Considerations for Advocacy Group Members

An advocacy group that has a diverse group of members can pull from those members’ different background, experience, knowledge, and skills. This will make your group even more effective in making positive changes. Below are a list of considerations and questions to help guide you in discussions with possible group members. Note that it is not necessary to make a public call for committee members. A committed group of five to ten people with a shared vision can be more effective than a larger group with competing priorities. The group can also grow as efforts progress.

Who should be in the group? Here are some suggestions:

**Parents**

Parents are a great force for change in school communities and having another parent on the committee can help galvanize the parent community.

* Have you discussed your school district’s food with other parents?
* Has another parent been publicly vocal about wanting to create change?
* Is there a parent in your school community who has been a leader concerning other wellness issues?

**Parent Teacher Organization (PTO/PTA)**

PTO/PTAs can help you create and promote school events once you are ready to do so.

* Does your school have an active PTO/PTA? If so, ask them for a representative who would like to serve as a member of your group and act as your ambassador to the larger parent community.

**TEACHERS**

A teacher may have insight into the political structure of the school or district that parents may lack. A teacher will also be able to help guide a plan for educating students about school food changes and why they are important.

* Do you know of a teacher who incorporates nutrition education into classroom instruction, brings students into the school garden, or takes classes on field trips to local farms?

**School/Community Garden Representative**

If your school or community has a garden, a person who is actively involved in the garden may also be interested in improving the quality of school meals. Furthermore, a member of the school garden group will already have relationships and experience working with the administration.

**School Board Member(s)**

A board member can be helpful in making school food part of the board agenda.

* Is there a school board member who has expressed interest and/or concern regarding student wellness?

**School Nurse**

The school nurse has a vested interest in making students healthier and can provide support and information regarding children’s nutritional health.

**Community Advocate(s)**

These types of advocates may be interested community members or representatives from a nonprofit group that aligns with healthier school food. A representative from such a group can help access community resources unknown to parents and school staff.

* Is there a nonprofit group in your area that is committed to childhood health and wellness?

**Local Business Representative(s)**

Many businesses that produce and sell healthy food make it a priority to contribute to their community in some way. A representative from the business community can help show the school district how healthy school food makes good economic sense. Representatives from larger corporations, such as Whole Foods Market, may provide access to volunteer resources and funding.

**Administration**

It is important to develop a positive working relationship with school and district administration. An administrator should have a firm understanding of the district’s wellness policy, district priorities, and budget issues. Even if an administrator can’t be a part of the group, it is important to identify a person who can act as a liaison with the rest of the administration and communicate information from your group.

* Does the school or district administration have someone who is primarily responsible for student wellness, or who has spearheaded change to improve school food or student wellness?
* If the district already has a nutrition advisory committee or a wellness committee (such as a School Health or Student Health Advisory Council (SHAC), can you work with them to see what they have accomplished, what their goals are, and how your group can align with theirs?

**Food Services Director (FSD)**

The FSD will be able to provide insight into existing school food resources, facilities, policies, and practices. The FSD can also inform you of past and current efforts to improve school food. It is important to remember, however, that the FSD’s position is extremely demanding. They must address a spectrum of needs while being responsible for food service at all the district’s schools and must field questions and concerns from individuals throughout the district. Reach out to your FSD to let them know you’re organizing an advocacy group to support healthy school food and invite them to the meetings. Let the FSD know that you will keep them informed of the group’s goals and activities even if they cannot join.