WISCONSIN WELLNESS

Putting Policy into Practice

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction
Tony Evers, PhD, State Superintendent

WISCONSIN
School Wellness

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SECOND EDITION

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INTRODUCTION

The wellness policy requirement was established by the Child Nutrition and Women, Infants, and Children Reauthorization Act of 2004, which required all public, private, and tribal schools participating in the National School Lunch Program to establish a wellness policy by school year 2006-2007. On July 29, 2016, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service released the Local School Wellness Policy Final Rule. This rule expanded the requirements to strengthen policies and increase transparency. In this resource, public school districts, private schools, and tribal schools will be referred to as "district."

The school wellness policy is a key component to providing healthier school environments that promote positive behaviors and helps students reach their full academic potential.

Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child

The health behaviors of children and adolescents are influenced by a variety of environmental factors including families, schools, communities, and the media. Schools play a particularly important role in helping students establish healthy eating habits by offering nutritious meals and providing nutrition and physical education that support the development of positive behaviors. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child (WSCC) model is an expansion and update of the Coordinated School Health approach. The purpose of the WSCC model is to establish greater alignment, integration, and collaboration between health and education across the school setting to improve each child's cognitive, physical, social, and emotional development.

The school wellness policy is a key component to providing healthier school environments that promote positive behaviors and helps students reach their full academic potential. The wellness policy creates a framework that provides direction and guidance for school staff and students while offering information to families and the community. Adopting a wellness policy that embraces the WSCC model ensures a collaborative approach to learning and health.

Review of Wisconsin School Wellness Policies

In August 2017, the Wisconsin Obesity Prevention Initiative (OPI) at the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute conducted a review of school wellness policies from 401 out of the 440 Wisconsin public school districts and independent charters that receive federal reimbursement for their school meal programs. The OPI reviewed each district's wellness policy for breadth of content and strength of language using 74 research-based best practices categorized under six content areas. Each policy was scored and returned to the district. Breadth of content scores represent the percent of best practices that are addressed in the policy, and higher scores reflect policies that included best practices across all content areas. Strength of language scores represent the percent of best practices that a policy requires, and higher scores reflect polices that used direct and clear language such as required, must, and mandatory. The results summarized below are the statewide average breadth of content and strength of language scores. The results indicate that while Wisconsin district wellness policies are addressing some of the best practices in each content area, the language in the policies is weak, tentative, or suggestive.

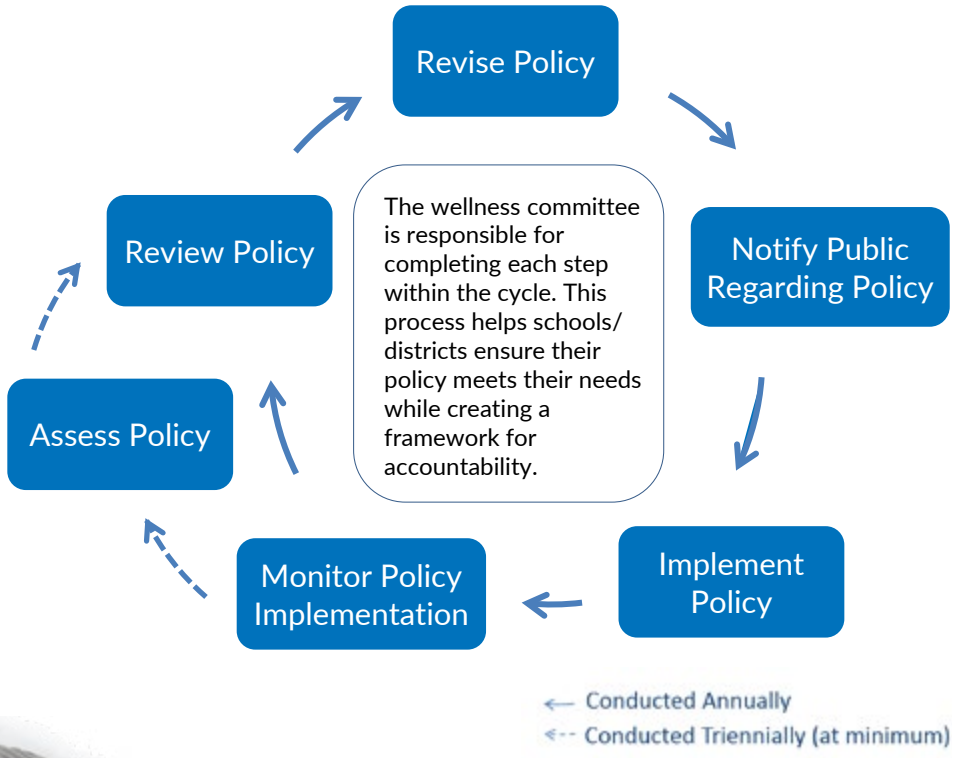
OPI Local Wellness Policy Evaluation Project, August 2017

Content Area	Breadth of Content % Best Practices Addressed	Strength of Language % Best Practices Required
Nutrition Education	82.5	33.8
School Meals	32.2	16.8
Competitive Foods and Beverages	40.4	11.8
Physical Education and Physical Activity	23.9	11.5
Implementation, Evaluation, and Communication	20.7	19.2
Wellness Promotion and Marketing	43.7	6.0
Overall Score	34.2	14.3

The Wisconsin Health Atlas, Local Wellness Policy webpage (wihealthatlas.org/lwp) has information regarding the Local Wellness Policy Evaluation Project including regional results, resources, and model policy language.

About This Resource

This resource is designed to assist districts with developing a comprehensive wellness policy that incorporates the new requirements while establishing a framework for accountability. In addition, this resource also includes best practices that will assist schools with creating and maintaining a strong wellness policy. The wellness policy should be a living document that considers the needs of the whole child while addressing the unique needs of the school. By following the cycle outlined below, schools can strengthen their wellness policy and create a health-promoting environment.



WELLNESS POLICY COMPONENTS

Policy Leadership: Who's at the Table

Policy Leadership

A designated wellness leader is critical to successful implementation of a school wellness policy. This person is responsible for ensuring that health policies and practices are enforced and progress is made in attaining wellness policy goals. In addition, the designated wellness leader can facilitate collaboration among school staff, families, and community to improve student health and academic achievement.

MINIMUM REQUIREMENT

Districts must identify a person as the wellness leader who is responsible for wellness policy oversight in the written policy. Districts may elect to specify the position or title of the individual instead of a person's name.

Wellness Committee

A school wellness committee is a key element to developing and sustaining a successful wellness policy. A school wellness committee includes individuals interested in supporting the health of students and staff.

A wellness committee should include diverse representation from the school and community such as:

- Parents
- Students
- School nutrition personnel
- Teachers, especially physical education and health
- School nurse
- School administrators
- School board members
- Community health professionals

Once the wellness committee members are identified, it is recommended that the school make available to the public a list of the wellness committee members, their relationship to the school, and school-based contact information for the wellness committee leader. This information will help the wellness committee maintain communication between meetings.

MINIMUM REQUIREMENT

Districts must include language related to permitting the public to participate in the development, implementation, and review of the wellness policy. Districts must allow participation and include a written plan for involving the public.

BEST PRACTICE

Conduct four wellness committee meetings throughout the school year. Consider setting a regular schedule of meetings as this will help ensure committee members are able to attend.

Wellness Policy Content

The wellness policy must include goals that support the health and well-being of its students. Districts must ensure stakeholder participation in the development and updates of the policy, as well as periodically assess and disclose to the public the compliance with the wellness policy. In addition, districts must establish minimum content requirements for the wellness policy. The policy must include:

- Goals for nutrition promotion and education.
- Goals for physical activity and other school based activities that promote wellness.
- Standards and nutrition guidelines for all foods and beverages available for sale and provided on the school campus during the school day.

As the wellness committee develops the wellness policy, start by determining the desired goals. A goal is something you are trying to achieve or do. Goals are not measurable, but rather broad statements that are related to longer-term outcomes. Districts must consider evidenced-based strategies when developing goals for nutrition promotion, nutrition education, physical activity, and other school-based activities that promote wellness.

Once the wellness committee has established goals, decide on objectives and activities that are needed to accomplish these goals. Unlike a goal, an objective should be measurable, so consider how to evaluate your objectives and activities to assess progress towards meeting your goals. Objectives should include specific statements that describe a strategy for implementation. In addition, including strong language in the wellness policy ensures that guidelines can be enforced. Include words like require, must, and insist. Statements that are vague and include weak language are difficult to enforce. Therefore, avoid using words like may, encourage, suggest, and urge in your wellness policy.

BEST PRACTICE

Develop wellness defined objectives using the SMART approach.

- Specific: Include detailed and well-defined language in the objective.
- Measureable: Define numbers and quantities as a means for evaluation.
- Achievable: Ensure objectives are feasible.
- Realistic: Consider constraints such as resources, personnel, costs, and time.
- Timely: Identify a timeframe to complete the objective.

MINIMUM REQUIREMENT

Districts must include standards and nutrition guidelines for all foods and beverages sold to students on the school campus during the school day that are consistent with federal regulations.

Nutrition Guidelines

Nutrition Standards for All Foods Sold

Eating well can make a positive difference in a student's ability to achieve in school. National school nutrition standards reflect the latest knowledge about health and nutrition, ensuring that meals and snacks are nutritious and help children maintain a healthy weight. The wellness policy is a document the school community can reference to learn about the nutrition standards for school meals and other foods available in schools.

Foods sold to students during the school day on the school campus as part of a la carte, school stores, vending, and fundraising must adhere to the Nutrition Standards for All Foods Sold in Schools Rule, also referred to as Smart Snacks (dpi.wi.gov/school-nutrition/program-requirements/smart-snacks). The Department of Public Instruction (DPI) School Nutrition Team has developed the Smart Snacks Tracking Tool (dpi.wi.gov/school-nutrition/program-requirements/smart-snacks) for tracking competitive foods and beverages sold regularly by the food service department, school store, vending machines, etc.

Fundraisers

Districts rely on fundraisers to raise money for different activities, events, and equipment. The Wisconsin DPI allows schools two fundraiser exemptions per student organization each school year. An exempt fundraiser may sell foods and beverages that are not allowable under the Smart Snacks rule but this may not occur in the meal service area during meal service times. Each fundraiser may last no more than two consecutive weeks.

To ensure that schools are in compliance with the state fundraising exemption policy, the DPI School Nutrition Team has developed tools for schools to use for documentation of competitive food and beverage fundraisers. The Compliant Fundraiser Tracking Tool is used for tracking food fundraisers that are compliant with Smart Snacks standards. The Exempt Fundraiser Tracking Tool is used for tracking non-Smart Snacks compliant exempt food fundraisers. These two tracking tools can be found on the DPI School Nutrition Smart Snacks webpage (dpi.wi.gov/school-nutrition/national-school-lunch-program/smart-snacks).

BEST PRACTICE

School fundraisers should communicate the same messages that support the goals of a healthy school environment. Plan healthy fundraisers that sell nonfood items such as gift wrapping paper or foods that meet the Smart Snacks standards, such as fruit and bottled water. In addition, physical activity fundraisers such as fun runs and walk-a-thons are great for all ages and promote healthy behaviors.

MINIMUM REQUIREMENT

Districts must include language that only allows for the marketing of food and beverages on the school campus during the school day that are consistent with the Smart Snacks standards.

Food and Beverage Marketing

According to USDA, food and beverage marketing is prevalent in schools, and the majority of foods and beverages marketed to children are low in nutrition value and high in fat and sodium. Many of the foods and beverages marketed to children contribute to poor diet quality, high calorie intake, and excess weight gain.

BEST PRACTICE

Marketing products with low-nutritional value can undermine nutrition education and health promoting efforts of the school. Advertise only foods and beverages that support healthy lifestyles, such as fruits, vegetables, and plain water.

Food marketing commonly includes oral, written, or graphic statements made for the purpose of promoting the sale of a food or beverage product. Therefore, the marketing standards apply to items such as posters, flyers, and other printed materials that advertise food and beverage products. It also applies to prizes or other premium items given to students to promote a product, cups used for beverage dispensing, and various equipment, such as the exterior of vending machines, score boards, coolers, trashcans, and other food service equipment. All food or beverage products depicted on items and equipment on the school campus during the school day must meet the Smart Snacks standards. While these are the minimum standards, schools may choose to include more stringent food marketing restrictions in their wellness policy.

The marketing standards do not require that districts immediately replace menu boards, coolers, and other food service equipment that depict noncompliant products. It also is not intended to require that districts remove or replace existing vending machines and scoreboards in order to comply. However, as districts consider new contracts and as equipment needs to be replaced and updated, the purchasing decisions should reflect the marketing standards. It is also important to note that food-based fundraisers exempt under the DPI policy must still adhere to the food and beverage marketing guidelines.

Nutrition Standards for All Foods Offered/Provided

Districts must establish nutrition guidelines for all food and beverages offered and provided to students. These nutrition standards apply to food at classroom parties, school celebrations, and foods offered as rewards and incentives. Districts are encouraged to set policies that support lifelong healthy eating habits.

USDA does not delineate a set of standards for foods not sold, but instead has mandated that schools establish their own standards. Districts have the discretion to adopt standards that conform to federal school meals and Smart Snack standards or to adopt more or less stringent standards.

MINIMUM REQUIREMENT

Districts must include standards for all foods and beverages offered, but not sold to students on the school campus during the school day.

BEST PRACTICE

Use an alternative reward system, such as stickers, additional time for recess, or school themed merchandise to recognize student achievement.

Nutrition Promotion

The school environment should encourage students to make healthy eating choices. Districts can engage in a variety of activities that promote healthy behaviors.

Smarter Lunchrooms

The Smarter Lunchrooms Movement brings evidence from the fields of economics, marketing, and psychology into the school cafeteria. Smarter Lunchrooms strategies are evidence-based, simple, low-cost, or no-cost changes that encourage students to make healthy foods an easy choice. By implementing Smarter Lunchrooms strategies, schools can see less waste, higher participation, more satisfied students, and increased consumption of important nutrient-rich foods.

The following are strategies that improve the likelihood that students will make a healthier choice:

- Creatively naming fruits, vegetables, and targeted entrées.
- Training staff to prompt students to select fruits and vegetables.
- Bundling grab and go meals that include fruit and vegetable items.

The Wisconsin School Meals Rock! webpage (dpi.wi.gov/wisconsin-school-meals-rock) has several resources to assist districts with promoting their school meals program.

Additional nutrition promotion activities include:

- Offering farm to school activities, such as farm visits and school gardens.
- Providing participatory activities such as contests, surveys, promotions, food demonstrations, and taste tests.
- Including nutrition and health signage or displays in the cafeteria, dining areas, classrooms, and hallways.
- Offering information to families about health, nutrition, and tips for planning nutritious meals.

MINIMUM REQUIREMENT

Districts must include goals for nutrition promotion in the wellness policy. At a minimum, districts must review Smarter Lunchrooms tools and strategies.

MINIMUM REQUIREMENT

Districts must include goals for nutrition education in the wellness policy.

Nutrition Education

Teaching nutrition to children and adolescents throughout their educational experience is key to developing healthy eating habits. Nutrition education is designed to help students:

- Improve health literacy by learning about essential nutrients, the benefits of healthy eating, and safe food preparation.
- Gain nutrition-related skills, such as understanding food labels, comprehending nutrition information, and evaluating commercial food advertising.
- Assess personal eating habits by using food guidance systems, such as *MyPlate* and the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*.

It is not required that the wellness policy include a specific number of hours for nutrition education, but instead it is recommended that nutrition education be part of a comprehensive health education curricula and integrated into other core subjects including math, science, language arts, and social sciences. The USDA Team Nutrition (fns.usda.gov/tn/team-nutrition) and Wisconsin Team Nutrition (dpi.wi.gov/team-nutrition/nutrition-education) have developed resources to assist teachers with incorporating nutrition education into the school day.

The school cafeteria is an excellent place to reinforce nutrition education messages. The cafeteria can act as a classroom where students learn healthy eating habits. There are several ways to connect nutrition concepts learned in a student's classroom to the cafeteria, including implementation of a Harvest of the Month Program or displaying posters featuring nutrition messages. In addition, school garden activities such as planting, harvest, preparing, and tasting garden-produced food is an evidenced-based strategy that has been shown to improve children's consumption of fruits and vegetables.

Home environments are extremely influential on children's eating behavior. Families serve as roles models, and home activities should promote good nutrition. Schools can distribute nutrition education to families using a variety of strategies:

- Distribute a newsletter highlighting wellness activities at the district. Include healthy eating and physical activity tips for families to use at home.
- Hold a district health fair to highlight the importance of nutrition and physical activity. Consider inviting local health professionals to provide presentations.
- Create a webpage on the district's website dedicated to nutrition and physical activity. Include healthy recipes, activities for families, and wellness information.
- Hang posters, such as USDA's Ten Tips Nutrition Education Series (choosemyplate.gov/ten-tips) where family members and other school visitors can see them.

BEST PRACTICE

Nutrition education should extend beyond the classroom and utilize multiple channels of communication. Teachers, school nutrition professionals, family members, and peers all play a role in promoting healthy eating habits. Nutrition education taught in the classroom should be linked with the school food environment and home.

MINIMUM REQUIREMENT

Districts must include goals for physical activity in the wellness policy.

Physical Activity

Many adolescents are getting less than the recommended 60 minutes of daily physical activity. The increased use of technology, such as video games and cell phones, along with busy family schedules has led to a more sedentary lifestyle. Regular physical activity is important for promoting lifelong health and well-being and preventing various health conditions.

There are several recommendations for fitting physical activity into the school day including recess, classroom-based physical activity breaks, and opportunities for physical activity before and after school. Active Schools: Core 4+, developed by the DPI, is a set of evidenced-based strategies to increase student physical activity and improve academic learning. The DPI Physical Education and Activity webpage (dpi.wi.gov/sspw/physical-education) has information about Active Schools: Core 4+ and other strategies to increase physical activity. Fuel Up to Play 60 (fueluptoplay60.com) is a health and wellness program created by the National Dairy Council and National Football League in collaboration with the USDA. The program provides an online Playbook full of action strategies to improve eating and physical activity at school.

BEST PRACTICE

Withholding physical activity as a punishment should be prohibited. Ensure that students get the physical activity they need by implementing alternative consequences to withholding recess and physical education class.

Physical Education

Physical education is not required to be included in the wellness policy. However, a physical education program provides an opportunity for students to acquire the knowledge and skills to lead an active lifestyle. The benefits of a quality physical education program include improved physical fitness, self-discipline, increased self-confidence, and stress reduction. Physical education opportunities complement a healthy school environment, and schools are encouraged to offer physical education for every grade level.

MINIMUM REQUIREMENT

Districts must include goals for other school-based activities that support wellness in the wellness policy.

Other School Based Activities That Support Wellness

Wellness policy activities can and should be integrated across the entire school setting rather than limited to the cafeteria and school physical activity facilities. Districts can take a coordinated approach to developing and implementing a wellness policy by addressing nutrition and physical activity through health education, physical education, school nutrition services, the physical environment, family engagement, community involvement, health services, and social services.

Employee Wellness

While school wellness programs typically focus on student health, staff wellness is just as important. An employee wellness program is an essential component of school health. These programs can address health risk behaviors and can help to enhance productivity, improve morale, decrease absenteeism, increase retention, and lower health care costs. It is important for school staff to promote and model healthy eating and physical activity habits.

To get started, offer activities that are easy to implement and provide visibility at little or no cost. Consider conducting an employee survey to obtain feedback on types of wellness activities to offer. The following are activities that districts can implement to promote staff wellness:

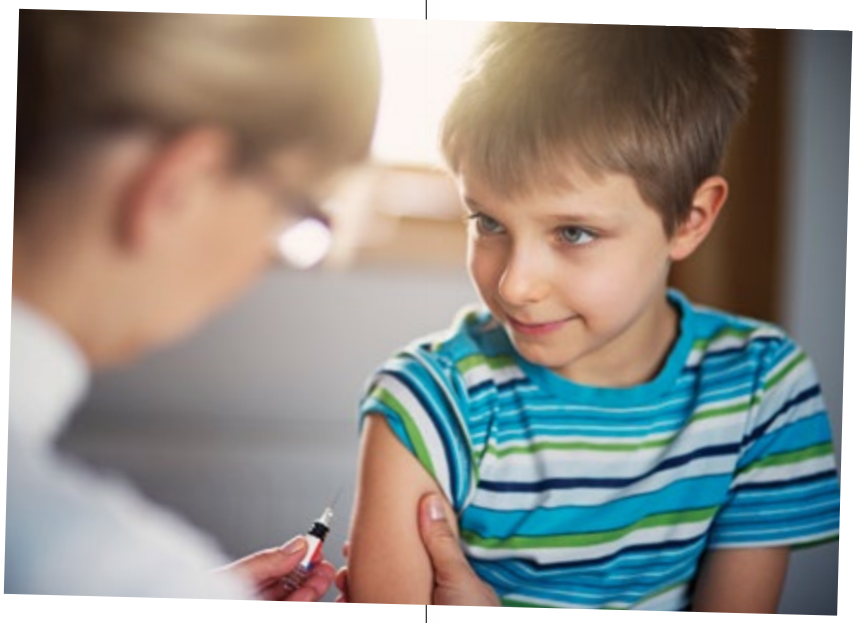
- Organization of employee physical activity clubs.
- Administration of flu shots at school.
- Periodic screening at school for blood pressure, blood cholesterol, body mass index, and other health indicators.
- Annual administration of individual health risk appraisals to help staff members establish personal health improvement goals.
- Educational activities for school staff members on healthy lifestyle behaviors, such as cooking or meal planning classes.

Family Engagement and Community Involvement

It is important for families to be involved with district activities as this helps to foster positive engagement with educators and supports the development and health of students. According to the CDC, the relationship between school staff and families cuts across and reinforces student health and learning in multiple settings – at home, in school, out-of-school programs, and in the community. Districts should consider partnering with community groups and local businesses interested in health-related activities. These organizations may be willing to volunteer and donate resources for the district's wellness initiatives.

The following are activities that schools can implement to encourage family engagement and community involvement:

- Create a system that links families to community health and social service resources, activities, and events.
- Collaborate with community partners to provide health services at school that meet the needs of students and their families such as dental services, immunizations, and health screenings.
- Make school facilities available for use by community organizations that will host activities for students and their parents outside of school hours.



BEST PRACTICE

Use multiple modes of communication to connect with families and alert them to upcoming school events. Communication methods include email, phone, social media, and text messages.

MINIMUM REQUIREMENT

Districts must conduct an assessment of the wellness policy, at a minimum, every three years. The triennial assessment should include compliance with the wellness policy, how the wellness policy compares to model wellness policies, and progress made in attaining the goals of the wellness policy.

Implementation, Assessment, and Updates

Implementation

Developing a strong wellness policy does not automatically mean that it will be implemented. The key to implementing a wellness policy is your action plan. Your action plan not only identifies the priorities of the wellness committee, but can list additional resources for meeting your goals. It is important to remember that implementation of the policy should be district-wide. Therefore, getting support from students, parents, and school staff is critical to successful implementation of a wellness policy.

The Alliance for a Healthier Generation Healthy Schools Program (schools.healthiergeneration.org) has several tools and resources to assist with implementing healthy policies and practices at your school. The Healthy Schools Program has adopted the CDC's School Health Index to help schools assess their wellness environment. Once completed, schools are able to develop a customizable action plan that provides implementation strategies for your wellness initiatives.

Assessment

An assessment of the wellness policy can determine if the goals are implemented as planned. In addition, the assessment can address the effectiveness of the policy and identify new and changing needs of students and staff.

There are assessment tools available that can determine the implementation and compliance with your school wellness policy:

- Wisconsin Team Nutrition: Local Wellness Policy Report Card Online Tool (dpi.wi.gov/school-nutrition/wellness-policy) – An online tool for districts to use for assessing their compliance with the wellness policy as well as evaluating progress made in attaining the goals of the wellness policy.
- WellSAT 2.0 (wellsat.org/) – An online tool for districts to rate the quality of language in their written wellness policy.
- Center for Disease Control and Prevention: School Health Index (cdc.gov/assessing-improving-school-health/shi/index.html) - An online self-assessment and planning tool that schools can use to improve their health and safety policies and programs.

Updates

Using the above tools will help to assess where your school needs to update the wellness policy. Districts should review their wellness policy annually and update as needed. The policy should be updated as the district changes, emergence of new science, and/or issuance of new federal guidance.

Reporting and Records

Public Reporting

Communicating with the public about your wellness policy promotes transparency and ensures families have regular and easy access to information about the wellness environment of the district their children attend.

Districts have the ability to determine the optimal time for distributing wellness policy information to the public. In addition, districts have the flexibility to determine the best method for communicating this information to the public. Examples of public notification include:

- Posting the wellness policy on the district website and sending a notification to families on how they may obtain a copy or access the policy.
- Display the wellness policy at each school site, such as in the front office or near the main entrance.
- Present information on the wellness policy during a meeting with the Parent Teacher Association/Organization or other interested groups.
- Notify the public through local newspapers or media that link to a webpage with the wellness policy.

BEST PRACTICE

It is important to provide basic information regarding the wellness policy early in the school year. In addition, consider communicating on a regular basis on how individuals can get involved and provide updates about school wellness events and activities.

Record Keeping

Districts that participate in the USDA Child Nutrition Programs are required to undergo an Administrative Review every three years. As part of the Administrative Review, the state agency must assess the school's compliance with the Local School Wellness Policy Final Rule. To assess compliance, the state agency will review the following school records:

- A copy of the most current wellness policy.
- Documentation on how the policy and assessments are made available to the public.
- The most recent assessment demonstrating implementation of the wellness policy.
- Documentation of efforts to review and update the policy, including who was involved in the process and how stakeholders were notified of their ability to participate.

Administrative Review findings must be addressed through documented corrective action that permanently corrects any deficiency and brings the wellness policy into compliance.

MINIMUM REQUIREMENT

Districts must make available to the public the wellness policy, including any updates on an annual basis, and the results of the Triennial Assessment.

SUCCESS STORY

We came across story after story of staff members embracing health and wellness and sharing the passion for healthy choices with their students.

Wellness Makes a Difference!

By Amy Miller
Community Education and Recreation Director
District Coordinator of Advanced Learning
Oregon School District

The Oregon School District is proud to have earned Wisconsin School Health Awards, National Alliance for a Healthier Generation's Healthy Schools Awards, and the USDA HealthierUS School Challenge Awards in all of our schools. We are even more proud of the changes we have made in our schools to make our learning environments healthier for students, staff, and families!

Our story begins with a desire to turn wellness into a positive term where everyone in our district and community understood that "Healthy Active Kids Are Better Learners." One of our first steps was to find staff members, classes, and specific activities promoting healthy eating and activity throughout the school day to help kids to be "Ready to Learn." We came across story after story of staff members embracing health and wellness and sharing the passion for healthy choices with their students. We began sharing the stories of what we saw and heard with our community and within our school. Also during this time, the Wisconsin DPI introduced us to the Healthy Schools Framework of Best Practices. The introduction came at a perfect time for us, as we could look at our schools individually to determine what areas of health and wellness were already fully implemented and the next areas to focus on. We used the assessment tool to once again celebrate all the things we were doing well and to discover what next steps could be targeted. We used the achievement of our first awards as a showcase to highlight the changes we had made and to illustrate how the changes benefited our students, staff, and our community. The DPI and the Alliance provided us with the tools we needed to make the health and wellness changes that have benefited our students and staff to maximize learning and to support health for a lifetime.

Our wellness policy is no longer a policy that is reviewed every few years. Instead our policy has come to life in all our buildings.

Throughout this process, it has been exciting to watch the growth of health and wellness in our schools and in our community. Those first small steps taken by a few staff members to highlight the great things we were doing to support kids to be "Ready to Learn" helped create awareness and understanding that "Healthy Active Kids are Better Learners". Our wellness policy is no longer a policy that is reviewed every few years. Instead our policy has come to life in all our buildings. In the Oregon School District, a visitor can see kids out and active before school, additional bike racks at all buildings, school gardens in 5 of our 6 buildings (with the 6th coming this spring), active classrooms, healthy snacks, extra recess, active indoor recess, and cafeterias where our food service is using marketing techniques to promote healthy choices for our students. We are now partnering with community groups so all students have access to healthy snacks every day, snacks and meals over long breaks, and lunches in the summer. We are also partnering with our community wellness coalition to offer community events throughout the year for children, families, and community members. We look back over the past few years and celebrate all the positive changes that have been made to benefit our students and to support all of our students to be "Ready to Learn."

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