



## **REDUCING CHILDHOOD OBESITY SUMMARY OF NEA HIN FOCUS GROUPS JANUARY-MARCH 2010**

In 2010 the NEA Health Information Network (NEA HIN) conducted a series of three focus groups with NEA members from the Western, Southeastern, and Pacific regions. These groups, supported by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, were designed to help NEA HIN and the Foundation better understand what motivators and challenges existed for NEA members to be more involved in and supportive of policies in schools that will help combat childhood obesity.

A total of thirty nine participants were distributed among three groups. Each group was marked by lively discussion and engagement and while there were some differences among the groups there was much in commonality as well.

- Many of the participants described school-based efforts to use physical activity and/or nutrition to address childhood obesity. Among the programs were:
  - After-school physical activity
  - Changes to vending machines (either changes in content or removal of machines)
  - Regulations about the nutritional content of food served in schools
- Participants believed that policy can have an influence on nutrition in the school, with two areas singled out: food selection and food preparation.
- Participants also believed that policy could have an influence on physical activity, with the focus on: physical education mandates/requirements; out-of-school time programs; and mandating/protecting recess.
- While many participants were aware of the federal mandate for Local Wellness Policies, the majority were less familiar with their district's policy
- The majority of the participants indicated that, for policies to be effective, they must be supported with funding, training, and consistent enforcement.
- Participants stated that support for policies meant:
  - funding/financial support
  - training
  - volunteerism
  - buy-in and inclusion of staff in the implementation process
  - modeling or "walking the walk"
- Support was greatest for policies that originate at the school or district level because they:
  - increase staff ownership
  - increase community support
  - increase ability to shape the policy and reflect local diversity
- Participants believed that NEA should devote attention and resources to the issue because of the importance in general of student well-being and the link between student health and student learning.