupants from physical threats (e.g., crime, violence, traffic and injuries) and biological and chemical agents in the air, water, or soil as well as those purposefully brought into the school (e.g., pollution, mold, hazardous materials, pesticides, and cleaning agents).

7. Staff Wellness

A comprehensive school employee wellness approach is a coordinated set of programs, policies, benefits, and environmental supports designed to address multiple risk factors (e.g., lack of physical activity, tobacco use) and health conditions (e.g., diabetes, depression) to meet the health and safety needs of all employees. Partnerships between school districts and their health insurance providers can help offer resources, including personalized health assessments and flu vaccinations. Employee wellness programs and healthy work environments can improve a district's bottom line by decreasing employee health insurance premiums, reducing employee turnover, and cutting costs of substitutes.

8. Family and Community Involvement

Families are committed to actively supporting their child's learning and development. This relationship between school staff and families cuts across and reinforces student health and learning in multiple settings, in school, in out-of-school programs, and in the community. Family engagement should be continuous across a child's life and requires an ongoing commitment as children mature into young adulthood.

SCHOOL-LEVEL HEALTH TEAM/WELLNESS COMMITTEE

In order to implement sustainable, healthy changes, each school within a school district should develop a school health team/wellness committee whose focus is on implementing programs and activities that meet the needs of their own students and staff. Often, all it takes is one champion to create the momentum and excitement around school health!

Some roles and responsibilities of an action-oriented School Health Team/Wellness Committee are:

- Support the school in developing a healthier school environment by following the 6 Step Process
- Create the vision and goals for a healthy school
- Promote student, parent, and community involvement in developing a healthier school environment
- Plan, implement and evaluate program and policy efforts
- Provide feedback to the district SHAC regarding progress on the implementation of the district's local school wellness policy

When considering members for your team/committee, focus on the following, with the understanding that this is only a suggestion:

- Members represent the diversity of your community.
- Members have a passion for kids and health
- Members play a key role/influencers in the school and community
- Involve skeptics as well as believers.

TIP FOR SUCCESS

Complete and Update School Wellness Roster in Appendix. Keeping an updated Roster is critical for Success year after year.

TIP

The School Health Team can be combined with existing school committees such as School Improvement Team, School Safety Team, etc – to align efforts and provide additional support and resources for their school community.

TIP

The school, its students, and their families benefit when leaders and staff at the district and school solicits and coordinates information, resources, and services available from community-based organizations, businesses, cultural and civic organizations, social service agencies, faith-based organizations, health clinics, colleges and universities, and other community groups.

Now that we have shared the differences and roles between the District SHAC and the School Health Team/Wellness Committee (STEP 1), let's continue through the remaining 5 Steps to ensure continued and sustained progress year after year.



STEPS 2 and 3: Assess Policies & Practices and Develop an Action Plan

As described in Step 1, district-level SHACs and school-level health teams have different goals therefore Assessing Policies and Practices (Step 2) will follow a different path, which is described below.

DISTRICT-LEVEL SHACS

The main focus and goal at the district-level is creating and updating an effective Local School Wellness Policy that meets federal guidelines and is being implemented at their schools. Therefore, we recommend either of these two Assessments, which both require access to your Local School Wellness Policy:

- **Option A:** WellSAT 3.0 and its corresponding WELLSAT-I
- **Option B:** Wellness Policy in Action Tool (WPAT): uses results from the WellSAT 3.0 and the SHI (see school assessment options below); however, you may still input answers directly into WPAT without completing WellSAT 3.0 & SHI

SCHOOL-LEVEL HEALTH TEAMS

To effectively support, execute and measure school-level health priorities as well as implementing your Local School Wellness Policy, we recommend these two Assessments:

- **Option A:** The Centers for Disease Control's [School Health Index \(SHI\)](#) is an online self-assessment and planning tool (also available in a downloadable, printable version) that schools can use to improve their health and safety policies and programs.
- **Option B:** [Healthier Generation's Healthy Schools Assessment](#) is Healthier Generation's version of the School Health Index.



Your SHAC & School Health Team play a major role in completing an initial assessment, and updating that assessment as changes are made. Your first SHAC & School Health Team Meeting is a great place to start working on your assessment together!

Once your District and School Assessment is complete, you're ready to begin developing an **Action Plan!** Both assessments mentioned above have action planning tools available on their platforms. We recommend that you choose 2-4 areas of improvement for your action plan each school year that align with your school's wellness vision and district's local school wellness policy. When selecting items, consider ones that are **important, feasible and sustainable**, as well as one or two that are **easier to improve** in the beginning as a way to create excitement and momentum for other items that make take more time. Your second SHAC & School Health Team Meeting can be used to finish up any last minute assessment questions and begin developing an action plan.

It is important to understand that Steps 2 and 3 of the 6 Step Process will be updated continuously throughout the school year and at the beginning of each school year to ensure sustainable change happens year after year.

TIP

If schools choose to complete Healthier Generation's Healthy Schools Assessment, they are able to generate a report that can be helpful for your district SHAC when updating and assessing Local School Wellness Policy implementation.

TIP FOR SUCCESS

See Appendix for School Wellness Timeline to guide your SHAC & School Health Team.



STEPS 4-6: Explore Resources, Take Action & Celebrate Success

Your Assessment is complete and your team determined 2-4 items to focus on, which means now it's time to **Explore the Resources** needed and available in order to **Take Action** and **Celebrate Your Success!** We have compiled a list of Resources in the next section, but this list is not exhaustive.

Step 6, Celebrating Success is a great way to continue momentum for Step 1. Who doesn't like to be part of a winning team?

Schools in Louisiana have the opportunity to apply for the Department of Education's Louisiana Physical Activity Award, as well as as National award through Healthier Generation's America's Healthiest Schools.

Healthier Generation's America's Healthiest Schools: This annual recognition program has honored schools for the key role they play in advancing the health and well-being of students, staff, and families. Schools apply for recognition in up to nine topics related to student and staff health. Learn more: <https://www.healthiergeneration.org/take-action/schools/award>

Louisiana Physical Activity Award: To recognize outstanding public elementary and secondary schools that are implementing an outstanding physical activity program, the Department will be recognizing and honoring exemplary schools through the School Physical Activity Award program. Learn more: <https://www.louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/awards/louisiana-school-physical-activity-award-overview.pdf>

RESOURCES

- [Well-Ahead Louisiana School Health](#)
- [The Alliance For A Healthier Generation](#)
- [USDA Tools for Schools](#)
- [CDC Healthy Schools](#)
- [Louisiana Fit Kids](#)
- [Pennington Biomedical \(LSU\) - Louisiana Smart Snacks Meeting Recommended Criteria](#)

APPENDIX

SCHOOL WELLNESS ROSTER

Name	Position	Email Address	Phone	Responsibilities/ Resources

SCHOOL WELLNESS TIMELINE

LET'S MAKE OUR SCHOOL A HEALTHY SCHOOL!

JOIN THE HEALTHY SCHOOLS PROGRAM

START

The 6 Step Process is a circular journey where schools continuously take a status check, work on making improvements, learn from successes and challenges and keep pushing the needle forward. When schools repeat the cycle each year, their healthy changes become embedded in the culture of the school and efforts to become a healthy school are sustained.

Here's what it looks like

Your School Wellness Team can move through the 6 Step Process together. That's easy enough to do when you hold regular, quarterly meetings.

Here's how you do it



1.	2.	3.	4.
1st School Wellness Team Meeting	2nd School Wellness Team Meeting	3rd School Wellness Team Meeting	4th School Wellness Team Meeting
WHEN Within the first 2 months of joining the Healthy Schools Program	WHEN Within the first 4 months of joining the Healthy Schools Program	WHEN Within the first 6 months of joining the Healthy Schools Program	WHEN Within the first 9 months of joining the Healthy Schools Program
GOAL Build your Team and start working on your Assessment.	GOAL Move forward through your Assessment and Action Plan.	GOAL Check your progress on your Assessment and Action Plan.	GOAL Celebrate your accomplishments and plan for next school year.
AGENDA AND ACTION ITEMS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decide who will be in charge of completing each of the Modules. Print off the Assessment Guide as handout. Following the meeting, each Team Member should work on his/her assigned Module. 	AGENDA AND ACTION ITEMS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review your Assessment results. Choose a Module to focus on this school year. Identify 1-3 goals on your Action Plan to accomplish this school year. 	AGENDA AND ACTION ITEMS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Update your Assessment. Review your Action Plan progress. Apply for the National Healthy Schools Award (if applicable). 	AGENDA AND ACTION ITEMS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review your progress. Celebrate your accomplishments of the year. Choose a Module to focus on next school year.

CONTINUE

You'll want to hold these meetings every school year as you continue to make your school a healthy school!

Schools.HealthierGeneration.org

