

Introduction

Childhood obesity is a national epidemic. Over the past three decades the number of children who are obese has tripled. Children who are obese have an increased risk for health related problems such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol, type 2 diabetes, several types of cancer, and osteoarthritis. In addition, childhood obesity is associated with psychological consequences, such as low self-esteem.

Several factors increase a child's risk of becoming overweight. Two of the major contributors are poor eating habits and lack of physical activity. The results of the 2013 Wisconsin Youth Risk Behavior Survey revealed that 20% of high school students reported drinking soda every day while only 7% of students reported eating three or more vegetables per day.¹ Additionally, nearly a quarter of students reported watching TV for three or more hours per day on an average school day but only half of the students were physically active for a total of 60 minutes per day for five or more days. This is concerning data as research continues to emerge demonstrating that healthier students are better learners.² Given the emerging evidence demonstrating the positive link between nutrition and physical activity and school performance, an investment in wellness could potentially lead to better academic performance overall.

Obesity is influenced by a variety of environmental factors including families, schools, communities, and the media. Schools are in a unique position to help students establish healthy eating and physical activity habits as it's where the majority of their day is spent. Recognizing the important role schools play in the health of youth, Congress passed the Child Nutrition and Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children Reauthorization Act in 2004. This required School Food Authorities participating in child nutrition programs to establish a local wellness policy (LWP) that addressed goals for nutrition and physical activity, as well as develop guidelines for all foods available at school.

2010 Healthy, Hunger Free Kids Act

In 2010, the Healthy, Hunger Free Kids Act was passed, which expands upon previous requirements and includes new provisions that place a greater emphasis on the implementation, evaluation, and transparency of local wellness policies.

- Include goals for nutrition education and promotion, physical activity, and other school-based activities to promote student wellness.
- Include nutrition guidelines for all foods available on school campus.

¹ Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. (2014). *Wisconsin youth Risk Behavior Survey*. Retrieved February 18, 2014, from <http://ssp.wi.gov/ssp/yrbindex>.

² Basch, Charles. (2010). Healthier Students Are Better Learners: A Missing Link in School Reforms to Close the Achievement Gap. *Campaign for Education Equity*. Accessed http://www.equitycampaign.org/i/a/document/12557_equitymattersvol6_web03082010.pdf

³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2010). *Childhood Obesity Facts*. Retrieved February 18, 2014, from <http://www.cdc.gov/obesity/data/childhood.html>.

1

Approximately 12.5 million (17%) of children and adolescents aged 2-19 years are obese.³

- Permit parents, students, representatives of the School Food Authority, the school board, school administrators, physical education teachers, school health professionals and the public to participate in the development, implementation, review, and update of the LWP.
- Inform and update the public about the LWP’s content and implementation.
- Measure and make available to the public an assessment on the extent to which schools are in compliance with the LWP and a description of the progress made in attaining goals of the LWP.
- Designate one or more school officials to ensure that each school complies with the LWP.

Wisconsin Wellness Policy Assessment

The Rudd Center for Food Policy & Obesity at Yale University developed the Wellness School Assessment Tool (WellSAT) to help users measure the quality of their school district's wellness policy. This tool assesses the comprehensiveness of a policy, which reflects the extent to which recommended content areas are covered. It also measures the strength of the policy, which describes how strongly the content is stated. Scores range from 0-100. Low scores indicate less content and weaker language while high scores indicate more content and use of specific and directive language. Five different categories are USDA School Meals; Nutrition Standards; Physical Education & Physical Activity; and Evaluation.

The WellSAT was used to analyze 100 Wisconsin school district wellness policies. The following chart provides the average comprehensiveness and strength score for each section, as well as the overall average score. This small sampling illustrates that many schools are including a moderate amount of content and tending towards less directive language. In the sample, physical education & physical activity tended to be an area where wellness policies are in need of improvement, whereas evaluation is an area where wellness policies tended to be stronger.

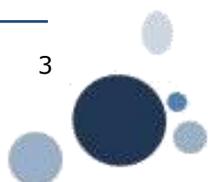
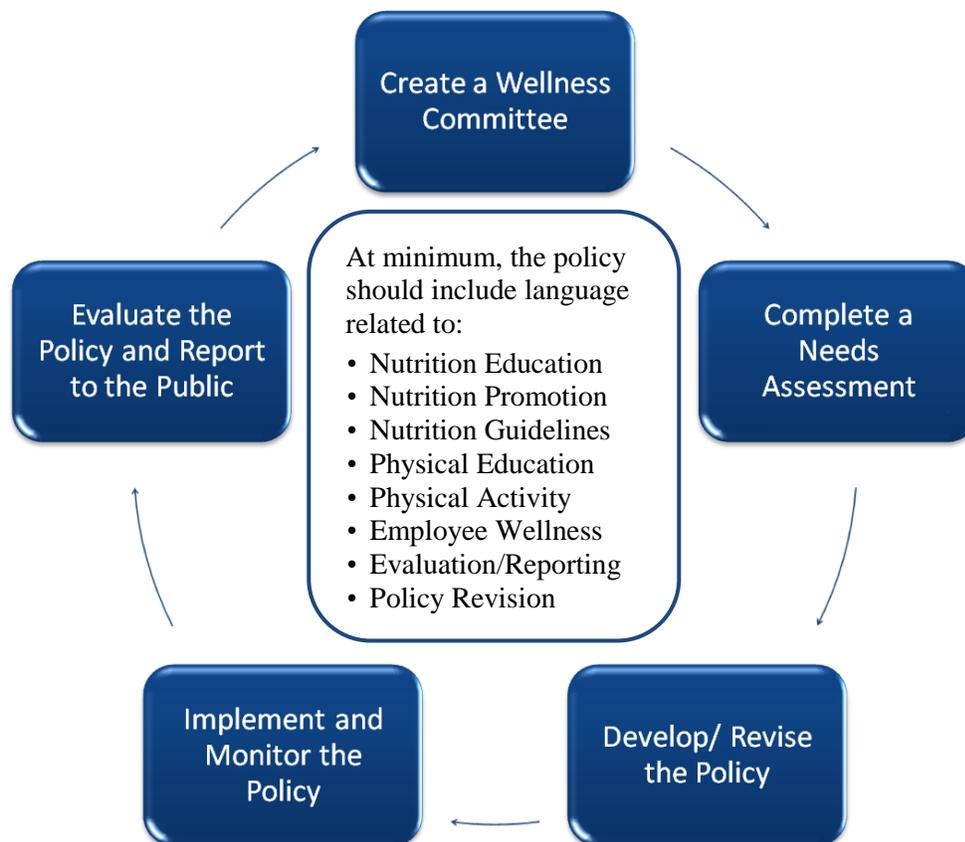
Wisconsin School Wellness Policy Assessment Scores		
Section	Comprehensive	Strength
Nutrition Education & Wellness Promotion	51	39
Standards for USDA School Meals	44	35
Nutrition Standards	52	33
Physical Education & Physical Activity	31	23
Evaluation	65	55
Overall Average Score	49	37



Wisconsin Team Nutrition conducted a needs assessment of school nutrition professionals and educators. The following were identified as needs to creating a successful school wellness policy:

- Resources for implementing, monitoring, and evaluating progress.
- Sample policy language.
- Ideas to promote healthy choices to students. Healthy options for vending, fundraisers and other school events.

Strengthening local wellness policies is a key component to providing healthier school environments that promote positive behaviors and help children reach their full academic potential. Policies create a framework that provides direction and guidance for school staff and students while offering information to parents and the community. Your LWP is an evolving document that must be reviewed and revised on a continuous basis. Each step of the process should be completed at least once per year. By following the cycle outlined below, schools can strengthen their wellness policy and create a health promoting environment.





This interactive, web-based resource is designed to assist school districts with developing comprehensive policies with directive language that incorporate new wellness policy requirements while establishing a framework for accountability. The resource provides information on the five steps that should be taken to create and maintain a strong local wellness policy. It also includes information on components that should be included in your policy and provides sample goals and objectives for each content area. The resource was designed to be used either as a full document and read in its entirety or treated as separate sections to be reviewed and utilized individually. Within the text, there are links to handouts that may be accessed individually or along with the section.

In addition to this resource, schools/districts are encouraged to utilize the U.S. Department of Agriculture's [School Nutrition Environment and Wellness Resources Website](#). This website is dedicated to helping schools/ school districts find the resources they need in the following areas:

- Local School Wellness Policy Process
- Required Wellness Policy Elements
- Healthy School Nutrition Environment
- Samples, Stories, and Guidance
- Research Reports
- Grants/Funding Opportunities