

Healthy School Nutrition Environments

Establishing a Local School Wellness Policy



Oklahoma State Department of Education
Child Nutrition Programs

REPRINT

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What is a Wellness Policy?

To help combat childhood obesity, Congress passed a law requiring each School Food Authority (SFA) participating in the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA's) school meals programs to establish a local wellness policy.

Schools play a critical role in establishing a healthy school nutrition environment for the prevention of childhood obesity. In addition, a healthy school nutrition environment helps prevent problems associated with a poor diet and physical activity-related chronic diseases.

Schools must set goals for nutrition education, physical activity, and other school-based activities designed to promote student wellness. Schools must also establish nutrition standards for all foods that are available on each school campus during the school day, with the objective of promoting student health and reducing childhood obesity. Schools are required to measure the implementation of the wellness policy and to involve a broad group of individuals in its development.

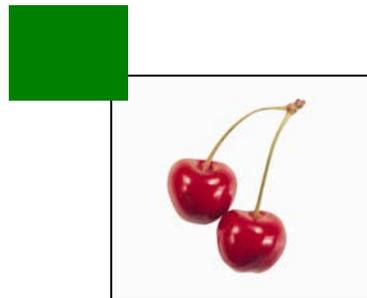


Information in this brochure may be found on USDA's Team Nutrition Web Site: <www.teamnutrition.usda.gov>.

What Does the Federal Law Say?

Public Law 108-265, Section 204, requires each SFA to establish a local school wellness policy no later than July 1, 2006. At a minimum, the policy must:

- (a) Include goals for nutrition education, physical activity, and other school-based activities that are designed to promote student wellness in a manner that the SFA determines appropriate.
- (b) Include nutrition guidelines for all foods available on each school campus during the school day with the objectives of promoting student health and reducing childhood obesity.
- (c) Provide an assurance that guidelines for reimbursable meals shall not be less restrictive than regulations and guidance issued by USDA pursuant to the Child Nutrition Act.
- (d) Establish a plan for measuring implementation of the local wellness policy, including designation of one or more persons at each school, as appropriate, charged with operational responsibility for ensuring that the school meets the local wellness policy.
- (e) Involve parents, students, representatives of the SFA, the school board, school administrators, and the public in the development of the school wellness policy.



What Does the Oklahoma Law Say?

Oklahoma Statutes, Section 24-100a of Title 70 enacted the Healthy and Fit Kids Act of 2004. By September 1, 2004, each school site was required to establish a Healthy and Fit School Advisory Committee.

- a. Committee membership:
 - 1) Must be composed of six members
 - 2) May include teachers, administrators, parents of students, health care professionals, and business representatives
- b. The committee may be combined with the school's Safe School Committee (established in Oklahoma Statutes, Section 24-100.5 of Title 70).
- c. Each Healthy and Fit School Advisory Committee shall study and make recommendations to the school principal regarding:
 - 1) Health education
 - 2) Physical education and physical activity
 - 3) Nutrition and health services

What is the Difference between Federal Wellness Policy Requirements and the State Healthy and Fit Advisory Committee?

USDA Wellness Policy:

- Implementation Date: July 1, 2006
- One policy required per school district

State Healthy and Fit Committee:

- Implementation Date: School Year 2004-2005
- One Committee required for each school site

What are the components of a Wellness Policy?

The four basic components of a wellness policy are:

1. Nutrition education goals
2. Physical activity goals
3. Nutrition standards
4. Other school-based activities

USDA's Team Nutrition website <www.teamnutrition.usda.gov> offers recommendations to include in the four components of a wellness policy.

Component 1: Setting Nutrition Education Goals

The primary goal of nutrition education is to influence students' eating behaviors. The following items should be considered when establishing nutrition education policy language:

- Students in grades pre-K through 12 receive nutrition education that is interactive and teaches the skills they need to adopt healthy eating behaviors.
- Nutrition education is offered in the school dining room as well as in the classroom, with coordination between the food service staff and teachers.
- Students receive consistent nutrition messages throughout the school, classroom, cafeteria, home, community, and media.
- State and district health education curriculum standards and guidelines include both nutrition and physical education.
- Nutrition is integrated into the health education curricula or core curriculum (e.g., math, science, language arts).
- Schools link nutrition education activities with the coordinated school health program.
- Staff who provide nutrition education have appropriate training.
- Schools are Team Nutrition Schools, and they conduct nutrition education activities and promotions that involve parents, students, and the community.

Component 2: Setting Physical Activity Goals

The primary goal for a school's physical activity component is to provide opportunities for every student to develop the knowledge and skills for specific physical activities, maintain physical fitness, regularly participate in physical activity, and understand the short- and long-term benefits of a physically active and healthful lifestyle. The following examples of policy language should be considered when setting goals for physical activity:

- Students should be given opportunities for physical activity during the school day through daily recess periods, elective physical education (PE) classes, walking programs, and the integration of physical activity into the academic curriculum.
- Students should be given opportunities for physical activity through a range of after-school programs, including intramurals, interscholastic athletics, and physical activity clubs.
- Schools should work with the community to create an environment that is safe and supportive of students' physically active commute to and from school.

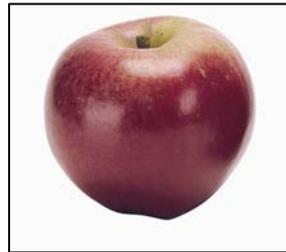


Component 3: Establishing Nutrition Standards for All Foods Available on School Campus During the School Day

Students' lifelong eating habits are greatly influenced by the types of foods and beverages available to them. Schools must ensure that reimbursable school meals meet the Child Nutrition Program requirements. Schools must also establish standards to address all foods and beverages sold or served to students, including those available outside of the school meal programs.

The following items should be considered when setting nutrition standards for all available foods during the school day. These standards should focus on increasing nutrient density, decreasing fat and added sugars, and moderating portion size.

- Set guidelines for foods and beverages in a la carte sales in the food service program on school campuses.
- Set guidelines for foods and beverages sold in vending machines, snack bars, school stores, and concession stands on school campuses.
- Set guidelines for foods and beverages sold as part of school-sponsored fundraising activities.
- Set guidelines for refreshments served at parties, celebrations, and meetings during the school day.



Component 4: Setting Goals for School-Based Activities Designed to Promote Student Wellness

Policies established under this category create a school environment that provides consistent wellness messages. In addition, these policies are conducive to healthy eating and being physically active. The following items should be considered when establishing policies to promote student wellness:

- Provide a clean, safe, enjoyable meal environment for students.
- Provide adequate time for students to enjoy eating healthy foods with friends, scheduled as near the middle of the school day as possible.
- Prohibit use of food as a reward or punishment.
- Provide enough space and serving areas to ensure student access to school meals with a minimum of wait time.
- Prohibit denial of student participation in recess or other physical activity as a form of discipline, or cancellation of recess or other physical activity time for instructional make-up time.
- Ensure fundraising efforts are supportive of healthy eating.
- Provide ongoing professional training and development for food service staff and teachers in the areas of nutrition and physical education.
- Provide student access to physical activity facilities outside school hours.
- Schedule recess for elementary grades before lunch so that children will come to lunch less distracted and ready to eat.
- Develop strategies for parents, teachers, school administrators, students, food service professionals, and community members to serve as role models in practicing healthy eating and being physically active, both in school and at home.

What are the Steps for Establishing a Local Wellness Policy?

Check to see if your school district or school already has written policies. If so, review them to ensure they meet the requirements of Public Law 108-265, Section 204, and the Oklahoma Healthy and Fit Kids Act of 2004.

There are no standard procedures for developing a school wellness policy. The following steps adapted from the National Association of State Boards of Education's (NASBE) Fit, Healthy, and Ready to Learn may get you started:

1. Form a team

It is important to recognize any existing efforts underway in the school or community. This might help you determine whether a new team is necessary, or whether you can establish a local wellness policy through existing efforts. The team



must include parents, students, representatives of the SFA, the school board, school administrators, and the public.

2. Assess the needs

Before making plans to develop policies, you should assess the needs of your students. Look for data on the education and health status of students through the following web sites:

<www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/obesity/trend/>

<www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dash/yrbs/>

<www.actionforhealthykids.org/AHK/tools>

The following resources will help you assess your school's needs:

- **Changing the Scene Improvement Checklist** at <www.teamnutrition.usda.gov> is a simple checklist to help you take an honest look at where things stand in your school and to help focus on exactly what needs to be done.

- **School Health Index: A Self-assessment and Planning Guide** at <www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/> is the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's self-assessment and planning guide for physical activity and healthy eating. This tool enables schools to identify the strengths and weaknesses of nutrition policies and programs and develop an action plan for improvement.
- **Keys to Excellence: Standards of Practice for Nutrition Integrity** at <www.schoolnutrition.org> The School Nutrition Association identifies the elements of a quality school nutrition program. This publication provides an easy-to-use evaluation form for assessing program quality and tracking progress.

3. Create policies

According to the NASBE, a policy provides officially determined objectives that guide the actions of students and employees in the education system. Policies typically express *what* should be done, *why* it should be done, and *who* should do it. The following resources are available to assist you in wellness policy development:

- **Making it Happen! School Nutrition Success Stories** at <www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/nutrition/making-it-happen> was developed by Team Nutrition and the CDC. Thirty-two success stories are featured, and six specific approaches for improving the nutritional quality of competitive foods are identified.
- **Fit, Healthy, and Ready to Learn** at <www.nasbe.org> is a school health policy guide developed by the NASBE that provides sections on nutrition and physical activity policy development.
- **Changing the Scene: Improving the School Nutrition Environment—A Guide to Local Action** at <www.teamnutrition.usda.gov> was developed by Team Nutrition to help schools take action in improving their nutrition environment.
- **CDC Model for Coordinated School Health Programs** at <www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/> this model identifies strategies most likely to be effective in promoting lifelong healthy eating, physical activity, and overall wellness.

4. Market the established policies

This very important step enlists widespread support for the goals and strategies of your school wellness policy. Steps that can assist you in building this support include:

- Involve those affected by the policy
- Anticipate, respond to, and involve critics
- Apply communication strategies
- Involve other student-serving agencies in the community
- Involve people from a variety of community groups

5. Implement policies

Developing and adopting sound policies are only the first steps. Implementing them requires good planning and management skills, the necessary resources, consistent enforcement, and widespread buy-in by school staff and the local community. Leadership, commitment, communication, and support are the keys to your success. SFAs must establish a plan for measuring the implementation of the local wellness policy, including the designation of one or more persons at each school, charged with the operational responsibility for ensuring that the school meets the local wellness policy. Schools may use a variety of methods to measure the implementation of their wellness policy. For example, the school may want to use a checklist or assign implementation dates to their goals and objectives. In addition, the SFA could use the original needs assessment used prior to establishing the wellness policy to evaluate whether changes have been implemented and progress has been made.

6. Maintain the effort

A sustained effort is necessary to implementing and reinforcing these policies. Periodically assess how well the policy is being managed and enforced, and evaluate any financial impact to vending policies. Evaluation and feedback are very important in maintaining a sound, school wellness policy.

Summary of resources

Making it Happen! School Nutrition Success Stories

Food and Nutrition Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; and U.S. Department of Education

<www.teamnutrition.usda.gov> and the CDC Web site

<www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/nutrition/making-it-happen>

Changing the Scene: Improving the School Nutrition Environment

Team Nutrition

Food and Nutrition Service

U.S. Department of Agriculture

<www.teamnutrition.usda.gov>

Fit, Healthy, and Ready to Learn: A School Health Policy Guide

National Association of State Boards of Education

<www.nasbe.org>

Guidelines for School Health Programs to Promote Lifelong Healthy Eating

Division of Adolescent and School Health Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

<www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth>

School Health Index: A Self-Assessment and Planning Guide

(Available in an elementary school version and a middle school/high school version)

Division of Adolescent and School Health Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

<www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dash>

The Obesity Epidemic: What Schools Can Do

The State Education Standard, December 2004

National Association of State Boards of Education

<www.nasbe.org>

Keys to Excellence: Standards of Practice for Nutrition Integrity

School Nutrition Association

<www.schoolnutrition.org>

USDA Team Nutrition

<www.fns.usda.gov/tn>

Oklahoma State Department of Education

Child Nutrition Programs

<www.sde.state.ok.us>

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