



# Water Access in Schools

## Tips for Effective Water Access in Schools Messaging

- ✓ Stress that all children deserve to go to a school that has access to safe and appealing drinking water at no charge, no matter where they live, what school they attend, or what grade they are in.
- ✓ People know drinking water is healthy, but it is good to restate health benefits as a shared value between you and your audience.
- ✓ Frame water as a basic human need, which is more powerful than presenting it as a civil right.
- ✓ Help parents understand the current water situation at their kids' school. Twenty three percent of parents are unsure of how their children get water during the school day.
- ✓ Provide examples of how schools can help increase access to water, such as through drinking fountains and bottle filling stations.

## Water Access in Schools Messages (\*Use key messages consistently and repeatedly)

- ★ **All kids, no matter where they live, should have access to water in school. Water is a basic human need—something kids cannot live without.**
  - Children spend many of their waking hours at school; schools should provide students with access to drinking water.
  - Water makes children healthier by helping their muscles, joints, and tissues; improving their digestive system; and keeping their growing bodies hydrated.<sup>1</sup>
  - Healthy, active children learn better, perform better academically, and behave better.
  - Water access is part of creating a healthy school environment that helps set children up for a healthy future.
  - More must be done to ensure that all kids have access to water in school.

## Language to Emphasize/Language to Avoid

Messages that resonate best are clear and simple. They use everyday language free of jargon and communicate shared values and emotion. Below you'll find a list of words/phrases Voices for Healthy Kids encourages you to use (left-hand column) when talking about water access in schools. Language in the right-hand column includes terms and phrases not as easily understood or impactful when looking to engage your audience.

<i>Use This Language</i>	<i>Instead of This Language</i>
✓ Clean water	✗ Potable water, high quality water
✓ Water as a basic human need	✗ Water justice, civil right
✓ Sugary drinks like sports drinks, fruit drinks with added sugar, energy drinks, and soda	✗ Sugar-sweetened beverages, SSBs
✓ Help children grow up at a healthy weight	✗ Prevent childhood obesity
✓ No charge	✗ Free

<sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Water & Nutrition. Updated October 2016. <https://www.cdc.gov/healthywater/drinking/nutrition/index.html>. Accessed August 30, 2018 and Jéquier E, Constant F. Water as an essential nutrient: the physiological basis of hydration. Eur J Clin Nutr. 2010; 64(2):115-23, doi: 10.1038/ejcn.2009.111.



## Tips for Effective Messaging to Support Public Policy Change

### 1 **Connect with supporters.**

When communicating to gain support for policy, systems, and environmental changes that help kids grow up at a healthy weight, it is important to use language that will move people to take action. By framing your message in a way that paints a picture of how the current environment makes it difficult, if not impossible, to make healthy choices, you can create a sense of urgency and the need to take action. Make sure to clarify that the change and action you're calling for is about transforming environments to make it easy for people to eat healthy and be physically active and less about creating personal behavior change.

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### 2 **Use the right words.**

While obesity is a chronic disease, most people still think of it as a personal problem with a personal solution. They believe if someone is obese or overweight, that person just needs to eat less and be more physically active. They don't immediately see the need for public policy solutions. However, when talking about people facing obesity-related diseases like diabetes and heart disease, most people agree that we need to work together to find a solution to the problem. Avoid using "obesity" and instead emphasize the health threats posed by heart disease and/or diabetes.

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### 3 **Emphasize choice.**

People are most supportive of healthy changes if they don't fear their choices will be limited. When talking about adding healthy options, stress the array of overall choices offered to people, especially parents who we are here to support, so the focus is not on the removal of unhealthy options.

### 4 **Use the right messenger.**

Messages are only as strong as the person delivering them. Is the person delivering the message credible? Are they representative of the community most affected? Do they have personal experience related to the issue? Are they respected by the audience? The best messenger needs to be determined for each situation and location. For example, when messaging on health issues, the best messenger could be a doctor, a nurse, or a patient. Make informed decisions about the most culturally appropriate messenger on an issue.

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### 5 **Stress consumer education as ONE piece of the puzzle.**

People believe education is the best way to encourage behavior change. But helping all children grow up at a healthy weight is a complex challenge and education is only one part of the solution. Reinforce consumer education as key to awareness building about the problem and solutions, but emphasize other initiatives that drive system-wide policy change. For example, with tobacco use, warning labels did a great deal to educate consumers but the change in norms and dramatic drops in smoking rates happened when environmental changes happened like prohibiting the sale to minors and making workplaces smoke-free.

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### 6 **Alleviate skepticism and build trust.**

People are very skeptical of government and framing our solutions only from that lens can prevent us from getting our message through to key audiences. Introduce policy, systems, and environmental change efforts to the public with words like "services," "resources," "partnerships," as people are more inclined to embrace this terminology instead of "regulations," "mandates," "bans," "funding," and "government."