

# WISCONSIN SCHOOL WELLNESS

## Moving Into Action





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**School Wellness**

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# INTRODUCTION

## Healthy Students are Better Learners

Student health encompasses a wide range of complex topics including physical health, safety, mental health, and social-emotional health. Evidence shows that student health is closely linked to academic achievement, including academic performance, classroom behavior, and cognitive skills and attitudes (Center for Disease Control and Prevention 2014). Specifically, physical activity can positively affect concentration, memory and behavior; is related to lower levels of anxiety and stress; and associated with better math performance. Healthy eating is linked to improved student behavior, lower absenteeism, and reduced tardiness. Furthermore, eating breakfast at school is linked to greater improvement in standardized test scores and math grades.

The health of children and adolescents are influenced by a variety of environmental factors including families, schools, communities, and the media. Schools play an important role in helping students establish healthy eating and physical activity habits. It is imperative that students develop healthy behaviors early so they may be successful and contribute to healthy communities in the future. There are many ways for schools to support the development of healthy behaviors. Schools can offer nutritious meals, provide nutrition and physical education, and allow opportunities for students to be physically active throughout the day while providing a safe and supportive classroom environment.

The school wellness policy is a key component to supporting healthier school environments. The wellness policy should contain a variety of goals and activities that contribute to the health and well-being of the school's students. The school wellness policy should incorporate SMART goals and objectives, which means they are specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and time-bound.

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



Adopting strong and directive language within a wellness policy provides staff, students, families, and the broader school community with direction and guidance. When writing a policy, the use of strong, directive language ensures the policy can be implemented and enforced. Include words like require, must, and insist and avoid using words like may, encourage, suggest, and urge in your wellness policy.

Wellness policies should establish healthy practices within the school community to encourage healthful choices. However, strong policies don't ensure the creation of healthier school environments. Policies are ineffective in eliciting change if they are not communicated, implemented, and enforced. Developing an action plan may help schools move policy into practice. Action plans should include a list of specific tasks needed to complete an activity, a lead person or people who will be responsible for ensuring tasks are completed, a date for when the tasks will be done, the resources needed to accomplish the tasks, and a defined measure of success.



# SCHOOL WELLNESS COLLABORATIVE

In September 2018, Wisconsin Team Nutrition selected five school districts from Cooperative Educational Service Agencies (CESA) 2 and 3 to receive \$2,500 in funding to support school wellness initiatives. The participating districts were Barneveld, Darlington, Iowa-Grant, Juda, and River Ridge. The goal of the collaborative was to measure the effectiveness of training, technical assistance, and financial support on improving the implementation of school wellness initiatives.

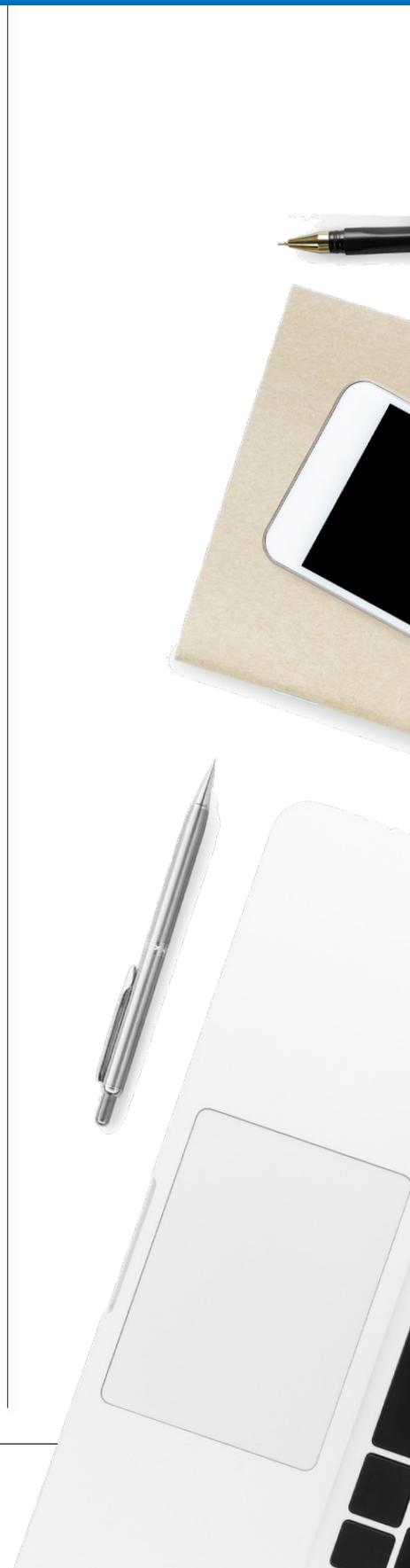
As part of the project, districts were required to send four to six wellness team members to a day-long workshop. During the workshop, the teams received training on best practices in school wellness. Additionally, teams evaluated the implementation of school wellness best practice strategies and identified strategies to implement. Over the course of the 2018-2019 school year, the districts were required to convene wellness committee meetings at a minimum of three times and implement self-identified best practices.

## *Measuring Wellness Implementation*

All school districts completed an adapted version of the Wellness School Assessment Tool for Implementation (WellSAT-i) at the workshop and at the end of the 2018-2019 school year. The WellSAT-i allows districts to measure the degree of implementation of practices from five content areas: Policy and Environment, Nutrition Services, Health Education, Physical Activity, and Employee Wellness and Community Engagement. Policy items were rated on the extent to which each was implemented in the school district (i.e., not implemented; partially implemented; or fully implemented). Additionally, three districts that did not receive training or funding completed the WellSAT-i and served as a control group (Clinton Community, Johnson Creek, and Pecatonica).

## *Results*

Overall, between pre-implementation and post-implementation, districts participating in the collaborative improved their total combined scores on average by 15.4 points. The control districts on average improved their total scores by 5.7 points. The wellness collaborative districts saw the biggest gains in the Policy and Environment, Physical Activity, and Employee Wellness and Community Engagement categories. The successful strategies implemented by collaborative districts are described within this resource.



# WELLNESS COLLABORATIVE BEST PRACTICES

## Environment and Policy

### Active Wellness Committee

The wellness committee can be the driving force behind the implementation of all other wellness-related practices. A strong wellness committee will consist of school staff, family members, and students that are representative of the school community. It is important that members of the committee have diverse perspectives and skills. The committee should meet at least four times per year, define roles and responsibilities of committee members, and define overarching wellness goals for the committee.

Cost: 0-\$

Time Commitment: ⌚ ⌚



### Wellness Collaborative Success

Wellness committees participating in the collaborative met four to eight times during the 2018-2019 school year. Districts reported that prior to participating in the collaborative their wellness committees only met once or twice a year. All districts indicated this change was instrumental to the success of their wellness initiatives. In fact, Juda School District reported that the most beneficial outcome of the collaborative was getting staff together that do not typically work together. This has opened up new ideas and new relationships that will help with future projects.

## Non-food Celebrations

Celebrations are common in schools, especially elementary schools. Food-based celebrations and rewards have become ingrained in school culture. However, food in the classroom presents a number of concerns regarding student health, equity, and safety. Allowing treats to enter the classroom for birthdays, holidays, and accomplishments sends a message that food is a requirement for celebrations. Celebrations that encourage healthy habits should be used to avoid unhealthy messages. Additionally, consider students of families who may not be able to afford providing birthday treats or students with life-threatening food allergies who are being exposed to dangerous foods.

Implement a policy that prohibits food as a reward and restricts food and beverages from being provided to students outside of meal programs. Work with school staff and parents to develop alternative ideas for celebrations. These can include healthy habits such as extra recess, non-food prizes, or the allowance of an alternative special activity (e.g., pajama day or hat day). Promote the policy positively by highlighting the benefits of healthy celebrations and the goal to keep all students feeling safe and supported in schools.

**Cost:** \$-\$\$

**Time Commitment:** ⌚

### *Wellness Collaborative Success*

River Ridge School District invested around \$500 in the creation of a birthday cart. Instead of bringing in birthday treats, students are able to select an item from the cart to use in the classroom. Items included activity cards, carpet hopscotch, hula hoops, balls, and more. Classrooms are able to use the physical activity materials during the time that would usually be spent eating a birthday treat. The cost to maintain the cart will be minimal. If needed, the district will ask for donations from community groups in order to restock materials.





## Non-food Fundraisers

Fundraisers are often necessary to raise money for special events or student groups. As such, food fundraisers are common in schools, especially middle and high schools where students are making their own food and purchasing decisions. Similar to food-based celebrations, food fundraisers send mixed messages to students on healthy habits. Also, these fundraisers can further heighten differences in socio-economic status and endanger or alienate students with food allergies.

Schools should implement a policy that, at minimum, restricts food fundraisers to adhere to the Smart Snacks in Schools nutrition standards. Schools could elect to further strengthen fundraising policies by including language to prohibit food fundraisers from being sold during the school day or at all. Ensure the school community is aware of the fundraising policy by providing education surrounding the policy to all organizations that participate in fundraising and offer a list of alternative fundraising ideas. Promote the policy positively and share the alternative fundraising ideas through multiple channels of communication to ensure the school community is aware.

**Cost:** 0

**Time Commitment:** ⌚-⌚⌚

### *Wellness Collaborative Success*

River Ridge School District looked at their fundraising efforts and determined a number of unhealthy food-based fundraisers were being done. The district worked to ensure all fundraisers were compliant with the Smart Snacks in School rule as well as eliminated some food-based fundraisers, such as the Friday morning doughnut fundraiser.

To learn about the Smart Snacks in School nutrition standards and requirements, visit [dpi.wi.gov/school-nutrition/program-requirements/smart-snacks](https://dpi.wi.gov/school-nutrition/program-requirements/smart-snacks).

# Nutrition Services

## Meal Appeal

Serving appealing school meals can help influence students to participate in the school meal programs and select healthful food choices. Research from around the country has been done to identify strategies that can increase participation and improve selection of healthy foods that are no-cost or low-cost. Strategies can be selected from eight categories: lunchroom atmosphere, fruit, vegetables, salad, white milk, reimbursable meals, student involvement, and school community involvement. School nutrition professionals can identify specific strategies to implement by completing the Meal Appeal Self-Assessment ([dpi.wi.gov/wisconsin-school-meals-rock/school-nutrition-professionals](http://dpi.wi.gov/wisconsin-school-meals-rock/school-nutrition-professionals)).

**Cost:** \$-\$\$

**Time Commitment:** ⌚

### *Wellness Collaborative Success*

Barneveld School District identified the need to increase meal appeal in their schools. Signage and posters were added in the schools to encourage healthy food choices. A television was added outside of the high school lunchroom to allow for rolling information about menus and nutrition to encourage meal participation. Additionally, a salad bar was started in the elementary school. The district spent less than \$1,000 in funding provided by the Wellness Collaborative to implement these activities.

## Student Wellness Advisory Group

A Student Wellness Advisory Group (SWAG) provides students the opportunity to get involved with wellness initiatives to create healthier school environments. Specifically, SWAGs can provide students a voice in what and how activities in the school are implemented. Student members of SWAGs can work to improve the school meal environment, influence menu items, and create healthy changes in their schools. They can also make recommendations for activity offerings and identify topics of interest for potential speakers.

Invite a group of six to eight students to serve as SWAG representatives. If necessary, receive approval from the school principal/administrator. Schedule routine meetings at times that work for SWAG members and set goals.

**Cost:** \$

**Time Commitment:** ⌚-⌚⌚

### *Wellness Collaborative Success*

Darlington Community School District started a SWAG during the 2018-2019 school year. The group met multiple times throughout the year to address a number of activities. Activities included wellness competitions for staff, classroom movement breaks in the high school, and morning activities for students and staff.





# Physical Activity

## Active Classrooms

Active classrooms integrate movement breaks, also known as brain breaks, into the classroom. It is a way to increase the amount of physical activity students receive during the school day. A brain break can be incorporated in as little as three to five minutes, but teachers may elect to implement breaks of 10 to 15 minutes. These regular breaks improve learning as they provide students time to process information learned as well as stimulate areas of the brain.

To implement active classrooms, start by educating school staff on the importance of physical activity breaks. Provide staff with resources and training to implement physical activity breaks in the classroom. Continue to provide staff with new strategies, resources, and support to implement brain breaks in the classroom.

**Cost:** 0-\$

**Time Commitment:** ⌚

### *Wellness Collaborative Success*

Barneveld Elementary School implemented active classroom strategies in their K-5 classrooms. The school nurse trained teachers on different exercises and helpful apps that could be used in the classrooms. Additionally, the nurse implemented playground challenges. Students had the opportunity to participate in an exercise challenge each week on the playground. Classrooms that had an 80 percent or higher participation rate earned a “star” that was placed on a chart outside the classroom door. The challenges were so successful that most classrooms had 100 percent participation!



## Active Before and After School

School districts can provide a wide variety of before- and after-school programs that include physical activity in addition to competitive sports. These programs can ensure that all students are provided with the opportunity to participate in physical activity regardless of athletic skills or abilities. Programming outside of competitive sports can offer a wider variety of physical activity opportunities that may result in increased student participation.

Before- and after-school activities can benefit not only students, but staff, families, and the broader school community. Programs can include school-community recreation programs, community education, and education-focused clubs and programs. A school district can run the activity programs or partner with community organizations.

**Cost: \$\$-\$\$\$**

**Time Commitment:** ⌚⌚ - ⌚⌚⌚

### *Wellness Collaborative Success*

Darlington took steps to get students moving before school by providing an “open gym” for middle and high school students. Students were able to arrive to school and enter the gym and participate in physical activity. Wellness Collaborative funding was used to support teacher stipends to ensure the gym had adequate supervision. On average, over 50 students participated in open gym daily. Due to this success, Darlington plans to continue this opportunity through funding provided by their Community Fund.



## Staff Engagement

### Staff Wellness Programs

Staff wellness is a critical component of creating a healthy school environment. Not only are healthy, active employees more likely to incur lower health costs, but staff who participate in health promotion activities are also more productive (Mitchell et al. 2013). Additionally, wellness programs can result in improved physical activity, higher fruit and vegetable consumption, lower fat intake, and a reduction in body weight (Mattke et al. 2013)

**Cost:** \$\$-\$\$\$

**Time Commitment:** ⌚⌚ - ⌚⌚⌚

#### *Wellness Collaborative Success*

Iowa-Grant School District used their funding to offer a variety of educational opportunities to students and staff. The district implemented Wellness Wednesday activities for their staff. A total of ten live sessions were offered allowing staff to participate in yoga, financial wellness, and self-defense trainings. Additionally, wellness videos were promoted to staff for those uninterested or unable to attend in-person activities. Finally, staff and students benefited from in-person mental wellness presentations.

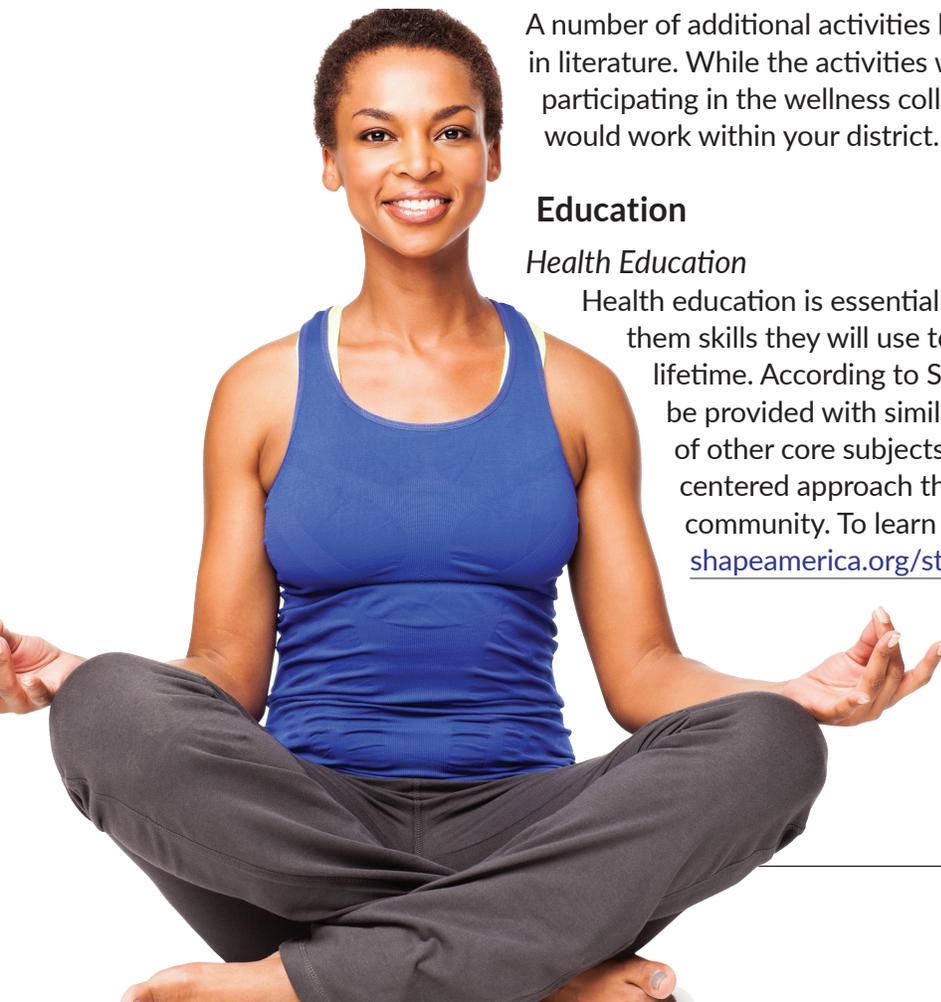
## Additional Best Practices

A number of additional activities have been shown to be successful in literature. While the activities were not addressed by the districts participating in the wellness collaborative, they may be initiatives that would work within your district.

### Education

#### *Health Education*

Health education is essential to students' development and teaches them skills they will use to make healthy choices throughout their lifetime. According to SHAPE America, health education should be provided with similar time, instruction, and support to that of other core subjects. Health education should take a student-centered approach that engages many aspects of the school and community. To learn more about quality health education, visit [shapeamerica.org/standards/health/](http://shapeamerica.org/standards/health/).



### *Quality Physical Education*

Wisconsin school standards require a comprehensive, sequential curriculum plan for physical education (PE). Students should receive PE at minimum three times per week in elementary school, weekly for the entire school term in middle school, and 1.5 credits earned over three separate years in high school. It is recommended that schools provide 150 minutes of PE to elementary students and 225 minutes of PE to middle and high school students per week for the entire school year (SHAPE America 2015). Additionally, schools should strive to ensure the majority of PE classes allow students to have an elevated heart rate at least 50 percent of the class time. To learn more, visit [dpi.wi.gov/sspw/physical-education](http://dpi.wi.gov/sspw/physical-education).

## **Environment and Policy**

### *Adequate Time to Eat*

The school meal programs provide students with quality meals full of fruits, vegetables, lean protein, low-fat dairy, and whole grains. However, there currently are no national or Wisconsin standards to address the length of the lunch period. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends students receive at least 20 minutes to eat after receiving their meal. Unfortunately, many students have insufficient time to eat their meals, leading to significantly decreased entrée, milk, and vegetable consumption when compared with students who had more time to eat (Cohen et al. 2016). To learn more, visit [actionforhealthykids.org/activity/time-to-eat/](http://actionforhealthykids.org/activity/time-to-eat/).

### *Marketing*

Marketing of foods and beverages is commonly seen in schools. However, research has shown that food-based marketing results in little to no revenue for schools (Center for Science in the Public Interest 2017). In addition, they encourage students and staff to make unhealthy food choices. While schools are now prohibited from marketing products that are not compliant with Smart Snacks during the school day, there is nothing prohibiting marketing of companies that make these products. Additionally, there are no limits to marketing actual products outside of the school day. Consider policies that:

- Encourage sponsorship of community businesses for supply/equipment needs;
- Limit brand marketing of food-based companies that are associated with foods that are not healthful;
- Prohibit “look-alike” products that have been reformulated by food manufacturers to comply with Smart Snacks so they can be sold in schools but are not sold elsewhere; and
- Prohibit marketing food and food-based companies anywhere on the school campus, including those used only outside the school day.



### *Recess*

Recess provides students an opportunity to be physically active and engaged with peers in activities of their choice. It is recommended that elementary school students are provided with at least 20 minutes of recess daily. Studies have shown that recess benefits students in multiple ways, including increasing physical activity levels; improving memory, attention, and concentration; and reducing classroom disruptive behavior (American Academy of Pediatrics 2013). Strategies have been identified that allows schools to maximize physical activity, positive behavior during recess, and improved classroom behavior. Visit [cdc.gov/healthyschools/physicalactivity/recess.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/physicalactivity/recess.htm) and use the Strategies for Recess in Schools guide to learn more.

### **Nutrition**

#### *Farm to School*

Farm to school programming connects students to nutritious, local foods through local food procurement, nutrition education, school gardening, or a combination of these strategies. Farm to school programming has been shown to support the development of healthy eating habits of children, increased willingness to try and consume fruits and vegetables, and enhanced overall academic achievement (National Farm to School Network 2017). Visit [dpi.wi.gov/school-nutrition/farm-to-school](https://dpi.wi.gov/school-nutrition/farm-to-school) to learn more.

#### *School Breakfast*

Many children and adolescents in Wisconsin do not start their day with a healthy breakfast. There are several reasons why students do not eat breakfast, including lack of time in the morning, lack of hunger first thing in the morning, and lack of access to food at home. Studies consistently have shown that children who eat breakfast benefit nutritionally and academically. Students who participate in school breakfast show improved attendance, behavior, and academic performance as well as decreased tardiness (Food Research and Action Center 2016). There are many different breakfast models that can be implemented in schools. Visit [dpi.wi.gov/school-nutrition/programs/school-breakfast](https://dpi.wi.gov/school-nutrition/programs/school-breakfast) to learn more about the School Breakfast Program.



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